



THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF EDUCATORS

Education in the Criminal Justice System – Special Interest Group. Seventh Meeting. January 11th2022.

Implementation of Europe-wide recommendations for education of young people in prisons.

Chaired, via Zoom, by James Crabbe. There were 27 participants.

Speakers for the evening were:

Geir Arne Hundvebakke, head of the school department in Bjorgvin Prison, Norway and the Youth Unit. National co-ordinator for young prisoners since 2012.

Magnus Andre Rokne, teacher in prison education since 2021. National co-ordinator for young prisoners since 2020.

Francesca Cooney, head of policy at the Prisoners' Education Trust. A former prison inspector specialising in inspecting women's prisons. Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellow.

Ingunn Seim, worked as a public prosecutor for 2 years, and from 2006 led the Norwegian model of Drug Treatment Courts (DTC) and ran the DTC-centre. She is currently assistant director of the Correctional service region west – responsible for all the prisons and probation services.

Prior to the meeting attendees were invited to view a recording supplied by Magnus Andre Rokne. The recording was of a talk given by a youth unit teacher describing the unit's pedagogical approach and how the staff work with their students. It was an excellent introduction. Motivating the unmotivated was highlighted as the first point along with the high teacher to pupil ratio necessary to identify and respond to the complex needs of the young people they work with. Often there is a long history of problems involving police and social services. Being in a juvenile unit is in itself stressful. Counsellors engage with the pupils and information is gathered from previous schools in order to gain an insight into the problems before education can begin and a pedagogical relationship developed. The teachers aspire for their pupils and seek to motivate them in a variety of creative ways. The youths often wish to avoid education as they suffer from a low sense of self-efficacy seeing challenges negatively as threats. They have very often been told repeatedly they will fail socially and educationally so the power of praise, of affirmation is seen by staff as crucial

but it must be sincere and justified. All pupils in Norway and in the UK, in all branches of education, should be enabled to aspire, succeed and want to embrace education.

Professor Crabbe welcomed everyone and reminded the meeting of the focus of the last meeting which was education in the adult Norwegian prison system comparing it to education in the British adult prison system. The focus of this meeting was on education in the prison system for youth offenders. As a focus it was decided to concentrate on what the Council of Europe in 1989 put forward when they adopted 17 recommendations outlining the needs and responsibilities concerning the education of imprisoned persons in Europe.

Ingunn Seim began her introduction by highlighting the importance of the Europe-wide recommendations for the education of young people in prisons in Norway. A quotation from Confucius prefaced her remarks, '*Anybody, even criminals can become useful citizens of society as long as they get education and are led in the right direction.*' She shared with the meeting the prison numbers current in Norway reminding us that more people serve sentences in the community than in prisons, 60%. There are two juvenile units for 15 to 18 year-olds. In the whole of Norway there are 12 cells for minors in three centres. Approximately 400 young adults, 18 to 25 are serving custodial sentences, radically different numbers than the numbers in the UK. The central principle is one of '*Normality*' and The Education and Sentences Act specifies that prisoners should not forfeit their right to the services available to the wider population. All services including health, education, social welfare, library, spiritual services should be offered by the same providers. In addition to the principle of Normality the other key Norwegian principles are: discretionary power of implementation, progression towards release, reduced use of custodial sentences, rehabilitation and openness. There is an important circular co-operation between the correctional services and the education service to fulfil the recommendations of The Council of Europe on Education in Prisons 1990, The European Prison Rules 2006 and The Council of Europe's recommendations concerning foreign prisoners number R[84] 12.

Ingunn's presentation provided the context for the following presentation by Magnus and Geir. Both are currently working within Norwegian education services and gave an engaging and informative account of the education of minors within the prison service. All levels of education are catered for from basic to higher. A question posed later in the meeting prompted a response that few pupils have very poor literacy and numeracy skills though achievement levels are generally below the level in the pupil population as a whole. Exceptions are some foreign pupils. Teachers aim to establish a culture within the units of positivity and a desire to learn as pupils will look for role models among fellow detainees. Programmes for pupils are a combination of academic and vocational courses with training within the private and public sectors mirroring the educational programmes for all pupils. At 16 a choice is made by all pupils between a general academic programme and vocational training. Qualifying for a certificate, if formal education has been interrupted, can include life experience along with completion of programmes. Doctors can provide evidence of a medical reason, for example drug abuse, to enable qualification for higher education. The imperative for all is to establish formal competency.

Asane Public School is a school offering sports facilities, health services, adult learning and a library. An account of the physical and human resources available on the school campus was

detailed. Both presenters were clearly and justifiably proud of Asane. The prison system has complete access to all resources offering many options and potential opportunities for those in the offender's unit to participate in regular classes when appropriate. There are 10 different vocational programmes leading to as many as 100 different certificates. Access to technology is restricted for offenders but provision of bespoke courses and a flexible approach is uppermost. A revised curriculum across Norwegian education is placing greater emphasis on physical and mental health in addition to core competency. The development of transferable skills is valued, music is held in high esteem by the whole school community and the talents and achievements of Moses (an offender in custody) were shared with the meeting via a short video. It was good to learn that along with his music, Moses aspires to be a carpenter and he understands the power of the transferable skills he has developed. The library is at the heart of the school hosting concerts and visiting speakers. Impromptu concerts in the entrance hall are appreciated by the whole school community and build self-esteem and encourage a sense of self-efficacy.

Building a relationship of trust is important and necessitates a high staff to pupil ratio. The strong relationships continue post release where the ethos within the units focusing on education, rather than punishment, continues. Post release, the need to develop technical skills in order to function in a world increasingly reliant on technology becomes very important in establishing normality. The lack of ICT access is causing issues for offenders within schools as paper text books disappear and on-line examinations are becoming more common. As their presentation drew to a close, Magnus and Geir also emphasised the importance of circular co-operation between the correctional services and all services available to the wider population in order to fulfil the recommendations of the Council of Europe.

Answers to questions posed informed the meeting that all teachers in Norway are professionally qualified to master degree level and most working in the units also teach in regular school settings. The level of cooperation between units and regular schools is good and if a pupil is refused access it is usually on the grounds that the needs of that pupil may not be able to be met. Most pupils in the units have mental health needs but a doctor visits and counsellors engage with pupils as needed. Transfers from prison to hospital occur. A proportion of those in prison have committed very serious crimes and are extremely challenging but those working with them still aspire and hope. Those with longer sentences do face barriers especially around access to technology. Those on remand for relatively short periods are also a challenge.

Magnus and Geir were warmly thanked for giving the meeting a window into how young people within the Norwegian Criminal Justice system are educated. The meeting sent their very best wishes to Moses and hoped to hear of his continued success in music and his future career.

A very different picture was presented to the meeting by Francesca Cooney. In England and Wales secure children's homes are welfare-based and managed by Local Authorities. There are never enough places to meet need. In recent times two secure training centres designed to accommodate boys have closed. Currently there are 515 children in detention units and 400 in prisons. Numbers have been gradually reducing due to the tireless work of the Youth Offender Teams and the Youth Justice Board. Legislation has not supported this. 40% of

those detained are on remand, and black and other ethnic groups, for example Travellers comprising 8%, are disproportionately represented. 50% are black boys. Each year there are 30 life sentences imposed on youths occasionally as young as 10. Prison governors are responsible for their residents but have no control over services including education and health. In reality no single organisation has overall responsibility for young offenders in the UK. Looked after children in society have a designated person and their needs are met in school but in prison the provision is uncoordinated and fragmented. Information relating to the level of need is rarely complete and the issue of risk plays a significant part in the access an individual may have to education. In the units the inmates are subjected to frequent lock-downs because of, for example, staff shortages and gang related issues. The pandemic has exacerbated this with too many children having time out of their cells restricted to 40 minutes a day. Many children feel threatened and two centres have been deemed unsafe and closed down. Ofsted's last report identified up to one third of boys are confined to cells without access to education. Workshops and other resourced areas frequently lack a qualified teacher. Too often routines inappropriately mirror those in place in adult prisons. In the community during the pandemic, vulnerable children had access to education in school or at home with professionals monitoring their welfare and progress. HMP Park in South Wales is the only unit to offer education to small groups. The system was described as lurching from crisis to crisis with damaged children suffering significant further damage and the UK a very long way from even beginning to fulfil the 17 recommendations of the Council of Europe. It amounted to a depressing picture.

The meeting was invited to comment. It was observed that good things do happen and good practice is rewarded, by among others The Worshipful Company of Educators, who have partnered with PET for some years for Inspirational Educator awards. One recent recipient, serving a sentence himself, was recognised for the educational use of mentoring of offenders by an offender. Unfortunately, initiatives are compartmentalised, uncoordinated and fragmented. The Norwegian model works largely because it is realistically funded, society accepts that offenders belong to society and prison is seen as an opportunity to rehabilitate and not as primarily punitive. There is much to be done and it was suggested that information needs to be gathered and pressure applied to bring about fundamental change. Currently there is a White Paper which unfortunately relates to adult prisons but as a Company it was asserted that during the consultation period representations regarding youth offenders could usefully be communicated and pressure applied.

Norwegian prisons are not privatised and are part of the circular co-operation between services. It was observed that the prison model in UK urgently needs to be reviewed. The meeting reluctantly concluded that comparing the Norwegian situation with the UK was difficult. Numbers given custodial sentences are radically different. The funds available and the attitude of society allow for very different approaches. Better quality education, vocational courses and the emphasis placed on 'normality' inevitably influence the reoffending rates. It was observed that The Ministry of Justice's own figures show that getting a vocational certificate is one of the most influential things to reduce reoffending in UK. What is clearly needed is UK legislation and an insistence on relevant ministries co-operating. The many worthy and committed volunteers and organisations should be supporting and not attempting to provide key services. The meeting learned that livery companies are discussing how technology can be accessed in British prisons to support literacy. The provision of reading pens has enabled prisoners on remand to read statements

and legal documents but the concerns prison governors have around security limit the roll out of devices. Providing tablets to youth offenders, suitably restricted and monitored would enable them to access education and develop transferable skills. Lessons learned concerning safe use of devices supplied to school children during lock downs could usefully be applied to young offenders. The meeting appreciated the power of music and regretted that too often lack of staff and the time taken up overcoming unrelated obstacles resulted in plans collapsing. Even so, many worthy individuals and organisations persist in trying and they deserve support.

It was concluded that legislation is urgently needed. It was observed that the SIG is supported by many influential individuals and their combined energy and desire to bring about change should be harnessed. This was endorsed by the whole meeting. The Chair agreed to produce a draft response to the Government White Paper on Prisons, for circulation to attendees.

The Chair once again thanked, on behalf of all in attendance, the contributors. The quality of the presentations was impressive and most certainly enlightening and thought-provoking.

Evelyn Guest and James Crabbe.