

CITIZENS' CURRICULUM CASE STUDY

HMP NEW HALL

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Introduction

Taking a Citizens' Curriculum approach ensures all individuals have the core set of skills they need for the 21st Century, including English, maths, ESOL, digital, civic, health and financial capabilities. NIACE is committed to widening access to these skills, particularly amongst under-represented groups in society, as well as improving the range and quality of provision available to all adults. These interrelated skills, which underpin lifelong learning, can be made more accessible by being contextualised and developed as an integrated curriculum offer or framework.

In 2015/15, the development of a Citizens' Curriculum was taken forward by thirteen pilots across a range of organisations including colleges, local authorities and charities. The pilots tapped into what motivates adults to learn, ensuring that more people are learning skills which are relevant to their lives, their needs and their work. Particular areas of focus included provision for homeless / vulnerably housed adults, offenders, ex-offenders, migrants, families and disadvantaged young adults. The pilots provided insight into methods of adopting a Citizens' Curriculum approach, how effective the approach is in engaging disadvantaged learners, the impact on learners and providers, and key success factors for both the learner and the provider. This case study tells the story of one of the pilots.

Background

HMP New Hall is a closed category women's prison located in West Yorkshire. It has a capacity for around 400 prisoners and holds women of all ages and categories. The education department within the prison offers the equivalent of around 120 full time education spaces a week. Women undertaking an NVQ in Business Administration were chosen to take part in the Citizens' Curriculum pilot.

How it worked

HMP New Hall felt that the Citizens' Curriculum approach would be a valuable project for them to take part in because they were already working to encourage citizenship within the prison. As a result, they were starting to embed civic and other capabilities into their education provision. For example, their NVQ in Business Administration course covered aspects such as environmental issues and organising fundraising events for charities. The prison felt that the Citizens' Curriculum would help them to take a more structured approach to embedding the capabilities into their programmes and ensure that they were not duplicating some areas whilst missing out others. They also felt that a more structured approach would help learners to recognise the wider benefits of their learning. The pilot therefore decided to embed their Citizens' Curriculum pilot into their existing Business Administration NVQ programme.

The prison consults with its learners through focus groups when new courses are implemented or changes are proposed to existing programmes. They also conduct surveys twice a year which ask learners about their views on the current learning provision in the prison and what they feel could be done to improve it. For their Citizens' Curriculum project, the pilot lead met with the learners on the Business Administration course and explained what the project was and how it would be built into their programme. This helped to get the learners on board as they understood what was required of them and why they had to complete additional tasks.

To embed the Citizens' Curriculum pilot into their course, learners were asked to complete a daily diary in which they wrote down what activities they had taken part in, what their barriers to taking part were (if any) and which of the Citizens' Curriculum capabilities they had covered that day. This enabled learners to build up a clear portfolio of what skills they had gained throughout the pilot and which of the capabilities they had covered.

The Business Admin course requires learners to complete a range of tasks and activities which relate to the Citizens' Curriculum capabilities. The nature of the programme encourages learners to get more involved in the workings of the prison and increase their civic capability through the organisation of charity and business events. This requires learners to organise and coordinate meetings, developing their literacy skills through writing meeting invitations, taking minutes and creating posters. They also created presentations on the computer for delivery to visitors and regularly used the interactive whiteboards in their learning. Numeracy skills were also integrated into course activities. For example, learners organised a buffet for a meeting and needed to ensure they ordered the correct amount of food and drink from the Prison canteen. This also required learners to make sure they had enough budget to cover the order. The health capability was embedded into the programme through learners taking part in charitable events such as the Race for Life and other fitness activities. However, due to the short timeframe of the pilot, learners were limited in the number and type of events they could participate in.

Challenges

The main issues associated with the pilot were logistical challenges of operating within a prison environment. Firstly, the pilot lead noted that there were time restraints in regard to women being available to take part in the courses. The NVQ course is normally delivered on a full-time basis but the nature of the prison regime often created potential for disruption to this timetable. For example, learners had to miss sessions or leave early to attend medical appointments or visits from family and friends. Similarly, there were issues with access to and availability of a suitable venue within the prison.

'There are times when we can work with learners and times when we can't because of the prison regime and everything. That can be quite constraining from time to time.' (Pilot lead)

Secondly, the pilot lead noted that retaining learners for the duration of the pilot was difficult to achieve. At the beginning of the pilot there was a total of ten learners, however by the end this number had reduced to only four. This is not unusual in a prison environment as prison populations have a high churn rate. As a result, HMP New Hall run their programmes on a roll-on, roll-off basis, which meant that some of their learners were released or transferred during their programme; some changed courses part way through; and some completed the course and moved onto another.

'They could be leaving literally because they're going home, or they could be leaving because they've finished the qualification and they've moved on to something else and they've been difficult to keep on top of.' (Pilot Lead)

Finally, although some of the learners found it beneficial to complete the questionnaires, others found this quite arduous and time consuming. The pilot lead suggested that this could be improved in the future by running a longer pilot and allowing learners to fill in the diary on a weekly basis instead. Learners also suggested that offering a certificate for completing the Citizens' Curriculum programme would be more motivational.

Impacts and Outcomes

For learners

The pilot lead felt that adopting the Citizens' Curriculum approach had helped to change learners' attitudes towards learning and recognise the wider skills and experience that they had gained from their programme, instead of focussing solely on gaining a qualification at the end of a course. He felt that the learners would now be able to talk about the transferable skills that they had gained and practised and understand how these relate to the world of work. Learners commented that completing the diaries had helped them to identify their own existing skills and think about how they could use these on release from prison.

'I feel the personal diary has helped me to recognise my skills and knowledge when completing tasks and jobs for other members of staff and recognise my capabilities.' (Learner)

'It got them thinking differently because I think unfortunately, when someone comes on a course, they've got a habit of being tunnel-visioned... [thinking] "I am doing this and I am doing unit 3.1 today" and everything like that, when in fact, what they ought to be thinking is, "when I get out and I'm looking for a job I will need these skills to be able to do it". It's getting them to focus a little bit more on the transferrable skills that they're gaining, whether or not it be for a job in business admin. I think that's what makes it important.' (Pilot lead)

This was particularly important for vulnerable learners who had previously experienced abusive relationships and as a result had little self-worth or self-esteem.

'Many have come from abusive relationships where basically they've been utterly convinced by their abusive partner or abusive parents, or whatever, that they're worthless... what we are wanting them to do is recognise the range of skills that they are developing and that's why it's useful and it goes above and beyond.' (Pilot lead)

The majority of learners have progressed onto other educational courses since completing the pilot programme. Those who were working at Level 1 progressed onto Level 2, either in Business Administration or on another course of the same level. Because the prison is only funded to offer learning programmes up to Level 2, one of the learners who completed Level 2 as part of the pilot were being supported and encouraged to apply for distance learning courses at higher levels.

'Well, certainly of the ones that have completed the pilot, in many cases they are on a journey, so we get people in who start looking at their Entry Level or Level 1, then will move on Level 2. We've got at least one person here who has done her Level 2 now and she's moving on - because within prisons we can't offer anything directly above Level 2, she's looking at doing distance learning courses in various different things. Now, I know she's put application forms in to do that.' (Pilot lead)

The prison has links with a variety of outside organisations that they are continually trying to develop further. They work closely with the National Careers Service who have a consultation session with women when they arrive to find out what their goals are and where they would like to be when they leave the prison. Other partnerships include working with 'SFEDI Awards', where the education department provides self-employment awareness courses to learners in prison and, upon release, SFEDI provides them with 12 months of membership and access to mentor support to help them set up their own business. However, the prison is keen to develop more links with employers who are sympathetic to employing ex-offenders.

For staff

The pilot lead noted that whilst the pilot has been beneficial for the learners in terms of improving their confidence and changing the way they see themselves, the structured embedding of the Citizens' Curriculum approach is also an important approach for the prison to take. He felt that the interlinked capabilities of the Citizens' Curriculum approach could support the education department's broad aims of reducing the number of women reoffending on release and supporting prisoners to improve their lives and enter sustainable situations upon leaving prison. For example, by making the capabilities embedded into the programme explicit, the Citizens' Curriculum approach would enable learners to produce a more impressive CV which demonstrates the transferable skills they hold. Each of the capabilities plays an important role in helping learners to achieve this.

'I think it's very, very important for people in our learning environment, because I think what we're trying to do is deal with the whole person rather than just that person the offender, that person the prisoner, that person - do

you see what I mean? It's very much looking at getting them to see themselves differently.' (Pilot Lead)

Critical Success Factors

- The Citizens' Curriculum approach of considering different capabilities helped learners realise that they had gained transferable skills and how these can be applied in employment.
- Being explicit with learners about the aims of the pilot and what it would require of them helped to engage them in the programme and the additional activity of completing daily diaries.

Further Information

For more information about HMP New Hall, please visit

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/contacts/prison-finder/new-hall>

For more information about the NIACE Citizens' Curriculum, please contact Alex Stevenson at alex.stevenson@niace.org.uk