What do you need to make the best use of your time in prison?

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About the Prison Reform Trust
The Prison Reform Trust is an independent UK charity working to create a just, humane and effective prison system. For further information about the Prison Reform Trust, see www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/

About the Prisoner Policy Network
The Prisoner Policy Network is a network of prisoners, ex-prisoners and supporting organisations. It is hosted by the Prison Reform Trust and will make sure prisoners’ experiences are part of prison policy development nationally. Contact ppn@prisonreformtrust.org.uk or call 020 7251 5070 for more information.

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Printed by Conquest Litho
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## Acknowledgments

This consultation report would not have been possible without the support and dedication of our network members, the helpful members of staff that saw the value in our work, and the establishments that went to great lengths to help facilitate our prison visits.

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Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice
Rt Hon David Gauke

The contribution to our programme of reform of organisations like the Prison Reform Trust is really significant. I welcome the informed and constructive conversations that we have on a wide range of issues. The value of those exchanges is certainly increased when it includes the insight and the ideas of prisoners.

I have discovered in this job that almost everybody has an opinion about prisons. But no-one is likely to understand the issues more clearly than the people who live and work in them. We make better policy and take better decisions when those voices are clearly heard.

The Prisoner Policy Network is a very welcome initiative. I can assure you that I value its work and look forward to it playing a significant role in the months and years to come.
Executive summary

The Prisoner Policy Network was launched in 2018 to support prisoners to contribute effectively to policy issues that affect them. Prisoners have embraced this national opportunity to be heard and this consultation has been marked by prisoners being proactive about getting in touch and working with prison staff to organise workshop visits by the PPN team.

Our second report *What do you need to make best use of your time in prison?* discusses prisoner experiences of life behind the wall and their thoughts on exactly what is needed to make best use of time served.

We received a wide range of responses from over 1,250 prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families. There were multiple examples of good practice, and prisoners were at pains to show that they were not simply highlighting grievances but suggesting positive ways to move forward. Many prisoners highlighted positive contributions from staff, and we are very grateful to the officers who have taken to the work of the PPN and contributed in their own way. What this shows is that prisoners want to have healthy, respectful relationships with staff with the understanding that a calm, safe and productive prison environment benefits all.

Beyond the basics of cleanliness, order, well-trained staff, and a consistent regime, prisoners want education that stretches the mind and delves deep, training that bestows industry recognised qualifications, the opportunity to use the skills they came in to prison with, and work experience that makes them attractive to future employers. Prisoners want the breadth of the education, employment and training offer to be increased, and to make better use of technology so that prisoners can access educational materials, maintain family contact, and find information about outside agencies on which they will rely in future. Connection with wider society, a desire to be reintegrated and not forgotten about came through as a priority.

People in prison need a reason to be optimistic. They want to move from despondency to belief that this time in prison will be their last. They seek reassurance that on the outside there is a potential future awaiting them that doesn’t provoke anxiety and dread, but instead makes them feel positive about their chances. Maintaining their connection with that future requires cheaper phone calls, and visits that are relaxed and mindful of the impact that a bad visit can have on family as well as the prisoner. Families have told us that they need to be more fully involved in the prison sentence so that they can help, and know what to do to support effectively both during custody and on release.

Above all, this consultation has shown that prisons need to promote personal growth as an end in itself, not just a means to reduced reoffending. Making best use of time in custody is about the here and now as well as what will happen after release – which for an increasing number of prisoners will be years or even decades away. Good citizens value the community in which they live and are conscious of their responsibilities towards it – that is as true inside prison as outside, and prisoners want the opportunity to create a good life for themselves and the people they live amongst.

This all goes to the way the prison thinks and works – the culture that informs and guides the thousands of interactions that make up its daily existence. Much of the existing policy framework for prisons in England and Wales supports that approach, in theory, but it is clear from this
consultation that policy is only applied in some places and only for some of the time. Determined national and local leadership remains essential, encouraged we hope by the clear evidence from this report that prisoners are willing to play a much bigger role in creating prisons that use time well.

But during this consultation prisoners have also made many specific and practical recommendations for change that will make a positive difference. They include:

1. A stable, safe and consistent regime with a well communicated set of expectations for prisoners and for staff is an essential building block for a prison where time is well used. Prisons should ensure good communication, with prison rules and processes clearly conveyed to new arrivals, and these should be updated and made readily available to existing prisoners.

2. Prison staff need to be supported to develop ways of working that build inspiration and model different ways of resolving conflict, disputes and tension.

3. Prison security department assessments should be communicated to prisoners clearly with an outline of how a prisoner can improve his or her risk assessment to permit progress. Prisoners must be told what they can do to restore trust and be given opportunity to earn it.

4. Prison education should be developmental and go beyond basic skills. Any prisoner should have the opportunity to go beyond their existing level of achievement or learning. For example, long sentence prisoners should be able to access Open University and other degree courses before the current seven years from release, and prisoners with pre-existing workplace skills should have the chance to keep them up to date.

5. The arts and creativity have a key place in prison to support engagement, tackle isolation and build optimism. Prisons should show that they value that contribution in the way that resources of both time and money are allocated.

6. Prisons should conduct a skills audit for each prisoner on arrival and utilise these skills to support and enhance life inside prison.

7. Prisoner-led initiatives are vital to increase agency, a sense of ownership and responsibility for the health of the prison community. Prisons should create space and opportunities for prisoners to demonstrate that they can be trusted, including by involving prisoners in decision making and scrutiny functions.

8. Prisons should enable greater and better quality access to families and the wider community as part of a strategy of building prisoners’ capacity to change, and to sustain change in resettlement post release. Controlled access to the internet would transform prisoners’ ability to help in delivering this ambition, as well as multiple other objectives relevant to education, health and personal growth.
9. All prisons should make it easy for community-based organisations to contribute to the health of the prison community

10. Prisons should provide more practical help towards resettlement and this should start earlier in the sentence. This should include practical life skills training in cooking, cleaning and budgeting for example, all of which can then be practiced during the sentence, but also more support for finding housing and accessing benefits before release. OMU departments should be more proactive in meeting with prisoners, even if that means going on the wings to meet prisoners in their cell.

11. Prison wages should be reviewed and brought into line with the rising cost of canteen items and the high cost of prison phone calls. Prisons should not expect families to make up the shortfall in basic provision.
1. Introduction

We begin this report with a reminder of some well-known facts to contextualise our findings.

- There are currently around 84,000 people living in prison in England and Wales.
- The prison service mission statement is: “to look after them with humanity and help them lead law-abiding and useful lives in custody and on release”.

The Prison Reform Trust aims to suggest, encourage and support changes within the prison system that will help that mission to be achieved.

We believe that prisoners have the insight and skills to make reform happen, and this was the rationale behind the Prisoner Policy Network (PPN) which launched one year ago. The PPN is a growing collective of mostly serving prisoners in England and Wales, as well as ex-prisoners, relatives and supporting organisations. Their voices allow us to confirm or challenge our own assumptions about what prison reform needs to look like and feed into prison policy discussions at a national level.

In preparation for this second PPN report, and following our inaugural report on incentives in prison, we considered the responses of over 1,250 prisoners nationwide to the question:

“What do you need to make the best use of your time in prison?”

2. Submissions to the report

The question was launched at HMP Coldingley in February, where approximately 100 individuals with an interest in the PPN met to discuss and debate their views. These individuals included prisoners, former prisoners and staff from HMP Coldingley, Prison Reform Trust, representatives from charities and not for profit organisations, as well as policy makers and decision makers from relevant government departments.

After this launch, PPN members nationally were invited to respond to the question in any way they felt appropriate. We advertised in the March edition of Inside Time, as well as by sending out ‘PPN information sheets’ to existing members who were asked to spread awareness of the consultation on their wings. We received mainly letters in response, often several from the same person.

In total, we received 95 letters from 35 prisons. Three were anonymously sent, while some individual letters contained contributions from multiple prisoners as prisoners sought to conduct mini consultations with their peers on the wings. We also received a wealth of responses that included enclosures of initiatives, concepts and personal plights, many of which were fed into the report. All letters received were responded to personally by Prison Reform Trust staff. We also received over 30 phone calls from prisoners directly in response to the question.

Some prisons initiated alternative ways to reach more prisoners. For example, HMP Rye Hill submitted a 30-page document following a prisoner led consultation across the prison in response to the question, which they believe reached over 200 prisoners. A prisoner-led
consultation at HMP Ashfield also reached out to 111 within the community for their submission. HMP Parc posted the question onto their self-service kiosks, which generated 165 responses in this way. HMP Dovegate (with a little help from one of our PPN members) provided paper slips for prisoners to respond anonymously. We received 22 slips. The Prison Council at HMP Coldingley submitted a collective response, and many prisoners proactively contacted both PRT and their own prison staff to advocate for, and organise PPN workshops as part of the consultation.

We facilitated a large number of workshops in prisons across England and Wales, which sought to reach the ‘far corners’ of the prison population. We are mindful that letter writing is not a method of communication favoured by all. So, we specifically targeted groups that would not write letters such as those who could not read or write, or those with intellectual disabilities. We also ‘walked the wings’, speaking to those who were not interested in attending workshops, to widen our reach. On occasion we were able to visit the segregation units of the prisons we visited, and in this way were able to have short conversations with individual prisoners housed there. Workshops were run in the following 23 prisons:

- HMP Ashfield
- HMP Belmarsh
- HMP Birmingham
- HMP Dartmoor
- HMP Eastwood Park
- HMP Elmley
- HMP Exeter
- HMP Foston Hall
- HMP Frankland
- HMP Grendon
- HMP High Down
- HMP Leyhill
- HMP Liverpool
- HMP Long Lartin
- HMP Oakwood
- HMP Parc
- HMP Portland
- HMP Rye Hill
- HMP Stafford
- HMP Stoke Heath
- HMP Swaleside
- HMP Swansea
- HMP The Verne

We also received responses from ex-prisoners, academics, family members and supporting organisations, which represent approximately 5% of respondents.

In total we have heard from over 1,250 individuals who have lived experience of life in custody or supporting a prisoner for this consultation question.
3. Findings

The range of responses was vast, and the breadth of messages received reflected the diversity within the prison system.

The overall tone of respondents was one of possibility. Imprisonment was seen for many as a metaphorical re-set button, a period from which you could potentially benefit through private reflection and support. However, the current system doesn’t always allow for this re-set to happen. Instead, there were plenty of examples given of negative experiences in custody and evidence of poor (rather than best) use of time:

*Time inside the walls is a waste, and a wasted opportunity.*
HMP The Verne

*To me, prison is the most futile waste of human beings, time and money.*
HMP Garth

But many of those who contributed to this discussion did not simply refer to negative experiences, but appeared to see it as an opportunity to suggest changes needed so that they were able to ‘get on’, ‘live a better life’ or to ‘change’.

*Sometimes people mess up, that shouldn’t stay with me forever.*
HMP Birmingham

*I want to progress, help others progress, put something back and stop others from following the same path as I did.*
HMP Buckley Hall

For most respondents, imprisonment was transient rather than life long, although sentence lengths varied considerably. Some who responded will already be released by the time this report is published while others will be incarcerated for over twenty years from now. Individual differences like sentence length and offence type affected the type of response, highlighting the important fact that prisoners are not a homogeneous group:

*Doing time is so individual – it’s impossible to say what would work for one would work for another.*
HMP Swaleside

One respondent discussed the need to get through a prison sentence one day at a time and explicitly did not opt to look to the future. However, the focus for the majority who contributed was about going home in one way or another: what do they need to be able to get parole, to get a job on release, to maintain family connections or avoid crime in the future.
What was needed to achieve this goal was hugely diverse. The picture below is taken from one prisoner's response. He had adapted Maslow's well-known Hierarchy of Needs (1943)\(^1\) to be specifically relevant to life in prison. The hierarchy demonstrates that there are three broad categories of need:

1. Basic Needs (including physiological and safety needs)
2. Psychological Needs (including needs relating to self-esteem, belonging and love)
3. Self-fulfilment Needs (which relates to self-actualisation and achieving one’s potential)

This was a theory raised by several other prisoners and as almost all the responses we received fitted within these categories, it has been used as a framework for organising them. There was considerable overlap between the needs and some responses represented additional need categories to those within the drawing. The remainder of this report outlines responses which are relevant to each category.

### 3.1 Basic Needs

Within this section we consider what is needed from the physical environment for prisoners to move on from basic to higher levels of need. We consider basic standards of living, such as warmth, cleanliness and safety. We also refer to health, both emotional and physical. Finally, in this section we consider how improved information sharing and consistency may provide an essential platform from which prisoners could then start to work on their psychological and self-fulfilment needs.

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3.1.1 Standards of living
Following our inaugural report on ‘What incentives work in prison?’ we expected to receive some responses about basic standards of living in prison and this expectation was met. There were numerous responses which referred to basic hygiene and levels of cleanliness, such as not having a toilet seat or hair brush or not having clothes that fit.

We spoke to one man while walking around a wing who had not received any bedding since he entered the establishment five days previously. When asked what he was doing about it, he said he had “given up” trying to communicate and was using his coat as a blanket. We spoke to one woman who had a blood-stained mattress in the cell she had been allocated, which was not removed from the cell when she asked, but a plastic mattress was placed on top instead.

It is not necessary to include all the examples given, however, the examples indicate to us that basic standards are still not being met in every establishment:

*Cockroaches aren’t exactly my idea of pets.*
HMP Garth

*Adequate mattress to avoid sleep deprivation.*
HMP Dovegate

Some felt frustration at not being able to access basic provisions, or at the price charged for them within prison canteen. Some were financially supported by their family to be able to access basic items such as toothbrushes and soap due to the situation with low wages and high canteen prices:

*It’s not right, I’m already sat here feeling guilty that I can’t help them financially, and I’m putting strain on them to help me in here.*
HMP Frankland

Another fundamental need mentioned was physical safety: “I need to feel safe”. We understand that prisons can be challenging environments, with alarming rates of violence and unrest. This was described by one prisoner as “exhausting” due to having to be “on your toes the whole time, in a hyper sense of vigilance”.

*Being subjected to a hostile environment day in and day out will only ever lead to a reduction in forward thinking… we only have to look at the effect of hostile environments have had on our heroes (soldiers returning from a tour in a war zone) for proof of this.*
HMP Frankland

*In prison trouble is only ever seconds away, it’s totally exhausting. You can never take your eye off the ball; the main task is to stay alive.*
HMP Woodhill
For us to have the time and mental calmness to examine and work towards our issues, prisons need to be safe. Not just safe as in no assaults, safe as in no fear.
HMP Whatton

Therapeutic communities such as that at HMP Grendon or the Enabling wing at HMP Dartmoor sign a good way forward. In place of noise, shame, debt and violence, you get discussion, honesty, clear eyed living and calm.
HMP Dartmoor

3.1.2 Access to health
An obvious basic need within prison relates to healthcare. Without their health needs met, prisoners stated they were not able to commit to other activities which might help them to make effective use of their time in custody. This relates to both physical and mental health and was a common feature within the correspondence.

*Healthcare provision that is comparable to that in the community.*
HMP Leyhill

*The times at which you can call to make an appointment is restricted, the times it is available coincide with when everyone is at work meaning it is literally impossible for most people to get a healthcare appointment.*
HMP Frankland

*In my previous establishment there was no access to healthcare for those in wheelchairs as the doors weren’t wide enough.*
HMP Rye Hill

One prisoner sent a bundle of papers to illuminate his ongoing battle with health care over medication. He said he was currently without the medication he had been prescribed due to concerns about it being a tradable drug, and as such was frustrated and in pain. His response to our question “what do you need?” was quite simple: “my medication”. Numerous prisoners referred to their medication being challenged at receiving prisons.

*Health records / continuity of treatment stops on transfer, medicines are taken away at reception.*
HMP Dartmoor

*It’s hard enough being in here away from our families but then having the medication taken from us for no reason just makes our time here even harder… I’ve been on this medication for many years and I was told I’d be on it for the rest of my life …A lot of the prisoners on this unit are in the same position as I am and some of them now self-medicate.*
HMP Parc
Others spoke of waiting lists and cancelled appointments to see healthcare providers.

*I had 12 successive appointments cancelled to see a transplant specialist due to the prison not being able to supply escort staff.*

HMP Birmingham

We know there are significant health inequalities within prison populations and a heavy demand on health services. There is also a growing older population in prison who are adding to the demand on services. One prisoner wrote to explain an area of good practice in relation to this; his position of ‘buddy’ to older prisoners needing health and social care. In his prison, buddies assist with in-cell cleaning, collecting meals and filling in forms for those who would struggle to do them on their own. He felt this had been beneficial for the prisoners he was assisting, the healthcare teams, wing officers and himself:

*Taking on the role of a buddy has given me the opportunity to develop myself and be more caring, considerate and thoughtful of others.*

HMP Dartmoor

There were some excellent examples of peer initiatives relating to health. In HMP Oakwood they have a prisoner-led healthcare support team that among other things, operates a reminder service for people with healthcare appointments. As a result the number of missed appointments has fallen dramatically. Some in HMP Exeter were disappointed in the lack of listeners on their wings, but generally the role of peers was to be championed and developed.

*Prisoners often rely on other prisoners to offload.*

HMP Whatton

*Having somewhere to talk confidentially about how you feel about being in prison in the first place. I understand you can’t have one-on-ones cause of resources but maybe a group of women sharing what they feel safe to share and being appreciated and listened to.*

HMP Foston Hall

There was a clear concern that mental health services were not available or extensive enough and this would be an important step in the journey through custody.

*Some form of higher-level support for those in custody with mental health concerns being addressed as a matter of priority.*

HMP Ashfield

*A better first night centre… Staff should be there to talk to you and listen to you and get to know you.*

HMP New Hall

This woman prisoner also remarked that so many prisoners struggle with their mental health that they should have “three months of therapy for everyone entering the system”, regardless of whether they request it or not.
There were numerous responses which related to connecting with nature. One prisoner gave a detailed response regarding the benefits of bringing animals within prison and letting prisoners take responsibility for their care. Multiple responses, however, were given about the need for being outside:

*More blue sky and fresh air – do wonders for mental wellbeing.*
HMP Dovegate

*More time in the fresh air… giving prisoners the ability to take a short break from the regime will allow them to address building pressures they may be feeling. This could potentially have a powerful positive effect on the amount of people entering the ACCT process.*
HMP Rye Hill

*I need fresh air, the outside and space.*
HMP Eastwood Park

Many of the prisoners who responded via the kiosks or through slips of paper commented on the use of the gym as essential to their physical and mental health, with several writing simply “more gym”. This was less prevalent in the longer responses but important to include as it may reflect the views of those who were less inclined to write comprehensive letters. Others who used the kiosks or reply slips referred to activities like yoga to benefit both physical and emotional health:

*The prison service searches for solutions to mental health issues, substance misuse, anger control and physiotherapy. The trick that is being missed is that yoga is a cure for all those problems.*
HMP Coldingley

Prisoners also spoke of their need to access addiction services, with either an existing or an emerging habit. Fellowship meetings were raised as an important addition for prisons, such as Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous. One prisoner wrote about his desire to access Gamblers Anonymous but that this was not an option for him. Particularly strong was the view that ex-addicts were an important resource for prisons in terms of their ability to connect with others with addictions and provide some inspiration.

*I came inside with a bit of a problem but now I have a raging addiction.*
HMP Parc

*Outside AA / NA are where the home of recovery really is. AA / NA should happen every week.*
HMP New Hall

*Talks by ex-addicts – what links / partnerships exist between HMPPS and external charities?*
HMP Wymott
Access to primary health care can be difficult in prisons, and for those prisoners who have unmet need in this area, it becomes a matter of all-encompassing concern which must be addressed before they can effectively make use of what is in custody.

3.1.3 Information and knowledge
One of the issues contributing to prisoners feeling unsafe is mounting frustrations regarding lack of communication. We have included it within this section because it is something that has the potential to make a difference at a rudimentary level. For example, within one workshop at HMP Stafford, emerging resentments were described as “petty” and “easily resolved through officers explaining their actions or policies”.

An example of the cause of tension in one prison was that some prisoners were being locked up before the allocated time. This was causing resentment not just because of the time lost on association, but because of their lack of understanding as to why it was happening. This was raised several times during the consultation in relation to different aspects of prison life.

_Pruners left in the dark as to why certain decisions were made._
HMP Dartmoor

_Canteen items come and go without any explanation from staff as to why._
HMP Exeter

_One young offender … was just left locked up in his cell all day every day for his first six weeks without any explanation._
HMP Portland

_Security regime should be required to justify their intrusions that prevent activities or events on the basis of ‘security’ to some sort of independent oversight group._
HMP Wandsworth

Several prisoners suggested that more information regarding the rules in prison would be beneficial in order to create a secure platform from which to engage with prison life. Others requested more at induction, while one woman ex-prisoner said she was afraid to come out of her cell on her first morning, as she did not know what the regime was or what would happen and was “too afraid” to move. Others said that it was not just new prisoners who needed information.

_Is there scope to produce a kind of ‘prisoner’s guide’ to custodial sentencing – a relatively brief and ‘plain English’ explanation of how custodial sentences work; release and recall arrangements, appeals against sentence and the specific things which apply to sex offenders. It would absolutely not be legal advice; rather an accessible statement of current law which is – as you will know – highly complex and technical._
HMP Isle of Wight
Advice when you arrive, initial arrival is disorientating especially if you haven’t been before.
HMP Swansea

Induction booklets get updated but when you’ve been there a while you don’t get them so don’t know of the changes.
HMP Parc

By having access to directories … honest and pertinent factual information … will inform people in prison as to what their entitlements are.
EasyJail

This place feels like a dead zone, a dark box, you don’t know what’s going on outside, who’s there to help you.
HMP Belmarsh

This is also the case for prisoners who struggle with their reading and writing, and for those who struggle to understand the English language.

The first stage of deportation is that the foreign national prisoner gets a S.120 notice. This is nine pages of dense legal material… He has barely enough English to deal with the daily routine. Yet he was given this form and the provisions which require it to be explained to him, or have it translated, or have an interpreter present were simply ignored.
HMP Maidstone

Something really frustrating for me was the lack of understanding from staff dealing with people with complex needs, learning disabilities, foreign nationals. They’re feeling how we felt but with added pressure. I’ve seen people with severe autism run around the landing because they’ve been stuck in a cell all day, foreign nationals given documents they can’t read, people penalised for missing appointments who are struggling to cope. There needs to be specialist support for those that need it, we need a trauma informed approach to imprisonment.
HMP East Sutton Park

A key concern was raised in multiple prisons about the lack of understanding of how to contest reports and assumptions on prisoners’ records that were often redacted as “security intelligence”. This information was often then used to prevent prisoners from progression through the system and accessing workshop placements, or access to privileges such as family visits. Prisoners talked about not knowing how to contest such “evidence” and how hopeless it felt when a marker on a file meant that there was seemingly no chance for progression, nor any way of understanding what you might need to do to move forward in the sentence. One man told of an infringement of the rules at a previous establishment that was following him and blocking his ability to move forward despite having understood the issue and resolved to move forward.

It’s like nothing I do can rebuild trust, I am not allowed to live it down, or even know what I can do to make it be in my past; it’s like a secret police force.
HMP Stoke Heath
3.1.4 Stability and consistency
As with the inaugural report on ‘What incentives work in prison?’ and in line with the previous section, understanding ‘the lay of the land’ was an essential requirement of many of our respondents in terms of their physical environment. There were calls for prisoners to be issued with the PSI handbook so that they could understand the rules more fully, “as there is never any continuity with replies to questions the prisoners ask. Quite often the prisoners are told different answers by different officers. There is little continuity”. Consistency was raised many times as an essential requirement for being able to settle and move forward.

*If prisoners know where they stand it reduces anxiety and they can use the mental energy for productive things.*
HMP Portland

*Prisons need discipline and structure. These two things appear in daily life outside of prison.*
HMP Frankland

*Once we embark upon a path, we need to be confident that we can complete it without disruption. Prisons don’t currently provide people with sufficient stability or certainty either to pursue their goals or to see them through.*
HMP Coldingley

Many respondents chose to comment on the lack of consistency they had experienced in custody and some gave specific details of when this happened. A consistent approach within prisons would be an important step in alleviating these frustrations.

*For us, being behind our door is a big deal. E.g. if regime says unlock 08.15 and we don’t get unlocked until 08.50, [it] means no shower before visit, [you] end up being late for visit.*
HMP Birmingham

*All prisons if a Cat A, B, C or D regime [should] have the same wage structure, facilities list and IEP regime.*
HMP Ashfield

*You can ask and ask over and over again for the things you need, and you’ll be ignored or pacified with empty meaningless promises. Kick off and fight and assault your cell mates or staff and you will get anything you ask for. It’s very normal for a prisoner to leave prison more violent and angry than when he arrived because prison staff encourage it.*
HMP Stafford

Without consistency, one prisoner commented that “you create a hierarchy which fosters bullying, intimidation and gang mentality which results in self-harm, drug use, poor mental health and in some cases, suicide”. It was clear that it caused frustration within the responses we received. One prisoner commented that every department seemed to blame each other, which does not inspire confidence, nor does it solve the problem.
Prisoners have lost money on items they have purchased as the orders take so long to process, and when items arrive, they are often the wrong size or specifications, sending them back and getting a refund is nearly impossible. Poor communication on what is happening with their orders only adds to the frustration.

HMP Frankland

Other prisoners also spoke of the challenges of moving between prisons and having to start all over again on transfer to new prison, with no recognition of personal challenges and accomplishments in preceding prisons. One prisoner argued, “Nothing counts for anything”.

A national passport needs to exist and include a prisoner’s approved telephone numbers, visitors, child contact levels, education scoring etc. This will alleviate stresses upon transfer as long as steps are in place to stop prisons adopting the ‘we want to check all of these details ourselves’ mentality.

HMP Ashfield

Thinking further away still, the contribution by Creative Inclusion explained how ex-prisoners felt there was a ‘postcode lottery’ not only during imprisonment but on release as well, in terms of the quality of public services made available to those leaving prison. This was echoed in a prisoner letter:

The prison estate is now so fragmented (like specialist schools or academies) that it is really “luck of the draw” whether you get intervention or help.

HMP Frankland

Generally, it would be fair to say that faith in the current system to ‘make things happen’ or to support prisoners was low, however, there was a will that this should improve. There were calls to remedy this situation:

Lots of broken promises, need to rebuild the trust.

HMP Birmingham

Need to do an external audit to restore faith in the prison system.

HMP Parc

It was noteworthy that several prisoners did refer to specific staff members as being champions of justice. There are certainly some areas of good practice, where staff have challenged applications taking too long to be processed or decisions not being made. However, it was also mentioned that these staff were the “unsung heroes of the system” and should be credited more readily.

There are some amazing staff ... they conduct themselves with dignity and honesty, which in turn commands respect. They are firm, fair and compassionate. You know what to expect from them and you know what’s expected of you.

HMP New Hall
Women at HMP Foston Hall said when their current governor came into the prison, a ‘dark cloud was lifted, anything she says she’ll do, she does. She isn’t full of empty promises, she’ll come to lifer days … knows about us and our families, there’s a trust’. It was interesting that men at HMP Long Lartin had felt similarly when their current governor took over. However, on the news that he was due to leave, there was a genuine concern, with some speaking of a “fear” of what was to come. Consistency was important for them:

*Will the next governor continue on the path set out by the current one? Will the old governor come back? Will the next one be like the last one and implement a restrictive regime? Did they just throw themselves into a cultural shift pointlessly, only for it all to revert back to the ‘old ways’?*

As well as the staff being consistent within and between prisons, it is important that everyone working and living within them can agree on their purpose. We know prison to be a unique culture whose function sits somewhere between a rehabilitative and a punitive culture. Even within the mission statement, there are quite different roles expected of staff; as security and as rehabilitators, which can lead to confusion. The above section (and indeed our previous report) highlight challenges with this blurred function, complicated further with staff shortages, cuts to services and frequent Ministerial changes.

Within the prison estate, establishments run differently according to the different weightings placed on these opposing functions, which can be heavily dependent on the governor. This has a direct knock-on effect on the way staff and prisoners interact, which is the focus of the next section.

*Prison administrators need to think carefully about the role of prisons in society and what kind of people they are sending out into the world.*

HMP Coldingley

3.2 Psychological needs

This is the largest section within this report and covers both belonging needs and esteem needs; what prisoners need to be ready for change. First, we look at the culture within prison before moving on to the connections prisoners have with their family and friends, and how these can be strengthened. We also consider the importance of a positive mindset in prison as a means of making best use of time.

3.2.1 Rehabilitative culture

An environment supportive of change has shown itself to be of central importance to prisoners looking to progress in prison. The phrase ‘rehabilitative culture’ has gained considerable traction and refers to an aspirational environment within prison where both staff and prisoners share a belief that change is possible. Safety and basic needs such as those highlighted in the previous section, must be met before a rehabilitative culture can be developed. This should also include a sensitivity towards issues of respect and decency.

*Treat people with dignity, be polite when speaking.*

HMP Parc

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Whatever the category of the prison, and whatever the personal circumstance, neither side loses much with the application of basic human fairness, politeness and civility.
HMP Dartmoor

Throughout the consultation, we learnt that while rehabilitative culture is sought after, it will take time to embed within the system. A few prisoners spoke of the excessive use of bang-up, and feeling like animals “ushered from pen to pen” without human connection.

Authorities just want us to be locked away like animals with no possible prospect of being rehabilitated until it’s too late.
Prison Undisclosed

As someone said to me, if you keep an animal caged up all day and let it out, the chances are it will bite you.
HMP Risley

Not just in relation to movement, concerns were raised about the way prison officers treat and speak to prisoners.

Officers concentrate on putting you behind your door, once you’re there, they forget about you.
HMP Dartmoor

The longer your sentence, the less they care about you.
HMP Birmingham

I hear the saying “you’re in prison, what do you expect” a lot. I hear this from poorer thinking prisoners, they especially say this when they are scamming, stealing or abusing someone, as if that phrase makes it acceptable. But it is incredibly disheartening when I hear it from an officer.
HMP Stafford

A very senior front-line senior officer came to my cell and told me she was my key worker. I told her I did not require a key worker. She said “good, I don’t want to deal with you either, I will put you down as failure to engage” and she walked off.
HMP Garth

Despite this, there is a clear will to banish the barriers between prisoners and officers, believing that a relationship between the two was at the foundation of reformation and something to strive for.

Some are exceptional and caring.
Prison Undisclosed
For prisoners to make the best use of their time, they need many things but essentially they need prison staff to be helpful and motivated.
HMP Stafford

Someone believing in you, this is transformative for people in prison.
HMP Coldingley

They too have to be motivated by the possibility of lives (theirs included) being changed by their current experience. Their keys must open hearts as well as metal doors.
HMP The Verne

Sometimes that’s all you need, that little bit of praise and appreciation can make the difference.
HMP Swansea

The approach taken by people working within the criminal justice system was often the difference between whether people engaged in any support offered or not. A non-judgemental and authentic member of staff or volunteer could break down barriers.
Creative Inclusion

What was suggested was for staff to be more compassionate and to “believe in rehab culture”. It was also clear that treating everyone as simply “a prisoner” without individual needs and traits was standing in the way of progress. For example, one prisoner wanted to be moved as his cell was in the bustling centre of the ground floor, where the pool table, stairs and dartboards were located. He said, “When asking one officer and telling him I was autistic, his reply was ‘I have lots of prisoners with ADHD’. Others spoke of individual differences which can lead to additional strain.

Some officers have a one size fits all approach which doesn’t really work.
HMP High Down

If a prisoner receives bad news just before bang up, give the opportunity to seek help, rather than 100% sticking to rules and putting straight behind the door.
HMP Coldingley

Particularly in my case as a transgender prisoner, I think support is essential, both emotional and practical... professional support from a psychologist about the emotional changes being transgender involves.
(prison name removed due to potential identification)

One woman explained how important it was for her to be treated as an individual in a difficult situation:

I was allowed to go to my grandma’s funeral, I can’t put a price on that, for my family the value was huge.
HMP Foston Hall
Furthermore, prisoners at HMP Long Lartin spoke of previous experiences affecting their ability to form relationships with others. They suggested that this needed consideration when relationships are harder work than staff might expect:

> Many of these people have been through traumatic childhoods, have been let down by multiple people, agencies, services, and have themselves broken trust put in them by others. As a result, levels of trust are low, as they are across the prison estate. Trust in authority, trust in the system, trust in their fellow prisoners.

HMP Long Lartin

Several prisoners recognised that being a prison officer can be a challenging job without the rewards it might have. Furthermore, the age of newly recruited officers was mentioned as being a challenge, particularly by those who would draw comparisons with prison before the financial crisis, “Before the recession, officers were older with more life experience. Now teenagers manning the wings”.

> You have staff employed within the adult estate who are not even eligible to be in this estate as an inmate.

HMP Rye Hill

> Prison officer should be an expert job, with training, esteem and qualifications to match.

HMP Birmingham

> Staff morale can have a big impact upon the environment – it affects us.

HMP Coldingley

There was acceptance that officers might struggle with competing pressures and that this should be addressed at the recruitment stage with “more trained staff, more mental health trained staff. Different type of staff. You know, not just staff that lock you up and run to alarm bells”. Ex-prisoners taking part in a focus group also suggested that there should be more diversity at every level to help build trust.

The importance of staff-prisoner relationships was very much emphasised throughout this consultation, as assisting prisoners to progress through their sentence, stay focused and reduce tensions that could lead to further problems.

### 3.2.2 Family and friends

Improved connection to families and significant others was also mentioned by many as something that would help them get through their sentence.

> Those family links, that stability, that’s all we’ve got left.

HMP Birmingham
Suggestions for how this could be improved included having photographs copied in colour by security, conjugal visits and video links for important family moments (such as a child playing in their football league final).

*Return to policy of not holding prisoners more than 100 miles from their home/release area.*

HMP Ashfield

*People here think in Albania we have a prison system stuck in the past, but we have conjugal visits, we get home leave, we get time off our sentences for good behaviour and work.*

HMP Long Lartin

*PACT are visible on the wings, they go out of their way to arrange school reports to get brought in, bringing kids in to visit. This level of care and dedication is what prisoners want in the prison staff.*

HMP Swansea

There was a strong theme of “don’t punish my child for what I’ve done” as this exacerbates tension and damages mental health. An example was given by one prisoner of a time he was “shouted at by a staff member” because his daughter gave him a hug and sat on his lap. Afterwards, his daughter refused to hug him,

*...she said no dad I don’t want to get you in trouble ... that broke my heart that did.*

HMP Swansea

*As a mother, I think more/easier access to children is very important. This especially applies to women with older children (there seems to be a train of thought that only parents with small/young children have a need to keep relationships sustained) and that children whose fathers are around are not seen as a priority. All mothers, with children of any age, and married or single, should be given full support to maintain relationships with their children.*

HMP Eastwood Park

The cost of telephone calls was discussed in several letters and was referred to as “extortionate”. An example of the prices was given, which has not been verified:

*7.44p/min Mon-Fri to a landline, 16.56p/min to a mobile.*

HMP Rye Hill

When pitched against a backdrop of reduced wages, prisoners were finding it difficult to maintain the desired level of contact.

*The cost of phone calls... most people are on about a tenner a week, it’s absolutely disgusting.*

HMP East Sutton Park
It’s all a money-making scheme at the end of the day.
HMP Swansea

We need access to cheaper phone calls, there is no reason that we cannot be offered minute packages at a discounted price as you would get with a supplier outside of the prison estate.
HMP Rye Hill

There were several references to the prison accepting incoming calls, with one prisoner saying, “let my children speak at a time that’s right for them”.

Being able to say goodbye to your loved ones would be a hugely rewarding event.
HMP Coldingley

A Birmingham-based women’s centre, Anawim, provided a case study which is relevant to this section as it relates to her enjoying her family time, but also the reason why this was so important to her time in prison:

Jane felt that the support she received from her family and friends outside was really important for her time, but she understands that other women do not have this external support. She feels external agencies coming into the prison to see women could be really supportive, as she felt as if she was in a ‘bubble’ in the prison & the world outside had stopped. By seeing people who were coming into the prison to support her (e.g. family, friends, external agencies) reminded her there was still a life outside of the prison, which supported her leaving. Jane really enjoyed the ‘family days’ that were run at the prison & felt this supported her relationships with her children.

Visits centres were mentioned, and examples were given of particularly good visits centres at HMP Oakwood, HMP Parc and HMP Swansea. One further example of good practice was given regarding tea dances for couples at HMP Oakwood, so that couples could connect through dance and music. This was greatly appreciated, and important for those who do not have children, as families are made up of multiple members. In fact, many commented on the difficulty of seeing those not considered to be ‘immediate family’:

If you don’t have children, you don’t get family visits.
HMP Exeter

Let us see our family, why’s it such a barrier to see my nephew, why’s it so hard to see my aunties and uncles?
HMP Long Lartin

Family members who contacted PRT spoke of not knowing what to do to help and receiving minimum guidance from prisons to play a more effective support role. Several talked about the stigma and the lack of understanding of the prison process, and lack of opportunity to seek support for their own anxieties about returning prisoners.
In Jane’s case study (above) there is also reference to external agencies. Although not referred to as strongly as family, there was reference to the importance of external agencies acting as role models throughout a period in custody. Many want an opportunity to hear from those who have lived experience of imprisonment to come back and inspire hope that things can change in a positive way. Examples were given of specific prisons or organisations who promote this type of practice, although more would be welcomed.

He was able to turn his life around by meeting people who could relate, and who have built a life after prison. Easier to be open with people who have been there. Red Rose Recovery – holding the ladder down.
(Ex-prisoner, Blackpool Lived Experience Team)

Using peers who want to change as positive role models. Lifers coming back in for focus groups.
HMP Foston Hall

One anonymous prisoner wrote in to say that he feels that connection should be even wider than family and friends but with other strands of society to ensure that prisoners do not feel as isolated on release. Connection with life outside the walls was raised several times.

Further involvement with the public via prison restaurants, art exhibitions and miscellaneous events with guest speakers (i.e. reformed prisoners, athletes, MPs, artists) can help to bridge the gap between public and prisoners. This helps with resettlement, developing social skills and creating a sense of belonging within inspiring social networks.
HMP Grendon

There were the numerous calls for more frequent and efficient use of release on temporary licence (ROTL) to assist longer term prisoners in their release into the community. This is something raised in our previous PPN report, and prisoners in this consultation felt it would make for good use of their time – preparation for release.

A chance of ROTL earlier on in our sentences so that we can keep ourselves in the swing of living a normal working life but only if the prisoner has been deemed suitable.
HMP Dovegate

3.2.3 Maintaining connections through technology
We have included this section here as it relates to family and the need to keep in contact, but it also relates to wider psychological needs such as maintaining a connection to the community and the workforce.

There was a clear recognition of the rapid and dramatic changes we have seen in communications, with smart phones now being the primary method of communication, especially for young people. Indeed, a group of younger prisoners at HMP Parc and at HMP Coldingley commented that out of everything they had lost since coming into custody, they just wanted their phones back. They felt it to be a cultural shock to not have access to information and people.
In line with this, several fathers said they would like to be able to use internet-based communication with their children rather than the more traditional telephone.

An in-cell email system for example, family ties are a heavily relied upon protective factor but is becoming ever more difficult…. The younger generations who we will be relying on to be our positive support networks only use electronic format for contact now.
HMP Frankland

A further consideration is those whose families live far away or even outside of the UK:

How can we take what they say seriously about supporting families when they can’t even let us skype our families abroad.
HMP Wandsworth

I was taken over 200 miles from my support network. From weekly visits with 7+ varying people, I now have no visits and only written support when I can manage it.
HMP Isle of Wight

The challenges faced by the prison service in relation to technology are significant, in terms of upholding the need for security but also in assisting prisoners to be successful upon release. Some made suggestions for how this might work in practice, with almost all who raised the prospect of improved technology in prisons being aware of the operational difficulties this poses.

Resources should be up to date with the modern external world, an example of this is the white flag internet such as they have in youth detention centres. This can be set up to be ultra-secure.
HMP Rye Hill

Tablets not connected to the internet.
HMP Birmingham

Allow kindle type secure downloads to improve choice and remove security fears about books being sent in.
HMP Dovegate

Developing a bespoke browser that gives prisoners secure, restricted and monitored access to the internet (operating on a whitelist and traffic filtering system) is entirely within our capabilities, and would help liberate us from many of the practical barriers holding us back from researching educational and legal materials, or filling out application forms for courses, jobs, or finance.
HMP Coldingley

Entry into the digital age - I can type 5+ times faster than I can write, I’m in that generation. If I could email family then my contact could be easily monitored and recorded, guaranteed spice free and far faster and cheaper. It would massively improve communication.
HMP Isle of Wight
Prisoners wanted access to technology, not just for contact with family but to assist them in not losing touch with society. Long term prisoners at HMP Swaleside expressed an anxiety around ‘not keeping up’ with the pace of change, while also wanting to be released ‘world ready’. For this group, ‘world ready’ meant knowing how to use a phone, how to use a tablet, how to apply for jobs online and navigate search engines and websites. Having time and support to learn how to use the internet to better themselves was considered be an important use of their time.

_I think prisoners should have access to a laptop computer in their cells. This would empower many prisoners to develop IT skills which are necessary for a person re-entering society._
HMP Frankland

10 ½ years in, looking back, access to a laptop would have been hugely beneficial for me to make best use of my time in custody.
HMP Coldingley

One anonymous letter outlined his frustrations with the amount of time men “idly spend on the landings”. He felt this time could be better used “accessing a prison virtual campus site. The virtual campus would allow prisoners to research resettlement plans, job vacancies (i.e. linked to the job centre) and apprenticeships for ex-prisoners, rehabs, halfway houses, licence conditions etc. This could be accessed by in-cell tablets or booths on the wings”. One prisoner from HMP Maidstone stated that they now had a virtual campus within the prison and that the Prison Council had enabled them to access a computer with access to www.gov.uk which has aided foreign national prisoners enormously.

3.2.4 Mindset
Prisoners also spoke of needing to have an optimistic outlook to in order to get through a sentence, particularly a lengthy one. Phrases such as stay positive, keep strong, keep busy were frequent. One prisoner referred to his “fighting spirit” and how this relates to his mental health, physical health and spirituality.

There was an acceptance that prison was boring, and this had the potential to temper any determination or fighting spirit. Prisoners felt that isolation and confinement worked against the concept of using their time as best they could but that this was a first line approach taken by prison – punitive and punishing rather than understanding, supporting and enabling.

_In prison something that should take a month can take a year, that’s not a joke._
HMP The Verne

Two prisoners referred to the need to be able to tolerate this without letting it affect behaviour so that it does not “lead to expressions of rage that are detrimental to one’s progress”, while others suggested hobbies to help tolerate the wasted time or a place to feel ‘normal’.

_What you need is a masters in super patience._
HMP Long Lartin
Being able to be normal, the example of the barber shop set up on the enhanced wing, a place where you can feel like you’re not in prison, have a chat, open up to someone you trust.
HMP Birmingham

Others spoke of the need to seek out a purpose, which needs to be individual, in order to keep motivated.

The dehumanising process of prison removes one’s sense of purpose. So where one would have had purpose outside such as college, work, travel etc. Prison becomes a dead end and the brain also comes to a dead end unless you give yourself purpose. I chose to study and lift weights. So, over the years I transformed my physicality and mentality. It gave me the will to get up in the morning and look forward to tomorrow, next week, next month, next year and next decade.
Undisclosed prison

Within HMP Swaleside, the focus group was comprised mostly of long-term prisoners who felt they needed some long-term planning, since working to a yearly plan was “demoralising and demotivating”. For others it was about coming to terms with what has led to this point, in order to be able to move away from it.

Requires the individual prisoner to be honest and forthright about ‘how and why’ they got into prison.
HMP Risley

At HMP Grendon, where prisoners are familiar and comfortable with therapeutic methods, the groups felt “it was fundamental to understand themselves, take ownership and accountability of their actions and take responsibility for their behaviour. But for them, this also meant making themselves vulnerable and open to exploring their previous life experiences – both good and bad”.

Prisoners felt they could make better use of their time in custody if they had more responsibility within prison.

Not infantilised, instead treated like an adult and with respect and dignity.
HMP Leyhill

Prisoners want to play more active role in prison life, barrier in the way of doing that (security).
HMP Exeter

Opportunities to change or control our environment ourselves.
HMP Parc
At HMP Grendon, prisoners felt they were invested in and given opportunities to contribute to the community through being able to challenge others appropriately and take ownership amongst themselves of community issues. They saw this as helping to preparing them to manage potential conflict in the community moving forward. This was also the case at HMP Oakwood:

*Opportunities are presented, and it is for us to take them and create the best use of our time within the constraints of the regime. A combination of opportunities and structure create a positive and purposeful environment in which to live and overcome our issues.*

One prisoner at HMP Wormwood Scrubs felt strongly that prison should relinquish much of the control it currently holds over individuals. He states:

*What I, among many, need is for the interference of the prison authorities in prisoners’ lives to be minimised, i.e. for the containment of prisoners to be limited to the physical constraints of imprisonment without any interference with communications, publications or business matters except in so far as is required by the competent authorities (police, security services, courts).*

Prisoner-led initiatives can work not only to increase prisoner responsibility and skill but to alleviate problems within establishments. HMP Oakwood demonstrated a strong commitment to prisoner-led initiatives, with the following table highlighting their current schemes, many of which are running in multiple prisons and are relevant to the key areas discussed within this report:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YCG – Your Consultancy Group</td>
<td>Advice and guidance on prison law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIFT – Leading Individuals Forward Together</td>
<td>Mental health support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frog Prince</td>
<td>Within prison printing service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PACE – Peace and Community Engagement</td>
<td>Striving for a peaceful community and working to deescalate situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Unite</td>
<td>Bringing people together to challenge discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cordial Group</td>
<td>Working with those who are isolated to create a community spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAS – Health Advisory Service</td>
<td>Telephone helpline to support prisoners with access to and information about healthcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RALPH line – Resettlement Advice Line and Prisoner Helpdesk</td>
<td>Supporting rehabilitation and reducing re-offending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIG – Basic Intervention Group</td>
<td>To help those who are on Basic Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASPIRE</td>
<td>Career Planning and Development Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CICS Store</td>
<td>Deals with property concerns and questions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Those in HMP Grendon also had the opportunity to explore their offences in a therapeutic way, something that others in the system would like to access in order to be in a psychological state of wellbeing, also without the fear of repercussions for being honest about their issues.

> *My time would be best spent undertaking intense counselling, therapy and life coach programmes both directly and indirectly related to my offending and the factors contributing to it.*

Anonymous

> *It is my opinion that offenders should be able to input and highlight areas that they wish to improve themselves in without the fear of further prosecution and punishment.*

HMP Ryehill

In a more practical way, several prisoners from the more general prison estate referred to their skills in management being put to use within a wing community. For example, one prisoner from HMP Norwich refers to wasted time on the wings being minimised:

> *Processes are poor, but no one seems to be able to challenge, they (the officers) just carry on as that’s what they’ve been shown.*

It was also considered to be empowering for the prisoners themselves when given responsibility and helps to maintain a sense of agency, not reliance. This is an important consequence to avoid in prison, becoming institutionalised.

> *To be treated like an adult ... if over 18 then allowed to have the rights of an 18-year-old such as buying and watching of 18 rated films and games, which are shown on TV anyway.*

HMP Rye Hill

> *Utilise long term prisoners more, giving them a sense of purpose but also tapping into their valuable insight.*

HMP Birmingham

> *Want us to be responsible, give us more responsibilities and incentive to take them up.*

HMP Parc

> *Get prisoners to use their skills to do DIY type work.*

HMP Exeter

One ex-prisoner, whom we have kept anonymous, wrote into us with the benefit of hindsight in response to the question. Once again, he referred more to psychological needs and keeping busy in order to keep motivated.

> *I needed a plan, I needed to keep busy, to get a job, learn (even if that consisted of reading and learning privately, rather than the paid education route). As an example: I learnt to do my BILCS as one of the wing cleaners, I learnt how to make origami along with trying my hand at creative writing classes, went down the gym regularly, learnt how to make braille sheets for the blind on a special machine, and was a chapel orderly. Keeping busy, busy, busy, doing lots of things and not noticing the time ticking by (with me stuck there).*
There were a few mentions of a wider social responsibility, the feeling that the best use of time will be to benefit wider society (such as charitable and environmental causes) while in custody, as the following quotations demonstrate.

_We have a craft workshop, we have an art department in education, we have a textile workshop, all of which output products that have a potential resale value. The money raised could go to Victim Support, but instead it is just binned or scrapped. Why?_

HMP Whatton

_Why not rather than doing menial low skilled work, give us the chance to create discounted furniture for low-income households? That would create meaningful work while also giving us the chance to contribute positively to society._

HMP The Verne

_Is there anything that can be done for charity?_

HMP Dovegate

_Huge emphasis on the environment, reducing meat choices, reducing the plastic containers that food comes in. Jobs should be waste free in material and energy forms._

HMP The Verne

_We had a charity day after we raised money for a specific charity, a representative came into the prison and thanked us for what we’ve done. That was the highlight of my time here._

HMP Birmingham

The preceding sections outline the backdrop needed for prisoners to be able to make the most of what is on offer within the prison system; stability and psychological readiness. The next section considers what is on offer, or what prisoners feel should be on offer.

### 3.3 Self-fulfilment needs

Within this section, we consider the available opportunities in prison for prisoners to stretch and develop themselves. This is the highest need on Maslow’s hierarchy; realising personal potential. The reality for many was that there are not the opportunities that would allow that currently within the prison service.

_Being locked up and isolated behind your door for 100 hours or more a week will turn anybody into a nobody._

HMP Frankland

_You come here to rehabilitate yourself but there’s nothing on offer._

HMP Parc

_The only guaranteed knowledge and experience the residents can gain on the wing is how to become a very good snooker player … how many of them are going to use such a knowledge and experiences towards their future life improvements once they are released._

HMP Highpoint
Exercising autonomy requires believing that the avenues open to us include valuable choices, or in other words, choices worth making. In prison, it can quite often feel that the options afforded to us are so mundane, trivial, or demeaning that it’s hardly worth our time.

HMP Coldingley

There were so many responses about this that we have sub-sectioned them under the following headings: education, employment and readiness for the future.

3.3.1 Education

Literacy levels are poor in prison, with approximately half of prisoners having a reading age of 11 or lower. It was not a surprise therefore that for many, education was the backbone of their rehabilitation plans.

The biggest thing I need in prison is a strong education and training structure.

HMP The Verne

Some of us don’t have any qualification at all. I would love to be released and tell my family I got a GCSE.

HMP Risley

Education, simple as that, you need something to stimulate your brain and give you something to aim for. It makes the sentence easier, and hopefully sets you up for release, at least that’s how it should be.

HMP Stoke Heath

There were a few positive stories about prisoners achieving their educational aims.

I am due to start a Drug, Alcohol and Solvent Abuse Counselling course with Stonebridge Distance Learning. Also, I am planning to start my third year uni in criminology.

HMP Exeter

Fortunately, by chance, I met a counselling tutor who persuaded me I was capable of completing a degree, which I have done and moved onto a masters as well.

HMP Coldingley

However, in multiple prisons, prisoners who did not have basic reading and writing skills chose to go to work, instead of education. This may be due to not wanting to admit their level of need, but may also have to do with encouragement. It is also relates to rates of pay. HMP Full Sutton’s regime was highlighted as an example of good practice, with a regime based around two days’ work and two days of education for prisoners, with lunch eaten at work which meant that work was completed by 3pm.

Many people in prison do want to gain educational qualifications but feel as though they need to “work” in environments as this is where there is often a higher “wage” and the opportunity to attend extra sessions on a weekend to increase the balance on their “spends account”. Those enrolled on educational courses do not get much opportunities and are often financially less well off than their peers.

EasyJail
Pay scale – more options – more engagement.
HMP Parc

Evening education classes … rather than association sat watching people play pool, snooker etc.
HMP Rye Hill

It is criminal that people come into jail not being able to read and write and leave in the same circumstances.
HMP Coldingley

Some were surprised on entry to the prison system that there was not more emphasis on education and felt that it was not regarded as highly as other areas of the prison.

There is an overall feeling amongst those who work in education as well as views expressed by NOVUS staff that education appears to be the forgotten dept within prisons.
HMP Rye Hill

I arrived [at a previous establishment], petrified but in some ways excited about the opportunities to add to my education, and get some GCSEs and maybe A Levels. I spent the first few days setting targets and decided I would get myself 5 GCSEs and an A Level, minimum. I told the prison tutor when I eventually met her, and her reply was just a nervous laugh “Not here love, Level 2 English and Maths is your lot”.
HMP Lewes

For me personally, the best use of my time whilst incarcerated would be to study and better my prospects for release. Whether I will achieve them or not is yet to be seen.
HMP Holme House

Several spoke about wanting to achieve more in education than they were able to within the prison’s education department: “Quite a few would like to study at higher educational levels but are thwarted by a lack of courses and teachers”. There were also suggestions that prison education (and work) was pitched at a level that wasn’t high enough for many prisoners. We had a substantial number of letters from individuals convicted of sexual offences, a group of prisoners that is growing steadily. Several felt that the prison service has not grown accordingly to meet the needs of this growing population, with the following quote representative of the struggle facing the already stretched prison system.

Mainstream prisoners are mostly about trade, honour, reputation, money, machismo and the primacy of family. Vulnerable prisoners – including prisoners maintaining their innocence like me – tend to be more about cerebral or political discussion, wider cultural topics, career, social trends, history and psychology.
HMP Dartmoor
They were not feeling stretched or any sense of achievement as courses were catered for those with little education. Due to a shortage of educational courses, a lot of prisoners wanted to undertake self-study, and felt it should be more accessible.

*You can’t do anything more than level 2 until a certain number of years left on your sentence so you’re just treading water.*
HMP Foston Hall

*Offer more activity to help us feel less bore. I have completed all the courses in education but am not here long enough to do distance learning so what can I do now? When I’m bored I often end up in trouble.*
Nelson Trust

Most prisoners who discussed this acknowledged that it was difficult for prisons due to diminished funding. There were suggestions for how this could be overcome, including self-motivated learning opportunities.

*Book donation groups like Universities, Haven Books and Borderline Books should be formally recognised by the prison service as being allowed to gift books to prisoners.*
HMP Wandsworth

Again, the use of technology was raised in relation to self-study.

*The intranet like they have in prisons all over the world, with access to knowledge and courses we could learn and study from in order to gain skills and qualifications for when we finally get released so that we don’t get thrown out into the big bad world as cavemen.*
HMP Dovegate

One ex-prisoner wrote in with a suggestion for current serving prisoners looking to access educational material.

*A small DAB radio does not have to cost much but will be a man’s best friend in prison. I have the one I bought here in my bedroom at home. So many good, lively and topical debates on LBC, Talk Radio and BBC5 Live. Radio 4 is great from an educational perspective with shows such as Law in Action and Money Box.*
EasyJail

Several prisoners suggested prisoners could take on teaching roles where appropriate. For example, one suggested that he could teach other prisoners IT skills if employed within the workshops, but that the managers said this needed to be externally delivered, by a paid provider. Another wanted to run a course on “the thinking cycle, victor or victim, gratitude, goal setting” but was given the same answer regarding the need for paid employees.

There may be much untapped potential here, in terms of extending the education departments, providing skills and giving meaningful employment to prisoners. At HMP Littlehey, the carpentry course was delivered by a prisoner, although a tutor completes assessments. Yet:

*No-one asks what you can do.*
HMP Dartmoor
Each of us has skills what no one else has but don’t want to use them for crime anymore.
HMP Risley

Put people skills to use, start education on weekend using PLI’s [Prisoner-led initiatives].
HMP Dartmoor

Prisoners noted that there could be more enthusiasm from staff in helping them to source educational courses that match their needs, courses that go beyond the more typical English and Maths Levels 1 and 2 educational targets.

Get keyworkers active at the beginning of your sentence plan. If you want to go to college or university the keyworkers should be liable for that.
HMP Birmingham

It should not rest on the shoulders of charities to provide for education for prisoners who are amongst the worst off in society. Unfettered access to education of the highest level should be available if the government are truly of the opinion that rehabilitation is valuable.
HMP Lewes

The lack of awareness mentioned earlier was also mentioned in relation to education.

GCSEs, A Levels, foundation degrees and bachelor’s degrees are available, but they are not widely advertised and certainly not funded effectively.
HMP Whatton

Suggestions were given as to what courses would be desirable in prison and the list below contains some of the suggestions made:

- Accounting
- Business administration
- Current affairs
- Entrepreneurship
- Environmental affairs
- Extensive music lessons
- Horticulture
- Languages
- Level 3 hairdressing
- Photography
- Politics
- Recycling

Maslow originally included creativity into his hierarchy of need, a word that doesn’t often feature in writing about imprisonment. Yet, we did see references to creativity peppered throughout the evidence we gathered.

One prisoner stated that he had asked to purchase a keyboard in order to write music but was told this was prohibited. He asked why, when passive music systems were permitted. A woman
prisoner suggested “craft groups, either knitting, sewing, cookery, art, just to open up and create”. Prisoners in the HMP Rye Hill consultation suggested a “bigger variety of in-cell hobbies and project kits, a better list of what hobby equipment we are allowed” in order to have something mentally stimulating.

Twelve men from HMP Risley got together to discuss their needs and argued for: “access to facilities to create something for your children, whether it be models, cards or even sending toys to them for birthdays and Christmas”.

More suggestions were given regarding skills that will be transferable to careers or simply life after release. These are the focus of the next sections. However, one prisoner raised the point that not all prisoners will look for work following release, referring particularly to the aging population. This raises further questions around the purpose of education and its suitability for the entire prison population, in a similar way to the points regarding the expected educational level of ‘typical prisoners’.

*Horticulture courses, especially for older prisoners who aren’t going to be released to work as they’re near retirement age, and can’t do vocational courses for the same reason.*
HMP Frankland

### 3.3.2 Employment

Some prisoners wrote that they enjoyed their work in prison. Some felt that it helped to pass the time and make their sentence go faster. Others stated that depending on the work available, it can help them with motivation for the future and others felt it was good for keeping their spirits up in custody.

*The Clink [restaurant]: people actually caring makes a difference. Where there is a good working practice, good level of attention, professional equipment, it makes you want to try.*
HMP High Down

*Going to work makes you feel potentially useful, potentially normal.*
HMP Dartmoor

*Painting the wings... gets you out your cell, makes you take a little bit of pride in the place knowing you’ve done it.*
HMP Liverpool

*Railtrack course is very popular, as it can lead to employment on release. Mechanical training and forklift training were cited as being desirable courses.*
HMP Stafford

*I was very fortunate at HMP High Down to work in the education dept; reprographics centre, designing and producing forms, posters, educational resources, newsletters etc. This was fulfilling and empowering work, and trusted work to boot. And it more closely reflected the kind of work I’m most likely to do in the long term, after release.*
HMP Littlehey
Despite some prisoners enjoying work, there was a genuine sense that work provided little more than an opportunity to pass the time. It was not an opportunity to make best use of time. This is because work tended to be menial tasks, not reflective of prisoners’ current skill sets and certainly not progressing them.

*Prisoners feel like they have meaningful occupation of time however lots of jobs don’t seem to contribute to the skill set of prisoners and no development of the existing skill set is available.*

HMP Stafford

*In this prison, there is no workshops to gain registered trade skills.*

HMP Dovegate

*People in high security have needs, packing tea bags rots your brain.*

HMP Long Lartin

*In prison, it can quite often feel that the options afforded to us are so mundane, trivial, or demeaning that it’s hardly worth our time. It not only devalues us as human beings but devalues our time – time made all the more precious by its loss, and which could be put to far more productive and meaningful use than the prison allows.*

HMP Coldingley

*Surely prison is the ideal place to train people up to fill the gap in tradesmen available outside in the workplace.*

HMP Frankland

Low wages were mentioned as a key feature of prison employment, and detail given about the struggle to decide between basics such as shower gel or a phone call home. There were calls for raised wages to reduce tensions on the wing.

*Access to fair minimum wage even if this has to be lower than the national minimum wage, or if national minimum wage, a deduction for rent and food to appease the general public.*

HMP Rye Hill

A significant number of responses referred to employment in the future, outside the prison walls. Employment following release was raised as a significant issue by several of the respondents who had been incarcerated for sexual offences. Suggestions for a career’s advisor were made as a means to making the right choices in prison to help in the future, akin to those provided in secondary schools. However, part of the role would need to be understanding more about employment after a period in prison, not just about what jobs are available in a general sense. Issues such as disclosure of convictions, licence conditions and identifying supportive agencies was raised. Imagination was required in this regard, as mentioned by an Anawim employee working with women released from custody, “Qualifications tailored to jobs they are able to apply for with a criminal conviction that are not just hair-dressing”.

*Who will employ ex-prisoners? And who will offer this advice? It all seems very ad hoc.*

HMP Wymott
Clarity of choice of what career options are available, and what license restrictions will mean for work.
HMP Exeter

They offer tiling and painting and decorating but I’m not allowed in someone’s house?
HMP The Verne

The feedback from an external focus group was that fear of discrimination after disclosing criminal records was a key barrier to getting the most out of your sentence. There was a feeling that you won’t be able to use what you learned in prison when released anyway, so it is difficult to engage fully in education/training whilst in prison. This group of ex-prisoners advocated working with local businesses to support ex-offenders into work, encouraging more employers to follow the example of Timpson who readily train and employ people involved in the criminal justice system.

One prisoner commented that there could be more focus on employment within sentence plans, with specific focus on individual preferences and desires.

Sentence plans are bizarrely difficult to access. It took me a year to get hold of mine and it was fantastically vague. One of the three targets was ‘improve employment related skills”.
Perfect – and what will I actually be allowed to do as a sex offender?
HMP Littlehey

Regular job fairs were suggested as positive use of time in prison and had been well regarded by the community. Some prisoners at HMP Elmley had secured employment through this process and felt this was a positive for both the prison and prisoner:

Knowing you’ve got something to go out to – a legit job – no stress, the Mrs is happy - you keep your head down and do your time quietly.

Preparation for work courses were raised as a good use of time. Several focus groups agreed about the helpfulness of learning basic IT skills in order to access job descriptions and applications and working towards obtaining H&S and CSCS cards to support the practical requirements of successful employment on release. There was general agreement that these things were hard to source independently on release but completing inside offered prisoners a ‘chance to better themselves’. Again, there was reference to the potential for ex-prisoners to support this work.

We see mini courses for interview techniques, disclosure letters, CV writing and self-employment but in reality, these are conducted by staff that haven’t had an interview for many years and have never had to disclose a criminal record and who haven’t been self-employed.
HMP Whatton

Prisoners given the opportunity of ‘mock’ job interviews, at which all the difficult and awkward questions can be discussed and dealt with.
HMP Wymott
Prisoners felt that to really make best use of time in prison, there needed to be individual focus. This was evident throughout the whole of the consultation, from healthcare to relationships to education and also with employment. Looking at prisoners as all being the same can deny them the opportunities to a sentence which will ultimately help them lead law-abiding and useful lives in custody and on release as per the mission statement.

However, as with many things, there was acknowledgement and acceptance that there are barriers to seeing the ideal solution from being implemented. This was, again, particularly identified by men in prison for sexual offences who felt they have the least amount of support from the public.

   Joe Public may need convincing in the merit of giving prisoners these opportunities when there are those in the community struggling on zero hours contracts and with prisons being an easy target for political point scoring.
   HMP Rye Hill

3.3.3 Readiness for the future

Both education and employment are important in relation to building a better future. In addition, prisoners are often required to work on issues around their offending. Targets are set on a ‘sentence plan’ which is recommended to be constructed collaboratively and should assist with prisoners’ future goals and motivation. It was argued that this should be something that happens early in a sentence to help set the pace for the remainder.

   Preparation for release should start immediately on entering prison.
   HMP Frankland

However, there was frustration that due to budgetary cuts and inefficiencies, motivated prisoners were not able to move on and complete their sentence plans. In fact, some do not have sentence plans at all, or received them towards the end of their sentence, and rehabilitation is not seen as a key area of focus for some.

   Two years here and I’ve still not had a sentence plan.
   HMP Long Lartin

   Rehabilitation is the runt of the judiciary litter.
   HMP Littlehey

One prisoner within a focus group said he had been transferred specifically to a prison to do an offending behaviour course but had been on a waiting list for 16 months. He had initially hoped that there would be time for him to undertake the course and go to open conditions to practice implementing the skills before full release. However, due to the waiting list, he would be released soon after completing the course.

There was concern regarding the slow progression of prisoners through the system, particularly those on parole sentences:

   Us on parole get penalised for the prison’s problem.
   HMP High Down
So as a prisoner, you’re stuck sitting waiting, not knowing how long you will wait.
HMP Frankland

The Offender Management Unit (OMU) was one of the departments that was recognised as being stretched and consequently not able to meet with prisoners who are looking to progress. Working collaboratively with OMU was certainly an important target for those looking to make the most of their time in custody. Not being able to do this was a cause of tension, and prompted quite angry responses especially in relation to understanding the reason behind the lack of contact. One prisoner at HMP Long Lartin was visibly distressed, saying he could not complete his sentence plan because the courses he needed to complete were not available. He said he had “tried getting in touch with OMU but they’ve not got back”.

More access to offender supervisors and probation – we want to work with you but we can’t.
HMP Portland

I personally have had five different offender supervisors over the space 23 months, of these the majority have contradicted themselves with information given.
HMP Rye Hill

To see my OMU worker or be allocated an OMU worker earlier in my sentence would have been helpful. I know other women have a sentence plan, but have no idea if mine has been written or what is in it.
Nelson Trust

Looking back, I would say to be given a complete map of sentence progression route, including timelines in between courses, re-cat boards and establishment moves.
HMP Frankland

One prisoner from HMP Bure suggested having a “detention / custody pathway” reminiscent of care pathways in the community. As with education, there was some trepidation over the courses on offer in the prison. Some prisoners did not feel that there were sufficient courses. We had a number of submissions where prisoners had written material for their own courses. We received one letter from a man who was looking to understand his offending more. He had spent eight to nine months of the last 10 years looking at his offending and felt this wasn’t enough.

Anger management courses... there aren’t any here. Also counselling for previous trauma.
HMP Nelson Trust

Others felt that they were not effective in creating change because they are too superficial.

Reoffending rates for sex offenders are already low, the rehab programmes available are scarce and unproven but probation wants everyone to do them to cover their backs. Fear wins.
HMP Littlehey

Prison courses are designed for prisoners to go through the material, rather than the material going through them.
HMP The Verne.
Speaking for those receiving short sentences, prisoners in focus groups were concerned that there was nothing to support them:

*Lads that are in and out of prison on a regular basis don’t really get anything.*
*HMP Elmley*

It was interesting that offending behaviour work received less attention within our responses than education or employment. Most of those who did discuss it were from sex offender establishments.

*They also need a rebrand, make the focus more on support and development and less on treatment, it makes it sound like a disease you want to cure.*
*HMP Whatton*

*Some won’t even realise what their needs are because they’ve never been told there’s something better. Many only see happiness or achievement in terms of material benefits.*
*HMP The Verne*

There was no doubt that the focus was on what would help on release – such as gaining employment. One prisoner summed this up quite poignantly:

*The problem is when I’m out... I can do all the courses you want me to do but that won’t help me when I’m out... Prison is easy, I can sit in my cell all day and let the time tick away, but all my problems / issues start when I’m out.*
*HMP Portland*

The importance of learning life skills in prison was a key finding in the consultation, so that you have a better chance of success on release. This was the major finding from Merseyside, Cheshire and Greater Manchester CRC who consulted with ex-prisoners on this question. Life skills include cooking, nutrition, parenting, banking and housing. There many references to this, and the list below provides a sample of recommendations of what prisoners and ex-prisoners would like to learn about.

- Budgeting
- Debt management
- How to pay a bill
- Prices of everyday items
- Understanding benefits
- Where to find emotional support in the community
- Where to find job opportunities in the community.

Anawim included the following in their response:

*Women want to keep busy and want to build on themselves for themselves but there seems to be little opportunity to do things which have an impact that will benefit them practically.*

While true for many prisoners across the estate, this was particularly important for those with long sentences who had not had the opportunity to practice these skills for many years. There was a clear sense that those with a long sentence will need to “start from scratch”.
In our previous report we found that prisoners would like to use their time in custody to ‘save up’ to help them on release. This consultation found that prisoners felt it would help them with deposits for accommodation, buying things for a new home and clothes/equipment for work. One prisoner argued that this should be mandatory. Others called for help to understand the benefits system and to attend to matters in advance of release to avoid any shortfalls in finances contributing to recidivism.

Without a plan, there appears to be little enthusiasm and optimism for release.

What’s the point if I’m just going to be released homeless?
HMP Foston Hall

We leave prison with a discharge grant and a prayer.
HMP Whatton

Others summed up what they need for release very clearly.

I have to be prepared for the world I am to be released into, kept up to date with technology, a laptop in cell, a phone in cell, useful job training, better access to family and well managed visits areas.
HMP Frankland

Getting mentally and physically prepared for release.
HMP Birmingham

Those reading this report may be familiar with the concept of ‘pains of imprisonment’; the psychological damage that can be caused to those in prison as a consequence of their imprisonment. We know that many prisoners will bring the experience of trauma into custody and the prison itself can exacerbate these deep-rooted issues. This was recognised by a number of PPN members.

Prisons need to be places that actively rebuild broken self-esteem and self-worth, not places that crush hopes and stifle dreams. Belief in ourselves gives us the confidence we need to exercise our autonomy and make the bold choices necessary for a brighter future.
HMP Coldingley

Hope is very important in prison. Without this, it can leave a prisoner on a path to destruction. Treat a person like a dog, don’t be surprised to get bitten… one day that prisoner will be released into society, no better or often worse than when they were incarcerated.
Undisclosed prison

We have chosen to close the findings section with a quotation which pulls together several of the themes covered. What is needed to make the best use of custody may be individual and multifaceted but there are common themes which are no different to those outside of custody, things that are important to humans whether they have committed offences or not.

Put the funds back into the prison system. Putting funds into the Good Life Skills (1) healthy living, (2) knowledge (3) independence (4) inner peace (5) spirituality (6) happiness (7) creativity (8) excellence in work and play (9) relationships and community. Lastly, hope.
HMP Frankland
4. Conclusions

It is important to conclude by emphasising the potential for change evident from this consultation. Prisoners recognised the constraints but were solution focused and pragmatic with their responses. This consultation was not seen as an opportunity to list grievances, far from it. Instead prisoners made great efforts to not only highlight good practice where they know it exists, but to offer solutions to the many problems that exist within the system. 

Firstly, we heard once again that a safe and secure environment was needed in order to be able to engage purposefully with what is on offer in prison. Prisoners need access to health care and to know where they stand in relation to what is expected of them (and equally what they can expect from the prison). 

Secondly, prisoners reaffirmed to us that they needed to have valuable relationships during their time in custody; namely with officers and with their loved ones outside the prison walls. 

Thirdly, once these more fundamental needs were met, they wanted the chance to develop, the chance to thrive. The pursuit of personal growth was shown to be an end in itself, not just a means to rehabilitation or resettlement.

*Prisons could be a place to help us find ourselves, find out what we are good at, and for.*

HMP Eastwood Park.

*I (now) know what the good life looks like, I just need the ladder.*

Every Step of the Way

One response referred to the well-respected Good Lives Model of Offender Rehabilitation (Ward, 2002) which proposes that we need to build capacities and strengths in people in order to reduce recidivism.

*I need to have a balanced life, i.e. based on the Good Lives Model which meets my following needs; relationships and community, healthy living, inner peace, sense of purpose, autonomy and creativity. These goods give me the platform to maintain a positive mental attitude so as to overcome the hurdles I face, manage my risk factors and embrace opportunities available to me to develop life plans.*

HMP Frankland

Cost is often cited as a recognised barrier to the prison service being able to make the changes needed for prisoners to thrive. However, many of the suggestions put forward in this consultation were inexpensive or free. Utilising prisoners’ existing skills for example such as to fix broken equipment or to provide training for other prisoners, may have the potential to plug some of the holes that austerity created. Being allowed to purchase A4 writing paper through the canteen to enable personal study was another example of a cost-free change that could change outcomes:

*This (not being able to purchase paper) makes self-study, note taking or writing almost impossible. This is particularly devastating for someone like me with dyslexia as I need to re-write my work several times.*

HMP Wandsworth
Of course, hope, the vital currency of time well used in prison, depends on much more than money.

Prisons have the potential to be places of genuine change and we support the adoption of a rehabilitative culture throughout the system for the benefit of staff, prisoners and the wider community.

*This time in prison could be the beginning for many of us. Not the end. We are here because of X but that does not define who we could become.*

HMP Eastwood Park

What do you need to make the best of your time in custody? **Hope**.

-You do not need to put your name and your answers will be sent to The Prison Reform Trust.
5. Recommendations

In answer to the question of ‘What do you need to make best use of your time in prison?’, the following recommendations emerged through consultation with those with lived experience of imprisonment and their relatives:

1. A stable, safe and consistent regime with a well communicated set of expectations for prisoners and for staff is an essential building block for a prison where time is well used. Prisons should ensure good communication, with prison rules and processes clearly conveyed to new arrivals, and these should be updated and made readily available to existing prisoners.

2. Prison staff need to be supported to develop ways of working that build inspiration and model different ways of resolving conflict, disputes and tension.

3. Prison security department assessments should be communicated to prisoners clearly with an outline of how a prisoner can improve his or her risk assessment to permit progress. Prisoners must be told what they can do to restore trust and be given opportunity to earn it.

4. Prison education should be developmental and go beyond basic skills. Any prisoner should have the opportunity to go beyond their existing level of achievement or learning. For example, long sentence prisoners should be able to access Open University and other degree courses before the current seven years from release, and prisoners with pre-existing workplace skills should have the chance to keep them up to date.

5. The arts and creativity have a key place in prison to support engagement, tackle isolation and build optimism. Prisons should show that they value that contribution in the way that resources of both time and money are allocated.

6. Prisons should conduct a skills audit for each prisoner on arrival and utilise these skills to support and enhance life inside prison.

7. Prisoner-led initiatives are vital to increase agency, a sense of ownership and responsibility for the health of the prison community. Prisons should create space and opportunities for prisoners to demonstrate that they can be trusted, including by involving prisoners in decision making and scrutiny functions.

8. Prisons should enable greater and better quality access to families and the wider community as part of a strategy of building prisoners’ capacity to change, and to sustain change in resettlement post release. Controlled access to the internet would transform prisoners’ ability to help in delivering this ambition, as well as multiple other objectives relevant to education, health and personal growth.
9. All prisons should make it easy for community-based organisations to contribute to the health of the prison community

10. Prisons should provide more practical help towards resettlement and this should start earlier in the sentence. This should include practical life skills training in cooking, cleaning and budgeting for example, all of which can then be practiced during the sentence, but also more support for finding housing and accessing benefits before release. OMU departments should be more proactive in meeting with prisoners, even if that means going on the wings to meet prisoners in their cell.

11. Prison wages should be reviewed and brought into line with the rising cost of canteen items and the high cost of prison phone calls. Prisons should not expect families to make up the shortfall in basic provision.
The Prisoner Policy Network’s second report *What do you need to make best use of your time in prison?* discusses prisoner experiences of life behind the wall and their thoughts on exactly what is needed to make best use of time served.

We received a wide range of responses from over 1,250 prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families. Many prisoners highlighted positive contributions from staff, and we are very grateful to the officers who have taken to the work of the PPN and contributed in their own way.

Connection with wider society, a desire to be reintegrated and not forgotten about came through as a priority. Above all, this report shows that prisons need to promote personal growth as an end in itself, not just a means to reduced reoffending. This report also makes recommendations for change that will make a positive difference.

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