



European Prison Education Association

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## November Newsletter



## *Impressions from #EPEA17*

As Autumn settles & the leaves fall around us, it is a time of rest and recovery for the Steering Committee in the aftermath of our recent conference. EPEA '17 was a conference of energy & action, of sharing ideas & experiences. This newsletter will round up on the conference activities and provide some delegate impressions of the 3 day event.

As part of the desert of this November newsletter, we have some updates in the final section of this newsletter that are also well worth a read.

I hope that you all are settling into the festive season and as we do, are anticipating the budding & new growth of the coming Spring.



**Ioannis Papadimitriou**

**EPEA SouthernRegional Representative**  
[south@epea.org](mailto:south@epea.org)

## Beyond Frontiers Conference Roundup



# FRONTIERS

## 16th EPEA Biennal Training Conference



### Day 1: #epea17

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The 2017 EPEA conference in Vienna got off to a flying start. Chair Annet Bakker opened the day saying that in “times of economic crisis” it was all the more important that countries joined together to discuss challenges and find inspiration from each other’s work. “It’s a pleasure seeing so many new faces here,” she said.

Katharina Schwarzl, from Austria’s Ministry of Justice, gave an introduction to her country’s prison system. Katharina, a former social worker, offered examples of challenges (“Motivated staff, looking beyond security barriers, are scarce”) as well as positive innovations. She highlighted the e-learning platform through which prisoners can take part in distance learning, even accessing courses run by the University of Hagen. Questioned from the audience about the public’s response to allowing prisoners to use digital technology, Katharina said this did not concern her. Her “duty and intention” was to prepare prisoners for a release into the modern world. “I’m not shy about advertising this,” Katharina said.

In the afternoon, delegates split up to visit one of four criminal justice settings - male prisons Simmering and Korneuburg, female prison Schwarza, juvenile institution Gerasdorf and probation scheme

NeuStart. Visitors were warmly welcomed by prison staff, who were made informative guides to their workplaces. Reconvening afterwards, delegates shared some of their impressions. Most agreed that the prison environments felt calm, and that relationships between staff and prisoners seemed friendly. While there are still issues of short staffing, the ratio between staff and prisoners is a lot higher than in some other countries - in Schwarzau for example, there are around 80 staff to 110 prisoners. An officer at Schwarzau shared her pride in working at the prison, which was formerly an imperial palace - and the progression she has witnessed, from a system that was "very strict" to one that is "a lot more loose" and sensitive to the individual needs of prisoners.

However, some delegates questioned the centrality of education in the institutions they visited - Korneuberg prison, for example did not employ a full-time teacher. There seemed to be more focus on work and work-based training, but provision appeared to be largely dependent on what prison staff could offer themselves - it was rare to have a third-party come in to train or teach.

That evening, the delegates were lucky to be welcomed to the Ministry of Justice for a dinner prepared by prisoners at Simmering prison. We were welcomed by an official, who spoke about the importance of education in equipping people with skills to take back into the community, and reflected on some of the challenges faced by the system, including the number of foreign prisoners, who make up 54% of the population.





## Day 2 #epea17

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The second day was another information and inspiration-rich day at the EPEA Conference in Vienna! We began with a presentation from Walter Hammerschick, Director at the Institute for Law and Criminology in Vienna. He spoke about work and education in prison and the benefits of connecting the two. Prisons often had a “bias” towards work, he said, meaning education and training were subordinated. But “it is worthwhile to reconsider this” as a means to “upgrade” both work and education - meaning prisoners were upskilled for workshops at the same time as being more meaningfully prepared for life after release.

Walter, who has been working in prison education for 20 years, said the field was still “reinventing the wheel”. He called for a comprehensive database to record projects and initiatives across Europe, and said there should be research into the national economic effect of education and training in prisons. “This would be very useful for our arguments with politicians,” he said.

Next, Sara Lee spoke about her experience as founder of The Irene Taylor Trust 'Music in Prisons', a UK music charity that works both in and outside prisons, co-producing music. In prisons, this involves “turning up with a van-full of instruments” on day one, and ending up with a band performance and the production of a CD by day five.

The aim of the programme, said Sara, is to improve health and wellbeing, raise aspirations, and ultimately reduce reoffending. A classically-trained oboeist, Sara spoke about the impact she has seen both as a music teacher in HMP Wormwood Scrubs and running the charity. “Music lifted spirits, gave them confidence, and helped them get through long sentences,” she said.

More recently, the Irene Taylor has expanded to work outside prison - running workshops with young people 'on the fringes' of criminal justice, and continuing to work with adult prisoners after release. This sort of intervention, said Sara, "cannot be light-touch". Support must be "professional, solid and relevant", guiding people around the "deep hole" they need to navigate after release.

Lastly, Nina Champion, Head of Policy at UK charity Prisoners Education Trust and Western representative for the EPEA, fed back on her research into prison/university partnerships. Showing photos of herself as a student, Nina said university "was so much more" than what was being studied. "It can be a fantastic source of social capital," she said.

In the last year, Nina has visited prisons in Belgium, Denmark, Poland and the US as part of a grant from the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust. She shared examples of prison/university partnerships flourishing in every jurisdiction, and taking on very different forms. Even in jurisdictions not renowned for their criminal justice innovation, Nina said she found "golden nuggets" of forward thinking. For example, in Poland, men at Lublin prison can study for a full degree in social work at the same pace as students in their local university.

Getting the buy-in of prison staff can difficult, but is crucial, said Nina. She shared the story of a guard she met at Avenal prison in California whose perspective changed after he took a criminology course required to gain a promotion, and had to learn about the Norwegian penal system. "It was a lightbulb moment, said Nina. "He thought - 'What if I have been wrong all this time', and began to look at the prison with new eyes." Meanwhile at Leeds prison in the UK, some officers were resistant to the partnership work going on with Leeds Beckett university, before it was suggested that physiotherapy students also visited the prison to apply their study to the officers' ailments. "Now the officers are very happy the students are there," said Nina.

In the afternoon, delegates split up to attend workshops on subjects including the arts education for foreign national prisoners and working

including the arts, education for foreign national prisoners and working with vulnerable women.

In the evening, we were treated to a tour of nighttime Vienna, ending up in the Rathaus square on the first day of its famous Christmas market - and were able to enjoy the lights, gingerbread, decorations, and just ein kleiner Geschmack of Glühwein.



## Day3#epea17

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The closing day of the conference started with delegates split up to attend research roundtables on setting up European networks and workshops on subjects including Adult learning, writing media challenges, JPER, and the “EPEA and you” workshop about the structure and future of EPEA.

After lunch the closing keynote speeches took place with a live broadcast in the EPEA facebook page.

EPEA founder member and renowned prison education researcher Kevin Warner presents the Beyond Frontiers #epea17 keynote speech: "The Potential vs The Policy".

[https://www.facebook.com/pg/epeaorg/posts/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/epeaorg/posts/?ref=page_internal)

The video stream is still available at the EPEA facebook page.

The keynote speech from Kevin Warner was followed by a panel discussion: "Policy, Potential and Breaking the Frontier", presented by Paul Talbot between Kevin Warner, Per Thrane of the EPEA and EuroPris Education Group and Daiana Huber of CPIP, Romania.

The conference works came to the end by the closing made by EPEA Chair. Before the closing our chair honored Carolyn Egglestone, a very dear and loyal friend to the EPEA for many years. Also, it was the time to say goodbye to Cecilie Høisæter Torsvik the EPEA Secretary that had to step down from the office and welcome her substitute for the remaining of her duties José Alberto Pereira Pinto from Portugal. The closing reception at the hotel restaurant was a great opportunity to network, discuss and also have some great EPEA fun photos that brought a smile to everybody. All the delegates agreed that the Conference was a big success.

**Text by:** Katy Oglethorpe and Ioannis Papadimitriou

**Photos by:** Ioannis Papadimitriou





## Delegates Impresions from the Conference



The recent EPEA conference in Vienna was an interesting and stimulating experience. It was attended by over 150 people from across Europe and the US, and the presentations and workshops covered a wide range of topics including the use of the arts in prison, the benefits of learning via prison and university partnerships and the diverse ways you can employ prisoners when they are released. It is always useful to hear the perspectives of others and to be offered the opportunity to share effective practice and learn potential new ways of working was extremely beneficial.

On the first day of the conference, delegates were invited to select a prison to visit, to learn more about the Austrian system and how staff work with and support the people in their care. I visited Schwarza, about an hour or so outside Vienna where they house both men and women. It was surprising to find out that there was only one teacher in the whole prison and that there are no outside delivery organisations coming in to supplement the curriculum. This is quite different to our experience in the UK where outside organisations and the interventions they provide are a regular and indeed integral part of the

interventions they provide are a regular and indeed integral part of the prison regime. It was enlightening to see the progressive way the prison works with mothers and babies/young children, taking each case on its own merits and having the child's education and development as a focus.

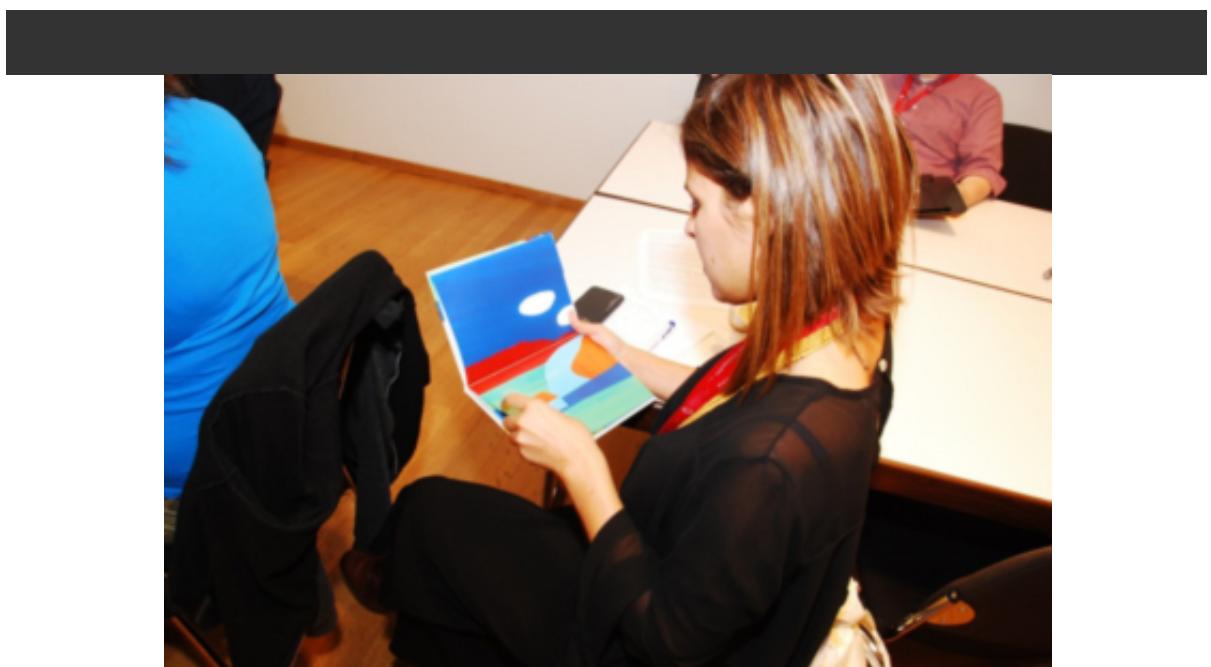
There was plenty of time available to network with other delegates and some beneficial new partnerships were brokered. Effectively organised and imaginative events such as these are so useful to attend; it is wonderful to spend time with like-minded people who share the same passion about their work as you do and to be able to use their knowledge to help address issues, and to learn new techniques and approaches to support work in your own country.

**Sara Lee**

Artistic Director

The Irene Taylor Trust

[www.irenetaylortrust.com](http://www.irenetaylortrust.com)



I have been a member of the EPEA for over 20 years and I've managed to attend most of the conferences. I have seen the EPEA evolve from a small group of persons who defined themselves as 'practitioners in daily contact with the prisoners' to an association that embraces a wider audience, including policy makers and university

researchers. This was evident during the Vienna conference where, in particular, the contribution of research and the collaboration with Universities was manifest. One phrase that stuck to my mind was about ‘the moral obligation Universities have to support education in prisons’: an extremely valid point that needs further consideration. Resulting from this widening of interest groups in the EPEA, this year sees the setting up of ‘Special Interests Groups’, an innovation in the association that argues well for the future. For the coming conference I would like to see further developments in the widening of the vision of the EPEA, particularly in more discussions about how to reach and influence key politicians (advocacy) at national level, discussions on the support teachers working in prison need (care of the service providers) as well as more discussion on the interlinking of education to other services within the prison, such as health and general well-being. This requires EPEA to move away from the tradition notion of education as schooling, one that tends to be teacher dominated to one that is multi-disciplinary: an education that involves more the correctional officer who is to be perceived as a key educator in prisons. A great (but rather expensive) conference – already saving to make it to the forthcoming one in two years’ time.

**Dr Joseph Giordmaina**

*Prison Education and Re-Entry Programme*

*University of Malta*





## WHAT'S IT LIKE TO TEACH IN PRISON?

Dear colleagues (allow me to address you in these terms), I should like to summarize the EPEA Training Conference in Vienna (2017) to a single question, but I'm afraid it's not possible, because the answer will not appear as simple as it may seem at first sight.

As we all know, it was EPEA's intention to prepare a programme as rich and varied as possible taking into account the contributions of its participants, covering all the angles, addressing the problematic situations inherent to Prison Education, actors on the ground, institutional stakeholders, prison population and their varied interests, needs and expectations regarding social (re)integration, which, I believe, has been achieved.

Nevertheless, it was with some sorrow (not to mention a bit of sadness) that I saw not many teachers talking about their personal/professional experiences, their difficulties (how they overcome them) and the potentialities of their work, the contents they teach, the specific training they (don't) receive, how they motivate inmates for education, the problematic health situations they face, the idiosyncrasies of the context they have to deal with, their relationships with the prison population, staff, administrations, etc., but, above all, how they accomplish their mission on a daily basis.

As a prison teacher and researcher in the field of professional development of prison teachers (and not intending to reduce this reflection to the importance of teaching in prison), I have to confess that I would like to see the teacher's role more refocused on the concerns of the organization we belong to (it was with this emphasis that it has developed over the years and, I'm sure, will continue to grow for years to come, despite the challenges).

The participation of other countries and regions, including, but not limited to, southern Europe (where I'm from) and the lack of broader representation, as I understand it, contribute to a limitation of the discourse on the (dis)similarities in prison systems, regimes and

discourse on the (dis)similarities in prison systems, regimes and treatment, since a more accurate and realistic overview of the sharing of good practices throughout our continent and their development on the ground would enable practitioners to improve themselves personally and professionally.

This brings us to another issue, which is not part of this reflection, but has to do with ‘funding’, and which I strongly believe will, in the near times, deserve the greatest attention on the part of our constituent members, for such as Rome, also EPEA wasn’t built in a day, and there’s a lot of work ahead to meet the results that will propel us through the present and prepare us better for the future.

**José Alberto Pinto**

*New Secretary EPEA SC*

## Other Updates





# Prisoners' Education Trust

## Why Prison Education Matters

### Writing Competition 2017

Why does education matter for people in prison? We know the statistics – [the significantly lower reoffending rates](#), the higher chance of finding employment – but what about the stories behind these?

To mark the second International Day of Education in Prisons, we asked people in prison to submit poems, short stories and essays addressing the question: “Why does Education in Prison Matter?” We received dozens of submissions in each category, and a panel of PET staff and volunteers whittled them down to the strongest.

For the full article & to read some of the winning poems, stories & essays follow this link: [Prisoners Education - PET Writing Competition-](#)

[2017](#)

[Learn More →](#)



### **Adult education in Europe – A Civil Society View**

On a daily basis, EAEA monitors proceedings on the general European level, and advocates for the importance of adult education. Annually, EAEA launches a survey for its members to create specific country reports for various European countries. By asking our members and other adult education providers to answer a range of questions on the state of adult education in their country, we want to create accessible overviews that will help us to connect with one another, learn from each other and ultimately provide new insights and information to be used in advocacy work, on all levels.



To read the full article or watch & download resources, follow this link:  
[Adult Education in Europe - EAEA.](#)

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