

**ICT & MULTIMEDIA IN EUROPEAN PRISONS****Results of research undertaken as part of the *PriMedia Network***

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**INTRODUCTION**

*“E-learning gives inmates the chance to not only learn subjects for their general or vocational education but also provides them with the opportunity to acquire digital literacy. In today’s society, where digital competence is becoming necessary at the workplace as well as in daily life, the chance for ex-offenders to be reintegrated can be greatly improved by offering qualifications in the field of new media and computer use. People lacking digital competence are at risk of exclusion.”*

*‘E-Learning in Prison Education in Europe’<sup>15</sup>*

*“There is very little literature which covers ICT use amongst offenders specifically, in fact, very little attention appears to have been given to offender learning as a specialism at all. Measuring ICT literacy is a problem, as ICT literacy itself needs a definition.”*

*Paul Astley, a Learning Support Practitioner at HMP Stafford<sup>11</sup>*

*“One particular side of the prison curriculum which has recently generated more comment than others is Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Of particular concern to prison educators across Europe is the lack of access to ICT (and other new media technologies), which is hampering the digital literacy of prisoners. A lack of even basic digital literacy serves to marginalise prisoners even more and significantly hinders their employment prospects.”*

*Amitie report, Italy<sup>6</sup>*

There are contradictory views as to how effectively ICT is being introduced into European prisons. On the one hand a review of prison education and training from the European Commission<sup>14</sup> is particularly concerned about the limited access to ICT and other new media technologies, which is hampering the digital literacy of prisoners, stressing that the “lack of even basic digital literacy serves to marginalise prisoners even more and significantly hinders their employment prospects”. Even in the Scandinavian countries, widely seen as the trend-setters in this field, inadequate access to ICT equipment was considered to be the biggest problem faced by prisoners.

On the other hand a UK report, *Digital exclusion or learning exclusion?*<sup>11</sup>, suggests that internationally technology for education in prison is improving. In some countries, Internet access has been accepted for some time now, especially in Northern Europe, without jeopardy to the security of prisons. The above report provides an example from Norway where an information and communications technology infrastructure called the IFI (Internet for Inmates) has been created which encourages prisoners to become e-citizens. Student-inmates in Norwegian prisons can access university learning platforms outside the prison, communicate with teachers, upload assignments and research online.

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In other European countries such as France, there is more resistance to the general use of ICT for prisoners; and in the UK, whilst in principle the right of all inmates to access the new technologies is established, the practice often undermines this. Unfortunately there is very little information on ICT in eastern European prisons, although –as witnessed a few years ago during a visit to Lithuania as part of *'The Will to Dream'* European project<sup>12</sup> and more recently as part of a *PriMedia* workshop to Bulgaria– computers were available to inmates in some prisons there.

### CONTEXT

The degree to which ICT has developed in a prison context is, of course, a product of the overall national environment that applies in different countries: the philosophical attitude to the desirability of giving IT access and/or education to prisoners; and the resource that the government gives to funding teaching staff, hardware and software as part of the national educational process.

There is significant variation, in performance, attitude and resource. In France<sup>4</sup>, for example, despite a relatively early start in 1985, the 'IT for all' initiative in French schools has not sustained a leading edge; only 12% of teachers use IT in a quarter of their lessons (compared with 65% in the UK), though 97% of them think that it would help improve the educational quality of their teaching. Multimedia support equipment such as interactive smartboards are still not widely established.

In Italy<sup>67</sup>, while detailed statistics are not available in terms of ICT education in general, an enlightened approach to its importance is manifested in a number of interesting prison related initiatives (see below)

In Turkey<sup>10</sup> research shows that teachers mostly used available IT resources for administrative tasks such as lecture preparation, planning and reports on pupils, rather than in instructional tasks. However, the ongoing FATIH project, which is set to be completed this year (2014) will see 40,000 schools and nearly 600,000 classes equipped with the latest technology including smart-boards and tablet PCs to access course material, so that textbooks will be 'thoroughly eliminated'.

In Bulgaria<sup>1</sup> ICT is the fastest growing sector in their economy (19% productivity growth), marked by high competitiveness and export potential. This sector is one of the few in Bulgarian industry that remain virtually unaffected by the economic crisis. Their IT sector has been excellent in all key aspects and there is significant potential for innovation and expert-oriented growth. However, by and large ICT practitioners seem to be expected to develop their own educational opportunities.

The UK<sup>12</sup> is ahead of most other European countries in terms of computers per pupil, but there remain concerns about the quality of computing lessons, particularly for students at secondary level. An OFSTED report in December 2011 rated only a third of secondary schools as good or outstanding, and expressed concerns about the curriculum and qualification routes. In January 2012 the Education Secretary Michael Gove described IT provision in schools as 'a mess' and announced the launch of a flexible curriculum in computer science and programming. Specific targets were set for secondary school pupils in terms of their ability to use a range of ICT devices and achieve goals such as analysing data and designing and creating digital content for specific audience types.

## PRISON-RELATED INITIATIVES

As in other research undertaken into European prisons, the situation regarding the provision of ICT & multimedia are varied and often contradictory not only in each country, but often from regions to region. Despite the comments in the EC report quoted above <sup>14</sup>, the Northern European countries tend to be further advanced in allowing access, although other countries have also made encouraging progress:

- In Denmark<sup>3</sup>, according to the Ministry of Education's guidelines for adult education (including offender learning), ICT in education is now compulsory and in descriptions of all curriculum areas it is made clear how ICT should be included in specific subjects.
- The same principle is true in Norway<sup>9</sup>, although in that country there is a division of responsibility between prison schools which come under the Ministry of Education and prisons which are the responsibility of the Ministry of Justice. The use of ICT and multimedia however relates to both the law of Education and the law of prisons, so that there is no conflict on this issue.
- In England<sup>11</sup> classroom-based prison education addresses basic literacy and numeracy needs, provided in the state prisons by the *Offender Learning and Skills Service* (OLASS), although in private prisons by prison-employed education staff. Prisoner access to ICT is largely dependent on a number of factors relating to conditions within a particular prison rather than to a nationally defined strategy. However, since 2008 the development of the *Virtual Campus* project between the prison service and the *Learning and Skills Council* has encouraged the general use of ICT by inmates and today nearly 100% of UK prisons are connected to the scheme
- A similar policy has been adopted in Catalonia<sup>2</sup> where the 2007-2010 Strategic Objectives of the Penitentiary Services made a special mention of the necessity of the use of ICT as a tool for socio-educational intervention to "*provide prisoners ICT access as a tool against digital illiteracy and social exclusion.*"
- In Greece<sup>5</sup> there is fertile ground for implementing ICT and multimedia in prison education in the existing framework, due to the high level of equipment in all prison school units. A particular issue for them is the high number of foreigners in Greek prisons that are attending school and needing ICT and multimedia support.
- In France<sup>4</sup> the situation is generally less positive, where negative attitudes towards the use of ICT in the academic education system impact on its use in prisons. The situation is similar to that of the public outcry when a former Minister of Justice introduced television into prisons. On the other hand a recommendation by the Controller General, advocating a softening of rules concerning prisoner access to information technology, stated that IT did not compromise prison security and was an essential aid to the reintegration of detainees.
- In the Republic of Turkey<sup>10</sup> the Ministry of National Education conducts educational activities on a central level and is responsible for preparing curriculum, maintaining coordination between educational institutions, construction of school buildings etc. Educational activities in the provinces are organized by the Provincial Directors of Education appointed by the Minister. Prisons are included in these provisions.

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- In the Netherlands<sup>8</sup> there is only slow progress in creating a uniform platform for ICT education across the country's 70 prisons. Since 2006 all prison ICT departments, which had previously been independent, were united in a so-called *Shared Service Centre ICT* (SSC-I) However, only the most important programs were provided – for every other process, each of the 70 prison locations has to find its own solution. Because of the continuing diversity of computers (hardware) and programs (software), this is very expensive. The Dutch Prison Agency is therefore developing a centrally controlled network, which can provide access to centrally provided education applications and safe internet access. When this network is finished it will take over from all the local networks. The intention is that it will embrace not only education, but other processes such as shopping and bank account management.
- A pioneering initiative in Italy<sup>6</sup> has been developed in partnership with Cisco Systems, the Bollate penitentiary, the Fondazione Adecco per le Pari Opportunità, SIAM and the Fondazione IBM Italia. This project aimed to create an accredited training course with qualifications for inmates to access employment. The course participants were chosen according to their skills, motivation, and the time til, the end of their sentence, with the aim by creating a homogeneous class with good potential. Opportunities are provided for them also to become trainers for their fellow prisoners, with a view to a wider access to the labour market in the future, After attending the e-learning course, the students will know how to design, manage, implement and deploy small and medium sized networks. This initiative has not only educational value, but also has a great social importance, since it is a concrete action that offers high professional training.

## SECURITY

Despite progress in a number of countries, security continues to be a significant issue in terms of the development of ICT education in prisons. Quoting the Grundtvig *Pipeline* project, Amitie<sup>6</sup>, states: *"The use of ICT in the education within the correctional system also involves other considerations. On the one hand, ICT is a natural and necessary part of a modern education. On the other hand, the execution of the sentence causes the inmates to have different degrees of limitations on their communications due to security concerns. ICT can be a challenge to the demands for security. At a certain degree this can make some of the inmates vulnerable of not being able to participate in the so called "digital age" and to develop skills needed to handle a life in freedom on the same conditions as other citizens regarding the use of ICT."*

To summarize - a major challenge for the use of ICT in prisons is the issue of security. More specifically, how to incorporate ICT within the necessary limitation on external communications relating to security concerns.

*"The prisons must hence be able to check that the inmates are not planning criminal activities or actions detrimental to society while in prison, including with persons outside the prison. Thus it is a fundamental principle with respect to the security concerns that an inmate's communications with the world outside the prison must be able to be checked, and that this checking must be done by the prison. The rules are formulated in accordance with the same principles for visits, letters and other correspondence, and telephone calls."*<sup>6</sup>

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There have been developments to address this stumbling block. In Denmark<sup>3</sup> for instance the use of the open internet is prohibited in high security prisons and it is therefore a challenge for prison education there to fulfill the Ministry of Education's guidelines on the compulsory use of ICT. However, with the introduction of certain safeguards, this problem is gradually being overcome.

In Norway<sup>9</sup> data technology used in prison must be regulated specifically and a restrictive policy under which all offender learners are enrolled allows prisons to control student files and installed software. Furthermore, before access to ICT/internet is given, the student enters into a binding written agreement.

In Greece<sup>5</sup> the internet provider for prison schools is provided with "black list" filters on access just as with every other Greek school unit; there is no special filter or software for the inmates, so internet usage is always under the supervision of the teachers.

In France<sup>4</sup> the use of Internet in prison is monitored, to ensure there is indeed a degree of permanent restriction on individuals, and access to certain sites forbidden.

### ACCESS

Despite the security concerns identified above, access, particularly the use of ICT for educational or training purposes, is in many cases – but by no means all - becoming increasingly easier.

- In Norway<sup>9</sup> through the controlled Internet provision in prison education, the students are able to access educational websites, as well as pages with more general content such as search sites, public information pages, etc.
- *The General Prisons Act* in Catalonia<sup>2</sup> authorises the administration to organize "educational, cultural and professional activities in accordance with the official system, so inmates can pursue appropriate qualifications ... and provide maximum facilities to those unable to take courses abroad (who) do so by correspondence, radio or television." This has enabled a range of ICT technology to be installed with limited internet connections.
- The *Avlona Prison School* in Greece<sup>5</sup> is equipped with 7 interactive whiteboards connected to the internet, plus a computer classroom with 10 PCs, a multimedia projector and 4 multimedia computers with printers for office usage for the teachers. This software is standard for all Greek schools - there is no special software for teaching ICT and multimedia to prisoners. However, although in the Gymnasium 3<sup>rd</sup> grade curricula, ICT and multimedia are taught as key subjects, there is a specific time limit on how long computers can be used.
- In France<sup>4</sup> there are five prisons which provide Internet access in the scope of what the prison administration calls "cyber-bases". But this form of experiment is exceptional and does not imply the acceptance of widespread access to IT, which is forbidden elsewhere.

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- In England<sup>11</sup> OLASS has invested heavily in upgrading and replacing its ICT infrastructure in many prisons. Most education departments now have at least one IT suite which has modern computers, some of which may be internally networked, and ICT skills are offered as a standard part of the curriculum. This means, theoretically, that every prisoner has the opportunity to use ICT while serving their sentence. In a “learning” prison the organisations involved appear to be working together with an aim which values the learning. In most prisons, however, and particularly in the “working” prisons, conflicting stakeholder perceptions result in higher level distance learning being marginalised, with a corresponding lack of interest in student-inmates’ IT needs.

### OTHER PROBLEMS

Even when the problems of security and access have been resolved, there are a number of other obstacles to be overcome.

*“... despite good IT skills and improved technologies, prison learners’ access and use of technology is hampered by conflicting priorities amongst the multiple organisations controlling prisoner activities. This can lead to a prison in which menial work is valued far higher than learning. Technology-enhanced distance learning, perceived by many to be a lifeline in a desolate environment, is heavily restricted in such prisons. The situation is thought to be deteriorating as the number of organisations involved increases and the Government’s plans for “working” prisons gather pace.”<sup>11</sup>*

- In the UK<sup>11</sup>, as is nearly always the case in prison environments, the gap between the stated intention of large-scale prison initiatives and their on-site implementation is often such that for those on the receiving end - the serving prisoners - the service is of little practical use. Also, given the Prison Service’s priority of keeping order, higher level distance learning is often classed as a pastime, an unpaid recreational activity which helps to maintain order, rather than as a means of rehabilitation. It is often not included in prison management targets and had much lower priority than prison “work”. Further limitations include technical unreliability, lack of assessment and portfolio of achievements, and poor basic ICT skills of users.
- In France<sup>4</sup> public opinion plays a negative role: given the restrictions in mainstream adult education, detainees getting better access to such tools than school or university students would not be understood. In general the French Prison Administration communicates very little on provocative issues such as ICT for inmates, on the principle of “the less said, the better”. This has led to a wide-spread ignorance of the prison environment. For example, there is a common fear that IT would allow detainees to build criminal networks, even though these can equally be facilitated via letters and prison visits.
- In Greece<sup>5</sup> cutbacks in formal education and the uncertain future of non-formal educational units in prisons, magnified by the current financial crisis, create an uncertain future in prison education, including in the use of ICT and multimedia

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### BENEFITS OF ICT

Nevertheless, despite this rather gloomy perspective, where such problems can be overcome the benefits not only for the prisoners but also for the prisons are enormous.

- ICT will make prisons safer because it reduces tension in the prisoners, restores calm, not just the passive way like television 20 years ago, but also in a more active way.<sup>4</sup>
- ICT can assist in the prevention of repeat offences and for better rehabilitation of detainees.<sup>4</sup>
- ICT is a tool which can help detainees to take responsibility for themselves on release. It reinforces rehabilitation tools without changing them, especially as traditional tools used in prison for rehabilitation are now neglected because there is not enough support. There are now fewer social workers in prison and they are all overwhelmed. With this rehabilitation tool crisis, IT is now more necessary than ever.<sup>4</sup>
- A large majority of the students are foreigners and so educational approaches are targeted at their specific needs. The use of interactive boards has made a strong impact on the students, since the prison environment deprives them from the use of ICT. Another major factor is that foreigners facing communication difficulties in the Greek language benefit a lot by the use of the interactive boards, because electronic teaching tools can be multileveled and multifunctional.<sup>5</sup>
- Every school year the *Avlona Prison School* takes on numerous extra-curricular activities involving art, music, dance, school newspaper, literature, environmental subjects, etc. In many of them, the inmates under supervision, use the internet to collect material or examples of good practice related to their tasks.<sup>5</sup>
- In Italy<sup>6</sup>, specific initiatives include a 'Skype for prisoners' project at Trieste penitentiary, allowing prisoners to talk with people on the outside: one prisoner had the chance to discuss with his son's teachers how he was progressing with his studies. The project is part of a general protection scheme for the families of prisoners, in order to limit the pain of punishment to the prison environment without exceeding the legal status of offenders. In other words, it aims to limit the painful impact on others, especially the prisoners' families. The use of internet communication from prison may not only include relatives: for example foreign prisoners could communicate with their respective embassies to access necessary information. More generally, new technologies enable more immediate communication between the inmates and the government.
- A learning support practitioner in the UK<sup>11</sup> identifies the main benefits of the newly introduced internet programme for prisoners as boosting ICT confidence, helping to build personal CVs and assisting in productive job-searches.
- E-learning can also be used for the further qualification of prison staff. By using e-learning systems for their own purposes prison employees become aware of the advantages of using ICT in education. E-learning for staff provides innovative tools for essential continuous qualification and at the same time increases awareness of the benefits of e-learning for prisoners.<sup>15</sup>

## MULTIMEDIA

In earlier European projects concerned with prison education<sup>13</sup>, a range of multimedia examples - the creative application of ICT - have been identified, chiefly though videos and DVDs, many of which have been circulated online via U-Tube, etc. In fact multimedia provides a vast range of opportunities, including YouTube, Skype, blogging, PowerPoint, internet forums/message boards, Facebook, Twitter, open on-line courses tools for making videos and music, and educational games. However, multimedia is mostly identified as part of ICT in general, rarely as a specific discipline in its own right, not only in offender learning but in education generally.

For example, although much has been written on ICT in formal education, there is little specifically on the role of multimedia in UK schools.<sup>12</sup> The only contemporary overview is supplied by the BBC on its *Bitesize* exam revision programmes for 14-16 year olds: It stresses that multimedia can be used to convey information to young people effectively, and has brought fundamental changes to the way they learn, play and find information. It identifies a number of ways in which multimedia can be utilised, including: for e-learning purposes (education), entertainment, promotional and advertising aims, e-publications, modelling and simulation, and public information.

A rare exception is to be found in *Sonder Omme*, the only prison in Denmark that teaches multimedia as a school subject.<sup>3</sup> The reason for this probably lies in the fact that multimedia is not specified on the list of subjects given by the Ministry of Education, and does not therefore meet the demands of the official educational board. So far Multimedia in *Sonder Omme State Prison* has consisted of publishing a newspaper four times a year and a few videos of workshops. However it is planned to extend it into making more videos describing various activities in the prison, alongside developing a website where videos, news and eventually the newspaper can be distributed. The prison also has an internal TV channel and it is the vision of the prison staff to combine elements from the website and the TV channel, so that it can provide more information and news to the prisoners.

In Norway<sup>9</sup> some prisons, for example Oslo Prison and Halden Prison, offer educational classes on software-based subjects such as film and media, electronic music, and art with photoshop. Indeed Halden Prison has just opened a state-of-the-art media suite for the use of inmates.

In Italy<sup>6</sup>, initiatives include a web-based prison journal involving Padua and Giudecca prisons, with articles on a range of topics produced by inmates and prison staff.

In Catalonia<sup>2</sup> the *Digital Storytelling* project promotes the use of ICT in socio-educational actions, with learning and skills development linked to a final product. Despite not having sophisticated technical equipment, the project offers versatility and flexibility in audio and video format, the results of which can be shared and spread through different means, including blogs, social networks, and other distribution channels. In this way what is happening inside the prison can be connected to society outside.

Other multimedia initiatives in Catalonia include the *Digitale* project again focused around digital storytelling, which is narrated by different voices using different methods and resulting in a range of products; *AudioRelats* and *VideoRelats* creating audio and video stories created from literary texts; *dMagaZines* producing digital audio magazines; and *The Island Radio Blog* producing TV radio and television products.<sup>2</sup>

In Greece<sup>5</sup> students at the Avlona Prison School write articles and collect photos to be used in the school newspaper that is published every year and uploaded onto the school's website. Another example of the creative use of ICT is a power point presentation of the school made by inmates for the *Pipeline* project's online magazine. Digital music recordings are also occasionally used to present the students' work, including a Greek version of the EPEA song "*Learning for Liberation*", and a song composed for the collaboration with the *Greek School of Fine Arts* that resulted in murals in the prison yards.

### SUPPORTING INITIATIVES

Despite the difficulties outlined above in implementing ICT support for prisoners, there are encouraging signs in the number of recent national initiatives to encourage access in this field.

- In Catalonia<sup>2</sup> the programme *AlfaDigital* (Promoting Digital and Cultural Literacy) began in 2007 to support inmates in accessing information and communication technologies as tools against illiteracy and social exclusion. *AlfaDigital* aims to prioritise the connection between social reality and personal experiences and boost the inmates' personal capabilities, thus encouraging the development of technological, oral expression, written, creative and aesthetic skills.
- The CIRE (Centre for Social Reintegration Initiatives), an autonomous agency of the Department of Justice of Catalonia in charge of Penitentiary employment and vocational training, has set up classrooms in five centres with 10-15 locally networked computers equipped with proprietary software and operating systems for delivering ICT training.<sup>2</sup>
- In Greece<sup>5</sup> all prison schools had new equipment installed in 2011 by the *Stavros Niarchos Foundation*, one of the world's leading international philanthropic organizations.
- In France<sup>3</sup> *Cyber-base Justice*® linked to external partners (job centres, local initiatives, etc) so that the release of detainees can be prepared in the best possible conditions (job-hunting, work placements).
- In England<sup>11</sup>, as part of the Government's Criminal Justice System reforms, a curriculum is being developed focused on providing skills to perform work effectively using independent providers
- Also recently established in the UK<sup>11</sup>, the *Virtual Campus* is an engaging and innovative secure intranet that supports and enhances delivery of learning and skills provision to learners in custody. It facilitates a multi-agency approach to e-learning in the secure estate and preparation for release.
- ICT education in prisons cannot be considered as a solution in itself. The EU's Lifelong Learning *LICOS* project<sup>15</sup> emphasises that experiences from e-learning case studies all over Europe have shown that there cannot be a substitute for the personal guidance of inmates by teachers, though it can support the qualification process by adding educational resources to effectuate learning and giving teachers time for their actual pedagogical work. E-learning has to be organised as a "blended learning" process: the strengths of interpersonal support and mentoring by the teacher have to be combined with the strengths of effective and efficient e-learning repositories for educational material and action-oriented learning supported by the new technologies.

- LICOS further recommends that E-learning for inmates should be organised as part of an overall process model, using ICT from assessment and gaining qualifications through to resettlement and job placement. An end to end ICT support with embedded e-learning and documentation of learning results (e-portfolio) guarantees a continuous information flow for all parties involved. This is especially true for a continuous qualification process starting in a prison and being continued in another prison or outside the prison after release.<sup>15</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Whilst the overall picture regarding ICT & multimedia activities in European prisons – at least with regard to the countries covered by this survey – is mixed, concerns about access and application are to some extent offset by some encouraging initiatives, both at national and regional and at local level. It is to be hoped that, despite the difficult economic and social environment in which prisons are operating today, the real benefits to be gained by allowing prisoners their basic right to become digitally literate and access the same communication facilities as those on the outside will be reaped. Certainly the *PriMedia Network* will support all actions that enable this to happen and to this end is already initiating the process of developing an internationally accredited training programme for ICT and multimedia practitioners and teachers, which should be available from 2015. A further planned initiative arising from the Network is the development of a European-wide Intranet service.

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