



# *The Right Type of Education*

A Briefing on Education and Training Provision for Gypsy and Irish Traveller  
Prisoners in England and Wales

**Traveller Equality Project**

***“There’s no use having the wrong type of education for a man who has worked 20 years on the roads... It has to be the right type of education.”***  
(A Traveller prisoner, HMP Wormwood Scrubs)

**The Right Type of Education:  
A briefing on education and training provision for Gypsy and Irish Traveller prisoners in England and Wales**

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## **Executive Summary**

5% of the prison population in England and Wales comes from a Gypsy or Irish Traveller background, costing the tax-payer approximately £155 million annually (excluding healthcare and education provision). Gypsy and Irish Traveller prisoners share similar demographic and offender behaviour profiles. This prisoner group also shares similar educational attainment levels on entry into custody – significantly lower than other groups in society.

### **Our research found that:**

- 68% of Traveller prisoners did not attend school or left at or before the age of 14.
- 48% of all respondents wanted specific training that would lead to employment.
- 45% of male respondents wanted training in construction or mechanical engineering.
- 32% of Traveller prisoners had accessed vocational courses.
- 26% of all respondents wanted classes in literacy and/or numeracy.
- 9.5% of all learners on the Shannon Trust Reading Plan were from a Traveller background.

### **We recommend that:**

- Entry Level Literacy and Numeracy Courses be made available and have sufficient places for all prisoners who wish to participate without delay.
- Prison education staff regularly speak with Traveller prisoners about engaging with training and education provision.
- Regular Traveller Prisoner Group Meetings are held and that the role of Traveller Prisoner Rep is maintained in all prisons with a Traveller population in order to foster an interest in education and to disseminate information on education and training opportunities.
- Prisons create a positive learning environment by providing Traveller cultural and education resources within the library, education department and generally, across the prison.
- Prison education departments facilitate the high level of interest amongst Traveller prisoners in pursuing vocational training, recognising that their occupations on release will mainly be in the self-employed and manual sectors.
- Prisons should facilitate learners with low literacy and numeracy levels in pursuing vocational courses which have a literacy and/or numeracy element. Initiatives that embed literacy and numeracy within vocational courses should be encouraged. Poor literacy or numeracy levels should not be an excuse for preventing a learner's progression in vocational training.
- Successful peer-mentoring education initiatives such as the Shannon Trust's Reading Plan should be facilitated and encouraged both by prison staff and education departments.

## Introduction

This briefing includes: i) an overview of education and training in prison as it impacts on Gypsies and Irish Travellers; ii) findings of research on the experiences of Traveller prisoners; and iii) recommendations on how prisons could more effectively deliver education and training to the prisoner group.

For some time there has been grave concern expressed at the situation of Gypsies and Travellers in prison, both in terms of the group's disproportionate level of incarceration and their experiences in custody.<sup>1 2</sup> However, since 2011 developments in prisons have, generally-speaking, improved the situation for Traveller prisoners. The most dramatic change came in late 2011 with the introduction of monitoring of 'W3 Gypsy / Irish Traveller' prisoners on the P-NOMIS system, the operational database used in prisons for the management of offenders.

There remain serious issues regarding the effective and accurate monitoring of W3 prisoners across England and Wales with wide discrepancies between recorded W3 prisoners and the (usually much higher) actual population of Traveller prisoners. Nevertheless, the fact that this ethnic grouping is monitored means that most prisons are cognisant that in addition to their duty of care for the individual there is also a responsibility for a level of cultural awareness amongst staff in terms of this prisoner group. In short, as a result of the development of P-NOMIS, Gypsies and Irish Traveller prisoners, as a group are becoming more visible within prisons. Within this context various other initiatives have developed. Many prisons run regular Traveller Groups, have Traveller Reps, and hold Traveller History Month celebrations in June. Focussed Traveller literacy and training initiatives exist in a number of prisons. Five years ago, there were about seven regular Traveller Groups running in prisons in England and Wales. Now the figure is closer to fifty Traveller Groups.<sup>3</sup> A number of prisons have campaigned vigorously to stamp out racial name-calling by staff and prisoners with regard to Travellers, even disciplining officers in response to prisoner complaints.

At a national level, the criminal justice system has made big strides in addressing Traveller issues in prison. In 2013, NOMS in partnership with National Prison Radio established 'Open Road' a monthly radio show primarily for Gypsies and Travellers but also to promote cultural awareness amongst non-Traveller prisoners. In 2014, HM Inspectorate of Prisons published a report 'People in Prison: Gypsies, Romany and Travellers' which detailed the challenges facing Travellers in prison and made recommendations for improvements.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore in 2015, the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman published 'Deaths of Travellers in Prison' which again

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<sup>1</sup> 'Failure area: Access to goods, facilities or services... Prisoners with low literacy skills had difficulty adapting to prison life and accessing prison services. In the case of Irish Travellers, this is compounded by prejudice and discrimination, leading to high levels of self-harm', in Commission for Racial Equality, *Race Equality in Prisons* (London: Commission for Racial Equality, 2003) p.83.

<sup>2</sup> *Race Review 2008* (London: NOMS, 2008) p.59, found that 'five years on from the CRE report, there was still a lack of recognition in the establishments visited of the issues facing White minority groups and therefore no strategy in place to tackle these. Particular concerns relating to Gypsy Traveller Roma prisoners included: difficulties accessing services, including offender behaviour programmes, as the literacy level required was too high, derogatory and racist name calling primarily by prisoners, and by some staff, in two of the prisons visited, lack of confidence in the complaints system and the lack of cultural awareness and understanding of staff.

<sup>3</sup> Despite cuts in staff and resources in recent years many Traveller Groups have survived and even flourished. In a number of recent HM Inspectorate reports of London prisons, while often painting a dire picture generally, it is reported that support for 'Traveller prisoners was good', *Report on an unannounced inspection of HMP Pentonville 2-13 February 2015* (London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 23 June 2015) p.5.

<sup>4</sup> HM Inspectorate of Prisons, *People in prison: Gypsies, Romany and Travellers*, (London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons, February 2014).

identifies the main issues facing Travellers in prison and recommends many of the steps advocated by the Traveller Equality Project over the past years.<sup>5</sup>

The consequence of this official interest in issues affecting Travellers in prison is that prison staff at all levels, are increasingly concerned with addressing the needs of this prisoner grouping. Yet prison staff and management are often unsure as to how they might go beyond simple recognition of Traveller ethnicity to the point where they can make a telling contribution to the rehabilitation and resettlement of Traveller prisoners. This briefing aims to point the way in devising a more effective strategy to address the primary need of most Traveller prisoners - education and training. As yet, prisons in England and Wales have failed to comprehensively address this issue with regard to Gypsy and Traveller prisoners. No strategy or policy has been composed to tackle this major issue and as a result, Traveller prisoners, prison staff, tax-payers and society continue to pay the price for the absence of focussed interventions.<sup>6</sup>

This briefing draws on five years of work by the Traveller Equality Project with Traveller prisoners, prison and probation staff, the National Offender Management Service and numerous other stakeholders. It is intended to offer both an accurate account of the current situation and a series of realistic recommendations that would improve outcomes for Gypsies and Irish Travellers in custody.

### **The Rationale for a Traveller Education Strategy**

Gypsy and Irish Traveller prisoners represent approximately 5% of the entire prison population of England and Wales.<sup>7</sup> The annual cost of incarcerating this prisoner group is over £155 Million excluding the cost of healthcare and education provision.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps the most notable characteristic amongst Travellers in custody is the extremely poor levels of literacy, even in comparison with the low levels across the overall prison population.<sup>9</sup> <sup>10</sup> Various studies indicate that prisoners who have had vocational training in custody are more likely to secure employment shortly after release and hence are less likely to reoffend.<sup>11</sup> In this context, the lack of intervention to address the most essential of vocational skills amongst Traveller prisoners - literacy and numeracy - is shocking. The

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<sup>5</sup> Prisons and Probation Ombudsman, *Deaths of Travellers in Prison*, (London: Prisons and Probation Ombudsman, January 2015).

<sup>6</sup> The custody of individuals facing prison with limited literacy presents major problems not just for the prisoners themselves but for staff and prisons as a whole. Prisoners with learning disabilities or difficulties are more likely than other prisoners to have broken a prison rule, five times as likely to have been subject to control and restraint, and over three times as likely to report having spent time in segregation, see Jenny Talbot, *Prisoners' Voices: Experiences of the criminal justice system by prisoners with learning disabilities and difficulties*, (London: Prison Reform Trust, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> 5% of prisoners stated that they considered themselves to be 'Gypsy, Romany or Traveller' in 2012–2013, HM Inspectorate of Prisons, *People in prison: Gypsies, Romany and Travellers*, (London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons, February 2014) p.5.

<sup>8</sup> Using prison population figures for week ending 11/9/15 which is 85,699 people in total, (available at: <http://www.howardleague.org/weekly-prison-watch/>), the approximate population of Gypsies and Irish Travellers is 4285. At an average cost of £36,237 per prison place excluding health and education provision, imprisoning Traveller prisoners costs approximately £155,275,545. See National Offender Management Service, *Costs per place and costs per prisoner*, Annual Report and Accounts 2013-14, (London: NOMS, 28 October 2014) Table 1.

<sup>9</sup> One in five prisoners report needing help with reading and writing or numeracy, while around two in five need help with education and improving work-related skills. See Kathryn Hopkins, *The Pre-custody Employment, Training and Education Status of Newly Sentenced Prisoners* (London: Ministry of Justice, 2012) p.13.

<sup>10</sup> 47% of prisoners report having no qualifications. This compares to 15% of the working age general population. See Kathryn Hopkins, *The Pre-custody Employment, Training and Education Status of Newly Sentenced Prisoners* (London: Ministry of Justice, 2012) p.14.

<sup>11</sup> Prisoners who attend vocational training in prison are more likely to secure employment shortly after release. See Ian Brunton-Smith and Kathryn Hopkins, *The impact of experience in prison on the employment status of longer-sentenced prisoners after release*, (London: Ministry of Justice, 2014) p.3; and Ofsted, *The report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2013/14: Further education and skills*, (Manchester: Ofsted, 2014) p.14.

most serious impediment to employment and in effect, rehabilitation and resettlement is poor literacy and numeracy. An ex-prisoner with poor literacy and numeracy will, quite probably, soon become a prisoner again.

Regarding the provision of Traveller education in prison it is sometimes assumed that Travellers are not interested in, and will not participate in education and training. The Traveller Equality Project has found on occasion that this attitude seems to have permeated the thinking of some prison education staff and also that of some Traveller prisoners, which has in turn reinforced a certain anti-education stereotype. Despite these exceptions, the Traveller Equality Project has witnessed a widespread and deep-rooted interest in purposeful education and training amongst Traveller prisoners.

In summary, society needs Traveller prisoners to gain education and training so that these individuals are more likely to lead constructive, positive lives upon release. Gypsy and Irish Traveller prisoners themselves repeatedly articulate a desire for effective education and training while in custody. It is the purpose of this briefing to point out, how these parallel goals can more effectively be achieved within the prisons of England and Wales. Given the similar offending behaviour profiles of Travellers, their similar educational attainment levels and the similarity in the desired training preferences of Traveller prisoners expressed in this study, it would be judicious, cost-saving and humane for the Skills Funding Agency, NOMS, prison education providers, prison governors and staff to act on the issues contained in this document.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> An indication of similarity in the nature of offences carried out by Travellers is seen in a 2011 report which found that '51.7% of the offences committed by Irish Travellers involve the unlawful obtaining of property ... compared to a corresponding figure of 30.5% for all prisoners nationwide. Furthermore, burglary accounts for 26.4 % of the offences committed by Irish Travellers...compared to a figure of 9.9% for the entire prison population' in Conn Mac Gabhann, *Voices Unheard: A study of Irish Travellers in prison* (London: Irish Chaplaincy, 2011) p.28.

## Education and Training in Prison

The Skills Funding Agency (SFA) manages the Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) which aims to integrate offender education with mainstream academic and vocational provision:

OLASS allows offenders in custody, according to need, to receive education and training. This in turn enables them to gain the skills and qualifications they need to get sustainable employment and have a positive role in society.<sup>13</sup>

The SFA has contracts with four training organisations which provide learning and skills training for offenders across ten areas. One of the most significant principles of education provision in prison currently is localism. The four OLASS providers offer training in prison in accordance with the Agency's Funding Rules, where the relevant prison governor gives approval.<sup>14</sup> The nature of this multi-party decision-making process as to what will and will not be available in terms of education and training is described here:

OLASS funds adults (aged 18 and over) in custody in England, including offenders on remand. This includes ... working with lead governors to plan, monitor, review and assess the curriculum, with the OLASS provider, to meet local needs, and considering the offender's needs and the job market offenders are released into.<sup>15</sup>

The benefit of the localism approach is that knowledgeable local stakeholders (including the training provider and the prison governor) can match the needs of a specific prison population with the opportunities in the local employment sector. For example, a prison in an area which requires more employees with construction skills or perhaps, more expertise in manufacturing processes, can adjust the in-prison training accordingly. A consequence of this education funding model is that the curriculum of different prisons varies considerably depending on the views and assessments of the respective stakeholders.

In summary, this model which is intended to be highly de-centralised, responsive and dependent on local knowledge seems to produce a widely divergent range of course provision across the prison estate. Remarkably, both nationally and regionally, the collation of information on specific course provision in individual establishments seems sketchy. Following a request for information to the Skills Funding Agency, regarding specific courses in individual prisons, the Agency stated that it 'does not publish the above data for individual prisons'.<sup>16</sup>

Significantly, Ofsted highlight that a key decision-maker in this localism model – the prison governor – is frequently not fully engaged in the process of identifying what is best for the prison population for which he or she is responsible:

Leadership and management of learning, skills and work activities in prisons remain very weak. Too many governors of prisons inspected this year did not take provision of learning and skills sufficiently seriously.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> OLASS Funding: Rules and Guidance, accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2015, at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/olass-funding-rules-and-guidance>

<sup>14</sup> For a detailed account of qualifications funded see Skills Funding Agency, *Qualifications Information Guide, Version 3*, (London: Skills Funding Agency, February 2015).

<sup>15</sup> Skills Funding Agency, *Funding Rules 2015 to 2016, Version 2*, (London: Skills Funding Agency, March 2015) p.99.

<sup>16</sup> Response from the Skills Funding Agency, 26/08/2015.

<sup>17</sup> Ofsted, *The report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2013/14: Further education and skills*, (Manchester: Ofsted, 2014) p.14.

Needless almost to say, given the immense pressures on prison governors such a situation is understandable. Undoubtedly, even the most gifted criminal justice professional would find leading a large education and training unit daunting. However, this prison education structure has practical consequences for learners, primarily because the prison education 'core curriculum', the framework in which governors make decisions, is very ambiguous.

### **Prison Education Core Curriculum**

The Skills Funding Agency outlines who the decision-makers are with regard to education and training provision and the nature of the core curriculum as follows:

*Lead governors, OLASS providers and other partner organisations will match the learning and skills offer for learners in custody with the local, regional or national employment priorities for the areas each cluster (group) of prisons releases offenders to.*

*Partner organisations may include:*

- *Jobcentre Plus*
- *Work Programme providers*
- *offender managers*
- *Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs/National Probation Service)*

...

*432. The core curriculum must include:*

*432.1. mandatory initial assessment of English and maths*

*432.2. English and maths and ESOL provision*

*432.3. vocational qualifications, including Information and Communications Technology (ICT)*

*432.4. employability skills (these may include a wide range of team- working, personal, social and other skills)<sup>18</sup>*

The 'core curriculum' as outlined above, in ideal circumstances can provide a flexible, highly responsive prison education strategy because it is not prescriptive. Nevertheless, when the situation in a prison environment is not ideal, the absence of a more detailed curriculum means that there appears to be little in the way of a minimum standard in terms of what courses prisons should provide.

Looking at the most basic education provision which prisons are obliged to provide – literacy and numeracy – illustrates the issue:

#### **English, maths and ESOL**

*English, maths and ESOL provision forms part of the core curriculum and **is likely to be required** in every prison. The expectation is that this will be delivered through intensive learning including online learning. All new entrants to prison are screened using the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) Basic Custody Screening Tool (BCST), and where the outcome from the BCST indicates the individual is not operating at level 2 or above for English and maths NOMS will refer the individual to OLASS providers for mandatory initial assessment of English and maths.<sup>19</sup>*

Therefore, implicit in the core curriculum description of Literacy and Numeracy provision is an ambiguity regarding the provision of Literacy and Numeracy courses. This ambiguity clearly has practical implications. Following requests for information from the OLASS providers, regarding delivery of Entry Level to Level 2 Literacy and Numeracy, one provider confirmed that all prisons in their area, offer Literacy and Numeracy from Entry Level to Level 2.<sup>20</sup> Another OLASS provider indicated that they did not provide Entry Level Literacy

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<sup>18</sup> Skills Funding Agency, *Funding Rules 2015 to 2016, Version 2*, (London: Skills Funding Agency, March 2015) p.100-101.

<sup>19</sup> Emphasis added, Skills Funding Agency, *Funding Rules 2015 to 2016, Version 2*, (London: Skills Funding Agency, March 2015) p.101.

<sup>20</sup> One OLASS provider stated 'all of our prisons ... offer English and Maths from pre-entry level to Level 2 and all learners have the opportunity to undertake accredited qualifications at their appropriate level' (MK Response, 14/09/2015).

in one medium sized prison.<sup>21</sup> It is not clear whether every prison provides Literacy and Numeracy classes, as this information does not appear to be publicly available. It is likely that the vast majority do provide some Literacy and Numeracy provision. However, meeting core curriculum obligations in English and maths may be met by the OLASS provider running for example a Level 2 Literacy and Level 1 Numeracy class without providing classes for those at Entry Level Literacy and Numeracy. As significant numbers of prisoners (in the experience of the Traveller Equality Project) are at Entry Level Literacy, the absence of a specific obligation on OLASS providers to meet these needs is surprising.<sup>22</sup>

When addressing basic Literacy and Numeracy provision, a number of prison officials who engaged with this study referred positively to the 'mandatory initial assessment of functional English and maths (for all offenders on reception to custody)'.<sup>23</sup> It was suggested that the introduction of mandatory assessment would help address the low levels of Literacy and Numeracy amongst prisoners. However, it is not clear how mandatory assessment of Literacy and Numeracy levels addresses poor attainment levels unless assessment is accompanied by an obligation on the provider to offer suitable basic Literacy and Numeracy course provision. No such obligation on the OLASS provider exists. On the contrary, based on information from one OLASS provider it appears that assessment of Literacy and Numeracy does not ensure action to tackle poor levels of attainment in these essential skills.<sup>24</sup> Ofsted report that:

Most education departments had good systems for assessing prisoners' levels of English and mathematics, but few prisons had effective procedures for ensuring that those with the greatest need took up the provision. The quality of teaching and learning in these subjects was generally poor and achievement of qualifications was low in about half of the prisons inspected.<sup>25</sup>

Ofsted found that over half of prisons inspected are inadequate or require improvement in terms of learning and skills provision.

Furthermore:

In these prisons, education and training had little impact on supporting prisoners' progression to sustained employment or training on release. Inspectors often found that prisons had insufficient activity places to ensure good access to education or vocational training for prisoners.<sup>26</sup>

The current model of education and training provision in the prison estate is extremely varied. The flexibility offered to governors and OLASS training providers by the localism approach at best allows for a responsive education and training programme for prisoners in a particular region. At its worst, this highly discretionary model appears to do little but offer a skeletal curriculum of courses which are the most convenient to provide, at the lowest cost and which engages the easiest-to-reach prisoners. It is notable that the OLASS contract does not specifically require training providers to consider reducing reoffending. Rather, OLASS providers are incentivised to focus on numbers of accreditations awarded. It is not clear how training providers and indeed, governors are incentivised to introduce, in the

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<sup>21</sup> One OLASS provider indicated that Entry Level Literacy was not available in all its prisons (PP Response, 2/09/2015). Interestingly, included in this response was information that there was no Entry Level Literacy course operating in one medium-sized Category B/C prison within the provider's area. Two further OLASS providers failed to respond to two separate requests for information (25/08/2015 and 02/9/2015).

<sup>22</sup> The author and manager of the Traveller Equality Project is a qualified primary school teacher.

<sup>23</sup> Skills Funding Agency, *Funding Rules 2015 to 2016, Version 2*, (London: Skills Funding Agency, March 2015) p.99.

<sup>24</sup> An OLASS provider indicated that a prison with a population of over 750 does not have any Entry Level Literacy provision (PP Response, 2/09/2015) Given the nature of the Literacy levels in the general prison population it appears likely that either assessment has been ineffective or assessment has been effective but no Literacy intervention has been provided.

<sup>25</sup> Ofsted, *The report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2013/14: Further education and skills*, (Manchester: Ofsted, 2014) p.14.

<sup>26</sup> Ofsted, *The report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2013/14: Further education and skills*, (Manchester: Ofsted, 2014) p.14.

words of Ofsted, 'effective procedures for ensuring that those with the greatest need ... [take] up the provision'. Ministry of Justice statistics from 2010 indicate that 42% of prisoners have been expelled or permanently excluded from school.<sup>27</sup> In light of such statistics, it is understandable that prisons often do little to engage a challenging population in education and training. Nevertheless, while it is understandable that providers and prisons opt for the 'low-hanging fruit' approach, by not having procedures for ensuring those with the greatest need engage with education, then substantial progress on reducing re-offending seems unlikely.

When discussing barriers to education, prisoners themselves routinely cite the limited availability of desired or suitable courses and a lack of information as to what the prison education department actually provides.<sup>28</sup> It seems apparent that the aim of OLASS to allow 'offenders in custody, according to need, to receive education and training' is some distance from being achieved in view of official assessment (Ofsted, 2014) and in the findings of this study.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ministry of Justice, *Compendium of reoffending statistics*, (London: Ministry of Justice, 2010) p.5.

<sup>28</sup> These factors are amongst a number of barriers to education in prison highlighted by Prisoners Education Trust's *Response to 'Transforming Rehabilitation: A revolution in the way we manage offenders'* (London: Prisoners Education Trust, 22 February 2013) p.5.

<sup>29</sup> Ofsted, *The report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2013/14: Further education and skills*, (Manchester: Ofsted, 2014) p.14.

## Education and Training for Traveller Prisoners

Approximately 58,000 people in England and Wales described themselves as ‘Gypsy or Irish Traveller’ in the 2011 Census.<sup>30</sup> In 2015, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons reported that Gypsy, Romany and Traveller prisoners are a significant but often unrecognised minority in many prisons.<sup>31</sup> Prison Inspectorate surveys conducted in 2012–2013 found that 5% of prisoners said they considered themselves to be Gypsy, Romany or Traveller.<sup>32</sup> The educational attainment of these communities is generally low:

At present, Gypsy and Roma pupils, along with pupils of Irish Traveller heritage, are amongst the lowest-achieving groups at every Key Stage of education... In 2011, just 25% of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils achieved national expectations in English and mathematics at the end of their primary education, compared with 74% of all pupils. At the end of secondary education, just 12% of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils achieved five or more good GCSEs, including English and mathematics, compared with 58.2% of all pupils.<sup>33</sup>

A major factor in the low achievement of Gypsy and Traveller children is poor attendance at school. Specifically, there is concern about the number of children who fail to make the transition to secondary school or who drop out before Year 9.<sup>34</sup> The reasons for these low attendance rates are not simply a matter of choice on the part of Traveller communities; discrimination (both historic and current) in schools contributes to the situation:

There is considerable anecdotal evidence that bullying and prejudice against Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils are contributing to their poor attendance and behaviour – leading to disproportionately high levels of exclusion.<sup>35</sup>

As a consequence of this poor engagement with education as children, Gypsies and Irish Travellers have the highest proportion with no qualifications for any ethnic group (60 %) – almost three times higher than for England and Wales as a whole (23 %).<sup>36</sup> Low levels of engagement with schooling as children mean that Traveller adults as a whole are the least qualified of any ethnic group. However, it should also be noted that a significant number of Travellers feel that educational qualifications are unnecessary given their preferred or predominant choice of occupations. Census 2011 states that:

For Gypsy or Irish Travellers (16 and over) in employment, elementary occupations (such as farm workers, process plant workers or service staff) were the most common type of employment at 22% (11% for England and Wales). The second highest occupation was skilled trades at 19% such as agricultural, electric and building trades, higher than England and Wales and all other ethnic groups.<sup>37</sup>

It would be inaccurate to automatically assume that Travellers are ‘pushed’ into such employment as a result of poor qualifications. Employment such as construction work is, for many Travellers, traditional and such work can facilitate flexibility, self-employment and

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<sup>30</sup> Office for National Statistics, *2011 Census Analysis, What does the 2011 Census tell us about the Characteristics of Gypsy or Irish Travellers in England and Wales?* (London: ONS, January 2014).

<sup>31</sup> HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales, *Annual Report 2014–15* (London: HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2015) p.45.

<sup>32</sup> HM Inspectorate of Prisons, *People in prison: Gypsies, Romany and Travellers*, (London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons, February 2014) p.6.

<sup>33</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government, *Progress report by the ministerial working group on tackling inequalities experienced by Gypsies and Travellers*, (London: DCLG, April 2012) p.7.

<sup>34</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government, *Progress report by the ministerial working group on tackling inequalities experienced by Gypsies and Travellers*, (London: DCLG, April 2012) p.9.

<sup>35</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government, *Progress report by the ministerial working group on tackling inequalities experienced by Gypsies and Travellers*, (London: DCLG, April 2012) p.10.

<sup>36</sup> Office for National Statistics, *2011 Census Analysis, What does the 2011 Census tell us about the Characteristics of Gypsy or Irish Travellers in England and Wales?* (London: ONS, January 2014).

<sup>37</sup> Office for National Statistics, *Gypsy or Irish Travellers smallest ethnic minority at 58,000* (London: ONS, January 2014).

working within the family unit. Moreover, some research suggests that being self-employed is a way in which Gypsies and Irish Travellers can avoid workplace discrimination and prejudice.<sup>38</sup> According to Census 2011 figures, Travellers had the highest proportion of self-employment of all ethnic groups at 26%, compared to 14% for England and Wales.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, in terms of education provision in prison, it is apparent that training that facilitates vocational, manual, skilled employment and self-employment generally, is more likely to engage members of these communities.

There has long been serious concern expressed within the criminal justice system regarding access to education amongst Travellers in prison.<sup>40</sup> NOMS' *Race Review 2008* identified explicitly the consequence of poor literacy amongst Traveller prisoners:

As they [Travellers] often had very low literacy levels, [they] found it difficult to make applications or complaints. Overall, the Prison Service did not do enough to change its practices so that those with low reading skills could cope with prison life.<sup>41 42</sup>

The result of failing to address the very low levels of education amongst Traveller prisoners creates difficulties for both the prisoners themselves and for prisons.<sup>43</sup> It remains the case that intervention to address illiteracy amongst the general prison population and specifically amongst Traveller prisoners in England and Wales is sporadic.<sup>44</sup>

At a policy level, however, the pre-eminent consideration will be what education intervention in prison for Travellers means for wider society and specifically, for the tax-payer: *How has prison helped to develop the prisoner into a positive contributor to his or her community? Or is he or she still a burden or nuisance in society?*

The current model of education and training offers only occasional appropriate interventions to an ethnic group with the lowest level of educational attainment. This failure to address low levels of educational attainment amongst this group is a failure to address a key factor in the offending and re-offending behaviour of Traveller offenders.

A report from 2014, *Working with Gypsy and Traveller Offenders: A Thames Valley Probation Case Study* carried out by the Traveller Equality Project and Thames Valley Probation, offers a detailed account of the extent to which prison education interventions have

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<sup>38</sup> 'Using focus groups of Gypsy, Traveller and Romany prisoners, NACRO (2009) similarly found that these prisoners perceived unequal access to work [outside of prison] as a result of racial prejudice. High value was placed, therefore, on learning a trade, self-employment and business start-up advice to assist future nomadic resettlement' in Jessica Jacobson, Coretta Phillips and Kimmett Edgar, *'Double Trouble'? Black, Asian and minority ethnic offenders' experiences of resettlement* (London: Clinks and Prison Reform Trust, 2010) p.14.

<sup>39</sup> Office for National Statistics, *2011 Census Analysis, What does the 2011 Census tell us about the Characteristics of Gypsy or Irish Travellers in England and Wales?* (London: ONS, January 2014).

<sup>40</sup> Commission for Racial Equality, *Race Equality in Prisons* (London: Commission for Racial Equality, 2003), p.83.

<sup>41</sup> NOMS, *Race Review 2008* (London: NOMS, 2008) p.48.

<sup>42</sup> 'Prisoners from Traveller backgrounds ... face practical barriers to accessing services. Low literacy levels among Travellers....mean that they can miss out on information about provision; and, more broadly, their marginalised status within broader society can limit their capacity and willingness to request help' in Jessica Jacobson, Coretta Phillips and Kimmett Edgar, *'Double Trouble'? Black, Asian and minority ethnic offenders' experiences of resettlement* (London: Clinks and Prison Reform Trust, 2010) p.33.

<sup>43</sup> Prisons and Probation Ombudsman, *Deaths of Travellers in Prison* (London: Prisons and Probation Ombudsman, January 2015) p.3.

<sup>44</sup> See for example *HMP Ford: Model of Good Practice Gypsy, Traveller, Romany*, (HMP Ford, 2014), available at: <http://www.gypsy-traveller.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/GypsyTraveller-good-practice.pdf> . Also although not part of the adult estate and therefore with a different education model, a recent Prison Inspectorate report on Cookham Wood observed the type of ad hoc good practice that occurs occasionally in prisons: 'In education, Traveller boys were helped with reading, writing and mathematics in a group learning environment' *Report on an unannounced inspection of HMYOI Cookham Wood by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons 5 – 15 May 2015* (London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 22 September 2015) p.40.

achieved the OLASS goal of enabling offenders to 'gain the skills and qualifications they need to get sustainable employment and have a positive role in society' in respect of Traveller offenders:

65% had problems with reading and writing compared to 14% of other offenders. While 57% of all other offenders had some form of educational or professional qualification, only 12% of Traveller offenders possessed any qualifications.<sup>45</sup>

The research was based primarily upon Gypsy and Irish Traveller offenders who had been released from prison on licence. As such, we are in a position to gain a recent picture of a Traveller offender cohort that has passed through prison and been exposed to the education and training opportunities there.<sup>46</sup> The Thames Valley study indicates that education and training strategies are not impacting significantly upon Traveller offenders. These figures indicate that improved employability has not been achieved amongst this group and consequently, by and large this offender group is likely to continue to present a future burden on both society and tax-payers unless an alternative strategy is developed.

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<sup>45</sup> Joe Cottrell-Boyce, *Working with Gypsy and Traveller Offenders: A Thames Valley Probation Case Study* (London: Irish Chaplaincy, 2014) p.1.

<sup>46</sup> The study includes information on individuals serving a community order sentence (and hence not engaged with prison education provision) as well as those released from prison on licence. However, as "Low literacy was said by officers to 'narrow your options of what you can do with offenders'" one can infer that those on community order sentences represent a small minority of the cohort, Joe Cottrell-Boyce, *Working with Gypsy and Traveller Offenders: A Thames Valley Probation Case Study* (London: Irish Chaplaincy, 2014) p.1.

## Research Findings

In December 2014, the Traveller Equality Project (TEP) distributed 163 survey forms to Gypsy and Irish Traveller prisoners who had been in contact with us in the preceding 6 months. 29 forms were returned. Those who returned the forms are more likely to be literate (although some respondents were clearly aided in giving written responses) and, one could reasonably assume, more open to the belief that education provides important skills for life.

In the first half of 2015, TEP held four focus groups in four prisons: HMP Wormwood Scrubs (a large London prison), HMP & YOI Bronzefield (a privately run prison for women), HMP & YOI Isis (holding sentenced males under the age of 25) and HMP Liverpool (a large local prison). 32 Traveller prisoners in total participated in these 4 focus groups.

Overall, 61 Gypsy and Irish Traveller prisoners engaged with this study. As the focus groups did not require literacy skills for participants to engage, it is likely that the information provided by both survey and groups offers a fair representation of attitudes to education and training amongst Travellers in prison. The information derived from the research is consistent with attitudes articulated to TEP in previous research and in its daily engagement with Travellers in prison over a period of 5 years. The relatively modest sample survey was designed primarily to be illustrative of attitudes amongst Travellers to education in prison. The findings of this research highlight the relevance of low levels of educational attainment amongst Travellers in wider society to the subsequent prison experiences of this group.<sup>47</sup>

### The Educational Background of Traveller Prisoners

**68% Did not attend school or left at or before the age of 14**

**14% Left school early**

**11% Had National Qualifications Framework (NQF) level 1-2 qualifications**

#### *\*Educational background prior to prison<sup>48</sup>*

The most significant finding from the sample survey was that 68% of respondents either did not attend school or left school at or before the age of 14. Without a basic education which can provide literacy and numeracy skills, it is unlikely that an individual will be able to secure a job in the United Kingdom in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. In the case of the sample group, a large majority evidently embarked on adulthood without the skills to get and keep a job.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Office for National Statistics, *2011 Census Analysis, What does the 2011 Census tell us about the Characteristics of Gypsy or Irish Travellers in England and Wales?* (London: ONS, January 2014).

<sup>48</sup> National Qualifications Framework (NQF) level 1 qualifications include GCSE (grades D-G) and NVQ level 1. National Qualifications Framework (NQF) level 2 qualifications include GCSE (grades A\*-C) and NVQ level 2.

<sup>49</sup> As other research has indicated a significant proportion of Traveller prisoners have resorted to criminal behaviour to support themselves and their families, which in turn has led to incarceration. See Conn Mac Gabhann, *Voices Unheard: A study of Irish Travellers in prison* (London: Irish Chaplaincy, 2011) p.27-28.

While this research is primarily focussed on interventions within prison, the large number of prisoners who have left education before the age of 16 is an issue that requires attention by statutory bodies, NGOs and the Gypsy and Irish Traveller communities. Nevertheless, when addressing the issue of exactly what can be achieved within prison, one must take account of the limited nature or complete absence of basic education on the part of most Travellers when they first come into custody. If prisons wish to effectively engage Travellers in education and training then they must offer Literacy and Numeracy classes beginning at Entry Level 1. Offering only Literacy and Numeracy classes at levels above Entry Level is illogical and doomed to failure with regard to this prisoner group (and no doubt with regard to many other prisoners).<sup>50</sup>

More positively, it must be recognised that a significant number of Travellers both in the surveys and in the focus groups praised the education they had received in prison, with many respondents highlighting that it was the first time in their lives that they could access a stable learning environment. Given this context, it appears that prison education could offer a golden opportunity for many Traveller prisoners if the Literacy and Numeracy classes are pitched at an appropriate level.

*I left school at 8 years old, I could not read or write.*

*I left school aged 10. I've been working as a driveway specialist. I can drive but want to get a licence. I need to get a theory test.*

*I left school at the age of 13 with no qualifications. I spent a lot of time in prison which has helped me with my reading and writing for release.*

*I left school at 13, started hands-on work which I believe every Traveller lad has done.*

## The Current Education and Training Situation in Prison

**54% Literacy**

**36% Numeracy**

**32% Vocational courses**

**14% ICT**

**11% Rehabilitation courses**

### **\*Completed or current education course participation amongst Traveller respondents**

Amongst the sample group, 54% had participated in, or were participating in Literacy classes. 36% of respondents had participated in or were participating in Numeracy classes, while 14% had been or currently were participating in ICT courses. Significantly, only 32%

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<sup>50</sup> An OLASS provider indicated that a prison with a population of over 750 does not have any Entry Level Literacy provision (PP Response, 2/09/2015). Given the nature of the Literacy levels in the general prison population it appears likely that either assessment has been ineffective or assessment has been effective but no Literacy intervention has been provided.

had participated in, or were participating in a vocational course. This statistic is particularly revealing given the preference expressed by the majority of Traveller prisoners for vocational or 'hands-on' training.<sup>51</sup> As Travellers opt primarily for self-employment within manual occupations, this low level of participation in vocational courses is worthy of note.<sup>52</sup> The main reasons given for not accessing vocational courses in prison were that there were limited or no such courses in a particular prison, and that when courses were available a respondent's literacy levels were judged inadequate for participation.

*I'm doing Level 1 bricklaying before that I was on the gardens. The bricklaying has been good for me.*

*I'm doing reading and writing taught to me by the Shannon Trust mentor at HMP Highpoint. This has been very good for me.*

*He's doing nothing. He wants to learn to read/write with the Shannon Trust but hasn't heard anything yet (a month). It's [the education department] not very active in prison. [He] keeps putting in apps.*

## Desired Education/Training Opportunities in Prison

**48% of all respondents wanted specific training that would lead to employment**

**45% of male respondents wanted training in construction or mechanical engineering**

**26% of all respondents wanted classes in literacy and/or numeracy**

### *\*Desired education/training opportunities for Travellers in custody*

In terms of what Traveller prisoners identified as desirable education and training opportunities, 48% of respondents sought training that would lead directly to employment. 45% of men similarly specified a desire for vocational courses in construction and mechanics.

Interestingly, 26% of survey respondents wanted classes in literacy and/or numeracy. This finding seems to support the view of many participants in the focus groups who stated that access to literacy and numeracy courses in prison was limited or unsuitable. The fact that over a quarter of survey respondents (who themselves are more likely to have some education skills evidenced by their participation in the survey) desired literacy and/or numeracy classes in prison, indicates a worrying degree of unmet educational need. If the most basic education skills of reading, writing and numeracy are not universally available, accessible and advertised in prison, then it is unlikely that more complex issues such as rehabilitation, employability and resettlement will be resolved.

<sup>51</sup> See Conn Mac Gabhann, *Voices Unheard: A study of Irish Travellers in prison* (London: Irish Chaplaincy, 2011) p.34.

<sup>52</sup> For the breakdown of employment sectors amongst Gypsies and Irish Travellers see Office for National Statistics, *Gypsy or Irish Travellers smallest ethnic minority at 58,000* (London: ONS, January 2014).

*I'd like to do bricklaying, [and get] the CSCS [Construction Skills Certification Scheme] card so I can go and work legitimately.*

*I'd like to do bricklaying, plastering, plumbing, welding, so I could work for myself when I get out.*

*I would like to do my level 2 in maths so I can find something on release in mechanics.*

*There needs to be basic reading and writing as well as IT skills. These courses are the way forward for me and all of the Irish Traveller Community. The Travellers way of life has changed and we need a good level of education.*

*I would love more than anything to get help, find a job to help me stay out of here. I have seen so many Travellers in prison over the years. My key goal is to stay out of prison. I am willing to work very hard to find the right kind of job. I feel the key goal to help Travellers in prison stay out of prison is helping them find a job and also a place to live.*

## **Suitability of Education/Training for Traveller Prisoners**

**54% Good or adequate**

**32% Not suitable**

**14% Don't know**

### **\*Suitability of education/training provision**

The responses to the survey question regarding the suitability of education and training in prison was quite positive with 54% describing provision as 'Good or adequate'. Again, while there is the proviso that the respondents were more likely to have accessed classes, there was a markedly engaged attitude towards education in prison from the respondents including those who thought that education provision was poor. The survey respondents and the focus group participants overwhelmingly were interested in accessing suitable education and training opportunities but repeatedly stressed the need for courses to be at a suitable level.

Another important issue arising from the research was the absence of knowledge about what was or was not available in terms of education for prisoners. It was only in the focus group in HMP & YOI Bronzefield that prisoners seemed aware of the full range of classes available. This finding raises questions about how a prison communicates to a largely illiterate group of prisoners about the educational opportunities which are available. It seemed to be the case during the conduct of the research that many prisoners seemed unaware of opportunities which staff later stated were available. It seems therefore that a priority for prison education departments must be to verbally communicate the availability of these courses to prisoners on a regular basis. Interestingly, many prisoners highlighted the importance of Traveller Group Meetings and Traveller Prisoner Reps as an effective way of relaying information about educational opportunities to Traveller prisoners.

*We need basic reading / writing for beginners. One-on-one, very small groups, where everyone is at the same level.*

*I would like to learn to read and write better but they just put me on IT.*

*I want to do courses like bricklaying, tarmac, plumbing, practical hands-on training.*

*We need practical courses for work.*

## **The Nature of Education/Training Provision for Travellers in Prison**

Many of the participants in the study emphasised the benefit of a prison culture which promoted cultural understanding of Travellers through awareness events, and the facilitation of Traveller Groups and Traveller Reps. In particular, it was felt that both Traveller Groups and Reps allow for information about education to be effectively disseminated amongst the group.

A number of respondents emphasised the importance of teachers who had an understanding of the background of Travellers, specifically, the early entry of Travellers into the workforce which often sees them miss out on schooling. A significant number of participants expressed a desire for targeted education provision for Travellers, in particular, one-to-one or small-group education. While the idea of such provision may at first glance seem unfairly favourable with regard to this ethnic grouping and potentially an impossible burden on prison budgets there are reasonable grounds to suggest it *may be* a constructive development for all concerned.

Under race equality legislation, augmented delivery of a service for a specific ethnic grouping does not necessarily imply favourable treatment especially where that group are shown to be at a specific disadvantage in accessing a service such as prison education (as would be the case with Gypsy and Traveller prisoners given that they have the lowest levels of educational attainment of any grouping in the UK).<sup>53</sup> As a legally recognised minority, the Equality Act 2010 places a positive legal obligation on the National Offender Management Service, (NOMS), to see that the needs of this ethnic grouping receive due regard. In terms of prison policies, services and staff, this must be done in a way which improves equality of opportunity for Travellers in respect of services in prison such as education and training.<sup>54</sup> In order to meet these obligations, the Act allows scope for treating some prisoners more favourably than others.<sup>55</sup> Specific measures may therefore exist for one ethnic group to ensure that they have the same level of access and opportunity in respect to a particular service.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> 'Public Sector Equality Duty ... [to] encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.' *Equality Act 2010*, s.149 (3) (c).

<sup>54</sup> *Equality Act 2010*, s.149 (3) (a) (b) (c).

<sup>55</sup> 'Compliance with the duties in this section may involve treating some persons more favourably than others; but that is not to be taken as permitting conduct that would otherwise be prohibited by or under this Act.' *Equality Act 2010*, s.149 (6).

<sup>56</sup> This recommendation has been made previously: 'Specialist services may be needed to address the problems of groups of offenders with specific needs – such as...offenders from Traveller/Roma/Gypsy backgrounds – or to help some BAME offenders to engage with services which they would otherwise mistrust.' in Jessica Jacobson, Coretta Phillips and Kimmett Edgar, *'Double Trouble'? Black, Asian and minority ethnic offenders' experiences of resettlement* (London: Clinks and Prison Reform Trust, 2010) p.3.

Regarding the financial burden which would fall on prisons if there were to be more small-group or one-to-one education provision, it need not be the case that such provision would cost more overall; in fact it may be much more cost effective to deliver education in this manner to this group. It need only be observed that an illiterate prisoner who goes out the prison gate as an illiterate ex-prisoner will, upon his or her return to prison, cost the tax-payer on average £36,237 for the next 12 months of their incarceration.<sup>57</sup>

One-to-one provision need not always be costly. The Shannon Trust's Turning Pages reading programme which uses a prisoner-to-prisoner model shows that one-to-one education with limited costs involved, is possible.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, for the current purposes, the Shannon Trust have shown that such a model can be extremely effective in firstly engaging with and secondly, improving the literacy of Traveller prisoners. A survey carried out by the Shannon Trust in April 2014, and which received 736 responses, found that 9.5% of learners on the Shannon Trust Reading Plan were from a Gypsy or Irish Traveller background.<sup>59</sup> This was significantly higher than all other ethnic groups except 'White - English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British'. These figures indicate a very high level of interest amongst Travellers in gaining literacy skills.<sup>60</sup> Such evidence corroborates the findings of this study in illustrating that Gypsies and Irish Travellers in prison are interested in education and training, and will engage with appropriate courses when they are available.

*You could do with a starter course for people with no reading or writing skills at all.*

*Yes, [the] education [department] did help a bit with my reading and writing.*

*All young Irish Travellers must keep up with the changing community. Education is very important to ensure all basic skills are grasped especially with reading, writing and computers.*

*Yes. They [prison education] did help, I couldn't read when I first came to jail. A mentor - not another Traveller - taught me to read.*

*They [the education department] are no help at all, if there is a problem with literacy.*

*No, they [prison education] were no help because all the boys here can barely read and write so they feel ashamed to do any written work. But they like using their hands, they can work perfect.*

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<sup>57</sup> The average cost per prison place excluding health and education provision is £36,237, in National Offender Management Service, *Costs per place and costs per prisoner*, Annual Report and Accounts 2013-14, (London: NOMS, 28 October 2014) Table 1.

<sup>58</sup> While the Shannon Trust's model has been extremely successful with Travellers, by circumventing the negative feelings that many have towards education as a result of experiences at school, TEP has found that some prisons have not facilitated its development despite its proven success. For example, in HMP Wormwood Scrubs, prisoners are frequently unable to leave their cells to mentor or learn on this programme. Given the large population of Travellers in custody in this prison such a situation represents a missed opportunity to reduce recidivism.

<sup>59</sup> Information provided by the Shannon Trust, (16/09/2015).

<sup>60</sup> 5% of prisoners stated that they considered themselves to be 'Gypsy, Romany or Traveller' in 2012-2013, HM Inspectorate of Prisons, *People in prison: Gypsies, Romany and Travellers*, (London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons, February 2014) p.5.

## Recommendations

### Universal Availability of Entry Level Literacy and Numeracy Courses

Given the low level of literacy and numeracy skills amongst Gypsy and Irish Traveller prisoners when they enter custody, course provision must be correspondingly appropriate in order to be effective. As the research indicates, significant numbers of Traveller prisoners enter prison unable to deal with Level 1 Literacy; provision must therefore begin at Entry Level. The provision of Entry Level Literacy and Numeracy in every prison should be a priority not just for Travellers but for all prisoners who have been unable to gain these skills. As progress in vocational courses (as well as in rehabilitative and therapeutic courses and in everyday prison life) requires literacy and numeracy skills, Entry Level courses must be readily available in order to meet OLASS' aim of increased 'employability'.

### Talking to Travellers about Education Provision

A recurrent theme in many of the submissions to the research team was a lack of awareness of what educational and training opportunities were available in a particular prison. A significant number of Traveller prisoners stated that they had never engaged with education and they were unlikely to seek out information which in many cases is in written form or requires literacy to access that information. As Travellers have in many instances had negative experiences of education as children and also as prison does not encourage an individual to exhibit weaknesses such as an inability to read, it will require an effort on the part of education departments to engage Traveller prisoners. Such efforts should include the attendance of education personnel at Traveller Group meetings and liaison with the appointed Traveller Rep.<sup>61</sup>

### Provide Traveller Cultural and Educational Resources

One of the most fundamental aspects of creating a positive learning environment is making the learner or would-be learner comfortable, confident and respected. It is important to note that as Travellers are one of the most vilified ethnic groupings in Britain and from a culture that is rarely celebrated in the mainstream media, the creation of a positive learning environment is a practical foundation to engagement with these learners. If the prevailing view in a prison is negative towards Travellers; if the view is that 'Travellers don't do education' then such thinking will be self-fulfilling – Travellers will avoid education and training. In prisons which have overturned such stereotypes and created a respectful atmosphere towards Travellers, Traveller engagement in education has increased significantly.<sup>62 63 64 65</sup> This can be done by making cultural awareness and education resources available in prison libraries and education departments.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> On one visit during this study it was observed that in a prison with an operational capacity of over 1200, there was no Traveller Group meeting, no Traveller Rep and no monitoring of W3 Gypsy / Irish Traveller prisoners. See also, as an example: HM Inspectorate of Prisons, Report on an unannounced inspection of HMP Northumberland by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons 1–12 September 2014 (London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 27 January 2015), p.32. Attempts to engage Gypsy and Traveller prisoners are unlikely to occur, if the prison fails to monitor this group in the first place, even before the issue of creating an encouraging educational environment arises.

<sup>62</sup> 'Regular forums for Gypsy, Romany and Traveller prisoners had been developed and they received a good level of support from the equality team. An external organisation, Pertemps, provided resettlement interventions for them through their New Leaf programme, including finding accommodation and employment.' HM Inspectorate of Prisons, *Report on an unannounced inspection of Oakwood by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 1–5 December 2014* (London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 18 February 2015) p.34.

<sup>63</sup> 'Events were held twice a year to mark Traveller culture. One Traveller acted as a diversity representative and chaired a Traveller forum; one Listener was also a Traveller.' HM Inspectorate of Prisons, Report on an unannounced inspection of HMP and YO1 Peterborough (Women) by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons 16–27 June 2014 (London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 31 October 2014) p.32.

## Vocational Courses

The Gypsy and Irish Traveller communities in the UK primarily depend on self-employment or family-owned businesses, in various manual occupations. Prison education departments while encouraging individuals to broaden their horizons, should facilitate Traveller participation on courses that allow them to lawfully participate in businesses that coalesce with Traveller family life. Education departments could engage Traveller prisoners through driving theory test training, construction courses and Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) training. Training for self-employed businesses could for example, provide information on national and local government requirements for scrap dealers and door-to-door sales and could as has happened in one case, involve local council Trading Standards personnel. As self-employment in manual trades is often the primary training ambition of Travellers in prison, it is unlikely that Traveller learners will be engaged by a curriculum that does not offer such opportunities in some manner.

## Embedded Literacy and Numeracy

A number of prisons in England and Wales have engaged prisoners with poor literacy by embedding courses within vocational training, thus providing a context and incentive to learn. HMP Ford, a prison with a large Traveller population describes its intervention:

There are also embedded learning classes for those who want to complete trade courses, such as Carpentry or Painting and Decorating. The learners have support with their English and Maths as required by each course. They are also supported to complete their portfolios with as much of the evidence collated by the use of photographs as possible.<sup>67</sup>

The efforts of HMP Ford and other prisons in embedding literacy and numeracy within vocational training shows that progress in these basic life skills can be made in parallel with vocational training. Indeed, within the context of learning the skills necessary for a trade or occupation, the learner is often more enthusiastic to progress at literacy and numeracy. Given the high-level of interest amongst Traveller prisoners in gaining vocational skills and qualifications, not to provide such interventions is a missed opportunity. While vocational courses necessarily require these basic skills, the teaching of both vocational and basic skills can be achieved simultaneously.

## The Shannon Trust Reading Plan and Peer Mentoring Initiatives

Over the past 5 years, the participation of Traveller prisoners on the Shannon Trust Reading Plan has been substantial.<sup>68 69</sup> In 2013, a Traveller Equality Project survey found that 44% of Traveller prisoners in 6 focus groups had engaged with the Reading Plan. The Reading Plan's rapid, discreet and one-to-one approach has proven itself to be extremely successful amongst Traveller prisoners. However, the consequence of reduced staffing has meant a limiting of prisoner mobility within prisons to attend peer mentoring

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<sup>64</sup> 'Gypsy, Traveller or Romany... Prisoners had access to support sessions through the Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas, and a monthly forum had been established in April 2014.' HM Inspectorate of Prisons, Report on an unannounced inspection of HMP Wormwood Scrubs by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons 6 – 16 May 2014 (London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 3 September 2014) p.34-35.

<sup>65</sup> See also Sarah Dabinett and Noel Moran, *Working together in HMP Guy's Marsh* in Travellers in Prison News (London: Irish Chaplaincy, March 2014) Issue 10, p.2-3; and Emily Niroomand-Rad, *GRT History Month at HMP Wayland* in Travellers in Prison News (London: Irish Chaplaincy, September 2015) Issue16, p.3.

<sup>66</sup> A range of cultural and educational resources are available in hardcopy and electronic copy from the Traveller Equality Project at: [http://www.irishchaplaincy.org.uk/Groups/160519/Irish\\_Chaplaincy\\_in/Our\\_Work/Traveller\\_Equality/Traveller\\_Equality.aspx](http://www.irishchaplaincy.org.uk/Groups/160519/Irish_Chaplaincy_in/Our_Work/Traveller_Equality/Traveller_Equality.aspx) .

<sup>67</sup> *HMP Ford: Model of Good Practice Gypsy, Traveller, Romany*, (HMP Ford, 2014), available at: <http://www.gypsy-traveller.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/GypsyTraveller-good-practice.pdf> .

<sup>68</sup> In the summer of 2015, the Shannon Trust launched its new peer-to-peer reading programme, 'Turning Pages'.

<sup>69</sup> A survey carried out by the Shannon Trust in April 2014, which received 736 responses found that 9.5% of learners on the Shannon Trust Reading Plan were from a Gypsy or Irish Traveller background, (information provided by the Shannon Trust, 16/09/2015).

sessions. In HMP Wormwood Scrubs, for example, where there is a large Traveller population and significant interest in the Reading Plan, it appears that the programme is not currently operating as a consequence of staff shortages and prolonged prisoner lock-up. Proven (and inexpensive) education initiatives such as the Shannon Trust Reading Plan should be facilitated in all prisons which are serious about tackling Traveller and wider prisoner illiteracy.

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