

Prison Education in Europe: Informing Practice, Provision and Policy 2008

*Review of the VEPS Project and its associated
Conference for Directors and Coordinators of
Prison Education*



European Prison Education Association



Acknowledgements

The European Prison Education Association (EPEA) wishes to thank sincerely everyone involved in the Virtual European Prison School (VEPS) Project. In particular, we wish to acknowledge the input and enthusiasm of the prison educators and their students who participated in varying ways and at different stages throughout the life of this project. We wish to acknowledge the commitment of all those involved in driving the project in the partner countries and we extend our appreciation to the project partners for their hard work and commitment while supporting and implementing the project aims and objectives.

In addition, we would like to thank the following:

EPEA Steering Committee

Alan Smith, Grundtvig Coordinator, Deputy Head of Unit EAC – B4 Adult Education, European Commission

Presidents of the Human Rights and Culture & Education Groupings at the Council of Europe

Modern University of the Humanities, Moscow & Samara, Russia

Organizing Committee Directors' Conference & the Swedish Prison and Probation Service

Preface

The quality of education provided in European prisons varies widely. In some countries, prison education is in its infancy while it is well established in others. In some regions, it is embedded within a clearly defined ideology and supported by reflective policy. Elsewhere, it struggles to have its voice heard and few are interested in rationalising its purpose or objectives. Great advances have been made in terms of appropriate methodologies and resources in some countries while in other countries education has to fight for dwindling prison resources and reduced personnel. Never the less, one factor common to all, is the dedication and determination of prison educators to improve the service within their country and meet the needs of their students. It was within this context that the VEPS Project was initiated.

The instigating organisation and coordinating partner of VEPS is the European Prison Education Association, which is the representative body for prison education in Europe, drawing its membership from over 40 countries. The EPEA Steering Committee believes that efforts should be made to coordinate and support practitioners, providers and policy makers in their attempts to improve their prison education services. With this in mind, the EPEA set about devising a transnational Grundtvig-funded project that would benchmark best practice, inform constructive policy, instigate innovation in Internet, eLearning and distance learning technologies and generally facilitate greater contact and cooperation among prison educators. In this way, improvements in the quality of teaching and learning as well as the quality of management, evaluation and planning in prison education would be realised. This is why the VEPS Project is significant and its outcomes noteworthy.

Foreword

The Virtual European Prison School is a timely project. In this period of widespread cut-backs in education and increasingly punitive attitudes to imprisonment, it is crucial that those involved in prison education work together to influence policy, improve existing practice, develop innovative resources and harness new technologies. While it is obvious why we must do so, it is not always so obvious how we can do so. Luckily, this report provides us with a very real example of how these crucial aims can be realised.

Throughout the following pages, the reader will develop an understanding of the journey undertaken by the project partners. They embarked on this uncharted journey as a diverse group, many of whom did not know the others involved, but arrived at their destination as friends and allies. The journey was challenging and required energy and drive but their collective enthusiasm and professionalism sustained them throughout. And like all the best journeys, while the traveling itself was a meaningful learning process, it also provided the opportunity to do something significant, something that would bring about lasting change.

I would like to acknowledge the enormous effort of each project partner in bringing VEPS to its fruition. It has been a substantial and creative effort that has thoughtfully and practically tackled important issues in the field of prison education. The advances and successes of this project challenge the providers, policy makers and practitioners delivering education in prisons across Europe to take the project's innovations and examples of good practice forward and contribute to the on-going raising of standards in our prisons.

Dr. Anne Costelloe
Chairperson, EPEA

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Part I

VEPS Project

Virtual European Prison School

Reference Number: 133878-2007-NO-GRUNDTVIG-GMP

**Grundtvig Multilateral Projects
Lifelong Learning Programme**



VEPS Project

Overview of VEPS Project

The Virtual European Prison School (VEPS) Project was developed through the Lifelong Learning Program - Grundtvig Multilateral Projects of the European Union. The project's broad aims were to increase participation and widen access to education in European prisons. Its primary actions involved the transnational transfer of best existing practice and the establishment of a web-based Virtual Prison School.

The project lasted from October 2007 to December 2008 and involved a wide range of prison educators from across Europe. The coordinating partner was European Prison Education Association (EPEA). The other project partners were prison education services, organisations and bodies from Bulgaria, Czech Republic, England, France, Greece, Ireland, Norway and Sweden.

The project not only leads to the development of new programmes and the adoption of new methodologies but also to significant changes in policy direction and the restructuring of some prison education services. Furthermore, the transfer of distance learning methodologies and the creation of eLearning opportunities lead to the widening of both provision and access. Of particular note, is the creation of the Virtual Prison School established as a repository for educational programmes, teaching materials, course syllabi, etc, which prison educators can access to assist international students study in their mother tongue while imprisoned abroad. In order to benchmark and disseminate its outcomes an International Conference for Directors and Coordinators of Prison Education was convened. In this way, the project's achievements can live on long after its conclusion.

This purpose of this report is to document the project's development and highlight its outcomes. Further information on VEPS can be found throughout these pages and at www.prisoneducation.eu.

The screenshot shows the website interface for the Virtual European Prison School. The browser window is titled "Virtual European Prison School - Windows Internet Explorer" and the address bar shows "http://www.prisoneducation.eu/". The page content includes a navigation menu on the left with items like "Aims of VEPS", "Flyers about VEPS", "Participants", "VEPS News", "Legal Notice", and "EPEA". The main content area is titled "The Virtual European Prison School" and features logos for the European Union and the Grundtvig Programme. Below the logos, it states: "A project founded by the European Prison Education Association and sponsored by the EU Grundtvig Life Long Learning Programme 133878-LLP-2007-Grundtvig-GMP". There are also sections for "Main Menu", "Course categories", "Available Courses", "Login", "Online Users", and "Calendar".

Project Development & Implementation

Aims and Objectives

The project had four overarching aims, which were met through a variety of actions:

Aim: To identify and benchmark existing best practice in prison education and support the transnational transfer of such practices.

Actions:

- Three examples of best existing practice were identified, namely, the Norwegian modular system, the Swedish distance learning model and Irish Personal Development Programmes. Target countries were identified to which these could be transferred; Bulgaria, Czech Republic, United Kingdom and Greece.
- The convening of a conference for policy makers and administrators involved in the field of prison education which helped disseminate the project's outcomes and ideals and consolidate the transfer of best practices.
- The involvement of the Modern University of the Humanities in Russia as well as Council of Europe INGO's ensured that the project was informed by developments and experiences of a wide range of organisations and bodies.

Aim: To improve the national and local provision and management of prison education.

Actions:

- The transfer of best practices improved the target countries' prison education services through the development of flexible, student-centred and cost effective systems grounded in the practices and philosophies of lifelong learning.
- A secure system for Internet use in prisons based on ILIADS and building on the PIPELINE Project¹ was to tested and perfected for use in prison education centres.
- A web-based Virtual Prison School was established to act as a repository for teaching materials and an online resource store.

Aim: To minimise the social exclusion of prisoners by increasing their participation in and widening their access to lifelong learning programmes.

Actions:

- Dissemination of the projects aims and outcomes to Council of Europe INGO's concerned with the role education has to play in combating social exclusion informed their perceptions of prison education.
- The project put into practice the EPEA's contention that prison education has the power to transform prisoners' lives by cultivating the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation necessary for active citizenship.

¹ The PIPELINE Project is a Grundtvig-funded project designed to make INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES and Internet access available to learners and teachers in European prisons. Further details can be found at <http://www.pipeline-project.org/>

Aim: To develop innovative programmes and strategies focused on reducing levels of re-offending.

Actions:

- The newly developed programmes would foster relevant skills and enhance the capacity of prisoners to compete successfully on the labour market, or continue with lifelong learning on their release.
- The transfer of the Irish Pre-release Programme would stimulate new thinking on re-offending prevention strategies.
- The Project's focus on developing links between prisons, public institutions and the civil society would highlight successful social inclusion routes for ex-offenders.

Project Development & Implementation

Project partners

European Prison Education Association (EPEA)

The EPEA is an International Non-Government Organisation (INGO) and a member of the Council of Europe's NGO Liaison Committee. It was established in 1991 to promote and safeguard the ideals of Education In Prison, Recommendation No. R (89) 12, Council of Europe, 1989². It aims to

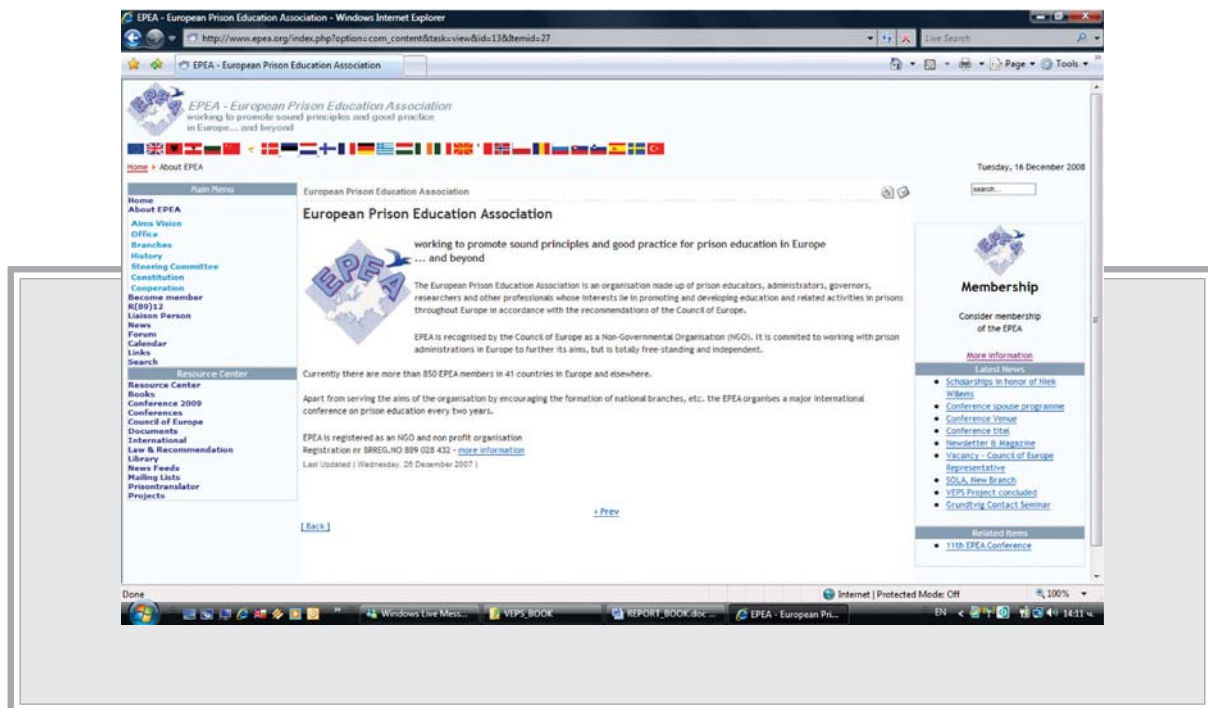
- Promote and embed educationally-sound principles, practices and policies for education in European prisons,
- Assist the professional development of those involved in prison education through European co-operation,
- Work with related professional organisations,
- Support research in the field of education in prisons.

The EPEA considers education in prison to be a moral right that meets a basic human need. It promotes a view of prison education that is grounded in adult and community education and stresses that education in prison must be inline with the best practices and principles of lifelong learning available in the wider community. Further information can be found at www.epea.org.

Role in the project:

The EPEA devised and coordinated the project, appointing a Steering Group and Project Coordinator to drive it forward. It facilitated the dissemination of the project at the Council of Europe and among its membership. The International Conference for Prison Directors and Coordinators was convened under its auspices.

² This forward thinking document lays the foundation for the policies and principles that underpin prison education in the Council of Europe's 43 member states. It outlines succinctly the important role education has to play within the prison regime and the prisoner's daily life. It stresses that all prisoners have the right to education and provides a checklist of factors essential to the provision of an effective prison education service. It highlights the role education has to play in the development of the individual prisoner as well as the prison and the communities to which they will return. It is summarised and translated into many different languages and can be downloaded from the EPEA website, www.epea.org.



Society for European Educational Cooperation

Сдружение за Европейско Образователно Сътрудничество,
(in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice, General Direction "Execution of Sentences",
Sofia, Bulgaria)

The Society for European Educational Cooperation is a Non-profit Legal Entity for Public Benefit entered under ¹ 20030613010 into the Central Register of the Non-profit Legal Entities for Public Benefit, Ministry of Justice, Republic of Bulgaria. The association assists prison teachers and supports people with special educational needs, including prisoners.

Role in the project:

In order to bring the prison education service more in line with counterparts in other European countries, the Society for European Educational Cooperation was eager to explore alternative models. It was partnered with FOKO, Norway to examine their approach to providing short, modular courses.

Department for Innovation, Universities, and Skills: Offender Learning and Skills Service (DIUS), UK

DIUS has policy responsibility for the education of prison learners as part of its remit, having taken this over from the previous Department for Education and Skills. In December 2006, DfES jointly published (with the Home Office and the Department for Works and Pensions) a key document "Reducing Re-Offending Through Skills and Employment: Next Steps" which outlines an ambitious set of plans for prison learners.

Role in the project:

DIUS was keen to discover how other jurisdictions attempt to widen access and incorporate information and communication technologies into their prison education systems. It was thus partnered with Kriminalvården, **Sweden** to review their eLearning system and application of secure technologies.

EPEA-France

As the name suggests, EPEA - France is the French branch of the EPEA. It is an association of teachers and administrators working in the field of prison education and human rights. It is the primary point of contact between French prison educators and the EPEA. See www.epea.org/epeafrance for details.

Role in the project:

EPEA France was responsible for initiating contact with the relevant departments within the Council of Europe in Strasbourg in order to showcase the VEPS project and facilitate its dissemination among its INGOs.

FOKO, Norway

Forening for opplæring i Kriminalomsorgen

FOKO is the Norwegian Branch of the EPEA. It is comprised of prison teachers, administrators, prison staff, librarians, governors and researchers and other professionals whose interests lie in promoting and developing education and related activities in prisons. See www.foko.no for more details.

Role in the project:

The practice of providing short-term, stand alone modular courses is common in many Norwegian prisons and was identified as an example for best existing practice which could be usefully applied elsewhere. FOKO was partnered with the Society for European Educational Cooperation in Bulgaria.

2nd Gymnasium of Avlona with Lyceum classes

2^η Γυμνάσιος Αιόνας με Λυκειακές τάξεις

The 2nd Gymnasium and Lyceum in the Avlona Prison for Minors and Young Offenders is the only autonomous educational institution sited in a Juvenile Prison in Greece. It was founded and is supervised by the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs (GMERA).

Role in the project:

The 2nd Gymnasium and Lyceum in the Avlona Prison for Minors and Young Offenders was keen to developed courses that take an holistic, student-centred approach to the education of prison students. The Irish practice of delivering courses focused on the personal development of the student was identified as a useful role model.

Irish Prison Education Association (IPEA)

The IPEA is the Irish branch of the European Prison Education Association. It was established as the professional body representing Irish prison educators and organises seminars, meetings and lectures to advance its ideals and meet the needs of its members. Further information can be found at www.epea.org/ipea.

Role in the project:

Partnered with the 2nd Gymnasium and Lyceum in the Avlona Prison for Minors and Young Offenders, the IPEA set about piloting an existing personal development and pre-release programme with its Greek partners.

Swedish Prison and Probation Service Head Office

Kriminalvården, Sweden

The Prison and Probation Service through the Department of Offender Management and Security provides the local prisons education centres with guidelines and support in the delivery of education to Swedish prisoners. Attached to the department's education sector are a head master, a deputy head master, two project leaders and a senior advisor who supply the service on the ground.

Role in the project:

The somewhat unique approach to prison education provided by Kriminalvården through distance learning channels and advanced access to information and communication technologies was identified as an example of best existing practice. They were partnered with Vocational Training Centre of the Prison Service in the Czech Republic and also the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (England and Wales) Offender Learning and Skills Service.

Vocational Training Centre of the Prison Service of the CZ

Vezenska sluzba Ceske republiky - Stredni odborne uciliste, Czech Republic

The Vocational Training Centre of the Prison Service plays a national role in the provision of education in prisons in the Czech Republic. In this capacity it provides extensive educational activities for prisoners. Education of prisoners is provided through detached workplaces of the Vocational Training Centre of the Prison Service of the Czech Republic in seven prisons.

Role in the project:

The Czech partners wished to develop information and communication technologies and Internet facilities in order to increase prisoner participation in education and upgrade the skills and competencies necessary for successful reintegration into society. They were partnered with Kriminalvården, Sweden for this purpose.



**VEPS Project Team
Council of Europe, Strasbourg, France**



VEPS Project Meetings

Project Development & Implementation

Timeframe

Date	Location	Purpose	Partners
22-25 November 2007	Czech Republic	Preparatory meeting.	All partners
16–19 January 2008	Bulgaria	Transfer & piloting module system	Norway & Bulgaria
30 January – 2 February 2008	Sweden	Transfer & piloting ICT & Internet technologies	UK & Sweden
4 – 7 February			
7 – 9 February			
28 February – 2 2008			
2 – 4 April			
23 – 27 June 2008			
11 – 14 September 2008			
		Evaluation meeting.	
16 – 18 October	Norway	Disseminate Project at FOKO Conference	VEPS Project Steering Group



Project Development & Implementation

Actions

Transfer of best practice

Norwegian Module System transferred to Bulgaria

**Best Practice
Norwegian Module System**

During their formative years, many prisoners have had negative experiences of education, viewing it as irrelevant, boring and a waste of time. Part of this ennui can be due to their perception that the curriculum is too vast and the achievement of their goals too long term. To counter this viewpoint and to overcome the difficulties of a high turn over of students due to short-term sentencing, Norwegian prison teachers felt that teaching short-term, modular courses could be a practical solution. They set about structuring the standard adult education curriculum and subjects in the upper levels of compulsory school into modules that they students could build up to achieve certification. The benefits of this are

- Student motivation is enhanced as they work on small-scale, but complete projects, and the series of small steps means that long-term goals can be achieved in a manageable and focused manner.
- Grading the final assessment on individual grades in each module can increase the breadth of instruction. Teaching can be more student-centred rather than curriculum-centred.
- Students in small and medium-sized prisons are able to work to long-term perspectives. The problems arising out of transfers between prisons will be diminished, as inmates will bring their separate module grades with them from one prison to another.
- Re-offenders can build up their competences as they are credited on modules completed and they can pick up where they left off on their previous sentence or continue on the outside.
- Ultimately, more prison students will achieve high school certification.

Since 1989, political and economical developments in Bulgaria have had a negative effect on prison education. Prisons were demilitarised and they lost their financial independence as prison budgets became centralised. Tightening the budgets in all sectors resulted in the closure of several prison schools. The prison education model in operation was not in accordance with the principles and practices of adult learning as was the case in other countries. Instead, it followed the general education curriculum developed for primary level children and was thus degrading, de-motivating and ultimately ineffectual. A major review and restructuring of the Bulgarian prison education was necessary and the VEPS project

provided the opportunity to prove or to reject the applicability of the module system there. Details on how the transfer proceeded can be found on the VEPS website at <http://www.prisoneducation.eu/course/view.php?id=9>

Transfer of best practice

Irish Personal Development Programmes transferred to Hellas

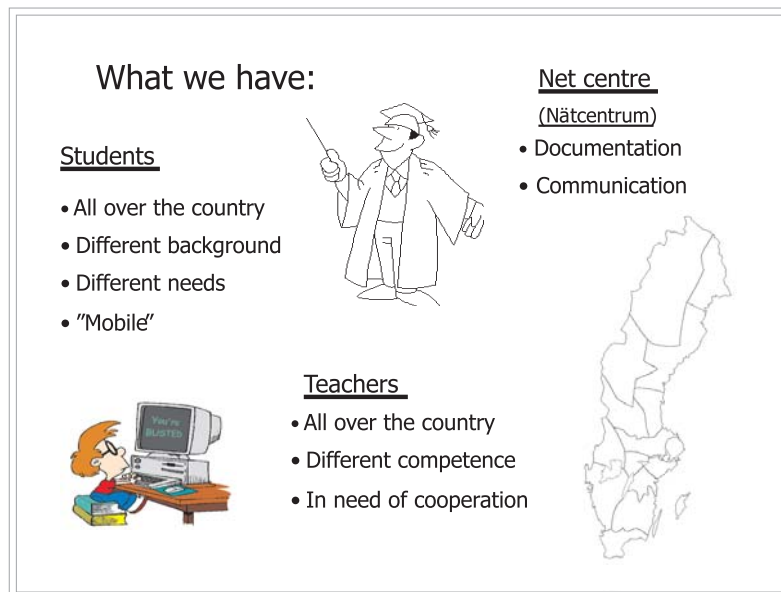


The philosophy of education framing education provision in Irish prisons is grounded in the ideals and methodologies of Adult and Community Education and in particular in Transformative Learning. The emphasis is on meeting the needs of the student as defined by the students and their particular circumstances. Readjustment and resettlement can be problematic for many men and women when they leave prison. Housing, relationships, addiction, finance, relapsing into crime, employment, etc, are just some of the areas that pose the most immediate challenges and difficulties. Accordingly, the IPEA was keen to stress that substantial, realistic and practicable support must be provided to all prisoners before and after release. The IPEA in its transfer of best practices was eager to highlight how the philosophy of adult education and transformative learning was fundamental to the design and delivery of Pre-Release courses in Ireland. Transformative learning reflects the belief that the best prevention strategy and most successful attempts at re-integration come about from lasting and significant changes in the prisoners' thinking and actions.

After much discussion, the 2nd Gymnasium and Lyceum in the Avlona Prison for Minors and Young Offenders arrived at the conclusion that the most useful adaptation of the Irish holistic approach to personal development would surround the development of Pre-release Programmes being delivered in Ireland. Having investigated a range of teaching methodologies and adapting and modifying the Irish approach, they designed a generic pre-release programme based on the Irish experiences but relevant to the Hellenic context. The programme was piloted the Gymnasium and Lyceum in the Avlona Prison for Minors and Young Offenders and an Instruction Manual devised for use by teachers in other Greek prisons. For further details on the transfer, the piloting process and its outcomes, please see www.prisoneducation.eu/course/view.php?id=9

Transfer of best practice

Swedish eLearning system transferred to Czech Republic and UK



The emergence of new technologies further excludes prisoners from participating fully in society. It would be no exaggeration to generalise that Europe's prison population is not digitally literate. The eEurope 2005 Action Plan (2002) states that every European citizen should be equipped with the skills needed to live and work in the information society. It proposed to connect all schools to the Internet, to adapt school curricula and to train teachers to use digital technologies. Few attempts have been made to implement this in our prisons. Yet, the VEPS partners recognised that there is considerable potential for the sharing of the limited resources and strategies that do exist. They were keen to investigate existing practices that combat the lack of digital literacy and to promote virtual campuses and virtual twinning of prison education programmes. It aimed to encourage the integration of the new information and communication technologies into prison education and training systems, thereby improving their quality and accessibility.

The Swedish distance learning system is based essentially on eLearning models. It allows for the delivery of over 800 courses and thus every prison can provide a vast range of subjects to which every prisoner, including non-Swedish prisoners, can have access. Involving a joint venture with the Swedish Agency for Flexible Learning (CFL) alignment to the national adult education service was ensured. A net-system connects each prison and communication is based on Internet and telephone connections. Teachers are located at different prisons and each is responsible for all subjects and students, for example, a math teacher teaches students in all prisons. The program is being upgraded currently and video connections will be available in 2009.

The Czech Republic was keen to apply the technologies to their system in order to offer distance learning in every prison. Similarly, the UK was eager to investigate the applicability for the UK context, being impressed in particular with the flexibility it allows.

This aspect of the project is incomplete at the time of going to print, but the final outcomes will be available on the website www.prisoneducation.eu.

Virtual Prison School

Increasingly, more and more people are being imprisoned in countries other than their home countries. This is a cause of concern for many prison educators, as often they feel ill equipped to meet the diverse demands of ethnic and religious minorities and non-national students. The 'Virtual School' established as part of the project attempts to meet some of those demands. It is designed as a repository for educational programmes, teaching materials, course syllabi, etc, which prison educators can access to assist all students study in their mother tongue or achieve certification from their country of origin while imprisoned abroad. The VEPS Steering Group hopes to develop this resource further over the coming years.

See www.prisoneducation.eu/mod/resource/index.php?id=9

Project Development & Implementation

Dissemination

Dissemination of the project's progress and outcomes took a number of forms and continues to be a priority.

- VEPS website
- Virtual European Prison School
- EPEA Newsletters & Journals
- Project publicity materials (brochures, posters, leaflets, etc)
- Project report and Information sent to every European Ministry of Justice and Ministry of education
- Local information seminars
- FOKO Conference
- IPEA Conference
- International Conference for Directors and Coordinators of Prison Education
- Meeting with Presidents of INGOs at the Council of Europe
- Linking with Modern University of the Humanities, Russia.

The project Steering Group agreed it important to ensure that the widest possible group of interested parties were made aware of the project and continuously informed of its progress. Furthermore, they felt it necessary to enable others gain easy access to the generated knowledge and outcomes. Each project partner was charged with promoting specific dissemination activities such as the publication and distribution of publicity materials. Copies of these posters, fliers and brochures can be viewed on the project website. In addition, workshops and seminars were created locally to inform national colleagues of developments. The project was presented as a Keynote Address in October at the FOKO Conference (annual conference of the Norwegian branch of the EPEA) and will similarly be presented at the IPEA, the Irish branch, annual conference to be held early in 2009. The EPEA continually informed its international membership (over 1000 individual and

organisational members) of progress and outcomes on its website, in its publications and will continue to do so through the following planned events.

- To reach interested professionals who are not EPEA members a Training Course based on the VEPS project is in process of validation in the Comenius-Grundtvig Database. It is hoped that this will take place from 27 October - 2 November 2009 in Cyprus and run parallel with the 12th EPEA International Conference.
- Project report and information distributed to each Ministry of Education and Ministry of Justice in Europe.

Of particular note, are three specific platforms that were vital in reaching key decision makers, namely the VEPS website, the presentation at the Council of Europe, and the International Conference for Directors and Organisers of Prison Education.

VEPS Website - www.prisoneducation.eu

The creation of a website specific to VEPS was deemed necessary to ensure that cost-effective and efficient methods of dissemination were being employed. The website allowed for effective communication between the project partners and facilitated frequent updating of information and news as well as almost instant feedback and immediate answers to queries. Most importantly, it will continue to support practitioners in their work in prison education and prove to be a valuable resource for all.

Presentation at Council of Europe

The EPEA presented the VEPS project to the Presidents of the Council of Europe's INGO Culture and Education Grouping and Human Rights Grouping. Its intention was not only to use this platform to disseminate the aims and outcomes of the project but also to showcase how it furthers its aims through international cooperation and harnessing the expertise and creativity of those engaged in prison education. In this way, the VEPS Steering Group intended to promote and contribute to policy debates on creating lifelong learning opportunities and fostering employability and adaptability skills for prisoners. Thus the project partners were intent on galvanising political consensus and action for important and appropriate changes in the philosophy and practice of prison education. In addition, it was viewed as an opportunity to develop links and create networks with other organisations working in the areas of social exclusion and human rights.

Videos of the meeting were broadcast on YouTube and can be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=npYzOsyARyI.

International Conference of Directors and Coordinators of Prison education

The gathering together of prison education policy makers, administrators and senior managers provided an excellent opportunity to showcase VEPS and its outcomes. The VEPS Steering Group wanted to convene this conference because they felt that in order to make a difference it was necessary to make the case for change with those who can actually influence policies and their implementation. The diversity of programmes developed, the advances in technologies, and the underlying philosophy of inclusiveness apparent during the VEPS presentations impressed the officials and decision makers. Conversely, it al-

lowed the project partners identify emerging trends and key issues in prison education internationally, which in turn informed their evaluation and perception of the project's potential and worth. The EPEA Chairperson's summary of the significance and impact of the project as presented to the conference participants can be viewed at

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4GwnJWsg5M>

Contained in Part II of this report are the Keynote Speeches, papers presented and workshops delivered at this conference. They are included here to set the context within which the project developed. They indicate the emerging trends and issues common to European prison educators that the VEPS project attempted to address and which focused the project's partner's attentions. A primary aim of the conference was to attempt to resolve the contentious issue of Internet and ICT access in prison education centres. This is one of the key reasons why the VEPS Steering Group felt it necessary to showcase in particular the transfer of best practice between the Swedish partners and their colleagues in the UK and the Czech Republic. Without a doubt, the benchmarking of this transfer of realistic, effective and workable solutions to any concerns the providers may have in facilitating ICT and Internet access among the prison population will widen access and increase participation by opening the gates to ICT, we-based eLearning systems.



VEPS Project Presentation



Project Presentations in Sweden



Project Presentation in Bulgaria



Project Presentations in Norway



Project Presentations in Russia

Project Development & Implementation

Project Outcomes

The project produced many significant and worthy outcomes. Their effects can be grouped under one or other of the following headings; impact on practice, impact on provision and impact on policy.

Impact on Practice

As in much of mainstream education, the education of prisoners is not an exact science, yet over the years, experienced prison teachers have perfected the practices, methodologies and materials that enhance teaching and learning in their classrooms. The downside to such onsite and practitioner-led developments is that news of exciting and innovative developments in one prison is rarely shared with colleagues in other prisons or other countries. This means that teachers new to prison education or those attempting new approaches and programmes are forced frequently 'to reinvent the wheel'. The benefit of projects such as this is that they not only allow for the transfer of best existing practices among the project partners but they ensure that the results are distributed beyond the life and remit of the project. For example, the Greek partners arranged for the 'Instruction Manual' produced as part of the project to be distributed by the Correctional Policy Directorate of the Hellenic Ministry of Justice to every prison in Greece. Similarly, the Norwegian partners realised when revisiting their modules that changes in the national adult education curriculum necessitate changes to their existing modular courses. In this way, aspects of the project not only impacted positively on the recipient country but also in the source country. These are just two basic examples of how VEPS enhanced and enriched practices in all the countries involved.

Further details on the various changes to methodology, the adoption of new programmes, the modification of existing programmes and the collating of useful teaching resources which resulted from the project can be viewed on the VEPS website.

Impact on Provision

The provision of education in European prisons can prove problematic. The variety in the type of bodies and institutions currently providing education in European prisons highlights the fact that there is little uniformity and no 'perfect' provider. In many countries informal, voluntary organisations effectively plug gaps in provision while other countries have at their disposal the services of highly trained professionals. Independent 'outsiders' deliver the service in some regions while custodial and security staff are the main providers in others. Such diversity means that the methods of delivery, the type of provision and indeed the quality of provision varies enormously. On a more positive level, it means that those seeking to upgrade or enhance the quality of their provision have the opportunity to examine numerous tried and tested ways. So it was for the project partners from the Czech Republic and the UK in particular and the IT-supported distance education approach of the Swedish prison education service interested them greatly. The UK partners are still in the process of incorporating the Swedish experience into their service at the time of publication but progress can be followed on the project website. Similarly, the testing of the distance learning system acquired by the Czech partners is ongoing but initial feedback is positive and undoubtedly it will prove to change dramatically the provision of education in Czech

prisons.

A less direct impact on provision resulted from the contact made between the project partners and the Modern University of the Humanities (MUH) in Russia. Representatives from the VEPS project were invited to discover how the university provides distance education in a number of prisons across Russia. The partners were eager to avail of this opportunity, as the MUH is the only higher education institution/television company in the world and it is also one of the largest institutions of higher education in Russia with more than 140,000 students and 500 branches in Russia and abroad. It was agreed by the project partners that there was much to learn from the MUH provision. A depth account of relevance of the Russian experience to the project partners' development of distance learning provision can be found on the website. It is interesting to note that one of the lessons which the Czech and UK partners felt most pertinent was the need to ensure that the teachers need quality training to guarantee that they are not only familiar with the new technologies but that they up date their own methods and materials for the effective delivery of the new provision.

Impact on Policy

It could be said that changes in policy and policy implementation rarely result from practitioner-led projects but it is no over exaggeration to suggest that the VEPS project led to significance changes in policy direction in some countries. Certainly, the changes in practice and provision can be seen to have been an aid to policy making and review. For example, the transfer of the Norwegian modular system to Bulgaria led to a national review of the Bulgarian prison education service with the emphasis on identifying its weaknesses and strengths. This resulted in the decision that the upgrading of the service to bring it more in line with European counterparts was to be priority task for the Prison Service in 2007 - 2008. Consequently, a working group was set up to develop the service and harmonise it with the national curriculum and report back to the Ministry of Education and the Prison Directorate. In this way, the knowledge generated by the project and its application of new practices had a direct bearing on a shift in policy direction. Likewise, it would be naive to think that the changes in provision which will result from the UK and Czech move towards eLearning will not necessitate changes in policy there. This is particularly significant should it influence a decision to allow greater Internet and ICT access for prisoners in those countries as this would in turn influence other national services to review their policies on Internet and ICT access. Policy changes that the project partners believe are long overdue and which they will continue to work towards.

Project Development & Implementation

Conclusions

The project opened new doors for prison educators to network internationally and initiate developments adapted to their local or national context. It provided them with the resources necessary to evaluate their situation, allowed them discover a rich palette of best practices to choose from and the tools needed to assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of those alternatives. It indicated cost effective steps that would prove critical to the appropriate design and implementation of new programmes and practices and the harnessing of state of the art technologies and methodologies. In light of the success of VEPS, it is

essential that the project partners, the EPEA and other interested bodies, continue to develop and advance the changes brought about by the project and support and stimulate further cooperation and project involvement among European prison educators. It is hoped that this account of the experiences and outcomes of VEPS will inspire other prison educators to develop and build on the achievements of the project.

Finally, the VEPS Project generated knowledge and outcomes that have and will impact significantly on transnational policy formation, service development, planning and deployment of resources. As we have seen, it prompted new responses and approaches to the policy, practice and provision of prison education in a broad mix of European countries. While these substantial and direct changes stretch from the macro to the micro and from local to national and international levels, what is most noteworthy is that they reached down to the level of the prison classroom and rise up to the level of politicians and policy makers. This was made possible because the project identified gaps in provision and shortcomings in practice. It put these issues on an international agenda and then brought solutions and responses to the attention of decision makers and practitioners alike. Because the changes were needs driven and because they significantly enrich and enhance practice and provision, they will undoubtedly prove long lasting and far-reaching.

