

Arts In? Prison

Research into Access Issues
2008 - 10

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Foreword

It's been a long struggle but increasingly, the role of the arts in helping to reduce reoffending rates is finally being officially acknowledged. Indeed, the Ministry of Justice has recognised the value of the arts and committed to supporting arts-based initiatives within prisons. This commitment is demonstrated by the implementation of recent Prison Service Orders and by fresh statements recognising the value of the arts.

However, as revealed in this research, the welcoming and positive tone of policy statements is not often reflected on the ground or, in this case, within the gates of penal institutions. The research gives clear evidence of a lack of any consistent or coherent approach to establishing positive, mutually beneficial relationships with arts organisations at the point where it most matters – the initial communications interface. The professional culture of prisons and of arts organisations is in many ways very different: divergent worlds, you might say. However different working styles may be though, each should be able to come together to effect what they both want to achieve – better outcomes for released inmates, lower rates of reoffending.

Arts organisations have demonstrated that they are able to play a role in reducing reoffending, but there are significant barriers preventing them from maximizing their potential in this area of work. For example, enquiries from arts organisations to prisons are likely to be directed anywhere within the institution from the Security department to the Chaplaincy. Within each prison, a logical single point of contact would seem to be the Head of Learning and Skills, a suggestion with which Ministers appear to concur. However, in the final year of this research, out of twenty enquiries made to twenty prisons to establish a point of contact, not one prison receptionist identified the Head of Learning and Skills as the key contact point. Prisons should be able to handle enquiries and offers of support adeptly from arts organisations from the outset. This is a very basic problem, one that prevents effective relationships between prisons and arts organisations being formed.

Given the recent marked policy shift in terms of attitudes and approaches to offender management, sentencing and rehabilitation, now is a good moment to take stock and determine how best the arts can work with colleagues in prisons to make a positive impact on re-offending rates. Arts organisations are ready to step up and commit to working in partnership with criminal justice institutions; the Ministry of Justice has adopted a positive approach and offered support to this end; what we need now is a clear indication from prisons that they are prepared to work in a flexible way with arts sector professionals as mutually respectful colleagues.

Based on the evidence produced by this research, there is a substantial amount of work that needs to be done if productive relationships are to be established. The support of the Ministry of Justice is essential if we're to develop an appropriate system of communications but prisons need to be involved from the outset too, in order to make these partnerships work.

Rideout is to be thanked for bringing this communication problem into the open and I hope the research will serve as an incentive to all of us – prisons, government departments and arts organisations - to come to a better understanding of the need for improvement in partnerships and working relations.

We may have very different professional cultures but ultimately, we are both interested in the same goal – reducing the number of former prisoners reoffending. And given that both sectors have proven expertise in this field, it makes sense for us to work closely together, in partnership, wherever possible.

Baroness Young of Hornsey
30 January 2011

Arts In? Prison - Research into Access Issues

For three years concluding in 2010, Rideout has conducted research into how prisons are handling 'new' enquiries from third sector arts organisations interested in making a contribution to offender rehabilitation.

The first set of calls was made in autumn 2008, the second in autumn 2009 and the third in autumn 2010. In each case the researcher telephoned the same 20 prisons. There is a slight preference for prisons in the midlands; however, there is some geographical spread in the sample. The researcher would identify himself as calling from a new arts organisation and each year a different name was given to the company, the first being Open Road Theatre, the second Seven Ways Arts and the third Reality Check. The company from which the researcher was phoning was always a new organisation, always arts-focused and with a strong interest in offender rehabilitation. The researcher would if necessary talk about a number of programmes that were in preparation with prisoners in mind. No 'pitch' was made to the receptionist; the researcher was solely concerned with identifying a means by which to build a relationship.

Following an initial introduction, the question was put to the receptionist in each case, 'Who should I correspond with within the prison? To whom can I send information about our new arts programme which is intended for offenders? Is it best sent by post or email?'

A total of sixteen different departments or post-holders were cited as being the agencies responsible for dealing with enquiries about arts work, over the three year research in the twenty prisons. The overall picture was consistent in its inconsistency, although in 2010 there was a marked shift towards referrals to the Education Department. However, it should be noted also that this sometimes came about as a result of conversations between the receptionist and the researcher (see results). Also in 2010 there was some decrease in the more unlikely destinations for enquiries such as Security or the Chaplaincy - although one telephone operator still insisted the information be sent to her.

The research indicates clearly that receptionists are at something of a loss to assist arts organisations to begin a relationship with the prison for whom they are the 'front door'. Without such assistance at this first point of contact, the task of establishing and maintaining effective partnerships would appear to be falling at the first hurdle.

A summary of the total figures is as follows:

Number of calls that were directed to:	2008	2009	2010
Head of Learning and Skills (or Manager)	6	5	0
Number 1 Governor	5	5	4
Head of Education (or Manager or Department)	2	3	9
Head of Regimes	2	0	0
Governor's Secretary	1	1	2
Head of Activities	1	1	0
Chaplaincy	1	3	0
Director of OLASS at the local college	1	0	0
Security	1	0	0
'Course Co-ordinator'	0	1	0
Co-ordinator of Art	0	1	2
Offender Management Unit	0	0	1
Head of Resettlement	0	0	1
Telephone Operator	0	0	1
Total	20	20	20

Prison	2008	2009	2010
HMP Brixton	Head of Education (name given). (Spoke to a woman in the Education Department. Head of Education not in this afternoon). By post.	Switchboard first put me through to H.R. Got an answering machine which said, "Sorry, you are unable to leave a message". Back to switchboard who put me through to education. Was given a name on extension ****. Called it, but was told the named person was in a meeting. Finally got to speak someone else (name given) who is a course co-ordinator, who said to send the info to him by e-mail (email given).	Switchboard suggested Education and Arts. He put me through and I got an answering machine with message "Thank you for calling Kensington and Chelsea College at HMP Brixton etc".
HMPYOI Chelmsford	Was put through to the main gate who said, "Send it in to the Governor. Everything has to go through him anyway". By post.	Spoke to someone in the Education Department who was very helpful and said the right person to send info to would be the Co-ordinator of Art (name given). By post.	Switchboard suggested education. I spoke to them and was passed to the Co-ordinator of Art (name given). When I explained that although we were an arts organisation we didn't do 'art' as such (i.e. painting) she suggested that I send the info to the Education Department Manager (name given).
HMPYOI Drake Hall	Learning and Skills Manager (name given) By post. (Spoke to her assistant).	The operator put me through to the Education Department. who said to send info by post to Education Manager (name given). Education Manager not available.	The operator asked for some details of the project and the suggested the Education Department. He suggested that I talk to them to make sure. He put me through, but I got an answering machine with a name (first name was clear, second name garbled).
HMPYOI Foston Hall	Head of Activities (name given) By post.	Switchboard said Head of Activities (Name given) By post.	The operator said to send it through to her by e-mail. I asked if there was anyone who dealt with arts enquiries and she said, "I'm not certain. It would be better to send it to me."

Prison	2008	2009	2010
HMP Hewell	Learning and Skills Manager (name given) Education Department By post. (Spoke to her).	The operator put me through to the Education Department but there was no answer. Back to switchboard. Then she put me through to Learning and Skills, but I just got an answering machine. Back to switchboard. New operator who said just sent the info to The Governor's Secretary (wouldn't give me her name).	The operator said, "To be honest I'm not certain who you should send the information to". She then said to send by post to the Education Department. I asked if there was any particular person that I should send it to and she said no. She put me through to the Education Department. The person who answered the phone just said, "Yes send here".
HMPYOI Holloway	The operator first told me to send the information to Security. When I questioned whether they would be the appropriate people she told me to send it to the Governor. I asked if there was anyone who deals with this sort of thing and was told, "Maybe there is, maybe there isn't. I don't know. Send it to the Governor".	The operator said, "Send it to the Governor. It's her prison".	The operator suggested sending the info to the Governor's secretary. I asked if he could put me through to her, which he did. She said that if I sent the stuff to her via email (email given) she would forward it on to the Education Department.
HMP Lancaster	Education Manager (name given). By post. (Spoke to her assistant).	The operator didn't seem to understand what I was asking. He just asked which department I wanted to speak to. When I said that I was hoping that he could tell me, he suggested that I just send a letter to the prison. When I asked who I should send it to he said, "To Whom It May Concern, someone'll pick it up".	The operator suggested Education and put me through. A helpful staff member said to send info through to (name given) who she spoke to while I was on the line.

Prison	2008	2009	2010
HMP Leicester	Send all information to the Governor. By post.	The operator said, "Just send it to the Governor by post".	The operator just said, "I'll put you through". I asked who he was putting me through to, but he'd already gone. The line he put me through to just rung and nobody answered. I called back and got another operator who said she would try some lines for me. I waited and after a while the line went dead. I called back yet again and got a third operator who said to send the info to the Governor's secretary. He couldn't give me her name, but she would show it to the Governor and he would decide if he would let us into the prison or not.
HMP Long Lartin	I was told to send the information to the Chaplaincy. When I asked for a name the operator said, "I'm not at liberty to give out any names. Just send it to the Chaplaincy." I asked to speak to someone in the Chaplaincy, but there was no answer.	The operator said, "Just send it to the Governor, he'll sort it out".	First the operator said, "It doesn't really matter who you send it to as long as you've got your logo on it and it states clearly what it is". I asked who I should address it to and then she said, "You could send it to the Education Department, that might help". I asked to be put through to Education Department. There was no answer.
HMP Manchester	Operator said, "We don't have anybody who deals with this sort of thing, just send it to the Governor". By post.	The operator suggested Head of Learning and Skills (name given). Asked if I could speak to her, but only got her answering machine.	Switchboard at first suggested OMU. When I asked what that meant she said she thought it meant Offender Management Unit. I suggested that they might not be the best people and she then suggested Education. I spoke to them and was told that they already had a drama group in and so it may not be relevant, but I could send the info to Learning and Skills if I wanted. No particular person.

Prison	2008	2009	2010
HMP Morton Hall	Spoke to the Learning and Skills Department and was told to send info to Head of Learning and Skills (name given). When I asked to speak to him I was told he wasn't available. By post.	Spoke to the Learning and Skills Department and they said to send info Head of Learning and Skills (name given).	Send it to the 'number one Governor'. I asked if there was anyone who dealt with these kinds of enquiries and was told, "Everything has to go through the Governor".
HMPYOI Norwich	Head of Activities and Regimes (name given). (Switchboard couldn't track him down). By post.	Spoke to the Education Department. A very nice man said please sent the info to Education Manager (name given). Gave me his direct number, but there was no answer.	The person on the switchboard suggested Education and put me through. Turns out that he'd put me through to a woman who 'does alcohol'. She gave me the direct number of education, but there was no answer. Called back and got the switchboard to put me through to Education, but again no answer.
HMP Parkhurst	Head of Learning and Skills (name given). (No answer from her extension). By post.	The operator thought either Education or maybe the Governor. Then he said he would have a, "shout 'round the office". When he came back he said the person to get in touch with was Head of Skills and Learning (name given). He put me through, but there was no answer.	There appears to be a problem with their telephone system. I made 17 attempts to get through over a period of 3 days. After the initial announcement you are told to wait for the operator, but no-one ever answers. There is also an option to press 1 for a list of departments, but this in fact takes you to a recorded message about visits. By trial and error I discovered that pressing 2 would take you to the list of departments. There are 9 different departments listed. I tried all of them but never got an answer on any. Eventually I rang the number for booking visits (different from the main number). I explained why I was calling and they suggested sending the info to someone (name given) in the Education Department. They also said they would let someone know about the 'phone system.

Prison	2008	2009	2010
HMPYOI Reading	Governor's Secretary (name given). (Spoke to her). By post.	The operator said sent it to the Chaplain. I asked if I could speak to him, but was told he wasn't there.	The person on the switchboard said he wasn't sure who to send the info to. Then he said he would try to find me a name. When he came back he said to send it to Governor of Resettlement (name given). I asked to speak to him, but was told he wasn't there today.
HMP Rye Hill	Head of Regimes (name given). By post. (Spoke to her).	The operator wasn't sure. She put me on hold. When she came back she suggested the Education Manager, (name given), and put me through to her. She confirmed that she was the appropriate person and asked to be sent info by post.	The operator said to send by post to the Director (name given) who will deal with it. I asked if there was anyone who dealt with arts or education. The operator said there was an education department and that the Director would pass it on to them.
HMP Stafford	Everything goes to the Governor. <u>Must be in writing.</u>	The operator first suggested the Chaplaincy, but then thought that the Education Department might be better. No particular person. Must be in writing as can't give out e-mail addresses.	The operator said to send by post to the Governor, who will pass it on to the relevant person.
HMYOI Stoke Heath	Head of Learning and Skills (name given). By e-mail. (Spoke to him).	The operator first suggested the Education Department. They are not employed by the prison, but are part of The Manchester College. Spoke to them and they said that I'd have to go through the prison. Back to switchboard. This time they suggested Head of Learning and Skills. They put me through, but no answer. Back to switchboard who said to post info to Head of Learning & Skills.	The operator said to send by post to the Education Department. I asked if there was any particular person that I should send it to and she said, "No, just send it to the Education Department, I mean it is more or less education." She put me through to the Education Department, but there was no answer.

Prison	2008	2009	2010
HMP Wandsworth	Got passed around various departments. Eventually was told just to send the info to the Governor. By post.	First the operator put me through to Works who said, "Definitely not us. We do maintenance". Back to switchboard who put me through H.R. who just said send it to the Governor.	The operator couldn't decide between Education, and Learning and Skills. She eventually settled on Education and put me through. Got an answering machine, so called back. This time she put me through to Learning and Skills, but got and answering machine there too. Called back again and was told to send it to the Governor.
HMP Wormwood Scrubs	Someone in the Education Department suggested sending the info to the Director of OLASS at Kensington and Chelsea College (name given) and Director of OLASS (name given) at City and Islington College. Between them they cover all the prisons in London.	The operator put me through to the Chaplaincy who said, "Not us". They said that Head of Learning and Skills (name given) would be the person to sent info to. Tried to speak to her but there was no answer from her extension.	The operator first suggested the Governor, then when I asked if there might be someone who might be more relevant he suggested Education. I spoke to them and was told to send the info through to the Art Co-ordinator (name given).

Rideout specialises in creative practice within the criminal justice system and engages the public in issues of crime, justice and rehabilitation

Rideout (Creative Arts for Rehabilitation)
Registered Charity No 1100181

The Roslyn Works
Uttoxeter Road
Stoke-on-Trent
ST3 1PQ

01782 325555

admin@rideout.org.uk
www.rideout.org.uk