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# Recent Trends in UK Prison Libraries

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to explore and explain the significant developments and trends in prison libraries over the last thirty years. The article includes sections on legislation affecting prison libraries, staffing arrangements, roles and responsibilities of HMP (Her Majesty's Prison) Service, and UK Local Authorities. The work of the Prison Libraries Group (PrLG) of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) is examined in detail, as are the management of prison libraries and the methods of inspections and audits. The article examines the challenges of trying to engage an often disaffected population with diverse needs. Training requirements and opportunities for prison staff are investigated, as this is a crucial element in prison library work. The article concludes that the prison library is at the heart of the prisoners' learning journey by assisting in functional and emotional literacy. Not only can the prison library help to bridge the digital divide and increase prisoners ICT skills, it also can instill a love of books and reading through exciting reader development projects. The author hopes that funding for prison libraries continues at its present level in order to maintain an excellent service to prisoners and to ensure that providers are able to deliver an affordable service within a reasonable timeframe. The article will be of interest to prison library staff, local authority staff with responsibility for library services to prison facilities, and library and information science students.

## INTRODUCTION

UK prison libraries have seen major changes and developments over the past thirty years. In this article I will examine how government funding and implementation of national standards have led to significant improvements for prison libraries, prisoners, and librarians. There are currently 140 prisons serving the courts in England and Wales, and 16 in Scotland. For the purposes of this article, I will focus mainly on England and Wales. The current prison population is over 85,000—one of the highest per capita in Europe. Table 1 shows not only high numbers, but also the social backgrounds of prisoners that create very diverse needs.

Offender recidivism is very costly to society, in both economic and social terms. A reoffending former prisoner costs on average £65,000 to reincarcerate and £40,000 a year while incarcerated. While punishment will always be a primary aim of the criminal justice system, the government is determined to do more to turn offenders away from crime and into work, to improve their skills, and to encourage them to lead productive lives.

As prisoners are not able to use their local public library, the prisons have had to ensure that these individuals have reasonable access to an adequate library service; this access has mainly taken the form of an agreement with the nearest Public Library Authority (PLA).

## LEGISLATION

Basic standards for the delivery of a library service to Prison Service Establishments were defined for the first time in Home Office Policy Statement Number 7, "Library Facilities for People in Custody" (1978); and were further developed in *Guidelines for Prison Libraries* (1981), produced by the Library Association (now the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals [CILIP]). Standards concerning stock, staffing, accommodation, finance, and management were developed over the years using these guidelines. As the result of changes in Public Library Authorities and the Prison Service, there was still a need, however, to clarify issues around delivery, managerial responsibilities, and funding of the prison library service. This led to the official report *Prison Libraries: Roles and Responsibilities* (1991) on prison service and public library authority roles and responsibilities. This key document marked an important development by endorsing the Library Association guidelines and calling for civilian prison library staff. The Library Association guidelines, designed to provide a model for prison libraries, were then revised in 1997 to reflect changes in Local Authority and Prison Service structures (Collis & Boden, 1997).

The Prison Service recognizes that every prison must have a library and that all categories of prisoners must have the opportunity to visit the library. A library is a statutory requirement according to Adult Prison Rules

Table 1. Social characteristics of prisoners

	General Population (percentage)		Prisoners (percentage)	
Ran away from home as a child	11		47	50
	(all)		(male)	(female)
Excluded from school	2		49	33
	(all)		(male)	(female)
No qualifications	15		52	71
	(all)		(male)	(female)
Suffer from two or more mental disorders	5	2	70	72
	(male)	(female)	(male)	(female)
Psychotic disorder	0.5	0.6	7	14
	(male)	(female)	(male)	(female)
Drug use in previous year	13	8	66	55
	(male)	(female)	(male)	(female)
Hazardous drinking	38	15	63	39

Source: Report by the Social Exclusion Unit. (2002, July). *Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners*. Retrieved October 31, 2010, from [http://www.gos.gov.uk/497296/docs/219643/431872/468960/SEU\\_Report.pdf](http://www.gos.gov.uk/497296/docs/219643/431872/468960/SEU_Report.pdf)

Number 33<sup>1</sup> and Young Offender Institution (YOI) Rule 26,<sup>2</sup> which both state: "A library shall be provided in every prison and, subject to any directions of the Secretary of State, every prisoner shall be allowed to have library books and to exchange them."

The sixteen prisons in Scotland are dealt with in a different way and are governed by the 1989 Prisons (Scotland) Act, which provides the framework for the operation of adult prisons and YOIs. Responsibility for management of prisons rests with the Scottish Prison Service (SPS), which is accountable to the Scottish government. Rule 76(2) of the Prisons and Young Offenders Institutions (Scotland) Rules 1994 states: "The Governor shall make arrangements for lending library services for the use of prisoners which take into account so far as is reasonably practicable their educational, informational and recreational interests." Although every prison in Scotland is obliged to provide a library service, the interpretation of this mandate varies widely. For example, HMP (Her Majesty's Prison) Barlinnie is the only facility to employ a qualified librarian.

All prisons vary, and their libraries vary accordingly, reflecting the needs of the type of prisoner they serve. Prison librarians also have to adjust to modifications instituted by Public Library Authorities, new directions from the recent (December 2009) Review of Public Libraries by the Department for Culture Media & Sport (DCMS), cuts in public spending, as well as developments within the Prison Service, which can mean changes in the inspection process and management. Finally, changes in national government often mean new directions and aims for government departments. Other key directives are Prison Service Orders, which are long-term mandatory directives for staff and prisoners intended to be in effect for an indefinite period; copies are kept in the prison library

(access to some of these are restricted for prisoners). There is a specific order pertaining to prison libraries.<sup>3</sup>

### STAFFING

The Library Association's 1997 *Guidelines for Prison Libraries* (Collis & Boden, 1997) enabled a significant advancement in the organization and management of prison libraries across England and Wales. Library staff had to include a professional librarian, prison officer, and library orderlies (prisoners), and library hours were increased. The job of Prison Orderly is much sought after, as it is regarded by prisoners as a "good," high status job, although not quite as desirable as working in the kitchen. Prison librarians are constantly training this often transient workforce in library tasks. By working in the library, most prison orderlies acquire transferable skills in customer service, reference work, and computer technology—and some of these skills are accredited. Library orderlies are valuable members of the library team and contribute immensely to the smooth operation of the library. Orderlies feel a sense of loyalty toward the library and often step in to protect library staff in situations of potential conflict.

Minimum staffing levels were recommended in the 2005 *Offender Library, Learning and Information Specification*, and updated in the May 2010 *Prison Library Specification*. The new enhanced staffing levels have presented increased challenges in the Public Library Authority budgets for staff recruitment and training (see table 2).

### ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Responsibility for management and funding of education and libraries within the Prison Service is held by the Offenders Skills and Employment Team (OSET) of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (DBIS, n.d.). Offender skills and employment are key components in

Table 2. Staffing recommendations for prison libraries England and Wales

Prison population	Librarian hours per week	Library assistant hours per week
<200	16	16
201–300	22	24
301–450	31	36
451–550	37	44
551–700	37	56
701–850	37	68
>850	37	74

Source: *Prison Library Specification* (2010)

the government's Skills for Life and Skills Strategies program and play a central part in the action plan to reduce recidivism by the Ministry of Justice.

The UK Prison Service vision for prison libraries is: "To provide offenders in custody with a similar range of services to those found in public libraries in the outside community, and to facilitate in practical ways the smooth transition to their usage of such services on release, as a means of encouraging them to adopt a positive role in society" (*Prison Library Specification*, 2010).

### PRISON LIBRARIES GROUP

A key group with regard to prison libraries in England and Wales is CILIP's Prison Libraries Group (PrLG) (CILIP, 2009, May), whose committee works actively in the following areas:

- Promotion—promotes the importance of prison libraries within the Prison Service and generally throughout the library and learning sectors
- Policy—is a focus for prison library policy development and responds to requests for consultation in related areas
- Advice—provides professional advice, where possible, to PrLG members and others engaged in prison library services
- Continuing professional development (CPD)—works with CILIP to encourage professional development and provides training opportunities for prison library staff
- Networking and communication—maintains PrLG web page with links to relevant articles and documents and acts as point of contact for other CILIP groups
- Advocacy—advocates on behalf of prison library services and PrLG members, where appropriate
- Mentoring—committee members act as mentors for PrLG members, where feasible
- Publishing—publishes the *Prison Libraries Journal*<sup>4</sup>
- Involvement—encourages the membership to be actively involved in the profession and, specifically, in the work of the Prison Libraries Group

The Prison Libraries Group believes that prison libraries play an important role in the following areas:

- Functional literacy: The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines functional literacy not as the ability to read and write, but as "whether a person is able to understand and employ printed information in daily life, at home, at work and in the community" (BBC News, 2000). For both academic and economic suc-

cess, it is imperative that prisoners have good reading skills. *Prison library staff can deliver reading materials for prisoners at all ability levels.*

- Emotional literacy: Emotional literacy is the ability to manage one's own emotions and to understand what other people are thinking and feeling. Reading for pleasure is a safe way to explore and develop human relationships. Cutting-edge reader development and family learning projects can contribute to raising prisoners' self-esteem, which is an important factor in reducing recidivism. *Prison library staff can help to raise the self-esteem of prisoners.*
- Information literacy: "Information literacy is knowing when and why you need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner" (CILIP, 2009, May). *Prison library staff work with prisoners to help them locate, retrieve, understand, and communicate appropriate information.*
- Mental health: Happiness, well-being, contentment, harmony, enjoyment, and peace do not all mean the same thing, but all contribute to self-esteem and a positive outlook on life. Reading for pleasure increases relaxation and can reduce stress. *Prison library staff work with health professionals to recommend reading materials that help prisoners learn more about and manage their mental health.* Likewise, an offender's engagement with the prison library can lead to: (a) improved self-esteem; (b) increased involvement in learning; (c) increased employment opportunities; (d) improved opportunities to maintain family links.

## MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICIES

It is important for the library service within a prison to be seen as part of the core services provided by the facility. Prison library services are currently provided by sixty-four Local Authorities in England and Wales. This arrangement is accomplished through a Service Level Agreement with each prison, using on-site local authority librarians financed by ring-fenced funding by the DBIS via OSET. Additional ring-fenced funding is used to purchase books and other library materials as well as associated off-site services to maintain and update the stock. Prisoners are currently allowed thirty minutes per week to visit the library and check out books.

Privately managed prisons were introduced to the UK in the 1990s. At present there are eleven private prisons contractually managed by private companies. Library staff are employed directly by the private prison, and book stock is mainly purchased independently rather than through a library authority.

In 2005, the Offender Learning and Skills Unit (OLSU—now OSET) issued the *Prison Library Specification* for a wider ranging and up-to-date Offender Library, Learning and Information Service, in consultation with Public Library Authorities, the Prison Service-National Procurement Unit, and the Prison Libraries Group. This document sets out an agenda to

introduce a new integrated service, including reader development, basic skills support, distance/individualized learning and information, advice and guidance. Along with the introduction of realistic and relevant goals and increased funding, the 2005 *Specification* was designed to increase both the quantity and quality of services, while at the same time taking into account the needs of individual offenders. The new service was piloted in July 2005, in the same three development regions (North East, North West, and South West) used by the Offenders Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) Project. The changes were introduced nationally in August 2006.

In order to achieve its aims and objectives, the Offenders Learning & Skills unit was successful in securing significant increases in funding for prison libraries. Between 2005/6 and 2007/8, funding increased from £3,700,000 to £7,000,000 in order to finance the pilot project and implement the 2005 *Specification* nationally in all nine regions. These numbers constitute a budget increase of approximately 90 percent over three years. This recent increase shows that OSET sees prison libraries as integral components of the learning and skills agenda as well as of the overall effectiveness of prison rehabilitation programs. According to its website, OSET and its key partners have every intention of providing a prison library service comparable to that of a mainstream public library (2005).

The new funding structure has helped achieve the home-office vision for prison libraries of providing offenders in custody with a similar range of services to those found in public libraries and of facilitating their transition to the outside community where such resources are readily available. Following the pilots in the three development regions, the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) conducted an evaluation of the restructured library service. A full evaluation and a summary report of the pilot project are available at the NFER website (2006).

The Cedar Partnership's 2009 review of prison library service, although not yet published, is now being considered by DBIS and the National Offender Management Service. Among the significant issues for consideration are: (1) where the policy responsibility for prison libraries should rest; (2) what the service should consist of; and (3) how the service should be delivered. The service will operate in its present form until April 2012, when these thorny issues will hopefully have been resolved and a sustainable future solution presented. The 2010 *Specification* will serve as an interim as a guide for prison librarians and governors (CILIP, 2010).

Each prison receives a capitation fund to pay for a library service, and there is a professional librarian in the majority of the 140 facilities. The specialist expertise and extensive knowledge of these professionals provide great strength in UK prison libraries and have been invaluable to their recent improvement.

It is vital for prison libraries not to fall behind their public counterparts and to offer the best possible service to prisoners, who have a wide range

of information needs, and who can benefit greatly from learning IT skills and having access to computer technology. It is estimated that 60 percent of prisoners have insufficient skills to obtain employment. By increasing their self-esteem and skills, they are more likely to obtain employment and to avoid reoffending. Phil Wheatley, Director of Prisons, has made it a priority to reduce recidivism rates and to break the cycle of crime (currently 80 percent of young offenders and 60 percent of adults reoffend).

### INSPECTIONS AND AUDITS

Inspections and audits are carried out in all prisons, and HM Chief Inspector of Prisons team reports directly to government ministers. Inspectors from the HMP Inspectorate and, also recently, the Adult Learning Inspectorate will check prison libraries as part of their facility inspection, so it is important for the librarian to ensure that the library service is compliant with a set number of baselines. Obviously, prison governors are keen to pass inspections with flying colors, and the librarians can capitalize on this priority to make necessary changes and improvements.

#### *Standards*

Librarians need to be aware of the current requirements for measuring performance and services, both within the Prison Service and according to UK government national standards for libraries. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons places great importance on each library complying with the stated "Expectations." The subject of "Libraries" is covered in paragraphs 17–20 of Section 5 of the Inspectorate's *Expectations: Criteria for Assessing the Conditions in Prisons and the Treatment of Prisoners* (2006) (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, n.d.). Section 5, which deals with the more general area of "Learning and Skills and Work Activities" begins by stating that: "Prisoners are encouraged and enabled to learn both during and after sentence, as part of sentence planning; and have access to good library facilities." It is worth quoting paragraphs 17–20 in full:

Para. 17. The establishment has an effective strategy for maximising access to and use of a properly equipped, organised library, managed by trained staff.

#### *Evidence*

- Observation: Library induction for prisoners, prisoner movement.
- Documentation: Check timetables, usage records, strategies for prisoner engagement, performance indicators, staffing levels and qualifications, inter-library loan arrangements, unit arrangements, e.g., C&S, health services etc., prisoner surveys, loan records, book stock.
- Prisoners: Speak to those who have mobility problems and ask how they get access.
- Questionnaire: *Cross-reference with discipline and health services inspectors.*

Para. 18. Library materials should be broadly reflective of the different cultures and needs of the prison population, including Braille, talking books, and foreign language books.

*Evidence*

- Observation: Check library materials and provision of international newspapers, journals, etc. Check the library stocks for a textbook explaining immigration law and procedure for foreign nationals.
- Prisoners: Speak to prisoners.

Para. 19. All prisoners have access to a range of library materials, which reflect the population's needs and support learning and skills including literacy, numeracy, and languages, employability and vocational training and social and life skills.

*Evidence*

- Observation: Access arrangements, check library facilities and materials. Check for provision of positive fiction and nonfiction relevant to the population.
- Documentation: Check routines, etc., needs analyses, reviews of sentence plans, evidence of discussions between learning and skills and library staff.
- Staff: Interviews.
- Prisoners: Interviews.

Para. 20. Library materials include a comprehensive selection of up-to-date legal textbooks and Prison Service Orders (PSOs).

*Evidence*

- Observation: Check library materials.
- Prisoners: Speak to prisoners.

Other nationally recognized standards by which prison libraries are measured include the Butler Trust Award, which encourages effective care for prisoners. HMP Haverigg won this prestigious award in 2004 for playing a positive role in prisoners' lives and providing the services they need. The library was awarded a Charter Mark, an award demonstrating the achievement of national standard for excellence in customer service in United Kingdom public sector organizations. Introduced in 1991, it was replaced in 2008 by the Customer Service Excellence Standard. HMP Haverigg prison library was called "the best in the service" after the prison's recent HMCIP inspection.<sup>5</sup>

*Self-Assessment*

Librarians are required to submit self-assessment reports in readiness for any Prison Service inspection. The reports must contain evidence of meetings, training undertaken, and development work carried out, in accordance with the Service Level Agreement.

*Prison and Probations Ombudsman (for England & Wales)*

During the past two years (since January 2008), the Prisons and Probations Ombudsman (PPO) department (<http://www.ppo.gov.uk/>) received just sixteen complaints about libraries. And only nine of these were eligible for investigation, as the others had not gone through the required internal complaint procedures. Bearing in mind that the PPO received a total of 4,288 complaints in 2008–9, the library complaints represent a very small proportion of these. The library complaints most often related to the lack of access to the library. Other complaints were about being sacked from a job in the library, the provision of photocopying, and library staff.

## DEVELOPMENTS AND CHALLENGES

*Staffing*

The role of prison librarian presents many challenges, many of which arise from running a unique service within another type of service. Librarians often begin their career in the public library arena, where an open customer-focused approach is required. In a prison setting, the librarian will, to a certain extent, have to “unlearn” this approach and to replace it with a detached professionalism, so as to avoid any “conditioning” by the prisoners. Being a civilian in a prison can be a daunting experience and is not for everyone. Even so, many prison librarians find their work very rewarding and consider it almost a vocation, where they can enjoy seeing lives transformed by reading and learning.

*Library Stock*

The library materials collection should reflect the needs and interests of the prison population and be based on a wide range of management information. Materials should be available in various formats appropriate for the subject matter and requirements of the individual. Current reference material should be available, including all required titles listed in the 2010 *Prison Library Specification* (p. 17). A funding formula recommends ten items of stock per prisoner, with prisons having fewer than 200 prisoners holding a minimum stock of 2,000 items. In the last ten years, the number of foreign nationals in prison has doubled and now represents over 14 percent of the total prison population in England and Wales. There is a huge range of nationalities and languages to be considered alongside the cultural and religious diversity that the foreign nationals already bring. Prison libraries have had to respond to these needs in terms of providing relevant stock and information resources.

More than 50 percent of male offenders and 71 percent of female offenders have no qualifications. Nearly half have literacy skills at or below level 1, and 65 percent have numeracy skills at or below level 1, as defined by the UK’s Lifelong Learning agency (Lifelong Learning, n.d.).

It is hardly surprising, then, that finding employment upon release is difficult: 67 percent of offenders were unemployed when they went to prison and more than three-quarters have no job to go to when they get out.

It is a well-established fact that nonreaders:

- are more likely to commit a crime and be sent to prison;
- are more likely to reoffend once released;
- represent half of all offenders leaving prison.

Prison library staff have worked hard to address this problem of low literacy and have purchased basic skills materials for their readers. They work closely with basic skills tutors to ensure these materials are used effectively. Their reader development activities encourage prisoners to access these books and build up reading confidence.

#### *Sensitive Material*

Every prison librarian gets asked at some point if there is a list of banned books. The answer, of course, is that there is not. It is not part of the prison librarian's role to make moral judgments on what offenders should be reading. Prison librarians should not, however, lose sight of the fact that they work in an environment where security is paramount. This means that there will be occasions when certain books are considered to be inappropriate for the prison library. In such cases, a decision will be made by the governor or security staff on a case-by-case basis. Some librarians have been asked by police liaison staff for information on what certain prisoners are reading. This information should only be divulged in accordance with correct data protection legislative procedures. The *Prison Libraries Training Pack*<sup>6</sup> contains advice on how to deal with sensitive materials.

#### *Book Loss and Retrieval*

Loss of library materials is closely monitored, and library staff work with prison staff to minimize stock loss. Individual prisons can specify in the Service Level Agreement how lost and damaged items are dealt with. A computerized library management system can help with effective stock control and the handling of reservations, which is crucial for prisoners who are at the facility for only short periods. Librarians should have access to prisoners' release dates to ensure that they return library items before they leave.

#### *Access*

It is no good having an excellent prison library if no one can use it. Staffing problems, however, can mean that there are no prison officers to escort prisoners to and from the library. Prison librarians are required to be proactive in making sure scheduled visits are adhered to. They should work with prison management to ensure library visits are embedded into daily core activities.

*ICT*

For prisoners to obtain employment skills and lead law-abiding lives after release, they need to be able to use computers and, where possible, obtain qualifications. Prisoners can study for basic IT qualifications while incarcerated, but places in education classes are limited. In contrast, all prisoners should have the opportunity to visit the library, a place that can play a vital role in their journey of learning. Most prison libraries have some access to PCs, mainly standalones, for prisoner use with CD-ROMs or other software. These resources are used for informal learning and/or research. Internet access is now available to prisoners in some European countries with monitoring of e-mail and websites visited, similar to how phone calls and mail are monitored now. These methods of communication will probably be introduced in the UK in the future, with suitable safeguards in place.

Many prison libraries have online links to their PLA, in order to access catalogs and to place reservations and bibliographical inquiries. Some library staff are able to access the Internet either via library computers or Prison Service intranet PCs. This enables them to provide improved reference services and to respond quickly to requests for information. Such quick responses are often crucial to those prisoners who are moved around the prison system at short notice.

*Reader Development*

Public libraries have led the way in reader development, and there have been some exciting initiatives in prison libraries. These initiatives often act as a launch pad to prisoners resuming contact with their families, learning key skills, addressing personal issues, and changing their attitudes about learning. Reader development activities add value to the library service and engage an often disaffected prison population. All such projects are subject to prison security department monitoring, especially where links with families are involved. Some reader development projects have attracted major funding; others are low-key local programs. The success of them all, however, depends heavily on the commitment and enthusiasm of library staff.

Storybook Dads (<http://www.storybookdads.co.uk/>) and The Big Book Share (Read, n.d.) are two of the many programs where prisoners read stories onto CDs and send a book bag with the books and CDs to their children. These family literacy programs have generated improved literacy and closer ties with the family, another important factor in reducing recidivism.

The National Literacy Trust has noted that reader development work in prisons has been on the increase in recent years with libraries finding ways to encourage prisoners and prison staff to make use of the prison library. Several prisons received funding during the National Year of Reading in

1998/99, including a successful dyslexia project at HMP Pentonville, innovative drama workshops run by Safe Ground at HMP Wandsworth, and a story-taping project at Gartree. One of the large-scale library-based reader-development projects, Inside Books, received funding in 2000–2001 from the DCMS Wolfson Public Libraries Challenge Fund. Inside Books, run by Opening the Book for the Prison Libraries Group, set up reading groups in several prisons and produced a reader development manual and fiction sampler that were distributed to all prison libraries and education departments.

The Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit has funded some family reading projects where the prison library and education department encourage prisoners to support their children's reading development while at the same time improving their own reading skills. Some of these programs adopt the Big Book Share model, now funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. "Reading Together: The Role of the Reading Group inside Prison" (2009) by Jenny Hartley and Sarah Turvey (Roehampton University) documents the success of reading groups in prison. In 2007, they conducted a survey of all prison reading groups in the UK, in order to assess their participants and reflect upon their value. The survey was publicized in *Prison Libraries Journal*; the responses reveal a thriving world, rich in both current benefit and future potential. From this evidence it is clear that reading a book together and talking about it can be a powerful resource. The report concludes that "Prison librarians are the key to successful reading groups. Without them the groups could not happen" (Hartley and Turvey, 2009, p. 32, n. 12).

Reading Champions is a program run by the National Literacy Trust that works toward three levels of achievement—bronze, silver, and gold. To make sure the project is flexible and relevant to all prisons, the librarian or project leader must develop their own criteria for each level. The program focuses on individual progress and achievement rather than on meeting a specific reading level or standard. When the librarian or project leader feels that a participant has demonstrated significant improvement or has reached a new reading level, they nominate this person for an achievement award on the Literacy Trust website. Within three weeks, a certificate will be sent out to the contact at the prison (n.d.).

The Six Book Challenge (<http://www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk>), run by the Reading Agency, invites less-confident readers to read six books, such as the Quick Read books (<http://www.quickreads.org.uk/>), and to record their reading in a diary. The participants are supported with incentives and rewarded with a certificate when they complete the Challenge. Ninety percent of participants say they feel more confident about reading after taking part. Eighty percent expect to use a library more to borrow books. The tutors say that the Challenge improves learner confidence, increases motivation, and helps to develop a reading habit. The Challenge

has been very successful in prisons where the learners are encouraged by literacy tutors and library staff to participate and record their accomplishments in their individual learning plans.

Family Time is a project run at HMP Gloucester, where fathers design and make a book for their child/children, which is sent to their family or given at a special family visit. One prisoner made a book for his sister whose baby had died and filled it with poignant poems and artwork. Such activities can help prisoners cope with absence at difficult times by giving them a feeling they are helping their families and making amends in a small way. This strengthens family ties, a proven factor in reducing the probability of reoffending.

Ping Pong Stories is a creative writing exercise at HMP Haverigg, which complements Story Book Dads. A prisoner writes the first chapter of a story that is mailed to his child to read; the child then writes back with the next chapter. The stories run as long as both parties have the inclination and imagination. The only requirement is that each chapter should end in a cliff-hanger.

V & A Creative Writing course is run by HMP Cookham Wood and HMP Rochester. Here library staff have adapted a creative writing course, which uses artifacts from the Victoria and Albert Museum, to local conditions and items available in a local museum. After a pilot period, the program will be offered as a six-week course this year.

Premier League Reading Stars is supported by the Football Foundation, Premier League, National Literacy Trust, and Arts Council England. It was designed as a national program for UK public libraries, but several prison libraries have applied to participate as well, including HMP Birmingham. The readers can link up with a premier league football team and read the books their hero is reading (Football Foundation, 2010).

*Toe by Toe*, a highly-structured reading manual is produced and distributed by The Shannon (<http://www.toe-by-toe.co.uk/>), which teaches basic literacy skills to learners of all ages. Free copies of the manual are available to prisons, providing another valuable learning tool. This program also increases the motivation of prisoners with good literacy skills by appointing them as mentors for men with lower literacy skills. The two prisoners read one-on-one for twenty minutes a day at least five times a week, using the *Toe by Toe Manual*. The prisoners manage the program themselves, meaning prison officers need only loosely monitor the process. There are currently 650 graduates and 2,000 mentees enrolled in over one hundred prisons.

The Bookies Group is made up of prisoners, librarians, and prison staff at HMP Birmingham. This program won the Reading Agency's 2007 Short Story Reading Challenge. An initial questionnaire about attitudes to short stories provoked a lot of discussion among the group members. Sue Wilkinson, the prison librarian said: "Some of the men felt that, because

they were prisoners, their entry might not be taken seriously. Others felt that this was an opportunity to show what they could do.” The “bookies” read over 200 short stories, all less than twelve pages long, before choosing their top five. Sue Wilkinson added: “The group now sees themselves as a group of readers who happen to be in prison, rather than a group of prisoners who read. Some members have suggested we have a short story writing competition. Everyone was keen, so we’ve started thinking about our stories.”

### STAFF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

The PrLG actively promotes improvements in standards within all prison libraries and organizes training events each year for library staff working in prisons. The group also administers the Margaret Watson Award, which is awarded to a paraprofessional member who has demonstrated that she/he has been instrumental in developing an example of best practice. The best practice may be any ongoing activity or organizational process that the entrant considers to be of exceptional benefit to the prison or enables an aspect of the library operation to be handled with particular efficiency and effectiveness. The recipient must have demonstrated that the particular best practice can be sustained over time or regularly repeated.

Various developments within the Prison Service have created an increased demand for information for remand prisoners and reading materials for foreign nationals. To keep up with these changes, prison librarians need regular training, both through their own workplace (e.g., Prison Awareness Course, diversity training, mental health awareness, Prison Service ICT) and through the Public Library Authority in order to keep up with ICT, reader development, stock management, community developments, conflict management, etc.). There are obvious difficulties in operating a library service within a larger nonlibrary service, and prison librarians can often feel isolated physically as well as professionally. To help cope with this situation, the PrLG has produced various resources, including the *Prison Libraries Training Pack*.

#### *Qualifications*

To become a librarian in public libraries, including prison libraries, the usual route is:

- A degree in librarianship or information management that is recognized by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) or
- A degree in any subject, followed by a postgraduate qualification in information management or equivalent, accredited by CILIP
- Chartership, the professional award made by CILIP, gives the right to

have the MCLIP title after one's name. Chartered membership opens up new career opportunities and gives members the skills and approach needed to develop their roles and make good job applications. By honing evaluative and professional skills through chartering, members also add value to their organizations and can advocate effectively on behalf of their services.

- Certification, the CILIP paraprofessional award, was introduced in April 2005. It recognizes the contribution made in library and information work by paraprofessionals. Successful applicants are admitted to the Register of Certified Affiliates and awarded the postnominal letters, ACLIP (Certified Affiliate of CILIP).
- Revalidation is open to all chartered members and fellows who wish to gain evidence and recognition of the commitment to personal professional development.
- Fellowship is the highest level of professional qualification awarded by CILIP, recognizing a high level of personal commitment and achievement. Being a fellow allows one to use the title, FCLIP (Chartered Fellow of CILIP).

## CONCLUSION

The value of the prison library cannot be underestimated. Between 80 and 90 percent of the prison population use the prison library. Some visit just to get out of their cell, but many discover reading for the first time, and many prisoners read only when they are in prison. The library is one of the few places they can feel human again and where they are not just a number. In the library they are free to make their own choices and do not have to follow orders. A library book is one of the few things allowed in a cell, and many prisoners try to acquire more than their allowance to furnish their cell and personalize it. The library plays an important role to underpin work of the education department. Recreational reading, however, is equally important for self-development. The so-called digital divide is felt keenly in prison libraries, as librarians are faced with little or no Internet access for themselves and their customers. The prison libraries guidelines call for the libraries to be connected to their local library authority, in order to facilitate stock and reservation access. More work needs to be done to improve access to suitable and relevant ICT in UK prisons, both for library staff and to ensure prisoners are equipped with the necessary employment skills. The library should be a neutral space where prisoners can feel safe and where their informational needs are dealt with in an effective and professional manner.

One can only hope that funding for prison libraries continues at or above the present level and that a clear direction from government departments is forthcoming in order to maintain the existing excellent service

to prisoners. Without such clear support, library service providers cannot ensure the continuance of an affordable and timely service.

Stephen Shaw, Prisons and Probation Ombudsman, has stated that a healthy prison is one where there are lots of complaints and that he would encourage prisoners to complain if they do not have adequate access to the library. He would then put pressure on governors to implement the necessary changes (<http://www.ppo.gov.uk/>).

“The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons,” said Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821–81). Maybe the prison library is a true measure of this?

## NOTES

1. HMSO 1999 Prison Rules. As amended by the Prison (Amendment) Rules 2000 [S.I.2000 no. 1794], the Prison (Amendment) (No. 2) Rules 2000 [S.I.2000 no. 2641], the Prison (Amendment) Rules 2002 [S.I.2002 no. 2116], the Prison (Amendment) Rules 2003 [S.I.2003 no. 3301], the Prison (Amendment) Rules 2005 [S.I.2005 no. 869], the Prison (Amendment) (No. 2) Rules 2005 [S.I.2005 no. 3437], the Prison (Amendment) Rules 2007 [S.I.2007 no. 2954], the Prison (Amendment) (No. 2) Rules 2007 [S.I.2007 no. 3149], and the Prison (Amendment) Rules 2008 [S.I.2008 no. 597].
2. HMSO (2000) Young Offender Institution Rules. As amended by The Young Offender Institution (Amendment) Rules 2002 (S.I.2002 no. 2117).
3. The Prison Service Order 6710, specifically for prison libraries, is being revised and is currently replaced by The Prison Libraries Specification May 2010. They specification or orders constitute national standards and form the basis for site inspections and audits, which are supposed to take place regularly. Many of the mandatory documents will eventually be made available on the Prison Service intranet. Prison librarians must ensure that intranet terminals are provided in the library, wherever possible.
4. *Prison Libraries Journal* is published in three issues per year to members of Prison Libraries Group. The journal is useful for sharing good practices and disseminating information; it is produced in print rather than online, as not all prison library staff have Internet access in their libraries.
5. More details can be found at The Butler Trust (2009).
6. The PrLG Training Pack (2009, December 11) is available online to members of CILIP. These materials are aimed primarily at people new to prison library work. A workshop is held at the PrLG training events to highlight new additions to the document. Providing a library service in the secure environment of a prison is not an easy job, and the pack is designed to demystify some prison jargon and unique procedures that new staff are likely to encounter. The training pack is not intended to be a substitute for formal training, which should be provided by the institution, but can be useful as a guide to many common prison library situations. The pack is compiled by members of the PrLG committee, most of whom are experienced prison librarians. The pack is regularly updated, and the PrLG welcomes ideas for future coverage.

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