

# E-Learning in Prison Education in Europe

## Recommendations for European Policy Makers

December 2010

The following recommendations about *E-Learning in Prison Education* have been developed in the context of the EU Lifelong Learning project “Learning Infrastructure for Correctional Services” (LICOS) in close cooperation with the “Ex-Offender Community of Practice” (ExOCOP).

These recommendations are the result of several discussion processes among prison education professionals throughout Europe, amongst others:

- Conference “Pathways to Inclusion”, Budapest (Hungary), 22-24.02.2010  
(see Final Report: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/grundtvig/doc/conf11/report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/grundtvig/doc/conf11/report_en.pdf))
- Conference on “E-Learning and Knowledge Management in Correctional Services”, (ICPA 2010 Pre-conference, Ghent (Belgium), 22-23 October 2010, organised by LICOS, ExOCOP and the Belgium Directorate General for Penitentiary Institutions)
- LICOS final project meeting in Pécs (Hungary), 01-03 December 2010
- Various discussions with professionals from penitentiary institutions in Europe.

## Table of contents

• Prison education .....	2
• E-Learning as a strategic means for qualification in correctional services.....	2
• E-Learning introduction process .....	3
• Providing learning content .....	4
• Using valuable resources from the Internet in a secure way.....	4
• Embedding e-learning in an overall qualification strategy .....	5

**Contact:** Prof. Jürgen Friedrich, University of Bremen/FB 3, Bibliothekstr. 1, D-28359 Bremen, [friedrich@uni-bremen.de](mailto:friedrich@uni-bremen.de)

LICOS



LICOS is sponsored by the Lifelong Learning Programme

## Prison education

1. Prison sentences always constitute a deprivation of freedom. However, beyond the security aspects the aim of the organisation of sentences is to foster the reintegration of (ex-)offenders into society.

According to international conventions and recommendations the prisoners have the same right to education as other citizens<sup>1</sup>. Education helps to develop the personality and character of the individuals. Education plays an important role in the process of reintegration. Therefore deprivations and restrictions which constrain education in prison should be avoided as far as possible.

Considering the growing importance of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in society, prisoners should have the chance to use ICT for education and training purposes (e-learning). Restrictions with respect to the use of ICT have to be limited to measures necessary for maintaining security.

2. Education and training in prisons have to aim at levels of competence which are comparable to those outside the prison. Efforts should be made to issue the same or similar certificates as are issued in society in general and accredited by official bodies like Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Ministries of Education, etc. e-Learning can support this goal by giving inmates – online or offline – access to learning material from general schools, vocational training schools or colleges. In addition, central examination facilities, which can be accessed via secure Internet channels, should be used by inmates to obtain degrees which are widely acknowledged by employers.

## E-Learning as a strategic means for qualification in correctional services

3. E-learning for inmates provides a huge opportunity to enhance prison education by
  - using the flexibility of the technology to address the individual qualification needs of the inmates on a personal time schedule,
  - broadening qualification opportunities,
  - improving the quality of education and training,
  - motivating (especially young) inmates,
  - effectuating learning processes and
  - saving financial means for improving individual support for inmates by teachers.Correctional services should be encouraged and enabled to make use of these special opportunities.
4. E-learning gives inmates the chance to not only learn subjects for their general or vocational education but also provides them with the opportunity to acquire digital literacy. In today's society, where digital competence is becoming necessary at the workplace as well as in daily

---

<sup>1</sup> The European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of 4 November 1950 entered into force on 18 May 1954, and was signed by member state governments of the Council of Europe. Council of Europe: Recommendations on Education in Prison (Recommendation R (89) 12 1989). Council of Europe: The European Prison Rules (Recommendation rec (2006) 2). Council of Europe: Recommendation No. R (84) 12 Concerning foreign prisoners. UNESCO Recommendations for adult education (UNESCO 1985)

life, the chance for ex-offenders to be reintegrated can be greatly improved by offering qualifications in the field of new media and computer use. People lacking digital competence are at risk of exclusion. One goal could be to provide inmates with the opportunity to obtain the (modularised and standardised) European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) in prison.

5. In many cases inmates have had bad experiences during their time in school. In these cases e-learning can not only support the learning of subjects but can also – because of its “non-school attitude” – provide a new way of re-entering learning in general.
6. There are many foreign inmates in European prisons. These inmates often have no chance to obtain appropriate qualification because teachers in most cases are not able to provide teaching in the mother tongue of these inmates. Consideration should be given to the possibility of establishing cooperations with prisons in the home countries of the foreign inmates and letting teachers from there teach these inmates by using e-learning and distance learning. This method can enable inmates to maintain links with their home country in terms of culture, working practices etc. in order to be better prepared for reintegration into their home country after release.
7. E-learning should also be used for the further qualification of prison staff. By using e-learning systems for their own purposes prison employees become aware of the advantages of using ICT in education. E-learning for staff provides innovative tools for necessary continuous qualification and at the same time increases awareness of the benefits of e-learning for prisoners.
8. Technical means and pedagogical approaches for e-learning cover a wide range of facilities.
  - Today, technology ranges from stand-alone personal computers and networked classrooms to in-cell use of ICT and secure access to the Internet.
  - In the future there might be learning applications on handheld and portable devices, providing inmates with appropriate learning material in an effective way.
  - E-learning should start with a pedagogical concept, the action-oriented learning facilities, in particular, should be considered. The appropriate technology has then to be chosen.
  - Based on pedagogical and technical advice, correctional services have to decide which educational setting (pedagogical approach, learning content, technology and organisational environment) best fits their needs and concepts.

### E-Learning introduction process

9. The introduction of e-learning in correctional services has to be organised in a professional way by
  - starting by defining the overall pedagogical concept
  - considering the given prison environment and
  - choosing appropriate state of the art technology
  - setting up a strategic introduction plan (including a communication plan, paying attention to participation aspects and realising change management strategies).
10. The recommendation is not to “reinvent the wheel” but to use results from European transnational projects (e. g. LICOS) to effectively and efficiently introduce e-learning facilities in correctional services. To improve this exchange of experience an “e-Learning in prison” task

force should be established on a European level to further develop and promote e-learning concepts and products in both the pedagogical and technical areas of prison education.

11. In addition, “Forums of e-Learning” should be founded on a national or regional level with representatives from correctional services and school authorities. The forums should discuss opportunities to establish cooperation between prison schools and conventional schools using e-learning in a secure way.
12. E-learning as a special information technology can nowadays be handled in a secure way. Communication and interaction with third parties, in particular, can be prohibited, controlled or regulated and documented. From a technical point of view, all means for running a secure educational technology in correctional services can be provided. In addition, prisons have to ensure that the organisational means are in place to support the secure operation of the system.
13. The public has to be informed that the introduction of technology in prison education is not a “pleasant toy” for inmates but a necessary measure to provide up-to-date qualifications which improve social reintegration chances and job opportunities, and ultimately substantially reduce costs by reducing the risk and costs of recidivism.

### Providing learning content

14. Consideration should be given to founding a European Virtual Prison School with prisons from various EU member states as member schools, enhancing market power in negotiations with content providers (publishers). The aim is to buy school licences which can be used by all school branches.
15. Learning content which is already provided by public bodies for use by the general public should also be made available for prison education. Within the public network a secured subnet for use in prisons should be established.
16. In many cases learning material is copyright-protected and therefore it is difficult to share such material between prisons. Governments should consider if it is possible to privilege correctional services by allowing the use of such material in the closed prison environment free of charge. In the meantime, it would be helpful if publishers provided their learning material free of charge as a form of sponsorship.
17. We recommend setting up a group of prison teachers and e-learning specialists on a European level to collect and distribute appropriate content for e-learning in correctional services. Best practice content should be translated into other European languages; this needs financial support from the European Commission. In this way synergies in content production and distribution could be used. Wherever possible this content should be put under an open licence, e.g. a Creative Commons Licence.

### Using valuable resources from the Internet in a secure way

18. The Internet provides a lot of valuable pedagogical content. E-learning systems can be configured in such a way that only appropriate learning material can be accessed by inmates. Misuse of the Internet can be avoided by technical means. The state of the art in ICT security provides methods and tools to prohibit illegal or unwanted interactions and to run a secure intranet for educational purposes.

19. Presentations and pilot projects should be set up and promoted to show prison governors, security officers and teachers that Internet facilities can be managed in a secure way for prison education and how this is done.

### Embedding e-learning in an overall qualification strategy

20. Experiences from e-learning case studies all over Europe have shown that this technology cannot substitute the personal guidance of inmates by teachers, but it can support the qualification process by adding educational resources to effectuate learning and giving teachers time for their actual pedagogical work. The role of teachers is changing from being an instructor to being a facilitator, a role whose value is becoming more and more appreciated. This change has to be supported by additional specific training.
21. E-learning has to be organised as a “blended learning” process: the strengths of interpersonal support and mentoring by the teacher (advice giving, facilitating learning processes and evaluating results) have to be combined with the strengths of effective and efficient e-learning repositories for educational material and action-oriented learning (presenting high quality learning material, enabling cooperative learning and supporting active acquisition of knowledge and skills).
22. Staff qualification by means of e-learning needs time resources. Correctional services should consider staff training with e-learning as being part of employees’ normal work. If employees use e-learning in their free time for further qualification this should be acknowledged, encouraged by incentives and rewarded by certificates which facilitate further career steps etc.
23. E-learning for inmates should be organised as part of an overall process model using ICT from assessment and qualification through to resettlement and job placement. An end to end ICT support with embedded e-learning and documentation of learning results (e-portfolio) guarantees a continuous information flow for all parties involved. This is especially true for a continuous qualification process starting in a prison and being continued in another prison or outside the prison after release.
24. Further research is needed to analyse the impact of e-learning specifically in prison education, to evaluate the learning outcome of applying new media in both general and vocational education, and to stimulate the further development of pedagogical concepts and technical solutions. In addition, support for practical implementation, evaluation and European transfer has to be organised. These research and practical needs should be reflected while setting up new educational programmes on the European level.