**Digital Learning for Prison Students: the State of Play**

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**Abstract summary:** Education is seen as one of the puzzle pieces in any strategy to improve reintegration and reduce recidivism. However, education providers are increasingly turning to the online provision of course materials and activities. This excludes prisoners from participating in transformative education as the internet is often prohibited. Given this fundamental mismatch between online education and access to internet in prisons, universities are increasingly looking for ways to ensure effective digital delivery of their courses. This paper outlines innovative solutions from two higher education institutions on opposite sides of the world, both with a track record of providing higher education to prisoners. The OU's 'walled garden' and Open Educational Resources with the UK's Virtual Campus and the Australian internet-independent LMS coupled with tablet computers, are just some of the technologies being trialled which could be repackaged for other contexts and countries.

**Text:** Recent research highlights the [benefits of higher education](#) for reintegration and reduced recidivism, but limited access to the Internet in prison makes access to this increasingly difficult. Two universities are trialling secure e-learning platforms, providing prison students with transformative learning and greater opportunities upon release. This paper outlines the programs of research conducted by the Open University (OU), UK and the University of Southern Queensland (USQ), Australia. Researchers at these universities hope to combine their knowledge and experience to work on a joint project that will provide digital learning for offenders and equip them with the digital literacy skills they need for further study, employment and reintegration.

In the UK, the Open University (OU) has produced a 'walled garden' to provide Access courses on the Virtual Campus (VC), a secure network accessed by most prisons. A whole higher education curriculum and Open Educational Resources (OERs) are planned. However, as prisoners' access to the VC is limited, other in-

cell technologies could maximise opportunities for self-directed learning. This is something that researchers in the USQ-led projects are grappling with. The Portable Learning Environments for Incarcerated Adult Distance Education Students (PLEIADES) project trialled an internet-independent version of USQ's Learning Management System (LMS) on a prison education server, together with the provision of eReaders. The technologies proved a viable alternative to printed text. The [From Access to Success](#) project builds on PLEIADES and automates many functions of the LMS including installation. USQ's Tertiary Preparation courses are used in the trial with the technologies allowing access to multi-media and quizzes. The Triple 'E' project has furthered the eReader trials. Technical and usability issues led to use of tablets as an alternative. The $4.4 million, [Making the Connection](#) project takes these ideas further, using the adapted LMS and tablets to deliver a whole pathway. This project will roll out across Australia over three years.

Technologies developed as part of the OU and USQ projects could be readily deployed in other contexts and countries. We propose to gather evidence from these projects with a view to repackaging them. For example, the OU have rebranded some OERs for the US ([Bridge to Success)](#) as part of the Next Generation Learning Challenges project and these are suitable for prison delivery.

**Author Biographies:**

**Dr. Anne Pike** is a researcher at the Inst. of Educational Technology, UK Open University, with a particular interest in technology for learning in prison. She is a lecturer in Mathematics and Criminology and advisor to the University of Southern Queensland.

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**Dr Susan Hopkins** is a lecturer within the Open Access College of the University of Southern Queensland, Australia, who teaches tertiary preparation students, including incarcerated students. She was the project leader of the Triple 'E' Project which provided eReaders to incarcerated students.