

Investigating the Digital Divide for the OU Offender Learner

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1. Aims of the Research

1. Investigate the experiences of the Open University student in a prison environment
 - What effect does learning have on their prison life and visa-versa?
 - What are the key motivators or de-motivators
2. Determine what influences students to embark on an Open University course
 - What factors have encouraged or inhibited progress?
3. Identify how lack of technology affects learning, choice of study and future decisions

4. Lack of Support

- Many dedicated staff, internal and external to the OU, provide excellent support to students but insufficient resources, funding or policy to adequately meet student needs:-
- OU relies too heavily on prison education staff who have insufficient resources and are forced to bend rules
 - LSC priorities are for education to level 2 so insufficient funding for HE
 - Regional variation in student support and guidance
 - Lack of prison-trained OU tutors .

2. The Methodology



35 in-depth, semi-structured student interviews (M, S & T initially, broadening to all faculties).
Triangulation with prison and OU staff interviews

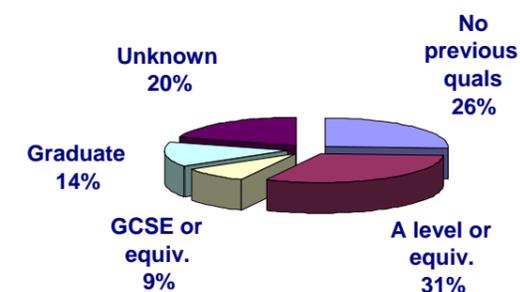
10 prisons in 5 OU regions, covered all security categories (A – D), Male & Female, Public & Private

5. Access to Technology

3/35 (<10%) of students in the study were allowed access to the internet but even those were given insufficient access to the OU site
Wide variation in availability of technology to students

- Access to computers varied from 1 hour/week to a full Open Learning suite with open access most days or in-cell laptops
- Variation is Prison specific (not always related to Security Category)
- One Cat A allowed DVDs in-cell, but Cat C did not.
- Software license problems restrict use

3. Educational Qualifications before entering prison



6. Course choice

Lack of course choice seriously affects the students' ability to complete a chosen degree in a prison

Only 18% of Undergraduate Named Degrees fully available [April 07]

"Prison is not the environment to study... 1 open and 4 closed doors. Now it's almost impossible to find the one open door" [3,17]

