Prison education for individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence: exploring the realistic expectations concerning their future.

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Copyright Statement

Publications from this thesis.

Book publications

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Journal publications

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Abstract

This thesis explores the lived experiences of prison education through the narratives of prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence and prison staff who work with this prisoner cohort. The educational offer in a prison environment provides education courses for all prisoners and does not distinguish between individuals based on their offence. However, individuals who are incarcerated for a sexual offence have different educational and employment needs than those individuals incarcerated for a non-sexual offence. When someone has the label *sex offender,* they are often stigmatised and discriminated against, both inside and outside of the prison walls. In addition, the prisoners may have licence conditions, and notification procedures and they will need to comply with the sex offenders register when released from prison. This thesis examines the realistic expectations around the future of prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence regarding prison education. This thesis comprised of four separate chapters consisting of secondary data collection and three empirical studies. Secondary data was reviewed illustrating the demographics of the prisoner population. Studies one and two used qualitative data which explored the narratives of 48 (N=48) adult males incarcerated for a sexual offence. Study three captured the narratives of prison staff (N=14) working in a prison that holds prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. The qualitative data from all three studies were analysed thematically, exploring the perceptions, and lived experiences of education within a prison environment. Findings from the rich data set identified that engaging with prison education does not benefit the prisoners because the educational offer is often at a low-level. Education needs to be individually tailored to best meet the diverse needs when dealing with specific restrictions consequential of an individual's conviction. Additionally, the culture inside and outside of prison requires change to overcome the negative effects of stigma and labelling. There should be no limitations on learning because engaging in education provides meaningful pursuits and improves prisoners' employability, thus, giving prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence the opportunity to become active members of society when released from prison.

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Glossary of Acronyms

Acronym	Clarification
ACCT	Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork
C-SOTP	Core Sex Offender Treatment Programme
DPS	Dynamic Purchasing System
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GLM	Good Lives Model
HC	House of Commons
HL	House of Lords
HMIP	His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons
HMPPS	His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service
ICT	Information, Communications and Technology
IPP	Indeterminate sentence for Public Protection
MOJ	Ministry of Justice
NOMS	National Offender Management Service
OLASS	Offender Learning and Skills Service
OMS	Offender Management Statistics
ONS	Office for National Statistics
OU	Open University
PEF	Prison Education Framework
RNR	Risk Need Responsivity

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i. Terminology

For this thesis, it is important to clarify the use of terminology that is used throughout. This is to ensure the language that is used in this thesis does not further label or stigmatise any individual. Some terminology that is commonly used can be inaccurate and thus this terminology can have a damaging impact on an individual's well-being (Winder et al., 2021). The first term to be clarified is regarding individuals who are incarcerated in prison and what they will be referred to throughout this thesis. In addition, careful consideration is given to the terminology used to describe individuals who have been released from prison after serving a custodial sentence. The terminology for individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence is discussed with regards to the description used throughout this thesis of this prisoned cohort. The final terminology that is discussed in this thesis is regarding education and the levels of qualifications.

ii. Prisoner

It is important to consider the language that is used to describe individuals in this thesis, particularly as the use of negative labelling may be a contributing factor in the stigmatisation of this group (individuals in prison). Prisoner, offender, convict, and inmate are all phrases that are used to describe an individual who is incarcerated; however, the word offender suggests that individuals are still offending, which is viewed as a negative description of the individual. There are no words that can positively describe a person who is in prison without having negative assumptions about the meaning of the description. The use of negative language has the ability to change the way an individual reacts, this can have negative consequences that can affect the offer of help and support from others (Lowe & Willis, 2020). Law and Roth (2015) identified how the term 'offender' has been replaced with a more neutral description of an incarcerated individual. Furthermore, during the analysis of the qualitative data, the research participants used the term *prisoner* when describing themselves during the interviews. In addition, the focus group participants also describe their client group as *prisoners.* For this thesis, the term *prisoner* will be used as a name for individuals who are incarcerated, this is because at the time of writing they are in prison, therefore prisoner seems the most appropriate term to describe individuals who are incarcerated.

iii. Formerly incarcerated person

Ex-offender and ex-convict are phrases that are used to describe an individual who has been incarcerated. Farrell (2013) argues that the term ex-offender relates to the past as opposed to

the future which in turn creates a vicious cycle of negative association for the individual. Offender is a term that is often used to describe those incarcerated by the prison service such as Offender Management Statistics Bulletin, England and Wales which reports quarterly on the prisoner population (Ministry of Justice (MoJ), 2022). However, any term that connects an individual with a criminal act should be avoided (Winder et al., 2021) both inside and outside of prison. The term that is used throughout this thesis for those that have previously served a custodial sentence will be referred to as a formerly incarcerated person.

iv.   Prisoner incarcerated for a sexual offence.

The term *sex offender* is a descriptive label that is commonly used when discussing individuals who have been incarcerated for a sexual offence. The media often label *sex offenders* with terms such as *predators, or sex beasts* (Breen, 2004, p. 287) and those who have been incarcerated for a sexual offence are typically represented as one homogeneous group throughout the media (Sample & Bray, 2006). These labels are counter-productive because in our society there is a tendency to create a normal group and to label others as being abnormal (Minow 1990). Therefore, using the label *sex offender* as an umbrella term ignores the individuality between prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence (Lowe & Willis, 2020). Using neutral language that puts the person first, rather than the offence can lead to seeing the person as an individual, rather than the stereotypical *sex offender* they may have heard about in the media (Lowe & Willis, 2020). The terminology for individuals convicted of a sexual offence is slowly becoming mandated with person-centred language becoming the description used to describe an individual engaged with sexual harm (Willis & Letourneau, 2018). The term *sex offender* is a negative description of this prison cohort, and thus the author accepts that using person-centred language is the best and most appropriate way to describe individuals who are incarcerated for a sexual offence. In addition, some of the prisoners who volunteered for this research are on remand in prison, they are incarcerated but not convicted. Therefore, *prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence* is the term used throughout this thesis.

v.   Education levels

Education levels are discussed throughout this thesis, and it is important to understand how these equate to the Education Qualification Framework adopted in England and Wales. There are nine levels of qualifications in England and Wales, the information provided in Table 1 is taken from the Government website (UK (United Kingdom) Government, 2020).

Table 1: Education and qualifications in England and Wales

Education Level	Qualification
Entry Level	Entry Level award, Entry Level Certificate (ELC), Entry Level diploma, Entry Level English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), Entry Level essential skills, Entry Level functional skills, Skills for Life
Level 1	First Certificate, GCSE - grades 3, 2, 1 or grades D, E, F, G, Level 1 award, Level 1 certificate, Level 1 diploma, Level 1 ESOL, Level 1 essential skills, Level 1 functional skills, Level 1 national vocational qualification (NVQ), Music grades 1, 2 and 3
Level 2	CSE - grade 1 and GCSE - grades 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4 or grades A*, A, B, C, Intermediate apprenticeship, Level 2 award, Level 2 certificate, Level 2 diploma, Level 2 ESOL, Level 2 essential skills, Level 2 functional skills, Level 2 national certificate, Level 2 national diploma, Level 2 NVQ, Music grades 4 and 5, O Level - grade A, B, or C
Level 3	A Level, Access to higher education diploma, Advanced apprenticeship, Applied general, AS Level, International Baccalaureate Diploma Level 3 award, certificate, and diploma Level 3 ESOL, Level 3 national certificate and national diploma, Level 3 NVQ, Music grades 6, 7 and 8, Tech Level
Level 4	Certificate of higher education (CertHE) Higher apprenticeship, Higher national certificate (HNC) Level 4 award, certificate, and diploma Level 4 NVQ
Level 5	Diploma of higher education (DipHE) Foundation degree, Higher national diploma (HND) Level 5 award, certificate, and diploma Level 5 NVQ
Level 6	Degree apprenticeship Degree with honours - for example, bachelor of the arts (BA) Hons, Bachelor of Science (BSc) Hons Graduate certificate and diploma Level 6 award, certificate, and diploma Level 6 NVQ, Ordinary degree without honours
Level 7	Integrated master's degree, for example, Master of Engineering (MEng) Level 7 award, certificate, and diploma, Level 7 NVQ Master's degree, for example, Master of Arts (MA), Master of Science (MSc), Postgraduate Certificate, Postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE), Postgraduate diploma
Level 8	Doctorate, for example, Doctor of Philosophy (PhD or DPhil) Level 8 award, certificate, and diploma

Throughout this thesis education levels are discussed by prisoners and prison staff; they use the words *level* and *basic* as a description of qualifications that can be gained in prison. In prison, the qualifications that are delivered are based on education levels (see table one) and are often referred to throughout this thesis as Level 1, Level 2 etc. The basic levels of education are discussed by the prisoner participants and the prison staff, and the term is used to describe qualifications and courses that are Level 2 or below. In addition, higher levels of education are discussed in this thesis and the term is used to describe education qualifications that are Level 3 or higher.

Chapter 1: Thesis Introduction

The idea for this thesis comes from the author's time working as a prison educator. The lived experience of the author prompted a desire to investigate prison education relating to prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence, to explore the realistic expectations concerning their future. In this first chapter, the author writes in her own words the rationale behind this thesis, explaining the driving force that compelled her to take on this research study. Following the author's rationale, the introduction discusses the context, highlighting key information concerning prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence and prison education. The final part of this introductory chapter explains the structure of this thesis, focusing on key information that is discussed in each chapter.

1.1: Rationale

"For context, I first started my teaching career working in the education department of a local prison. I worked in the main education block as an education induction tutor where prisoners would take their initial assessments in Mathematics and English. At that time, the prison contained very few prisoners who were incarcerated for sexual offences. During the next few years, the number of prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence had risen, thus making the need for a separate education block for this prison cohort. This is when I found myself moving over to the other side of the prison, known in the prison as the 'dark side.' This site housed terrifying sex offenders, I did not know much about this prison cohort except that I needed to keep my guard up as I was told they would manipulate and groom me. I was warned, as a female that I was putting myself at risk by working with prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence and here I was tasked with teaching this cohort of prisoners. However, I soon found myself questioning the beliefs that I held regarding those who were incarcerated for a sexual offence.

This prison cohort were not the terrifying monsters that I was led to believe. What I found was this prison cohort were 'normal' people who were friendly, respectful, and appreciative of education. When speaking to staff members who work in prison establishments which house prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence, it was well-known that these prisoners are different to other prisoners. Prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence tend not to cause trouble, they did not misbehave, they enjoyed keeping busy through work or education, and they were often professional people who were polite, and respectful towards prison staff. Prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are vastly different from the typical prisoner

profile that is often portrayed by the media. What I believed before working with men incarcerated for a sexual offence was vastly different to reality which is where the idea for this thesis comes from.

What I found most surprising when I began teaching was that most of this prison cohort exceeded the levels of education that were on offer in the prison. Through my lived experiences and knowledge of prison education, I held the belief that all people in prison were low-level learners that had often left school at an early age and did not have any interest in education. Yet here I was faced with a different cohort of prisoners that enjoyed education and wanted to learn. This is when education became challenging for me. At the prison I was working in, which only offered qualifications up to Level 2, it became apparent that this educational offer which I was delivering was not challenging enough for this prison cohort and prisoners attending my class were wanting qualifications of a higher educational level. Frequently prisoners would attend my class and tell me about their previous education and their employment status, which did not match the prisoner profile that I knew; there was a substantial proportion of prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence who were educationally higher than Level 2 when entering prison. In addition, quite often, they were previously employed in a professional role. All too frequently I was teaching Level 1 qualifications based on employability to people who had A-levels, degrees and even PhDs. This seemed a waste of time and money; I questioned the education department's management on many occasions asking if there was scope for higher level courses that would benefit the prisoners. I was informed "there is no funding for that course" or "they are sex offenders; they cannot study that course." Not only was this very frustrating for me as a prison educator but it was also very frustrating for the prisoners.

I have spent several years working as a prison educator in a prison and through personal observations, significant differences between those who have been charged/convicted of a sexual offence (vulnerable prisoners) and those who have not (mains) have been observed. The differences that have been observed where education is concerned between the prison cohorts include prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence tend to have finished secondary school and have been a part of further education; they tend to have a history of employment and have a supportive family unit (pre-conviction). In addition, there are notable behavioural differences between the prisoner cohorts with personal observations that prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are generally calmer, less likely to 'kick off' and they spoke to each other and staff respectfully.

This thesis grew from my frustration with having to teach education courses to prisoners who already had that same level of education or higher. The educational courses on offer were not challenging for the prisoners who wanted to gain qualifications. What I wanted to do was to teach education courses at the appropriate level for each prisoner, to provide a clear progression route and to ensure prison education was fit for purpose. In addition, there was the stigma, labelling and negativity surrounding this prison cohort throughout the prison estate and the general population. This was a problem because the idea behind education in prison for me is to provide a rehabilitation opportunity to help prisoners get back into the world when released. Education provides opportunities to gain qualifications for employment or further education and helps prisoners gain confidence and belief in themselves. Therefore, if the education courses in prison did not meet the needs of the prisoners, then what is the point? This is what frustrated me because I could see the education courses were not helping prisoners other than giving them something to do and making their time in prison more enjoyable. I originally thought it was just the prison that I worked in at that time that was the issue. Therefore, I wanted to investigate if my experience was unique or if this happens across the whole prison estate." (Jane Slater, author)

Sex offending has been a part of society just like other offences, for example history shows that the pharaohs of ancient Egypt committed acts of incest (Jones, 2006) and male homosexuality was a criminal offence until the introduction of the Sexual Offences Act in 1967. What is defined as a sexual offence can vary across religions and cultures and can also change over time, society's tolerance to various acts depends on the politics and ideologies of present time (Terry, 2012). Some sexual acts are considered psychological, as well as socially dysfunctional (Blackburn, 2006). Additionally, there are some sexual acts that are completely legal between consenting adults such as sadomasochism or fetishism, but this may be considered abnormal by society (Jones, 2006).

Committing a sexual offence is considered different to other forms of criminal acts and occupies a distinct place in society's demonology (Thomas, 2005). Individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence tend to be despised and feared by members of the public. It was in the late 1990s' that observed the predatory paedophile which increased the fear in society of offending paedophiles (Soothill & Francis, 1998). Society's fear was observed when Sarah Payne was abducted and murdered in 2000, this triggered an immense debate about appropriate responses to people charged with a sexual offence, especially those released back into the community (Lovell, 2001). The media coverage that followed saw a call for all those

convicted of a sexual offence to be named and shamed by the News of the World newspaper (23rd July 2000) (BBC, 2000). The newspaper published photographs of people known to have been convicted for a sexual offence on their front cover. As a result, there was nationwide vigilante action, with protests outside the homes of released individuals forcing many individuals underground which in turn increased the risk to the community (MacVean, 2000). Intense media coverage was observed two years later when 10-year-olds Jessica Chapman and Holly Wells were abducted and murdered which received disproportionately elevated levels of news media attention (Greer & McLaughlin, 2011). The media continued to sensationalise their reports of cases of sexual offences, this is due to high profile cases such as those of Sarah Payne, Jessica Wells and Holly Chapman but also of the high-profile perpetrators such as Jimmy Saville (Zgoba, 2017).

Following the Jimmy Saville scandal in 2012, Haper and Hogue (2017) examined crime reports by the national British press in the 12 months following the allegations against Saville. They identified a significant increase in sex crime news coverage which was overrepresented by 295 %. It can be argued that the media exploit prolific cases such as these by sensationalising the stories and exploiting society's fear of sexual offences (Rothwell et al., 2021). This can be observed when the media give pseudonyms to people who commit horrific crimes such as that of Peter Sutcliffe who has been labelled in the media as the Yorkshire Ripper because of what he did to his victims (Shaw, 2021). In an interview with the son of Sutcliffe's first victim who died in 1975, he stated that giving pseudonyms such as the ripper, only serves to glamorise the crime and re-traumatises the victim's family because the name is a reminder of what they did to the victim (BBC, 2020). The sensationalising of crimes in the media influences society which can then lead to people becoming fearful and develop harsher views towards individuals who have committed a sexual offence, more so than any other offence including murder (King & Roberts, 2017). Thus, societal perceptions became less accepting, resulting in a more punitive approach in the management of individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence (Crown Prosecution Service, 2016).

In England and Wales, there is no direct relationship between what is classified as a sexual offence and what is the clinical definition of sexual deviation. For example, Jones (2006) suggests that unlawful sexual intercourse with a person under sixteen does not necessarily indicate that the perpetrator is a paedophile as they could additionally be a young person. What is identified as a sexual crime can depend on contemporary social standards (Blackburn, 2006). The Sexual Offences Act 2003 (SOA) came into force on 1 May 2004 and applies to all offences committed on or after that date. This Act replaces the previous version

of the Sexual Offences Act 1956. The main reason for the updated version was to include new forms of sexual abuse such as voyeurism (Gillespie, 2008) and the growing concerns over child sexual abuse (Ost, 2004). Legal definitions of sexual offences have changed during the last century, and they are now mainly defined by the use of force, disparities in age, violations of close relationships, and violations of public order. Legal definitions of sexual offences have changed considerably (Blackburn, 2006), for example, before the case of R v R [1992] rape could occur in a marital relationship. Additionally, following the introduction of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, it became possible for a man to be raped by another man.

The SOA 2003 gives clarity to sexual offence meanings such as consent which was absent from the previous version and was governed by common law. The Act now defines consent as the freedom and capacity to make such consent (Herring, 2014). The burden of proof has been amended along with several evidential presumptions about consent (SOA 2003 s 74). The burden of proof has now been changed from the complainant to the defendant (SOA 2003 s 75(2)). The SOA 2003 has also created new types of sexual offences that have not been previously included, such as assault by penetration (SOA 2003 s 2), non-consensual voyeurism (SOA 2003 s 67), and sexual penetration of a corpse (SOA 2003 s 70). Assault by penetration is different to rape in that the latter required the defendant's penis to penetrate, while the former can be done with a part of a body or anything else (SOA 2003 s 2). Additionally, the SOA 2003 offers children stronger protection because the new Act changed the definition of 'child' by amending the age from under sixteen to under 18 (SOA 2003 s 45(2)). It also created new offences related to child prostitution (SOA 2003 s 47-50), making indecent photographs of children (SOA 2003 s 45), sexual activities with a child family member (SOA 2003 s 25) and meeting a child following sexual grooming (SOA 2003 s 15). The new types of offences against children included the abuse of the position of trust, which include sexual activity with a child (SOA 2003 s 16) or in his/her presence (SOA 2003 s 18), as well as causing a child to watch a sexual act (SOA 2003 s 12). The SOA 2003 defines the meaning of words such as consent and aims to give children greater protection.

Following the introduction of the Sexual Offence Act in 2003, the number of individuals convicted for a sexual offence rose by 31 % in the years between 2004 and 2011 (MoJ, 2013c). The number of individuals incarcerated for sexual offences has been increasing at a fast pace with 14 % of the overall prison population being incarcerated for a sexual offence in 2011 compared to 9 % in 2005 (MoJ, 2013b). The number of prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence had been decreasing since 2018 following a record high in 2002, however, the

numbers are gradually rising again and in the year 2021 saw a 3 % increase equating to 12,130 prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence (MoJ, 2022). Additionally, there were also 21 % and 29 % increases in the number of untried and unsentenced prisoners respectively in this offence group over the same period (MoJ, 2022). At the end of June 2023, 20 % prisoners who are incarcerated have been charged with a sexual offence (Sturge, 2023). Although these statistics highlight the increase in incarceration these do not show the true prevalence of sexual offending. This is because there are cases of sexual assault that are not reported to the police and not all cases that are reported to the police result in a charge or conviction (Pemberton et al, 2023).

There is the assumption that those incarcerated for a sexual offence are more dangerous than others who have committed other crimes because they will reoffend when released and cannot be successfully treated (Meloy, 2006). Although this is not entirely accurate because prisoners who have been released following incarceration for a sexual offence have the lowest reoffending rate at 13.1 % (MoJ, 2024). Despite evidence of low reconviction rates for people formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence, the risk of reoffending and the danger surrounding them is constantly reinforced in society. Arguably prison has now become a place obsessed with the negative conception of risk (Warr, 2016) echoing wider societal concerns regarding previously incarcerated people. The descriptions in the media of those incarcerated for a sexual offence are described with negative labels such as *high risk* or *dangerous* and more unpleasant names such as *beasts,* or *nonce* (Thomas, 2005; Burrows, 2016).

Prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence are seen as vulnerable inside the prison gates and often experience the ongoing threat of victimisation (Blagden & Pemberton, 2010). Prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are often stigmatised by prison staff which can result in this prison cohort being treated negatively (Ireland, 2000). Lea et al., (1999) suggests that staff who work with prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are often torn between their personal feelings which are influenced by the stereotyping and stigma associated with this prison cohort. However, providing support for prison staff is the key component in supporting prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence, and the overall prisoner-staff relationship (Blagden et al., 2014).

Prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are treated differently by fellow prisoners compared to prisoners who are incarcerated for a non-sexual offence. Ricciardelli and Moir (2013) highlight how prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence feel unsafe in the prison environment due to a constant sense of threat and actual victimisation by fellow prisoners.

The threat of violence from other prisoners was something that prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence experience, along with threats of violence from staff (O'Donnell & Edgar, 1998). Prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are often despised by other prisoners and occupy a position at the bottom of the prisoner status hierarchy (Ricciardelli & Spencer, 2014). Furthermore, having the label of *sex offender* makes prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence vulnerable to sexual assaults and violence whilst in prison (Ireland, 2000). Blagden and Pemberton (2010) suggested that, in British prisons, prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are extremely vulnerable, especially when their conviction becomes known to other prisoners.

Consequently, prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are often segregated and housed in vulnerable prisoner units, which are separate to the general prisoner population for their protection. Vulnerable prisoner (VP) units also house prisoners that are considered outcasts in the prison environment and the VP units are purposed with keeping prisoners in protective custody. Consequently, this can leave prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence serving their custodial sentence in solitary confinement or isolation because of fear for their safety (Blagden & Pemberton, 2010). Indeed, the negative attitudes of other prisoners and prison staff combined with the prison environment can be socially isolating, especially for those cut off from their family and friends which could potentially result in a deprivation of their basic needs (Windzio, 2006). Blake and Gannon (2011) identified that social isolation and feelings of loneliness are often associated with higher levels of aggression in those who are incarcerated for a sexual offence. As a result, this could increase the risk of prisoners within this prison cohort reoffending (Marshall, 2010).

Societal attitudes to individuals labelled as a s*ex offender* are often prevented from safe reintegration back into society because of the lack of opportunities that are available (Willis & Johnston, 2010). Moreover, societal perceptions highlight prisoners formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence do not deserve a chance at a better life (Brown, 2005). Furthermore, society tends to have inaccurate beliefs that individuals who have been incarcerated for a sexual offence are at a higher risk of reoffending and are not capable of rehabilitation (Levenson et al., 2007; Lowe & Willis, 2020). Levenson et al., (2007) highlighted how the personal details of someone incarcerated for a sexual offence are easily accessible by anyone with access to the internet. Therefore, this can make it near impossible for those formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence to return to society anonymously. The community or public protection model is still the most common approach to risk management of people with a sexual offence conviction, but this causes harm and suffering to the individual because of the

punitiveness of the policy and practice (Teague &Winder, 2023). In addition, prisoners formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence are placed on the sex offenders register which contributes to establishing the stigmatised identity of those convicted of a sexual offence. Consequently, this limits opportunities for individuals formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence to find work, a home or a strong social network which are considered essential to reintegration and reduction in recidivism for released prisoners (Hepburn & Griffin, 2004). Society discriminates against people who have been imprisoned for a sexual offence which becomes difficult to find employment and stable housing upon release. Yet it is these factors which have been demonstrated to reduce recidivism (McGuire, 2002). Therefore, realistic opportunities for those formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence to be integrated back into society becomes much more difficult because of implications of having a conviction for a sexual offence.

The notion of a custodial sentence as stated by the United Nations (Nelson Mandela Rules) (4) is primarily to protect society against crime and to reduce recidivism. This can be achieved by ensuring prisoners are using their custodial sentence to receive rehabilitation activities that they can use when they are released, to help them lead a law-abiding and self-supporting life (United Nations, 2015). Rehabilitation aims to reduce offending by encouraging individuals to embark on a law-abiding life by helping people who have committed a crime to think and act differently (Franke et al., 2010). Therefore, incarceration can be used as an opportunity for the prison to provide effective training and education to individuals who have committed a crime.

All prisons in England and Wales provide a range of education courses that prisoners can participate in while they are incarcerated. For this thesis, the term education is used to describe the education courses that are taught inside a prison establishment by educators employed by the education provider and will not include education courses that are run by the prison staff[1]. This thesis focuses on education in a prison setting only. The government's framework for prison education states that the prison governors must ensure education providers deliver core qualifications consisting of Mathematics, English, and ICT (MoJ, 2019). The focus of prison is to help individuals who are incarcerated lead law-abiding, useful lives, both while they are in prison and after they are released (Her/His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS, 2017).

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[1] The educational courses that are discussed in this thesis are provided by an outside agency. English, Mathematics, ICT and barbering courses are discussed in this thesis. The course that will not be discussed are qualifications gained through working in industries inside a prison.

The Ministry of Justice (2015) reveals that 47% of prisoners have no qualifications, compared with just 15% of the general population. Therefore, it could be argued the delivery of these core qualifications are essential to enable the prisoner population to become equal to the educational standard of the general population. Additionally, the levels of education amongst the prisoner population are significantly lower than the education levels of the general population. It has been highlighted that 62 % of individuals entering prison have been assessed as having English skills expected of an 11-year-old, which is more than four times higher than in the general adult population of 15% (Prison Reform Trust, 2022). Again, it makes sense that core qualifications are the focus of the government's framework to ensure all prisoners have a level of education comparable to the levels of education of the general population. However, these statistics also highlight how the prison education framework is not designed for all prisoners, as there is a substantial number of prisoners who have qualifications and English skills that are higher than an 11-year-old.

As previously mentioned, there are just under half of individuals in prison that have no qualifications, therefore highlighting that just over half of the prisoner population do have qualifications. There is a dividing line between prisoners whose English skills are above the level of an 11-year-old, and those whose skills are not (Clark & Dugdale, 2008). Rice et al., (1998) argues that there is a high percentage of the prisoner population that either matches or exceeds the educational skills than those in the general population. Therefore, the educational provisions in prison should be at an appropriate level for the individual, rather than targeted at the majority. There have been some incidents where prisoners have engaged in educational courses at a low level which was not appropriately challenging for the prisoners (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2015). Therefore, as Taylor (2014, p. 4) argued *'the current system is more suitable for short custodial sentences, offering bite-size, low-level courses.'* As a result, prison education appears to be steering towards low-level learners, subsequently delivering an educational provision that is not fit for purpose for over half the prisoner population.

Participating in prison education has a positive influence on reoffending as evidence has indicated that individuals who engage with prison education are less likely to reoffend within 12 months of release (MoJ, 2021b). The Ministry of Justice and Department for Education, (2017) highlight prisoners who do engage in prison education have a reoffending rate of 34 % compared with 43 % of prisoners who do not engage in any form of education. More recently the MoJ (2021c) highlighted prisoners who do engage in education through the Prisoner Education Trust (PET) have a reoffending rate of 18 % compared to prisoners who do not attend education at 23 %. Therefore, engaging with prison education can be beneficial for

prisoners as it can reduce their risk of reoffending, however, although education does play a part in a prisoner's rehabilitation it is difficult to conclude that education is solely responsible for this. For example, participation in education could depend on the prison's educational offerings, the availability of courses, availability of education places or efficient staffing levels. In addition, there could be other factors to consider for the reduction in reoffending such as prisoners who participate in education may be more motivated to go straight (Czerniawski, 2016) and this may be the reason they chose to engage with education in the first instance.

The Ministry of Justice (2018) emphasises how the prison education system should be about putting prisoners on the right path to employment when they are released. Prison education has been recognised as a means for preparing prisoners for work when released. The Ministry of Justice (2013) published an article titled 'Transforming Rehabilitation' which connected the rehabilitation of prisoners with education in getting formerly incarcerated people back into work as a way to reduce reoffending. Although gaining employment appears to be one factor with prisoners engaging in education, it can be difficult for formerly incarcerated people to find employment because having a criminal record is a significant barrier to obtaining employment (Visher et al., 2011). For example, a large number of employers said they would reject an individual if they had a criminal conviction (Unlock, 2021). This is amplified for prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence because they face more barriers in finding and maintaining employment upon release (Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2009) that are unique to this prison cohort. Therefore, prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence faces substantial challenges with finding an employer willing to employ them because of the nature of their offence. In addition, prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence are subject to licence conditions, the sex offenders register and notification procedures when released from prison (Burrows, 2016) which, arguably, makes them the most unemployable demographic (Blessett & Pryor, 2013). Although education by itself does not necessarily guarantee prisoners will find employment, education does help them to gain the necessary skills and qualifications for employment. Therefore, to enable prisoners to access employment opportunities, education provisions must deliver much-needed qualifications that employers are demanding.

Education is part of the rehabilitation process that prisoners have access to, but the current provisions tend to offer low level qualifications. In a prison environment the focus of education is gaining qualifications to become employed upon release which has been identified as a way to reduce recidivism. However, prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence

have difficulty in finding employment because of unwilling employees plus they have additional restrictions. Additionally, prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence have a unique status of stigma and risk that are perhaps not prevalent with prisoners incarcerated for a non-sexual offence. Therefore, this prisoner cohort may require a different or additional education provision to help them with realistic opportunities for employment and reintegration when released from prison.

1.4: Research aims

The focus of this thesis was to consider prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence and prison education to explore realistic expectations concerning their future. Currently information regarding prison education tends to be collected based on the prisoner population being one homogenous group and does not differentiate between the individual's offence status. This thesis aim was to investigates prisoners incarcerated for a sexual because they do not fit the standard prisoner profile to identify different educational and rehabilitative needs for successfully reintegration into society.

The aims of this research are as follows:

1. Identify and examine the educational profile of the prisoner population of England and Wales, with a focus on prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence.
2. To gain an understanding of why prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence do not participate in prison education, to recognise how education can be more accessible to these individuals.
3. To gain an understanding of why prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence participate in prison education.
4. To understand the experiences of relevant prison staff, and their expectations and understanding of the assumed benefits of education for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence.

1.5: Thesis structure

This thesis examined prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence regarding education to explore realistic expectations concerning their future. To enable the question to be answered, the literature regarding prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence and prison education is discussed and unpacked to gain a deeper insight into the thesis question.

Chapter two of this thesis discussed literature beginning with identifying the prevalence of sexual offending followed by an exploration into the stigma and labelling that surround

prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. The Sexual Offence Act 2003 has been described earlier in this chapter but policy and procedure surrounding sexual offending is discussed to gain an understanding of the governments response. The literature review delves into the treatment programmes that are required for this prisoner cohort. Prison education is examined and begins with a brief historical context to gain a deeper understanding of how prison education has developed. The benefits of engaging with prison education are examined and this chapter finishes with a discussion of the barriers for engagement. This chapter examined the available literature providing a discussion into key issues regarding prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence and prison education.

The focus of chapter three discussed the methodology that was used to answer the research question. This chapter begins with a discussion around the epistemology to gain an understanding of the knowledge that underpins this research. The chapter continues with an explanation of the mixed method approach that was originally chosen for this thesis followed by an in-depth discussion surrounding the quantitative and qualitative aspects mixed methods. However, due to complications surrounding the collection of availability of quantitative date, the method of data collection has been revised and further discussed in this chapter. This methodology chapter discusses the research studies that were completed with an explanation of why these studies were chosen. The method of data collection is explored to understand the ethical considerations of this research as well as an explanation of how the data was collected. The qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis, which is discussed in the final part of this chapter.

Chapter four of this thesis aimed to identify and examine the educational profile of the prisoner population of England and Wales, with a focus on prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. This chapter consists of an explanation of the intended focus of this chapter and discusses how this chapter has been adapted. The researcher sought secondary data that was available in the public domain and the collected information was reviewed. This review provides an insight into the demographics of the prisoner population to include the educational achievements, age of prisoners, employment status before incarceration and the sentence length of prisoners. The gathered secondary data collection aimed to discuss the differences, between prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence and prisoners incarcerated for a non-sexual offence. However, there was extraordinarily little data available to distinguish between prisoners based on their offence. Thus, the secondary data review in this chapter is discussed in relation to the prisoner population as a whole.

Chapter five is the first empirical study for this thesis, and it aim was to gain an understanding of why prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence do not participate in prison education. This study aimed to recognise how education can be made more accessible to prisoners. The qualitative study explored the narratives from twenty-four face to face, semi structured interviews, with prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence and discussed prison education regarding why they do not attend. There were two superordinate themes that emerged from this study (i) *second class education* and (ii) *we are sex offenders*.

Chapter six explored the narratives of prisoners who have lived experiences of prison education. This study is the second study of this thesis which aimed to gain an understanding of why prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence, participate in prison education. This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of twenty-four prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence through semi structured interviews that were conducted face to face. There were two superordinate themes that emerged from this study (i) *Escaping prison life* and (ii) *lesser of two evils*.

Chapter seven is the third and final empirical study. This study aimed to gain an understanding of the perceptions of relevant prison staff, and their expectations and understanding of the assumed benefits of education for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. The participants for this study consisted of prison staff who work with prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. Three focus groups were conducted across three different prison estates that consisted of fourteen prison staff. The narratives from the focus group formed two superordinate themes (i) *false hope* and (ii) *second-class citizen*.

The concluding chapter of this thesis discussed the research findings from the secondary data review and the three separate studies which forms this thesis. Each of the studies for this thesis were conducted as a stand-alone study and were analysed individually. The concluding chapter brings together findings from the secondary data collection and each of the three studies forming an understanding of prison education to gain an understanding of the impact education has on a prisoner's future. Drawing on the findings from all four chapters, this thesis ends with recommendations to enhance the educational provisions for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This thesis examined prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence regarding education to explore realistic expectations concerning their future. This literature review begins with an introduction to the prevalence of sexual offending in England and Wales. Following on this chapter discusses sexual offending and the implications surrounding this offence, from both inside and outside of the prison walls. The perceptions of society towards prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are analysed regarding stigma and labelling along with the government's response to this prisoner cohort. The rehabilitation of prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are discussed with regards to treatment and educational programmes and the impact this has on their rehabilitation. The current prison education provisions are examined to gain an understanding of how these provisions meet the needs of the prisoner population. Finally, the literature review discusses the benefits and barriers of engagement with education in today's contemporary prison environment. Although current prison education provisions are aimed at all prisoners regardless of their offence, these are examined to explore prison education regarding prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence.

2.1: Prevalence of sexual offending

Sexual offences are highly prevalent in England and Wales with the number of reported cases rising. In the year ending September 2022, the police recorded the highest-ever number of rapes in England and Wales at 70,633 (Rape Crisis, 2023). In addition, by the end of December 2021, 37 % (67,125) of sexual offences were rape which has been an increase of 21 % from the previous year. Other sexual offences also increased by 22 % to 116,462 compared with 95,156 the previous year (MoJ, 2022b). However, not all sexual offences are reported to the police, but the prevalence can be captured through additional data collection such as crime surveys. The Crime Survey for England and Wales (2023) estimated that 2.3% of adults aged 16 years and over (1.1 million) experienced sexual assault (including attempts) in the year ending March 2022. Additionally, there was 73,260 sexual offences where the victim was a child, in the year ending March 2019 (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2021).

Although the Crime survey in England and Wales does include crimes that have not been reported to the police, crimes of rape and sexual offending are frequently underreported (George & Ferguson, 2021). The Rape Crisis Centre (2023) suggests several factors that can lead to the underreporting of a sexual offence, with survivors saying they felt embarrassed (40 %), or they did not think the police could help them (38 %) and survivors also said they

thought it would be humiliating to report the offence (34 %). There is also the element of blame where survivors blame themselves for the assault (Starzynski et al., 2005) or perceive they will have a negative experience in the criminal justice system (Ahrens et al., 2009). Regarding child sexual offences, many victims do not tell anyone at the time of abuse because they were too embarrassed (ONS, 2021). Therefore, figures imply there is a high prevalence of sexual offending in England and Wales. However, sexual offences are a hidden crime, and it is estimated that there are only 10-15 % of sexual offences that are reported to the police (Criminal injuries helpline, 2023) indicating that the true prevalence of sexual offending is unclear.

Despite there being a high number of reported rape cases, only 2,616 of those cases resulted in charges (Rape Crisis, 2023). Regardless of low charge rates, there is a substantial number of individuals who are incarcerated for a sexual offence in England and Wales. At the end of June 2022, there were 12,455 prisoners serving custodial sentences for sexual offences, representing 15% of the total prisoner population (MoJ, 2022b). The 12 months to 31 December 2022 observed the number of prisoners convicted for a sexual offence rise by 5 % to a total of 12,745 which is a significant increase of 41% for prisoners who are on remand (MoJ, 2023). Therefore, because sexual offences are prevalent in England and Wales with the number of reported cases rising, this has an impact on the prisoner population. Thus, exploring this prisoner cohort is important to identify their specific needs regarding prison education to ensure their needs are met, to enable rehabilitation back into society.

2.2: Stigma and labelling

Stigma has been described by Goffman (1963, p. 3) as *"an attribute that is deeply discrediting"* and that *"reduces the bearer from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one"*. Thus, stigma is a social construction of identity, is one whose social status is indicated as "*devalued, and undesirable*" (Tewksbury, 2012, p. 608)*.* The status of *ex-offender* has been described as one of the most stigmatising statuses in Western society (Goffman, 1963). However, this is further exacerbated when an ex-offender has a conviction for a sex offence, because individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence are the most stigmatised group in society (Kjelsberg & Loos, 2008; Rogers & Ferguson, 2011). Prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence incite fear in society and are associated with stigma which stimulates feelings of anger and disgust (Olver & Barlow, 2010). Thus, prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence have a dual stigma which is reinforced by society (Ricciardelli & Moir, 2013).

Stigma and shame are powerful motivators (Arneson, 2007) as the more an individual perceives they will be discriminated against, the more likely they will keep their offence a secret and they may withdraw from society. Indeed, the shaming of individuals formerly incarcerated has been linked to several unfavourable outcomes such as low-self-control and poor psychological adjustments (Tangney et al., 2014). Robbers (2009) interviewed individuals who had committed a sexual offence which highlighted their experiences of being socially outcast and publicly shamed which had negative impact on their reintegration back in society. Two types of shaming that can be applied to incarcerated individuals disintegrative and reintegrative shaming. The term disintegrative shaming means that a person is treated disrespectfully and will not be forgiven by society as opposed to reintegrative shaming where people who have committed a crime are welcomed back into society following punishment (Tangney et al., 2014). These two types of shaming can be seen in society where individuals formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence are viewed as less deserving of rehabilitation and more deserving of social exclusion (Viki et al., 2012). Whereas individuals who have convictions for other serious crimes such as murder or violence are often considered sympathetically and given more support for successful resettlement in the community (Saunders, 2019).

In society, stigma and shame can be used to ensure that its members follow the rules (Crocker & Major, 1989). Public shaming has been used for centuries to punish the wrongdoer which is thought to deter others from committing a crime (Braithwaite, 1989). However, Hay (2001) highlights that when shaming is used to stigmatise and punish this increases, not decreases, abnormal behaviour. Although stigmatisation has shown to be beneficial to society in the form of a deterrent to others and a positive way to reduce reoffending, it can also produce consequences which can lead to social issues and maladaptive coping strategies (Burchfield & Mingus, 2008). Furthermore, for those experiencing stigma, this can result in spoiled identity and socially discredited identity. Goffman (1963) describes the experience of moving through life with an attribute that divides people into normal and abnormal, with those perceived as abnormal are less worthy because of their spoiled identity. Therefore, a stigmatised individual has to strive to shake off the label of their offence or conceal it to be perceived as normal in society.

The term *sex offender* has such powerful stigma attached to it that it can be transferred to others such as family members, people association or work within close proximity to an individual who is stigmatised (Pryor et al., 2012; Evans et al., 2023). There are some rather unpleasant labels given to individuals who work with prisoners incarcerated for a sexual

offence such as *Paedo-pals* (Brayford & Deering, 2013). Consequently, individuals who work with prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence experience secondary stigma because they are associated with members of a stigmatised group. Having a conviction for a sex offence has become the most heinous of criminal offences with the attitude towards those incarcerated for a sexual offence being amongst the most stigmatised group (Jewkes, 2004). Thus, the negative characteristic of this stigmatised group is then placed on the individual simply because of the association (Halter, 2008). The stigma and fear that society places on prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence can affect all aspects of their lives when they are released from prison. Therefore, individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence face additional challenges in reestablishing any sort of positive identity within society (Manza et al., 2004).

The idea of stigma, and the consequences for those incarcerated for a sexual offence can be understood by exploring the concept proposed by the labelling theory. The label of *sex offender*, and the stigma that is associated with this label, Becker (1963) argued is more of a product constructed by society than of the person committing the criminal act. Individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence have other labels that are attached to them such as "monster" or "predator" (Breen, 2004; Pickett et al., 2013). The labelling theory suggests that once an individual receives a negative label, they will be denied vital life opportunities because of the stigma attached to this label, therefore, there will be a greater tendency by the individual to repeat their behaviour (Oyserman & Swim, 2001). Once an individual is labelled negatively, such as criminal or offender, they will begin to see themselves as that label and they will then begin to act in ways that are consistent with their new label (Hagan, 1973).

Undeniably once a person has the label of *sex offender*, this consumes the person and takes away any other identity they may have such as father, brother, or even human being (Harding, 2003). Thus, the label of *sex offender* becomes their master status (Becker, 1963) overriding any other identity that they have. The label of *sex offender* has a significant impact on a prisoner's position in society and could potentially last their whole life and is more pervasive than labels imposed on prisoners without a conviction for a sexual offence (Ievins & Crewe, 2015). As a result, society tends to believe these prisoners can never change and therefore have less eligibility of reintegration into society (Laws & Ward, 2011). The labelling of prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence ultimately gives the expectation that they will offend again (Willis, 2018). Thus, the labelling theory appears to make it easier for individuals to act in accordance with their given label rather than for then to shed the label.

Being labelled as a *sex offender,* can become isolating for that individual along with the possibility of being shunned by society which can lead to the issues that caused the person to offend in the first place, potentially triggering a relapse (Hudson, 2005; Tofte, 2007). Worrall and Hoy (2005, p. 175) argue that the *sex offender* label has been constructed as morally, socially, and politically irredeemable thus those incarcerated for a sexual offence have become a socially excluded group. However, to socially exclude a group of people based on their convictions will more than likely raise the risk of reoffending rather than reduce the risk. The social exclusion of a particular group can lead to *moral panic* (see Cohen, 1972). Thus, the community in which prisoners formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence live are often blocked from opportunities for them to live a safe, stable, and prosocial life (Willis & Johnston, 2010). Therefore, the label of sex offending can have an influence on an individual's identity and their belief that they can be anything other than their label.

2.3: Government response

The perceptions towards individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence do play a role in the formation of legislation (Harper et al., 2017). The government has attempted to eliminate the fears of the public by detaining individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence for longer periods. This has been exhibited by the Ministry of Justice who identified that individuals who were convicted of a sexual offence spent on average thirty-two months in prison, including time spent on remand, compared with an average of ten months for all other offences (MoJ, 2013b). In addition, the Sentencing Act 2020 was updated to grant courts with powers to impose life custodial sentences to serious offenders including those who commit a sexual offence (Crown Prosecution Service, 2023). Furthermore, in 2022 the courts were awarded the power to sentence individuals who intended sexual harm even when there was no harm or sexual activity taking place (Sentencing Council, 2022). Arguably the amendment made to the sentencing of individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence has resulted in a rise in the prison population of this prison cohort, and it is one of the largest groups among prisoners serving immediate custodial sentences (MoJ, 2023).

Populist beliefs enforce prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence to be seen as *outsiders* because of the perceived danger for which there is no cure (Spencer, 2009; Thomas, 2005). Populist punitiveness is where *"politicians tap into, and use for their own purposes, what they believe to be the public's generally punitive stance,"* (Bottoms, 1995: 40) which is especially applicable for individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence. Populist punitiveness has contributed to a demand for tougher punishments for people who commit a criminal act

but exaggerated when the criminal act is of a sexual nature (Brayford & Deering, 2013). Ignorance surrounding individuals who have been charged with a sexual offence result in a dehumanised populist narrative which then become normalised. As a consequence, has an influence on legislation, for example the Sexual offence legislation which has an impact on the individual (Teague & Winder, 2023).

The government's reaction to societal attitudes is often fed by the media causing a growing awareness in society regarding sexual offences (Wood & Gannon, 2009). McCartan (2010) highlights how society and policymakers tend to rely on the media for their information regarding people convicted of a sexual offence and this has a direct effect on the legislation that is introduced. The media reporting of sexual offences influences society's perceptions because they use the emotionally driven term *paedophilia* which has an influence around the risks posed by child sex offenders which increases support for punitive policies (McCartan, 2004; Silverman & Wilson, 2012). However, this would do extraordinarily little in terms of strangers targeting children, as 90 % of children who have suffered sexual abuse stated that the perpetrator was someone they knew (NSPCC, 2021). Although the media tends to sensationalise its news when reporting on the sexual assaults committed by strangers, in reality, most people who commit an offence know their victims (Terry, 2012). Although sexual assaults on children by strangers gain media attention and have been at the forefront of the public's imagination (Burdon & Gallagher, 2002) children are more at risk from the members of their household. Therefore, it is the media reporting which plays an educative role in informing society about sexual offences (Harper & Hogue, 2017). However, media reports can also have the opposite effect and improve public opinion by being informative (Marlinen et al., 2014). Following the introduction of the sex offender registry in 1997, there were confusion surrounding the conditions of the policy (Kitzinger, 2008). Thus, the media reporting prompted political debate on whether the police and other professionals should tell the public where known individuals who have been incarcerated for a sexual offence lived (Thomas, 2015). Nevertheless, through the media reports, society continually perceive crimes of a sexual nature as being crime which have an elevated risk of reoffending and therefore continually advocates for a more punitive approach. The sensationalising of crimes in the media influences society which can then lead to people becoming fearful and develop harsher views towards individuals who have committed a sexual offence, more so than any other offence including murder (King & Roberts, 2017). Thus, the attitudes towards individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence become less tolerant and a punitive approach in the management of these individuals is demanded (Crown Prosecution Service, 2016).

Consequently, this prisoner cohort is perceived be more dangerous and risky because of their offence, thus, greater restrictions are placed on them when compared to individuals who have committed a non-sexual offence (Bailey & Sample, 2015).

In England and Wales, one of the main ways to monitor risk from a prisoner formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence is through the sex offender's register (Kemshall & McCartan, 2014). The sex offenders register was introduced in 1997 as part of the Sex Offenders Act following a period of heightened populist punitiveness, especially towards child molesters (Thomas, 2010). The number of individuals who are Registered Sex Offenders (RSO) in England and Wales as of 31st March 2019, stands at approximately 60,000 (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2019). However, the restrictive legislation can limit the social opportunities for individuals formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence who are attempting to establish a role back in society (Burchfield and Mingus, 2008). Furthermore, the placement on the Sex Offenders Register continues to influence the stigmatised identity of those convicted/incarcerated for a sexual offence.

The reoffending rate for prisoners is considered high, with approximately a quarter of all adult prisoners going on to commit further offences within a year of being released and this rises to almost half of all adult prisoners who have a custodial sentence of less than twelve months (MoJ, 2023b). However, the reoffending rate is 13.1 % for individuals who have been released following incarceration for a sexual offence (MoJ, 2024). Therefore, despite this prisoner cohort being perceived as being more dangerous and riskier, this prisoner cohort are at less of a risk of reoffending than other prisoner cohorts. However, this may be because prisoners formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence have more punitive measures when released and they are closely monitored. For example, prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are risk managed through Multi-Agency Public Protection Management (MAPPA) which involves the police, prison and probation service working together to protect the public from harm (Pemberton, et al., 2023). The MAPPA of offenders, assess their risk levels which determines the level of management needs, for example level 1is classed as ordinary, level 2 requires active multi-agency management and level 3 requires senior management to be involved (Nash, 2019). Prisoners formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence are required to be on the sex offender register hence, they are overseen by MAPPA. Therefore because of the continuing monitoring of this prisoner cohort, it can be argued that their risk is significantly reduced. In addition, whilst in prison prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are often subject to treatment programmes for their offending behaviour which can have an impact on recidivism.

2.4: Treatment programmes

The use of rehabilitative intervention programmes for incarcerated individuals has doubled over the last decade with twenty-two intervention programmes being provided by HMPPS and seven programmes provided by other agencies (MoJ, 2023d). The number of intervention programmes has grown because more individuals are being incarcerated due to factors such as changes in sentencing and the identification of historic sexual offenders (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2019). The intervention programmes aim to target a specific offending behaviour such as sexual offending or substance abuse with the aim of reducing the recidivism rates. However, it can be argued that intervention programmes which are specific for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence assumes that there is something wrong with them and they need fixing (Burrows, 2016).

There are challenges with preventing offending behaviours because there is not a one size fits all approach when it comes to intervention programmes (McCartan & Kemshall, 2023). Intervention programmes that target sexual offending are often cognitive-behavioural psychologically based and can be found in various settings such as the community, forensic mental health hospitals, and prison settings (Tyler et al., 2021). Research into intervention programmes has identified that it is possible to reduce reoffending rates by treating or rehabilitating those incarcerated for a sexual offence rather than simply incarcerating them (Andrews & Bonta, 2003). Although prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence have low recidivism rates compared to non-sexual offences, arguably there is still a level of punitiveness because of the heightened level of risk of reoffending when it comes to this prisoner cohort (Burrows, 2016).

The approach for intervention programmes was initially based around psychological programmes but these interventions have been replaced with behavioural and cognitive behavioural intervention (Walton & Chou, 2015). The reason for cognitive behavioural interventions to replace psychological programmes are because they have been found to be more effective in reducing risk (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). Meta-analytic research has identified that cognitive behavioural interventions are most effective in reducing recidivism when compared to other treatments and interventions (Hanson et al., 2002; Lösel & Schmucker, 2005). Behavioural interventions focus on reducing abnormal sexual interests using conditioning procedures because of abnormal sexual desire caused by conditioned behaviour (Jennings & Deming, 2013). Whereas cognitive interventions are based on the behaviours, emotions and cognitions that surround the offence which aims to replace these with adaptive processes (Walton & Chou, 2015). Thus, by identifying the risk factors of

offending and reducing those factors that are predictive of sexual offending should result in reduced recidivism rates (Carich et al., 2004).

There has been controversy surrounding the effectiveness of the intervention programmes that have been implemented in a prison environment. In 1994, an intervention programme for sexual offending named The Core Sex Offender Treatment Programme (C-SOTP) was introduced which aimed to reduce the reoffending rates (Williams & Mann, 2010). The C-SOTP, a cognitive-behavioural intervention was designed specifically for men who have committed a sexual offence and aimed to reduce reoffending by identifying and addressing the known criminogenic needs of an individual (Mews et al., 2017). However, a study was completed by the Ministry of Justice of men in England and Wales who had completed the C-SOTP treatment programme (ibid). The study consisted of 13,219 people who had been convicted of a sex offence and were matched with a comparison group of 2562 people who did not take part in the CSOTP intervention, the matching factors were taken from SOTP records, Offender assessment system, and the police national computer between the years 2000 and 2012 (Marshall, 2021). The treatment and comparison group were compared regarding proven reoffending rates, for both sexual and non-sexual offences. The results from this study identified that rather than a decrease in offending for those who had taken part in C-SOTP, there was an actual increase in reoffending (Mews et al., 2017), however it is uncertain if the outcome was influenced by the treatment or the design of the programme.

Although there have been problems with some of the intervention programmes in previous years, more recent research has proven that participating in intervention programmes reduces recidivism. A meta-analysis of intervention programmes was conducted by Schmucker and Lösel (2017), they compared twenty-seven sexual offending intervention programmes and identified recidivism rates were 10 % for the intervention group compared to 14 % of the untreated control group. A more recent meta-analysis which comprised of 41,476 individuals identified a 9.5 % reduction in reoffending rates for those that had taken part in intervention programmes compared to 14.1 % of those that did not participate in intervention programmes (Gannon et al., 2019).

The intervention programmes which have been successful in reducing reoffending are the programmes that specifically focus on a risk-need-responsivity approach (Hanson et al., 2009). The intervention programmes for individuals convicted of a sexual offence now follow the Risk Need Responsivity (RNR) principle and are effective in recidivism (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). The Risk principle suggests that the individuals receive the level of treatment that corresponds with their level of risk of reoffending (Andrews et al., 2011).

Therefore, for those that are considered more at risk of reoffending, additional time, and increased supervision contact hours needs to be incorporated with a minimum of three hundred hours recommended for those that are deemed a high risk (Hanson et al., 2012). The primary goal of using a risk management approach when implementing intervention programmes is to enhance public safety by reducing the risk of offending in the future (Andrews & Bonta, 2003).

The Need principle should aim to target the (dynamic) risk factors identified as being likely to increase the likelihood of reoffending (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). Hanson and Morton-Bourgon (2005) notes that the strongest predictors of recidivism for individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence include criminogenic factors such as sexual attitudes and antisocial lifestyle and non-criminogenic needs such as low victim empathy and social skills defects. Thus, by targeting these risk factors for change does help with reducing recidivism rates for people with convictions for a sexual offence (Yates, 2013). Although criminogenic factors are important with the need principle, non criminogenic factors should also be addressing to reduce recidivism. Non criminogenic factors include self-esteem, personal distress, empathy, and denial (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005; Yates, 2009). However, these factors have not been linked to research surrounding recidivism and is not supported by empirical evidence (Yates, 2013).

The Responsive principle is where the intervention programme is adapted to the different abilities and learning styles of the individual (Newberry & Shuker, 2011). Therefore, the intervention should be delivered in response to individual characteristics such as language, culture, personality style, intelligence, and cognitive abilities which can increase an individual's engagement in the programme (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). Thus, the responsive principle needs to be varied and adapted to individuals' abilities and style to achieve maximum effectiveness (Yates, 2013).

According to Bonta and Andrews (2017), an effective intervention programme should be adapted to the individual's risk level; high risk individuals need more intensive interventions than individuals who are assessed as being low risk. The intervention programmes in England and Wales are based on reducing the threat by high-risk individuals and appear to be highly effective (Harrison, 2005). However, a study consisting of twenty-six systematic reviews and meta-analysis of underlying RNR principles identified the evidence was mostly low quality and inconsistent (Fazel et al., 2024). RNR has been criticised as insufficient because it focuses on deficits, risk management, avoidance goals and its inability to motivate a change in the person (Yates, 2013). Motivation to participate in interventions is critical for RNR to

work effectively and as Thorton (1997) identified people incarcerated for a sexual offence tend not to be motivated to engage with interventions. Therefore because of the shortcomings identified in the RNR principle of intervention, the good lives model approach for people incarcerated for a sexual offence emerged (Yates, 2013).

The Good Lives Model (GLM) (Ward & Laws, 2010) is a strength-based approach to rehabilitation that aims to reduce risk by equipping prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence with life skills, empowering prisoners with resources and basic human values in a socially accepted way (Kemshall, 2017). The GLM is a positive intervention because rather than being preoccupied with risk, this model develops a good life plan which helps prisoners to focus on their interests and aspirations to achieve meaningful life goals (Ward & Fortune, 2013). Ward and Marshall (2004) first proposed there were nine primary human goods that an individual needs to live a good life. However, Purvis et al (2013) suggested that there are actually eleven grades of primary human goods as opposed to nine as previously suggested.

The eleven assumptions of the GLM have been highlighted as follows.

1. Life (living and functioning in a physically healthy way)
2. Knowledge (feeling informed about the world and things important to the individual)
3. Excellence in play (having a range of hobbies and interests)
4. Excellence in work (having something that one is considered an 'expert' in)
5. Excellence in agency (having autonomy in decision-making)
6. Inner peace (emotional health and freedom from stress)
7. Friendship (having relationships in intimate, romantic, and family domains)
8. Community (having a connection to a broader social group or community)
9. Spirituality (finding meaning and/or purpose in life)
10. Happiness/Pleasure (feelings positive in the here-and-now)
11. Creativity (the ability to express oneself through a range of different methods).

The GLM gives individuals who have offended the opportunity to have a good life by working on their primary human goods to set individual goals. This enhances their wellbeing to reduce their risk of reoffending (Ward & Brown, 2004). However, if an individual fails to achieve primary human goods or use antisocial methods to achieve these goods then they are more at risk of reoffending behaviours (Harper et al., 2021). Although these primary human goods are a focus on the GLM, it can be argued that these are the basic needs that all individuals strive for regardless of whether they have committed an offence (Harper et al, 2021). With regards to the context of rehabilitation the GLM places equal emphasis on giving

people with convictions the capabilities to "*secure important personal and social experiences ("goods") in acceptable ways*" (Mann, 2004, p. 142). Thus, this is important for desistance related protective factors for individuals (de De Vries Robbé et al., 2015; Harkins et al., 2012). The GLM approach provides an alternative to the risk-based approach in assessing the likelihood of an individual reoffending because the focus is on the individual and their ability to change (Baumgartner, 2014). The GLM is concerned with an individuals' ability to consider and implement their own goals and construct a plan to achieve these goals (Purvis et al., 2011). However, with some individuals the way they attempt to achieve these goals is key, as opposed to having life goals, which can lead to problems in their life and essentially lead to sexual offending (Yates, 2013).

The GLM of rehabilitation for individuals who have committed an offence provides an effective theoretical framework regarding the case management of offenders (Ward & Maruna, 2007). Even so, the GLM has been criticised for a lack of empirical evidence regarding the outcomes of the intervention (Wormith et al., 2012). Bonta and Andrews (2003, p. 217) have asserted the GLM is *"no substitute for evidence"* because they state the GLM is more of an ideological and intuition-based model. Although there is empirical evidence to support the GLM, this is only just beginning to emerge supporting both the assumptions and outcomes of the GLM (Mallion et al., 2020).

The effectiveness of intervention programmes has been a subject of debate with evidence that highlights cognitive behavioural programmes can be effective in reducing recidivism for individuals who are incarcerated for a sexual offence (Schmucker & Lösel, 2017). Whereas Dennis et al., (2012) identified that there is no evidence, or the evidence that is available is not conclusive. However, what is not discussed with regards to intervention programmes for rehabilitation is prison education. Education in a prison environment is an important aspect of the rehabilitation process with which prisoners can engage with. Prison education can help put prisoners on the path to employment which can influence rehabilitation because employment has been highlighted as one outcome that reduces reoffending (MoJ, 2018). Prison education aims to give prisoners the skills they need to unlock their potential, gain employment, and become an asset to their communities (MoJ, 2019). Furthermore, education can support desistance and aid the rehabilitation process (Higgins, 2021). However, when discussing rehabilitation with regards to individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence the focus tends to be on intervention programmes such as RNR (Andrews & Bonta, 2010) and the GLM (Ward & Laws, 2010) and largely ignores the rehabilitation aspect of education.

2.5: The development of education in a prison environment

All prisons in England and Wales offer educational programmes consisting of a dedicated prison education department that presents a range of qualifications and courses for prisoners. Prison education emerged in the 1800s and was first introduced under John Peel's Parliamentary Goal Act 1823 in which headmasters became part of the establishment and instructed religious education alongside reading and writing skills (Wilson & Reuss, 2000). It was around this time that Elizabeth Fry began to preach at Newgate prison who was later regarded as the mother of education (Forster, 1981). Therefore, the role of religion in defining the purpose of prison education became extremely popular. Chaplains who worked in a prison became very influential; they encouraged prisoners to reform and made cell visits along with supervising the work of the educator (Forsythe, 1987).

During the 1860s, education in prison was moved from the daytime to the evenings, so that education did not interrupt the working hours of prisoners, however, education still heavily relied on religious texts (Forster, 1981). The 1870s saw the introduction of national standards of reading, writing and arithmetic, but this was only for those prisoners who were under the age of 25 (Johnston et al.*,* 2022). It was during the 1880s that a national prison education scheme was started where governors and chaplains of local prisons were allowed total freedom in the design and delivery of the education provisions (Crone, 2016).

The Gladstone Report in 1895 arguably gave prison education a new lease on life. Rehabilitation was a key feature in the report in which education played a major part (McConville, 2000), suggesting that a prison should be a place of reform and teaching of new skills along with a place to encourage a change of behaviour. Furthermore, it was during this time when it became apparent that the levels of education amongst prisoners were identified as generally representative of the communities from which the prisoners came, rather than overwhelmingly deficient as previously thought (Clark & Dugdale, 2008).

Prison education had started to expand during the 1920s with a wider range of education provided in prisons, in the form of lectures and concerts. However, these lectures tended to occur once a month in local prisons and once every four months for all other prison establishments (Commissioners of Prisons and Directors of Convict Prisons, 1922). At that time, there were strict age limits which saw those prisoners who were over twenty-five were denied education, resulting in many prisoners not receiving any form of education (Hobhouse & Brockway). For example, out of a prison population of 1,435, only 178 of these prisoners received education and the prisoners who did choose to attend education during their incarceration faced limited library provisions and poor writing materials (Hobhouse &

Brockway, 1922). Following World War II, prison commissioners began working on the Education Act of 1944, with the Department of Education and Employment, and local authorities, to put an education system in place which enabled Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to employ a dedicated cohort of people to teach in prison (Forster & Forster, 1996). Four years later saw the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948) consider education as a fundamental right with Article 26 stating that: *'everyone has the right to education', which 'shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms'* (p. 7). Following this, the rights of prisoners have been included in the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (UNSMR) in 1955 (now known as the Mandela Rules) which states the minimum standard of education that should be provided in prison establishments (United Nations, 2015).

During the 1960s, although there was a legal duty to deliver education, the focus of a prison began to shift towards the security as this became the main priority for prisons (Cavadino & Dignan, 1998). The security of prisons was called into question following a string of high-profile prison escapes (Mountbatten Report, 1966). This led to an increase in the risk of prisoners escaping and heightened the risk of violence for prisoners and prison staff. This in turn led to staff shortages because of illness, feelings of constant stress and threats of violence by the prisoners (Baxendale, 1981). In addition, the prison population began to rise which resulted in the rehabilitation principle of prisons being pushed aside (Harris & Smith, 1996). However, prison education received a boost from the Woolf Report in 1991 following the Strangeways riot in 1990. The report stated that education makes an important contribution to the prison regime and should be given the same equal status to work and receive equal pay levels (Woolf, 1991). Education in prison mirrored the political agenda of the government at the time with education reflecting prison reform. Following the newly elected Labour Government in 1997 there were several reviews into the education provisions, such as the Carter Report in 2003, recommending changes to the penal system in England and Wales to enable a joined-up service consisting of prisons and probation. Following the recommended changes to the penal system saw the introduction of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and the Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) that focuses on prisoners gaining skills necessary to improve their employability (O'Grady, 2013).

The Offender, Learning and Skills System (OLASS) was first rolled out across England and Wales in 2006 with the aim of organising prison education (O'Grady, 2013). OLASS was

initially developed to focus on initial assessment, advice and guidance that would lead to the development of a prisoners individual learning plan which would pass through the criminal justice system (CJS) (Halsey et al., 2006). The aim of OLASS was to improve the prison education system and provide quality education to enable prisoners to seamlessly move through the prison system into the community (Halsey et al., 2006). Following OLASS, the next step involved handing control of prison education to prison governors, this was originally set out by Coates in her 2016 prison education review. The prison education review 'Unlocking Potential' by Dame Sally Coates stated, *'education should be at the heart of the prison system'* (2016, p. 3) further advocating how prison education can contribute to transforming lives. The idea behind changes to education in prisons was to give greater control of the education provisions to the prison governors. In Coates' review, it was suggested that prison governors should *"have the freedom to design the right curriculum and choose the delivery arrangement that best meets the rehabilitation needs of the individuals for whom they are responsible"* (Coates, 2016, p. i). This is an important consideration because this thesis explores the provisions for individuals who are incarcerated for a sexual offence because they have different educational and employment needs than those incarcerated for a non-sexual conviction. Thus, the education curriculum should reflect the prisoner population and ensure their rehabilitation needs are being met.

In 2016, responsibility for the prison education budget moved from the Department of Education to the Ministry of Justice. New education contracts were established, and prison governors had more control and flexibility over the education budgets to better meet the needs of their prisoner population (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022). This new framework for prison education consists of two elements that work in unison - the Prison Education Framework (PEF) and Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) (UK Government, 2021). The move from OLASS along with the change from National Offender Management Service (NOMS) to His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), aimed to end the term offender learning and thus moved away from the negative *offender* identity (Champion, 2017). The Prisoner Education Framework (PEF) provides a core curriculum which includes Mathematics, English, and ICT whereas the Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) allows prison governors to tailor educational provisions on training which is based on identified job market needs (UK Government, 2021). The PEF is delivered by four learning providers, whose contracts are managed by the central government. Milton Keynes College provides the education provisions for long-term and high security for the North, South, and South Central, Novus provides the education provision for the London area, Cumbia and Lancashire, Greater

Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire, Tyne and Wear, west Midlands, Women's estate North and Yorkshire. The Western College covers the areas of Avon and South Dorset, Devon and North Dorset, Kent, Surrey, and Sussex. People Plus covers Bedfordshire, Cambridge and Norfolk, East Midlands, Morton Hall, Hertfordshire, Essex and Suffolk and the North Midlands (Prisoner Education Trust, 2019). The development of the prison education system has periodically been reviewed with the aim of reforming the education provisions to help prisoners gain skills and improve their employment prospects. However, there has yet to be an education system that provides the necessary educational needs of the prisoners.

In the first year of the governors' autonomy in commissioning education, only a third of the prisons, nine of the thirty-two prison establishments that were inspected delivered an appropriate curriculum that met the needs of their prisoners (Ofsted, 2020). In addition, the same report identified almost two-thirds of prison inspections showed poor management in the quality of education, skills, and work in the custodial estate (Ofsted, 2020). The government's response to the Coates review (2016) identified several recommendations for policy initiatives to be implemented but many of these initiatives have not been realised over six years later (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022). Therefore, if education is left the way it is, then prison education will die, because of the low-level courses, run by inexperienced providers, who just do whatever they can to get bums on seats (Breakspear, 2018).

Although prison governors have greater control over the education budget, the vision of governor autonomy, as set out by the Coates Review, has not been realised by the new contracts with the quality of prison education being deemed inadequate (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022). There is no indication that the education provisions that was directly managed by the governors has resulted in meaningful changes to the previous contractual outcomes (Prisoner Alliance Trust, 2021). One reason the education contracts have not quite worked is because prison governors had very little time to implement and manage the education contracts efficiently, (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022) thus, more training is needed to support the prison governors. Furthermore, there has been no change in the prison education budget, the funding for prison education has remained at the same level for the last five years (approximately £129 million per annum) the amount of funding has been guaranteed at the current level for the life of the PEF contract (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022). From the beginning of April 2024, there will begin a new tendering process for the education contracts which could introduce a wide range of

educational provisions. However, as the prison population continues to grow and the education budget continues to be limited, this can prove to be a real challenge for the potential education providers (Collins, 2023).

In contemporary prisons the education provisions have been described as unimaginative because there is a lack of courses on offer and limited internet access and digital technologies available (Czerniawski, 2016). Moreover, education has been described as a box ticking exercise where the government provides education in prisons as a way to meet the criteria on their agenda (Champion, 2013). Prison education has often been criticised for its inflexibility, for example where a governor decides what provision they want to offer, and then contracts a provider to deliver this, there is a tendency to offer a very narrow curriculum of Mathematics, English, ESOL and ICT (Prison Learning Alliance, 2021). This can be observed in prisons in England and Wales because they offer some form of qualifications as part of the prison regime with the prisoner education framework covering a core curriculum of Mathematics, English, ESOL and ICT. The Dynamic Purchasing System provides a niche and flexible curriculum which is designed for bespoke shorter-term provisions, such as careers guidance and sector-specific training (Clinks, 2022). Prison Rule 3 states *"the purpose of the training and treatment of convicted prisoners shall be to encourage and assist them to lead a good and useful life"* (The Prison Rules, 1999). The educational provisions are largely based around formal adult education with the focus being on gaining qualifications (Rogers, 2003). Purposeful activity inside a prison establishment includes education courses, these differ at each prison, but they all offer basic skills in Mathematics and English. The basic skills are fundamental in ensuring all prisoners, as a minimum are able to read and write which will make a difference to every person who is incarcerated (McMann, 2016). Basic skills in Mathematics and English education can contribute to a reduction in reoffending by up to 12% which suggests that basic skills education is a valuable tool in helping reduce reoffending (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). Furthermore, individuals are less likely to reoffend if they have a qualification citing a 45 % reconviction rate for those with a qualification (within a year) compared to 60 % of those reconvicted without a qualification (MoJ, 2012). Although, gaining a qualification does appear to be a significant factor in an individual reoffending but there is no discussion on the qualification that makes the difference. However, participating in education does offer benefits to prisoners such as enhancing their social skills and self-esteem which could account for the reoffending rates (Tønseth, & Bergsland, 2019). Therefore, it could be a combination of participating in education and gaining qualifications which helps reduce a person's likelihood of reoffending.

All prisons provide a range of qualifications within each prison's education curriculum. However, prison education tends to focus on basic skills such as Mathematics, English and employability skills which results in other courses and qualifications being overlooked (Szifris et al., 2018). The minimum levels of education classes provided through the educational offer in a prison establishment, range from Entry Level (equivalent to pre-secondary school level) to Level two which is equivalent to GCSE - grades 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4 or grades A*, A, B, C (UK (United Kingdom) Government, 2020).. During the year 2019-20, there was a drop in prisoners participating in prison education with 67,700 adults participating. This was a drop from previous years and fewer than the peak of 101,600 in the year 2014-15 (Prison Reform Trust, 2022). In the year 2019-20 saw the number of prisoners achieving qualifications rise by 12%, although there was a decline of 19% of prisoners achieving pre-Level 2 qualifications (Prison Reform Trust, 2022). At present the number of prisoners engaging with education are slightly below the year 2019-20 but the numbers are gently rising following the pandemic.

2.6: Benefits of engagement with education

One of the benefits of engaging with education is that prisoner gain new skills and qualifications to enable them to gain employment on release. Prison education does play a key role in improving the employability of prisoners and thus reduces reoffending (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022). The employment market is constantly changing, with a growing demand for higher levels skills and it was estimated that by 2030, 17.4 million more jobs would require high-level qualifications, while the demand for low skills would drop to around two million (Melville & Bivand, 2019). Prison education aims to have a clear purpose and goal for employment when released (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2021). Having a job to go to upon release can significantly reduce the chance of reoffending (MoJ, 2013). Employment is a crucial factor in desistance from crime; education can help in gaining qualifications for successful employment and reduce the rates of reoffending (MoJ, 2018). Thus, education can provide prisoners with qualifications that can help them gain employment because a lack of occupation is associated with engaging in crime (Bottoms et al., 2004). Prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence often face barriers and restrictions when seeking employment opportunities (Robinson & Crow, 2009), which is exasperating because research suggests that engaging with employment is associated with successful desistance among those formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence (Kruttschnitt et al., 2000).

However, giving prisoners a good education can enable them to get jobs and turn their backs on crime, which will reap huge dividends eventually (Atkins, 2021).

Prison education does more for prisoners than just improving their employability skills because engaging with education involves the prisoners communicating with the prison educator and other people on their course. Thus, this is demonstrating positive behaviour in class, such as not being disruptive and not engaging in anti-social behaviour (West, 1997). Engaging with prison education is beneficial for prisoners because it impacts their personal development and coping skills, and gives them a sense of belonging (Nichols, 2017). Having a positive attitude has been noted as being more important than having technical skills for a role in the employment market (CfBT Education Trust, 2011). Therefore, prison education has the potential to provide personal growth and development for prisoners which has been identified as crucial for long-term desistance from crime (Terry & Cardwell, 2015).

Being sentenced to prison can be an extremely low point for most, therefore, by gaining new knowledge prisoners can acquire skills which can boost their self-confidence giving them a sense of purpose, thus education can be a constructive way to spend their time (Wilson & Reuss, 2000). Prison life can be difficult for many prisoners, and they may engage in education to give themselves something to do and relieve the boredom of prison life (Hughes, 2009). Therefore, prisoners see education as a potential break from the prison culture, a space where prisoners can interact with others as a learner rather than a prisoner (Szifris et al., 2018). In addition, education can provide prisoners with a much-needed occupation whilst in prison, this can help relieve boredom and in doing so can help relieve the pain of being incarcerated (Liebling & Maruna, 2005). Additionally, education can provide mental health benefits to help balance the isolating conditions whilst also improving their general behaviour (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022). Thus, engaging with education can help to lessen the damage caused by imprisonment and help prisoners cope with the pains and deprivations of prison life (Maruna, 2010).

There are several ways in which participating in education can positively influence a prisoner's life and contribute to their desistance from crime. For example, Abeling-Judge (2019) suggests the benefits of education are that it lowers rates of offending, helps with personal development, and helps with the transformation of prisoner identity. Honeywell (2019) identified the positive transformative potential of education. Transformative learning is intended to allow the development of self-knowledge, critical thinking, and moral development, Mezirow (1991) argues to be deeply involved in transformative learning, one must be open to inquiry into behaviour of the mind, meaning perspectives and expectations.

Mezirow (1991) argued the theory of transformative learning is where individuals change their beliefs, attitudes, and emotional reactions, to the world around them. Therefore, because education has the potential to be transformative for prisoners, this can lead to a new identity. Thus, education can transform the life of a prisoner in that they gain a new identity as opposed to their prisoner identity and therefore this encourages them to desist from crime (Maruna et al., 2004; Turner et al., 2019). Transformative learning begins when the label of prisoner is removed. This enables a prisoner to feel valued when being named a learner as opposed to prisoner which positively links to gaining confidence and self-esteem (Cleere & Maguire, 2013). Therefore, when prisoners are recognised as learners, they can feel a sense of belonging and see the education environment as a trustworthy space (Little & Warr, 2022).

Maruna (2001) describes the process of desistance as the transformation and change in the narrative identity of those that desist crime. For an individual to successfully desist from crime they must gain a sense of what the future can hold for them and how this can be realised (Farrell, 2004). Therefore, as noted previously, engagement with education whilst in prison has the potential to transform lives and give prisoners the skills necessary to desist from crime. To desist from crime means to stop engaging in criminal activity, although how long one must cease from crime is subject to debate (Fox, 2021). Furthermore, desisting from crime can often be described as zig zagged or curved (Carlsson 2012) as the desistance process is not straightforward and can be a different process for each individual. To successfully desist from crime access to work and education must be available for them to engage with, in addition they should have access to family, friends, relationships and healthcare (Laws & Ward, 2011; Robinson & Crow, 2009). Desistance theorists first focused on the thought that individuals abstained from crime due to a life event such as marriage (Giordano et al., 2003; Sampson & Laub, 2006). Whereas later desistance theorists focused on the internal transformation in identity (Maruna, 2001; Healy, 2017). However, desistance research has tended to focus on individuals incarcerated for a non-sexual offence and highlights how these individuals eventually give up or mature and thus desist from offending (Farmer et al., 2015). Therefore, to understand the desistance process for individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence is unclear, predominately because this prisoner cohort have low recidivism rates to begin with (MoJ, 2023b).

There are several arguments surrounding desistance from crime and the role of education. Musick et al., (2012) has suggested that education can be a positive influence because of external social circumstances, such as employment opportunities. Whereas others have suggested it is the internal developments, such as when an individual engages with education

because this can help to contribute to changes in an individuals cognitive processing (Giordano et al., 2002). However, Maruna (2001) states that the desistance process includes the attitudes and opinions of prisoners, and they can use their past to create positive change as an active development process in desisting from crime. Although learning may involve change and transforming beliefs but not as far as changing who somebody becomes (Newman, 2012).

By understanding desistance as something that can be a part of the learning process, engaging in education can help to support prisoners with wider benefits that reach beyond employment opportunities. Prison education is part of the prisoner's rehabilitation in that it can assist with their self-identity. Developing new identities in a prison environment can help individuals during the distressing transition to prison life (Sani et al., 2015). A positive identity can become a social cure because they can take on a positive, valued identity such as student (kellezi et al., 2019). However, their identity could become a social curse because they are incarcerated and thus, they may lose their community or profession (Bosworth & Kellezi, 2014) and be identified as a detainee (kellezi et al., 2019). Overcoming the negative identity of *prisoner* is important along with developing a new positive pro-social identity in the process of desisting from crime (Maruna 2001; Giordano et al., 2002). The negative identity of the prisoner is exaggerated when the prisoner has been incarcerated for a sexual offence. The personal identity of prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence is often focused on the shame and stigma that is associated with the labels given to this prison cohort (Blagden et al., 2014). Therefore, by increasing the desire in a prisoner to change can influence their decisive momentum, and thus they can take positive steps to grasp opportunities to change, which Göbbels et al., (2012) identified as the first step in desisting from sexual offending. Therefore, participating in prison education as their purposeful activity can empower prisoners and enable them to make a constructive contribution regarding their own rehabilitation process (Blagden et al., 2017).

Education has value in itself, as it can help in developing the person as a whole (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022). Therefore, engaging in education can empower transformation in an individual's identity because it has the potential to help with redemptive experiences. Hence the negative past self is reconstructed as a positive self, leading to the transformation of that individual (McAdams, 2006). Furthermore, individuals who desist from crime have been found to have a stronger sense of personal agency when compared to those that are potentially active in their offending (Farmer et al., 2011). Therefore, desistance from crime can be seen as a constructive way to change a person's identity (Healy, 2017).

Hence, personal identity is an important part of desisting from crime, thus, those individuals who are lacking in personal identity may be more likely to continue to offend (Ward & Marshall, 2007). This shift in personal identity has been argued to be an important process of desistance for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence (Göbbels et al., 2012).

A prison environment should aim to limit the damage caused by imprisonment and focus on reducing recidivism (Hawley, 2011). However, a prison environment is often a place that is hostile, noisy, and crowded with prisoners exposed to movement restrictions and transfers, often without warning, daily lockdowns, cell searches and head counts, all of which seem to be prison 'norms' (Hopkins & Farley, 2015). Whereas the education environment tends to be different to the prison environment and offers an atmosphere which is non-threatening and has been described as a non-penal oasis (Behan, 2014). However, prison education is situated within the prison walls which is seen as an institution of power that is used to inflict punishment on the individual (Little & Warr, 2022). Although prison education is part of the prison environment, it is viewed as a separate space away from prison.

Prisoners who engage with education prefer the atmosphere in education as opposed to the prison wing or the workshops (MacGuinness, 2000) and education has been described as *"one of the few zones within the institution that didn't feel like a prison"* (Crewe, 2012 p. 119). Furthermore, the prisoners' attitudes towards the education staff were much more positive compared to the prisoners' attitudes towards prison officers (Nichols, 2017). This may be because education staff were there to teach prisoners as opposed to being the authoritative figure of discipline. Thus, prisoners perceived education staff as less threatening and more trustworthy (Liebling et al., 2011).

For the benefit of prisoners and prison educators the prison education system needs to be properly resourced and only then can it be truly rehabilitative (Parker, 2021). The MoJ (2021b) states prison education equips prisoners with the skills and qualifications they need to enable employment after they leave custody because employment can offer a path to a crime-free life. However, despite the many benefits of participating in prison education, there has been a decline in engagement. In the academic year 2022-23, 63,744 of prisoners participating in an education course (MoJ, 2023e) which is significantly less than the year 2014–15 where more than 100,000 prisoners participated in prison learning (Coates, 2016). However, the lower numbers of engagement in the year 2022-23 numbers maybe due to the prison systems recovery following the Covid-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of purposeful activity in adult prison establishments has declined with prisoners spending too much time locked in their cell (HMCIP, 2019b). The purpose of education in prison seems to

be the idea of rehabilitation and allowing prisoners to participate in education would allow them to gain qualifications that they will be able to use upon release, to gain employment, therefore they would desist from offending behaviour. Although education does play a part in rehabilitation which aims to lower reoffending and supports prisoners learning needs. There are several aspects of a prison environment that may have a direct impact on the effectiveness of rehabilitation procedures which need to be considered to enable the development of a truly rehabilitative environment.

2.7: Barriers for engaging in education

Prison education can mean different things to different people, it can be a positive way to help prisoners cope with their custodial sentence and this can limit the damages of prison life (Behan, 2014). Additionally, prison education can be perceived as a way to keep prisoners occupied (Evans et al., 2018). However, engaging with prison education can be an opportunity for prisoners to gain new skills and qualifications (Reuss, 1999). Nevertheless, prison education can be the stepping stone that is needed for prisoners to be included in society upon release (Hawley et al.,2013). Prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence often face social exclusion following their release thus engaging with prison education may help to decrease social exclusion. However, there are a number of barriers that prevent prisoners accessing and engaging with prison education.

The prison environment can be difficult for those prisoners who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In the year 2022-23, 28 % of prisoners who took part in an initial assessment were identified as having a learning difficulty or disability (MoJ, 2023e). The World Health Organization (WHO) (2016, p. 1) defines learning disability as a *"reduced level of intellectual functioning resulting in a diminished ability to adapt to the daily demands of the normal social environment."* There appears to be a considerable number of people in contact with the criminal justice system who have a learning disability which is approximately 7 %, compared with around 2 % of the general population (NHS England, 2016). The Ministry of Justice (2012) identified that 11 % of prisoners have a physical disability, 18 % of prisoners have a mental disability and 8 % of prisoners have both. Indeed, having a learning difficulty or disability can be detrimental to those incarcerated, as 22 % of prisoners who have a disability reported they felt suicidal when they first arrived in prison (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2020).

It has been identified approximately half of all individuals who enter the prisons system have some kind of neurodivergent condition, which can have a significant impact on their

capability of engagement within the justice system (Criminal Justice Joint Inspection, 2021). Prisoners with dyslexia are three to four times more common among people who are incarcerated when compared to the general population (Rack, 2005). Furthermore, Talbot (2008) identified that prisoners who do have a learning disability or difficulty were almost three times as likely as other prisoners to have anxiety or depression. Young et al., (2018) identified approximately 25 % of prisoners have been diagnosed with ADHD, around 9 % have been identified as having an autism spectrum disorder and approximately 9 % of prisoners have an intellectual disability. Mouriden (2012) identified that sexual offences and arson are the most common types of crime that are committed by individuals with autism.

Having a learning difficulty or disability in a prison environment can be challenging for prisoners. For example, prisoners identified as having a learning disability or difficulty have been found to be more disruptive and are five times more likely to need to be restrained and three times more likely to be placed in segregation when compared to prisoners without any learning difficulties or disabilities (Talbot, 2008). Furthermore, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2017) identified more than half of the prisons that were inspected in the year 2016–17 was actively identifying and supporting prisoners with learning disabilities. Moreover, Rack (2005) notes that 20 % of the prisoner population who have a disability has an impact on their ability to be productive in education and work. Consequently, prison inspectors argue prison regimes should be adapted to meet the needs of those prisoners who have learning disabilities because prisoners with learning difficulties may struggle understanding and following the prison routine (Criminal Justice Joint Inspection, 2015). This is a positive step in the right direction for prisoners as they do appear to have more learning difficulties than the general population, thus, they may need more support.

As mentioned previously, education can provide skills and qualifications to enhance the employment opportunities for prisoners. However, the available employment options are focused on the general prisoner population as opposed to prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. For example, the business Timpson, they implement a selection process which includes training, and mentoring opportunities for prisoners while they are still incarcerated. Timpson are renown for having an inclusive recruitment strategy and they provide prisoners the opportunity to secure employment upon release (Pandeli & O'Regan, 2020). Although this has led to Timpson recruiting 10 % of their employees from prison, they do not employ those incarcerated for a sexual offence (Pandeli & O'Regan, 2020). Therefore, their inclusive recruitment strategies are not entirely inclusive and only serves to further exclude prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence from opportunities in society.

For many individuals who have a criminal conviction, qualifications alone may not be sufficient to gain employment. Having a criminal conviction can be a significant barrier to employment. The MoJ (2015) found that of those released in the year 2014-15, only one in four (27 %) had secured employment for their release and around 60 % of prisoners were released without gaining employment, training, or education (Coates, 2016). Employers may discriminate against formerly incarcerated people and refuse to employ someone with a criminal offence, regardless of the nature of that offence. In a YouGov survey in 2016 half of the respondents said that they would not consider employing a prisoner or a formerly incarcerated person (Department for Work & Pensions, 2016). This is particularly important to prisoners because their chances of gaining employment upon release are significantly less when compared to an identical individual with the same demographics and educational achievements who have not been previously incarcerated (Visher et al., 2011). The Department of Work and Pensions (2016) identified that only one in five individuals who had left prison after being referred to a work programme secured and held a job for six months or more. The reality is that many formerly incarcerated people will not be employed, and this is especially true of formerly incarcerated individuals convicted of a sexual offence (Brown et al., 2007).

Individuals formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence may come across additional barriers when released, for example, they may not be able to go back to their previous employment (Slater et al., 2017). Although the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 gives individuals with spent convictions the legal right not to disclose their previous convictions. Employers can and do ask about previous convictions which is why there have been steps to improve the job application process for those with criminal convictions. 'Ban the Box' is a campaign aimed at increasing the opportunities for those with a criminal conviction to gain employment by removing the need to disclose convictions at the initial job application stage (Unlock, 2018). Typically, prisoners who have formerly been incarcerated for a sexual offence often face more barriers in finding and maintaining employment upon release (Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2009). For example, someone who has received a conviction for a sexual offence in England are added to the sex offenders register, sometimes for life, and this will be revealed by the Disclosure and Barring Service application (DBS, 2018). The DBS provides a procedure to enable employers to recruit and make decisions about potential employees and aims to prevent unsuitable people from working with children or vulnerable adults (DBS, 2018). Therefore, individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence may need to reskill to find alternative employment upon release (Slater et al., 2017). The employment market is

constantly changing, with a growing demand for high levels of skill. As a result, basic-level qualifications are inadequate to enable an individual to gain meaningful employment in the present employment market (Flynn & Higdon, 2022). Thus, emphasis needs to be placed on prison education offering learning opportunities beyond Level 2 to all prisoners with recognised qualifications that will help the prisoner to gain employment, training, or education upon release (Slater et al., 2023). However, Clark (2016) argues that prison education should address deeper personal and social development needs of prisoners rather than simply focusing on skills relating to a specific employment route.

The government intends to adapt the prison regime to facilitate work for appropriate prisoners, so they can be vetted and released on a temporary licence to start work before their actual release date, wherever practicable (MoJ, 2023c). However, this is not possible for those incarcerated for a sexual offence because the vetting procedures and their conviction deems them unsuitable. In addition, prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence may need to retrain for employment because their profession previous to incarceration may not be accessible to them upon release, for example, if they were previously in a teaching or caring profession. There are vocational courses available in prison where prisoners are able to gain skills in employment areas such as construction or painting and decorating. However, 44 % of prisoners over the age of fifty are incarcerated for a sexual offence (House of Lords, 2020) therefore because of the physically demanding job role of vocational courses such as construction, this may not be a viable option for many prisoners. Thus, it can be argued that prison education keeps prisoners occupied under the facade of prisoner rehabilitation, and preparation for release (Warr, 2016).

Braden et al., (2012) highlighted how prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are publicly vilified in the extreme and consequently find it more difficult than other types of prisoners to reintegrate. This can have a negative impact on prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence as some may prefer to stay in prison rather than be released (Willis & Johnston, 2010). Public shaming and the subsequent social isolation experienced by prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence constitute risk factors in terms of further offending (Braden et al., 2012). Therefore, this can be seen as a self-fulfilling prophecy: *"If everyone around a person treats him like a danger and a threat, he may eventually internalize this view himself and fulfil the prediction by returning to criminal behaviour"* (Maruna et al., 2004. p. 31). Travis (2005) states that challenges and barriers are a form of invisible punishments because of the restrictive nature of these sanctions that restrict a formerly incarcerated person's ability to integrate back into society. Although the punishments and sanctions are not part of their

custodial sentence, Travis (2005, p. 65) states "*these punishments subvert reintegration goals by forcing returning prisoners to carry the stigma of past mistakes well beyond the prison gates*". Therefore, it can be argued that, because of the barriers and restrictions placed on prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence when they are released back into the community, they face worse living conditions than before they were incarcerated.

There is also an element of *force* when it comes to prison education because in order to participate in some purposeful activity, the prisoners need to have a minimum level of education to be able to participate (O'Grady, 2019). When someone enters prison, they are assessed on a range of factors associated with their offence which is put in their sentence plan (National Offender Management Service, 2015). These sentence plans are developed to manage and reduce identified risks and reduce the risk of harm when released (HM Prison Service, 2005). Furthermore, prisoners' education skills will be assessed as part of their sentence plan, if there is a need for engagement with an education course, this will form part of their sentence plan. In addition, prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offences sentence plan may require them to be assessed for engagement with offending behaviour courses (Burtt, 2024). This can have an influence on the prisoners' choices of purposeful activity as for some prisoners they will have to participate in a course in order to comply with their sentence plan. Therefore, prisoners can find themselves *forced* to attend education. As Wilson (2007, p. 197) stated "*for many prisoners, education is something that has been done to them, imposed, ordered and required*". Thus, it can be argued that making prison education courses mandatory can leave prisoners financially disadvantaged which results in believing education is part of their punishment (Warner, 2002).

The budget for prison education was transferred to the Ministry of Justice in October 2016 who provide Mathematics, English, vocational and employability skills along with information, advice, and guidance for those in custody (DfE, 2017). However, there have been concerns from the Prisoner Education Trust regarding Mathematics and English qualifications that are offered by the education providers as to whether they were adequate, or if the qualifications were recognised by employers or higher education establishments (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022). Although Mathematics and English qualifications are accessible in a prison environment, Level 2 is the highest level of qualification that the majority of prison establishments provide. The Open University (OU) stated *"there is a 'glass ceiling' beyond Level 2 for prison learners, with anything above that seen as at best an optional extra rather than a coherent progression route for students"* (Coates, 2016, p. 38). Also, in the same review it was recommended that governors use their budget to fund

qualifications at Level 3 and above (Coates, 2016). Regardless of these recommendations, access to study Level 3 or above for prisoners has not been implemented because the current education provision in prisons is remarkably like the level and choice that was available under the previous contract (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022).

From a prisoner's point of view there is a financial aspect to consider when applying for an education course. Inside a prison, the pay for attending education is often lower than other purposeful activities, as Coates (2016) recognised that prison education routinely pays less than other activities in a prison. Although prisoners do not need a huge amount of money to survive in prison, they still need money to buy essential items such as toiletries, stamps, and phone credit. Breakspear (2018) stated that the reason many prisoners who do not attend education, is due to being unable to afford it rather than a desire to. Although there have been some prison establishments that have changed their policy, this is to ensure that no prisoner is financially worse off for choosing education, however, this change in policy does not apply to every prison establishment (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022). Prisoners should not be at a financial disadvantage due to choosing to attend education, but many prisoners find that financial incentives are not there.

Due to a range of factors inside a prison establishment, such as limited courses and operational factors, attending education is an available option for around 25% of the prisoner population (Schuller & Watson, 2009). The 2019 Annual prison review revealed there were too few activity places in some prisons, or the education spaces were not filled or used effectively (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2019b). In addition, education can be disrupted for prisoners due to the class being cancelled, changed or prisoners being transferred at short notice, meaning they are not able to complete their education course (Farley & Pike, 2018; Pike, 2014). Furthermore, engaging in prison education can be challenging for some prisoners because they may have elevated levels of education before incarceration, meaning that education courses may not be suitable. This is relevant for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence as it has been noted that this prisoner cohort have elevated levels of employment and educational achievements prior to incarceration (Tovey et al., 2022).

There are also opportunities for prisoners to study higher education from Level 3 (A-Level) to degree-level qualifications through distance learning programmes, largely provided via the Open University (OU). Higher education for prisoners has the potential to offer positive outcomes for their social and economic transformation and can enhance a prisoner's economic opportunities and self-sufficiency (O'Grady, 2019). The Prison Reform Trust (2022) estimate that prisoners who participate in higher education will cut their reoffending

rate by 20–40 %. However, the number of individuals who engage with higher education are quite low with around 1,400 individuals in prison who are studying with the Open University (House of Lords (HL), 2022). In addition, there are approximately fifty prisoners who are enrolled on Access to Higher Education courses, which are supported by the Prisoners' Education Trust (HL, 2022). This equates to approximately 1.7 % of the current prisoner population which highlights low participation in higher level learning. Although this is a small number of prisoner participation, the demand for higher education courses to be provided in prison is around 30 % (McFarlane, 2019). Even if there is a high demand for higher education courses in prisons, to access and apply for these courses is dependent on each individual prison establishment and whether they support or encourage higher education (Clark, 2016).

Prisoners face several challenges when wanting to embark on a higher learning course. Prisoners who wish to study higher education will first need permission from several members of prison staff and higher education must be on the prisoner's personal sentence plan (Tickle, 2012). Additionally, prisoners will need to fund their course, this can be done by either taking out a student loan, pay from their savings or apply for financial support through the Prisoner Education Trust (Flynn & Higdon, 2022). Furthermore, prisoners must be within six years of their release date in order to be eligible for a student loan, which disproportionately affects prisoners who might benefit most from higher-level study and those serving long custodial sentences (Prison Reform Trust, 2022b). It would be beneficial for prisoners if the six-year rule were removed, this would enable all prisoners, regardless of sentence length to be able to apply for funding to study for a higher education course.

In prisons, access to digital technology and the internet is extremely limited, if indeed available at all to prisoners, which can be incredibly challenging when studying for a higher education course. In England and Wales, most prisons do have an education department with computer courses available for prisoners to engage with. However, these computers courses are often inaccessible to prisoners who are studying on a higher education course (Pike & Adams, 2012). There are some higher education providers that produce learning materials via DVD's (Hancock, 2010) but gaining access to the computers to use these can be extremely challenging. In addition, there may be the need for delivery of a higher education course that requires the use of the internet or interactive online learning, but this is virtually impossible when studying in a prison because prisoners do not have internet access (Hancock, 2010; Pike, 2010). This may be because there is an overwhelming focus by the prison regarding risk, security, and public safety, which means that many prisoners are unable to access online

learning (Harmes et al., 2019). The denial of internet access for prisoners undermines their educational opportunities, with the deprivation of the internet becoming another form of exclusion for the already excluded prisoner (Harmes et al., 2019). Higher education in prisons is seen as a privilege and not essential to prisoners which is why higher education is undervalued and underfunded (Czerniawski, 2016).

Studying on a higher education course would give prisoners motivation during their custodial sentence and this would help to keep them focused on potential employment opportunities following release (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022). However, engagement with a higher learning course requires the person who is studying the course to do so in their own time and at their own pace (Jarvis, 2009). Thus, as Flynn (2017) argues higher learning courses are predominantly for a small number of elite prisoners, because they are the ones who have already gained a high standard of education and can study on a self-directed distance learning course. Therefore, the accessibility to study for a higher learning course is unsuitable for those prisoners who may lack formal education or for those prisoners who may need additional support to learn independently (Taylor, 2009).

The priority for a prison establishment is the security of prisoners and public protection (HMPPS, 2017), which can limit what courses are accessible to prisoners and limit access to certain materials that may be needed to study (Wilson, 2010). Additionally, the prison environment can impact a prisoners' access to education because the prison controls what courses are offered (Wilson, 2010). Several barriers have been identified that limits a prisoner's ability to access education which consist of staffing shortages, overcrowding, unpredictable movement of prisoners to other prisons and conflicts in a prison environment (Hurry et al., 2012). HM Inspectorate of Prisons for England and Wales (HMIP) and the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) have been very concerned regarding the links between overcrowding, the reduction in staffing levels and funding constraints for educational provisions which all have an impact on education being able to be a core part of the prison provision (Stickland, 2016).

Although education can be one of the pathways out of reoffending, prisoner access to education can often be restricted due to staff shortages and operational constraints (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2019b). In a prison environment essential activities like meals, showers, and exercise are prioritised by prison staff over other activities such as education. Because prison security is prioritised above everything else in a prison, it appears education is at the bottom of the prison management's priority list (Farley & Pike, 2018). The 2016 Coates Review highlighted the need for prison education to be at the *heart of the prison system* (p.

3). However, there is a lack of understanding amongst prison staff regarding the importance of prison education because they do not acknowledge the link between educational outcomes and successful rehabilitation (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022). Rather than the educational offering in prison being meaningful and supportive of prisoner rehabilitation, prison education is largely an obligatory offering (O'Grady, 2019). Thus, for education to be better understood and to become a priority across the prison estate, prison education should be embedded into the culture of the prison environment and built on a common value that are shared by prison staff and prison educators (Flynn & Higdon, 2022).

There are some prison staff who positively respond to prison education by offering support and encouragement, whereas there are other prison staff who view prison education as something negative (Hughes, 2012). The attitudes of the prison staff have an influence on whether prisoners attend education or not, they have the power to work with prisoners by encouraging them to participate or to discourage them (Kjelsberg et al., 2007). According to Atkins (2021) there is the belief by prison staff that prison education has no positive impact on the lives of prisoners and thus education is a waste of time. Furthermore, there are also negative attitudes by some of the prison staff towards prisoners who are studying on a higher learning course (Darke & Aresti, 2016). The opposing attitudes towards prison education from prison staff can have a negative impact on education staff which can result in them feeling demoralised because there is a lack of support for them from the wider prison establishment (Atkins, 2021).

The quality of teaching and learning has been criticised because the provisions of learning activities are insufficiently challenging and engaging to prisoners (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2019b). However, prison educators struggle to deliver a quality education service because the courses are roll-on, roll-off and they are often left without a stable body of learners in their classroom (Czerniawski, 2016). Furthermore, prison educators are unhappy about the lack of progression routes into senior roles, their working conditions, and their limited influence regarding the educational offerings in prison (Prison Learning Alliance, 2021). The lack of career development for prison educators has been highlighted along with unsafe working environment which has had a negative impact on the retention of qualified and experienced education staff which has reached a crisis point (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022). The current education model is not working and as a result, many qualified and experienced prison educators are leaving the profession. Thus, it is becoming difficult to recruit prison educators because of the poor pay and conditions of prison education when compared to other educational settings (Parker, 2021). Therefore,

many prison educators have stated that they feel like prison education is the *'Cinderella service'* (Page, 2009) and the forgotten education sector. Parker (2021) argues that prison educators, due to their pastoral role they have in prison, need appropriate emotional and well-being support, additionally they also need to have clear career progression routes to enable them to feel valued in their role. This has resulted in seven out of ten prison educators being set to leave prison education in the very near future (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022). There are hundreds of prison education vacancies because of problems in recruiting suitable educators, which has ended up costing more money due to agency staff having to fill these roles (The House of Commons Education Committee, 2022). Overall, because there are numerous barriers that prevent prisoners from accessing education (Lee et al., 2017), many prisoners are unable to take advantage of the educational provisions that are on offer.

2.8: Summary

Education in a prison environment is an important aspect of the rehabilitation process with a variety of positive qualities for prisoners. Prison education can help put prisoners on the path to employment when they are released, which can help with rehabilitation because employment has been highlighted as one outcome that reduces reoffending (MoJ, 2018). Prison education aims to give prisoners the skills they need to unlock their potential, gain employment, and become an asset to their communities (MoJ, 2019). There is evidence to suggest engaging with education can significantly reduce reoffending. For example, the one-year reoffending rate is 34 % for prisoners who engage with education, compared to 43 % for prisoners who do not engage in any form of learning (Prison Reform Trust, 2022). A rehabilitative environment aims to lower reoffending and offers support for prisoners but there are several aspects of a prison environment that have a direct impact on the effectiveness of rehabilitation procedures which need to be considered to enable the development of a truly rehabilitative environment.

At present, there is currently no information available that separates the prisoner population by offence and therefore it is difficult to identify any differences between the prison cohorts. Grouping the prisoner population together impedes identification of individual needs as there is an assumption that prisoners are the same and have the same needs. However, as previously mentioned prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence often face greater barriers when released in terms of employment and are often a cause for concern by society. Brown (2005) argues societal attitudes that surround prisoners incarcerated for a

sexual offence perceive them as undeserving of the opportunity to gain experience new skills and ultimately, they do not deserve a chance at a better life. Such a position is a significant barrier for this prison cohort that is shared by those inside and outside of prison. However, the adoption of the United Nations Rules (Nelson Mandela) in 2015, highlights that every prisoner has the right to education and should be a part of the regime for sentenced prisoners and be integrated with the educational system of their country (United Nations, 2015). Therefore, education should be available for all prisoners to engage with regardless of their conviction.

There is a lack of data about the impact of education and training in prisons and as such it is difficult to understand which types of programmes are most effective for prisoners and their longer-term outcomes (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022). This is exaggerated even further for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence because they have more restrictions but are not considered separately from prisoners convicted of non-sexual offences. Prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are not mentioned in the Government's recent prison reports such as the Government's Prison Strategy White Paper (2021) or the House of Commons Education Committee Education Committee Report (2022). Therefore, it appears that prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are not considered as needing different or additional educational provisions. However, they are treated differently when it comes to the notion of risk because they have additional programmes to complete inside prison and they have greater restrictions upon release.

The initial literature review proved to be incredibly challenging as there appeared to be a body of literature regarding prison education but there was no specific literature relating to education for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. Indeed, there was no prison education literature that differentiated between prisoners with different convictions. In addition, most of the literature regarding prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence is largely focused on intervention programmes and research-based within the psychology discipline. There seems to be no evidence of literature or research available regarding prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence and their educational needs which suggests a significant gap in the knowledge. This identified gap provides a rationale and basis for this research project, it seems clear this thesis will draw upon the disciplines of both education and psychology. This enables a deeper understanding of both prison education and prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence by bringing these two disciplines together. This thesis explores prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence and prison education to explore realistic expectations concerning their future.

Chapter 3: Methodological Review

This chapter considers the research methodology that was adopted for this programme of research. The chapter begins by discussing the philosophical perspective that offers an understanding of the knowledge that underpins this research. This is followed by offering a rationale for the methodological approach that this programme of research has taken. The methods of data collection are discussed with a focus on the motivation for the research methods that were used. As the programme of research consists of data collection from vulnerable adults in a prison environment, this chapter considers the consent, and confidentiality of the participants and discusses the ethical implications of conducting research within a prison environment. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the chosen method of analysis used in this research and an explanation of how the findings were obtained.

3.1.1: Epistemology

It is important to discuss the philosophical methods and perspectives to gain an understanding of the knowledge that underpins this research. When conducting research, the researcher needs to explain why they have made the decisions regarding the methodology (Holloway & Todres, 2003). Therefore, it is necessary to define the philosophical stance adopted for this programme of research. Epistemology is the way that the truth or reality is known and considers what counts as knowledge within the world and how the social world is understood in a way that something makes sense or is real (Scotland, 2012; Walliman, 2017). Ontology is the nature of reality in terms of the beliefs and the universal truths about reality. The qualitative aspect of this research focuses on the accounts of people, and their knowledge of a topic, giving a human meaning to this research. Thus, because this research relies on the participant's view and the meaning of prison education, a social constructivism approach has been adopted. Reality can be described as socially constructed, providing knowledge, and recognising that subjective meaning has a crucial role in social actions (Walliman, 2017). Therefore, the researcher's aim in this study was to interpret the meanings of other peoples' views and make sense of the world that they have socially constructed within the prison environment (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Social constructivism also highlights the creation of a person's identity and that an individual's identity is context dependant (Goffman, 1955). Thus, the reality in which a person lives, and their identity are socially constructed.

This thesis aimed to use a mixed methods approach and thus it was of importance to consider the philosophy underpinnings of both qualitative and quantitative methods in one study (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Although quantitative research tends to focus on a more determinist approach such as positivism because of the deterministic philosophy which focuses on the absolute outcome (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). However, the mixed methods approach has been criticised because of the research paradigm as Hammersley (1996, p. 2) stated "*qualitative and quantitative research paradigms are founded on incommensurable philosophical and/or political presuppositions*". Therefore, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods may be incompatible due to how reality is interpreted. To minimise epistemological division between the research methods Bryman (2012) argues that using one method type will generally be primary, but all research is enhanced by the inclusion of other research methods.

The justification for undertaking this research was to identify and analyse the educational achievements and experiences of those that are incarcerated for a sexual offence. Social constructivism focuses on the account of people, and their knowledge and understanding of their experiences to give a human significance to this research. The participant's reality is socially constructed and provides knowledge and meaning from their experiences.

3.1.2: Mixed methods

This thesis aimed to follow a mixed methods approach, consisting of both quantitative and qualitative data collection. Creswell (2003) suggests using a mixed method research design, because the combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection can give a deeper understanding of the research question. There are several benefits for adopting a mixed methods approach, as Westmarland (2011) stated, using a mixed methods in research gives a much more contextualised and better understanding, of the bigger picture. Using a mixed methods approach helped to answer the research question with sufficient depth (Enosh et al., 2015). The mixed method approach would have worked well for the research aims of this thesis as opposed to only using either quantitative or qualitative data collection. This is because it enabled the researcher to analyse quantitative data and identify what is being researched, alongside, qualitative data to give who is being researched a voice. Creswell (2015) suggests there are three basic designs for all mixed method studies: convergent, explanatory sequential, and exploratory sequential design. The design that was deemed appropriate for this thesis was the convergent design because it mixed the quantitative and qualitative designs together. The means that two sets of data were collected concurrently, and

the data sets were analysed independently of each other (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The convergent design was beneficial for the researcher because when combining quantitative and qualitative data, provided a complete picture as opposed to using one research method alone. Thus, combining the two data sets would help create an overall picture of the focus of the research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) and provide both breath and depth to this thesis (Dawadi et al., 2021).

The studies that contribute to this thesis aimed to use both quantitative and qualitative data collection because social realities can be better understood by using both methods (Creswell, 2003; Caruth, 2013). The combination of quantitative and qualitative data can help the researcher to gain a deep understanding of the research question more coherently using the mixed method approach (Driscoll et al., 2007). Furthermore, by using a mixed method approach, this can enhance the richness of the data (Collins et al., 2006) and the findings that emerged helped to generalise to the entire population (Enosh et al., 2015).

Initially this thesis aimed to collect data in numerical form regarding the demographics of the prisoner population. This was to establish the educational profile of the prisoner population of England and Wales, with a particular focus on prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. Quantitative research is concerned with collecting data, usually in numerical form which aims to increase the number of participants and thus the findings may be used to generalise a wider population (Dawadi, 2021). However, the collection of quantitative data was not possible for this thesis, therefore secondary data was collected and reviewed.

Three studies for this thesis adopted a qualitative approach to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of prisoners and prison staff. Qualitative data is concerned with the inductive analysis of social reality (Guest, et el., 2011) and aims to understand the lived experiences of a social phenomenon (Elliott et al., 1999). The findings from the qualitative data focused on exploring individual human experiences while understanding the factors influencing these experiences (Gelling, 2015). Using mixed methods, the researcher was able to analyse quantitative data to identify who is being researched, while working alongside qualitative data to give who is being researched a voice.

3.1.3: Positionality

To ensure the findings of this thesis were reliable and trustworthy, the researcher considered their position within the research data collection and analysis, triangulation, and the audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002). Positionality allows the researcher to examine and consider their own identity, perspectives, and biases to enable the research to be

high quality (Berger, 2015). As a researcher it is important to include a discussion on how past experiences has developed this research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Thus, there is the need to be transparent about past experience and knowledge to enable potential readers to consider possible researcher influence on participants and the research process (Hunt, 2011). Therefore, it is important to be impartial and recognise one's own biases to avoid any influence over the research, ensuring the researcher remain non-judgemental and transparent throughout. When conducting research, individuals have their own beliefs, values, and knowledge around the areas they wish to study (Benkharafa, 2013). This was true in this thesis as the researcher had previous experience of teaching prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence.

Conducting research in a prison environment can be challenging for any researcher. This thesis required research to take place in a prison environment which can be a place of fear due to perceived dangerousness (Liebling, 1999) and prisons can be emotionally charged places (Phillips & Earle, 2010). The prison environments of the research were places containing adult males and the researcher is a lone female thus the gender relationship between the researcher and participants can play a relevant role in the research (Claes et al., 2013). For example, some female researchers have reported harassment and discomfort whilst conducting research in prison (Adams, 2021; Sivakumar, 2021) with some researchers advising against a lone female conducting research in a prison environment (Martinez-Merino et al, 2023). The relationship power dynamics between the researcher and the participant needs to be considered with regards to *them* and *us* dichotomy (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015).

In view of this, working in a prison environment can give the researcher *insider* information making their positionality advantageous compared to someone considered an *outsider*. Insider research as defined by Naples (2003) suggests it is someone who studies their own social group or society and share characteristic such as cultural, biological, or occupational (Loxley & Seery, 2008). However, Merton (1972) argued that an insider researcher must be a member of a particular ethnic or social group and has an intimate knowledge of the community and its members. Thus, researcher should research within the population in which they are members (Kanuha, 2000). Therefore, to be a true insider the researcher would have to share similar characteristics such as being incarcerated and/or male as opposed to a female working in a prison environment. However, working in the same prison environment can help the researcher as they already have insider experience and knowledge and share an identity language, and experiential base with the study participants

(Asselin, 2003). Having prior experience of a prison environment can diminish the effects of culture shock and have a pre-existing knowledge of the context of the research (Bell, 2005). However, an insider positionality can cause a biased view of reality because of their previous experience whereas an outside positionality can objectively capture the participants experiences because they are unfamiliar with the group. As Simmel (1950) argues the researcher can be objective because they have no understanding or perceptions of the group, allowing the researcher to be a *stranger.* For this programme of study, the researcher was able to navigate the prison environment with ease and had knowledge of the subject of research which helped the researcher to feel comfortable during data collection. However, the researcher and participants were strangers allowing the interviews and focus groups to be conducted without any preconceived knowledge or expectations about each other.

Therefore, as a prison environment may be perceived a place of dangerousness for some, the researcher did not share the same perceptions and felt comfortable conducting research inside a prison. Although the researcher's identity as an ex-prison educator may be perceived by the reader to be somewhat biased regarding analysis of the findings, as Crewe (2012, P. 488) put "*my identity was irrelevant to the study, but because my identity was not what the study was about*". The researcher did have previous knowledge of the topic of research, but the research was about others' perceptions and thus minimised what the participants said. The researcher was aware not to insert their perceptions and subjective ways of knowing proving a neutral stance to mitigate potential bias (Pillow, 2010).

Researcher bias was something that the researcher considered to ensure this research was reliable and trustworthy, the data was collected and analysed as impartially as possible. Although researcher bias can be difficult to fully implement, the researcher ensured extensive notes were kept, minimising researcher biased. This research is explicit in the way the data has been collected to avoid any influence over the analysis and findings. The process of data collection, analysis and findings are thoroughly explained in this chapter and clearly. documented so that the research steps are transparent and can be retraced (Stenbacka, 2001).

To ensure this research was of high quality, the researcher has made sure that the data collection and analysis was trustworthy and reliable, meaning that if this research were to be replicated, the findings would be consistent with the findings in this thesis. Although the exact findings would not be achieved because the data collected was in narrative form and subjective. However, the research methods have been rigorous, meaning that if this research were to be repeated, the findings would be as near as possible identical (Drost, 2011). Thus, instead of obtaining the exact findings, it was important for the researcher to consider the

dependency and consistency of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To strengthen the validity of this research, there are multiple ways in which the researcher obtained the data to ensure that it was reliable and trustworthy. Triangulation in this thesis enabled the researcher to use several methods of data collection to answer the research question which enhances the confidence and reliability of the findings (Bryman, 2004). For example, using a mixed methods approach ensured a meaningful understanding of complex human experiences (Greene, 2007). Therefore, by collecting multiple types of information through several different sources, it improved the trustworthiness of this thesis to minimise researcher bias.

3.2: Secondary data

Secondary data collection was sourced for chapter four of this thesis. This chapter aimed to capture the data of every adult male incarcerated in a prison in England and Wales and examine their educational profile. This information enabled a comparison to be made between those who are incarcerated for a sexual offence and those incarcerated for a non-sexual offence.

Secondary data is information that has been made available for use by other people other than the original investigator (Pienta et al., 2011). Using secondary data in large numbers allows the researcher to focus on demographics and characteristics simultaneously, which can save valuable time. The secondary data for this chapter contained a large data set of demographical information from the prisoner population. Therefore, collecting secondary data is preferable because the researcher can analyse a large data set rather than waste time collecting data that already exists. The use of existing data can accelerate a research project because the process of collecting primary data is removed (Doolan & Froelicher, 2009). In addition, collecting secondary data can be extremely cost-effective because the data has already been collected (Smith, 2008).

The use of secondary data can be complicated because, by doing so, the researcher does not know how this data was collected or how accurately the data collection was conducted (Johnston, 2017). However, for this chapter the secondary data consists of data that has been collected by the government in the United Kingdom (UK) therefore this data is likely to be trustworthy and reliable. Secondary data can be beneficial for the collection of large data sets, not only does this save both time and money, but larger data sets are also more representative of the target population. Thus, the more representative the target population the greater the validity of the research and the findings can be more generalised to the population (Smith et al., 2011).

Initially, this data was intended to consist of secondary data from HMPPS. HMPPS National Research Committee was contacted with regards to sourcing the educational information from data that is collected by each prison. At the time of request, the researcher was informed that they do not collect information that differentiate between offence status. Thus, the request for this data was denied because collecting this data would have been too time-consuming and very costly for HMPPS due to the excessively large data set involved. As a result, the information that was used for this chapter was secondary data sourced from data available within the public domain.

3.2.1: Data collection

The aim for this chapter was to gather data to identify the prisoner profiles of incarcerated individuals in England and Wales. Prison population and educational data tends to be collected by the government, HMPPS, Ministry of Justice and other organisations that focus on prisoner education. The researcher contacted several establishments through email (see Appendix one) requesting information regarding prisoners' educational profiles before and after incarceration. However, there was no data available that identifies prisoners' education profiles because the data was not accumulated. Therefore, a library-based search was conducted for information regarding prisoners' education levels, age, employment status, and sentence length, along with any perceived differences in the prisoner population. Although this review is similar to the literature review that has been conducted, this review gathered only statistical data. The search criteria included the words, prison education, sex offenders, and prisoners' intelligence. The word prisoner was interchanged with inmates, offenders, and convicts because there are several different names associated with prisoners. This was because this is the way it was presented in the documents that were gathered and analysed. Similarly, the word sex offender is most used in the literature, in particularly because inclusive language is still in its infancy stage. The inclusion for this review consists of any statistical data regarding prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence and prison education that has been published since 2007 and is freely available in the public domain. The reason for inclusion of data since 2007 it is because that is the year the author began to work in a prison environment and observed the increases in prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence.

3.2.2: Data review

The findings from the secondary data have been reviewed The data that was been requested from key organisations has been described and illustrated through a table that is presented in chapter four. The statistics which have been identified have been descriptively reviewed. The collected data was similar to data in a literature review and for this analysis, a

comparison was made between the collected statistics. However, because there was very little available data, the findings are presented as a written report.

3.3: Qualitative Data

Three out of the four studies for this thesis consist of qualitative data which involves direct personal experience to gain an understanding of "*externally observable behaviour and internal state*" in context (Patton, 2014, p. 56). This section provides an in-depth explanation of how qualitative data was used to gain an understanding of prison education through the lived experiences of prisoners and prison staff. Studies two and three were conducted using semi-structured interviews with prisoners and study three comprised of three focus groups with prison staff.

3.3.1: Access to prison establishments

The first stage of qualitative data collection was to gain access to the prisoners and prison staff. Three prison establishments were selected for this thesis because they represent the three stages of an individual incarcerated for a sexual offence. The first prison was a category B local prison in the East Midlands that houses 1060 adult male prisoners. Inside this prison, there is a mixture of prisoners with varying offences and a separate section of the prison for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. Often when a prisoner receives a custodial sentence that is for a year or over, they will be dispersed to another prison. This prison is the first place where many start their custodial sentence as convicted prisoners and where many prisoners also start their journey of prison education. For this programme of study, this prison will be known as prison A.

The second prison for this programme of research was a category C treatment/intervention prison that holds 841 men convicted of sexual offences. This prison is also one of the largest prisons in Europe that houses prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. At this stage, collecting information regarding prison education shows the second stage in the life of a prisoner. This prison houses prisoners that have been convicted and may settle in this prison for a number of years and where they may need to participate in therapeutic interventions. For this thesis, this prison will be known as prison B.

The third prison has been chosen because it houses those who have been convicted of a sexual offence. This prison houses approximately 751 prisoners and it is a Category C training prison. This prison represents the final stage of a convicted prisoner, here is where prisoners may finish their custodial sentence and are ready to be released back into society. For this thesis, this prison will be known as prison C.

By gathering participants from several different prison establishments, it gives the author an extensive insight into the education provision of English prisons, since it includes three separate establishments. In addition, because the prison establishments are all different and have different educational offerings, the participants have varied experiences allowing for rich data collection.

3.3.2: Sample selection

Purposeful sampling was used in all three qualitative studies. Purposeful sampling is part of the non-probability groups where data is collected in in a process that does not give all the individuals in the general population an equal chance of being selected (Robson, 2011). However, it does give each person in the population that the researcher was studying an equal chance to participate. Purposeful sampling is also known as selective, or subjective sampling (Crossman, 2018) to take a sample of the population that is of interest to the researcher. Thus, not selecting a random sample of participants as shown in probability sampling techniques (e.g., random sampling) (Lund, 2012). The use of purposeful sampling when using qualitative data ensures that the selection of participants is identified as having rich information regarding the topic of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015). The idea behind purposeful sampling is that it can identify and select individuals that are especially knowledgeable or have lived experience with a topic that is of interest to the researcher (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Thus, the selection of individuals that are targeted in purposeful sampling are a part of the population where the individuals are proficient and well-informed with a topic that is of interest for research (Etikan, 2016).

The target audience was selected based on the participants having shared characteristics that are of interest to the researcher. The shared characteristics for this study were that all participants were in a prison environment that housed prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. The prisoner participants were selected because they were incarcerated for a sexual offence and the prison staff were selected because they work in a prison housing prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. Purposeful sampling gives the target audience an equal chance of being chosen at random (Robson, 2011) which was why this method of sampling was chosen. However, random sampling may not be completely random because the sample may come from only those participants that are available at the time and from those who volunteer (Creswell, 2015). Moreover, the participants must have the ability to communicate their experiences and perceptions in a coherent manner (Bernard, 2002). Thus, the sample is not entirely random, nevertheless, to provide a completely random sample for this thesis would be near impossible because the participants must give consent for these studies. To

give consent there must be an element of self-selection, and where sampling is concerned, self -selection and randomness are not entirely compatible (Seidman, 2015). Although it is important to gather participants from the target population, consideration is given to the availability and willingness from participants when the research was conducted. Therefore, purposeful sampling has been chosen for this thesis because the sample of the population that is used for this research consists of individuals who are considered experts in the topic that is being investigated (Tongco, 2007).

3.3.3: Semi-Structured interviews with prisoners

Study one (chapter five) and study two (chapter six) consists of semi-structured interviews with prisoners, the process of recruitment and the interview process were identical. Posters were used to recruit participants and were placed on the walls of residential wings in each prison (see Appendix five). The posters had an additional tear-off slip where participants could add their details and volunteer. Participation was voluntary and conferred no additional external benefits to the prisoners. The slips were delivered to the researcher through internal mail via the education department and the psychology department. The slips were collected and checked against NOMIS for any security issues regarding the prisoners. Following the gathering of the volunteer slips, appointments were arranged with a date and time for an interview. A dedicated room was booked beforehand where the prisoners could talk openly about their experiences. The interview date and time were written on the reverse of the volunteer slip and were delivered to the prisoners' cell through internal mail. The slips also included information on how to cancel or change the date of the interview.

There are several methods for capturing qualitative data such as questionnaires, and interviews. Interviews are a valuable research tool for exploring data and understanding opinions, attitudes, feelings, and what people have in common (Arksey & Knight, 1999). Interviews can generate useful data to answer a multitude of research questions and as Hugh-Jones (2010) pointed out, interviews are also compatible with different methods of analysis. Due to the nature of interviews, they can be very time-consuming both in terms of data collection and data analysis and thus cannot be used with a substantial number of participants (Jupp et al., 2003). However, interviews are an effective data collection method for conducting qualitative research, this is because interviews provide a detailed narrative of what the researcher is aiming to find. The optimum number suggested for interviews is 15 +/- 10 this has been found as the appropriate number of participants in interview research (Kvale, 1996; Lyons & Coyle, 2007). There was a total of forty-seven interviews conducted for the

two studies across the three prison establishments to coincide with the optimum number of participants for interview research.

Semi-structured interviews were used in this research because they allowed flexibility in how the questions were asked and conducting semi-structured interviews provided flexibility in the order they were asked (Jupp et al., 2003). Semi-structured interviews permitted the participant to address topics they considered to be important to them in the language they use, and semi-structured interviews allowed flexibility in participants' answers. Semi-structured interviews permitted the researcher to use probing questions and actively encourage the interviewee to respond in ways which they considered significant (Jupp et al., 2003). Conducting semi-structured interviews meant appreciating that the answers participants gave were telling the researcher something that was important to them and that this was consistent with their underlying reality and meaning-making process (Forrester, 2010). Furthermore, conducting semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to explore multiple viewpoints from the participant regarding their feelings, motives, meaning and attitudes (Jupp et al., 2003). The semi-structured interview schedule was developed to gain an understanding of the participants' opinions, thoughts, and any experience of prison education they may have (see Appendix six).

Before an interview had taken place, the researcher administered a pilot test of the interview schedule with a prisoner who had volunteered. This enabled the researcher to check the ease of use of the indicative interview schedule and to ensure the researcher had covered key issues of the research question. By piloting an interview, it enabled the researcher to ensure that enough time had been allocated for each interview and to monitor any fatigue from the participant. As a result of the pilot interview, the researcher did not make any changes to the interview schedule because all questions were understood and answered by the participant. The time given for each interview was one hour, this includes time spent at the beginning to go over the consent form, approximately 30-45 minutes for the interview and time left over at the end for a debrief. A one-hour interview window enabled some time to answer any questions or concerns from the participants during the interview. Forty-seven prisoners volunteered to take part in this research across the three prisons.

As discussed previously a prison environment can often be an overcrowded, hostile place (Hopkins & Farley, 2015) thus entering a prison as a researcher can have safety implications for the security of the prison. Safety issues were adhered to when entering the prison establishments, the rules were followed to ensure safety of both researcher and the participants. To ensure safety of the researcher, the interview rooms at each prison

establishments were close to a prison officers office. The interview rooms were equipped with an alarm that could be easily accessed by the researcher. When conducting the interviews at prison B, there were three participants who were flagged as someone who was not allowed to be in a room alone with a female. Therefore, because the interviews were conducted by a lone female researcher an additional member of staff was needed to sit in the interview to ensure safety. The role of the second person in the interview was just to observe and did not participate in the interview process. However, because there was a second person in the interview room, this may influence the rapport between the interviewer and participant (Schmid et al., 2024). Furthermore, the participants may not wish to disclose information or share their story because of an additional person in the interview which would also reduce the confidentiality of the interview. The participants who volunteered for this research have a story to tell and may appreciate the opportunity to tell their story to willing listeners (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007). The participants are aware prior to volunteering for this research that they are required to discuss their perceptions about prison education. Thus, having another person in the room should not affect or influence their story telling. There were only three interviews that required a second person to be present which they consented to, and they answered the questions that were asked of them.

3.3.4: Focus groups with prison staff

The researcher gathered qualitative data from prison staff in three separate focus groups (study three, chapter seven). Altogether fourteen prison staff volunteered for this research from the three different prison establishments, this consisted of one focus group with four prison staff and two focus groups each containing five prison staff. The prison staff comprised of a range of professionals who were working in a prison environment that house adult males incarcerated for a sexual offence (see 7.2.1). Exploring the narratives of prison staff who are deemed professionals or experts in their role further enhance this study (Henn et al., 2005). This provides a broad range of perspectives which adds value to this research project to gain a deep understanding of the research question.

A focus group can be described as "*an informal discussion among selected individuals about specific topics*" (Beck et al., 1986, p. 73). The focus group was used to bring together people who have pre-existing knowledge of prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence and would have something to say regarding prison education. To recruit participants for the focus group the researcher contacted the governor to allow a global email to be sent to prison staff inside each prison establishment. The email contained an information sheet (see Appendix seven) giving details of the study along with details of how to volunteer for a focus group.

The prison staff who volunteered for this study were contacted via email with a place, date, and time that the focus group would take place.

Focus groups are large-scale multiple interviews that are a useful way to obtain opinions and lots of data quickly (Jupp et al., 2003). The group dynamics of a focus group can make them a more enjoyable experience for the participant compared to that of an interview because they are more like an informal chat. On the other hand, participating in a focus group can make participants feel uneasy or embarrassed about speaking freely in front of others. For a participant to agree to take part in research it was important for them to feel positive about their participation (Gibson & Riley, 2010). Therefore, to keep the focus group motivated the researcher had questions that they were able to ask during the focus group. The researcher maintained the group to ensure the participants remained focused on the questions acting as moderator which helped to guide the group discussions to ensure the focus group did not get too loud or argumentative. The interactions between the participants helped to focus the discussion on topics that are important to them, this was to enable a shift in direction of the research to an interesting area that had not been thought of before (Gibson & Riley, 2010).

Forrester (2010) suggests that a focus group should ideally include between six and twelve participants and the focus group discussion should last between sixty and ninety minutes. However, other researchers have suggested the number of participants in a focus group is generally between six and eight (Krueger & Casey, 2000), although there has been conducted research with as little as four participants and some groups have been conducted with fifteen (O. Nyumba et al., 2018). The difference between these numbers can give the researcher a different result. For example, if the focus group contained a small number of participants, they may have limited experience with the research subject to enable a detailed discussion suggesting that more participants can give a richer analysis. However, a group that is too large could stifle the discussion as there may be some strong characters who dominate the group leaving some members feeling unable to voice their opinion. Also, large groups can prove difficult to manage. Considering the size for each focus group the researcher decided to recruit between four and eight participants as the optimum group size. Altogether fourteen prison staff volunteered for this research from the three different prison establishments, this consisted of one group of four and two groups of five. The focus group numbers were ideal as previously stated because the groups were small enough to share their thoughts and opinion but large enough to employ a range of diverse views. The focus groups were set at one hour long, to enable participants to contribute and give their opinions without enduring fatigue during the discussion. In addition, one hour was the optimum number for the prison staff

because the focus groups were conducted during a working day, and the participants needed to return to work.

The focus group schedule (see Appendix eight) was developed and structured enabling a focused insight into prisoner education. The focus group schedule was flexible, in the sense that the participants were free to discuss thoughts and opinions around the major questions. As a result, flexibility helped to focus the discussion on topics that were important to the participants, but the researcher ensured the conversations did not drift away from the intended topic. The researcher conducted the focus groups allowing flexibility but also keeping the focus group 'focused' on the research question.

3.3.5: Data analysis

There are several designs available to enable analysis of data that has been collected with each design carrying its own assumptions. When developing the studies to answer this programme of research, the researcher was keen to select the research methods most suited to the research aims. The thesis aim was to investigate the perceptions, and experiences of prison education for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. Thus, the interviews and focus groups data need to be analysed and interpreted to create a deep understanding of the research question. There are several methods suitable for analysing qualitative data that interprets a shared experience, there is thematic analysis which aims to collect information from individuals who have shared an experience and focuses on interpreting patterns of what the participants have in common (Creswell, 2007). Thematic analysis can be described as "*a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) with data. It minimally organises and describes the data set in (rich) detail"* (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Additionally, interpretative phenomenological analysis which involves analysing the meanings and experiences of the participants answers and interpreting them (Smith & Eatough, 2006).

Thematic analysis worked well for this study as it allowed the researcher to identify themes and patterns from both the interviews, and the focus groups. Rubin and Rubin (1995) claim that thematic analysis is an exciting way that a researcher can discover themes that are embedded in discussions. When analysing data, it is important for the researcher to become part of the analysis by making judgments about initial coding and then theming (Starks & Trindade, 2007). Thematic analysis has been widely used in qualitative research, but Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest thematic analysis has been poorly branded and rarely appreciated like other models of data analysis. There have been claims that thematic analysis is not actually a separate method of analysis, but it is more of a useful tool to assist researchers in

analysis (Holloway & Todres, 2003). King (2004) states that thematic analysis is an extremely useful analytic method that is useful for summarising key information found in large data sets because it can help the researcher to use a structured method for data management, thus helping produce a clear and organised final report. The advantage of using thematic analysis is that it provides the researcher with a flexible research tool that can provide complex rich data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and the findings can be communicated without any major difficulty to the public. The researcher used an inductive approach which allowed codes to emerge from data that was not identified in the literature rather than rigid ideas or theory (ten Bensel & Sample, 2017). The researcher identified that a thematic approach to data analysis would be used in this programme of research because the research aimed to gather a rich detailed analysis. It was felt that a thematic approach would be most fitting for this programme of research.

3.3.6: Identifying themes

Thematic analysis is a flexible method that allows the researcher to determine the themes in the research. A theme as defined by DeSantis and Ugarriza (2000, p. 362) is *"A theme is an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent experience and its variant manifestations. As such a theme captures and unifies the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole."* Once a theme had been captured, the researcher builds a valid argument by referring to the literature. Thematic analysis is a highly flexible approach and can be used with all qualitative data that produces patterns and meanings across different datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By using thematic analysis this enabled the researcher to focus on the patterns of meaning in the data. Thematic analysis is not tied to any level of interpretation and is not embedded in any framework allowing the researcher to capture the voices of the participants and concentrate on what they are saying as meaning. The questions in the interviews and focus group schedule were designed to induce narrative from the participants as the emphasis is on what they were saying rather than how they said it. Braun & Clark (2006) suggest the final analysis should create an overall story about what the different themes reveal about the topic. Collection of data in qualitative research often result in large volumes of information being gathered (Bryman & Tee van, 2005). This data from this thesis produced over forty-five hours of audio data from the interviews and focus group recordings and approximately six hundred pages of transcriptions. The data collection for the qualitative studies were coded to allow the researcher to develop a criterion for a theme on specific characteristics that can be seen in the data. Boyatzis (1998) suggests that a good code captures the qualitative richness of the topic.

The themes for the qualitative chapters were developed by using the six-stage steps of reflective thematic analysis process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022). The first step involved the researcher becoming familiar with the data by reading and totally immerging themselves with the data. The researcher began with listening to the audio recordings several times along with reading the transcripts repeatedly to completely absorb the data. Notes were taken during this step around ideas and insights that appeared from the data that seemed important to the participants. The next step involved the coding process which comprised of a systematic process where specific statements are analysed and categorised into themes (Creswell, 2015). The researcher analysed the codes that initially emerged from the data and began to put the codes into categories. The researcher read the transcripts several times and identified potential codes and these were highlighted in different coloured pens each time a transcript was read (see Appendix nine). Initial notes were made on the transcript enabling potential codes to be captured. The themes were generated during the next step. A theme is stated as a meaningful and coherent pattern in the data that is relevant to the question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Quotes that made up the codes were written on post it notes and the researcher identified common themes from the coded post it notes (see Appendix ten). The codes were clustered together to capture a specific meaning from the participants that captured the research question. Step four involved reflecting on the themes to see if they *worked* or whether the same themes may be merged or discarded. Once the researcher had identified the codes to potential themes, these were analysed to ensure that the codes were meaningful to the themes. The coded post it notes were analysed further to ensure common themes were identified across the participants' transcripts, as traditionally used within qualitative research (see Appendix eleven). Themes were reviewed for accuracy to ensure that they made sense and were relevant to the research question. This next part of the analysis consisted of the researcher writing a detailed analysis of each theme. The researcher complied short summaries of each theme explaining the fundamental meaning of each theme (Clarke et al., 2015). Once the themes were identified the researcher began writing an evaluation of each theme to ensure that they accurately answered the research question. Informative names were given which were representative of the findings and this helped to identify the essence of each theme. Finally, the analytic narratives and data extracts were weaved together to create a story that was coherent to the data whilst also contextualising this with the existing literature. Care was taken when writing up the themes to ensure that the participants narratives were accurately portrayed to what they said and their lived experiences.

Once the six-stage steps had been completed the researcher went over the steps again to ensure that the themes that were written, captured the participants narratives. The researcher checked the accuracy of the themes and ensured that the quotes used in the findings section perfectly represented the themes. The findings are captured in the following chapters in this thesis with a table of themes incorporated in each chapter.

3.3.7: Ethical considerations

Before the commencement of the empirical studies, ethical approval (ref- 2018-268) (see Appendix two) was gained from His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service National Research Committee (NRC). Initially, an application was submitted to the NRC requesting access to three prisons, along with details of the intended research. The NRC agreed with the confines of this research and granted permission in 2018. In addition, an ethics application was submitted to Nottingham Trent University College Research Ethics Committee, who also approved the research. The researcher gained access to each prison establishment by providing the approval form NRC to the governors. The studies in this programme of research followed the guidelines outlined by the British Psychological Society (2009). There was a need for a thorough ethical evaluation because the research involved interviewing individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence who are deemed vulnerable.

Access to each prison was established by gaining written consent from the governor at each prison, this was established through the researcher emailing the governor. Upon gaining access to each prison the researcher conducted key and security training to ensure safety was a priority for both the prisoner and the researcher. Once access was established, research commenced in June 2019, starting with prison A, followed by prison B and then prison C. The research at each prison establishment was completed before moving on to the next. The researcher spent two months at prison A and three months at prison B and C. The research for the prisoner participants concluded in February 2020.

3.3.8: Informed consent

Informed consent was sought from all participants before they were able to take part in the research (British Psychological Society, 2009). All participants were asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix three and four) before the commencement of this research. This was of particular importance for the prisoner participants due to their vulnerability which may be cause for concern in their capacity to consent (Iacono, 2006). Prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are deemed as vulnerable prisoners, thus, it was important to protect them from harm during this research. As a precaution, the information sheets were read to all participants before any formal discussions had taken place along with an explanation of the

study before starting an interview or focus group. To enable the researcher to be sure that the participant had fully understood what they were consenting to, the researcher asked the participant to repeat back their understanding of what they were consenting to. This was to enable the participants to be fully aware of what was going to happen and to give them information regarding the study should they have any questions.

3.3.9: Confidentiality, anonymity, and data security

Confidentiality, anonymity, and data storage are really important when conducting research to ensure that participants details are kept private and are not identifiable. For this thesis, the guidelines outlined by the British Psychological Society (2009) were followed. During the data collection, the researcher explained the procedure to the participant and gave them assurance that their discussions would remain confidential. The reassurance of anonymity enabled the participants to feel confident during data collection enabling participants to discuss topics and provide detailed information which enhanced this research (Cowburn, 2005). However, because of the confidentiality and anonymity during this research, there could have been some participants who felt like they could confide in the researcher and share or disclose information that may incriminate themselves or someone else. As a result, the researcher could not give true confidentiality as the participant could have disclosed information. For example, if a participant had stated they had intention to hurt themselves or someone else, the researcher would need to pass this information on to others therefore, this information would not be confidential. The participants were informed before commencement of the research should they divulge information where there may be a risk of harm or a security issue, this information would be passed onto the relevant authorities. Cowburn (2005, p. 23) stated this as '*unguarded disclosures'* which may be in semi-structured interviews where the rapport built between participant and researcher may temporarily hinder the participant's defensiveness. Scully (1990, p. 23) argues that "*protection of the endangered person takes precedence over the rights of the informant"*. Therefore, it was important for the researcher to ensure the participant were aware of the boundaries between themselves and the researcher and for the researcher to assure the participants about confidentiality both before and during the interviews.

Before each prisoner interview, the researcher gave each prisoner participant a consent form (see Appendix three) which stated the expectation and focus of the study and outlined any confidentiality issues. In addition, the researcher discussed the consent form with the prisoner participants to allow for further understanding. The focus groups contained prison staff (n=14) who work with prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. The prison staff are

professionals people working with prisoners (see chapter 7) thus, they posed less chance of disclosure of a crime or intention of harm. However, the researcher ensured strict confidential guidelines were followed when directing the focus groups. Before each focus group started, the researcher asked the prison staff to read and sign a consent form (see Appendix four) which explained what was discussed in the focus group would remain confidential. However, if one of the prison staff did happen to disclose something that may indicate a potential risk of harm to themselves or someone else within the prison, this would be passed on to the relevant authorities. All participants were asked not to mention the names of themselves, staff, or prisoners during the discussion. However, any identifiable features that were discussed during data collection, the researcher removed these during the transcription stage; pseudonyms were used when necessary.

The researcher was mindful of the importance of confidentiality, anonymity, and data security of the qualitative data and importantly the research participants. The interviews and focus groups were recorded using a dictating machine which was also used for transcription and analysis purposes. The researcher gained permission from each prison governor to allow the use of a dictating machine in each establishment. The dictating machine was password protected and encrypted to ensure that only the researcher had access to the recordings. The dictating machine was kept in a secure and undisclosed location at the researchers' University of study. Following the interviews and focus groups, the data on the dictating machine was transferred to a computer and kept in a secure computer in a password-protected folder. The dictating machine's memory was then wiped. The transcribing of the interviews and focus groups was conducted in a private room using headphones to ensure no one else could hear. This was explained to the participants before they gave consent to take part in the research. Only the researcher and the supervision team had access to the transcripts of the recorded data that were kept in a locked draw at the researcher's university. During transcription, all identifiable features were removed, and pseudonyms were used to identify participants. Individual participants are not named in any report and the researcher followed HM Prison Service guidelines regarding the storage and usage of data. After completion of the studies, the research data was kept no longer than necessary as explained in [Art.5 (1) (e)] of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). After completion of this thesis the data was destroyed

3.4: Summary

This methodology chapter has described the way the research for this thesis was conducted to ensure transparency. Each step of data collection and analysis has been accurately documented to ensure the findings are reliable and trustworthy. The mixed methods research design was discussed along with the researcher's positionality, along with a discussion around the trustworthiness of the research. The procedure of data collection for the four empirical studies was explained along with the analytical methods of data collection for the different studies. The chapter ends with an analysis surrounding the ethical considerations for the three studies with a discussion regarding the consideration given to the research participants. The four chapters that follows this methodological review consists of a discussion and analysis of the secondary data collection and three empirical studies that was conducted for this thesis.

Chapter 4: Secondary Data Review

Prisoner education profile: A review of the published data on the educational profile of the prisoner population of England and Wales.

Prisoners are repeatedly represented in official statistics as having levels of education that are below the national school leavers age of sixteen years old. Thus, education in a prison environment tends to target these prisoners and provides qualifications that allow them to achieve a national standard of education of a sixteen-year-old. However, there is a considerable number of prisoners who have higher levels of education than the national school leaver age qualifications, particularly individuals who are incarcerated for a sexual offence. This review captured secondary data that provides information regarding the educational profile of prisoners to examine any differences in education levels between prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence and prisoners incarcerated for a non-sexual offence. During the data collection for this chapter, the researcher discovered there were no available data in the public domain that separates the levels of prison education by offence type. The data that was available represents the prisoner population in England and Wales as a whole and thus, a significant gap in data has been identified.

4.1: Introduction

The aim of this review was to collect secondary data to enable a comparison between adult males incarcerated for a sexual offence and adult males incarcerated for a non-sexual offence. This enabled an evaluation in identifying any differences between the two prison cohorts. This chapter aimed to collect secondary data which was based on two questions-

1. What is the highest level of education before incarceration for men incarcerated for a sexual offence compared to men incarcerated for a non-sexual offence?

2. What is the highest level of education when leaving prison for men incarcerated for a sexual offence compared to men incarcerated for a non-sexual offence?

The answers to the two questions were to enable a comparison of the education levels of prisoners. The data collection aimed to provide rich evidence to state whether prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence have higher levels of education compared to prisoners incarcerated for a non-sexual offence, before and after incarceration. As this thesis suggests

that prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence do have higher levels of education before incarceration which means that they require higher level qualifications once in prison.

In addition to the educational data collection, demographic information was needed to compare the prisoner cohorts. This enabled an analysis to identify if other variables are influential to prisoners' levels of education. The prisoner demographic includes the age of the prisoner, their employment status when initially incarcerated and the length of custodial sentence. The reason this data were collected and reviewed was to gain an insight into profiles of prisoners to gain evidence of any differences in prisoners based on their offence. The data collection underpins this thesis in comparing prisoners based on their offence to gain an understanding if there are any recorded differences.

The collected data initially intended to be analysed by describing and summarising the data using text and tables (Urden, 2016). However, due to unforeseen circumstances the data collection was not possible, this is clarified during this chapter.

4.2: Method

The aim for this research chapter was to gather data consisting of prisoner's education levels and demographical information and compare this information based on offence type. This was to identify differences (if any) in prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence and prisoners incarcerated for a non-sexual offence. Information regarding the prison population and educational data tends to be collected by a variety of agencies such as HMPPS and Ministry of Justice amongst other organisations. The first step in this chapter was to gather secondary data that is needed to provide an answer to the thesis question.

4.2.1: Requesting data

Organisations that collect prisoner educational records were contacted by email requesting key information on the prisoner population regarding the educational profile, age, employment status and custodial sentence length. An email (see Appendix one) was sent to a variety of organisations requesting key information of adult male prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence and adult male prisoners incarcerated for a non-sexual offence. The organisations that were chosen actively gather prisoners' data or have published research, statistics, or evidence regarding prison education. The organisations that were contacted include prison establishments that house prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence, HMPPS, The Howard League for penal reform, Unlock, Prisoners Education Trust, Ministry of Justice, and the Open University. The information in Table 2 highlights the

organisations that were contacted along with the response and outcome to the information request.

Table 2: Organisation Information request table

Organisation	Response	Outcome
Prison establishments The prison establishments selected were those that specifically stated on the government website they house individuals that were incarcerated for a sexual offence. If there was no reference, then these prisons were not selected. There were eleven HM prisons that fit this description.	• Three prisons did not reply. • Five prisons responded. • Four out of the five prisons did not collect the data requested. • One prison did collect data.	There was only one prison who responded with data. The prison establishment emailed a single document that contained the educational achievements of prisoners who had participated in education during the past year. The prison population of that prison was approximately four hundred prisoners, but the data only contains the prisoners that had attended and passed at least one education course. The data did not contain any information regarding prisoners who did not engage with education. There was no other data regarding the age, employment, or custodial sentence length of any prisoner.
HMPPS – NRC His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) is responsible for running prisons and probation services across England and Wales To conduct research in prison establishments, researchers are required to formally apply for research approval to the HMPPS **National Research Committee** (NRC)	HMPPS do gather the information that was requested however the data that HMPPS collected was for all prisoners. Therefore, to extract the requested data, the data would need to be sieved through as it is not readily available. The request for this data was denied.	HMPPS/NRC did respond to explain why they would not action the request for prisoner information: • Too much data to go through. • Retrieving the data would be time-consuming, • Retrieving the data would be too expensive.
The Howard League for Penal Reform This is a national charity working to achieve less crime, safer communities, and fewer people in prison.	The Howard League for Penal Reform does not collect the data requested.	No available data.

Unlock Unlock is a charitable organisation which was founded by a group of former prisoners. Unlock aims to help those with criminal convictions offering support and help to move on in their lives	Unlock does not collect the data that was requested.	No available data
Prisoner education Trust (PET) The Prisoner Education Trust is a charitable trust in the UK that provides support for learning and education for prisoners. The Prisoner Education Trust provides grants for prisoners to study distance learning courses while incarcerated.	The data requested is not collected by the Prisoner Education Trust.	No available data.
Ministry of Justice, Freedom of Information An email was sent requesting freedom of information	A reply was received which stated that they do gather this data, but they would not be able to access this data because the cost is too high.	• The data was not easily accessible which would require a significant amount of time for their staff. • The cost to source this information would be too expensive.
Open University - Students in Secure Environments An email was sent requesting key information regarding the educational achievements of prisoners in England and Wales	Information was received from here; they sent a spreadsheet which shows all prisoners in the year 2017-18 who are currently participating in higher education.	• The information identifies the educational achievements of the prisoner population as a whole and does not distinguish between prisoners based on their offence. • The data could be used to identify how many prisoners were taking higher level courses at different establishments. • Using this data would miss out a lot of prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence because the information is based on the prison and not the offence. • Only contains the data of prisoners who attend higher education courses.

The prison establishment that did reply to the request explained that the education department do collect data regarding the educational achievements of prisoners who attend education but do not collect information from prisoners who do not engage with education. This information would be insufficient to help answer the thesis question because the data sample would contain a limited amount of prisoner's information. In addition, because the prisons establishments that were contacted contain prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence only, any information that were collected would only contain this prisoner cohort. Thus, a comparison of prisoners based on their offence would not be possible.

The Open University explained they do collect the educational achievements of prisoners who are or have actively engage with a higher learning course. However, they do not collect data regarding a prisoner's offence. Although it would be possible to compare data between different prison establishments, for example, compare key information from prisons that only house prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence and those prisons that house people incarcerated for a non-sexual offence. However, this data does not consider prison establishments that have a mixed prisoner cohort. Furthermore, the data contains only the information of prisoners that have engaged with higher learning and does not contain data from the prisoners that do not engage in higher learning. Therefore, this data cannot be used because it is not a true representative of prisoner's information that this thesis aims to capture.

The government departments that were contacted HMPPS/NRC and FOI (freedom of information) replied stating they do collect the data that was requested. However, in their reply they explained that the data they collect captures the entire prisoner population as a whole. Therefore, the data is not separated by offence type, making it impossible to use this information. As a result, the request for data was denied because it would be too time consuming and costly to separate the data based on offence.

The aim for this chapter was to gather data consisting of prisoner's education levels and demographical information and compare this information based on offence type but this has not been possible. However, there is information regarding prisoner's education levels and demographical information that is available in the public domain. Therefore, the next step were to search data that is freely available to the public.

4.3: Available data

The key area under investigation for this chapter (four) is to identify the differences (if any) between prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence and prisoners incarcerated for a non-

sexual offence. A library-based search was conducted for information regarding prisoners' education levels, age, employment status, and sentence length, along with any perceived differences in the prisoner population.

4.3.1: Education levels

Reports regarding the levels of literacy for prisoners have identified them as having disproportionately lower levels than the general population. A report by the Prisoner Learning Alliance (2000) state prisoners literacy levels are four times lower than the general population. Moreover, 62 % of those entering prison have been assessed as having the reading skills expected of an 11-year-old, compared to 15 % of the general population (Prison Reform Trust, 2022). Therefore, there is evidence that identifies the literacy levels amongst the prisoner population remain significantly lower than the general population and this has remained unchanged for several years. As prisoners having low levels of education that are equivalent to the levels of an 11-year-old have remained relatively stable for the past 20 years (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). The results from the education induction highlight that prisoner's initial assessment results were at entry levels between 1- 3, with 68 % in Mathematics and 65 % in English (MoJ, 2023e). Furthermore, 47 % of prisoners are reported as having no qualifications, compared to just 15 % of the general population having no qualifications (Prison Reform Trust, 2022). These statistics highlight how prisoners are disproportionate in having lower levels of education and less qualifications compared to the general population. However, there is no indication regarding the offence that prisoners have been incarcerated for, thus there is no prison education data that provides evidence of any differences in the prison cohorts.

4.3.2: Prisoner IQ

The prisoner's intelligence were researched to understand any differences in the prisoner cohorts. IQ tests are a way to measure the intellectual functioning of people, the general population's IQ scores generally fall between 80 and 120 (Wechsler, 2008). The definition by the American Psychiatric Association (2013) identifies someone who has an intellectual disability has been suggested to have an IQ of below 70. However, research into the IQ (intellectual disability) of prisoners in England and Wales tends to be scarce (Ali & Galloway, 2016) and methodologically is quite poor (Murphy et al., 2017). Statistics from the prison Reform Trust (2013) have identified 25% of the adult prisoner population in England and Wales have an IQ between 70-79. Yet, in contrast, Mottram (2007) suggest 7 % of prisoners have an IQ of less than 70 and a further 25 % have an IQ of less than 80. However, Herrington (2009) implies that prisoners with an IQ between 70 and 80 are over-represented

(11 % of the population) within the prison service, whereas other research has found that 30 % of prisoners had an IQ below 80 (Hayes et al., 2007), which is a larger portion of the prisoner population. Moreover, a study was conducted across thirty different prison sites, and it was found that the mean IQ was 95.75 (Hocken et al., 2015). Therefore, there are discrepancies between the different studies in identifying the IQ of prisoners. This makes it difficult to consider prisoners IQs as a reliable source of evidence. In addition, the discussed data does not distinguish between the prisoner cohorts which is needed for this study.

4.3.3: Prisoner age

The age of prisoners is an important consideration when comparing the educational profiles of prisoners as this data can identify potential relationships between age and offence. Furthermore, the age of prisoners who actively engage with education is important because this can have an influence on the educational courses that are provided in prison. There is evidence from the MoJ (2022c) highlighting the rapidly aging prisoner population which has grown over three and a half times over the past 20 years. Moreover, the prison population for individuals that are aged 50 years and over is approximately 13,985, equating to 17 % of the prisoner population (MoJ, 2022c). The changes in the prisoners age can have an impact on the education provisions because different age groups may have diverse needs. In addition to the aging population, 43 % of the prisoners who are over 50 years old are incarcerated for a sexual offence (House of Lords, 2022). Therefore, these statistics highlight the relationship of the aging prisoner population with regards to providing an educational provision that is appropriate for the current prisoner population.

4.3.4 Prisoner employment status

The gathering of the employment status of prisoners before they were incarcerated is important to gain an understanding of prisoners' backgrounds. A report into the employment status of prisoners before incarceration highlights that only 37 % of prisoners stated they were in paid employment four weeks prior to incarceration and 11 % of prisoners stated they have never been in full-time employment (Burton-Smith & Hopkins, 2014). Several small-scale studies that have examined individuals' employment status before incarceration, discovered that individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence generally have a higher level of employment than individuals who are incarcerated for a violent or general offence (Aslan & Edelmann, 2014; Brown et al., 2007; Tovey et al., 2022).

Prison education tends to be focused on employment routes following incarceration because evidence suggests gaining employment after release reduces the risk of reoffending (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2021). Although having regular work does have a major

factor in reducing reoffending (Prison Reform Trust, 2022), formerly incarcerated individuals find it extremely difficult to find employment upon release. However, more recent data demonstrates that post-release prisoners in employment have risen by 4.4 % to 17.4 % within six weeks of leaving prison which rises to 26 % of prisoner who are in employment after six months (MoJ, 2023f). Nevertheless, these statistics focus on the prisoner population as a whole and do not consider the additional barriers to employment for prisoners formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence. Once an individual receives a conviction for a sexual offence their chances of gaining employment post-release are significantly reduced (Visher et al., 2011). Thus, it is important to understand the employment background of prisoners to ensure that the educational provision in prisons provide adequate qualifications for employment for individuals' post-release.

4.3.5: Prisoner sentence length

The length of a custodial sentence that prisoners have is important to gain an understanding of their educational needs as this may depend on how much time individuals have remaining to serve in prison. The custodial sentence length is an important consideration for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence because custodial sentences are increasing, and new sentencing powers mean there is a possibility of a life custodial sentence (Crown Prosecution Service, 2023). The current educational offer is focussed on prisoners with shorter custodial sentences (Taylor, 2014) who do not have enough time to complete lengthy courses. In the year 2022/23 the average custodial sentence for a person incarcerated for a sexual offence was 66.2 months, and the average custodial sentence length for all offences was 20.3 months (MoJ, 2023g). The average sentence does indicate that prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence do have longer sentences than other prisoners. Therefore, the length of a prisoner's custodial sentence has a considerable influence on their potential engagement with education.

4.4: Summary

The collected data identified various characteristics of the prisoner population. Data that is available in the public domain identified significantly more prisoners do have a lower IQ (Hocken et al., 2015) and tend to have lower educational achievements (Prison Reform Trust, 2022) when compared to the general population. However, in contrast, the data highlights that there are a considerable number of prisoners who do not share these characteristics and have elevated levels of educational achievements. Additionally, the evidence presented emphasises the difficulties individuals who were formerly incarcerated face when seeking

employment, which is amplified for those who are incarcerated for a sexual offence. There is evidence that highlights there is an aging prison population and prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are sentenced for longer compared to prisoners convicted of a non-sexual offence.

The findings demonstrate that there are several differences in prisoners based on their charge/conviction such as sentence length, age, and employment, although there is no distinction with regards to education levels or achievements. Although there is data available regarding the prisoner population, it rarely distinguishes between offence type. Thus, for this thesis, the available data cannot be used. It would be interesting to separate the data based on the type of offence of the prisoners to note any differences or similarities when compared. However, at the time of writing this is not possible. To collect data based on offence type may be beneficial to the prison establishments because they would be able to direct resources towards the prisoners that stand to benefit the most. This would help to provide a more tailored package of help and support for the prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence as they have additional barriers and may find it more difficult to find employment upon release.

This chapter has drawn attention to a current gap in the availability of data regarding the prisoner population. The data that is available in the public domain represents the prisoner population as a whole and does not take into consideration any differences in the offence type of prisoners. This thesis aimed to investigate prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence and prison education to explore realistic expectations concerning their future. As evidenced in this chapter, there is no data that is available in the public domain to identify the educational profile of prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. Subsequently because no evidence has been captured through secondary data, the next step is to collect data from qualitative primary data. Therefore, the next chapter (five) gathers the thoughts and perceptions of prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence who do not participate in prison education.

Chapter 5: Study one

'There is nothing for me': a qualitative analysis of the views towards prison education of adult men incarcerated for a sexual offence who do not participate in prison education.

Research has highlighted prisoners who attend prison education programs have lower recidivism rates and increased employment opportunities upon release (Abeling-Judge, 2019). Although there are advantages of engaging with education, there are many prisoners that do not engaging with education. This current study (two) examined the perceptions and lived experiences of prisoners (n=24) who do not engage with prison education. This qualitative study interviewed adult males who are serving a custodial sentence for a sexual offence in England and Wales. The data was analysed thematically with two key themes emerging from the rich dataset: (i) *Second class education,* highlighting the limitations of prison education and lack of quality provisions; (ii) *We are sex offenders*, explored non-engagement with prison education due to the '*sex offender'* label. The findings highlight how current prison education provision need to focus on a programme of study relevant to an individual.

5.1: Introduction

Chapter four has highlighted a current gap in research because the available data represents the prisoner population as a whole and does not take into consideration any differences in prisoners, for example, offence type. It should be important for the education provision in prison to take account of the diversity of the prisoner population and thus seek an educational offer that meets the needs of everyone. This thesis aimed to consider prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence and prison education to explore realistic expectations concerning their future. As evidenced in chapter four, there is no quantitative data available in the public domain to identify the educational profile of individuals who are incarcerated for a sexual offence. Subsequently because no evidence has been captured at a national level, it is important to investigate if evidence can be captured at an individual level. Thus, it is imperative to capture rich data from individuals that have experienced incarceration for a sexual offence and their perceptions of prison education.

Having a good education can enable individuals to gain employment upon release and desist from crime, which is beneficial for the individual and society (Atkins, 2021). In addition, engaging with prison education provides mental health benefits to those in isolated conditions while improving their behaviour in prison; as such education has value in

developing the person as a whole (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022). Despite the positive implications of engaging with prison education, there has been a decline in prisoners engaging with education at Level 2 or above. For example, in the year 2017/18, there were 31,700 prisoners participating in a Level 2 course which was a decrease of 18 % compared to 2010/11 (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022). More recent figures highlight Level 2 qualifications have declined by 39 % (MoJ, 2023d). Reasons for the decline in prisoners engaging with higher level learning could be that the education provisions have been highlighted as being in a poor state (Ofsted, 2020), or possibly the qualifications on offer, such as Mathematics and English are not recognised by employers of higher education provisions (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022), or perhaps the prison education curriculum tends to focus on low level qualification, this results in Level 2 or higher qualifications are not widely available (Prison Learning Alliance, 2021). Although there has been a decrease in engagement with higher level learning, in the year 2022/23 there has been an 28 % increase in prisoners participating in education courses compared to the previous year (MoJ, 2023). Thus, it is important to gain an understanding of prison education from the perceptions of individuals who do not participate in education to gain an understanding of the reason. This chapter illustrates the first qualitative empirical study for this thesis and focused on understanding why prisoners incarcerated for sexual offences do not participate in prison education. The study in this chapter examined prisoners' perceptions regarding why they do not engage with education.

5.2: Method

5.2.1: Participants

The participants of this study comprised of twenty-four male adults who were incarcerated following a charge or conviction for a sexual offence. All participants were housed in three different English prisons in the Midlands with eight participants from each prison establishment. The criteria to enable a prisoner to participate in this study were that they were not currently engaged with prison education and were incarcerated for a sexual offence. Although the criteria states that they must not be participating in education, some of the participants may have engaged with education previously in their current custodial sentence or in a previous custodial sentence. Once a participant volunteered, they were checked on the prison system (NOMIS) by the researcher to ensure they matched the criteria for participation.

The participants' data is captured in table 3 below:

Table 3: Chapter 5: Study one: Participant information table

Participant identifier	Age	Highest qualification (to date)	Previous Employment	Length of custodial sentence	Time in prison (To date)	Number of previous custodial sentences	Current activity in prison
P 1	42	A Level	Air con fitter	12 months	several weeks	6	Workshop
P 2	24	Level 1	Roofer	Remand	6 months	4	Workshop
P 3	21	GCSE C	Electrical	Remand	3 months	0	Workshop
P 4	31	Level 2	Labourer	20 weeks	10 weeks	23	Workshop
P 5	26	Level 1	Scrapyard worker	10 years	2 1/2 years	11	Workshop
P 6	58	A Level	Librarian	10 years +	2 weeks	few times	Workshop
P 7	39	Level 2	Building work	Remand	3 weeks	4	Workshop
P 8	26	Level 1	None	5 months	5 months	0	Workshop
P 9	28	Level 2	None	28 months	11 months	16	Workshop
P 10	31	Level 2	None	5 1/2 years	8 months	11	Programmes
P 11	40	Level 4	Repair person	19 years	3 years	0	Mentor
P 12	65	GCSE	Truck driver	2 1/2 years	1 year 2 months	0	Nothing
P 13	35	A Level	Self-employed	4 years 2 months	3 1/2 years	0	Programmes
P 14	30	Level 1	Fencing erecter	5 years	2 1/2 years	2	Cleaner
P 15	62	Level 2	Digger driver	Life	14 years	3	Cleaner
P 16	32	Level 1	Tattoo artist	7 1/2 years	2 years	3	Nothing
P 17	31	Level 3	Chef	7 years	3 1/2 years	1	Programmes
P 18	54	O Level	Professional Better	IPP	41/2 years	1	Programmes
P 19	23	A Level	Self-employed	3 years	6 months	0	Workshop
P 20	55	Level 1	Manager	42 months	12 months	0	Workshop
P 21	68	Level 1	Muffin baker	3 1/2 years	12 months	0	Retired
P 22	22	Level 2	Charity shop worker	2 years	9 months	5	Workshop
P 23	52	Masters	First aid trainer	5 years	2 years	1	Cleaner
P 24	46	Level 3	Engineer	5 1/2 years	1 year 9 months	0	Cleaner

The mean age of the participants in this study was 39 years old (SD: 14.44), which is comparable to the current prison population in England and Wales with 32 % being in the age bracket 20-39. The levels of education for the participants consisted of (n=7) 29 % at Level 1, GCSE/O Level (n=3) 12.5 %, Level 2 (n=6) 25 %, and Level 3 or above (n=8) 33 %. There are over half (58 %) of the participants in this study were Level 2 or above in their educational achievements. There were 8 % (n=2) of the participants had been unemployed before incarceration and 92 % (n=22) were in paid employment before entering prison. The custodial sentence length of the participants ranges from 20 weeks to 99 years. For 37.5 % (n=9) of the participants, this was their first time incarcerated, 37.5 % (n=9) had been to prison between one and five times previously, 12.5 % (n=3) of the prisoners had been incarcerated between six and ten times before, and 12.5 % (n=3) participants have been in prison over 11 times previously.

5.2.2: Procedure

Before the commencement of this study, ethical approval was gained. Posters asking for volunteers for this study were placed on the walls of residential wings in each prison. The posters had an additional tear-off slip where participants could add their details to volunteer. An appointment was made with each person who volunteered to take part in the research in a dedicated room where the prisoners could talk openly about their experience. Semi-structured interviews were conducted on a face-to-face basis. The mean length of time for the interviews was 46 minutes (SD: 16.45); interviews were recorded on a password-protected dictating machine and transcribed verbatim. Participants' names were anonymised, and pseudonyms were used (see chapter three for more information).

5.2.3: Analysis

The focus of the analysis for this study was determined by the participants narratives. The transcripts of the interviews were analysed thematically, and the themes were identified through a rigorous process. Extracts from the participants' narratives were grouped together where the themes emerged to create theme headings. Once the final themes had been reviewed and agreed by the researcher, extracts were chosen which accurately illustrated each theme and the researcher built a valid argument by referring to the literature, with the final analysis creating an overall story (Braun & Clark, 2006).

5.3: Findings

The interpretative process identified two main themes *Poor quality education* and *We are sex offenders,* presented in table 4 below.

Table 4: Chapter 5: Study one: Superordinate and Subordinate Themes

Superordinate Themes	Subordinate Themes
1: Poor Quality Education	1.1 Nothing to Offer.
	1.2 Lack of Progression
	1.3 Not the Same Quality Education
2: We Are Sex Offenders	2.1 Stuck with a Label.
	2.2 No One Will Employ Me

5.3.1: Superordinate Theme 1: Poor Quality Education

The first theme emerged as the participants discussed their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of prison education. The central part of this theme is focused on how the participants perceptions were that prison education could not help them. There were shared concerns over the quality of education because participants perceived the educational offer was not as good as the educational provision found in the community. The participants described how the education courses on offer inside the prison did not provide the knowledge and qualifications they wanted or needed. In addition, participants perceived the education provisions had nothing to offer because of the limited choice of courses available. Furthermore, the participants described a lack of progressional opportunities and barriers to accessing higher levels of education.

5.3.1.1: Subordinate Theme 1: Nothing to Offer.

The participants perceived that the qualifications offered in prison education were basic. They explained how the education courses and qualifications that were offered in prison were of a low-level, as highlighted in the extract below:

Extract 1

'[education] can offer you functional skills Level 2 in English which is basically similar level to GCSE, the only difference is the GCSE seems to have a lot more study which means that at best you are at the same level as a 16-year-old school leaver in the knowledge and their qualifications have a lot more weight than yours…..There's just such a limited choice and if you're slightly more academic there's pretty much

nothing for you and that's always disappointing, so you've got a lot of people who are reasonably smart who are just stagnating in prison because there is nothing for them' (P 13: lines 208 - 209)

The participants highlight how the levels of education offered in prisons were basic and unchallenging, with the levels being compared to those of a 16-year-old. Therefore, prisoners are not necessarily getting the appropriate levels of education because of the largely low levels offered in prison. Several participants highlighted how the qualifications obtained in prison were less complex when compared to qualifications available in outside colleges, for example, GCSEs (GCSEs are examinations undertaken by school leavers in England) and therefore they were seen as irrelevant. It can be argued that the qualifications gained in prison are not comparable to GCSE level, consequently they are insufficient to make prisoners an attractive employment prospect (Warr, 2016). The Annual Report from the HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2015) argued the range of learning opportunities for prisoners was not always accredited at a high enough level, with many providing only a Level 1 qualification.

Extract 2

'I don't know how to word it but anybody with a little bit of intelligence I think you're a bit stuck, even just a GCSE, if you've got GCSEs in anything then I think you're pretty much stuck, you can't really get any further, not while you're in here' (P 11: lines 151 - 153)

Extract 3

'I've now got level 4 maths and level 3 English, so it makes me overqualified for a lot of the things in here erm again I've got ICT A level I've got 2 sports A levels so they've kind of gone ok you're fine' (P 19: lines 153 – 155).

For participants who had achieved the levels of education offered through standard prison education, there was extraordinarily little education, if anything for participants to engage with. The extracts above highlight how once a prisoner has anything higher than a Level 2 qualification or equivalent, the choice of participating with education is removed. This is because the prisoners are perceived as overqualified reducing their progression to learning. As Champion (2017) argues prison education courses are limited accreditations, that are often delivered at a low level with very few opportunities for progression. Due to the limited choice

of education courses, there seems to be little offering for participants which left them feeling disappointed and overlooked as exemplified below:

Extract 4

'I've done everything really that there is the education system can throw at me, I've done everything else, if I find out that's there's something else, I can do maybe that will help my chances out there then I'll go for it' (P1: lines 191 - 194)

Once a prisoner had successfully passed a course there is little opportunity for engagement, leaving them with nothing educationally for them to do. As the participants' narratives confirm, educational courses in prison are extremely limited in what they offer which results in many unable to participate. However,

5.3.1.2: Subordinate Theme 2: Lack of Progression

The second subordinate theme emerged as several participants discussed how they would have liked to study a higher-level course whilst they were in prison. Indeed, a study of prisons in England and Wales reports that a fifth of prisoners would have preferred to study at a higher level (Coates, 2016). However, participants who tried to access a higher-level course through distance learning realised they were not easy to access, leaving them feeling frustrated. When the participants applied to start a distance learning course, there were many obstacles in their way as exemplified in the following extract:

Extract 5

'The only way that you can do a Level 3 course here is to apply to do an OU [Open University] distance learning but it's a case of getting the funding etc which takes forever and a day I've known people apply for funding and they have waited and waited and waited an awful long time' (P 23: lines 63 - 65)

This extract highlights the difficulties that many participants face when applying for distance learning courses. Therefore, the application stage can be difficult to navigate and takes a long time to obtain funding and therefore, prisoners lose their motivation. Several of the participants emphasised the long waiting time and slow progress of their application when applying for distance learning courses. To enable participants to participate in a distance learning course, funding is a requirement. Prisoners have the same access to funding as other

students, and this has been in place since 2012 when higher education tuition fees were introduced in England (McFarlane, 2019). The funding process that is highlighted in the extract above emphasises in the difficulties and barriers in accessing higher learning courses. If a prisoner requests to study on a higher learning course, they need to take out a student loan. However, to apply for a student loan, prisoners must be within six years of their release date, pay for the course themselves or get financial help from the Prisoner Education Trust (Flynn & Higdon, 2022). There has been a call for the six-year rule for funding to be abolished to enable more prisoners the opportunity to engage with higher learning courses, however to date, this has not been recognised (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022). To enable participants to participate in a distance learning course, funding is a requirement, this too appeared to be a waiting game, as one participant stated:

Extract 6

> *'It's very difficult to access PET (Prisoners Education Trust) in some prisons – I said twice I have had to ask for forms…I didn't hear back from PET so I can only assume that the forms weren't processed' (P 13: lines 764 - 766)*

There were concerns surrounding application forms that should have been processed but these seemed to have been lost in the system, which resulted in participants being unable to access distance learning courses. Demand for higher education courses to be provided in prison is thought to be around 30 % (McFarlane, 2019). However, applications for funding in 2014-15 were approximately 14 % of the UK prisoner population (Clark, 2016). Such low application rates could be attributed to the difficulties upon application and the lack of communication when applying for a distance learning course. Consequently, many participants felt disillusioned by the application process and was a cause of concern as stated by the participants:

Extract 7

> *'I've enrolled with Open college [university]; I have signed up for it, but I haven't received anything for it yet…I applied for funding, but it took them 8 months to even post it back' (P 11: lines 126 - 128)*

Extract 8

> *'I have thought about Open University courses but not many people will tell you about it. At prison B I asked about 6 or 7 times, people about Open University, They*

said *"I'll get back to you"* but they never do, I find it very difficult to get onto the courses and I'll tell you another thing, prisoner education trust has shut down, well you can't get the grant anymore' (P 6: lines 121 - 124)

In addition, the participants explained how they were often not informed of the progress of their application. Thus, this left them waiting for a response. After the participants had applied for a course, they did not know if their application had been accepted because there would be an extremely long wait for a response. The waiting period could be a consequence of how the prison education is establish because it is not explicitly set up for distance learning courses (Taylor, 2014). Furthermore, the participants stressed how there was no help available when applying for distance learning courses in prison, further exacerbating the challenges of communication during the application process. Those participants who did manage to sign up for distance learning were frustrated at the waiting period as one participant explained:

Extract 9

> *'I signed up in the first week for distance learning and I'm still waiting. So, nothing really happens quickly' (P 19: line 157)*

Through the participants narratives, distance learning courses were not easily accessible. There appeared to be little information regarding the application process, from enrolling on the courses, to not being updated on their application. Although education in the prison environment does allow prisoners to gain skills and qualifications, the educational courses provided do not always offer the skills and qualifications that the prisoners want or need.

5.3.1.3: Subordinate Theme 3: Not the Same Quality Education

The participants were concerned about the quality of education that was on offer in prison, both in terms of the quality of available courses and the quality of the education staff. Several participants expressed concerns regarding the quality of education they received in prison because their perception of education was that it was not the same standard as they would receive on the outside, as one participant stated:

Extract 10

'The lack of choice is the biggest disadvantage…I know that we will never ever be in a position where we will have a syllabus which is 50 or 60 different subjects to choose from, but I think the compromise is that there needs to be more on offer. I think they do have to accept that if you do prison education its never going to be the same quality as you get on the outside, you have to accept that it might not be to the quality as the outside' (P 13: lines 501 - 505)

This extract highlights how the education provided in prison was perceived as being low quality compared to education in the community by the participants. This sentiment has been echoed by the HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2019b) who criticised the quality of teaching and learning in a prison environment. This was because the learning activities and provisions available in prison are insufficiently challenging or engaging to prisoners. The participants accept that there are differences in educational provision but found the lack of courses quite surprising and extremely disappointing. The education provisions in prison do not mirror the education provisions outside of the prison walls. Although the Council of Europe (1990) have implied that prison education should *"resemble adult education outside prison"* (p. 3), the educational provisions in prison do not resemble the outside educational offer. Therefore, because the educational offer in prison was perceived as inferior by the participants, they explained they were at a disadvantage because they do not get the same quality of provisions. In addition, the education courses were often short and were delivered over a brief period as highlighted by one participant:

Extract 11

'They cut the courses too short and tried to cram everything in, they cut it by two or three weeks, and you wasn't learning enough and a lot of us were failing…so they extended it to six weeks' (P 20: lines 138 - 140)

As participants reflected on their previous experience of education courses in prison, they stated how the courses were not long enough to learn. This may be due to the limitations of the current educational offer consisting of short, low-level courses that is suited to prisoners with short sentences (Taylor, 2014). Because the courses were noticeably short, this did not give the participants time to learn what they need to pass their assessment and therefore, they failed. The need to pass assessment quickly is representative of a payment by results culture.

In addition, there were also issues around teaching staff as participants did not think that they were qualified to teach as stated below:

Extract 12

   'The maths teacher is the former motor mechanics teacher, so these aren't necessarily the people that had gone into teach maths or study, you've got a science teacher teaching business, so I think that's part of the problem you've got in prisons is that I don't think the same standards are always there' (P 13: lines 586 - 591)

The extract above highlights how the education staff in prisons may deliver courses in which they are not specialised in. The participants perceived prison education had lower standards compared to education in other settings. Wilkinson (2017) suggests there is a lack of subject-specific qualifications, resulting in prison educators' qualifications that do not match the qualifications of educators in mainstream education. In addition, a UK-wide review of prison educators in 2009 identified many educators working in prisons lacked appropriate knowledge and understanding of the skills and practices required to work in the challenging environment (Centre for Social Justice, 2009). Additionally, there was a common perception amongst the participants that education was just a way for the prison to make money. They did not believe that education really cared about educating them and prison education was seen as a business as opposed to an educational establishment. The participants voiced their concerns regarding education courses that were delivered to gain passes as opposed to actually learning any knowledge, as exemplified in the extract below:

Extract 13

   'I think it's more about ticking boxes, to be honest, a lot, it's very rare that you'll get a fail, they seem to guide the learners and almost give them answers if you like if they're struggling they seem to give certain individuals the answers, I've seen that quite a few times and it seems to be cos they get paid for results sort of thing...I would imagine they don't want them to fail because they don't get paid for it' (P 11: lines 139 - 144)

Several participants perceive education to be about them making money rather than about education, giving prisoners a pass result, even if they were not at the required standard. Indeed, Rogers *et al.,* (2014) stated nearly two thirds (62%) of prison educators criticised

prison contracts because the funding is dependent on results. Undeniably, education courses do rely on participants passing the course because of gaining payment through results, with several participants referring to education as being about ticking boxes and not about providing a quality service to the prisoner. However, because the prison education budget has remained stable for the last five years (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022), this has led to a lack of available funding for education provisions. Therefore, as the prisoner population continues to grow and the education budget remains limited, this can be a challenge for education providers (Collins, 2023). Thus, leading to a tick box culture and payment by qualifications becomes the most practical solution (Champion, 2013). Therefore, passing courses resulted in prisoners gaining copious amounts of certificates, which transformed into a joke, as exemplified below:

Extract 14

' A lot of people do get these certificates, they aren't worth anything, they are not going to get me anything but in many cases right they are just bits of paper, I mean you heard the jokes before about prison education departments about being certificate factories because there's so many of these short courses that prisoners can come into prison for a short time and leave with a wad of certificates and they are all Level 1s in this and Level 2 in that which ultimately aren't going to get them very much' (P 13: lines 257 - 262)

The certificates gained in prison education were perceived by the participants as worthless and were not taken seriously by the participants. Indeed, as Warr (2016) argues the danger of gaining certificates in prison can set prisoners up to fail because they will realise, beyond the prison walls, those basic certificates are meaningless. This sentiment is why the participants stated there is no value to the certificates because there are so many of them given out, making them just bits of paper. As a result, the participants perceive the education provision in prisons are not comparable to education courses outside of prison, therefore deeming education in prison to add no additional value to them upon release.

5.3.2: Superordinate Theme 2: We Are Sex Offenders.

The second superordinate theme *We are sex offenders* transpired as the participants discussed how they felt discriminated against because of their conviction. As a result, many participants believed there was no point in participating in prison education because it could not help

them when released. The participants believed because they have been incarcerated for a sexual offence, the label as a *sex offender* now became their identity and, as such, they believed they would not be accepted back into society when released.

5.3.2.1: Subordinate Theme 1: Stuck with a Label.

The first subordinate theme highlights how participants viewed themselves with a new identity as they discussed how they were now *sex offenders*, several of the participants viewed their current *sex offender* status as negative, as one participant explained:

Extract 15

> *'[prisoners] who in their heads who probably have lost all opportunities to do these things because there's this kind of mentality that once you're convicted of a sexual offence, that you're written off' (P 13: lines 738 - 740)*

The participants had given up on themselves because of their *sex offender* label, this mindset was shared by several of the participants. Indeed, the stigma and discrimination that prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence face can be argued to be a social curse, which has a negative impact on a person's well-being because they now belong to an excluded group (Kellezi *et al.,* 2019). Therefore, the status of a person convicted of a sexual offence consumes any other identity the person may have (Harding, 2003). Therefore, it appears being labelled a *sex offender* has negative repercussions for the participants. In the participants' minds they perceive themselves as being stuck with a label, and this label becomes their identity as exemplified below:

Extract 16

> *'You never get rid of the title, you are stuck with it for the rest of your life because when I walk out of them gates and I am a free man it doesn't matter cos I'm still a sex offender, whereas when a murderer walks out them gates he's a free man cos he's done his time, we've done time but were still punished for it, once you have come to prison like this, you are labelled and you are stuck with that label for the rest of your life and there nothing that you can do about it' (P 24: lines 294 - 299)*

The participants were aware of how their incarceration for a sexual offence is perceived differently when compared to other prisoners incarcerated for a non-sexual offence. Due to

their incarceration for a sexual offence, the participants believe they are labelled for life whereas if they were incarcerated for a different offence, such as murder, they would not be labelled in the same way. As Saunders (2019) argues, individuals who have convictions for other serious crimes such as murder or violence are often considered sympathetically and given more support for successful resettlement in the community. Whereas for those incarcerated for a sexual offence, the label *sex offender* becomes their master status and thus, this label stays with them forever (Goffman, 1963). Therefore, they are continually punished for their crime and the participants feel they are stuck with a label for life, along with the negative connotations associated with this label as stated in the following extract:

Extract 17

> *'There's a lot of people who have the mindset that well it won't do me any good especially in this prison being a sex offender…they've[prisoners] got the mindset that it doesn't matter what I do because I'm a sex offender and they are automatically labelled' (P 23: lines 147 - 150)*

Because of the *sex offender* label, the participants lose hope of becoming anything other than a person formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence and thus, they will never become a welcomed member of society. There has been some discussion regarding the impact that the term *sex offender* has on a person's well-being and self-worth (Willis, 2018). It appears that once the participants take on board this label, they take on a different mindset. The *sex offender* label defines them and the participants accept this label as their reality.

Extract 18

> *'You've got some really good people in here and really gifted people who in their heads who probably have lost all opportunities to do these things because there's this kind of mentality that once you're convicted of a particular, of a sexual offence that going to, that your written off' (P 13: lines 737 - 740)*

The implications of accepting the *sex offender* label have a negative effect on the prisoner's identity. Many participants have accepted defeat in the sense they believe they may never be given the same opportunities as others who are incarcerated for a non-sexual offence. Consequently, a person incarcerated for a sexual offence face an additional challenge when they are released from prison in re-establishing any sort of positive identity within

society (Manza et al., 2004). The participants seem like they have given up hope because they feel they have lost their rights because of their offence status as exemplified in the following extract:

Extract 19

'No matter what you're still a person at the end of the day, you've still got rights but not many but some rights you know' (P 21: lines 269 - 270)

Individuals who are incarcerated for a sexual offence are perceived by society to be less eligible than others (Pratt, 1998). The *less eligibility principle* argues that prison conditions should be worse than the poorest people not living in a prison environment to enable a deterrence effect (De Vos, 2023). However, the participants want society to know there is a person behind their offence status. Consequently, the participants believe no one cares about them because they are continually judged on their offence. Individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence are portrayed in the media negatively, with demeaning words like beast and predator which imply that the individual is dangerous (Sample & Bray, 2006). Unsurprisingly people incarcerated for a sexual offence are typically depicted as a homogeneous group throughout reporting by the media (Sample & Bray, 2006). Hence, participants question the point of trying to become a member of society when they are not allowed to become anything other than someone formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence.

Extract 20

'As much as I don't want to be sat in a room with 15 people around and they are taking about their stories with a shrink in the middle, err it would help, just get it all of your chest, realise what you've done and realise you are only human' (P 3: lines 267- 270)

The human aspect of the person is lost with participants believing they are not forgiven by society for making a mistake. Prisoners convicted of a sexual offence are human beings who make mistakes, but it seems some mistakes are unforgivable by society. However, not all mistakes are perceived as redeemable, for example by victims of a sexual crime. Although the recidivism for this prisoner cohort is relatively low, there are some individuals who continue to reoffend when released. Additionally, the media continues to sensationalise stories which further exploit society's fear of sexual offences (Rothwell et al., 2021).

Therefore, the fear in society leads to stigma and labelling of individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence and thus, they are perceived to be no longer human (Goffman, 1963). Therefore, the label of *sex offender* has a significant impact on a prisoner's position in society (Ievins & Crewe, 2015) which results in society perceiving these prisoners as undeserving of reintegration into society (Laws & Ward, 2011). The label *sex offender* becomes their identity with many practitioners, colleagues, academics, and policy makers continue to label and define people by possibly the worst thing they have ever done (Saunders, 2019). Consequently, the participants feel it may be detrimental to be released back into society and find it easier to stay in prison rather than risk reintegration back into society, which is exemplified in the extract below:

Extract 21

'There's more in here, less struggles plus they are safe and not being called a sex offender in the community… People get out and they are scared, it's a big thing, *it's a tainted stain' (P 18: lines 644 - 648)*

The participants perceive that it may be detrimental to be released back into society and find it easier to stay in prison rather than risk reintegration back into society, which is exemplified in the extract above. Participants consider being incarcerated a safe option due to perceptions of being labelled a *sex offender* by society. Being with others who have been charged with similar offences makes them feel safe as they can be themselves without judgement from others. Laws and Ward (2010) argue that prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence are often denied the basic needs to live decent lives. Thus, it is quite understandable why prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence feel scared of being released back into society and being identified as someone who has been incarcerated for a sexual offence. As a result, the fear of being exposed as a *sex offender* stopped them from participating in education.

5.3.2.2: Subordinate Theme 2: No One Will Employ Me
The participants believe they would be disadvantaged when they were released regarding job opportunities because of their incarceration for a sexual offence.

Extract 22

'When you get out and are a sex offender and try and get a job, it's going to be hard as fuck…so, when you get out and you apply for a job and it comes up sex offender, they're not going to give you a job' (P 14: lines 166 - 168)

Prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence acknowledge that gaining employment upon release will be hard if not impossible because of their offence status. Research has highlighted how some employers would not consider hiring prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence at all, regardless of the circumstance or type of offence (Brown et al., 2007). During discussions, the participants were worried about applying for employment because they would have to disclose their offence to their employers. A general criminal record can be a barrier to employment (MoJ, 2018), but the label *sex offender* can add intensity to the stigma experienced (Brown et al., 2007). In disclosing they have been formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence, it seemed to be the preconceived notion from the participants, employers would not be willing to employ them or give them a chance, as stated in the extracts below:

Extract 23

'I am now labelled a sex offender and certain jobs for me in the community aren't realistic to get probation to monitor or this and that, do you know what im saying you're not allowed in peoples houses to paint and decorate, you're not allowed to' (P 17: line 426 - 427)

Extract 24

'There's a lot of business out there that will look and go you're a sex offender, we don't want you' (P 19: line 426)

It is acknowledged by the participants that having been incarcerated for a sexual offence is going to reduce the chances of them becoming employed. There is also the added worry because they will have a limited choice in where they can become employed upon release. The perception was that most employers would not be willing to employ prisoners because they were formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence. Indeed, research suggests individuals formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence do experience more barriers in gaining employment than formerly incarcerated prisoners with a non-sexual offence (Brown et al., 2007). The participants perceive because they are labelled *sex offender*, they are not wanted by employers which can make it exceedingly difficult to find suitable employment, therefore, expressed difficulty in making plans as they are unsure of the options available to them.

Employment for a formerly incarcerated person has been to be found invaluable in the re-entry process but there appear to be numerous barriers to securing employment due to their prisoner status (Visher et al., 2011). It was widely accepted amongst the participants that it will be extremely challenging for them upon release because they have the addition of licence conditions as stated in the following extracts:

Extract 25

> *'With my conditions, it will be very hard for me to get a job and 99 % of people in this prison because of what it is, if you make one of these my licence conditions, you're going to make me unemployable' (P 24: line 242)*

Extract 26

> *'I think my big worry is applying to a university and I disclose to say I've been convicted of an offence, of a sex offence because that's why I'm here at prison B erm there is always the risk of them going ooh because of the daily mail, the sun stigma (P 13: lines 645 - 647)*

Being formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence carries numerous restrictions which are placed upon individuals when they are released which will affect more than just employment. Having to register as a *sex offender* creates additional challenges for formerly incarcerated individuals such as access to housing and social support (Levenson et al., 2016). In addition, licence conditions can identify prisoners formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence as being dangerous and risky regardless of their risk level (Digard, 2014). The additional restrictions and systematic barriers can limit their opportunities, and this can be challenging for successful integration back into society (Levenson & Harris, 2023). The participants worry about other applications when released, such as university, because they may reveal they have been incarcerated for a sexual offence. Furthermore, the participants had a genuine fear of being exposed as someone with a conviction for a sexual offence, leaving them feeling hopeless, and feeling like they would be discriminated against because of their conviction, as exemplified in the extracts below:

Extract 27

> *'You've got three people all with the same qualifications and skills and two haven't got a criminal record and 1 have, who is going to be the first of the list who's not getting the job?' (P 24: lines 257 - 258)*

It can be argued that in a strained employment market, there is no guarantee of employment. However, the risk of being unemployed after release was amplified because not only had the participants served time in prison, but they also have received a conviction for a sexual offence. As such, there was an overall perception amongst the participants that the chance of them becoming employed was zero. Essentially the participants were unemployable, and they had given up hope on their future and for this reason, they did not participate in education courses.

5.4: Summary

There seemed to be barriers for participating in prison education because of two main reasons. First, the participants did not believe prison education would be of benefit for them because the qualification levels that are offered in prison were too low for them to be of any significant value when released. Second because the participants have a conviction of a sexual offence there appeared to be no motivation for them to participate in prison education. This was because the participants seemed to have lost hope of becoming a *normal* person as they accepted the label of *sex offender* along with the negative connotations that comes with the label.

Through the prisoner narratives, it is evident that they perceive their educational needs are not being met. Whilst the government encourages prison education and implies that it should be at the heart of the prison system (Coates, 2016) the reality is, the educational offering available is aimed at prisoners who have truly little education. It appears low levels of education are associated with compulsory education, and the qualifications that are gained in prison were not useful outside of the prison gate, therefore, were worthless and was seen almost as a joke. However, it was not through choice that the participants did not engage with prison education but rather it was the lack of educational options. As a result, this left prisoners unable to participate in education, leaving them stuck and feeling disappointed with prison education. In addition, those prisoners who already had established educational profiles had extraordinarily little opportunity to participate in prison education. Although there is progression available in the form of distance learning, there seemed to be a lack of knowledge from the participants regarding how they can access these courses. The education courses on offer were acknowledged as being short and more of a tick box exercise of getting bums on seats rather than providing a quality education experience. This led the participants to question the quality of education. This resulted in participants perceiving that prison

education was not the same quality as the education they would receive if they were at an education provider outside of the prison gate.

The participants highlighted the difficulties in becoming employed in the current competitive employment market because of the need for qualifications that are higher than those currently being offered in prison. This was because the qualifications offered in prison did not meet the specifications of the employment market. In addition, participants identified significant barriers to employment because of their offence status. Evidence does suggest that prisoners formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence have difficulty in obtaining employment upon release (Visher et al., 2011; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2009). However, employment has been recognised as a positive route to enable prisoners to turn their backs on crime (Atkins, 2021) and prison education should focus on employability (MoJ, 2018). In addition, if one of the educational outcomes is for employment, positive action is required to change the way employers view ex-prisoners especially those formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence. However, in terms of employment, several organisations in England and Wales positively employ ex-prisoners, the same positive inclusion does not apply to ex-prisoners with a conviction for a sexual offence. Furthermore, there was a fear amongst the participants' regarding somebody finding out about their conviction which would result in no one willing to employ them. The stigma of being labelled a *sex offender* is well known, and the participants have lost hope in their future because once an individual has been identified as someone that has been incarcerated for a sexual offence this renders them unemployable.

The findings from this research chapter could be relevant to other prisoners incarcerated for a non-sexual offence. The poor-quality education is relevant to all prisoners, however individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence have additional barriers because of their offence status. The stigma and labelling of individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence has a significant impact on the prisoners' lives. The stigma attributes to the spoiled identity making the participants perceived themselves to be abnormal (Goffman, 1963). Thus, education is important for this prisoner cohort because of the specific kind of stigma they face when released back into society. As the participants discussed, the stigma of their offence is preventing them from engaging with education because they perceived there was no benefit because of the label of *sex offender*. However, prison education has the potential to be transformative for prisoners, this can lead to a new identity as opposed to their *sex offender* identity and promote desistance from crime (Maruna et al., 2004; Turner et al., 2019). Thus, engagement with education is important for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence to enable a change from the *sex offender* identity. Therefore, due to this prison cohort having

extremely challenging barriers in finding employment and having a stigmatised identity compared to other prisoner cohorts, it is vitally important to have an education programme that is tailored to the needs of this prisoner cohort.

This chapter (five) discussed the views, thoughts, and perceptions of prison education from the perspective of prisoners who do not actively engage with prison education. The prisoners' narratives are important because of their lived experience of the prison environment and their understanding of prison education. However, it is also important to gain a balanced view of the thoughts and perceptions of prisoners who actively engage with prison education because their narratives enable the researcher to form a complete picture of prison education from different perspectives. Therefore, the following chapter (six) of this thesis examined the lived experiences of prison education from the viewpoint of prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence who are currently engaging with prison education.

Chapter 6: Study two

'Like you're bettering yourself, aren't you?' Understanding the motivations of prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence who participate in prison education.

Engaging with education has the potential to provide prisoners with qualifications for employment and to develop personal growth which have been identified as crucial for long term desistance from crime (Terry & Cardwell, 2015). In addition, prison education can be seen as a potential break from the prison culture, a space where prisoners can interact with others as learner as opposed to prisoner (Szifris *et al*., 2018). This current study (two) examined the perceptions and lived experiences of prisoners (n=23) who were actively engaging with prison education at the time of recruitment. This qualitative study interviewed adult males who are incarcerated for a sexual offence in England and Wales. The data was analysed thematically with two key themes emerging from the rich dataset: (i) *Education environment,* highlighting the positive aspects of engaging with education and discussed education as a safe place; (ii) *Mediocre education*, which explored the educational provisions which were perceived as basic and unchallenging by the participants in this study. The findings from this study highlight how prison education was perceived as a positive activity to participate in whilst in prison, but the participants thought educational offerings were not of the same quality as the educational offerings on the outside.

6.1: Introduction

Chapter five highlighted several reasons why some prisoners do not engage in prison education. To fully consider the perceptions of prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence and prison education, it is key to consider both sides of the prisoner population (i.e., prisoners who engage with education and those that do not). This thesis aimed to consider prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence and prison education to explore realistic expectations concerning their future. Chapter five has provided evidence which highlights why there are some prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence do not engage with prison education. However, this only captures one side of the debate because there is a large number of prisoners who do engage with education. In the year ending March 2023, 63,744 prisoners had participated in an educational course, this was a 28 % increase from the previous year (MoJ, 2023). Although the figures show the increase in prisoners' engagement with education, this figure is still much lower than the peak of prisoner engagement of more than

100,000 in the year 2014-15 (PRT, 2024). Therefore, it is imperative that the perceptions from prisoners who do engage with education are captured to give a clear and balanced portrayal of all prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence regarding prison education.

Prison education can mean different things to different people and there are several reasons why prisoners actively engage with prison education. For example, it can help prisoners cope with their custodial sentence and limit the damages of prison life because education gave them something to do which takes their minds off them being incarcerated (Behan, 2014). Whereas education can be seen as an opportunity to give prisoners skills and qualifications that can help put them on the path to employment which helps with their rehabilitation (MoJ, 2018). Prison education can equip prisoners with the skills they need to unlock their potential, gain employment, and become an asset to their communities (MoJ, 2019) and help them to lead good lives (MacMurray, 1958). Furthermore, the Prison Reform Trust (2022) has highlighted how engaging with prison education reduces the recidivism rates of prisoners. Therefore, engaging in education whilst incarcerated is a constructive step for prisoners and has many positive benefits. This chapter's empirical study focuses solely on prisoners who do engage with prison education to investigate their perceptions of why they are actively engaging with prison education.

6.2: Method

6.2.1: Participants

The prisoner participants of this study comprised of twenty-three male adults who were, at that time, incarcerated following a charge or conviction for a sexual offence. All participants were housed in three different English prisons in the Midlands, eight participants were from prison A, eight participants were from prison B, and seven participants were from prison C. The criteria to enable a prisoner to participate in this study was they must be currently engaged with prison education at the time of the study and were currently incarcerated for a sexual offence.

The participants' data is captured in table 5 below:

Table 5: Chapter 6: Study two: Participant information table

Participant identifier	Age	Highest qualification (to date)	Previous Employment	Length of custodial sentence	Time in prison (To date)	Number of previous custodial sentences	Current activity in prison
P 1	24	A Level	Theatre technician	Remand	2 months	0	Employability
P 2	57	MSc	Project manager	Remand	6 months	0	Business studies
P 3	57	Degree	Self-employed	14 years	9 months	1	English
P 4	41	Level 2	DHL	6 1/2 years	3 months	0	English
P 5	19	GCSE B	Labouring	3 months	2 1/2 months	0	Art
P 6	25	Level 3	Distribution centre	Recall - 1 1/2 years	5 months	1	English
P 7	44	NVQ	Military	3 years	2 weeks	0	Maths
P 8	37	GCSE B	Manager	Remand	9 months	0	ICT
P 9	23	Level 2	Forklift driver	Remand	6 weeks	0	ICT
P 10	46	Level 1	Tesco	IPP	7 years	0	Creative writing
P 11	29	Level 2	Housekeeper	8 years	1 year	0	Painting and decorating
P 12	57	Level 3	Taxi driver	6 years	2 years	5	Distance learning
P 13	74	Degree	Teacher	4 1/2 years	2 years	0	Mentor
P 14	54	Level 2	Chef	IPP	8 years	0	Distance learning
P 15	36	GCSE A-C	Cycle mechanic	8 years	2 years	1	Art
P 16	72	Degree	Salesperson	4yrs 8mths	3 years	2	Virtual Campus
P 17	39	Level 3	Removals	8 years	5 years	0	Book-keeping
P 18	37	Level 3 ICT	Tool mechanic	Life	9 years	3	OU
P 19	23	Level 1	Bar manager	4 years	1 month	0	Carpentry
P 20	43	NVQ 4	Railway engineer	8 years	9 months	0	ITQ
P 21	30	GCSE	Self-employed	12 years	4 years	0	Barbering
P 22	32	Level 2	Jaguar/land rover	4 years 4 months	11 months	0	Tyre-fitting

| P 23 | 50 | HND | Jaguar/land rover | 8 years | 1 year | 0 | Plastering |

The mean age of the participants in this study is 41 years old (SD: 15.02). The levels of education for the participants consisted of (n=2) 9 % at Level 1, GCSE/O Level (n=4) 17%, Level 2 (n=5) 22%, and Level 3 or above (n=12) 52%. Three-quarters (74%) of the participants in this current study had levels of education that were Level 2 or above. All the participants had been employed before incarceration. The custodial sentence length of time the participants had been incarcerated ranged from unsentenced (remand) to 14 years. For 74 % (n=17) of the participants, this was their first time incarcerated, and 26 % (n=6) had been to prison between one and five times previously.

6.2.2: Procedure

Participants were recruited through a poster advertisement that was placed on the residential wings. When a prisoner volunteered for this study, they were checked on the prison system to ensure they matched the criteria for participation. The participants who volunteered for this study were contacted and an appointment was made. A dedicated room was made available where the participants could talk openly about their experience. Semi-structured interviews were conducted on a face-to-face basis with the participants. The mean length of time for the interviews was 43 minutes (SD: 19.2) and these were recorded on a password-protected dictating machine and transcribed verbatim. The semi-structured interview questions aimed to gain a sense of the participant's identity, their experiences of prison, and prison education (see Appendix six). Participants' names were anonymised, and pseudonyms were used (see chapter three for more information).

6.2.3: Analysis

The data was analysed using thematic analysis (TA) to identify emergent topics within the qualitative data. This study followed Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-step rigorous procedure of familiarisation; coding; generating initial themes; reviewing and developing themes; refining, defining, and naming themes; and writing up. The data in this study was analysed in the same way as study two and study three to enable consistency across all studies (see chapter three).

6.3: Findings

The interpretative process identified two main themes *Education environment* and *Mediocre education* which are presented in table 6 below.

Table 6: Chapter 6: Study two: Superordinate and Subordinate Themes

Superordinate Themes	Subordinate Themes
1: Education Environment	1.1 Opportunity to Better Ourselves
	1.2 A Place of Normality
2: Mediocre Education	2.1 Basic and Unchallenging
	2.2 Lack of Options

6.3.1: Superordinate Theme 1: Education Environment

The first superordinate theme *Education environment* emerged as the participants discussed their perceptions and understanding of prison education. While incarceration was not something that the participants wanted or envisaged, becoming incarcerated gave the participants time. The participants used this time to reflect on their lives and the time provided them with the opportunity to engage with education, which for some participants they had missed previous educational opportunities because they did not have enough time. The educational environment also provided the participants with a place where they felt safe, an environment that was different to the sometimes-volatile environment on the residential wing. Thus, becoming a part of education was something that made the participants feel like they were not in prison, a form of escapism from their reality of prison life. However, for several of the participants, they engaged in education because there was nothing in the prison that they wanted to do.

6.3.1.1: Subordinate Theme 1.1: Opportunity to Better Ourselves

Throughout the discussions, several of the participants appreciated the opportunity to engage in education whilst in prison. It became apparent that many of the participants had missed opportunities to further their education before becoming incarcerated. They had been occupied with living their life on the outside and there never seemed to be the opportunity to access education.

Extract 1

'I've had no opportunity, or I gave myself no opportunity to further my education… I'm learning something, doing things that I should have done years ago like sorting out my spellings, English, writing and so on' (P 4: line 14)

The participant explains how he never had the opportunity to participate in education before he came to prison. Evidence suggests that engaging with prison education gives prisoners the opportunity to gain new skills and qualifications (Reuss, 1999) which they may not have the time or opportunity before incarceration. This sentiment which was echoed by another participant who stated:

Extract 2

'I never took the opportunity on the outside to learn things cos I was always busy at work so I never thought to myself oh I would like to learn this, or I would like to learn that that's why im making the most of it in here' (P 22: line 87 - 89)

Becoming incarcerated and engaging with prison education gave participants the prospect of learning something new and it gave them new opportunities in expanding their knowledge. The positive aspect for education as a rehabilitative process gives prisoners the opportunity to change and reflect on their life giving them a unique way of thinking (Mann et al., 2018). Quite often, life events such as working or family, were perceived as a priority for the participants and therefore, engaging with education was not significant in their life. Because the participants lacked educational opportunities before incarceration, they embraced the opportunity to catch up with their learning in prison.

Extract 3

'Refreshing all my skills from before, especially English that's a big one because I didn't realise not that how terrible I was but you know when you don't do it over a period of time and the last time I done anything English wise was school and im going back over 25 years ago and its just amazing the things that you forget so yeah it's refreshing my skills and my levels of certain subjects it definitely helped erm yeah' (P 20: lines 168 - 171)

Prison education was particularly helpful for those participants who for many years, had not attended education. Thus, engagement with education helped them with previous skills, in the sense that it refreshed their memory where they could then utilise their knowledge. This is relevant to the ever-growing prisoner population because statistics indicate that the over-sixties are now the fastest-growing age group at almost three times higher when compared to

statistics from 16 years ago (MoJ, 2020a). Furthermore, 43 % of the prisoners who are over 50 years old are incarcerated for a sexual offence (HL, 2022). Therefore, this indicates that for the older prisoners, including nearly half of prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence, engaging with education is valuable for keeping their memory active. As such, participating in education did not necessarily mean gaining new skills or knowledge but that education could also simply be there as a memory aid in refreshing knowledge they had previously learned.

Extract 4

'It's [education] given me access to qualifications which I didn't have before which I can hopefully get into that field which I have thought about in the past, but I haven't any qualifications in, so that would help me' (P 1: lines 151 - 152)

Engaging in prison education left a positive impression on the participants because education allowed access to qualifications. Participating in prison education and obtaining qualifications can help participants in their future because there is scope for enhancing employment opportunities through qualifications. This can be beneficial for the participants as employment is a crucial factor in desistance from crime, thus, prison education and obtaining qualifications for successful employment is extremely important (MoJ, 2018). Accessing prison education can be seen as a positive step because it allows the participants to change their future outcomes.

Extract 5

'What I'm trying to do, is trying to do all the things I can to make it, in increasing my chances of being successful and that's why I think education is really important, I think the more that you can do in here, the more higher probability of succeeding on the outside' (P 23: lines 245 - 247)

The participants expressed their belief in the value of education and that engaging with education is important for their future. It has been recognised for some time that one way to reduce reoffending is by becoming employed upon release from prison (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). The participants seemed aware of the importance of employment and how education can help to achieve this. The role of employment can play a crucial role in desistance from offending and shaping the prisoner's future self identity (McAlinden et al.,

2017). In addition, the participants stated how engaging with prison education gave them belief in themselves, as several participants specified, they reasoned they were *bettering* themselves so they could achieve a successful life when released.

Extract 6

> *'Like you're bettering yourself, aren't you? getting yourself educated a lot better and you're learning different stuff which is a positive and then you can take that with you if you get the qualification in prison or if you get it on the out you can apply for a job or go higher than that and make something of yourself'* (P 17: lines 280 - 282)

The notion that an individual can become a *better* person by engaging in education is a perception shared by several participants. Individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence have a challenging time in re-establishing any sort of positive identity within society (Manza et al., 2004). Therefore, education can help prisoners to better themselves and has the potential to be transformative for prisoners, which can lead to a new identity. This is important for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence because their identity is stigmatised because of their offence. Therefore, education provides personal growth and development, giving prisoners confidence which is essential for them to desist from crime (Terry & Cardwell, 2015). The participants highlighted the importance of education for offering the opportunity to gain qualifications, obtain employment, make something of themselves and become an asset in their communities which are also key aims set out by the Ministry of Justice (2019).

Extract 7

> *'I hope to come away with something that at least when I, trying to get back into the job market, I can say yes, I might have been in prison but at least I did this whilst I'm in prison, you know'* (P 8: line 75)

The participants believe engaging with education would demonstrate to potential employers that they have done something positive whilst incarcerated. There is a stigma associated with individuals who have a criminal conviction, and this is a significant barrier to obtaining employment (Visher et al., 2011). Moreover, there are additional barriers to obtaining employment for those individuals formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence (Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2009). Thus, the participants identified education to be a positive step in accessing the employment market upon release which demonstrates to others how

they have made a positive contribution to their future. Thus, engagement with education will counteract the negative labelling that comes with being a formerly incarcerated person, particularly those with offences of a sexual nature.

6.3.1.2: Subordinate Theme 1.2: A Place of Normality

The participants discussed why they had chosen to engage with education whilst in prison and one reason, which was repeated numerous times throughout the interviews, was that prisoners attended education because it kept them occupied during their time in prison, as stated below:

Extract 8

> *'I guess it has because its kept me occupied and out of trouble and out of the way of some of the nefarious elements on the wing, as I was saying the people that are on the course, scoundrels as they may be, are at least the ones that are there to want to achieve something rather than the ones that are just sitting around for their 95p are on their beds, so yes its helped in my rehabilitation, also it looks better that I've done something rather than not done something' (P 8: lines 160 - 165)*

Extract 9

> *'It gets me off the wing, it gets me away from normal prison life. You can escape from everything' (P 14: line 158)*

The education environment in prison was perceived as a positive place because the participants never felt like they were a prisoner during the time spent in the educational setting. Prisoners who engage with education perceive education as a potential *break* from life on the wing. The education environment is a space where prisoners can interact with others as a *learner* as opposed to *prisoner* (Szifris et al., 2018). The prison wings can be places that are noisy, often overcrowded and conceivably they can be hostile environments, which is understandably why the participants stated education enables them to get off the wing. This is important for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence because they may be placed on a VP unit and fear for their safety on the wings. Thus, without a positive education environment, prisoners may serve their custodial sentence in solitary confinement or isolation because of fear for their safety (Blagden & Pemberton, 2010). The education environment was mentioned several times as being a place of comfort and safety for the prisoners as highlighted by one participant:

Extract 10

> *'You're working in a safe environment erm, and I think it gives you like the confidence like when you get out, if you want to go further with education, you'll have that confidence of what you've built up in education' (P 17: lines 180 - 182)*

The participants noted how they felt safe being in the education environment and this is important because a safe prison environment has been identified as being supportive for prisoner's in helping with their personal development (Van der Helm et al., 2011). The education environment has been identified as a place of warmth and a place where prisoners can go to lose their prisoner identity as they take on the role of student (Crewe et al., 2013). This is important particularly for prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence because there tends to be threats and victimisation by other prisoners (Ricciardelli & Moir, 2013).). Therefore, providing a positive prison environment helps the prisoners to feel safe and this allowed participants the comfort of learning. Participants perceived how learning in a safe environment enabled them to develop their confidence and self-esteem and this is developed (Cleere & Maguire, 2013).

Extract 11

> *'I think it's more of a relaxed environment in the education department instead of being locked up in a cell or day, when you in education it doesn't feel like you're locked up all day so yeah that's the benefit of it' (P 20: lines 202 – 203)*

The relaxed environment in the education department was mentioned throughout and participants felt the benefits of this. Indeed, when prisoners are recognised as learners, they feel a sense of belonging and thus view the education environment as a trustworthy space (Little & Warr, 2022). A change within the prison environment can be beneficial for the participants as they adapt to incarceration and using education as an opportunity to escape the monotony of the routine of the prison regime (Behan, 2014). Thus, spending time in an environment where the participants felt safe enabled them to escape the monotony of prison life and provided respite from the volatile prison wing.

Additionally, the participants stated that being in the education environment was a way to keep them occupied during their time in prison which helps relieve the boredom of prison life (Hughes, 2009). Engaging with education allows a prisoner to gain self-confidence and

provides mental health benefits in isolating conditions while improving their behaviours in prison (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022) and by keeping busy can lessen the damage that can be caused by imprisonment (Costelloe, 2014). Therefore, engaging with education keeps the participants busy and provides a safe environment away from the residential wings.

Extract 12

> *'[education] does two things it passes the time very quickly which it has passed quickly, and it also keeps you alert and stops you vegetating….you don't feel like a prisoner that's the beauty of it erm and that's one of the good things about education here, I don't think any of the tutors treat any of the prisoners as if they are prisoners, they are just people err just students erm and you just don't feel where you are, you just think you're somewhere else, in a school or a college and erm you're just getting the benefit of it' (P 16: lines 103 - 108)*

The participants recognised that the education environment made them feel less like a prisoner which was an additional benefit. Although they were in prison and were technically a prisoner, engaging with education gave them that break away from being a prisoner. It has been recognised that one of the benefits of engaging with prison education helps the prisoners in learning to be human (MacMurray, 1958). This is favourable for prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence because this prison cohort are often stigmatised inside and outside of prison because of their offence status. Furthermore, the relationships between prison officer and prisoner often lacks empathy and compassion when on the residential wing (Bullock & Bunce, 2020) whereas education staff were found to not treat those who are incarcerated like prisoners. The education staff can have a positive influence on the experiences of those incarcerated by treating them as human beings (Liebling, 2011). The participants discussed several reasons why they engaged with education. One theme that was often repeated throughout the interviews was, the participants engaged with education because it was better than the alternative.

Extract 13

> *'It's something to do, if it wasn't for that I'd be sitting in my cell refusing to move and I mean that, so wholeheartedly, 100%, I would struggle to do anything else here, there's not much option without being too picky… Lesser of the two evils, well it's*

what I would like to do the least, least likely to do, no that's not right is it?' (P 4: lines 121 - 123)

The participants discussed the lack of purposeful activity options that are available for them whilst they are in prison. This was reflected in the Annual report by the HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2019b) where it was highlighted that there was a decline in the effectiveness of purposeful activities in adult male prisons. Several of the participants stated that they only engaged with education because it was better than the alternative, education was not something that they would have chosen to engage with, if there had been more choice. The quality of purposeful activity has been highlighted in the Ofsted report (2020) that identified two -thirds of prisons that were inspected, were lacking in the quality of purposeful activity in the custodial estate. Prisoners are encouraged to do something while incarcerated and if they do not, they would not get paid and they also might be at the receiving end of a behaviour warning for non-attendance. Therefore, as prison education was the only choice for some prisoners to engage with an activity while incarcerated, there was an element of *force* in the sense that they did not have a choice. Thus, education can be seen as something that is done to prisoners and imposed on them (Wilson, 2007) and this can result in prisoners believing education is part of their punishment (Warner, 2002) rather than part of their rehabilitation.

Extract 14

'Cos there were nothing else to do, everything I've done in education has been better than the alternative…. the alternative of just working in jail with no qualification attached to it just doesn't appeal to me erm I do find it frustrating' (P 15: lines 344 - 347)

This extract exemplifies how the participants perceived there was no alternative activity in prison that was appealing. Therefore, they chose to engage with education. The prisoners have extraordinarily few choices in prison, and it could be argued that prisoners have less eligibility of quality purposeful activity because they are incarcerated. This is often reflected throughout society in the belief prisoners can never change and therefore have less eligibility of reintegration into society (Laws & Ward, 2011). Thus, it is not relevant regarding the purposeful activity that prisoners choose because they will never be forgiven by society. However, it is not important what prisoners have done, they have less eligibility of respect

(Kant, 1949) and education has been identified as a positive purposeful rehabilitation activity that can enable prisoners to make a positive input in their own rehabilitation (Blagden et al., 2017). Therefore, education is a positive aspect of prison and a constructive way for prisoners to spend their time.

6.3.2: Superordinate Theme 2: Mediocre Education

The second superordinate theme emerged as the participants discussed the educational offerings in prison. Education courses were seen as basic and unchallenging because the qualifications on offer were often low-level and did not go any higher than Level 2. In addition, the participants noted that there were limited routes for progression because once they had completed the courses on offer there was nothing left for them to do and higher-level qualifications such as OU (Open University) proved exceedingly difficult to access.

6.3.2.1: Subordinate Theme 2.1: Basic and Unchallenging

This subordinate theme emerged as there were concerns from the participants that prison education was mediocre because the education levels were often at a basic level. For some participants who did engage in education perceived the offerings to be basic, and low level. Therefore, the educational offer in prisons has been identified as unchallenging for many prisoners (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2015). This was echoed by the participants who noted how they found the educational courses unchallenging because the courses were basic, and the qualifications gained were low level as stated below:

Extract 15

> *'I have found them not hard enough, I found they didn't challenge me, I did Level 2, there should be something after that, something harder, that's only GCSE level so it's not that hard, is it?' (P 3: lines 33 - 34)*

Several of the participants discussed how they found the education courses to be too easy because they were Level 2, the same level qualification as GCSE level qualifications. The participants expressed how they would have liked to study at a level higher than the current educational offering and would have liked to have been challenged when learning. Higher level learning has been recommended in the Coates Review (2016), where it was suggested that governors use their budget to fund qualifications at Level 3. However, access to study at Level 3 or above has not been implemented and the current education provision in prisons is

remarkably similar to the levels before the Coates review (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022). Nevertheless, the low-level courses that are offered by prison education are perhaps there for a reason as one participant explained:

Extract 16

> *'The prison education is set-up, its set-up for people who are the very bottom up to an ok level, there isn't anything to develop higher than an ok level, but those that are slightly higher can get its only u until Level 2 that is offered on everything , which most of the courses being a Level 1, which generally are ok but those that are slightly higher base level of education, it doesn't offer any improvements on that' (P 1: lines 96 - 98)*

The above extract highlights how several participants perceived prison education to be set up for those prisoners who are of a low level. This may be because the English levels amongst the prisoner population remain significantly lower than the general population. Statistics highlight that 62 % of those entering prison have been assessed as having English skills expected of an 11-year-old, compared to 15 % of the general population (Prison Reform Trust, 2022). Therefore, it is understandable to help prisoners achieve a standard of education, but this does not help those prisoners who are already at the standard level. Therefore, several participants emphasised how the qualifications offered in prison were of little use outside of the prison gates as stated below:

Extract 17

> *'Some people say it's a bit of a basic qualification and on the outside, it doesn't mean nothing to the employer so really what they need to look at is a qualification that is going to help and what are recognised outside and can get people into jobs' (P 14: lines 429 - 430)*

The participants perceived the qualifications that were on offer in prison are unsuitable. This is because they are basic and not what employers are seeking. The Prisoners' Education Trust has voiced its concerns regarding the Mathematics and English qualifications offered by providers, as to whether they were adequate, or recognised by employers and higher education providers (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022). The participants questioned the validity of the qualification from a potential employer's point of view because

gaining Level 2 qualifications would put the participants at the same education level as a 16-year-old school leaver. It has been recognised that there are too many low-level qualifications being delivered that reap little to no reward for formerly incarcerated people, particularly when trying to secure employment upon release (MoJ, 2018). Thus, the basic levels of educational qualifications in prison can limited employment opportunities when released.

Extract 18

> *'There's going to be limited opportunities for certain areas and criteria of work that people want to do and think that they want to go and do but that's one thing that is wrong in this place is with the rehabilitative culture and the resettlement which they perceive it as yes you do this thing which is a tick box thing which you are going to be able to do this on the out which they are not going to do but they just don't realise it yet until they get out there…. but yeah, I think they should go up to a higher level of education or skills set to give people more opportunities to make sure they don't get in that vicious cycle again...I think they just give them a false hope sometimes and I think that is shameful considering that this is a government establishment' (P 20: lines 240 -244)*

This extract highlights the participants' concerns surrounding the educational offerings in prison because they perceived engaging with education is part of their rehabilitation. Prisons aim to rehabilitate rather than punish and the focus on rehabilitative culture gives individuals the opportunity to change, and to think and act differently (Mann et al., 2018). However, there is some discrepancy between the prison's and the participants' narratives because although prison education offers qualifications, they may not benefit many prisoners. Engaging with education has been identified as a way to reduce reoffending, for example, prisoners who engage with education have a reoffending rate of 34 %, compared to 43 % for prisoners who do not engage in any form of learning (Prison Reform Trust, 2022). However, the levels of qualifications offered are thought to be insufficient in today's job market to enable individuals to gain meaningful employment (Flynn & Higdon, 2022). Therefore, as the extract above highlights, the participants are given false hope because they are being sold education for their rehabilitation benefits, but the reality is that once outside the prison gates, their qualifications gained in prison will not help them. This is especially significant for those who are incarcerated for a sexual offence.

Abstract 19

> *'Another thing with you being on certain restrictions you're limited to what jobs you can do and things like that and with being a sex offender it is a lot more difficult to get back into work, it isn't for other people, but you can only work with certain people, but you can only have certain jobs' (P 14: lines 377 – 380)*

As the above extract highlights, there is a struggle for prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence. They face greater challenges such as dealing with the consequences of being placed on the sex offender register and/or being subject to restrictions on where they can live and notifications procedures when released from prison (Burrows, 2016). The participants understand they will need to find employers willing to give them a chance, despite licence conditions and the Sex Offenders Register which arguably, makes them the most unemployable demographic (Blessett & Pryor, 2013).

Abstract 20

> *'I just think also at my age, the important thing at my age I could never go back and have the career that I had before, I could never go back to, I was there for 20 years so I could never go back to that employer so I've lost my career completely and I could never go back into what I was doing which means I've got to create a new career for myself, a lot of it or some of it I've been able to do here, I feel that because of the nature of the offence erm or what you're labelled with now is so restricted when you go out for work' (P 23: lines 28 – 32)*

Because of their offence status, several of the participants noted how they could not go back to their previous employers. The prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence may need to up-skill to find employment upon release, thus, gaining qualifications that meet potential employers' needs becomes considerably important for this prisoner cohort. The restrictions that are in place for individuals formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence and the stigmatised label ensures they cannot back into their previous life. The participants acknowledge their life has changed and they will need to rethink their career path and life plan. Education is beneficial for rehabilitation and reintegration back into society because it is about learning new knowledge and skills which can have a positive impact on their outcome when released. There may be a need for a career change for many prisoners because of the restrictions and licence conditions imposed on them upon release. Therefore, some

participants may need to train for a different career which would be excepting of individuals formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence. Therefore, having an educational offering that meets the needs of incarcerated individuals and potential employers is important for enabling the participants to integrate back into society upon release.

6.3.2.2: Subordinate Theme 2.2: Lack of Options

This subordinate theme emerged as the participants discussed the educational offerings in prison. There was the perception that there was little option to progress and once they reached Level 2, there was nothing more on offer. There is a limit to what prison education can offer which can leave some prisoners disadvantaged because they are unable to engage with education.

Extract 21

'If there had been something at a higher Level, I would have done it, I've already done IT Level 3, I've already got my Level 2s in maths and English and that's as high as they go' (P 18: lines 229 - 231)

Extract 22

'There is a limit on the kind of level of education… its only u until Level 2 that is offered on everything, which most of the courses being a Level 1, which generally are ok but those that are slightly higher base level of education, it doesn't offer any improvements' (P 1: lines 74 – 76)

Once the participants reached the levels of education that are offered in prison, there were no courses for them to study because there was no progression after Level 2. The qualifications offered in prison tend to be basic at low levels and thus, they were of little use outside of the prison gates (Warr, 2016). Several participants discussed the idea of progression to study at Level 3 or above, but this option was not available to them. Although it has been recommended that prison education delivers qualifications for Level 3 or above (Coates, 2016), most prison establishments do not exceed Level 2 qualifications. Several participants discussed their disappointment because they did not identify how they could improve their educational outcome or enhance their employability prospects because of the lack of educational provisions.

Extract 23

'I think they [prisoners] should be able to progress into is there anything that you want to be really cos that's the point of rehabilitation, isn't it? cos if you've got like, if you've got that drive and ambition to want to do something like you can have your freedom and be out there (P 6: lines 90 - 92)

This extract highlights the shared perception amongst the participants that they were limited from progressing with their education because of the courses on offer. The quality of teaching and learning has been criticised along with the lack of educational progression routes in prison (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2019b). The participants indicated they would like more progression routes that exceed the basic level that is currently on offer. In life outside of the prison gates, individuals who want to progress with their education would enrol on further/higher education courses. However, in the prison environment, this was difficult, if not impossible.

Extract 24

'I would like to see education offering higher levels such as OU courses or something like that, I mean I though people did OU in prison and I don't know if it's something that they do in prison or not this particular one or I don't know if it's there, I see certain OU posters about but I'm not that far off being able to do an OU course and I don't see any signs of it being available, I don't know whether it is, no one's talked to me but it's everywhere I go, I've essentially Level 2 in almost everything that is handed to me and no one has said to me, you know what you could be going on and doing this instead of these entry-level things, so it's either not available or its not been offered' (P 8: lines 105 - 113)

This extract highlights the difficulties the participants have in accessing higher-level education courses while in prison such as those run by the Open University. Although several participants discussed higher level courses of education in prison, it was perceived as some sort of mythical creature inside the prison. The participants are aware that higher learning exists in prison, but they cannot seem to access any higher education courses. There is a demand for higher education classes in prison which is around 30 % of all prisoners, however, there are approximately 2,000 prisoners enrolled on higher education, equating to around 2.5% of the prisoner population (McFarlane, 2019). Although there is a demand for higher education learning courses in prisons, accessing and applying for these courses is

dependent on the individual prison establishments and whether they support and encourage distance learning (Clark, 2016).

Extract 25

> *'There's nothing they could offer me to do to be honest, if you're low-level learning then you're alright you know you can do maths, English but when you get a little bit higher there's not a lot to do, say once you get up to Level 1 and Level 2 in anything there's nothing else you can do, other than OU or distance learning or something like that....'I do think there should be a broader scope of things to do because once you've done Level 1 and 2 in English there's nothing, so that's the end of that' (P 12: lines 132 - 135)*

Extract 26

> *'It could be better to a higher level to be taught to so you know erm and it will give us more opportunities for us when we do get out I understand some of us here might have never been in a classroom before or for yeas and years and years, some of them may not even want a job when they get out because of the age that they are but for others that haven't had that opportunities…it would be nice to see there current levels go to level 3' (P 20: lines 90 - 94)*

To access higher learning educational courses, there appears to be several hurdles for participants who want to engage with these courses. Progression routes through levels of education could help participants because it provides them with more opportunities when they are released. Furthermore, prisoners who engage with higher education can enhance a prisoner's economic opportunities and self-sufficiency (O'Grady, 2019). The participants noted how higher levels of education can benefit their futures outside of the prison gate. Not only are the participants proving to themselves that they are contributing to their rehabilitation, but participating in education demonstrates to others they have spent their time in prison in a constructive way. There participants identified the need to be educated and would like to further their skills and learning but the opportunities inside a prison do not appear to be available to them.

6.4: Summary

Two superordinate themes emerged from the participants' narratives, they were: '*Education environment'* and '*Mediocre education.'* The two themes emphasised the

participants' opinions and perceptions regarding prison education. There were mixed reviews surrounding education itself, although education was seen as something positive and a way to better oneself. The educational offer was not seen as helpful because of the basic, low levels available and lack of progression. The findings from this study have highlighted there are a number of positive aspects of engaging with prison education. Although these findings could be representative of any prisoner, it can be argued that prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence have additional and diverse needs due to their offence status. Overall, the participants held positive perceptions about education whilst in prison and they had all actively chosen to engage with education.

Engaging with education had positive implications for the prisoners and the way they perceived themselves. The participants associated prison education with an opportunity to change themselves and it was *proof* that they were rehabilitating and becoming better people. Education was a way to evidence a change within themselves, it indicates to society that they were doing something positive. The change in the identity of a person can help with the process of desistance from crime (Maruna, 2001). The participants perceived that engaging with education was a way to demonstrate that they were changing their identity from a person who had committed a crime to someone who was now a changed person. Prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence have a dual stigma which is reinforced by society (Ricciardelli & Moir, 2013) and face additional stigma that is unique to this prison cohort. Therefore, to engage with education to enable a change in one's identity is significantly important for individuals who are incarcerated for a sexual offence because their identity is associated with stigma and shame (Blagden et al., 2014). Thus, education was understood by the participants as a positive opportunity to enable change in their identity and to show society that they can be something other than a *sex offender*.

The education environment was highlighted by the participants as somewhere they could go, and it was seen as a safe space away from the residential wing and prison culture. The participants explained how being part of education made them feel like they were a learner rather than a prisoner (Szifris et al., 2018) and likened being in education to a sense of normality. Being in education appeared to make the participants feel safe because it was a calm environment which is the opposite of the residential wing, which is often volatile. Thus, education saved the participants from the deprivations of prison life (Maruna, 2010). Having a safe space in prison is particularly important for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence because they are segregated from other prisoners because of their offence status (Blagden &

Pemberton, 2010) and they are regarded as the bottom of the prison hierarchy by other prisoners and staff.

The participants choose to engage with education, but they discovered the educational offering was unchallenging because of the basic, low-level qualifications being delivered. Through the narratives of the participants, they expressed their disappointment because their educational needs were not being met. The educational offering was perceived as basic, low-level education, often associated with compulsory school education. The participants engaged with education because they assumed they would be offered a range of qualifications that can enhance their existing skills and knowledge. This thesis insinuates that prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence have higher levels of education as opposed to prisoners incarcerated for a non-sexual offence, thus need higher levels of learning. The prisoners who were interviewed for this research do have higher levels of education as three-quarters (74%) of the participants had levels of education that were Level 2 or above. Therefore, the levels of education that were offered in prison were not appropriate for this prisoner cohort.

As stated in the Coates review (2016) prison education should be at the heart of the prison system but the reality is, the educational offering available is aimed at prisoners who have received extraordinarily little education. This was also emphasised as the participants discussed the education progression routes. The education courses in prison did not go higher than Level 2 so there was no progression when the participants reached Level 2. The participants discussed the opportunity to study at higher levels of education in terms of courses through the Open University. Although there is a demand for higher education learning courses in prisons, accessing and applying for these courses is dependent on the different prison establishments and whether they support and encourage distance learning (Clark, 2016). The need for progression routes higher than a Level 2 are relevant to prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence as they may need to re-skill following their conviction. As stated previously there appears to be a need for higher education courses because the participants in this study had education levels higher than the courses on offer. Therefore, higher level learning would be extremely beneficial for the participants in this study but as they highlighted, there was a lack of opportunity to engage with higher level learning.

This chapter (six) and chapter five discussed prison education from perceptions of prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. The prisoners' narratives are incredibly important because of their rich lived experience of the prison environment and education. It is also important to gain the perceptions of others who are immersed in a prison environment to

provide a non-biased representation of prison education from different perspectives. The perceptions of prison staff working in a prison environment is explored in the final empirical study (three). Although not all individuals working in a prison environment have first-hand experience of prison education, they have up-to-date knowledge of a working prison and are aware that education is offered in prison. The next chapter examines prison education from the perspectives of prison staff who work in a prison that holds men incarcerated for a sexual offence.

Chapter 7: Study three

'They are a big risk factor.' To understand the experiences of relevant prison staff, and their expectations and understanding of the assumed benefits of education for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence.

The prison environment can be a volatile place which is why it is important to adopt a working environment that promotes positive prisoner-staff relationships. A favourable prisoner-staff relationship has been highlighted as part of the successful rehabilitation of prisoners which promotes positive change in prisoners' behaviour (Blagden et al., 2014; Kjelsberg & Loos, 2008). However, working with prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence can be difficult for some staff because of the negative stigma associated with this prisoner cohort. This current study (three) examined the perceptions and understanding of prison staff (n=14) who work with prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. The prison staff volunteered for this research from the three different prison establishments. This consisted of one focus group with four members of prison staff and two focus groups containing five prison staff members. The participants comprised of a range of professionals who were working in a prison environment that house adult males incarcerated for a sexual offence (see table 7, section 7.2.1). This qualitative study conducted three focus groups across three prison establishments. The data was analysed thematically with two key themes emerging from the rich dataset: (i) *False hope,* which highlighted how the prison staff actively encouraged prisoners to engage with education but did not believe education would be beneficial to them; (ii) *Second class citizens*, which explored the perceptions of the prison staff regarding the stigma and risk that is often associated with this prisoner cohort. The findings from this study reveal how the prison staff deem the prisoners posed a risk of offending inside and outside of prison. Because of this the prison staff perceive that education does not offer any benefits to prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence because they cannot be fully accepted back into society.

7.1: Introduction

The two previous chapters (five and six) examined the narratives of prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence and their perceptions and understanding of prison education. It is vitally important to gain an insight into prison education from the viewpoint of prisoners because the educational provisions are for them, prison education is designed for prisoners. Although it is

important to gain insights from prisoners, it is also important to gather viewpoints from others within the prison environment to provide a comprehensive range of perspectives. The empirical study in this chapter provides an understanding of prison education from prison staff who work in a prison that holds men convicted of a sexual offence.

The prison environment and the attitudes of prison staff are an important part of the successful treatment and rehabilitation of prisoners (Blagden et al., 2014). The staff- prisoner relationship is vitally important for effective prisoner rehabilitation and positive behaviour changes (Kjelsberg & Loos, 2008). However, this may be difficult for some staff members because of conflicts with their personal feelings, which are influenced by the stigma attached to prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence (Lea et al., 1999). Therefore, it is important for prison staff to build positive relationships with prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. This is because prison staff who have a positive attitude towards prisoners have been found to encourage and motivate the prisoners (Kjelsberg & Loos, 2008). This chapter focuses on the perceptions and understanding of the role of education from the viewpoint of prison staff who work with prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence.

7.2: Method

7.2.1: Participants

The participants comprised of 14 prison staff (n=14) who work inside a prison establishment that hosts adult males who have been convicted of a sexual offence. The prison staff in each focus group consisted of a combination of different prison staff across each prison establishment as highlighted in table 7 below.

Table 7: Chapter 7: Study three: Participant information table

Prison establishment	Job role	Participant identifier
Prison A	Education tutor	P 1
	Workshop Instructor	P 2
	Administration	P 3
	Vocational training manager	P 4
	Education tutor	P 5
Prison B	Education manager	P 6
	Safer living foundation staff	P 7
	Probation officer	P 8
	Education tutor	P 9
Prison C	Prison officer	P 10
	Workshop Instructor	P 11
	Programme manager	P 12
	Education tutor	P 13

7.2.2: Procedure

Recruitment was conducted over a six-month period across three different prison sites. An email was sent out across the three prison estates calling for volunteers to participate in a focus group, with an information sheet giving details of the study (see Appendix seven). The volunteers replied indicating dates and times of their availability. One focus group was conducted at each of the three prisons where a dedicated room was provided. The room enabled the prison staff to discuss their thoughts and opinions in private. The mean length of time for the focus group was 68 minutes (SD: 6.24) and each were recorded on a password protected dictating machine. The focus group schedule was developed and structured to gain an insight into expectations and understanding of the role of prison education (see Appendix eight). The only criteria for a member of prison staff to volunteer was they had to be currently working in a prison which housed men incarcerated for a sexual offence.

7.2.3: Analysis

For this final study, thematic analysis (TA) was used to analyse data from the focus groups with the findings determined by the participants narratives. The focus groups transcripts were analysed using the six-step rigorous procedure as described by Braun and Clarke (2022) The analysis followed the same procedure as the two other empirical studies explained in chapters five and six. This was to ensure all data that has been collected for this thesis was analysed in the same way to be consistent and trustworthy. The extracts from the participants' narratives were group together where the themes emerged to create theme headings. Once the final themes had been reviewed, extracts were chosen which accurately illustrated each theme and a valid argument emerged creating a comprehensive narrative from the participants.

7.3: Findings

The interpretative process identified two main superordinate themes, *False hope*, and *Second-class citizen*, which are presented in table 8, each theme captures an important aspect of the prison staff narratives.

Table 8: Chapter 7: Study three: Superordinate and Subordinate Themes

Superordinate themes	Subordinate themes
1: False Hope	1.1 Prison Limitations
	1.2 Employment an Illusion
	1.3 Limited Education Provisions
2: Second Class Citizens	2.1 Always Offending
	2.2 Less Deserving

7.3.1: Superordinate Theme 1: False Hope

The theme false hope, developed as the prison staff discussed their perceptions and understanding of education within a prison environment. The prison staff did not consider participating in prison education would be beneficial for the prisoners, but they actively encouraged the prisoners to engage with education. There were too many limitations and rules in place for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence, thus, the prison staff perceived prison education was unattainable for them. Interestingly the prison staff did not explain these limitations to the prisoners, which led to prisoners believing prison education can help them when released, giving prisoners false hope. The prison staff highlighted how education had nothing to offer prisoners because funding was limited and there was a lack of courses available. Moreover, the prison staff indicated there was no benefit outside of prison for educational qualifications because there was a lack of employment opportunities for individuals formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence.

7.3.1.1: Subordinate Theme 1.1: Prison Limitations

The central part of this theme focused on how the prison staff perceived prison education to be limiting because of the prison rules. There were frequent discussions throughout the focus groups regarding the prison itself and how prison restrictions affected the prison regime including prison education as one prison staff explained:

Extract 1

'In a lot of prisons, the main erm focus is security which it is here obviously…. security is running the regime; they are short staffed, and education is very much down the bottom of the pile' (P 6: lines 210 - 212)

When it comes to security, education is not perceived to be a priority, therefore, if there is an issue in prison, prisoners are denied access to education. As Czerniawski (2016) states the top priority for a prison is its security, as a result security is often prioritised over education. It is understandable that the number one priority for a prison establishment is the security (HMPPS, 2017). This is to ensure both prisoners and members of society are kept away from harm. However, it appears that education is at the bottom of the priority list in prison with other activities taking precedence. This was emphasised by the prison staff as they explained how education was last on the list of priorities when it comes to ensuring the regime is running efficiently. Therefore, education was not viewed as a priority but rather as an afterthought as asserted in the extract below:

> *Extract 2*
>
> *'We don't get support from the extra wider jail to encourage men to come to education, it is seen as a second-class thing to do……I mean like the lowest is industry in the jail, they can come and pack tea bags and get paid more' (P 2: line 487)*

Education was not encouraged by the wider prison because it was perceived to have little value in the prison. The prison staff highlighted how the wider prison did not consider education to be important and deemed education to be less important than attending work. This is reflected in the way the prison prioritises pay because the prisoners who did attend education were paid the lowest wage in the prison estate. The low wages were identified by Coates (2016) who stated that prison education routinely pays less than the other work inside a prison. Prisoners get paid more money for workshops such as packing tea bags where prisoners put two tea bags, four sugar sachets, two coffee sachets and four individual milk portions into a plastic bag, which is unskilled work. Whilst education can be sold as a way to help rehabilitate and give prisoners skills and qualifications to help them in the future, education still remains low on the prison agenda. Yet arguably other purposeful activity such as packing tea bags is a more lucrative employment option in prison because prisoners can earn a higher wage. It is understandable why prisoners choose an employment activity with a higher salary because they need money to pay for items such as phone calls, stamps, and shower gels. Therefore, prisoners who do not engage with prison education cannot afford to attend rather than them not wanting to attend (Breakspear, 2018). Education is embedded in

the legislative framework within which prisons operate (Ludlow & Armstrong, 2019) and several of the prison staff highlighted how the prison establishments perhaps should reflect this. There are some prison establishments that have implemented the same wages for both work and education, but this is not in all prisons (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022) with education routinely being the lowest paid purposeful activity in prison establishments. Therefore, education is perceived to be a low value option by the wider prison. Several of the prison staff highlighted negative issues linked to prison culture as exemplified in the extract below:

Extract 3

'So, there's that sort of culture with more from uniformed staff I think, and it can be seen as a threat almost that the prisoners are of a higher level and, we have all sorts of things actually that staff aren't getting erm so there's a few negative issues around that' (P 6: lines 220-224)

Education has been noted by the prison staff as being intimidating for some uniformed staff, as the extract above highlights. Prisoners can be perceived as less intelligent than the general population. This is because repeated statistics regarding the prisoner population consistently highlight prisoners have low levels of education. For example, recent statistics indicate that 62 % of individuals who enter prison have the same English skills expected of an 11-year-old (Prison Reform Trust, 2022). However, prisoners who participate in prison education can gain an elevated level of qualification, which could be perceived as those prisoners having an elevated level of intelligence. Thus, uniformed staff and prison staff may feel intimidated because prisoners can have a higher-level qualification than the people who are considered professionals. There is an opinion purported by some prison staff that prisoners should not be educated, stemming from jealousy that prisoners are receiving free education when they do not. Moreover, prison staff can be cynical and pessimistic about the prospect of prisoner reform (Clarke et al*., 2004), as a result, there is negativity towards education from the wider prison staff and thus prisoners are punished for this.

Extract 4

'But that's just the ethos of the prison and the prison officers and the way that works'
(P 3: line 493)

This extract emphasises how the prison staff readily accept the attitude and culture of working in a prison. The prison staff perceived there was little they could do to change how education is understood by the wider prison, it was engrained in the culture of a prison. The attitudes of the prison staff can be a guiding factor in the decisions made by prisoners, and this can have an influence on what purposeful activity they choose to do whilst incarcerated (Kjelsberg et al., 2007). Therefore, to enable education to be better understood and to become a priority, prison education needs to be embedded into the culture of the prison environment (Flynn & Higdon, 2022). However, the attitudes towards prisoners and what happens inside a prison such as education, stem from the outside world as one prison staff stated:

Extract 5

'I do think a lot of education courses we are able to offer as well is dictated by this daily mail sort of attitude that they only really deserve the basics really and you could imagine the headlines if they started teaching sociology in prisons, they wouldn't like that' (P 4: line 540 - 542)

The prison staff highlighted how the prison establishments are often dictated by the media who tend to sensationalise crime news. The media reporting has an influence on society, and this leads to the development of harsh views of prisoners (King & Roberts, 2017) which causes an unforgiving society (Harmes et al., 2019). Thus, the educational provisions in a prison environment can be limited due to societal attitudes as well as prison attitudes. Societal attitudes are often amplified when the media reports on prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence because they are perceived to have less eligibility of educational opportunities (Brown, 2005).

7.3.1.3: Subordinate Theme 1.3: Limited Education Provisions

Engaging with education has been identified as a rehabilitation process that can contribute to reducing the rates of re-offending (Ronel & Elisha, 2011). However, there are limitations regarding the educational provisions and accessing the courses which was highlighted by several prison staff. The curriculum at each prison is remarkably similar in that they all run education classes in basic skills (Mathematics, English, and ICT) plus other courses that were dependant on the prison education curriculum. However, there were similar concerns throughout the focus groups regarding the limitations and restrictions of the education classes that are currently available.

Extract 6

> *'I think my biggest disappointment about education is the limited range of subjects that were able to offer cos if you were in a college environment you would have extra curricula activities you know, be much more interesting for people' (P 4: line 114)*

This extract echoes what the prison staff discussed during the focus groups. The prison staff perceive educational provisions as limiting and they are detrimental to the prisoners. This is because they do not get the same access to a range of subjects compared to those who are not in prison. At each prison there is an education block which run the courses, but there are limitations on the courses that can be facilitated. Furthermore, several prison staff discussed how the educational provisions are limited in what education courses a prison can offer. This can be due to the restrictions on funding which have been highlighted as something that has negative consequences:

Extract 7

> *'I think that one of the other things that need to be taken into account is funding…. but we have restrictions on what we can deliver within budgets and around what we can contract from this new wonderful system called the dynamic purchasing scheme which is a difficulty in prisons learning and skills world' (P 6: lines 333-346)*

Extract 8

> *'It comes down to funding as well, doesn't it? if it can't be funded, educations a business at the end of the day, so it got to pay for itself' (P 1: line 544)*

The budget for education restricts the courses that can be offered in prison which results in poor education provisions that are unsuitable. Prison education is restricted by the budget of the prison, like any other business and this can limit the educational provisions. Each prison establishment is allocated a different funding budget, depending on the size of the prison. It is the responsibility of the prison governor to use this funding budget to allocate educational provisions that are suitable for their prison cohort. However, the funding for prison education has remained at the same level for the last five years (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022) making it challenging to deliver quality provisions. Therefore, the prison education departments are limited in what they can deliver, although there is a requirement to deliver core qualifications consisting of Mathematics, English, and ICT (MoJ, 2019). Thus, if

an educational course cannot be funded then it cannot be delivered further limiting the educational provisions for prisoners.

Extract 9

> *'Whether resources and priorities should be targeted at erm kind of people with most needs so basic skills erm healthy living and that sort of thing as opposed to higher education erm and erm you know where the priorities should lie because there is kind of a fixed pool of money (P 8: line 67 - 69)*

Extract 10

> *'I think it's the limited amount of education that we can provide I think that's a barrier, you got these people with all these A Levels and it's a barrier not being able to access higher level that they are capable of...yes you've got people doing the Level 2 business and whatever they are doing but they've got degrees that's just a barrier that they are not accessing education that they are capable of achieving' (P 5: lines 596 - 600)*

It can be challenging for prison education to prioritise their curriculum because of the limited amount of available funding. There is a significant difference between offering basic skills for those prisoners who do not have any educational achievement and offering education to prisoners that have already achieved the basic level. The prison staff perceived education to be restrictive because it can only aid those prisoners who have basic low levels of education. Basic skills operate at each prison as this potentially enables those without the government required skills and qualifications to gain these while incarcerated. Therefore, this results in remedial focused learning equipping prisoners with basic skills so they may function in society and become employable (Ludlow et al.*,* 2019). Furthermore, the justification for the current prison education curriculum is the need for it to be tied to employability which is why there is emphasis on basic skills (Warr, 2016). However, by concentrating on basic skills this can restrict prisoners' engagement with education, particularly if they have attained qualifications at Level 2 or higher. This can be problematic for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence, specifically those who have been charged with an internet-based offence who were more likely to have graduated from university (Aslan & Edelmann, 2014). Furthermore, attending an education course and attaining higher levels of learning is relevant to prisoners serving long term custodial sentences and prisoners who have higher level of education such as A Levels. All prisoners should have access to education

regardless of prior achievements and education should be a part of the regime for sentenced prisoners (United Nations, 2015). Consequently, this means that for some prisoners they are being discriminated against whilst in prison for having qualifications that are Level 2 or higher.

Extract 11

'I think it's going to have to be fair…if we're going to say that people with learning difficulties or never had schooling or lower IQ's we will help you learn and help you educate and if someone comes in with an IQ of 140 and has 5 PhDs who are we to say no you can't continue learning because you are already smart we are not going to allow you to continue your studies so I think we have to be wary of saying well you're clever enough' (P 7: lines 501 - 505)

There is a danger of providing only basic skills in prison education because it can limit the prisoners who are able to attend. Outside of the prison walls, telling someone they cannot go to college because they are '*clever enough'* as stated by one participant, would not happen. This is because in an education environment outside of the prison walls there is a range of qualifications to choose from. However, in a prison environment this seems to be acceptable. Furthermore, the gaining of a diverse range of qualifications and certificate could have a negative impact on prisoners. This is because achieving lots of qualifications from a range of education courses can be a tell-tale sign that someone is a formerly incarcerated person. This was highlighted by one of the prison staff who discussed a recent conference where they had spoken to a formerly incarcerated person:

Extract 12

'When he came out on a high with lots and lots of qualifications and he took them to employers and the problem is that if you've got lots and lots of qualifications against a whole breath of learning, it's very clear to the employer that you've been in prison because nobody else does that' (P 6: lines 33 - 36)

Here the prison staff highlight that having lots of qualifications in different subjects would be obvious to employers that these qualifications were gained in prison. This is because when an individual goes to school/college/university they study a few subjects which are relevant to their career pathway. Thus, when a prisoner has attended prison education, they gain

numerous certificates in a variety of different subjects. Consequently, the prison staff assume the employer will say "*ah prisoner*" when a prisoner shows them their certificates, as this indicates these were obtained in prison, even before disclosure of their conviction. Therefore, the certificates gained in a prison setting are meaningless outside of the prison walls (Warr, 2016). Gaining qualification and certificates in prison can be relevant inside the prison environment because this is evidence for the prisoners to highlight what they have achieved. However, the restrictions on what prison education can deliver can be detrimental to the prisoners.

Extract 13

'There will be a big risk factor and a massive security risk with increasing their IT skills' (P 14: line 315)

Extract 14

'You can't buy a phone now without that technology [camera, internet] on it so in a way you can't help but need to interact with this technology' (P 7: line 479)

The above abstracts highlight the controversial issue of learning about digital technology in prison and the perceived risk. This risk factor associated with digital technology may be due to the prevalence of internet based sexual violence (Barak & Fisher, 2002). For example, the NSPCC (2022) reported online grooming has increase by more than 80 % in the year 2021-22. However, digital skills are needed in today's contemporary society, having access to the internet is crucial in educational, social, and work environments with most professions now require familiarity with differing computer systems (Warr, 2016). Thus, it can be argued that by not learning digital skills whilst in prison may cause prisoners to be disadvantaged when released from prison. Indeed, the Centre for Social Justice Studies (2017) identified that exclusion from learning digital technology skills can be felt more by individuals who experience multiple social disadvantages. Consequently, those individuals who are excluded from learning digital technology are often socially and economically discarded and therefore unable to fulfil their potential (Gosling & Burke, 2019). The participants explained how digital technology is used extensively in society which will be extremely difficult for prisoners to avoid when released. However, the use of digital technology in a prison environment is restricted and controlled by the criminal justice system (Gosling & Burke, 2019). To deny prisoners the use of learning about digital technology can undermine their educational opportunities, and thus becomes another form of exclusion for the already

excluded prisoner (Harmes et al., 2019). Consequently, having limited knowledge on how to interact with technology would restrict and exclude prisoners beyond their release. However, despite the limitations of educational courses on offer, the prison staff discussed how they actively encourage prisoners to participate in education.

Extract 15

> *'We're telling prisoner that they can do this, they can do that and maybe they are only going to get a job on a production line putting a cherry on a Bakewell' (P 6: line 316)*

Extract 16

> *'But one thing is about how realistic are the things that they are doing for jobs that they can do when they get out… so like barbering… they are going to really struggle in a barbers that children can come in and get their hair cut, so from a community point of view... if somebody said to me, I've done a barbering course, I've got this qualification, that qualification and I want to go self-employed it's kind of like a blanket no' (P 13: lines 501 - 508)*

The prison staff questioned how realistic some of the education courses were for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. This is because several of the prison staff were uncertain if the prisoners could take the skills and qualifications they gained inside a prison environment into the community. The prison education curriculum does provide course that relate to employability such as the barbering course mentioned by the participant. However, realistically prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence would not be able to work in a barbering environment post release. Therefore, it seems futile to allow prisoners to study a course for an occupation that they would not be able to continue when released. For this prisoner cohort due to the nature of restrictions imposed on them (Brown et al., 2007), they are extremely limited in their choice of occupation when released. Therefore, questions were raised regarding why these courses are delivered. However, there are additional benefits to engaging with education other than employment. Participating in prison education can provide prisoners with a much-needed occupation whilst in prison (Liebling & Maruna, 2005) and provide the opportunity to learn new skills or escape the monotony of the routine and regime of the prison (Behan, 2014). However, as the extracts above imply, prison staff perceive prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are going to be employed in unfulfilling, low-paid jobs, largely because of the restrictions placed on this prisoner cohort, such as

criminal record background checks. For example, the manufacturing sector is least likely to request a criminal records check, suggesting this would be a favourable employment option for individuals formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence (Haslewood-Pocsik et al., 2008). Metcalfe et al., (2001) identified many individuals who had previously been incarcerated were often found to be employed in low paid jobs. In addition, there is also the stigma attached to prisoners formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence rendering employers not wanting to employ them. Thus, the inability to find employment when released can impact a prisoner's life resulting in the loss of autonomy and induce self-isolating behaviours (Tovey, et al., 2022). Therefore, perhaps the educational provision needs to be updated to meet the needs of this prisoner cohort to enable them the chance of a realistic future.

Extract 17

'It will help you get a job when you get out with all these qualifications, that's how we sell it but it's not like that' (P 5: line 580)

Extract 18

'you put all your efforts into this rehabilitation thing right but you have to be realistic let's make everybody as good as they can be and that's brilliant however when you get out there all of a sudden they said I could do this, and I thought I was going to be doing this but there are so many limitations…realistically you've got too many limitations in place' (P 11: line 524)

The prison staff highlighted how education is *sold* to the prisoners as a way to help them gain employment. However, the reality is that many formerly incarcerated individuals will not be employed, and this is especially true of individuals formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence (Brown et al., 2007). Furthermore, prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence find gaining employment extremely difficult because of their conviction and may get rejected numerous times (Tovey et al., 2022). Individuals formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence must continually disclose their offence which limits their reintegration back into society because their offence limits where they can live and work (Harper, 2018). However, when an individual is denied employment opportunities this could potentially block an important pathway to desistance (Cherney & Fitzgerald, 2016). The restrictions that this prison cohort have when they are released has been highlighted by several prison staff. Because of the limitations placed on individuals formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence there is a lack of opportunities for employment. The prison staff are aware of the restrictions and limitations

that this prisoner cohort face, but they still encourage prisoners to participate with education, giving them false hope.

7.3.1.2: Subordinate Theme 1.2: Employment an Illusion

There were discussions amongst the focus group prison staff regarding employment opportunities for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. There was the belief that the prisoners would be released but would not get the opportunity to become employed because of their criminal record.

Extract 19

> *'You're setting people up to fail because I think especially cos there a limited amount of courses whereas if you were on the outside and you go to college then fine, they've got that choice there whereas here they haven't really got choice…they've got a criminal record, so they are going to find it difficult to find a job and especially for people that are really education they are going to find it really difficult,' (P 5: line 679 - 683)*

The prison staff are mindful of the difficulties that prisoners face when they are released from prison with regards to securing employment. Having a criminal record is a significant barrier in gaining employment for individuals formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence due to the stigma and perceptions surrounding their offence (Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2009). The prison staff are aware of the challenges that this prison cohort face when they are released but believe there is little, they can do to change their outcome. The reality is that prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence have substantially more difficulty in finding employment when release because of the restrictions placed on them, for example, being placed on the sex offenders register (DBS, 2018). Outside of the prison walls individuals have a choice of the educational courses and the career path they wish to pursue. Whereas once inside the prison walls, the prisoners do not have this choice, they have limited educational options, and limited career choices, thus they are being set up to fail. The prison staff acknowledge employers will not want to employ individuals who have been incarcerated for a sexual offence. There is the need to find alternative ways to tackle the barriers the prisoners face and consider ways in which education can help prisoners as stated below:

Extract 20

'We take into particular account that our guys have many more barriers to employment than erm general prison population, so we try and aim at self-employment' (P 6: line 8)

Extract 21

'They have the ability to do so many jobs but people don't want them because of what they have done and like fair enough but at the same time but what can education do to help that, were not offering anything' (P 5: line 588)

There appears to be a clear distinction between their guys (prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence) and the mains (prisoners incarcerated for a non-sexual offence). Emphasis was placed on there being more barriers for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. Becoming self-employed was perceived by the prison staff as a way to get around employment issues. This is because if this prisoner cohort were to become self-employed, this would result in them having fewer barriers to employment. This was echoed by Jennings et al., (2016) who identified that prisoners who found it difficult to gain employment often found self-employment to be a positive solution because there were less barriers. However, becoming self-employed can be a challenge for some prisoners as they could lack business knowledge and the skills to become self-employed, even after gaining a business qualification in prison. Furthermore, the selling of prison education to prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence to help them become employed when released was seen by some of the prison staff as misguided. The prison staff are aware that prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are generally perceived as their offence rather than the person. This is a significant barrier this prisoner cohort face when released. Thus, the prison staff question whether education can offer anything that can counteract the negative labelling of someone incarcerated for a sexual offence. The *sex offender* label is unforgiving, thus, if prisoners were engaged with prison education, this would not make society necessarily accepting of them. The animosity and negativity that is associated with prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence starts once they incarcerated.

Extract 22

'It's [education] more about doing something that you can do in your spare time, we can all pretend that they are going to come out and get a job but it's not going to happen, I had a guy apply for 60 jobs in a year and he got 60 knockbacks because

> *he's been in prison for his offence so but then he learned how to use a computer and*
> *he searched his family tree' (P 7: lines 166 - 169)*

It was highlighted multiple times throughout the focus groups that prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence would not be able to find employment upon release. Therefore, regardless of the educational courses the prisoners engaged with as they would still be unemployable because of the stigma attached to their offence. The prison staff are aware that the prisoners will leave prison with extremely limited choices thus they see education as something other than a means to employment. Indeed, prison education is more than just a route into employment, education can offer additional benefits for prisoners such as communications skills and personal development, as stated in the abstract regarding learning computer skills to search his family tree. Prison education has been acknowledged as being mundane because of the lack of choice (Czerniawski, 2016). However, if the educational provisions are there for learning skills that are not attached to employment, perhaps other courses could be offered. Although there are additional benefits of prisoner education the prison staff tended to focus on the employment route even though they did not believe that this was a route the prisoners could successfully access.

Extract 23

> *'I guess that's the difference with some of our with some of our population and saying*
> *that they work, they were employed so not like the mains so much, so they are used to*
> *going to work each day aren't they and probably doing something a bit more*
> *meaningful…. they are workers on the out and they are used to getting up and doing a*
> *job' (P 12: lines 203 - 210)*

The prison staff perceived prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence to be different to other prisoners who are incarcerated for a non-sexual offence. There was the assumption from the prison staff that this prison cohort were actively employed before incarceration, compared to other prisoner cohorts (mains prisoners) who were presumed to be unemployed prior to incarceration. This is echoed by McAlinden et al., (2017) who identified that most men in their study had previously held a stable and potentially rewarding job prior to their incarceration for a sexual offence. It appears from the prison staff there is a clear distinct difference between prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence and those incarcerated for a non-sexual offence in terms of employment. The prison staff focused on employment

outcomes and opportunities when discussing education. This may be because prison policy dictates that education should have clear purpose and goals for employment when released (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2021). However, the prison staff did not discuss other benefits from engaging with prison education such as personal development, and a sense of belonging (Nichols, 2017) which have been identified as crucial for long-term desistance from crime (Terry & Cardwell, 2015). On the other hand, the prison staff are aware of the restrictions and difficulties this prisoner cohort face when released, particularly if prisoners have to re-train for a different career. Prisoners formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence can be barred from working with children and vulnerable adults (Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000), resulting in numerous restrictions limiting their employment options.

Extract 24

'I don't mean to discriminate anyone in main but people in this kind of environment sex offender they tend to be a lot more clever than the people over there, [mains]so they need the help to get back out there because they are going out there with a qualification that they've already got and not being able to get a job because they've got a criminal record' (P 5: lines 586 - 584)

The prison staff highlighted the perceived differences in prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence and prisoners incarcerated for non-sexual offences. Prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are perceived to be more intelligent that other prison cohorts and this was a belief throughout the prison estate. Previous research has suggested that individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence have a higher level of employment before incarceration (Harris, 2014; McAlinden et al., 2017). In addition, Tovey et al., (2022) argues prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence do have elevated levels of employment and educational achievements prior to incarceration. These differences perceived were because of the prisoner's offence status as prison staff viewed prisoners incarcerated for a non-sexual offence were a result of a poverty issue as one participant stated:

Extract 25

'Because again the nature of the offences here can apply to any person can't they, it's not just about, mains might be more I don't know poverty stricken in certain areas of life or whatever where here (sexual offenders only prison) it's a broad spectrum of everybody from every walk of life' (P 11: line 113)

The prison staff highlighted their perception that those who are incarcerated for a non-sexual offence commit acquisitive crime due to lifestyle and factors such as poverty. Whereas those who are incarcerated for a sexual offence did so because of varied reasons and not because of lifestyle or poverty issues. Therefore, prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence do not meet with the standard prisoner profile of having low levels of education and low employment achievements. However, employment evaluations of individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence, in particular possession of indecent images were almost always employed with a third in working in supervisory positions (Calder, 2004; Frei et al., 2005). Therefore, there appears to be differences in prisoner cohorts based on offence type. There was the notion from the prison staff that poverty did not play a part in their offence because most prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence were employed prior to becoming incarcerated. Therefore, due to barriers as previously mentioned, the realistic options for their future may be extremely limited.

Extract 26

> *'They (prisoners) are going to find it really difficult, that can affect mental health if they are finding it difficult, it will affect mental health massively if they're cleaning and they are educated' (P 5: line 685)*

The difficulties prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence face have been noted by the prison staff. Thus, the lack of employment options could affect a prisoner's mental health; the hopes of finding fulfilling employment with good pay may not be readily available for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. Brown et al., (2007) revealed health related issues were common in prisoners such as depression. Thus, not gaining fulfilling employment upon release can lead to metal health issues for prisoners, which could further limit a prisoners employment option. The type of employment that is open to individuals who have been previously incarcerated may be detrimental to their mental health, this may be exaggerated if they have previously held a well standing job in the community.

7.3.2: Superordinate Theme 2: Second Class Citizens

The second superordinate theme, *second class citizens* transpired as the prison staff discussed how prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence were different from other prisoners. The participants perceptions regarding education were that it could not help prisoners

incarcerated for a sexual offence because this prison cohort could not change and will continue to offend. All too often the word *risk* has come to mean *danger* in some westernised countries (Douglas, 2003) with the word *risk* being associated with individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence. Thus, prison staff perceived that because of their offence status, the prisoners will be a risk when released from prison and they would be rejected from becoming a member of society.

7.3.2.1: Subordinate Theme 2.1: Always Offending

This subordinate theme captures the prison staff views regarding how prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence pose a risk while they are in prison and a risk of offending when they are released. Prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence are perceived as a homogenous group that is seen particularly as risky and dangerous (Burrows, 2016). This was evident during the focus groups as prison staff perceived the prisoners to be still offending or looking to offend whilst they are incarcerated.

Extract 27

  'I think the difference is with sex offenders what you have to watch out for is conditioning because in general they are more sophisticated' (P 4: Line 424)

Extract 28

  'You've got to remember the people you're with at the end of the day' (P 11: line 644)

Extract 29

  '*Yeah, grooming is manipulation and grooming is rife and if you blink, you've missed something in the classroom' (P 13: line 669)*

There was a sense from the prison staff, as illustrated in the extract above, they should remain aware that prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are known for conditioning their victims. Thus, prison staff perceived that it is the nature of prisoners incarcerated for as sexual offence to pose a risk to others. The prison staff referred to the differences in this prisoner cohorts' character as opposed to other prisoner cohorts. The *type* of prisoners they work with are the ones that would manipulate their status in prison to continue with their offending. Van Dijk (2006) defines manipulation as *"a communicative and interactional practice, in which a manipulator exercises control over other people, usually against their will or against their best interests"* (p. 360). Therefore, the prison staff were suspicious of being manipulated by the prisoners. It appears to be well known that prisoners incarcerated

for a sexual offence are often "*more complex and they tend to be highly intelligent, however, the flip-side of that is that sometimes they can be manipulative, and this can be dangerous"* (Wilson & Silverman, 2002, p. 77). Furthermore, grooming behaviours are associated with sexual offending, because they employ a variety of strategies to gain access to a victim and ensure compliance (McAlinden, 2012). Thus, prison staff were aware of the tendencies of this prisoner cohort of potential condition and grooming other prisoners and themselves. The prison staff had to continually remind themselves of the nature of this prisoner cohort to ensure they did not become too compliant. They perceived prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence to be dangerous and by working with them they are putting themselves at risk. There are prisoners who have committed a serious violent, sexual offence; therefore, it can be a harsh reminder of reality and the risk that is associated when working in a prison environment. It was acknowledged by the prison staff throughout all three focus groups that prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are experts in manipulation, as stated in the following extracts:

Extract 30

'They [prisoners] could cross over into some quite dangerous areas for some people in here…I think you know that we need to be conscious of that or where that could be an issue' (P 9: lines 556 - 568)

Extract 31

'You've got to monitor because it's the very nature of things, oh I need to educate but really its I need this young lad to come here' (P 11: line 157)

The prison staff discussed how they need to continually monitor the prisoners because of the perceptions of risk. The prison staff perceived that prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence have a nature of continued offending; in the sense, the prisoners were always looking for their next victim to groom. Arguably there is a level of punitiveness when it comes to this prison cohort because there is a heightened level of risk. However, prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence have low recidivism rates compared to prisoners incarcerated for a non-sexual offence (Burrows, 2016), thus the heightened risk associated with this prisoner cohort may be unjustified. However, the levels of risk associated with prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence may be accurately warranted. This is because prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence engage with interventions programmes such as the risk need responsivity principle (Andrews & Bonta, 2010) and the good lives model (Ward &

Fortune, 2013) which have been effective in reducing recidivism. Furthermore, prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence have licence conditions, notification procedures and they will need to comply with the sex offenders register when released from prison. Therefore, it can be argued this prisoner cohort are less likely to offend because they engage with intervention programmes, and they are closely monitored when released. Nevertheless, prison staff continue to perceive prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence as being dangerous and a risk of conditioning others.

> *Extract 32*
>> *'You could very s forget… it's really nice its lovely and everyone's friendly…then you go read a case... he's really nice, no actually he's not that nice…. he's done these horrendous things so you can't lose sight of that'* (P 14: lines 694 - 698)
>
> *Extract 33*
>> *'But you can't be groomed by stuff you can't ever be feeling sorry for these… you've just got to remember where you are, it's still a prison and they are still offenders'* (P 13: lines 711 - 712)

The prison staff emphasised there was a constant reminder they are working with prisoners and as such, do not get involved personally or emotionally with any prisoner. The attitudes of prison staff play a vital role in the successful treatment and rehabilitation of prisoners (Blagden et al., 2014), arguably it is necessary to build professional relationships with prisoners. However, there is the perception from the prison staff that those incarcerated for a sexual offence are more dangerous and will offend when released. Therefore, cannot be successfully treated (Meloy, 2006). Essentially, the friendly and helpful prisoner is perceived as a manipulative person rather than a prisoner who is taking positive steps to become a better person. The prison staff emphasise how they should not forget the horrendous things the prisoners have done. Thus, the prison staff appear to base their judgement on their offence rather than the person behind the offence. There are different views of individuals who work with prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. For example, some view them as monsters (Nash, 2019), whilst others view them as dangerous and manipulative (Kewley, 2017). Therefore, the stigmatise attitudes from staff are less likely to encourage the prisoners to promote agency or identity transformation (Pemberton, et al., 2023), which is needed for successful desistance. This is further echoed in society because prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are judged on their offence rather than their character (Hudson, 2013). There

is the understanding that prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence have an elevated level of risk and thus, prison staff need to be aware of their offence status.

Extract 34

'Some people who will abuse what they've learnt to maybe go on to reoffend… I mean you could argue that if somebody has offended against children and can't read or write and we teach him to read and write then he will write stories about it…we have to be careful and we have to be vigilant, but we also have to not tar everybody with that same brush' (P 8: lines 559 - 562)

Extract 35

'Yeah, but they could actually be doing the fantasy secretly…learning how to be creative and be contextualising learning…kind of fuelling their sexual fantasies or abusive sexual fantasies' (P 7: lines 545 - 550)

It was the perceptions of several prison staff that prisoners could use education as a way to become better at crime. Therefore, the prisoners should not receive certain educational courses because they would use this knowledge to enable them to offend. This has been highlighted earlier with the learning of digital technology in a prison environment (see section 7.3.1.3). There was the assumption throughout the narrative that the prisoners will automatically reoffend. However, the danger of assuming prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence will offend again highlights the perceived notion of risk. Therefore, this prisoner cohort continually attract the label of risk which can limit their chance of rehabilitation in society. Thus, if the prisoners are observed through their offence status, ultimately this gives the expectation that they will offend again (Willis, 2018). Moreover, there appears to be an unwritten rule that prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence can only ever be discussed in the context of risk (Burrows, 2016). This results in prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence exposed to a *"punitive and dehumanised narrative"* (Harper, 2018, p. 143) and this is continually promoted through society. Furthermore, the extract above highlights how prisoners were using education to fuel their sexual fantasies. This appears to be perceived because they are prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. Thus, engaging with education as a rehabilitative process is still perceived as a risk to allow prisoners to continue offending. It is unclear if the prison staff perceived all prisoners, regardless of offence status to use education to fuel their fantasies or to enable them to continue to offend. However, the prison staff stated this prisoner cohort was different from other prisoner cohorts and

ultimately the prison staff did not trust the prisoners. Therefore, if individuals working with prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence perceive them to be a high risk of offending, it is understandable why society has the same perception.

7.3.2.2: Subordinate Theme 2.2: Less Deserving

This theme emerged as the prison staff discussed the prisoners as being different to other prisoners. The prison staff perception was also shared by the prisoners, in the sense that they perceived they have less eligibility for opportunities compared to other prisoners. The prison staff discussed how the prisoners felt lucky that they were offered education opportunities at all, as stated below:

Extract 36

'I get that impression as well that they feel erm yeah that t*hey are lucky to be offered anything due to their crimes and nature of their crimes and it isn't how it should be but that's how they feel' (P 5: lines 449 - 450)*

The above extract indicates that individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence perceive they are fortunate to be offered prison education. This is because of their offence status and how society perceive prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence should receive harsher punishments. The prison staff are aware of how the prisoners view themselves because of the crime they have been accused off. The words *sex offender* incite fear in society which stimulates feelings of anger and disgust (Olver & Barlow, 2010). Therefore, the prisoner's identity is based on the public's attitudes held about sexual offending (Hudson, 2013). The prison staff discussed prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence were stigmatised for life and not just for the length of their custodial sentence. Therefore, this prisoner cohort are not given the same opportunities and are perceived as less eligible compared to individuals incarcerated for a non-sexual offence. The difference in criminal offences were discussed, with the prison staff highlighting the differences in the way society treat individuals based on their offence status. As one participant exemplified:

Extract 37

'But they still go out with a title unlike any other prisoner, if you've murdered somebody you go out as you know a normal human being, but you go out here as I

don't know a rapist, you're a rapist, you're a sex offender, you've still got that title
unfortunately' (P 10: lines 490 -492)

The above extract highlights how severely individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence are judged by society. The prison staff acknowledged how society's perception of a criminal offence differs. For example, if an individual commits murder, they can return to the community because they are perceived to be rehabilitated and are deserving of a second chance. Whereas those who have been incarcerated for a sexual offence are perceived as less deserving of a second chance because they have the highly stigmatised label of *sex offender*. Therefore, prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are forever labelled a *sex offender*, this label has become normalised by society and the media (Goffman, 1963). Thus, individuals with this type of conviction may never be accepted into society because of the negative beliefs associated with this cohort of prisoners. The stigma associated with prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence, perceive them not to be human, in the sense that the person is devalued and seen as undesirable and different by society (Goffman, 1963). Therefore, individuals who are incarcerated for a sexual offence are perceived as less than human. However, prisoners who commit any offence other than a sexual offence are perceived to be normal and human.

Extract 38
'If he comes in here and gets a sense of self-worth and he can get himself a job and be
a normal person' (P 11: line 441)

There is emphasis on the importance being placed on being normal by having a sense of self-worth and securing a job. This is how the prison staff perceive what *normal* is and emphasis is placed on the prisoners to achieve employment and become integrated into society. However, as the prison staff's stress the importance of prisoners becoming normal this implies that they believe prisoners are abnormal, or different from others. Therefore, prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence do not fit with the expectations in society. As previously mentioned, Goffman (1963) defined a person who has stigma attached to them is not considered quite human. As previously discussed, a person incarcerated for a sexual offence is highly stigmatised, therefore they are not human or normal. Furthermore, the prison staff did not perceive the prisoners in their care as normal and consequently, if the people who work with prisoners held this belief, how is society expected to see them any

other way? It was unclear if the prison staff thought the prisoners were abnormal because they were a prisoner, or because they were incarcerated for a sexual offence. Therefore, the perceptions of normality that are placed on prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence do not fit into the expectations of normality inside or outside of prison. Prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are deemed as different and will not only be labelled an *ex-offender,* but they will also be labelled an *ex-sex offender*. There is the risk that the label of *sex offender* may become their master status and thus, stay with them forever (Goffman, 1963). Master status signifies the belief that a label is more significant than any other aspect of the person (Hughes, 1945). Additionally, according to the prison staff, the general public's attitude to prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence, were often extremely negative because of preconceived notions which are often false. The prison staff explained how in the prison environment this prison cohort are disliked and stigmatised by other prisoners, as one participant explained:

Extract 39

'*When you've got a mixed jail where you've got a VP [vulnerable prisoner] or whatever, they are a constant reminder, those people are hated by everybody*' *(P 7: line 646)*

When there is a mixed prison with a variety of offences, the prisoners that are incarcerated for a sexual offence are segregated from other prisoners. This is to protect prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence as it is assumed they will be attacked by other prisoners. This is because they are viewed as vulnerable and often experience the ongoing threat of victimisation (Blagden & Pemberton, 2010). Furthermore, prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence experience stigmatisation from other prisoners and staff resulting in them being treated negatively (Spencer, 2009) and thus they are at the bottom of the prison hierarchy. This is purely based on the stigma attached to offences of a sexual nature and it is widely accepted in a prison environment. Therefore, it appears that prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are not accepted inside or outside of the prison walls. Furthermore, the stigma attached to sexual offending goes beyond those that are incarcerated. The stigma attached to sexual offending is attached to others and the negative characteristic is then placed on the individual because of the association (Halter, 2008). This includes prison staff that work with prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence, as one participant explained:

Extract 40

> *'I've lost friends through working here, I've lost people who I've known for years because they can't understand it, it's almost as if you've got 2 heads you're working with that type of individual' (P 9: lines 655 - 659)*

As the extract above highlights, the stigma that is attached to prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence is also placed on individuals who work with this prisoner cohort. Several of the prison staff discussed how they are also viewed as some kind of monster because of their association with prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. Therefore, the prison staff experience secondary stigma because the negative characteristics of this prisoner cohort are placed on them. *Sexual offending* has become the most heinous of criminal offences with the attitude towards those incarcerated for a sexual offence being amongst the most stigmatised group (Jewkes, 2004). Thus, the stigma has extended to staff working with this prison cohort. As the extract above highlights, the stigma attached to this prison cohort is so extreme that prison staff have lost friends simply because of their profession. Therefore, it may be difficult to recruit prison staff because of the negative perceptions of this prisoner cohort. There is little understanding of the nature of sexual offences within society and the attitudes surrounding this prisoner cohort are reinforced by sensationalist media coverage (Rothwell et al., 2021).

Extract 41

> *'But the reality is that the public has a perception of what's going to come and work with them or live next door…. it's the restrictions that this type of prisoner has and unfortunately, they all leave here with that label regardless of what they've done' (P 14: lines 485 - 488)*

The preconceived notions of prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence in society cause negative feelings. This is because there is little understanding of sexual offending. Therefore, this prisoner cohort is perceived be more dangerous and risky because of their offence. The stigma attached to prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence creates an ideology that explains their inferiority and account for the danger they represent in society (Goffman, 1963). In addition, the sensationalising of sexual crimes in the media influences society which can then lead to fear of individuals who have committed a sexual offence. Thus, society develops punitive perceptions of this prisoner cohort, more so than any other offence

including murder (King & Roberts, 2017). As a result, they have more restrictions compared to individuals who have committed a non-sexual offence (Bailey & Sample, 2015). However, societal responses to individuals labelled a *sex offender* often block opportunities for them to live a safe, and stable life (Willis & Johnston, 2010). Thus, the *sex offender* label has a significant impact on a prisoner's position in society, potentially lasting their whole life (Ievins & Crewe, 2015). Therefore, prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence have less eligibility compared to prisoners incarcerated for a non-sexual offence. Thus, individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence have become a socially excluded group.

7.4: Summary

The prison staff narratives gave rise to two superordinate themes: *'False hope'* and *'Second class citizen.'* The prison staff did not perceive prison education would be of benefit for the prisoners because of the limited opportunities available in prison education. Furthermore, the prison staff repeated the outcomes of education was for employment. However, prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are limited in their employment options when release. In addition, because of the nature of the offence of the prisoners they were working with, there was the perceived notion they are a continuing risk of offending.

Through the narratives of the prison staff, it appears the prisoners are given hope that they are engaging with prison education because this will help them obtain employment upon release. However, many employers discriminate against formerly incarcerated individuals and reject someone with a criminal offence (Unlock, 2021). This is exaggerated for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence as they face additional barriers (Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2009), which include licence conditions, and notifications procedures when released from prison (Burrows, 2016). Arguably, prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are perceived as the most unemployable demographic (Blessett & Pryor, 2013). Yet, the prison staff are aware of the barriers that this prisoner cohort face when released. However, the prison staff actively encourage the prisoners to engage with education on the false pretence it will help them find employment upon release.

The risk that is associated with prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence can be observed through the narratives of the prison staff. There is risk associated with the educational courses on offer because the prison staff perceived the knowledge gained would be used by the prisoners to commit further crimes. For example, the prison staff discussed digital technology and was considered a significant area of risk. There was the perception that offences of a sexual nature, takes place online, therefore learning how to use computers would only fuel

their offending. However, to become an active member of society there is the need to use technology. For example, searching for employment is conducted online, along with many other services. Thus, excluding prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence from digital technology would put them at a social disadvantage, unable to fulfil their potential (Gosling & Burke, 2019). Furthermore, attitudes are often amplified for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence and are perceived as being less eligible of educational opportunities (Brown, 2005).

The risk of offending is constant with prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. This is because they are perceived by the prison staff as being master manipulators with grooming as part of their offending behaviours. Prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are judged by society as being risky and dangerous because of their offence (Burrows, 2016). The prison staff are aware of the stigma associated with the label of *sex offender,* but it appeared the stigma follows the prisoners into prison. The implications of this chapter highlight the label of *sex offender* is associated with risk, inside and outside of prison walls. Therefore, this limits the opportunities to be viewed as anything other than an individual who has been incarcerated for a sexual offence.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

The concluding chapter of this thesis provides a discussion regarding the findings that emerged throughout this thesis. An extensive literature review was undertaken to gain a deeper understanding of prison education, and prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. Following the literature review the first chapter reviewed secondary data that was available in the public domain to enable a comparison between adult males incarcerated for a sexual offence and adult males incarcerated for a non-sexual offence. Three empirical studies were conducted for this thesis. Study one and study two were identical studies in the sense they had the same aim which was to conduct semi-structured interviews with prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence regarding their perceptions and opinions about prison education. The difference between the two studies is that study one consisted of prisoners who do not engage with prison education compared to study two which consisted of prisoners who are actively engaging with prison education. The final study of this thesis consisted of a qualitative study comprising of focus groups with prison staff who work with prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence regarding their perceptions and opinions of prison education.

The aim of this chapter discusses the findings from the secondary data and the empirical studies, highlighting the original contributions to knowledge that have been made. Recommendations for future practice and research are considered and an outline of the limitations of this research are discussed.

8.1: Thesis contribution

The thesis aimed to investigate the following:

1. Identify and examine the educational profile of the prisoner population of England and Wales, with a focus on prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence.
2. To gain an understanding of why prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence do not participate in prison education, to recognise how education can be more accessible to these individuals.
3. To gain an understanding of why prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence participate in prison education.
4. To understand the experiences of relevant prison staff, and their expectations and understanding of the assumed benefits of education for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence.

These aims enabled the researcher to answer the thesis: Prison education for individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence: exploring the realistic expectations concerning their future.

The first chapter (four) aimed to answer the research question by reviewing the educational profile of the prisoner population of England and Wales. The focus of this chapter was to investigate any differences between prisoners convicted of a sexual offence and prisoners convicted of a non-sexual offence. However, this proved to be problematic because there is no data available in the public domain that differentiates prisoners based on their offence. Although each prison establishment collects data regarding their prisoner cohorts, the collected data is recorded and published as one homogenous group. This means there is no distinction between prisoners, as a result, the educational profile of prisoners could not be compared due to lack of data available to the author.

The secondary data that is freely available in the public domain does give an overall picture of the educational profile of the prisoner population in England and Wales. Key information regarding each prisoner is captured upon arrival when they are first incarcerated, and when a prisoner participates in prison education, their achievements are recorded. For example, data that has been recorded has identified the level of achievement in functional skills courses in Mathematics, English, and ICT was 54 % (MoJ, 2021) for the prisoner population in England and Wales. However, the difficulty with this data is that it does not distinguish between prisoners who are incarcerated for different offences. In addition, this data is limited to those prisoners who participate in education and thus, the data excludes prisoners who do not engage with education. When prisoners first enter a prison establishment in England and Wales, they must take part in a mandatory initial assessment to assess their Mathematics and English ability (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022). The data is recorded and is available in the public domain. However, there are several challenges associated with this data, (i) the data does not distinguish between prisoners based on their offence, (ii) although mandatory, not every prisoner completes their initial assessment, (iii) the highest-level prisoners can achieve on the assessment is Level 2, and (iv) the assessments are usually conducted in the first week of entering a prison when their minds are not yet adapted to prison life. These challenges could be some of the reasons why 62 % of the adult prisoner population who take part in these initial assessments had reading levels below those expected of an 11-year-old (Prison Reform Trust, 2022). Therefore, collection of this data would not represent an accurate portrayal of the prisoner populations educational profile.

The data available in the public domain regarding the prisoner population portrays those that are incarcerated as having poor educational skills with no qualifications (Prison Reform Trust, 2022). In addition, those who are involved with the criminal justice system, have been identified as more likely to have a learning difficulty or disability (NHS England, 2016) when compared to the general population. However, this data is generalising the prisoner population and assuming they all have the same issues and thus all have identical educational needs. However, there is a sizeable proportion of the prisoner population who have completed secondary school, attended college and/or university, and had qualifications that are Level 2 or above. Moreover, there are prisoners who do not have a learning difficulty or disability and there is a large number of prisoners whose levels of education exceed that of an 11-year-old. However, this proportion of the prisoner population tends to be forgotten because the focus of prison education is on basic skills such as Mathematics and English (Szifris et al., 2018). The idea behind this chapter were to identify how many of the prisoners who have qualifications higher than a Level 2 are incarcerated for a sexual offence compared to individuals who are incarcerated for a non-sexual offence. However, due to the lack of data available in the public domain it is not possible to identify prisoners' educational achievements based on their offence.

The findings of this chapter highlight the current gap in the data collection in prison establishments. At present, the Ministry of Justice reporting procedures provides analysis of all prisoners as a homogeneous group, this prohibits analysis of the educational attainment of prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence as a distinct group. It must be acknowledged that the prison population is diverse and offering a 'one size fits all' approach does not take into account the variations in the prisoner population.

The three qualitative studies that have been conducted for this thesis are presented in chapters five, six and seven. Although all three studies were conducted and analysed separately, for this concluding chapter, the three studies are discussed as one set of findings.

The prisoner participants who were actively engaging with prison education held positive opinions regarding their experience. The prisoner participants highlighted how education had rejuvenated their knowledge as it gave them time to reflect on their previous learning experiences. Taking a step back from their lives by being incarcerated gave the prisoners time to reflect. Furthermore, participating in education gave the prisoners an opportunity for learning that previously they had little chance to experience. The prisoner participants identified how engaging with education proved to others that they were bettering themselves

and were doing something that looked positive to others. Therefore, by bettering themselves this gave the prisoners the opportunity to transform their identity and move away from offender to non-offender. This is important for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence because of the stigma and labelling attached to sexual offending. Thus, engaging with education was a way to demonstrate that they were changing their identity which also helps with the process of desistance from crime (Maruna, 2001).

A second positive aspect regarding prison education was noted by the prisoner participants. Prison education was perceived as the better choice for purposeful activity inside a prison establishment. Although in a prison environment there are opportunities for prisoners to participate in a range of purposeful activities, such as work and education. The purposeful activities other than education were often considered to be boring and monotonous amongst the prisoner participants. Evidence does highlight that there has been a decline in the effectiveness of purposeful activities in a prison establishment (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2019b). Therefore, the prisoner participants chose to engage with education because it was the most favourable option to choose from when compared to alternative activities in prison.

Engaging with prisoner education provided a form of escape from the often-volatile prison wing and provided a safe haven for the prisoner participants. This has been echoed by Behan (2014) who found prison education was used as an opportunity to escape the monotony of the routine and regime. The prisoner participants spoke about the education environment being somewhere they feel safe and where they did not feel like a prisoner. Furthermore, the prisoner participants stated that they were treated like human beings when attending prison education and enjoyed being identified as a learner rather than a prisoner. The education staff have a positive influence on the experiences of those incarcerated by treating them as human beings (Liebling, 2011). The prisoner participants stated that they chose to engage with education because it helps relieve the boredom of the prison environment as it gave them something to do. However, the only participants of the studies who identified education as being positive were those who were actively engaging with education. This can be understandable because if the prisoners did not see the positive aspect of engaging with education, they would not have chosen this activity. Although the prison participants have highlighted positive aspects of education, the elements they discuss evolve around engaging with an activity, having something to do, getting off the wing or proving they are doing something worthwhile. The positive aspects discussed did not involve the educational courses or the qualifications they gained.

Throughout all three studies, prison education was highlighted as a positive way to help prisoners gain employment when they are released. There was the perception that prison education was beneficial for prisoners because prison education gave the prisoners qualifications which could lead to employment upon release. The main outcomes of prison education were identified by participants from all three studies as enhancing employment skills. The education in a prison does appear to be heavily focused on prisoners becoming employed when they are released (Coates, 2016; MoJ, 2019). The prisoner participants perceived by engaging with education, this would give them skills and qualifications to find employment upon release. Additionally, the prison staff sold the idea of education to prisoners as they would be able to find employment upon release. Employment appeared to be the main reason for engaging the education which can be seen as something incredibly positive. Research has continuously revealed positive results regarding prisoners engaging with education whilst in prison with helping people desist from crime and helping lower the reoffending rates (MoJ, 2018; Musick et al., 2012; Prison Reform Trust, 2022). Therefore, prison education was identified as a positive factor for the prisoners who were actively engaging with prison education.

However, the employment focus on being a positive aspect of prison education is not quite accurate, especially for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. Although education is *sold* to the prisoners as being vital for enhancing employment opportunities. Neither the prisoner nor prison staff believed education could help them with employment. This was because of the prisoner's offence being sexual in nature. The lack of employment opportunities for prisoners formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence are extremely limited. It has been recognised that this prisoner cohort are the most unemployable demographic (Blessett & Pryor, 2013). Therefore, because the prisoner participants did not consider they would be able to find employment upon release. Thus, they perceived engaging with education would be a waste of their time. The prisoners were very aware of the negative stigma that is attached to sexual offending. This perception was echoed by the prison staff who discussed how the prisoners are unemployable because they are incarcerated for a sexual offence. However, this did not stop the prison staff from *selling* education to the prisoners, essentially giving the prisoners false information. This is a tricky situation for prison staff because they are aware of the positive benefits of education but did not think these benefits would apply to prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence.

The focus on employment through education may not be realistic for some prisoners, for example 43 % of the prisoners who are over 50 years old are incarcerated for a sexual offence

(HL, 2022) and the over sixties are the fasted growing age group in prison. The prisoner participants came from a wide range of age groups with the youngest being twenty-one and the oldest was 74 years old. The diverse range of ages in a prison environment highlights the different requirements of prisoners regarding their educational needs. Therefore, delivering education courses to people in their 50s and 60s may be an ineffective task in the sense that many of this age group may be considering retirement and not a career change. Thus, education with an employability goal may not be something that is required for these individuals. Engaging with education can provide health benefits by keeping prisoners minds active and keeping them busy which can lessen the damage that can be caused by imprisonment (Costelloe, 2014). This is a positive aspect for all prisoners because being incarcerated can be detrimental to a person's mental health. Therefore, the education curriculum needs to ensure that it meets the needs of all prisoners.

However, prison education delivers a curriculum that has been criticised for being too narrow with limited technology (Prison Learning Alliance, 2021; Czerniawski, 2016). There were several prisoner participants who had previously achieved the levels of education that were being offered in prison, and this meant they were unable to engage with education. This was because at the prison where the research was conducted, the courses were limited at a Level 2 qualification and there were no taught courses that went higher. Level 2 qualifications are the equivalent to a GCSE A-C qualification, thus, gaining these would place the prisoners at the same education level as a school leaver. Therefore, because the qualifications gained in prison are basic and they are delivered at a low level, they were not worth much to the prisoners. Gaining the same qualifications as a 16-year-old school leaver did not inspire the prisoners to engage with education because they could not see the benefits. Several of the prisoner participants stated they would have liked to study at Level 3 or above as they perceived this would make them more competitive in the employment market. Although it has been recommended that prisons should deliver qualifications that are at Level 3 or above (Coates, 2016) yet, this has still not been implemented.

There is the danger with delivering low level qualification to a range of people with different educational backgrounds as this can lead to discrimination and exclusion. If a prisoner cannot attend education because there are no qualifications that they are able to study because of the level of attainment, they are excluded. Essentially the education department is saying to prisoners with educational achievements that are higher than a Level two, '*we do not want you.*' They do not fit the criteria and they are unable to participate, thus they are discriminated against for being '*clever enough*' as described by prison staff. The

participants from all three studies highlighted the discrepancies in the levels of education and the fairness of the education provisions.

One aspect of prison education which was discussed by all of the prisoner participants was that education in prisons does not meet the needs of the prisoners. It seems that the education courses offer nothing more than basic skills qualifications, although research does suggest that basic skills are fundamental in helping prisoners to read and write (McMann, 2016), this does not help those prisoners that already had these basic skills. The government aims to get all prisoners to a required standard before they are released, this ensures all prisoners leave prison with a Level 2 qualification. This is a valuable initiative to those prisoners who do not possess basic levels of education because the reading levels for the prisoner population have been found to be significantly lower when compared with the general population (Prison Reform Trust, 2022). However, there are a large cohort of prisoners who do possess Level 2 qualifications and are at the governments required standard of education. Therefore, these prisoners are excluded from engagement with education because there is extraordinarily little to offer them.

Progression to higher levels of education was discussed throughout all three of the studies. Several of the prisoner participants discussed how they wanted to study education at higher levels but found that it was unavailable for them. There were many prisoner participants who wanted to study at a level that exceeds Level 2 but found there were lots of barriers when trying to access these courses. Therefore, the prisoner participants who did attempt to access a higher learning course stated they found it extremely difficult. Several prisoner participants highlighted some of the barriers starting with how they found it difficult to talk to someone regarding higher education courses and noted the difficulties in submitting their application. Once the prisoners submitted their application for a higher learning course, they did not receive a response to their application. There appears to be a high demand for distance learning courses in prisons but there are significant challenges to accessing these courses. Furthermore, engagement with higher learning is also dependent on the different prison establishment and whether they support higher learning courses (Clark, 2016). Although higher education is available to all prisoners where the research took place, it appears accessing higher learning courses was virtually impossible.

As previously noted, the education environment was seen as positive along with the education staff who were identified as treating prisoners like human beings rather than prisoners. Although, the prisoner participants had positive things to say about the education staff, equally they criticised them. The prisoner participants did not believe the education

staff were of the same quality as educators they would have if they were at an outside education establishment. During the interviews, the prisoner participants explained how there were some education staff who were teaching on a course that they had little knowledge of. Therefore, this led them to perceive the education was not of the same quality as the education they would receive if they were not in prison. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has been criticised along with not providing learning that was sufficiently challenging and engaging (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2019b). In addition, the quality of educational provisions was called into question by the prisoner participants because they did not believe education was the same quality as they would receive on the outside.

This may be because of the quality of the qualifications they received in prison. The prisoner participants reported that certificates were '*given out like sweets.'* Therefore, there was the perception that the certificates achieved from passing the course were not of the same quality as those gained in educational settings outside of prison. This is because the certificates tend to be basic and low-level qualifications which are insufficient for employment (Flynn & Higdon, 2022). Therefore, the prisoner participants recognised they would be released from prison with a criminal conviction; thus, they were aware they would require competitive qualifications for them to have a chance of employment against others without criminal convictions. Furthermore, the lack of quality certificates was also recognised by the prison staff as being problematic. This was because the certificates received from passing courses are seen as evidence that a person has previously been incarcerated. This was because the educational courses on offer in prison tend to be low-level and bite-size courses which results in prisoners gaining lots of qualifications and certificates in such a short amount of time. This is exclusive to prison education because other educational institutions do not do this.

The issue of money came up during both the prisoner and prison staff discussions. Prisoners get paid for each session of purposeful activity they participate in. The pay for attending education is consistently less than other activities in prison which means that many prisoners would not actively choose education. This is because they need the money to buy essential items whilst incarcerated. Therefore, there is little incentive for prisoners to choose education over other activities. Thus, if prisoners did want to engage with education, they may not be able to afford to participate. This was noted as a big issue because it meant that education was seen as the lowest activity to engage with in prison and thus did not hold much credibility. Work was perceived to be more important than education which is evident to where the prisons priorities lie.

The participants from all three qualitative studies perceived prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence were disadvantaged in many ways. As a result, the prisoner participants did not consider engaging with education was beneficial for them because it did not matter what qualifications they had, they would not be given a chance to use them. There was the perceptions of the prisoner participants and the prison staff that because they were incarcerated for a sexual offence, this consumed their identity, and they would never be known as anything other than a *sex offender.* This is because of the stigma and labelling that is attached to individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence. However, it did not seem to matter what qualifications or work experience this prison cohort had; it was acknowledged they would be unemployable when released. This was because prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence are released from prison with a number of restrictions such as having to be on the sex offenders register and have licence conditions (Burrows, 2016). Consequently, the prisoner participants assumed it would be twice as difficult for them to be given an opportunity of employment upon release. Thus, it can be argued that prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence have an invisible punishment (Travis, 2005) and they continue to be punished after release.

The labelling of prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence gives out the expectation that they will offend again (Willis, 2018). The prisoner participants are aware of the labelling and stigma that surrounds sexual offending and because of this many of the prisoners perceive they will never amount to anything when released. This is because they will never be forgiven by society. This sentiment was shared by the prison staff who discussed the false hope that they gave prisoners regarding their futures. Although whilst in prison the prison staff actively encouraged the prisoners to engage with education so they could get qualifications for employment upon release. The reality was that the prison staff did not consider the prisoners would be accepted into society because of the nature of their offence.

The risk factor of the prisoners was a major concern for the prison staff as they discussed aspects of prison education. The reality was that the prison staff did not perceive that prison education would benefit the prisoners because of the label of *sex offender.* It was widely perceived throughout the prison estate that prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence will continue to offend, even in prison. The opinion that those incarcerated for a sexual offence can never change is an attitude echoed by the public which makes it difficult to re-establish any sort of positive identity within society (Manza et al., 2004). The prison staff emphasised the risk factors that are associated with this prison cohort and they perceived that the

prisoners posed a risk of offending inside the prison. In addition, the prison staff thought that the qualifications in education should be monitored so that the prisoners would not use their newfound knowledge to offend. This was stated by several prison staff regarding education courses, for example, prisoners who attend education to learn digital technology would use these skills to further offend. However, learning about digital technology is important because it is part of everyday life and is required in most employment settings. In addition, if the prison and education department consider all the educational courses that on offer with regards to offending, this would limit the already narrow curriculum very quickly. The preoccupation with risk is evident within the education department because if prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence want to learn certain skills, they will need to be risk assessed.

The prison staff discussed the fear by some of staff members of the wider prison with regards to the prisoners becoming educated. It can be argued that education empowers prisoners to think for themselves and this is likely to be considered threatening and even subversive to prison staff (Flynn & Higdon, 2022). The fear of prisoners being educated contradicts the meaning of prison education and limits rehabilitation opportunities. The prison staff emphasised how it was not possible for this prison cohort to further their digital skills because sexual offending tends to be associated with computers. Therefore, the risk factor of prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence was something the security of the prison dealt with and thus, limited the prisoner's choice of education courses.

The preoccupation with risk is echoed by society because prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence are perceived as a homogenous group that is particularly seen as risky and dangerous (Burrows, 2016). For some prison staff, there was the notion that the rehabilitation aspect of prison education would have no positive impact on the lives of the prisoners, and thus, a waste of time. This was echoed by prisoner participants who perceived that because of their status as a *sex offender*, there would have limitations on what they can do when released. Prisoners formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence have numerous restrictions when released which can impact their successful reintegration back into society. Education is part of the rehabilitative activities in prison and for prisoners who engage with education can significantly reduce reoffending (MoJ, 2019).

Throughout the discussions from the three qualitative studies there were several themes that were repeated by all participants. The participants spoke about the same issues regarding education, and they held the same beliefs as each other regarding education and sexual

offending. There did not appear to be many differences in the participants perception of prison education and prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence.

The findings of this thesis highlight the current gap in the educational provisions for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. The current educational provisions do not take into account the diversity of the prisoner population. The education courses have been highlighted by the participants as being basic and low-level. Although it is evident that prisoners would like to study education at a higher level, there is a lack of opportunity for prisoners to learn beyond Level 2. Education in prisons have been highlighted as a pathway out of offending but the current educational offer cannot help prisoners to gain employment, training, or education upon release. It must be acknowledged that the prison population is diverse and offering a 'one size fits all' approach to prison education does not meet the needs of all of those who may wish to participate. It should be important for the education provisions in prison to take account of the diversity of the prisoner population and seek an educational offer that meets the needs of each individual prisoner. Subsequently, prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence may need additional or a differing programme of study due to their offence. Education is so important for many reasons and there should be courses available that can benefit all prisoners.

In addition, the findings from this thesis can be related to all prisoners, this is because the current educational provisions are delivered throughout the prison estate. Furthermore, the higher learning issues that have been discussed would greatly benefit those prisoners who have long custodial sentences. Therefore, these findings are beneficial for the prisoner population as a whole. However, prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are unique because they have additional restrictions and barriers based on their offence. This begins from when prisoners are first incarcerated because the prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are transferred to a VP wing. Therefore, they may not get the same education opportunities as the other prisoners. This is because in a mixed prison, prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are in the minority. In addition, prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are at the bottom of the prison hierarchy and are vilified by other prisoners. Therefore, this prisoner cohort have different incarceration experiences and may live in fear of other prisoners. In addition, some prison staff attitudes may be negative towards prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence thus, they may be denied opportunities that other prisoners have. Therefore, the navigation of the prison environment is more difficult for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence.

Although prison education tends to be focused on employment outcomes, this is difficult for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. This is because of the restrictions along with notification procedures that are placed on this prisoner cohort when released that other prisoners do not have. Therefore, this makes finding and keeping employment twice as difficult for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. Furthermore, when a prisoner has a conviction for a sex offence, this automatically stigmatises the individual. In addition, the employment focus in a prison is arguably set up for prisoners who are incarcerated for a non-sexual offence. This is because the employment opportunities are focused on careers such as barbering, which prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are unable to do. Furthermore, the training and mentoring schemes such as Timpson, as mentioned previously, they do not employ individuals with sexual offence convictions. Thus, limiting the already scarce employment opportunities available for this prisoner cohort. Therefore, the focus of employment through education does not appear to be beneficial for this prisoner cohort.

Arguably once someone is labelled a *sex offender*, this becomes their master status, and they are judged by society. Therefore, the stigma and labelling of this prisoner cohort is deemed unforgivable by society and they are perceived as more dangerous and riskier, which makes society fearful. Although reoffending statistics highlight that prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are less likely to reoffend compared to other prisoners' cohorts. However, society continues to perceive this prisoner's cohort as more likely to reoffend and requires tougher punishments. As a result, prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are receiving longer sentences and harsher punishments. Therefore, because of the negative association with prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence they have less eligibility when incarcerated. Thus, limiting the opportunities for rehabilitation.

Therefore, to provide an educational provision for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence the curriculum needs to be designed to meet the needs of this prisoner cohort. The education course on offer should incorporate a risk assessment to enable the prisoners to participate. The course design should incorporate the realistic opportunities that are available for this prisoner cohort. This would enable prisoners to engage with education knowing their achievements can be transferred beyond the prison walls. However, there is the barrier for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence when released, regarding not being accepted by society. Therefore, there needs to be more understanding from members of the public regarding the varying nature of sexual offending. Thus, if society are aware of the realistic risk associated with this prisoner cohort, perhaps they would not be so stigmatised.

Prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence have exacerbating factors that are unique to this prisoner cohort. Engaging with the current education provisions offers no additional benefits for the prisoner. Therefore, it can be argued that there is no value in education for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. This is because the levels of qualifications on offer are extremely low, and prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence tend to have higher levels than those that are currently available. Therefore, higher education is needed for this prisoner cohort because they tend to be more intelligent. Therefore, this prisoner cohort need realistic educational provisions that can enhance their future.

This thesis is centred around prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence, with the assumption that this prison cohort needs an educational delivery that is unique to their offence. However, care should be taken to ensure that prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are not marginalised. Prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence often face stigma and labelling because of their offence. This prison cohort is judged by society as committing the most heinous crimes and the media regular sensationalise crime stories that are sexual in nature (Burrows, 2016). Therefore, a culture change is needed to accept prisoners formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence back into society without the negative connotations that are associated with their offence. The findings highlight prison education does not meet the needs of prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence because the qualifications that are delivered in a prison setting are low level and basic with little benefit to many prisoners. Thus, a change is needed to provide realistic opportunities for their future.

8.2: Recommendations

The implications of this thesis highlight the current gap in educational provisions for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. It is clear that education in a prison environment brings a challenging aspect to the education providers. Delivering education in a security conscious environment has many restrictions that education provisions outside of a prison wall do not have. The findings from this thesis highlight that the current educational provisions in a prison environment are not fit for purpose and needs to adapt to meet the needs of the ever-changing prisoner population. The prisoner population is evolving with regards to the demographics of prisoners with a growing number of prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence, and they are now one of the largest groups among prisoners serving immediate custodial sentences (MoJ, 2023). There has been an increase in the average age of prisoners as more older people are being incarcerated with the over-sixties being the fastest-growing age group at almost three times higher when compared to statistics

from 16 years ago (MoJ, 2020a). In addition, there has been an increase in the length of custodial sentences which means that prisoners are being locked up for longer (Sentencing Council, 2022). The changes in the prisoner population have a significant impact on the educational provision because although the prisoner population is evolving the educational provisions have remained the same. Therefore, the findings of this thesis emphasise the need to adapt the educational provisions so that all prisoners have an opportunity to engage with education by offering a wide range of qualifications and learning opportunities that extend beyond Level 2.

The prisoner population is diverse and offering a 'one size fits all' approach to prison education does not meet the needs of all of those who wish to participate. At present, the Ministry of Justice reporting procedures provides an analysis on all prisoners as one homogeneous group which prohibits analysis of educational attainment of prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence as a distinct group. Subsequently, prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence may need additional or a different programme of study that is relevant to their conviction. Prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence have a number of restrictions as to what they can do and where they can work when they are released. The educational provisions should consider these restrictions by offering prisoners educational courses that reflect the individual prisoner. Those in prison should not be at an educational disadvantage and should have the same opportunities as those not in prison.

This thesis examined prison education for individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence, exploring the realistic expectations concerning their future. However, care should be taken so that this prison cohort are not marginalised even more than they are already. This prison cohort are at the bottom of the prison hierarchy and care should be taken not to widen the hierarchy gap. The findings highlight the qualifications delivered in prison education offer little benefit to prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. Education is so important for many reasons such as gaining self-confidence (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022), desistance from crime (Abeling-Judge, 2019), rehabilitation (Coates, 2016) and employment (MoJ, 2019). Thus, the educational courses should offer high quality provisions and high-level qualifications that are recognised by employees to help prisoners gain employment, training, or education upon release. Following the research findings there are several recommendations that have been identified throughout the studies that are discussed. Although the recommendations are based on the findings from this thesis, the first two recommendations can be related to all prisoner cohorts. This is because the recommendations are based on the education provisions and thus, can be beneficial for all prisoners. The

recommendations that are specific to prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are discussed in the last two recommendations.

Recommendation One: Prison educational provisions to mirror the outside education provisions.

The first recommendation following the findings from this thesis is to recommend that the educational provisions in a prison environment mirrors the educational provisions that are available outside of the prison walls. This recommendation was highlighted as the prisoners discussed the current education provisions. The narratives from the prisoners highlighted how they perceived prison education to offer low-level, basic skills. There were concerns that the education provisions were of inadequate quality and were not the same quality that could be found outside the prison walls. Therefore, the prisoners explained there was a lack of choice of educational courses because the education provisions were aimed at lower-level learning. The prisoners explained that there was a lack of choice when it came to education thus, the prisoners wanted a greater range of courses from which they could choose. Therefore, having a wider range of choice would give prisoners the opportunity to learn and gain qualifications that are available outside the prison gates. The Council of Europe (1990) did recommend that prison education should '*resemble adult education outside prison*' (p. 3), this statement was made over thirty years ago and yet the educational provisions in a prison environment do not resemble adult education outside of prison. Having educational provisions in prison that do not resemble education on the outside, further deprives the already disadvantaged prisoners of equal educational opportunities.

Prison governors have greater control over the education budgets to enable them to better meet the needs of the prisoner population in their care. The idea of the governors deciding on the education provisions can be beneficial for their prisoners because the governor can employ a wide variety of educational courses that can provide high quality qualifications. Prison governors "*have the freedom to design the right curriculum… that best meets the rehabilitation needs of the individuals*" (Coates, 2016, p. i). Therefore, prison governors have the ability to change and adapt the current educational provisions to ensure they meet the needs of the prisoners. However, since the education budgets have been managed by prison governors, there has been very little change to the educational provisions which are unimaginative and offer a very narrow curriculum (Prison Learning Alliance, 2021). Therefore, the funding for prison governors could adapt the current educational provisions to

ensure that they are fit for purpose and give quality qualifications that employees can recognise, giving prisoners an equal opportunity for employment.

The feasibility of providing education provisions that resemble outside education is limited due to environmental factors of the prison estate. For example, prisoners can be transferred at short notice, or there may be some issues on the residential wings resulting in prisoners not being unlocked for education. The prison environment is unpredictable and can be volatile thus regular engagement with education can be difficult to implement. In addition, the logistics of providing educational provisions that resemble education outside the prison walls can be an issue because how a prison is built. There are many prisons that have been built that do not have the infrastructure for new classrooms or updated technology. Thus, additional funding would be required to update the current educational provisions in a prison environment. Although there are several barriers that may prevent prison education mirroring the educational provisions on the outside, these barriers can be overcome. Even though this recommendation is based on the narratives of prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence, mirroring the education provisions can be beneficial for all prisoners.

Recommendation Two: Access to higher learning courses and learning materials for all prisoners.

Easy access to higher education is the second recommendation that has emerged from this thesis. If a prisoner would be willing to engage with higher learning while incarcerated, provision should be in place to allow easy access when applying and studying. The participants discussed how they would like to engage with higher learning whilst in prison. However, the prisoners stated that it was exceedingly difficult to access a higher learning course because it appears that education in prison is set up for lower-level learning. Although several prisoners discussed how they had tried to access higher learning by submitting applications. The application process took an awful long time, and several prisoners complained that they had not heard anything since submitting their application form. Therefore, higher learning is available in prison, but it was exceedingly difficult to access. Higher education courses have shown to be a positive step in rehabilitation for prisoners (O'Grady, 2019) and has been stated by Coates (2016) higher learning is something that should be encouraged. Higher education courses are available for all prisoners but there is a strict criterion when it comes to funding. To be able to access a student loan, prisoners must be within six years of their release date. This can disproportionately affect prisoners who

might benefit most from higher education courses and those serving long custodial sentences (Prison Reform Trust, 2022b). There have been calls to change the six-year rule regarding higher learning courses, but this was not accepted as a change and remains in place (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022).

Prisoners who do engage with higher learning courses have little access to items that would be useful for studying such as pens and paper, digital technology access and space where they can study. There is limited access to digital technology provisions in a prison environment which would not be an issue outside of the prison walls. Studying a higher learning course can be difficult and having access to course materials, digital provisions, and support from a tutor is the basic standard of any higher learning course. However, in a prison environment access to these basic needs are limited. Prisoners on a higher learning course often study on their own, in their cell and get little help from others. Thus, higher learning is restricted to those prisoners who are capable of self-directed study and predominately already have a high standard of education. Therefore, higher learning in a prison environment becomes inaccessible for most prisoners.

Higher learning courses in a prison environment would be beneficial to prisoners who have a long custodial sentence. This would enable the prisoners to engage with education for their entire custodial sentence. The educational courses that are on offer tend to be low-level courses that are short and thus, are suited to prisoners with a short custodial sentence (Taylor, 2014). Therefore, engagement with education would be limited for prisoners who have a long custodial sentence. Longer educational courses should be offered in prison consisting of higher-level learning. This would enable prisoners to receive the same educational provisions as they would have access to on the outside.

As with the first recommendation, higher education courses inside prison should reflect higher learning courses and should mirror colleges and higher learning environments in the outside world. The feasibility of providing access to higher learning courses in prison is something that can easily be accommodated. For example, local colleges could provide materials and support for the prisoners. However, funding the course can be a barrier because access to funding for prisoners is currently an issue. This recommendation evolved from the prisoners' narratives as they discussed higher learning in the prison environment. However, this recommendation is beneficial for all prisoners, in particular the ones that have a long custodial sentence.

Recommendation Three: Culture change for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence.

A culture change is needed where prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are concerned. This was evident throughout the three qualitative studies. The participants discussed the issues regarding being incarcerated for a sexual offence. The issues consisted of stigma and labelling because their offence was of a sexual nature. In all three studies, the participants discussed the negative labelling because the prisoners were *sex offenders* and discussed the impact that this label had on the prisoner's future. The prisoners were aware of the negative aspect of their offence and how they were vilified inside and outside of the prison walls. The prisoners understood that society would not be willing to accept them back into the community and were aware of the additional barriers and restrictions placed on them upon release. When entering prison, they are segregated and classed as vulnerable prisoners because of their offence status (Blagden & Pemberton, 2010) and they are regarded as the bottom of the prison hierarchy by other prisoners and staff. In addition, prisoners formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence are stigmatised by society and carry the label of *sex offender*. There is a risk associated with prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence because they are seen as more dangerous than other prisoners and will reoffend when they are released (Meloy, 2006). However, if a person commits murder for example, they are seen as deserving of reintegration back into society whereas a person who commits a sexual offence, they are seen as having less eligibility of reintegration into society (Laws & Ward, 2011). This may be because of the preoccupation of risk that is attached to offences of a sexual nature.

When an individual is incarcerated for a sexual offence, there is the perception that they are a risk of offending. This can be seen in the prison staff' discussions as there were an underlying narrative of this prisoner cohort were seen as attempting to offend and manipulate others. There is a heightened fear and risk that is associated with prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence which contradicts the evidence of offending with this prisoner cohort. However, prisoners formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence have the lowest reoffending rate (MoJ, 2023b). The fear and risk of this prisoner cohort comes from a lack of understanding and the media explicit reporting of stories sensationalising these types of crimes (Rothwell et al., 2021) which feeds into society's fear. Although this prisoner cohort have low reoffending rates compared to other prisoner cohorts, there is still a risk of reoffending.

The feasibility of culture change can be difficult because it would require a shift in an individual's as well as the cultural beliefs of an entire country. To achieve a change in culture, education is needed to gain an understanding of the offence and an understanding of the real risk associated with this prisoner cohort. There is a negative stigma attached to those incarcerated for a sexual offence which expands to staff who work with this prisoner cohort and this needs to change. Using language that is person first, enables a positive description and losing the words *sex offender* would perhaps neutralise the initial fear of this prisoner cohort. However, there is much more work needs to be done through the government, the reporting by the media and the prison establishments themselves to lose the labelling and stigma that is associated with prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence.

Recommendation Four: Educational courses to reflect the employment opportunities available to individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence.

A final recommendation for education provisions would be to tailor the educational courses to provide realistic opportunities for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. Through the narratives of the prisoners the education provision currently available do not meet the needs of this prisoner cohort. It appears that the prisoners are engaging with education for education's sake. Prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence have restrictions regarding where they can work and what they can do once they are released back into society. In addition, prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are subject to licence conditions, the sex offenders register and notification procedures when released from prison (Burrows, 2016). Therefore, this limits the options of what a formerly incarcerated individual can realistically do. Education provisions should reflect these restrictions by offering prisoners courses that are realistic for what they can do and not deliver courses that do not have prospects. For example, the prison staff discussed how prisoners can engage with a barbering course which encourages them to find employment or start up their own business in barbering. However, the reality is that prisoners formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence cannot work as a barber. Therefore, this is not a realistic opportunity for their future. Yet, education courses like barbering are set up and run in prison, despite there being no possibility of prisoners being able to work as a barber outside of the prison walls. However, it can be argued that learning and being in an educational environment teaches prisoners more than just employability skills. Education also provides prisoners with other skills such as communication skills which can provide personal growth and build a prisoner's confidence.

However, there is the need for prisoners to be reintegrated back into society and this may include employment.

Therefore, the education courses need to reflect the individual person and be tailored to meet the needs of the prisoner. Each prisoner has a different employment background, and different employment aspirations. In addition, each prisoner has a different sentence length with different conditions and restrictions and thus has a different educational goal. In addition, 43 % of the prisoners who are over 50 years old are incarcerated for a sexual offence (HL, 2022), thus, almost half of all prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence are in the older age group. Therefore, the education provisions should reflect the realistic opportunities that are available for this prisoner cohort.

Education in prison should be accessible to every prisoner regardless of offence, age, education level, or employment goals. The feasibility of adapting prisoner education to meet the needs of prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence would mean that education courses would need to be changed. Thus, additional funding would be required to update the educational provisions. The education provision would need to be scrutinised to identify the courses that provide realistic opportunities for prisoners upon release. However, this may restrict the education courses further because there are limited opportunities for prisoners formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence. Nevertheless, providing education courses that reflect realistic opportunities that allow prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence to be reintegrated into society gives prisoners hope for their future. Therefore, tailoring the education provisions to be aligned with realistic opportunities for prisoners is feasible but would require a significant amount of work from the prison estate and the education providers.

8.3: Limitations of this thesis

Alongside the discussion of the recommendations that emerged from this thesis, it is important to discuss the limitations of this research. The main limitation of this thesis was the lack of secondary data that is available in the public domain. The aim of the first chapter (four) was to collect secondary data to enable a comparison between adult males incarcerated for a sexual offence and adult males incarcerated for a non-sexual offence. The secondary data aimed to identify any differences in the prisoner population based on their offence. The intention of this thesis is to examine the educational profiles of prisoners because of the authors lived experience of prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence. The author

perceived this prisoner cohort had elevated levels of education when compared to prisoners incarcerated for a non-sexual offence. The aim was to collect data of educational profiles of prisoners and compare the highest level of education before incarceration and also the highest level of education when released from prison. However, this data was not available for the author at the time of writing which means that the educational profiles could not be compared which is a major limitation for this thesis.

If the secondary data would have been available, it would have provided an underpinning of information that would have offered rich data and would help to answer the research question. However, because the initial data was not available, secondary data was collected from other sources. The secondary data for chapter four was collected from information regarding the prisoner population that is freely available in the public domain. The limitations of the secondary data that was accessible did not distinguish between prisoners based on their offence. Therefore, the collected data contains information of the entire prisoner population and there is no difference between the prisoners based on their offence status. The secondary data was limiting because it did not answer the research aims.

Further research would be beneficial because the qualitative studies have identified the need for higher level qualifications to be delivered in prison establishments. The findings identified that many of the prisoners who were interviewed stated that they already have higher levels of education that was offered in prison. Therefore, the implications of gathering data that examines prisoners' education profiles based on their offence status would identify those prisoners who have levels of education that are Level 2 or above. This would imply that the educational provisions would need to be reconstructed to be able to meet the needs of all prisoners.

The Second limitations of this thesis are regarding self-selection bias of the participants. Self selection bias refers to where the individuals disproportionately select themselves into a group for study (Elston, 2021). The prisoner participants were recruited through posters on the prison residential wings that explained the study and called for volunteers. However, there are a few issues with the participants who volunteered for the study because those who did volunteer may be the most confident prisoners. Thus, prisoners who may be lacking in confidence did not volunteer. In addition, because the studies were only small this limited the number of prisoners that could reasonably be interviewed. This meant that there were many prisoners who did not volunteer or have been missed and they have not had the chance to voice their perceptions and opinions.

The prison staff recruitment had similar limitations because the focus group needed to take part during the working week. All of the prison staff were actively working in a prison environment and therefore to ask for volunteers to give up their free time to join a focus group may not have been appealing to some prison staff. The prison staff were recruited through email which may have been missed by some prison staff. The limitations of this study include not having a broad enough sample of different prison staff to allow for data analysis. It is possible that the focus group may appeal to those that already work in prison education or have experienced prison education in some way which may result in biased opinions. In addition, because there was a wide range of prison staff working in a prison, there are some that do not have any experience with prison education and thus may not feel like they could participate due to lack of subject knowledge.

Finally, this research thesis focused on one section of the prisoner population and did not consider the perceptions and opinions of prisoners incarcerated for non-sexual offences. It is unknown if other offence types need additional or a different education curriculum than is currently on offer. However, the findings from this thesis may be relevant to some prisoners, such as the ones that have qualifications at Level 2 or higher and for those prisoners who are serving long term sentences. In addition, this thesis did not include female or young people who are incarcerated for a sexual offence and only considered the viewpoint of male adults. Additionally, the participants were taken from a small section of the prison estate which focused on three prisoners in the Midlands area of England, which may not be representative of the entire prison estate due to cultural geographical differences. Every prison establishment in England and Wales are different in that they have distinct categories; have different number of prisoners and they have slightly different educational provisions. The experiences of other prisoners may produce a different outcome to this thesis, therefore this thesis and the recommendations that has been discussed should be interpreted as one side of a wider prisoner population regarding prison education.

8.4: Further Research

Further research has been discussed at various points throughout this thesis. This section discusses the implications of future research and how this would enhance the findings of this research thesis. As discussed in the limitations of this chapter, chapter four attempted to gather data from the entire prisoner population but this was not available at the time of writing. It would be beneficial for future research to be able to spend the time and funds to gather this data from the entire prisoner population. The data could be analysed and the

findings from this data would provide a wider picture of the prisoner population and examine the differences between prisoners based on their offence. This data would provide a much clearer picture of the prisoner population and their educational achievements before and after incarceration. The demographic data that would be collected would indicate the age of prisoners based on their offence, the employment status before incarceration and the custodial sentence length of prisoners based on offence status. This data could provide a wider understanding of the prisoner populations needs with regards to prison education thus, the educational provisions can be adapted to meet the needs of the prisoners.

Future research regarding prison education would be beneficial for all prisoners because as stated previously prisoners are individuals and have different educational backgrounds and different educational needs. Therefore, the next step for future research would be to replicate and expand this research beyond the prison establishments that house only prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence and repeat the studies in other prison establishments. This would identify any discrepancies and consistency within the findings. This would enable an exploration into issues that have been raised throughout this thesis and examine if they are exclusive to prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. This would highlight whether prison education is fit for purpose for the current prisoner population and clarify the modifications that need to be made to the educational provisions in a prison environment.

8.5: Personal Reflection

The idea behind this thesis was to discover if my own experiences of teaching prisoners who are incarcerated for a sexual offence were unique or if there were the same issues were experienced in other prison environments. It became increasingly frustrating for me because I was not able to deliver qualifications based on the prisoner's own education levels. The only qualifications that I could deliver were often lower than the prisoners' educational achievements. As a prison educator, it is about giving the students a good educational experience where they can think and form their own opinions whilst listening to others. Education is about developing a person's knowledge and giving them confidence to achieve their goals. In addition, I became increasingly bewildered by the perceptions of other people towards prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. There was a negative stigma attached to the prisoners that I taught, and this was something that I wanted to challenge.

This thesis has taken me six years to complete, and I have learnt so much about academic writing and research. Luckily for me, I finished gathering the last of my data in February 2020, so I was able to continue with this thesis before the pandemic hit. I have attended

several conferences where I have presented my work, which have received positive feedback regarding my findings with several individuals commenting on the accuracy of what I was saying. When I first started this thesis, I was working as an educator in a prison, I left the prison to begin a new role as a research assistant and this has progressed, and I am now a lecturer in the criminology and criminal justice department. Throughout this time my interests have not changed, and I am deeply passionate about prison education and the need for a change in educational provisions. In addition, prisoners no matter what crime they are incarcerated for, deserve the chance to be reintegrated back into society. Education provides a rehabilitative approach and is particularly important in building up a prisoner's confidence and identity other than a prisoner.

As I stated at the beginning of this section, I wanted to see if the educational provisions were the same in other prisons and if the prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence had the same issues as the ones that I was teaching. What I found was that in the other prisons they had the same issues as stated in the narratives of the participants from the three studies. The qualifications in prison establishments were low-level, short courses with little option for progression. Therefore, the educational provisions are not fit for purpose because they do not provide adequate learning and qualifications that the prisoners want or need.

8.6: Concluding thoughts

The overarching findings from this research are that the prison educational provisions currently being offered are not fit for purpose. The educational provisions do not provide qualifications that are quality at a high enough level to be beneficial for prisoners incarcerated for a sexual offence. In addition, this prisoner cohort are different from prisoners incarcerated for a non-sexual offence. This is because they have different restrictions and limitations placed on them when released, plus they are stigmatised and labelled as a *sex offender* which makes it difficult for reintegration back into society. In recent years there have been changes within the prisoner population with an increase in aging prisoners, amongst those incarcerated for a sexual offence, custodial sentences are getting longer, and employment opportunities are challenging for prisoners formerly incarcerated for a sexual offence. Therefore, the educational provisions need to reflect these changes and adapt to meet the needs of the prisoner population.

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Appendices

Appendix one: Email sent to organisations requesting information.

My name is Jane, and I am currently a tutor at HMP XX. At the moment I am studying for a PhD at Nottingham Trent University. The aim of my PhD research is to investigate prison education with regards to people who have been incarcerated for a sexual offence. I have received ethical clearance from both the university and HMPPS to conduct this research (I can send you a copy if you would like to see it).

As part of this study, I am aiming to study the demographics of those convicted of sexual offences and their education.

The next stage of my research is to try and gather as much information as I can about:

- educational levels,

- achievements

- numbers regarding education - how many apply/how many are on courses etc.

- OU courses

- general demographics

- any other information that is available regarding those convicted of a sexual offence and education.

I do not need any personal details such as names etc.

Therefore, I am writing to all prison establishments that hold those charged/convicted of a sexual offence to gather as much of this information as possible.

      Would you be able to provide this information?

      If not, do you know where I can get this information from?

      Or is there anyone that you can suggest that I may ask?

Any help or a point in the right direction would be greatly appreciated

My contact details along with my director of studies contact details are at the bottom of this email. Thank you for taking time to read this email.

Kind regards

Jane

My details

Jane Slater

Work email: **Director of studies.**

Professor Belinda Winder MSc PhD CPsychol MEd CSci AFBPsS

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Chaucer Building, Psychology, School of Social Sciences,

Nottingham Trent University,

50 Shakespeare Street,

Nottingham NG1 4FQ

Tel: 0115 848 5525 (direct line)

Email: belinda.winder@ntu.ac.uk

Appendix two: Ethical approval

<u>**APPROVED SUBJECT TO MODIFICATIONS**</u>

Dear Jane,

Ref: 2018-268

Title: What is the impact of prison education on the potential rehabilitation of individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence?

Further to your application to undertake research across HMPPS, the National Research Committee (NRC) is pleased to grant approval in principle for your research. The Committee has requested the following modifications:

- The published data used in Study 1 should be analysed to see what the data and existing literature says about the educational needs of sex offenders compared with non-sex offenders, and if possible whether there are any differences within sub-groups of the sex offender population.
- Some basic demographic information on the interviewed offenders should also be collected (including age group, previous level of education, previous employment, length of sentence, and so on) so that any differences in themes among the different sub-groups can be explored.
- There is a risk of low numbers of volunteers (offenders and staff) so your approach should consider how you will mitigate against this.
- As three prisons are included in this study, the study's sample must include offenders across the three prison populations. Additionally, we recommend that the staff focus groups are carried out in each prison (as staff might not be able to attend if outside of their place of work).
- Under the Prison Act (as amended by the Offender Management Act 2007), mobile phones, cameras and sound recording devices are classified as list B items, requiring authorisation from Governing Governors / Directors of Contracted Prisons (or nominated persons) to take them into and use them in prison. As you are planning to use a Dictaphone, permission must be granted by the Governors.

Before the research can commence you must agree formally by email to the NRC (National.Research@NOMS.gsi.gov.uk), confirming that you accept the modifications set out above and will comply with the terms and conditions outlined below.

Please note that unless the project is commissioned by MoJ/HMPPS and signed off by Ministers, the decision to grant access to prison establishments, National Probation Service (NPS) divisions or Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) areas (and the offenders and practitioners within these establishments/divisions/areas) ultimately lies with the Governing Governor/Director of the establishment or the Deputy Director/Chief Executive of the NPS division/CRC area concerned. If establishments/NPS divisions/CRC areas are to be approached as part of the research, a copy of this letter must be attached to the request to prove that the NRC has approved the study in principle. The decision to grant access to existing data lies with the Information Asset Owners (IAOs) for each data source and the researchers should abide by the data sharing conditions stipulated by each IAO.

Appendix three: Consent form for interview with prisoner

What are you agreeing to?

You are agreeing to take part in a study by Nottingham Trent University. In this study we will ask you to take part in an interview. These interviews will ask you questions about what you think of education inside prison.

We will ask you to take part in these interviews with a researcher from Nottingham Trent university who would like your opinions on prison education.

You can stop answering the questions at any time to have a break or stop completely if you change your mind. The interviews will take place in an interview room at your prison, and they will be recorded using a dictating machine.

What will happen to the information?

The answers you give in the interviews will be kept private unless it involves.

      a) You are harming yourself

      b) Someone else being harmed

      c) An offence which you have not been convicted for, or

      d) Plans to escape prison or break prison rules.

If you mention any of these things, the information may be passed to the prison security department, your wing staff, or the police.

After you have completed the interviews, I will collect the information and use your answers as part of my research. Your name will not be mentioned in any reports about the research.

Some of the answers you give will be used in the research, but no one will know it was you who said it.

It is your choice whether you want to take part or not.

It is your choice to take part in the research. You do not have to.

If you change your mind, you have 1 month (4 weeks) after the interview to let me know (contact details below).

All the notes I have made will be destroyed and the tape recordings will be deleted.

You will not get into any trouble if you do this.

You will not receive anything for taking part.

You will not receive anything if you take part, and you will not lose anything if you do not take part in the research.

It will not affect your chances of parole or getting treatment or medication.

Please ask if you have any questions.

I have read the above information and I consent (agree) to participate:

Signed……………………………..   Date…………………………….

Witnessed………………………….   Date…………………………….

Appendix four: Consent form for staff

What are you agreeing to?

You are agreeing to take part in a study by Nottingham Trent University. In this study we will ask you to take part in a focus group with other members of staff who work in the prison. The questions will be focused on prison education and those convicted of a sexual offence.

The interviews will take place in an interview room at your place of work, and they will be recorded using a dictating machine.

What will happen to the information?

The answers you give in the focus group will be kept private. After you have taken part in the focus group, I will listen to all the answers. These and any notes I make will be locked away. Although anonymity and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed due to the discussion which may involve disclosure of other members of the focus group. Only I and the research team will see these or know that you are taking part.

This report will not mention you by name and nobody will be able to tell you took part in the research. I will write a report at the end of this study.

By signing this consent form, you will be agreeing that any information shared in the focus group will not be discussed outside of the focus group.

Some of the answers you give will be used in the research, but no one will know it was you who said it.

Please ask if you have any questions.

I have read the above information and I consent (agree) to participate:

Signed…………………………..   Date…………………………….

Witnessed………………………….   Date…………………………….

Investigator: Jane Slater, PhD student at NTU
Supervisor: Professor Belinda Winder
Head of Sexual Offences, Crime and Misconduct Research Unit (SOCAMRU)
Chaucer Building,
Psychology, School of Social Sciences,
Nottingham Trent University,
50 Shakespeare Street,
Nottingham NG1 4FQ

Appendix five: Recruitment poster

Would you like to take part in a research project?
If the answer is yes! Then you might just be the person we are looking for.

My name is Jane, and I am a research student at NTU, and I would like to hear your views of the impact education has had on you.

The aim is to conduct informal interviews with

- 10 people who currently attend or have previously attended prison education.

- 10 people who choose not to attend prison education.

The interview will be broken down into 3 parts-
1. I will ask about your time in prison and what education you have done before.
2. I will ask you about your experiences of education in this prison.
3. I will ask you about your future.

The interviews will take no more than 1 hour and I want to find out the impact education has had on you.

If you are interested in this research and would like to volunteer, fill in your details below and send this to Jane (education) or Imogen (psychology)
I wish to apply to volunteer in this study.
Name _____
Number _____
Wing/cell location _____

Appendix six: Interview schedule for prisoners who are currently taking part in education.

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study.

Interview recap: I am going to ask you questions about your experiences of prison education. First, I will ask you some information about your time in prison. Then, I will ask you about your experiences of prison education if you have any. Then, I will ask you about your thoughts regarding prison education.

Timing recap: The interview will last between 1 and 1 1/2 hours, but please feel free to ask for breaks.

Confidentiality recap: Your information will be well-protected and anonymous.

Recording recap: I will be using audio recording to enable transcribing. All recognisable information will be removed. After transcription, your recording will be deleted.

Do you have any questions?

Based on what we have discussed, are you happy to continue with the interview?

Note: core questions indicated in bold, prompts and probes to be used at the discretion of the interviewer are in regular typeface.

The interview will be broken down into 3 parts-
1. I will ask about your time in the prison and what you have done before.
2. I will ask you about your experiences of education in this prison.
3. I will ask you about your future.

. **Part 1. Your time in prison, so far**

Objective: to gain a sense of the participants' identity and their experiences of prison.

Question 1: Could you briefly describe your time in prison, so far?

Prompts/Probes: how long have you been here?

How many times have you been in a prison establishment?

How would you describe the routine in this prison?

Why have you chosen to take part in this interview?

Question 2: Could you briefly describe what activities you do while in prison?

Prompts/Probes: If you were to write a list of jobs to do for the day, what would be on it?

How would you describe your daily activity?

Do you participate in different activities each day/week?

Question 3: How did you find out about the different activities in this prison?

Prompts/Probes: How did you find the induction when you came into prison?

How did you find out about your current activity?

What do you like or dislike about this?

What is your expectation about prison education?

Part 2. Prison education
Objective: to explore the participants' experiences of prison education.

Question 1: Why have you taken part in prison education?
Prompts/Probes: Tell me what you have done?
>   What made you decide to take part in prison education?
>   What difference has prison education made to your experience in prison?

Question 2: tell me about your experiences of prison education?
Prompts/Probes: what did you enjoy?
>   What didn't you enjoy?
>   What have you achieved?
>   Why do you attend prison education?

Question 3: How would you describe the advantages and disadvantages of prison education?
Prompts/Probes: what advantages/benefits do you think you gained form taking part in education?
>   What disadvantages are there to prison education?
>   Could you describe any compromises you have had to make to accommodate your prison?
education?

Part 3. Evaluating prison education
Objective: to examine participants' response to prison education.

Question 1: How would you describe your overall prison education experience?
Prompts/Probes: do you think that prison education is adequate?
>   Do you think there is enough provisions?
>   What would you change/keep in terms of education?
>   How do you think prison education can be improved?

Question 2: tell me about your future plans?
Prompts/Probes: Tell me about your plans for work?
>   Will you be continuing with your education?
>   Has prison education had any impact on your future?

Question 3: **Do you think prison education has had any impact on your rehabilitation?**
Prompts/Probes: Has prison education had any impact on your job prospects?
>   Do you think prison education has been a positive experience?
>   Do you think prison education has been a negative experience?

How did you find the interview?
Do you have any questions about any of the things we talked about?
Was there anything I said that has left you feeling concerned or unsettled in any way?
Would you like more information about anything that we talked about? Including any information on support services that are available to you.
Do you have any questions about the research project or what will happen to your information?

Thank you for participating in this study. I appreciate your views and comments.

Appendix seven: Information sheet, for the staff focus group.

What is the research about?

This study is primarily concerned about the education provisions in a prison setting for those who have been convicted of a sexual offence.

Please ask the researcher if you have any questions about this.

What would you be asked to do?

If you take part in the study, you will be asked to take part in a focus group with other members of staff who work at the prison. The focus group will take between 1 – 1 ½ hours.

The focus group will discuss prison education and how it impacts those convicted of a sexual offence.

The focus groups will take place in an interview room at your prison, and they will be recorded using a dictating machine.

What happens to the information you give to me?

The answers you give in the focus group will be kept private. After you have taken part in the focus group, I will listen to all the answers. These and any notes I make will be locked away. Although anonymity and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed due to the discussion which may involve disclosure of other members of the focus group. Only I and the research team will see these or know that you are taking part.

This report will not mention you by name and nobody will be able to tell you took part in the research. I will write a report at the end of this study.

When the research has finished, the focus group recordings and any notes will be destroyed.

Some of your answers and / or your information will be included in the report, but nobody will know it was you.

Are there any risks to me if I participate in this research?

I don't think that there are any risks to you from participating in this research.

Are there any benefits to me if I take part in this research?

While there may not be any direct benefits, your interview answers will help to have a better understanding of the prison education.

Who are the researchers and how can I contact them?

The researcher Jane Slater is from Nottingham Trent University (see below for details). If you would like to speak to the researcher, Jane Slater (perhaps because you have a question about the research or if you have a complaint) she can be contacted through the education department.

If you are interested in taking part, please complete this slip and return to the programmes department. The researcher will write to you soon to arrange the focus group.

Name _____

Please could you arrange a meeting to go through the research: ☐

Tick the days and time that you are available to meet the researcher and/or take part in a focus group.

Day	AM	PM
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		

Investigator: Jane Slater, PhD student at NTU
Supervisor: Professor Belinda Winder
Head of Sexual Offences, Crime and Misconduct Research Unit (SOCAMRU)
Chaucer Building,
Psychology, School of Social Sciences,
Nottingham Trent University,
50 Shakespeare Street,
Nottingham NG1 4FQ

Appendix eight: Focus group schedule

Introduction
Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study.

Focus group recap: I am going to ask you questions about education in this prison. While we are taking part in this focus group, we will all agree to respect each other's thought, feelings, and opinions.
Timing recap: The focus group will last between 1 and 1 1/2 hours, but please feel free to ask for breaks.
Confidentiality recap: Your information will be well-protected and anonymous.
Recording recap: I will be using audio recording to enable transcribing. All recognisable information will be removed. After transcription, your recording will be deleted.
Do you have any questions?
Based on what we have discussed, are you happy to continue with the focus group?
Note: core questions indicated in bold, prompts and probes (italics) to be used at the discretion of the interviewer are in regular typeface.

The focus group will consist of 3 major questions topic.
1. Thoughts and opinions are of prison education in this prison.
2. Prisoners and prison education
3. The benefits of prison education

What are your experiences with prison education?
- Have you been to the education department? *In what capacity?*
- Do you know what subjects they teach?
- What do you know about the education at this prison?
- Do you work with those that have been convicted of a sexual offence? (HMP Nottingham only)
- What are your opinions of prison education? *Good/bad/don't know?*
- What are the barriers to prison education? *Visits/healthcare/prefer a job/don't like education.*
- What are the incentives to attend prison education? *Qualifications/learning/money/get out of their cell/association?*

Do you ever hear the men talk about prison education?
- What do they say? Why do you think they say that?
- How do you think education can be improved? *Qualifications/more choice/vocational/classroom-based learning?*
- Do you encourage prisoners to attend education? *What do you say and why?*
- What do you suggest prisoners should do while they are in prison?
- What do you think prison education or employment in the prison? *Why do you think that? What are the benefits?*
- Do you think prison education benefits some more than others? *Different crimes/different abilities*

Do you think education is beneficial to the men here? If so, how? If no, why?
- What do you think education is for? *Qualifications/employment/something to do?*
- What do you think about the future of education for prisoners?

- Do you think prison education could help with rehabilitation? *explain?*
- Do you think it could help with employment? *explain*
- Do you think it could help with recidivism rates? *explain*
- How do you think prison education can be improved?

How did you find this focus group?

Do you have any questions about any of the things we talked about?
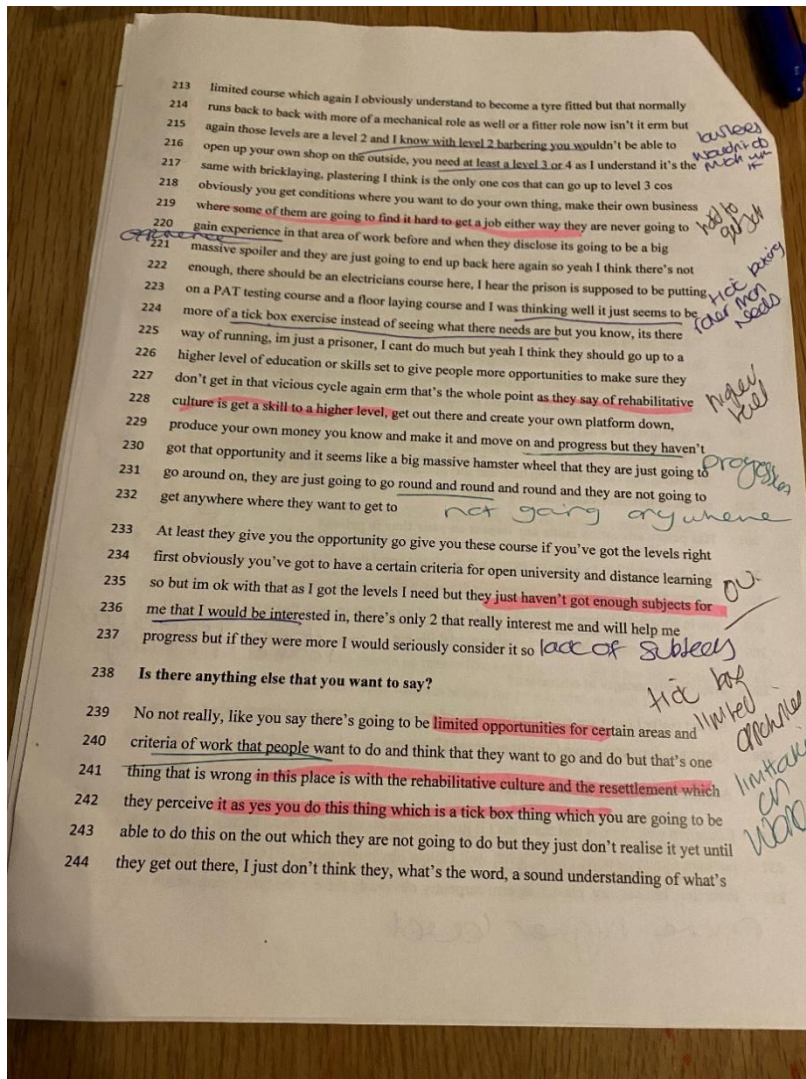
Was there anything I said that has left you feeling concerned or unsettled in any way?

Would you like more information about anything that we talked about?

Do you have any questions about the research project or what will happen to your information?

Thank you for participating in this study. I appreciate your views and comments.

Appendix nine: An example of a coded transcript

213 limited course which again I obviously understand to become a tyre fitted but that normally

214 runs back to back with more of a mechanical role as well or a fitter role now isn't it erm but

215 again those levels are a level 2 and I know with level 2 barbering you wouldn't be able to

216 open up your own shop on the outside, you need at least a level 3 or 4 as I understand it's the

217 same with bricklaying, plastering I think is the only one cos that can go up to level 3 cos

218 obviously you get conditions where you want to do your own thing, make their own business

219 where some of them are going to find it hard to get a job either way they are never going to

220 gain experience in that area of work before and when they disclose its going to be a big

221 massive spoiler and they are just going to end up back here again so yeah I think there's not

222 enough, there should be an electricians course here, I hear the prison is supposed to be putting

223 on a PAT testing course and a floor laying course and I was thinking well it just seems to be

224 more of a tick box exercise instead of seeing what there needs are but you know, its there

225 way of running, im just a prisoner, I cant do much but yeah I think they should go up to a

226 higher level of education or skills set to give people more opportunities to make sure they

227 don't get in that vicious cycle again erm that's the whole point as they say of rehabilitative

228 culture is get a skill to a higher level, get out there and create your own platform down,

229 produce your own money you know and make it and move on and progress but they haven't

230 got that opportunity and it seems like a big massive hamster wheel that they are just going to

231 go around on, they are just going to go round and round and round and they are not going to

232 get anywhere where they want to get to

233 At least they give you the opportunity go give you these course if you've got the levels right

234 first obviously you've got to have a certain criteria for open university and distance learning

235 so but im ok with that as I got the levels I need but they just haven't got enough subjects for

236 me that I would be interested in, there's only 2 that really interest me and will help me

237 progress but if they were more I would seriously consider it so

238 **Is there anything else that you want to say?**

239 No not really, like you say there's going to be limited opportunities for certain areas and

240 criteria of work that people want to do and think that they want to go and do but that's one

241 thing that is wrong in this place is with the rehabilitative culture and the resettlement which

242 they perceive it as yes you do this thing which is a tick box thing which you are going to be

243 able to do this on the out which they are not going to do but they just don't realise it yet until

244 they get out there, I just don't think they, what's the word, a sound understanding of what's

Appendix ten: An example of potential themes from the coded post-it notes.

Appendix eleven: An example of the themes that had emerged from the participants transcripts.