

Lifelong learning and policy changes for all offenders in England and Wales

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This paper explores the delivery of learning and skills in the 137 prisons in England and Wales and shares the experience of policymakers. Our vision:

that offenders according to need should have access to learning and skills both in prisons and in the community, which enables them to gain the skills and qualifications they need to hold down a job and have a positive role in society, and that the content and quality of learning programmes in prisons, and the qualifications to which these lead, are the same as comparable provision in the community.

Introduction

Offenders make up one of our hardest to help groups. They often face multiple social disadvantages that make it hard for them to break out of the cycle of re-offending.

The majority of offenders have few qualifications, low basic skills and a history of low school attendance:

- 52 per cent of male and 71 per cent of female adult prisoners have no qualifications at all
- half of all prisoners screened on reception are at or below level 1 in reading, two-thirds in numeracy and four fifths in writing. Level 1 is what is expected from an eleven year old
- 30 per cent of all prisoners have been regular truants
- almost four out of five prisoners have been temporarily or permanently excluded from school; with at least 6 months' education lost in nearly half of all cases
- 89 per cent of male prisoners and 84 per cent of women prisoners have left school at 15 or 16, compared to just 32 per cent of the general population.

Research suggests that, like others in the population, large numbers of prisoners are excluded from large numbers of jobs due to poor levels of skills. But we also know that stable employment following release from custody is one of the key drivers in reducing re-offending, and prisons provide an opportunity to start raising offenders' skills levels. Offering the right learning and skills opportunities will improve offenders' chances of getting a job in the future, and of making a positive contribution to society.

There have been significant improvements in the provision of learning and skills in prisons in recent years. The partnership between the DfES, Prison Service and Home Office to deliver prison education continues to mature. However, there is still much to be done to build capacity and develop the relevance, quality and continuity of the provision on offer,

not only for those in prison but also for offenders on probation. As sentencing policy moves towards a different balance of time spent in prison and in the community, there is a stronger challenge to keep individuals in learning throughout their sentence and beyond.

There are two key developments that will enable us to step up the rate of progress and improve the life chances of those at risk of re-offending. First, there is the additional funding made available through the Year 2002 Spending Review, which will provide significant improvements in the quality and quantity of learning opportunities for offenders. Second, there is the expansion of OLSU's remit from 2004 to cover learning and skills policy for offenders on probation, as well as those in custody. This will allow us to work towards a closer alignment between learning and skills policy for offenders on probation with developments in mainstream learning and skills.

Structure and organisation

Our delivery plan sets out our priorities for the next three years and supports the Government's manifesto commitment to:

increase dramatically the quality and quantity of education provision in prisons.

Responsibility for delivering this commitment is shared between the Home Office and Department for Education and Skills (DfES). The Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit, based in DfES, is working with partners in the Prison Service and others such as the Youth Justice Board to deliver the commitment.

The plan sets out a coherent vision for delivering the commitment in terms of funding, capacity building and the content and quality of learning and skills offered in prisons. However, this work does not exist in isolation. It feeds into 5 other key Government strategies: *Reducing Reconviction*; *National Rehabilitation Strategy*; *Skills for Life*; *Success for All* and the *Skills Strategy*.

Reducing reconviction

The Home Office's reducing reconvictions programme supports delivery of the Public Service Agreement (PSA) target to reduce the rate of convictions of all offenders punished by imprisonment, of all offenders punished by community supervision, and of all young offenders by 5% by 2006 compared to the predicted rate. The Home Office programme is delivered by three responsible agencies: the Youth Justice Board, National Probation Service and HM Prison Service. These agencies feed into a delivery programme which focuses on funded, targeted interventions which research has shown to have an impact in reducing re-offending rates, including action on offending behaviour, healthcare and drugs, and education. The targets in this plan on achievement of basic skills qualifications and work skills are a key component of the reconvictions programme.

National Rehabilitation Strategy

The Home Office Adult Offender and Rehabilitation Unit is developing a coherent national rehabilitation strategy for all offenders in prison and on probation. This is in response to the Social Exclusion Unit report *Reducing Re-offending by Ex-prisoners*, published in July 2002. This delivery plan will contribute to this work in particular through the development of education, training, employment and enterprise policy jointly with key partners such as the Learning and Skills Council. The work is supported longer term through the new

sentencing framework planned for all aged 16 plus, with many more individuals serving sentences with periods in custody and in the community.

Skills for Life

The Government's strategy to improve adult literacy and numeracy and language, *Skills for Life*, sets out how the Government will reach its target of improving the basic skills of 1.5 million adults by 2007, with an interim target of 750,000 adults by 2004. This strategy is led by the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit in DfES. Progress is monitored by the Adult Basic Skills Cabinet Committee.

Skills for Life has helped deliver real improvements. Over 1.5 million adults have already started basic skills programmes, and more than 300,000 people by summer 2002 had already achieved national awards for their progress. There has also been success in improving the quality of teaching. All teachers in the post-16 sector are now required to have full teaching qualifications, and degree level certificates are being introduced for specialists in literacy and numeracy.

Offenders are cited in *Skills for Life* as one of the "hard to reach groups" whose need for basic skills is particularly acute. The Prison Service is a major contributor to the national target. In 2002-03 prisons achieved over 41,000 basic skills qualifications which contributed significantly to the Government's overall target.

Success for All

The *Success for All* document, launched in November 2002, sets out the Government's strategy for reforming further education and training, focusing on four key areas of meeting needs and improving choice; putting teaching and learning at the heart of what we do; developing the teachers and learners of the future; and developing a framework for quality and success. These principles are as relevant to prison learning and skills as they are to provision in the mainstream, and they impact on this delivery plan as far as the constraints of prison learning and skills allow. (For example, there are constraints about providing choice for the learner in the prison environment.) *Success for All* is making an important contribution to improving teaching and learning in prisons and is backed by a major investment package to transform performance.

Skills Strategy

The 2002 Spending Review White Paper gave DfES a new PSA target to reduce by at least 40% the number of adults in the workforce without a Level 2 qualification by 2010. There is an interim target to help 1 million adults in the workforce to achieve Level 2 between 2003 and 2006.

The DfES published a *Skills Strategy* in June 2003 setting out how it will deliver this target, building on the Review of Funding of Adult Learning. Improving the work skills of offenders will be an important objective in the new strategy. This is the first time the Government has given such a substantial investment to this area of work and emphasises its importance in the economical agenda.

Aim 1 – Increasing supply

Project Rex

In April this year OLSU in partnership with the Prison Service and the Youth Justice Board set in train a major procurement project to revise and re-tender learning and skills contracts in prisons. Vocational training which was previously managed by the Prison Service will transfer under the new contracts when they take effect from 1 September 2004. There has been intensive work undertaken to design a new high value specification for learning and skills in prisons in England and Wales. The new specification will widen opportunities for participation, raise standards and improve levels of achievement whilst placing the learner at the centre and allowing opportunities to track the learners' journey.

Probation

This is another major project linked to the transfer to OLSU of responsibility for learning and skills of offenders under supervision in the community from April 2004. OLSU is working closely with the National Probation Directorate and Learning and Skills Council to manage and prepare for the transfer of responsibility, and to establish appropriate levels of provision. A project structure has been agreed, and the Learning and Skills Development Agency has carried out an audit of existing delivery, staffing and funding arrangements which will inform the project.

Aim 2 - Building capacity

Information Communication Technology Strategy

OLSU is currently exploring options for delivering online learning, including setting up local area networks to support learning in prisons which resembles much more clearly that in the community.

Capital Modernisation Fund Project

OLSU have allocated £20m to help modernise vocational training facilities and improve facilities for assessment, basic skills teaching and libraries in prisons.

Work with the Voluntary Sector

The aim here is to develop a proactive and structured relationship with the voluntary and community sectors at national, area and establishment level, recognising their contribution to offender learning and harnessing their resources. To date, consultative meetings have been held with voluntary groups with youth, family and women's interest. OLSU is engaged in a mapping exercise to scope the extent to which voluntary groups are already contributing to learning in prisons.

Heads of Learning and Skills

OLSU has been contributing to the Prison Service's recruitment campaign to appoint Heads of Learning and Skills for all establishments. The Heads of Learning and Skills will play a key role in overseeing learning and skills provision in their establishments and driving up quality. OLSU is developing training and induction, including a staff handbook, for the Heads of Learning and Skills, and a major conference is planned for December.

Aim 3 - Delivering learning, achieving targets and improving quality

This aim is about the development of provision which in terms of its content and quality, and the qualifications to which it leads, is comparable to equivalent provision in the community, and which is relevant to the needs of individual prisoners and the labour market to which they hope to return. Specifically, the aim is about supporting prisons to achieve basic skills and work skills qualifications targets. It will produce a new specification for prison libraries and increased participation in higher education. Crucially, it covers the development of a comprehensive quality framework to secure a cycle of continuous improvement and to support the identification, dissemination and transfer of good practice.

Literacy, Language and Numeracy Skills (Basic Skills)

The Prison Service is on track to meet its targets for delivery of qualifications in literacy, language and numeracy in 2003-04. By the end of August, prisons had delivered 20,216 basic skills qualifications against an annual target of 36,631. This is 55% of the target. Performance is above target for entry level and level 1 qualifications and broadly on track for level 2.

From 2004-05, OLSU will have responsibility for basic skills targets for the Probation Service, as well as the Prison Service. The 2004-05 targets are being negotiated as part of the probation project.

Vocational Training

Managing the transfer of funding and policy responsibility is a major piece of work in line with the Government's Skills Strategy, to increase the labour market relevance of vocational training provision and the qualifications to which it leads. In 2003-04, prisons will be working towards a target of over 54,000 work skills qualifications.

Curriculum

OLSU is undertaking a major review of the prison curriculum, ensuring that it is developed in line with Government priorities both within the Further Education/Adult learning sectors and the Criminal Justice System;

The Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) has carried out a snapshot report into the volume of learning and skills being provided in prisons, broken down into subject area. This report has provided some useful findings, including information on the proportion of prisoners in different categories who are able to access education. LSDA is being commissioned to follow up this work with focus groups, a literature survey and a more detailed analysis of the position of prisons with regard to Success for All and the Skills Strategy.

Other areas of curriculum development, including relevance and choice of courses are being addressed through the requirements and performance measures set out in the REX specification.

Libraries

OLSU is developing a new set of expectations for modernised prison library provision to enhance their role in education, and building these into a new deal with public library authorities.

Higher education

A New Openings course has been launched with the Open University to encourage prisoners to access higher education.

Quality Improvement

OLSU has been working closely with establishments to embed a cycle of quality improvement:

In June we launched a Quality Assurance Toolkit, which was followed up by a series of training events; we have begun a system of quarterly reports by learning and skills advisers which track prisons' progress in self-assessment and producing 3-year development plans.

In May we launched a Standards Fund to support improvements at establishment level. 50% of the available funding has been allocated in two bidding rounds, and a third round will take place this Autumn against a budget of £860K.

Formal inspections of learning and skills in prisons under the Common Inspection Framework began in April 2002. Prisons are expected to prepare action plans following inspections setting out how they propose to address issues raised. They are also expected - like all post-16 providers - to prepare annual self-assessment and development plans based around the Common Inspection Framework.

OLSU's Learning and Skills Advisers (LSAs) are working with prisons to embed the cycle of continuous improvement in their learning and skills provision. LSAs provide essential support to establishments in preparing their self-assessment reports and development plans and conduct quarterly "provider reviews" to consider progress against them. They also help establishments to improve by identifying and disseminating good practice. LSAs will prepare quarterly reports on individual prisons' progress in conjunction with Prison Service Area Managers. These reports provide an important measure of how effectively quality is being improved locally.

Strategies for those with learning disabilities, women and juvenile prisoners

Learning Disabilities

In the most progressive prisons and young offender institutions, teachers, instructional staff and other supporters of learning offer specialist support for the most vulnerable learners, including those who have dyslexia, mental health difficulties or other disabilities.

OLSU have published *Reaching All*, an inclusive learning handbook specifically designed for staff working in prisons and young offender institutions. It gives guidance to all those who work with learners who have autistic spectrum disorders, emotional and behavioural difficulties, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, physical disabilities and medical conditions.

Support for juvenile offenders with learning difficulties forms an integral part of the Youth Justice Board's *National Specification for Learning and Skills for Young Offenders serving a Detention and Training Order*. Juvenile establishments have been funded to employ

Special Educational Needs Coordinators and Learning Support Assistants on a ratio of 1:10.

Women

Women represent 51.3% of the population in England and Wales but only 6% of the prison population. Overall, the statistics show that women's offending is different from men's. Women are convicted of far fewer offences and generally have far shorter and less serious criminal careers. They are also less likely to be re-convicted than men.

21% of women in prison are foreign nationals. Over 90% are serving long sentences for drugs importation. Most are not drug users but have felt driven to smuggling by poverty within their own countries and the need to support their family. The skills that women need to earn a living abroad in poorer countries are not necessarily the same as those for prisoners being released in the community here.

Around 75% of women in prison are serving sentences of 12 months or less which makes for a high turnover and limits the time available to address the issues which contributed to the offending. For women, their children and family are the main focus of their lives. Research has shown that whilst for men leaving prison the first priority is general employment, for women it is accommodation which provides the base for family life.

It is important to ensure women prisoners develop generic, transferable skills and wider key skills whilst thinking creatively about what is appropriate preparation for work, looking at the changing needs of the labour market. OLSU have been looking at vocational training provision for female prisoners with a view to improving its relevance to their resettlement opportunities.

Juveniles

The Government is aiming to reduce the amount of juveniles in custody and is targeted to get 80% of all juveniles through at least one basic skills qualification.

The Prison Service and Youth Justice Board (YJB) have established a five-year Partnership Agreement designed to improve rehabilitative work in prisons. They aim to provide a full and active day, with 30 hours a week purposeful activity including good quality learning and skills provision while in custody.

The Youth Justice Board's *National Specification for Learning and Skills*, published in early 2002, focuses on improving numeracy and literacy; ensuring continuity of mainstream educational placements; reintegration into full time education, training or employment; increasing employability through practical and vocational activities; addressing offending behaviour; and learning how to learn.

Under the Detention and Training Order, training and resettlement plans are drawn up and monitored jointly between the Youth Offending Team supervising officer and the prison. This is designed to ensure that the time in custody and the period under supervision in the community are treated as a single training and rehabilitation programme, with opportunities to continue in the community educational and other progress, which has been made in custody.

Conclusion

There is an enormous investment in improving offenders' learning and skills and there are many new challenges ahead. We are building upon partnerships with other Government departments and agencies who have a stake in this area work so that together we can achieve common goals . Ivan Lewis, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Young People and Adults said in a speech earlier this year that:

“we want to raise the status and the value both of the people working in prison education and training and the service itself. I don't believe there has ever been a more exciting or optimistic moment in terms of what we're seeking to do with regard to the education and training of offenders in this country. I think we're all immensely privileged to be here at this exciting moment, but we've got to seize the opportunity and ensure that at the end of the day we make the difference. Because for many of the people we are talking about, we are their last chance”