

# Learning for Women in Prison

Report on the role of learning and skills in responding  
positively to the issues and circumstances faced by  
women in prison

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**Working for more and different adult learners**

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## About NIACE

The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) is an independent charity which promotes adult learning across England and Wales. Through its research, development, publications, events, outreach and advocacy activity, NIACE works to improve the quality and breadth of opportunities available for all adults so they can benefit from learning throughout their lives.

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- staff from Giles Trust, Women in Prison and Clean Break.

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## **Foreword**

I am really pleased that we have been able to carry out this piece of work, looking at the impact of learning on women offenders. NIACE, as the lead national body on adult learning, has sought for many years to contribute to debates about the nature, extent and quality of learning and skills available to offenders. This is in line with our primary aim of advancing the case for adult learning in public policy and debate and to influence and persuade others that improving, increasing and extending opportunities for adults to learn throughout their lives, has real public as well as personal benefits.

We know that there are fundamental differences between men and women offenders, and this is backed up by research evidence, by statistics and from talking to those working with offenders. We have to take account of personal, domestic and socio-economic circumstances before, during and after prison. This report highlights, through examples of good practice, how learning is key to responding positively to the issues and circumstances faced by women in prison and how programmes have been successful in progressing the learning for work and the reducing reoffending agendas.

But as well as ensuring women have access to a broad curriculum, progression routes and real life work experience, we feel that best practice takes account of women offenders' wider needs – for a more holistic programme which recognises their caring responsibilities, and the integration of personal and social development, alongside more vocational aspects.

Women can often return to situations on release that merely lead them back to offending behaviour. Developing their skills through access to learning in prison, and on release, can enable them to break out of destructive patterns, develop the skills to access sustained employment and training, and also enable them to better care for their families, and become effective members of their community.

**Carol Taylor, OBE**

**Director of Development and Research, NIACE**

## Executive summary

### Introduction

NIACE works to improve the quality and breadth of opportunities available for all adults so they can benefit from learning throughout their lives, and has for many years contributed to debates about the nature, extent and quality of learning and skills available to offenders. This is in line with our primary aim of advancing the case for adult learning in public policy and debate and to use research evidence to influence and persuade others that improving, increasing and extending opportunities for adults to learn throughout their lives, has public as well as individual benefits.

Throughout the past year NIACE has been carrying out research into learning and skills provision in women's prisons under the programme of work funded by the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS). This report focuses on examples of good practice currently evident from the research.

The research took place at a time of change; prisons across England were introducing the new OLASS 4 contracts and adjusting to the policy steer laid out in *Making Prisons Work* (2011) – both with an emphasis on learning and skills for employment. This report looks at how learning is key to responding positively to the issues and circumstances faced by women in prison and how programmes have been successful in progressing the learning for work and the reducing reoffending agendas.

The main body of the report is divided into five parts, each focusing on a different theme: the particular and complex needs of women in prison; supporting transitions; learning for progression; learning for employment; and working creatively with partners. These themes reflect the range of needs of women in prison. Each section includes a summary of research and policy evidence, principles of good practice and an in depth case study of current practice.

### Methodology

The research comprised the following three main stages:

- a review of key research and policy literature;

*The findings of the review enabled us to develop some principles of good practice in providing access to and delivery of learning and skills for women in prisons, which formed the basis of the rest of the work.*

- a call for information to all women's prisons and key third sector organisations in England;

*Potential respondents were invited to submit comments on the principles of good practice and provide examples of current practice in access to and/or provision of learning and skills for women in prisons, currently reflected in one or more of the principles.*

- the development of five in depth case studies focusing on different aspects of learning for women in prisons.

*Case studies were developed through visits to each site and interviews with a range of stakeholders, including education and prison staff, learners and community partners.*

‘[W]omen have been largely absent from criminological research and their needs have been marginalised or ignored’ (O’Keefe, 2003: 10) and so we felt it was important for our case studies to capture the voices of learners. Positive feedback from the women and staff show that participating in research can have an empowering and motivating effect.

### **The particular and complex needs of women in prison**

Research evidence and statistics show that there are fundamental differences between men and women offenders – in terms of personal, domestic and socio-economic circumstances. Further, due the smaller number of women’s prisons in and their geographical spread, women are also more likely to be located further from their homes and the community they will resettle in.

Women in prison face multiple barriers to education, such as: low confidence and self-esteem, learning difficulties and disabilities, mental health issues and drug and alcohol misuse. They are more likely to serve sentences of six months or less. This has led others, such as Baroness Corston (2007) and O’Keefe (2003), to recommend short courses and the unitisation of qualifications to act as stepping stones and a way of encouraging women to engage in learning.

Learning is key to responding positively to the issues and circumstances faced by women in prison. Corston called for prisons to take a women-centred approach to education and training: to assess each woman on an individual basis and tailor learning to ensure that it addresses her specific needs. Corston argued that there needed to be greater emphasis on personal and social development – or life skills – and this was echoed by many individuals who responded to our call for information, who further added that the government focus on employability is not always appropriate or helpful for many women. Evidence in this report shows that there may be a number of steps that would support women before they can engage with more formal education and training.

The case study on the CARE programme at HMP Foston Hall illustrates the value of a course designed specifically for women that focuses on the future and learners' aspirations.

*Principles of good practice*

- Learning should be empowering and motivating. It should build women's confidence and self-esteem, and validate their experiences and future aspirations.
- The learning offer should be flexible and tailored to meet a range of individual needs.
- Learning and skills provision should provide women with the tools they need to take control of their lives. Women should have the opportunity to develop life skills and capabilities in health, digital technology, personal finance, and civic participation.

**Supporting transitions**

Previous NIACE studies have reflected on the value of sentence and learning plans to ensure that progression is built into the offender's learning journey, but have also highlighted that too often there seemed to be a gap between intention and reality. Our research found that the transfer of learning records from one establishment to another continues to be a real barrier and this can have detrimental effects on learners' engagement and achievement in education.

As well as supporting the transitions that women make between prisons during their time in custody, learning should also support women's resettlement plans, in order to make the transition from prison to the community as smooth as possible. The Pathways induction programme at HMP East Sutton Park, which focuses on the seven reducing re-offending pathways, illustrates the way in which learners benefit from focusing on the future and taking ownership of their resettlement plan. Learners value that the course is personalised and tailored to their circumstances and that their plans also become a record of their progress and achievements.

*Principles of good practice*

- Learning should enable women to make a successful and positive transition from prison to their resettlement in the community. Learning and skills should play a key part of sentence and resettlement plans.
- All achievements should be recognised and recorded. Records of achievement should follow women as they move between prisons and into the community.

### **Progression in learning**

While it is clear that education in prisons should address basic literacy and numeracy skills needs, it should also encourage learners to progress and provide access to learning at higher levels. O’Keefe’s report described the frustration felt by many women due to the ‘over-emphasis on basic skills level education in prisons’ and that this ‘limited their ability to challenge themselves’ or to progress onto higher level courses (2003: 25). This was echoed by learners involved in this study. The case study about HMP Askham Grange demonstrates how the prison is meeting learners’ need for higher levels of learning.

The National Careers Service play a key role in providing learners with impartial, ‘realistic, relevant and up-to-date careers advice that will help them make the right decisions about their future’ (BIS/MOJ, 2011: 16) – and take the first steps towards their goal. There is no one specific approach or time to engage and inform women about the range of services available and there is a need for flexibility to meet the needs of the individual.

Women in the ‘Moving Mountains’ research reported receiving a lack of information about learning opportunities and that they had to be ‘very pro-active’ to get hold of the necessary information themselves. The report recommended that education, training and employment opportunities outside prison should be actively promoted to prisoners; for example, through distance learning. The service provided by Women in Prison is one way that information, advice and guidance (IAG) related to higher level learning is being delivered.

#### *Principles of good practice*

- Women should have access to a range of learning opportunities, including personal development, qualifications and preparation for work. Learning opportunities should not reinforce gender stereotypes. As well as providing an opportunity for women to complete lower level qualifications, learning should support women’s progression to higher levels of learning and skills.
- Good quality information, advice and guidance should encourage coherence between the courses that learners undertake and ensure that their achievements enable them to progress towards a career of their choice. This offer of support should be frequently and proactively promoted.

### **Learning for employment**

*Making Prisons Work* and the OLASS 4 contracts place a greater emphasis on learning and skills for employability as a way of reducing rates of re-offending. This is not always appropriate for women who have other needs and barriers to learning to address. However, much of the research that makes this case also supports ‘work-focused interventions and... the premise that re-offending can be reduced by improving the employment skills of offenders’ (Home Office, 2007: 44). Indeed,

*Making Prisons Work* recognises that ‘although employment is important to women offenders, there are a number of steps they may need to take before they are job ready’ (2011: 20). It is therefore crucial that learning is flexible and tailored to meet the range of needs that women may have.

O’Keefe (2003) found that women would like practical support in preparing for work and gaining employment. They also wanted to take part in work trials, so that they could get real work experience and have the chance to prove what they are capable of.

The case study about HMP Low Newton shows the range of ways that prison and education staff are working with employers to ensure that women participate in meaningful work experience and are supported to improve their employment chances upon release.

#### *Principles of good practice*

- Learning and training should prepare women for employment. Women should have the opportunity to develop practical skills for job seeking, writing applications, interviews and they should be given accurate and clear information regarding the disclosure of convictions. Where possible, education should be complemented by practical work experience.

#### **Creative partnership working**

This report highlights many examples of effective partnership working between prisons, education staff and external organisations. Working with community partners can bring benefits such as ‘funding, expertise, new progression and energy’ (Nashashibi *et al.*, 2006: 6). The examples in the report show how working with internal and external partners has enabled education providers to enhance and extend learning opportunities.

In addition, offenders and ex-offenders can play a key role in partnerships; peer mentoring schemes, such as Toe by Toe and Maths Mentors, show that they can be effective at engaging and supporting learners. Further, *Making Prisons Work* stated that peer mentors ‘can be particularly effective during the transition from prison to the outside world’ (2011: 23).

The Peer-to-Peer call centre at HMP Send demonstrates the essential role that all three partners – the prison, St Giles Trust and learners – play to ensure that the initiative is successful.

#### *Principles of good practice*

- Learning and training opportunities should be supported by partners in the community, including employers, voluntary sector organisations and learning providers. Where appropriate, learning should be supported or led by peers and mentors.

## Considerations

The following are ten key considerations drawn from the research:

1. Providers will need support to develop suitable curricula for women in prisons and to develop the partnerships that can support delivery.
2. IAG advisers, teaching and support staff would benefit from a framework for progression to provide guidance on appropriate learning journeys for women offenders. Individual learning plans should be key to this framework.
3. Local commissioners need to take woman-centred approaches to vocational learning and employability skills which include programmes designed specifically for female offenders.
4. Prisons would benefit from support in setting up good sequencing procedures and the forums necessary to better co-ordinate service delivery and provision.
5. Providers will need support in embedding the use of Virtual Campus within their provision.
6. Women's prisons should consider providing more opportunities for work within and outside the prison as appropriate.
7. Mentors will need specific training to deliver support in a wider range of vocational skills provision.
8. Prisons, OLASS providers and the National Careers Service need to demonstrate progress towards a standardised approach to completing and transferring learner records, using the Learner Record Service.
9. More/better partnerships with voluntary and community sector organisations and probation services could facilitate better through-the-gate support.
10. Those working with women offenders should consider how these examples of practice, or aspects of them, might be adopted or replicated.

## Introduction

NIACE works to improve the quality and breadth of opportunities available for all adults so they can benefit from learning throughout their lives, and has for many years contributed to debates about the nature, extent and quality of learning and skills available to offenders. This is in line with our primary aim of advancing the case for adult learning in public policy and debate and to use research evidence to influence and persuade others that improving, increasing and extending opportunities for adults to learn throughout their lives has public as well as individual benefits.

Throughout the past year NIACE has been carrying out research into learning and skills provision in women's prisons, under the programme of work funded by the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS). This report focuses on examples of good practice currently evident from the research.

The research took place at a time of change: prisons across England were introducing the new OLASS 4 contracts and adjusting to the policy direction laid out in *Making Prisons Work* – with an emphasis on both learning and skills for employment. For many prisons this was an extremely busy time as roles changed and staff restructuring took place; at the same time, adjustments were being made to the prison regimes and to most prison programmes. It was too soon for many of the education and prison staff to explain – or know of – the full impact of OLASS 4 on learning and skills provision in their establishment. For this reason we have not commented on the impact of the new contracts in this report.

In the female prisons change has also been occurring against the backdrop of the 2007 Home Office report from Baroness Corston, which pointed out the inadequacies of the penal system with regards to women. Following the report, the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Women in the Penal System was set up to publicise issues around women in the penal system and progress the implementation of the recommendations made by Baroness Corston. The APPG is currently focussing on community interventions for women offenders and has already conducted an inquiry into *Girls in the Penal System*.

The findings from the inquiry echo the findings of dozens of other reports pointing to the underlying socio-economic factors which lead to offending behaviour, including unemployment, poverty, mental health issues, poor levels of educational achievement at school, drug and alcohol misuse, and domestic and sexual abuse. Women who do not access appropriate treatment and support services may enter a cycle of offending and the revolving door of prison.

This report looks at how learning is key to responding positively to the issues and circumstances faced by women in prison and how programmes have been successful in progressing the learning for work and the reducing reoffending agendas. The report also considers the ways in which learning for personal and social development can lead to further learning, training and qualifications, thereby contributing to a reduction in reoffending.

There are approximately 4,000 women in prison in England and Wales, representing nearly five per cent of the prison population (Ministry of Justice, 2013). ‘The smaller numbers do not lend themselves to the kind of differentiation (by age, length of sentence, seriousness of offence, distance from release), which is possible in the male prisons... This makes the provision of and access to the full range of remedial, rehabilitative and learning and training programmes even more difficult to organise’ (NIACE, 2012: 7). The examples included in this report illustrate how female prisons are overcoming these challenges.

Our research identified a range of principles which are helpful in supporting good practice in the delivery of learning and skills in prisons. These principles are inter-dependent and success relies on a combination of principles being in place, which is reflected in the good practice highlighted in the report.

- Learning should be empowering and motivating. It should build women’s confidence and self-esteem, and validate their experiences and future aspirations.
- The learning offer should be flexible and tailored to meet a range of individual needs.
- Learning should enable women to make a successful and positive transition from prison to their resettlement in the community. Learning and skills should play a key part of sentence and resettlement plans.
- Learning and skills provision should provide women with the tools they need to take control of their lives. Women should have the opportunity to develop life skills and capabilities in health, digital technology, personal finance, and civic participation.
- Women should have access to a range of learning opportunities, including personal development, qualifications and preparation for work. Learning opportunities should not reinforce gender stereotypes. As well as providing an opportunity for women to complete lower level qualifications, learning should support women’s progression to higher levels of learning and skills.
- Good quality information, advice and guidance should encourage coherence between the courses that learners undertake and ensure that their

achievements enable them to progress towards a career of their choice. This offer of support should be frequently and proactively promoted.

- All achievements should be recognised and recorded. Records of achievement should follow women as they move between prisons and into the community.
- Learning and training should prepare women for employment. Women should have the opportunity to develop practical skills for job seeking, writing applications and interviews, and they should be given accurate and clear information regarding the disclosure of convictions. Where possible, education should be complemented by practical work experience.
- Learning and training opportunities should be supported by partners in the community, including employers, voluntary sector organisations and learning providers. Where appropriate, learning should be supported or led by peers and mentors.

## **The structure of the report**

The main body of the report is divided into five parts, each focusing on a different theme: the particular and complex needs of women in prison; supporting transitions; learning for progression; learning for employment; and working creatively with partners. These themes reflect the range of needs of women in prison. Each section provides contextual information drawn from literature and information from frontline staff. This is followed by the principles of good practice that relate to the theme. Finally, each section includes an in-depth case study that illustrates how these principles are being applied.

## **Methodology**

The research comprised three main stages: a review of key research and policy literature; a call for information to all women's prisons and key third-sector organisations in England; and the development of five in-depth case studies focusing on different aspects of learning for women in prisons.

### **Review of literature**

The research began with a review of key pieces of published research and policy literature. The review focused on the following themes: offender learning in prison; the circumstances, experiences and potential needs of women in the criminal justice system; and barriers to education, training and employment faced by women in prison. The findings of the review enabled us to develop clear principles of good practice in providing access to, and delivery of, learning and skills for women in prisons, which formed the basis of the rest of the work.

### **Call for information**

A call for information was sent out to all 13 women's prisons in England, as well as key third-sector organisations. Potential respondents were invited to submit comments on the draft principles of good practice, developed from the findings of the literature review. They were also asked to provide examples of current practice in access to and/or provision of learning and skills for women in prisons, currently reflected in one or more of the principles.

The call for information was posted and emailed to every Head of Learning and Skills (HOLS) and Education/OLASS Manager at women's prisons; additional emails were sent and phone calls were made where necessary to boost the number of responses. Responses were received from eight prisons, as well as from Women in Prison, St Giles Trust and Clean Break.

### **Case studies**

Following the responses to the call for evidence, examples of current practice at five prisons were chosen to be the focus of in-depth case studies. Each case study relates to a different theme – or aspect of learning – that corresponds with particular principles of practice.

Case studies were developed through visits to each site and interviews with a range of stakeholders, including education and prison staff, learners and community partners. The aim was to capture examples of practice that managers and practitioners working in other prisons could learn from. At each site data was collected on learning programmes – including why and how they had been introduced; the difference the provision had made; and any challenges faced by staff and learners.

It was important for the case studies to capture the voices of learners and this was reinforced by the literature, which stated that 'women have been largely absent from criminological research and their needs have been marginalised or ignored' (O'Keefe, 2003: 10). Feedback from the women spoken to has been positive: they explained that it was 'good to know that someone was listening and taking them seriously' and they appreciated 'having a chance to express their thoughts'. They also explained that the interviews had made them realise how much they had achieved whilst in custody and they felt encouraged to continue, which shows that participating in research can be empowering and motivating.

## **Part A: The particular and complex needs of women in prison**

### **Context**

#### **Profile and circumstances of women in prison**

Research evidence and statistics show that there are fundamental differences between men and women offenders. For example: women tend to be convicted for less serious and non-violent offences; they are more likely to have mental health issues and/or have experienced serious alcohol and drug misuse; and 'over half of the women in prison report having suffered domestic violence and one in three has experienced sexual abuse' (Ministry of Justice, 2010: 31). Due to the smaller number of women's prisons in England, women are more likely to be located further from their homes and the community they will resettle in. This can negatively impact their relationships with family and ultimately their resettlement prospects.

*'Women and men are different. Equal treatment of men and women does not result in equal outcomes... Custodial experience affects women differently and disproportionately from men. For example, they are located further from their homes and families because of the small number and geographical spread of women's prisons, which makes visiting difficult. Women in prison are less likely than men to have someone on the outside looking after their home and family and they are more likely to lose their home and children as a result of imprisonment.'*

Home Office (2007)

Statistics show that approximately three fifths of women in prison are serving sentences of six months or less (Ministry of Justice, 2013). This can negatively impact on women's access to education and training and the extent to which they can engage with the range of provision on offer. Further, if women are experiencing additional barriers to learning, such as the trauma of arriving in prison and being separated from children; low confidence and self-esteem; learning difficulties and disabilities; and others described above, these may need addressing before women can meaningfully engage with education provision.

#### **Role of education**

Baroness Corston's 2007 report to the Home Office highlighted the lack of 'emotional literacy' in education provision and called for education to support women to develop 'life skills', such as 'how to live as a family or group, how to contribute to the greater good, how to boil an egg, clean a toilet or one's teeth' (p.44). Corston argued that prisons should take a woman-centred approach to education and skills, so that each woman is assessed individually to ensure that the learning she participates in addresses her specific needs.

The central role of learning in addressing the particular needs of women in prison and developing life skills was the strongest message we received from the call for information. Respondents explained that, by participating in learning, women can develop skills in problem solving, dealing with authority, managing difficult behaviours, working as a team, and managing and maintaining relationships. They emphasised the need for education provision to address the ‘root causes of women’s offending (sexual and domestic violence, poverty, mental health issues)’ and support women to develop higher levels of self esteem and confidence.

Some respondents felt that the current ‘government focus on employability’ to reduce rates of re-offending is not always appropriate for women who often have different priorities and motivations to learn, such as home life and family, managing finances and accommodation. They noted that the outcomes of this learning are ‘often harder to measure than qualifications and jobs’.

Many submissions to the call for information highlighted the value of ‘creative learning and the arts’ in providing a stepping stone to learning. One respondent told us that ‘developing creativity can be a gateway to changing a person’s life positively and enormously increase their self-esteem and confidence’. This argument echoes Corston’s, that ‘personal development and activities that are artistic in nature... all help disadvantaged women gain confidence... and begin to understand that education and employment might be relevant to them’ (2007: 44).

There are Mountains was a partnership project between **HMP Askham Grange**, The Manchester College and Clean Break, the acclaimed theatre company which focuses women’s experience of the criminal justice system through producing original new plays and delivering theatre-based education for women offenders in custody and the community. The project worked with a small group of women to create a performance exploring the theme of release which was performed to both prisoners and members of the public.

By participating in the project the women have not only grown in confidence but have also gained a number of useful skills and competencies including: knowing how to work as part of team; better focus and stamina; enhanced self esteem and confidence; artistic skills and building on existing talents.

*‘In all sorts of different ways you are enriched.’* (Learner)

Corston recommended the ‘unitisation of recognised qualifications as additional stepping-stones so that small steps can be recognised and rewarded’ (2007: 45). She argued that receiving certificates and recognition would give women a sense of achievement and motivation to continue with learning. O’Keefe added that ‘bite-sized’ or ‘taster’ courses are also one way in which the barrier of short sentences

can be overcome. Even if women are not able to take full advantage of the learning offer in prison, they may be encouraged to seek opportunities in the community.

*Principles of good practice*

Drawn from the literature as well as existing practice, we believe that the following key principles reflect good practice in addressing the particular and complex needs of women in prison:

- Learning should be empowering and motivating. It should build women's confidence and self-esteem, and validate their experiences and future aspirations.
- The learning offer should be flexible and tailored to meet a range of individual needs.
- Learning and skills provision should provide women with the tools they need to take control of their lives. Women should have the opportunity to develop life skills and capabilities in health, digital technology, personal finance, and civic participation.

## Case study: CARE programme at HMP Foston Hall

### About Foston Hall

HMP Foston Hall is a closed women's prison in Derbyshire, with capacity to accommodate up to 310 remand and convicted women.

### About CARE

Since 2011, Foston Hall has been running the CARE (Choices, Actions, Relationships and Emotions) programme, the only accredited women-specific behaviour programme in the country.

The ten-week intensive course consists of 30 group sessions, in addition to which learners have access to nine one-to-one sessions with staff: three before the course, three in the middle and three at the end. Unlike other offending behaviour courses, CARE does not concentrate on offences. As part of the programme, women develop skills in mindfulness (a technique that encourages individuals to focus on the present) and a greater understanding of their rights and goals. Learners focus on what they would like for their future, which they refer to as their 'preferred story'.

*'Offending behaviour programmes focus on what you have done wrong, this focuses on positives – being able to look at the future optimistically.'* (Learner)

*'All of the other courses were made for the male estate and then passed on. This course was made for us.'* (Learner)

Learners build a portfolio of their preferred story and each woman has half a session dedicated to them to practice their preferred conversation – a key conversation they want to have in the future with someone they feel is important, such as a relative, social worker or employer. It is an opportunity for them to practice their skills from the programme and get feedback on their use of them, in order to take learning forward. During the final session, learners take part in a ceremony, share their portfolios and preferred stories, photos are taken and the Deputy Governor presents the women with their certificates.

*'People never look into the future. It's nice to speak about who and where you would like to be in the future.'* (Learner)

*'It gives the women a reason to get up in the morning... The programme looks at the positives and the future the women can achieve and this is motivating. Everyone should do it – it makes you reflect and realise there is a future.'* (CARE Advocate)

One of the key features of the programme is that the facilitators work alongside the women, rather than influence them to think a particular way. Women are encouraged and supported to speak openly in the group about events in their lives and their

feelings. Staff also model and participate in the group, for example sharing their experiences and emotions as appropriate. Learners value the fact that the course is voluntary and they therefore do not feel pressured.

*'You get positive feedback, constructive criticism. Most other courses can be very negative, in this course we were encouraged to speak openly and freely.'*  
(Learner)

Following the programme women are offered independent support for the next two years by the CARE Advocate from Women in Prison. The advocate sees women individually on a weekly or fortnightly basis and supports them through the gate with resettlement issues such as housing and benefits. Advocates are able to build good relationships with the women as they are non-judgemental and able to be more flexible than prison staff. They also act as a critical friend, do a lot of motivational work and support women to build their self esteem and confidence.

*'Having the back-up of Women in Prison – a confidential service – gives you trust. That's what CARE gave us.'* (Learner)

### **Benefits and impact for learners**

Feedback from review meetings and wing staff has so far been very positive and staff are looking at how many women have moved onto the enhanced regime and the reduction in cases of self harm as a result of completing the CARE Programme.

*'Since CARE I have had a smooth ride, been on enhanced since I've been here.'*  
(Learner)

The main outcomes for learners relate to improvements in self esteem, confidence and the ability to recognise and manage emotions. Learners now feel more assertive: they feel able to speak in a group and ask for help.

*'I find it easier to go and ask for help now; I used to see it as a sign of weakness.'*  
(Learner)

*'It's taught me to appreciate myself... It has given me confidence and self belief. I feel safe – I was not safe for many years... My mum was all fur coat and no knickers – we had to put on a show for people to see but inside it was horrible. I can be honest now and not afraid to speak out.'* (Learner)

*'I was really angry, the way I looked at people and I was very curt. But now I recognise my emotions and I have the tools to look after myself.'* (Learner)

*'I was passive and I'm more assertive now. I can mix with groups... Helps you to understand people a lot more – you can see where they are coming from.'*  
(Learner)

Some women feel that participating in the programme gives them the motivation and confidence to enrol on learning courses or apply for work.

*'The women will re-engage with learning and/or work and the programme gives them the confidence to do it.'* (CARE Advocate)

*'I went to college to do NVQ Level 3 in beauty. This was my preferred story and CARE gave me the motivation to do it.'* (Learner)

## **Challenges**

The programme was initially designed for women who are about to be released; however, some women who complete the course are still towards the beginning of their sentences or are serving life or IPP (Imprisonment for Public Protection) sentences. Advocates are supposed to work with and support women through the gate but cannot always do this because they are not yet close to their release date. While this could pose a challenge to the capacity of the Advocates, it can also be very frustrating for learners who are not close to their release date.

*'In the last group we were all lifers – the course is supposed to be for women who are about to go through the gate. When I finished the course, I was just waiting again. I was boosted up and I'm still sitting here a year on.'* (Learner)

However, it was still felt by learners and staff alike that the programme was undoubtedly beneficial to learners, no matter what stage of their sentence. Some of the learners suggested that a 'refresher' of the programme could be offered to women as they approach their release date.

*'CARE should be offered to everybody regardless of their offence... If I had known before what I know now, I might not be sat in front of you today.'* (Learner)

HMP Foston Hall is currently the only prison offering the programme and some women are temporarily transferred from other prisons in order to complete the course. There are currently only two CARE Advocates and logistically they are not able to cover all prisons and provide support to all women that complete the programme across the country.

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## Part B: Supporting transitions

### Context

‘There are two inter-related aspects of the offender’s learning journey. There is the journey in learning, from the individual’s starting point to achievement and new plans; and there is the offender’s journey from remand, throughout a sentence, perhaps in more than one institution, or on probation, to release.’

Nashashibi *et al.* (2006: 5)

Previous NIACE studies have reflected on the value of sentence and learning plans to ensure that progression is built into the offender’s learning journey, but have also highlighted that too often there seemed to be a gap between intention and reality. There is no doubt that learning should feature as a key element of sentence plans and that these plans should be updated and follow the prisoner through their time in custody. Indeed, prison and education staff who participated in this piece of research supported this view; however, many of them also reported that the transfer of learning records from one establishment to another continues to be a real problem. If records of achievement are not updated and/or transferred between prisons, this can have detrimental effects on learners’ engagement and achievement in education. O’Keefe reported that ‘some women had to repeat courses, which they had already completed because relevant information was not passed between establishments. This results in women feeling that their time is being wasted and they are not making any progress’ (2003: 26).

The following short example describes how learners’ motivation can be sustained through the development and ownership of Individual Learning Plans (ILPs).

The achievements and progress of women at **HMP Low Newton** are co-ordinated and monitored through ILPs. The ILPs are used as tools to map the women’s journeys during their custody and includes targets for learning, skills development, employability, personal and social development and the associated activities.

ILPs are developed during induction and women are encouraged and supported to take ownership of the plans and thereby to take responsibility for their own behaviour and development. The women see the ILPs as their record of achievement and use them to show off their successes to their families, to support their applications for employment and as evidence presented to the Offender Management Board.

*‘The women can see something that they are working towards. Because the ILP contains clear and achievable (SMART) targets, certificates, qualifications, evidence, etc. all in one place, they can see the value and the use it has on the outside.’* (Principal Officer)

Under the OLASS 4 arrangements, providers and the National Careers Service are required to 'ensure use is being made of the Learner Record Service to support learner transfers within the prison system' (Skills Funding Agency, 2012: 5). Once fully embedded in practice, this system should ensure that women's achievements and aspirations are not lost in the transfer between prisons or into the community.

Time spent in learning prisons is sometimes interrupted by other appointments, such as healthcare. This issue also affects both the female and male prisons: a recent study (Novitzky and Jones, 2013) found that 64 per cent of absences during a three week course could have been avoided (for example, by scheduling appointments at an alternative time). It is possible to overcome these interruptions with a robust sentence planning and sequencing system, as the following short example shows.

**HMP Send** has developed a system whereby all prisoners' activities (for example, work, health, education, etc.) are scheduled to avoid clashes. Traffic light colours are used to indicate the priority level of the activities. Time in education is coded as red, which means that it should not be rescheduled or interrupted.

As well as supporting the transitions that women make between prisons during their time in custody, learning should also support women's resettlement plans, in order to make the transition from prison to the community as smooth as possible. One of the recommendations arising from the *Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning* advocated for entitlements to 'help people use learning to make potentially difficult transitions, for example guaranteeing access to learning for those leaving prison' (Schuller and Watson, 2009: 7).

'The moment of coming out of prison is a critical phase in the path to reintegration... It would be perverse to invest more in rehabilitation programmes and leave it to chance outside the gates... The Inquiry's main report calls for an entitlement transition for offenders, guaranteeing them access to an education or training course immediately on their release, with suitable pre-release preparation and guidance.'

Schuller (2009: 39-40)

The case study on the following page describes a programme that supports women from induction to release by focusing on the seven pathways to reduce re-offending.

### *Principles of good practice*

Drawn from literature as well as existing practice, we believe that the following key principles reflect good practice in supporting the transitions that women in prison make throughout the learning journey:

- Learning should enable women to make a successful and positive transition from prison to their resettlement in the community. Learning and skills should play a key part of sentence and resettlement plans.
- All achievements should be recognised and recorded. Records of achievement should follow women as they move between prisons and into the community.

## **Case study: Pathways induction programme at HMP East Sutton Park**

### **About East Sutton Park**

HMP East Sutton Park, based in Kent, holds both adult and young offender women in open conditions preparing them for resettlement in the community. The prison has capacity to accommodate up to 100 women. The prison has a low re-offending rate of around five per cent (Owen, 2012).

### **About Pathways**

The Pathways induction programme is available for every new reception at East Sutton Park. The two-day course has been delivered by the OLASS provider, The Manchester College, for the past four and a half years. The programme focuses on the seven reducing reoffending pathways set by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS)<sup>1</sup>:

1. Accommodation and support
2. Education, training and employment
3. Physical and mental health
4. Drugs and alcohol
5. Finance, benefits and debt
6. Children and families
7. Attitudes, thinking and behaviour

Women are encouraged to look at the pathways and identify the support they need under each one, before producing an action plan of what they need, how they can get it, what support they require and the time span to achieve their targets. Women use this action plan at the sentence planning board and it forms part of their sentence plan for their resettlement. As the plan belongs to the individual woman – and is not something that the prison service requires them to do – they are accountable for their targets, take responsibility for the outcomes and feel motivated to achieve their aspirations.

The course is very personal and is therefore delivered sensitively with access to one-to-one sessions. The women we spoke to emphasised how important this was to them – that their personal circumstances were treated with respect and remained confidential. They were also very positive about it being ‘tailored and personalised’ to them, their needs and goals.

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<sup>1</sup> There are nine pathways in total, the remaining two (sex working and domestic violence) are dealt with by probation services.

*'Confidentiality is good here: your business is not discussed in an open forum, you have a one-to-one. When I started and saw all the things I had to talk about, I was worried, but then they explained that those things would be discussed one-to-one.'*  
(Pathways learner)

The Pathways induction programme is also delivered at HMP Blantyre, a male resettlement prison that amalgamated with East Sutton Park in 2007.

### **Benefits and impact for learners**

The Pathways programme provides a structure for learners: the tools to enable them to think, prioritise and set goals for resettlement. Learners explained that this helped them to feel able to take control.

*'I feel better able to plan. It gives you structure and something to aim for.'*  
(Pathways learner)

*'As with me, finding out about voluntary work and making plans gives you that bit back – like I am in control.'* (Pathways learner)

The programme and action plan encourages the women to consider enrolling on education courses that could benefit them and help them to achieve their goals.

*'Pathways drives the induction and raises the profile of education.'* (Education Manager)

*'You have to take advantage of what's available... Whatever courses I wanted to do I got onto.'* (Pathways learner)

As well as helping the women to look ahead, the action plan acts as a reminder of the courses they have already completed – like a record of achievement. Learners explained that this can be especially helpful when they attend their sentence planning boards.

*'Having the plan does help. You check through and see what you have done and what you still have to achieve... Before I had everything everywhere. It makes a difference. Every [sentence planning] board you sit you are moving forward. The boards are not so scary anymore.'* (Pathways learner)

Women told us that it took them 'a while to get used to people caring' but that the course had given them confidence and improved their levels of self esteem. Working with staff to plan their resettlement enabled them to believe that they could have a second chance and to feel positive about the future.

*'They know you here, they take time to get to know you and to go out of their way to help you. They care about how you are feeling and you are not just a number... It helps with confidence – they have made you feel like a human being again.'*

*They tell you you've got the right to have a chance, get you ready for when you're out.'* (Pathways learner)

## **Challenges**

Staff explained that it is sometimes difficult for women to take ownership of the pathways as they need time to settle into living in open conditions – especially those who have been in closed conditions for a longer period of time. For this reason, some women are encouraged to delay the induction slightly.

*'For third-stage lifers in particular we might advise them to take the induction a week or two later. They are not used to having structure and may struggle with taking ownership of their own lives. They need time to adjust.'* (Education Manager)

The Pathways induction programme is currently only available for women at East Sutton Park and some of the learners felt that they would have benefited from the course, or something similar, whilst in closed prison. They explained that they felt their time in closed conditions had not been structured enough in terms of supporting them to think and plan for the future.

*'It's not available in closed prisons where you are just sort of floundering about. It was quite nice to have someone sit and plan your sentence.'* (Pathways learner)

Staff suggested that a limited version of the programme could be delivered in closed prisons; for example, learners could focus on a reduced number of pathways, rather than all seven. They explained that it could be frustrating for some women to look at pathways such as accommodation if they were a long way from their release date, especially as support services and eligibility for benefits could change during their time in custody.

*'It could be delivered in closed prison, if it was very singular – they can address just one pathway... In a closed prison you can only focus on certain aspects of the NOMS pathways, for example you could not focus on resettlement. Here we spend more time looking at work, finance and accommodation – this is the end of their sentence and they can actually apply for a home.'* (Education Manager)

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## Part C: Progression in learning

### Context

#### Access to learning at a range of levels

While it is clear that education in prisons should address basic literacy and numeracy skills needs, it should also encourage learners to progress and support access to learning at higher levels. In *Moving Mountains*, O’Keefe describes the frustration felt by many women due to the ‘over-emphasis on basic skills level education in prisons’ and how this ‘limited their ability to challenge themselves’ or to progress onto higher level courses (2003: 25). This finding is supported by our research: some of the women in this study reported that they were not offered learning opportunities whilst in closed prison because they achieved Level 2 English and maths in their initial assessments and there were limited opportunities to access higher level learning opportunities. Instead, they were asked to support other learners as classroom assistants.

Research carried out by the Prisoners Education Trust (PET) suggested that statistics relating to prisoners’ educational profiles should be reviewed, as a high proportion (nearly 80 per cent) of their survey ‘respondents had qualifications when they came into prison, including 45 per cent with a GCSE’ (PET, 2012, p.1). This led PET to call for more opportunities for progression to higher level learning in prison.

*‘[S]tudies of attempts to increase women’s employment prospects, e.g. through vocational training, have not found that this reduces re-offending. On the other hand, studies indicate that increasing women’s educational level strongly improves outcomes.’*

NOMS (2012)

#### The role of information, advice and guidance

The National Careers Service is now responsible for providing IAG to the prison population. It plays a key role in providing learners with impartial, ‘realistic, relevant and up-to-date careers advice that will help them make the right decisions about their future’ (BIS/Ministry of Justice, 2011: 16). The IAG that women receive should ensure that there is coherence between the courses and qualifications that they undertake – in order that they can work towards a particular personal, educational or employment goal. We have found it is not uncommon for learners to complete a range of disparate qualifications at Levels 1 and 2, perhaps due to the availability of courses at these levels. This is not helpful in terms of preparing women for release into the community and finding employment.

Women may be ready to engage with learning at different stages during their time in custody and information about how to access learning opportunities should be forthcoming. There is no one approach to engaging and informing women about the

range of services available and there is a need for flexibility to meet the needs of the individual. Opportunities to convey the value of learning are many and include: induction, one-to-one IAG sessions, sentence planning, development of ILPs and outreach activity.

Women in the *Moving Mountains* research reported a lack of information about learning opportunities and that they had to be 'very pro-active' to get hold of the necessary information themselves. The reported recommended that education, training and employment opportunities outside prison should be actively promoted to prisoners, for example through distance learning. The following example is one way in which IAG about higher level learning can be delivered.

**Women in Prison (WIP)**, an organisation that supports and campaigns for women affected by the Criminal Justice System, provides a specialist information, advice and guidance service to women in prison who wish to study via distance learning and/or attend college on day release. WIP also provides grants towards distance learning course fees and materials. Both services are funded by BIS.

WIP Advice is provided in all 13 women's prisons across England, it is generally provided in a one-to-one meeting; however, initial advice can also be provided via letter and telephone. In most prisons the service is advertised and delivered through advice surgeries; however, there are prisons where they receive referrals above and beyond their resources by word of mouth.

WIP have a robust application and decision-making process for the distance learning awards: all courses must be directly linked to women's future employment goals and women must fulfil specific criteria before an award is made, including length of sentence, levels of literacy and numeracy, support from the education department, and history of commitment to – and completion of – courses. WIP also provides additional support to women to enable them to be in a position to apply for the distance learning courses, such as easy read books and self esteem workshops.

The grant from BIS also contributes towards the WIP magazine, which is distributed to all 13 women's prisons in England. This enables WIP to engage women who would otherwise remain isolated, unaware of their rights or unable to access informative, relevant articles. The magazine covers a range of subjects, including legal rights, education, employment, housing, domestic violence, addictions and mental health, as well as showcasing readers' art, poetry and creative writing.

### *Principles of good practice*

Drawn from literature as well as existing practice, we believe that the following principles reflect good practice in supporting women in prison to progress in learning:

- Women should have access to a range of learning opportunities, including personal development, qualifications and preparation for work. Learning opportunities should not reinforce gender stereotypes. As well as providing an opportunity for women to complete lower level qualifications, learning should support women's progression to higher levels of learning and skills.
- Good quality information, advice and guidance should encourage coherence between the courses that learners undertake and ensure that their achievements enable them to progress towards a career of their choice. This offer of support should be frequently and proactively promoted.

## **Case study: Learning opportunities at HMP Askham Grange**

### **About Askham Grange**

Askham Grange is an open prison in North Yorkshire, which facilitates a comprehensive resettlement regime for long and short-stay residents. The prison provides accommodation for up to 128 women and young offenders and also offers the opportunity for up to ten mothers to maintain full-time care of their child or children whilst in custody. Askham Grange has an excellent record in reducing reoffending, with a rate of less than six per cent (HMP YOI Askham Grange, 2011).

### **About the offer**

Learning and skills training is promoted within all areas of Askham Grange. The OLASS provider (The Manchester College) delivers a wide range of courses, including English, maths, IT, business administration, customer service, hairdressing, nail technician, employability, cookery, cleaning, assertiveness, stress management and creative writing.

#### *Induction*

Learning and skills staff aim to give learners a rigorous induction so they have a sound realistic job aspiration from the outset and so they can focus on achieving their aim throughout their sentence. As part of the induction, staff and learners identify existing personal and transferable skills and develop an ILP that is tailored to the learners' needs. Staff also discuss equality and diversity at each induction, including reasonable adjustments and safeguarding.

*'We work with each individual as an individual. Every learner has an individual learning timetable which has to be realistic in terms of what they are capable of and what they can do with the skills they have.'* (OLASS Manager)

*'It's individualised... there are some things I need and some things I don't need. Askham recognise existing skills and opportunities for further education.'* (Learner)

#### *Enabling progression*

Staff support learners to work through their ILPs to ensure that they achieve their aims and aspirations, rather than collect a set of disparate qualifications. It is therefore important that they can offer learners the opportunity to access learning and qualifications at a range of levels. At Askham Grange learners have the opportunity to access Level 3 courses for business administration, hairdressing and creative writing. While IT qualifications are only available up to Level 2, education staff have widened the offer to include additional units and credits; for example, a unit on security online so that learners are more aware of social media. Learners are also supported to access higher level learning with the Open University or with local colleges that women can access on temporary release.

*'I am doing Level 3 in accounting and Level 4 in floristry. I am hoping to set up my own business after release.'* (Learner)

*'In closed [prisons] there's no chance of anything past Level 2. It's good that everyone is assessed and then supported to get Level 1 and 2 in literacy and numeracy, but here at Askham you can go further.... Here you can get on... You need to have people who will help and support you.'* (Learner)

### **Progression to employment**

As a resettlement prison, employability is the main focus of education at Askham Grange. Learners have the opportunity to put the skills they have learned into practice by working in the prison. For example, learners on the customer services course provide support for conferences and functions held at Askham Grange and women work in the cafe; tasks on the business administration course include paperwork to be done for the prison. These activities provide learners with real and meaningful work that will enhance their employability.

The Manchester College works very closely with the Pathways Team, who secure volunteering and work placements for women when they are eligible for Resettlement Day Release. Pathways Advisors aim to ensure that the community placements align with the learning women have completed. Following these experiences of work, some women have successfully gained employment upon release. Further details on Pathways at Askham Grange can be found in Part E of this report, on page 41.

### **Benefits and impact for learners**

For some learners, accessing the education provision has given them an opportunity to formalise existing skills and build up their record of educational achievement, which should enable them to secure employment upon release.

*'I am enjoying it more than I expected to. At school there was no encouragement to stay past 15 [years old]. When I apply for work now I have something to put on the application, I didn't have qualifications before.'* (Learner)

*'Now I have qualifications in business administration, even though I have had my own business I have never had qualifications.'* (Learner)

Education provision also provides some women with the opportunity to retrain for a different career; for example, if the nature of their offence prevents them from returning to their previous occupation.

Additional benefits to participating in learning include a sense of achievement from learning new skills, increased levels of self-confidence, improved self-esteem, and better time management.

*'It was challenging for me, confidence was not instilled in me, and I surprised myself that I could do it.'* (Learner)

*'I am enjoying the creative writing. My first soft skill was confidence and I'm getting there.'* (Learner)

## **Challenges**

### *For education staff*

In order to ensure that women access learning that is right for them and aligned with previous learning and experience, staff try to get information from their previous prison. However, they are not always successful at retrieving complete information.

Staff find the lack of internet access and functioning Virtual Campus a challenge to the women's learning experience, not only in IT but also in accessing resources and information for higher levels of study, including distance learning. Staff suggested that the internet should be made available in a small number of prisons; for example, Category D and C prisons. In addition, it is also important that women understand how to use the internet, what the potential risks are and how to manage them, which is increasingly important due to the use of social media.

As prisons are increasingly being required to be more cost effective and run as a self-sustaining business, it will be more challenging to maintain a learner-centred approach to education provision and ensure that women progress through learning in a way that is appropriate for them.

### *For learners*

Learners explained that while in closed prisons the main barrier to accessing learning at higher levels was receiving reliable IAG about what they could access and how. They reported that they had not always been told about opportunities to learn at higher levels and suggested that this information be part of any standard induction.

Transferring from one prison to another can disrupt learners' educational progression. Some learners are moved with very little warning and often do not have the opportunity to complete a course or qualification before they move.

*'It feels like the move is the most important thing – not your education. They could move you the day before an exam and there is no opportunity to sort out anything. They can move you on the day without warning.'* (Learner)

Some learners reported that at other prisons they had not been encouraged to progress in education or work because they were good at their job within the prison.

*'We do jobs for the prison and then they keep you 'on hold' because you are good at your job. It's not a reciprocal relationship, they will not encourage you to progress because they do not want to lose your service.'* (Learner)

## Part D: Learning for employment

### Context

*Making Prisons Work* and the subsequent OLASS 4 contracts place a greater emphasis on learning and skills for employability as a way of reducing rates of re-offending. It has already been suggested in Part A of this report that it is sometimes more appropriate for women to first engage in learning that addresses other needs, such as life skills, emotional literacy and resilience. However, much of the research that makes this case also supports 'work-focused interventions and... the premise that re-offending can be reduced by improving the employment skills of offenders' (Home Office, 2007: 44). Indeed *Making Prisons Work* recognises that 'although employment is important to women offenders, there are a number of steps they may need to take before they are job ready' (2011: 20). It is therefore crucial that learning is flexible and tailored to meet the range of needs that women may have.

O'Keefe found that women would like practical support in preparing for work and developing skills in CV writing, disclosing convictions, self-presentation, job searching and interviews. They also wanted to take part in work trials, so that they could get real work experience and have the chance to prove what they are capable of. The following examples show how two prisons are providing work experience for their learners.

At **HMP Send**, learners that complete vocational qualifications are given the opportunity to put their skills into practice by working in real work environments. For example, the prison have set up a fully functional hairdressing and beauty salon and learners provide treatments to prisoners and staff who pay for the services as they would in the community. The Business Administration course operates as a fully functioning office: learners produce leaflets and booklets for all prison departments, translation materials and carry out all of the administration for the Education Department. This gives learners the opportunity to maintain and develop their skills, as well as build a record of work experience which should improve their resettlement prospects. Many women have been successful at gaining sustainable employment upon their release.

**HMP Downview** delivers NVQs in Business Administration at Levels 1, 2 and 3. Learners on the course also work in the administration office carrying out administrative jobs for the various prison departments and thereby gain valuable work experience. Several women have gained employment on release using this qualification and the experience of working in a real office.

As well as focusing on employability skills, *Making Prisons Work* also encourages learning providers to develop 'the vocational and employability skills associated with that work for which there is a demand from employers in the areas to which the

prisoner is released' (BIS/Ministry of Justice, 2012: 3). This is of course far more challenging for women's prisons, given their small number and geographical spread. Women are less likely to be in an establishment based in or near the community they will be released into. However, our research shows that some women's prisons do plan their provision strategically to ensure that women have the best chances of gaining employment during their time in custody and/or on release, as the two following examples demonstrate.

All prisoners at **HMP Foston Hall** complete a mandatory 2 week induction programme delivered by the Education Department. The programme requires all participants to take the Food Safety Level 2 certificate and Health & Safety in the Workplace Level 1 certificate, to ensure that they can then be employed in some capacity within the establishment. This also ensures that the women will leave with at least two qualifications which could help them to get a job on release.

**HMP East Sutton Park** offers an NVQ Level 2 in food preparation and catering. Learners gain skills in catering with a view to gaining employment in the catering and hospitality industry. The prison also offers other courses to embed the knowledge and widen employment opportunities, such as food hygiene, first aid and customer care. Through working in the busy kitchen, learners learn how to work effectively in a team, nutrition and staff use cooking as an opportunity to discuss equality and diversity issues and raise awareness of different cultures.

*'Equality and diversity is included in the course: we had a diversity day when we tried foods from different cultures... We have a very ethnically diverse group and we learn from each other. The different cultures benefit the women and staff – we are learning all the time.'* (Catering Assessor)

The prison recognises that catering and hospitality is one of the skills gaps for employment nationally therefore the prison has developed links with national employers to support this gap in the labour market. Previous learners have gone on to secure jobs in London hotels, national supermarkets and local restaurants.

*'I love cooking, I like all different foods. I would like to open my own restaurant... Prison is one big unit, we all come together to help each other. In an environment like a kitchen we work as a team.'* (Learner completing Level 2 food preparation and catering)

Many women have plans to go self-employed on release in the catering business; therefore the NVQ is linked to the self-employment course delivered by the education contract. This is then linked to the charity 'Start Up' that supports women offenders into self-employment on release. Through delivering this package of skills-based training the aim is that women are equipped with the skills to fulfil their goal of self-employment within a sustainable approach.

It is also very important to recognise the transferability of skills developed through courses that do not necessarily have employability as their primary aim, for example functional skills:

The tutors at **HMP Askham Grange** feel that the introduction of functional skills has worked really well, especially in terms of developing learners' confidence and employability skills. While some of the assessments may be more challenging than the previous skills for life exams, tutors believe that the practical aspects of functional skills are more effective at preparing learners for employment.

*Principles of good practice*

Drawn from literature as well as existing practice, we believe the following key principle reflects good practice in delivering vocational learning to women in prison and supporting them to develop employability skills:

- Learning and training should prepare women for employment. Women should have the opportunity to develop practical skills for job seeking, writing applications, interviews and they should be given accurate and clear information regarding the disclosure of convictions. Where possible, education should be complemented by practical work experience.

## **Case study: Learning for employment at HMP Low Newton**

### **About Low Newton**

HMP Low Newton is a closed prison for female adults and young offenders. The prison has capacity for 344 prisoners and has just opened a Resettlement Unit for prisoners suitable to be released on temporary licence (ROTL) for work experience.

### **The set up**

Staff at Low Newton have worked hard to develop the infrastructure necessary to support female offenders into work. This includes ensuring that the women have appropriate access to relevant vocational and employability skills training ranging from functional skills through to Level 3 (and above in some cases). This offer includes generalist courses in customer services, business administration, health and safety, first aid as well as qualifications linked to specific jobs in the prison like gym instructors course and the British Institute of Cleaning Services course. The prison uses a blended learning approach and the women have to complete a relevant qualification before they can go out on work release.

The opening of a Resettlement Unit for women nearing the end of their sentence provides a facility for the women to prepare for release by developing their independent living skills and access to more intense resettlement support.

Introducing ROTL for eligible women has also been crucial to the set up, allowing them to access work in the community and gain invaluable experience and skills.

In addition staff have developed and sustained effective partnerships with local employers, securing a variety of work placements and the prospect of employment on release. The success of these partnerships is the result of a concentrated effort to positively change the attitudes of local employers towards offenders, through presentations at local business conferences, employer days at the prison, and meetings and discussions with potential employers.

*'These changes won't work if we can't engage potential employers.'* (Principal Officer)

### **Individual Learning Plans**

The achievements and progress of women at Low Newton are co-ordinated and monitored through ILPs. The ILPs are used as tools to map the women's journeys during their custody and includes targets for learning, skills development, employability, personal and social development and the associated activities.

ILPs are developed during induction and women are encouraged and supported to take ownership of the plans and thereby to take responsibility for their own behaviour and development. The plans are used to track progress and as part of the process of reward and recognition, as feedback from learners, tutors and support staff is

recorded in the ILP. This also encourages information sharing and collaborative working between differing prison departments as staff can see what others have written and plan their work accordingly.

The women see the ILPs as their record of achievement and use them to show off their successes to their families, to support their applications for employment and as evidence presented to the Offender Management Board.

*'The women can see something that they are working towards. Because the ILP contains clear and achievable (SMART) targets, certificates, qualifications, evidence, etc. all in one place, they can see the value and the use it has on the outside.'* (Principal Officer)

### **I'm Ready for Work Programme**

'I'm Ready for Work' is a six week programme (one full day per week) where employers lead a series of employability workshops. Each week a different employer delivers a bespoke workshop, helping learners to identify the skills and experience requisite for work, such as CV writing, team building and interview skills.

*'The sessions try to give someone who believes they have no talents the knowledge that they do.'* (Learner)

The sessions are largely interactive and are tailored to the needs, abilities and aspirations of the group. Learners also have the opportunity to give employers feedback on their practice. In one workshop learners highlighted that the small print on an application for employment form said 'offenders need not apply'. The small print was subsequently removed.

Employers also deliver mock interviews and offer work placements to offenders on ROTL where appropriate. The six-week programme culminates with learners receiving certificates, handed out by employers and senior staff within the prison.

*'Makes the cynics among us know that there are some companies who will give you a chance on the outside.'* (Learner)

The employer group is co-ordinated by one lead employer who has authorised their training manager, supported by senior personnel, to take a lead role in championing employer engagement with the programme. As an employer they are better positioned to encourage and support other employers to engage with the programme. They have a successful record of working with the prison and employing offenders and they share that experience with other employers and allay some of their apprehensions. The training manager also provides some administration for the programme, booking and making arrangements for workshops leaders.

Margaret had little prior education and had never had a job when she arrived at HMP Low Newton. After working in the gym and accessing the range of qualifications available, she began to grow in confidence and ambition. Margaret wanted to 'sort herself out' and settled down to work on getting her ROTL so she could get some work experience before her release.

Margaret started her placement with a local employer and undertook all of the training available until she was the most qualified person in their warehouse. She was described as a model employee and offered a permanent job with the employer on her release. Margaret is still working at with the same employer and has recently won employee of the month.

### **Benefits and impact**

#### *For the prison*

The prison can offer real work placements to offenders through their successful engagement of employers. The prison employability programmes are now linked to local employment needs.

#### *For learners*

Learners have the opportunity to meet real employers and gain an understanding of what they expect from (prospective) employees.

Learners are able to identify what transferable employability skills they already have and how these can be used in the workplace.

*'I now know that not all employers discriminate and there is a real hope for employment when I leave which really helps.'* (Learner)

*'I'm Ready For Work' has given me a lot more confidence. It has taught me to speak out; I have learned that if I want to be heard I have to shout louder!*  
(Learner)

#### *For Employers*

Employers gain a more informed and positive understanding of working with offenders.

Employers often use this kind of activity to fulfil their social corporate responsibility, giving something back to society.

### **Challenges**

Setting up the ROTL scheme was complex as there are a range of offenders within the prison, both in terms of type of offence and population characteristics.

The women present a range of complex issues, (including domestic abuse, drug misuse, mental health, child care, accommodation) which also need to be addressed

alongside improving their employment prospects. Delivering co-ordinated programmes of support for individual prisoners with competing priorities is challenging.

Finding employers who are passionate about supporting offenders into employment can be difficult and these relationships do not blossom overnight.

## Part E: Creative partnership working

### Context

#### Working with community partners

This report has already highlighted some examples of effective partnership working between prisons, education staff and external organisations. Working with community partners can bring benefits such as ‘funding, expertise, new progression and energy’ (Nashashibi *et al.*, 2006: 6). One respondent to the call for information argued that partnerships between prisons and voluntary organisations will be crucial to ensuring that learners continue to have access to a range of learning opportunities. They believe that cuts to prison resources and OLASS priorities focusing on vocational learning will result in prisons becoming more dependent on voluntary organisations to secure funding to deliver courses that provide stepping stones to more formal education. Access to this kind of learning is crucial for women, as has already been argued in this report.

The following three examples provide an overview of how the prisons or education departments are working with internal and external partners to enhance and extend their learning offer.

To ensure that the Education Department does not work in isolation, education and prison staff at **HMP Send** have established SET – Send Education and Training. SET is a partnership between the OLASS provider (A4e), the prison, National Careers Service, Job Centre Plus, St Giles Trust and Surrey Libraries.

At **HMP Styal** The Manchester College and external partners deliver a course in horticulture, using the prison grounds as the main learning setting. Through the course women have produced a show garden at the Royal Horticultural Society Tatton flower Show and others have progressed into employment in the industry.

The Pathways Team at **HMP Askham Grange** are responsible for securing volunteering and work placements for learners when they are eligible for Resettlement Day Release. These placements provide an opportunity for learners to give something back to the community and gain additional skills for future employment. Pathways Advisors work closely with learners to ensure that, where possible, the community placements align with the learning they have completed, their previous work experience and aspirations for the future.

*‘The women build confidence, self-esteem, skills and gain experience – they also give something back to the community... I insist on meaningful employment – not cheap labour – and will challenge employers where necessary. I also challenge the women to make a meaningful contribution – to take it seriously.’*

(Prison Community Officer)

One member of the team, a Prison Community Officer, is dedicated to looking for opportunities in the community, building relationships with partners and overseeing the placement once it has started. As there are no formal arrangements between the prison and community partners, the success of the relationship and future placements is completely dependent on trust and good communication.

*'I started by cold calling community partners and employers and took it from there, building up relationships with them and building up their trust. This depends greatly on the decisions you make and the people you send. I also have to be there for employers when they need advice; we have to have good communication.'* (Prison Community Officer)

Completing community placements have enabled some women to secure employment upon release.

*'I sell the benefits of employing these women: they are reliable, they have to go to work, they are committed, hard-working and clean from drugs and alcohol.'* (Prison Community Officer)

### **The role of peer mentors**

O'Keefe (2003) highlighted the potential benefit of women having support from a peer. Indeed there are schemes within prisons that promote the role of peer mentors as an effective way of engaging and supporting learners and potential learners, such as Toe by Toe and Maths Mentors. Schemes such as these also bring benefits those taking on the mentoring role, such as 'increased confidence, status and opportunities' (Nashashibi *et al.*, 2006: 6). *Making Prisons Work* highlighted that peer mentors 'can be particularly effective during the transition from prison to the outside world' (2011, p.23). Under the right circumstances, the value of engaging offenders and ex-offenders as partners in supporting learning cannot be over-emphasised.

The in depth case study in this section describes a strong working relationship between a prison, a charity and learners. It clearly demonstrates the essential role that all three partners play to ensure that the initiative is successful.

### *Principles of good practice*

Drawn from the literature, as well as existing practice, we believe that the following key principle reflects good practice for working with a range of partners:

- Learning and training opportunities should be supported by partners in the community, including employers, voluntary sector organisations and learning providers. Where appropriate, learning should be supported or led by peers and mentors.

## **Case study: Peer-to-Peer call centre at HMP Send**

### **About Send**

HMP Send is a closed Female Training Prison in Surrey, with capacity to accommodate up to 282 women. It houses a 20-bed Addictive Treatment Unit, an 80-bed Resettlement Unit and a Therapeutic Community with a capacity of 40. Send's performance is rated as 'Exceptional' by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) (Inside Time).

### **About the Peer-to-Peer Call Centre**

The Peer-to-Peer Call Centre at Send offers over-the-phone support to women prisoners. It is a new service developed by St Giles Trust, a charity that aims to help break the cycle of offending, crime and disadvantage and create safer communities by supporting people to change their lives.

This crucial service aims to address the wide need for information and advice amongst women prisoners who are often isolated from the support networks outside the prison, with added worries such as caring for their children and financial difficulties. Peer advisors provide advice to fellow women prisoners around issues such as housing, benefits, finance, employment and information on other services available.

The call centre is currently linked to three female prisons – Holloway, Eastwood Park and Downview – via a secure phone line. St Giles Trust aims to connect every women's prison in England and engineering work is already underway at HMPs Styal, New Hall and Askham Grange, with negotiations commencing with HMP Drake Hall.

For security reasons, all phone calls are anonymous: neither the caller or advisor give their names and callers are given a reference number. In addition, there is always a St Giles Trust member of staff in the call centre to provide supervision, support and specialist advice.

### *Identifying and training peer advisors*

In order to become a peer advisor, women apply for the role and go through an interview process. Some women are identified through their sentence plans and some are identified through the roles that they currently have within the prison. For example, one of the women we interviewed used to work as an orderly in the chaplaincy and another was working as an 'insider', supporting women when they first arrived at the prison.

St Giles Trust trains the women under its Peer Advice Project, which offers serving prisoners the opportunity to gain an NVQ Level 3 in IAG and work as peer advisors providing an advice service to their fellow inmates.

## Benefits and impact

### *For the prison*

The scheme promotes partnership and multi-agency working by inviting other agencies to deliver information sessions to the women and ensuring that there is sufficient referral information available for the peer advisors. Making referrals and sign posting clients to support from a huge range of voluntary and statutory organisations is a key element of the programme.

*'I found the guest speakers very interesting: Price Waterhouse Coopers, Housing, St Giles Trust, Women in Prison...'* (Peer advisor)

The call centre has enabled Send to branch out and work with new partners. They have also taken on a part-time housing support worker to oversee and support the work of the peer advisors.

### *For learners*

A key aim of the service is to provide women with experience and a track record that should improve their resettlement prospects. Peer advisors have the opportunity to work in a real work environment, which enables them to develop a healthy work ethic and experience in communicating with a range of different people. Peer advisors build an understanding of IAG in context, learn about opportunities in the community and see it as professional role that they might continue in the future. In addition, the peer advisors have access to a range of information that should be useful to them when they are released.

*'We hope this service will greatly improve the resettlement prospects of women in custody. The fact that the callers are being provided with advice from other women prisoners means that there is an element of trust and credibility to the service.'* (St Giles Trust)

*'I read everything and tried to learn as much as I could. I learned about debt management, equality and diversity... I find it very interesting.'* (Peer advisor)

Learners explained that working in the call centre gave them a sense of purpose and they felt good about being able to help other people. They feel that their experience of prison and support they have received makes them well-placed to offer IAG to their peers.

*'This has given me a sense of purpose and this is the first thing in my life that has given me that sense of purpose. I did not realise how much I would enjoy helping other people – once I was fixed I could help others.'* (Peer Advisor)

*'Knowing that I can come in here and pick up that phone and help someone feels like I can make a difference, I can give something back. And the knowledge I have*

*gained, I am lucky to be in this job... Who is better to help a prisoner than a prisoner? We live it, we know it.'* (Peer advisor)

Completing the course and working in the call centre has given some learners the confidence and motivation to continue learning and achieve further qualifications.

*'I have done more education since. I am currently working in business administration and have done the Level 2 and am now a supervisor and doing the Level 3. I would not have had the confidence before to do that. I would like to do the Level 4 in IAG.'* (Peer advisor)

### **Challenges**

Getting the support of prisons was initially a big challenge to the success of the service provided by the call centre, however, it is now connected to three prisons and is currently being connected to three more. As a priority, staff at Send and St Giles Trust would like to see the initiative expand and the call centre connected to all women's prisons.

Sustainable funding for the service also presents a challenge. The project is currently funded by Sir Charles Dunstone Foundation but St Giles Trust is exploring other potential funding streams to guarantee its continuation.

The Virtual Campus is currently under development at Send and this would greatly enhance the advice that advisors could provide to callers, as they would be able to access more information.

The call centre is only open during working hours and so is not accessible to many offenders who are working.

## Conclusion

This report has drawn together research and policy literature as well as information from frontline staff to explore five aspects of learning relevant to women in prison: the particular and complex needs of women in prison; supporting transitions; learning for progression; learning for employment; and creative partnership working. The themes were chosen to reflect the range of issues that education providers and policymakers need to consider to ensure that the diverse needs of women in prison are met. The report also presented case studies and short examples to illustrate how female prisons are overcoming some of these challenges.

Women's prisons face some of the same struggles faced by the male prisons in terms of delivering learning and skills provision to offenders: the disruption caused by the regime; lack of effective communication between prisons; limitations of closed facilities or available resources and; a lack of appropriate progression routes to further learning or employment. Moreover, women in prison face a range of particular and complex needs which can preclude progress and achievement in learning if unaddressed.

The research also confirms that there is already a range of good practice in delivering learning and skills to women in prisons. Women's prisons are working with a range of partners to support the women's needs in prisons, including access to good quality learning and skills.

### **The particular and complex needs of women in prison**

There are fundamental differences between men and women offenders and learning is key to responding positively to the issues and circumstances faced by women in prison.

The case study on the CARE programme at HMP Foston Hall demonstrates the value of a course designed specifically for women that focuses on the future and learners' aspirations.

### **Supporting transitions**

Sentence, learning and resettlement plans can be used to ensure that progression is built into the offender's learning journey, but our research shows there continues to be a gap between intention and reality.

The Pathways induction programme at HMP East Sutton, which focuses on the seven reducing re-offending pathways, illustrates the way in which learners benefit from taking ownership of their resettlement plan.

### **Progression in learning**

The emphasis on basic skills in prisons can result in some learners finding it very difficult to access higher level courses that challenge them and enable them to

progress. The case study about HMP Askham Grange demonstrates how they are meeting learners' need for higher levels of learning.

The National Careers Service plays a key role in providing learners with IAG and enabling them to access learning that helps them achieve their goals and aspirations. The service provided by Women in Prison is another way that IAG about higher level learning is being delivered.

### **Learning for employment**

*Making Prisons Work* and the OLASS 4 contracts place a greater emphasis on learning and skills for employability as a way of reducing rates of re-offending. Our research has found many examples of prisons providing learners with work experience – both within the prison and in the community.

The case study about HMP Low Newton shows the range of ways that prison and education staff are working with employers to ensure that women participate in meaningful work experience and are supported to improve their employment chances upon release.

### **Creative partnership working**

This report highlights many examples of effective partnership working between prisons, education staff, learners and external organisations – and how this partnership working has enabled education providers to enhance and extend learning opportunities.

The Peer-to-Peer call centre at HMP Send demonstrates the essential role that all three partners – the prison, St Giles Trust and learners – play to ensure that the initiative is successful.

## Considerations

The following are ten key considerations drawn from the research. We have offered these suggestions on how stakeholders could improve the delivery of learning and skills for women offenders.

1. Women in prison should have access to a broader curriculum, which supports them to develop the life skills that will enable them to engage and progress with other learning and work opportunities. Whilst this is the responsibility of the HOLS and/or Governor, **providers will also need support to develop suitable curricula for women in prisons and to develop the partnerships that can support delivery.**
2. There should be clear progression routes from these courses to other learning qualifications and work. **IAG advisers, teaching and support staff would benefit from a framework for progression to provide guidance on appropriate learning journeys for women offenders. Individual learning plans should be key to this framework.**
3. Vocational learning and employability is not always appropriate or helpful for women where their wider needs are not also being addressed. **Local commissioners need to consider woman-centred approaches to vocational learning and employability skills which include programmes designed specifically for female offenders.**
4. Many women in prison experience considerable barriers to education, employment and training, including mental health issues and emotional trauma. Consequently considerable disruptions to learning are caused by other services. **Prisons would benefit from support in setting up good sequencing procedures and the forums necessary to better co-ordinate service delivery and provision.**
5. The maximum potential for the Virtual Campus is not being fully exploited within women's prisons. **Providers will need support in embedding the use of Virtual Campus within their provision.**
6. Vocational learning and training in women's prisons is enhance by opportunities to develop and maintain their skills by engaging in real work. **Women's prisons should consider providing more opportunities for work within and outside the prison as appropriate.**
7. Peer mentors add real value to learning and skills provision in women's prisons and have therefore potential to support a wider curriculum. **Mentors**

**will need specific training to deliver support in a wider range of vocational skills provision.**

8. There are still considerable issues in relation to the transfer of learner information from one establishment to another. **Prisons, OLASS providers and the National Careers Service need to demonstrate progress towards a standardised approach to completing and transferring learner records, using the Learner Record Service.**
9. Women leaving prison have a greater chance of success of resettlement if they can access through-the-gate support. **More/better partnerships with voluntary and community sector organisations and probation services could facilitate better through-the-gate support.**
10. The research identified a range of examples of good practice from across women's prisons and third sector organisation working with female offenders. **Those working with women offenders should consider how these examples of practice, or aspects of them, might be adopted or replicated.**

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