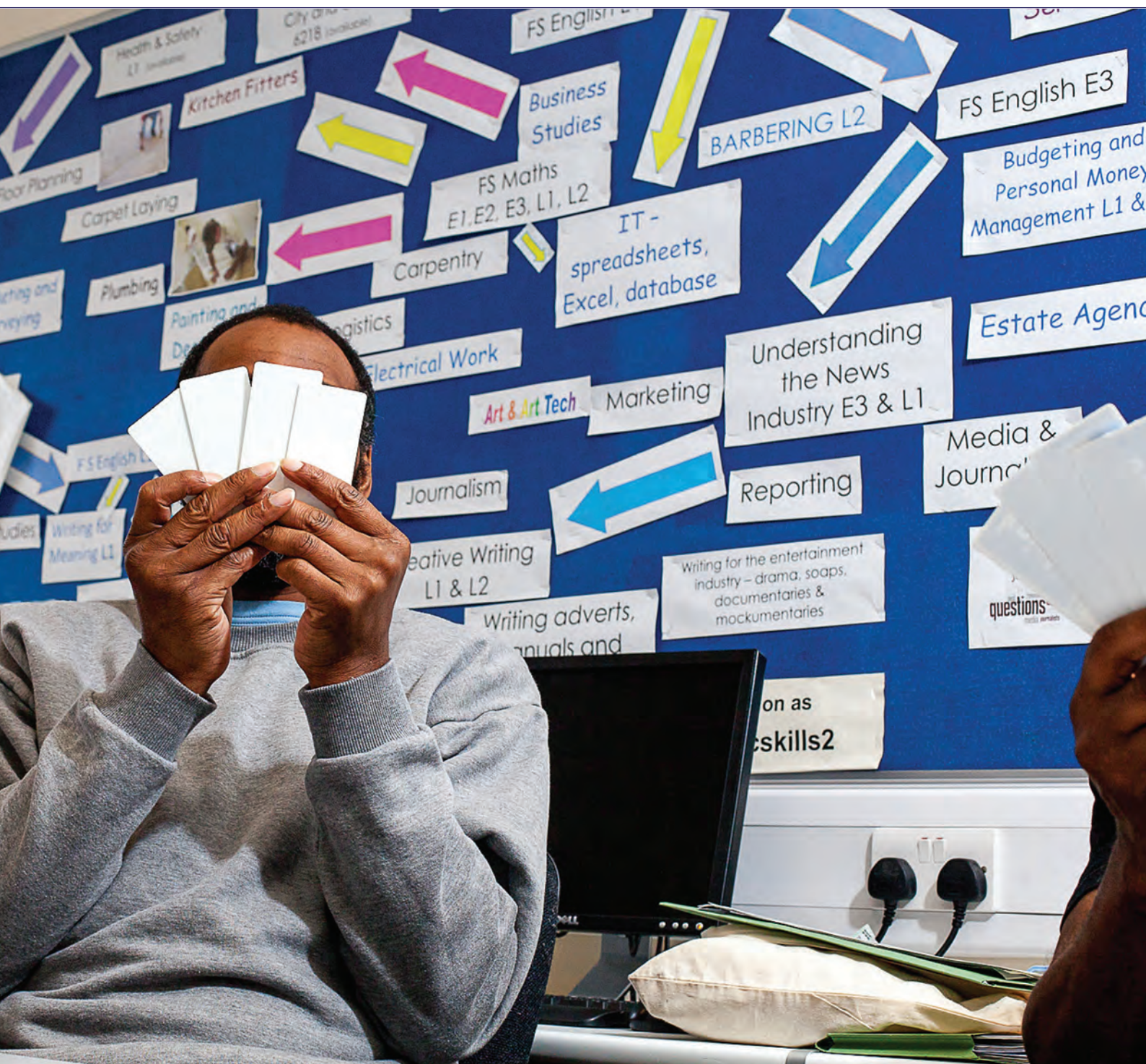




# The Future of Prison Education Contracts

**Delivering Better Outcomes**



Prisoners' Education Trust

**Nina Champion**  
Head of Policy, Prisoners' Education Trust  
(Secretariat for PLA)

# Prisoner Learning Alliance (PLA)

In 2012 Prisoners' Education Trust established the Prisoner Learning Alliance (PLA) and provides the Chair and Secretariat to the group. The aim of the PLA is 'to bring together diverse non-statutory stakeholders with senior cross-departmental officials, to provide expertise and strategic vision to inform future priorities, policies and practices relating to prison education, learning and skills'.

The PLA meet on a quarterly basis. Along with PLA members, meetings have been attended by senior officials from the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, Ministry of Justice, Skills Funding Agency, Education Funding Agency, Youth Justice Board, National Offender Management Service and Ofsted.

Learner voice underpins the work of the PLA and therefore at each meeting an ex-prisoner or prisoner on ROTL discusses their experiences. One meeting a year is held in a prison to hear directly from a number of current prisoner learners and the Governor. The PLA hosts frequent roundtable events and an annual conference to gain insight from practitioners, teachers, providers and other stakeholders.

## Current PLA membership

<b>Rod Clark</b>	Chief Executive, <b>Prisoners' Education Trust</b>
<b>Olivia Dorricott</b>	Director of Leadership, Governance and Management, <b>Education and Training Foundation</b>
<b>Maria McNicholl</b>	Head of Prisons, Senior Management Team, <b>St. Giles Trust</b>
<b>Michala Robertson</b>	Assistant Director, Widening Access and Success Service, <b>Open University</b>
<b>Ama Dixon</b>	Senior Project Officer: Offender Learning, <b>NIACE</b>
<b>Rachel Halford</b>	Director, <b>Women in Prison</b>
<b>David Ahern</b>	CEO, <b>Shannon Trust</b>
<b>Stephen O'Connell</b>	President, <b>Prison Governors Association</b>
<b>Ayesha Williams</b>	International Charter and Policy Manager, <b>Association of Colleges</b>
<b>Nicola Drinkwater</b>	Manager, <b>National Alliance for Arts in Criminal Justice/Clinks</b>
<b>Andrew Wilkie</b>	Director of Radio, <b>Prison Radio Association</b>
<b>Sarah Turvey</b>	Co-Founder and Co-Director, <b>Prison Reading Groups</b>
<b>Charlotte Weinberg</b>	Executive Director, <b>Safe Ground</b>
<b>Robert Mills</b>	Sector Specialist: Offender Learning, <b>OCR (Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations)</b>
<b>Juliet Hope</b>	Founder and CEO, <b>StartUp</b>
<b>Paul Warner</b>	Director of Employment and Skills, <b>Association of Employment and Learning Providers</b>
<b>Dr. Jane Hurry</b>	Co-Director of CECJS, Reader in the Psychology of Education, Centre for Education in the Criminal Justice System (CECJS) at the <b>Institute of Education, University of London</b>
<b>Max Tucker</b>	Assistant Programme Manager, <b>User Voice</b>
<b>Mark Blake</b>	Project Development Officer, <b>Black Training and Enterprise Group</b>
<b>Melanie Jameson</b>	Founder, <b>Dyslexia Consultancy Malvern</b>
<b>Cristina Fernandez</b>	Head of Recovery Support, <b>Rehabilitation of Addicted Prisoners Trust (RAPt)</b>
<b>Diana Sutton</b>	Director, <b>The Bell Foundation</b>

## PLA timeline

<b>2012</b>	Prisoners' Education Trust established the PLA.
<b>2013</b>	Prisoner Learning Alliance published 'Smart Rehabilitation' which set out three key principles for prisoner learning; outcome-focused, joined-up and value-driven.
<b>2014</b>	Prisoner Learning Alliance holds inaugural conference which was attended by 150 teachers, practitioners, ex-prisoners and stakeholders. Discussions and feedback from the conference informed the current PLA work plan. The four current areas of PLA work are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excellence and Engagement</li> <li>• Personal Social Development and Progression</li> <li>• A desistance model of prison education</li> <li>• Learning 'Through the Gate'</li> </ul>
<b>2015</b>	Prisoner Learning Alliance publishes 'The Future of Prison Education Contracts: Delivering Better Outcomes'.





# Introduction

Current Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) phase 4 contracts for prison education come to an end in July 2016. The Government will need to decide whether to extend the current contracts for a further year, or to begin re-procurement. The Prisoner Learning Alliance (PLA) welcomes the successes of OLASS 4, in particular the increase in the numbers of prisoners achieving entry level, level 1 and level 2 qualifications, including in literacy and numeracy. The OLASS 4 contract has aligned prison education provision with education providers in the community, which is focused on providing accredited employment-related qualifications. There has also been a positive focus on training prisoners to become peer mentors. However the PLA believes that there is much about the contracts that could be made to work better to produce the rehabilitation outcomes for prisoners we all want to see. This briefing sets out what areas within the current system need improving and how that could be achieved by changing the way the existing contracts work.

We are very aware of the costs and disruption for staff and learners that comes with re-competition. To avoid this we would therefore recommend that the contracts are extended for a further year, subject to building in greater flexibilities and incentives to achieve better outcomes (as discussed in more detail in this briefing).

## Summary: Focusing on rehabilitative outcomes

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The current contractual framework is essentially based on a traditional classroom model that rewards providers for achieving one type of 'intermediate outcome'; the enrolment and completion of units and qualifications delivered by the provider from their own resources. Even though it pre-dates 'Transforming Rehabilitation', the original OLASS 4 tender documentation stated that the Skills Funding Agency will *'work progressively with NOMS and providers to work towards a pay and reward model which is more reliant on job and reducing reoffending outcomes, as well as achievement of units and qualifications'*. We agree that prison education should be focused towards promoting longer-term rehabilitative and desistance outcomes for prisoners. Therefore we would suggest that greater flexibility is built into the contract to reward providers for achieving other 'intermediate outcomes' including:

### 1. Partnership working with the Voluntary and Community Sector

Increasing support for prisoners to complete accredited and non-accredited learning delivered by third party organisations, including the Community and Voluntary Sector, in order to meet learners' needs for a variety of subjects, levels and modes of delivery. *See page 5*

### 2. Engagement

Engaging more 'hard to reach' learners by converting those with learning needs as identified by the universal basic skills assessment, into learners through a flexible, non-accredited learning pathway induction, as well as building on current good practice in developing embedded learning, project-based approaches and peer mentoring. *See page 6*

### 3. Progression

Supporting prisoners to realise their full potential and progress to Further and Higher Education (above level 2 learning). *See page 7*

### 4. A Broader Education: Personal Social Development and Informal Adult Learning

Providing an education which provides more opportunities for personal and social development to address the whole person-something many prisoners have missed out on earlier in life. *See page 9*

### 5. Technology

Using ICT and the Virtual Campus (VC) to complement and extend the learning offer in prisons, in line with the recommendations and spirit of FELTAG (Further Education Learning Technology Action Group). *See page 10*

### 6. Quality

Improving the quality of teaching and learning by increased support for staff to access Continuing Professional Development and more opportunities for prisoners to be engaged in student councils and quality improvement meetings. *See page 12*

### 7. Through-the-Gate

Update the contracts to recognise the new Transforming Rehabilitation (TR) landscape and promote working with Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs), Probation Trusts and other community partners through-the-gate. *See page 13*

### 8. Leadership and accountability

Making the prison Governor accountable for the integration of education within the wider prison regime to achieve a 'learning culture' and for improving outcomes. This requires the contract to be flexible enough for the Governor to manage and exercise control over it effectively. *See page 14*

# Key statistics and Facts

## Level and Cost of Reoffending

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- 45.2% of adults are reconvicted within one year of being released
- The cost to the taxpayer of reoffending is estimated to be £9.5 to £13 billion per year.

## Impact of education on reducing re-offending

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- Prisoners who reported having a qualification were 15% less likely to be reconvicted in the year after release from custody than those having no qualifications
- The one year proven re-offending rate for 3,085 offenders who received a grant through the Prisoners' Education Trust for distance learning courses or arts materials was over a quarter lower than a matched control group of similar offenders (19% compared with 26%).
- There was a reduction in re-offending of 13 percentage points for those who participated in correctional education programmes in the USA versus those who didn't.

## Ofsted Inspections

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- Over half of prisons inspected in 2013/14 (58%) were judged as 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' for learning and skills provision. None were judged as 'outstanding'.

## Prisoner characteristics

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- 47% of prisoners reported having no qualifications, compared with 15% of the general population.
- 42% of prisoners reported having been permanently excluded from school.
- Only one in ten prisoners thought that 'learning was not for people like me'.
- Around 5% of prisoners were educated to a level higher than A-levels, with approximately 3% having university degrees (compared to 16% of the working age population).

## Number of prisoners involved in OLASS learning

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- In 2012/13 there were 89,900 OLASS learners (-0.2% on the previous year) of which 68,400 achieved a learning outcome (-4.9% on the previous year).
- In 2013/14 there were 95,300 OLASS learners (+6% on the previous year) of which 79,700 achieved a learning outcome (+16.6% on the previous year).
- There were 62,200 OLASS learners at the six month stage of the current academic year (2014/15) whereas at the six-month stage in 2013/14 there were 44,000 OLASS learners.
- In 2013/14 20,700 learners achieved English and/or Maths learning outcomes (an increase of 25.9% from the previous year)

## Prisoners engaged in Level 2 and 3 OLASS learning

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- In 2013/14 32,400 learners achieved level 2 learning outcome (an increase of 11.2% from the previous year)
- In 2013/14 600 learners achieved level 3 learning outcome (a decrease of 55.5% from the previous year)

## Participation in the universal English and maths assessments

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- Between August 2014 and January 2015 37,300 learners have been assessed in English and/or Maths.
- 69% (25,900) of those assessed went into OLASS learning.
- Levels of literacy or numeracy assessed had not been published at the time of printing this report.
- 30% (11,250) of those assessed self-reported having a learning difficulty or disability.

## Employment

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- The proven one year reoffending rate was 9.4 percentage points lower for those who found P45 employment than those that didn't, for custodial sentences of less than one year.
- 5% of ex-prisoners had been found employment through The Work Programme (2013). The target set was 8%.

### Sources:

MoJ Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR), Hopkins, 2012

Table 19a, Ministry of Justice (2014) Proven re-offending statistics quarterly, April 2011 to March 2012, London: Ministry of Justice, and Table 7a, Ministry of Justice (2013) Proven re-offending statistics quarterly January 2011 - December 2011, London: Ministry of Justice

MoJ Justice Data Lab, Re-Offending Analysis, Prisoners' Education Trust, 2014

RAND meta-analysis of published and unpublished studies in the USA between 1980-2011 (Davies et al. 2013)

Ofsted Annual Report, Further Education and Skills, 2013/14

SFA & BIS. Statistical First Release. Further Education & Skills: Learner Participation, Outcomes and Level of Highest Qualification Held SFA/SFR27 Published on 25th March 2015 (Para. 42 and Table 18)

Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion, 2013: Evaluation of The Work Programme



# 1. Partnership working with the Voluntary and Community Sector

## The problem

The tender documentation for the OLASS contract encouraged partnership working and described it in terms of the provider, the prison and the Work Programme. However there are a large variety of other potential partners, including the Community and Voluntary Sector, which OLASS providers can work with to complement and extend their provision to best meet the needs of all prisoners. Working with other partners to deliver learning gives providers the ability to enrich their curriculum and use a variety of delivery methods to engage and meet the needs of learners in their particular establishment.

Partnership working with the Community and Voluntary Sector is difficult to fund within the contract, even where there is a strong synergy. For example both The Shannon Trust and Prison Reading Groups work extensively throughout prisons to support the development of literacy outside a classroom context, and yet the funding restrictions within the contract make it difficult for providers to be able to give much meaningful support or co-ordinate this provision. This is a real missed opportunity for joined up work for example reading groups could be co-ordinated with basic literacy work or act as a bridge into accredited courses for prisoners with negative previous experience of formal education.

***Our reading groups are not classes. There is no syllabus; there are no set texts, no points which have to be covered. We have no targets, and award no qualifications or certificates. There is no secret agenda. Many group members have had problems or issues with educational achievement in the past, and may have been put off reading as a consequence. So our groups are to do first of all with pleasure: the pleasures of reading and of talking about books. We all – prison group members, librarians, volunteers – do of course learn much, but in an informal way. Quote from ‘What books can do behind bars, Prison Reading Groups, University of Roehampton. 2013.***

Providers can and do subcontract to other organisations, but unless they provide accredited courses, no funding can be drawn down from the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) to support this. Although there is SFA budget available using the Innovation Code and Learning Support (LS), more flexibility is required to better promote and support partnership working with the Community and Voluntary Sector. For example you can currently only access Learning Support if a prisoner is enrolled on an SFA funded qualification, even if they are engaging with learning funded through a Community and Voluntary Sector organisation.

Currently prisoners who take part in learning that is not SFA funded do not have that learning recorded on their Individual Learning Record, so it is ‘invisible’ to other agencies.

## Suggested solutions

- Widen the scope of ‘partnership-working’ under the OLASS contract by developing contractual flexibilities such as the Innovation Code and Learning Support budgets to enable providers to fund and claim a proportion of the credit in supporting delivery of additional learning by third parties, such the Community and Voluntary Sector.
- Providers should be explicitly responsible for recording all learning, whether or not funded by the SFA, on a prisoner’s learning record.

***I didn’t do well at school,  
this week has built my  
confidence and motivation.  
Participant on The Bridge  
Programme week-long  
education and PSD induction  
at HMP Low Newton.***

## 2. Engagement

### The problem

There are prisoners who would benefit from education who are currently not engaged in learning.



*Few prisons had effective procedures for ensuring that those with the greatest need took up the provision. Ofsted FE and Skill Annual Report 2013/14.*



New universal basic skills assessments help identify those with a need. Converting those with identified learning needs into learners and engaging the 'hard to reach' to want to be involved in education is therefore crucial.

- The OLASS 4 tender documentation stated that the providers are not expected to 'rely heavily on the stand-alone' teaching model for functional skills. Although there are good practice examples of embedded learning, much more that could be done to contextualise this learning and to expand such provision to embed learning in arts, sports, projects, industries or vocational contexts in all prisons. This would also help develop a prison-wide learning culture.
- The tender documentation states that 'there are roles for adult learners in custody to act as mentors including peer-to-peer teaching to improve outcomes', and yet there is no incentive to convert prisoners who have completed peer mentoring courses into active mentor roles. Peer mentoring is an important way to engage 'hard to reach' learners and to support learners in their studies. Providers train peer mentors under the OLASS contract. Some of those learners will then become mentors, orderlies, learning champions or learner reps, however the contract does not specifically incentivise this or allocate funding to support and develop mentors further in these roles.
- The tender documentation states that the initial assessment should be accompanied by 'a broader understanding of their background, skills, confidence and goals' and be 'presented to learners in a positive and constructive way' and yet specific funding not available for a broader, non-accredited, learning pathway induction. Work has started to develop this sort of induction in the women's estate, but there is a need for a similar approach in the men's estate. Education assessments are not automatically joined up with sentence plans or plans drawn up by the National Careers Service.
- The OLASS 4 tender documentation states that the provider 'should be able to refer prisoners, who appear to have learning difficulties or disabilities, for further expert assessment'. The tender documentation also describes 'diagnostic assessments' that can take several hours and result in a full learner profile being produced'. Although learning providers provide additional learning support needs assessments and follow up help when additional learning support needs are disclosed, there is no routine screening for prisoners with low levels of literacy who do not self report a problem.

### Suggested solutions

- a) Effective induction. Incentivise providers to complement the universal literacy/numeracy assessment with a one or two week induction and PSD course, not necessarily accredited. This would focus on reflection, identification of strengths and use support from tutors, peer mentors and others to develop a learning plan. We encourage the Minister to implement learning from the draft pilot PSD/induction course for the women's estate established by NIACE and pilot an appropriate version for male prisoners and the youth estate.
- b) SpLD screening and assessments. Develop guidance to ensure prisoners who are assessed at entry level for literacy and/numeracy, or who self-report as having a learning difficulty, are screened for Specific Learning Difficulties to establish any additional learning support needs and refer for diagnostic assessments, if appropriate.
- c) Conversion rates. Develop a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for prisons and providers based on the conversion rate of identified need into learning, either formal or informal, within a specified time, such as 3 months.
- d) Embedded learning. Use Innovation and Learning Support budgets and other flexibilities to enable providers to increase the amount of embedded functional skills and PSD in other programmes and activities, compared to stand alone teaching. Learn from establishments who are currently working with OCR to pilot a 'project approach' to embedding English, maths, employability and PSD.
- e) Learning plans. Establish best practice, overseen by prison inspection, for providers to work closely with the Offender Management Unit and National Careers Service to ensure a co-ordinated approach to learning and skills delivery across OLASS and non OLASS provision, reflected in prisoners' learning and sentence plans.
- f) Mentoring. Establish and share best practice for converting and developing graduates of peer mentor qualifications into meaningful roles to help them engage other prisoners through mentoring, championing and learner voice roles.
- g) Language. Change the name of the contracts to remove the word 'Offender'. Instead promote the use of positive pro-social identities such as 'student' or 'learner' rather than re-emphasising the negative label of offender. Encourage providers to re-brand their education departments as 'College' following best practice at a number of prisons including HMP Eastwood Park.



### 3. Progression

#### The problem

Once prisoners have achieved their basic skills or vocational qualifications at level 1 or 2, under the current contract qualification progression routes to level 3 and above qualifications are severely limited. This issue is particularly relevant for longer term prisoners seeking to use their time meaningfully. The tender documentation states that providers *'must support those who are serving longer sentences'*, however in practice it is challenging for providers to provide opportunities for this group beyond basic skills. Progression to higher level learning and access to PSD activities would help meet the needs of this group, which make up a significant proportion of the static prison population.

- The number of level 3 courses supported by OLASS being achieved in prison has halved since 2010 (from 1200 to 600) – which is less than one percent of the prison population. The structure of the OLASS contract funds numbers of learners completing and attaining courses; it is therefore more difficult to deliver higher level special interest courses that take longer to deliver with potentially less completions. The reduction also coincides with the introduction of advanced learning loans for prisoners aged 24+ for level 3 and above qualifications which introduces an additional tier of bureaucracy and risk for providers to offer such opportunities. Although providers will support prisoners to take out loans, the numbers of prisoners who have taken up L3 learning loans is very small and mostly relates to prisoners who are studying L3 courses in the community while on ROTL (Release on Temporary Licence). Recent changes to ROTL could make this opportunity even less likely (Inside Out, Prison Reform Trust, February 2015).

***It's all about level 1 and 2, no more GCSE's or A-Levels etc. This is good for short-term prisoners but when you are in long term prison doing life you complete them within a couple of years then there is nothing left to do. Learner quote from Brain Cells 3rd edition report, PET, 2014.***

- Often the only way a prisoner can access further or higher level learning is through distance learning courses. Despite the tender documentation stating that providers must ensure that OU, HE and DL students *'have access to the necessary time, resource and support to facilitate their studies'* this can vary significantly from one prison to another. Despite additional guidance emphasising the responsibility to provide this, currently providers cannot draw down funding to support this. This is particularly a problem in prisons with a significant number of prisoners serving longer sentences.
- Despite the tender documentation stating that providers must *'implement data sharing protocols in order to ensure the progression for learners'*, we have identified that many prisoners have to repeat courses due to data not being transferred to the new prison.
- The creation of additional learning opportunities within the existing contract is hampered by the SFA's funding cap on an individual's entitlement per academic year. Learners who are keen and rapidly achieve qualifications and can therefore use up their allocation, despite remaining well within the guided learning hours – particularly if they want to do more expensive vocational qualifications. As a result some providers have delivered learning that is not funded and some learners miss out on qualifications that offer the greatest chances of employment as they have exceeded their cap.

#### Funding cap case study

A prisoner wanted to work in carpentry and therefore needed to complete a Health and Safety qualification and L1 English and maths, before completing a vocational course in carpentry. However the PLA are informed that this combination of courses went over the annual funding cap.

Therefore the learner would have had to wait until the next academic year before being able to access the vocational course, despite it being the 'hook' for engaging them in the basic skills qualifications.

By the time the next academic year started, this learner may have been released without the qualification which would give them the greatest chance of employment or self-employment on release.

In this case the PLA are told the provider funded the course, despite it going over the cap. However this is not sustainable for the providers as they cannot draw down funding for this.



## Suggested solutions

- a) Establish a best practice model that can be monitored whereby providers have to meet set benchmark targets for distance/ higher level learning and for supporting prisoners to successfully complete this learning. The benchmark targets could be set using intelligence from the universal assessment data, as well as ILRs and information from Prisoners' Education Trust.
- b) Issue guidance to enable providers to use Learning Support (LS) and the Innovation Code to fund support for prisoners doing distance learning.
- c) Review the need for prisoners to take out loans for level 3 study, thus making it easier for providers to deliver level 3 learning.
- d) Provide checks that longer sentenced prisoners are being supported.
- e) Review the funding cap and either increase the cap to an appropriate level or introduce flexibility to draw down funds above the cap in particular circumstances.



## 4. Personal and Social Development (PSD) and Informal Adult Learning (IAL)

### The problem

Prisoners have often had deeply unsettled lives and have missed out on the broader personal development offered through school education. PSD and IAL are important means of engaging prisoners in learning and also to develop the attitudes, thinking and behaviour that contribute to desistance and also contribute to employability.

The OLASS tender documentation recognises informal learning (*'for example the non-vocational arts curriculum, learning for personal interest'*) has an important role in engagement, motivation, employability and personal development; however providers are invited to *'accredit this learning where possible'*. There is a need for more clarity and flexibility around the funding rules for PSD. This may help avoid accrediting for accreditations sake and shoehorning of provision into accredited modules, which risks reducing the flexibility and availability of this type of PSD and informal learning, and therefore reducing the ability to respond to the needs of individual learners.

These issues have led to some underspend in PSD budgets, despite OLASS providers strongly supporting the use of non-accredited PSD. More clarity and flexibility around the funding rules for PSD is required. Where prisons have identified a high need for PSD among their population, for example including longer-sentenced prisoners, women prisoners, remand prisoners, prisoners with mental health problems, older prisoners or prisons with a high churn, there is not sufficient flexibility in the contracts to shift the balance towards PSD where appropriate.

Governors have identified that education, in particular personal, social development and informal learning, have an important role in providing 'purposeful activity' in prisons which is a Key Performance Indicator. The provision of purposeful activity is a key element of a stable and safe prison regime. The flexibility to provide some PSD and IAL, which is not restricted to accreditations and their related guided learning hours, is therefore helpful in providing purposeful activity places and as a means of reducing the risks of violence, self harm and deaths in custody.

***Women prisoners' needs vary from male prisoners and is much more about emotional management, developing positive relationships with the women, building up their self-esteem and social capital and making them feel safe. During PSD activities women can work on these areas. We have to work on these issues before they can start to address other issues in their lives. There needs to be an increase in PSD in the women's estate. Quote from Governor of a women's prison to the PLA. 2015.***

### Suggested solutions

- Ensure that providers are able to access funding for provisions, both accredited and non-accredited, that will build PSD, by drawing up guidance on the use of the Innovation Code and PSD budget.
- Give the Governor greater control over the balance between formal accredited learning and PSD activities to meet the needs of their prison population.
- Provide guidance which clarifies that informal learning does not have to be accredited.

## 5. Technology

### The problem

**Technology has the potential to engage more learners, improve the learning experience, enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of providers and continue to meet the ever - changing needs of employers and the community.**  
**Government Response to FELTAG recommendations – June 2014.**

Further Education Learning Technology Action Group (FELTAG) has identified that digital learning is set to transform education over the next decade. The government response to FELTAG's recommendations shows that significant action is planned in this area to 'future-proof' the Further Education sector and to move towards a greater proportion of publicly-funded learning being online (starting at 10% and then building on this). The Skills Funding Agency are working towards a funding model for digital learning and Ofsted are now asking learners if they feel 'enabled and empowered to use technology and online resources' to support their learning.

We believe ICT has the ability to transform education in prison settings, as part of a blended teaching model, arguably more than traditional college settings, due to the range of learner needs and interests, varied lengths of sentence, as well as time spent in-cell during evenings and weekends. OLASS providers support the technology agenda and tell us that increased investment to develop secure learning sites and an IT refresh across the secure estate will increase learning opportunities in custody.

The OLASS 4 tender documentation stated that providers must '*utilise the Virtual Campus, where it is installed, to the full benefit of learners*'. Most prisons now have the hardware installed in the prison, however the PLA believe that the VC is not being used to its full potential. The model for the OLASS contracts is essentially based on a model of traditional classroom delivery with ICT, at best, a supplementary teaching aid rather than the main mode of delivery. The current contract makes it difficult for providers to draw down funding to support learners to access digital courses and learning resources from other providers.

Open University/distance learning students, and other prisoners who would benefit from its use, are being restricted in their access.

It is also well recognised that prisoners who have learning difficulties and disabilities would also benefit from accessing e-learning 'assistive technologies' on the VC. As well as the content, the location of the computers in some prisons is restricting access – especially where there may be a restricted regime. It is imperative that prisoners, whether or not engaged in SFA funded learning, have access to the VC and word processing to enable providers to drive digital learning.

**Although [IT] facilitates are very good, these can only be used if you are assigned to one specific workshop or in education. Many people undertake distance learning whilst doing other employment, and there are several vocational workshops that require full time assignments and therefore have no access to the VC. Learner quote from Brain Cells 3rd Edition, Prisoners' Education Trust, 2014.**

**My last prison was very progressive, even allowing us to purchase laptops (albeit with USB/Wi-fi disabled) to use in-cell. There is no reason why this could not happen across the prison estate.**  
**Learner quote from Brain Cells 3rd Edition, Prisoners' Education Trust, 2014.**

In the next few years paper-based distance learning may well decline, so unless prisons are enabled to support e-learning courses, access to FE and HE courses might also become more restricted. Given the reduction in level 3 and above courses delivered as part of OLASS provision, distance learning is becoming the main means by which prisoners can access Further and Higher education, it is important to 'future-proof' this means by which prisoners can progress in their learning.

### Suggested solutions

- a) Increase the investment in NOMS to enable suppliers to develop secure learning sites to offer more interactive and digital learning content as part of the Virtual Campus. NOMS and the Open University have developed a 'Virtual Learning Environment' (VLE) approach which enables the OU to offer a secure version of their learning environment through the virtual campus. Developing more secure learning sites has the potential to increase the range of learning opportunities to prisoners, however much more resource is needed to progress this further and quicker for the benefit of learners and providers. Many other providers of online courses and resources are keen to enable prisoners to gain access, but require a secure way to do this.



- b) Develop a prison-specific strategic response and action plan to achieve the FELTAG recommendation of at least 10% of provision being digital learning, including self directed online distance learning, as well as blended learning. The PLA believe that ICT, including the Virtual Campus with access to secure provider learning sites, has the potential to revolutionise learning in prison, as a complement to face to face teaching. If it was available in-cell in the evenings and weekends, prisoners could learn more quickly by completing additional work outside of the classroom. It could ultimately lead to a 'flipped classroom' experience where lectures and classes are delivered by videos and podcasts in cell with classroom time being used to check understanding and to develop learning through discussions and group work. Those studying distance learning could access a much wider range of courses than currently available in paper only and their ability to access useful resources for their programme of study could improve completion rates and results. Prisoners working during the week could access education in the evenings and weekends.
- c) Make use of funding flexibilities around Learning Support to enable providers to supervise all prisoner learners to use ICT and the VC, not just those enrolled in OLASS delivered courses.
- d) Work closely with colleagues in the MoJ when the new telephony contracts are re-procured to secure in-cell ICT capability for digital-learning (learning lessons from the pilot at HMP Thameside).
- e) Explore the potential for piloting secure tablets or laptops with educational resources and word processing capability (as used in some states in America, Australia and Belgium).
- f) Support providers to ensure staff receive sufficient CPD in using and developing digital learning approaches and enable them to draw down funding for staff to source suitable external digital learning resources and develop their own interactive content.
- g) Promote opportunities to up-skill prisoner learners to help staff design and develop educational content, learning from the NIACE pilot.



## 6. Quality

### The problem

The OLASS 4 tender documentation stated that providers ‘*must have in place a staff competency framework which includes plans for continuous professional development*’, however there is some evidence that in practice it can sometimes be difficult for teaching staff to access CPD and to network with other prison educators to share best practice. In order for teaching staff to deliver engaging and interesting classes, their training and the ability to share best practice with others is essential. In 2014/15 OLASS providers have worked closely with the Education and Training Foundation to develop and deliver a range of CPD programmes across the country, specifically for OLASS and other custodial staff. The PLA welcomes this development and the contract should support the continued development and delivery of both face to face and online CPD resources for teaching staff.



***I'm delighted that the Education Training Foundation is now offering support to teachers and trainers in prisons and other offender settings. The Education and Training Foundation is here to support ALL staff across the whole education and training system. Working with offenders can be tough; but I know from my own visits to prisons how rewarding it can be too for staff. Practitioners in offender learning services are often under-supported; the last in the queue when professional development is being offered. The Foundation is determined to change that. David Russell, CEO.***



There is also currently no requirement for staff to have an awareness of Specific Learning Difficulties. Access to leadership training and professional development is also important for those managing learning and skills provision in prisons or clusters of prisons, as well as Governors. Lesson planning is essential for high quality and engaging education and training, however there is some evidence that teachers require more time for this. Providers seek

feedback from learners of their experience of education and training so they can make improvements, however the contracts do not specify the need for a specific learner voice strategy to be in place. There are examples of some prisons having student councils and having learner representatives at quality improvement meetings, however this good practice could be much more widespread to ensure meaningful, higher level participation of learners in shaping the educational offer in all prisons.



***Feedback by prisoners is rarely acted upon. Each suggestion is answered by one of two responses: 1) we don't have funding for that or 2) it's not in our business plan. Learner quote from Brain Cells 3rd Edition, Prisoners' Education Trust, 2014.***



### Suggested solutions

- Incentivise providers to provide regular CPD and opportunities for staff (including sessional teachers) to meet teachers from other prisons to share best practice [for example monitor the number of prison teachers, managers and instructional officers who access CPD provision being provided by the Education, Training Foundation and e-learning CPD resources on the ETF Excellence Gateway].
- Develop leadership training and professional development for those managing learning and skills provision in prisons or clusters of prisons, as well as Governors.
- Require providers to have a learner voice strategy, to facilitate student councils/learner forums and to have learner representatives attend quality improvement meetings where appropriate. Enable providers to draw down funding to support non-accredited learner voice activities, such as student councils.
- Monitoring should also cover whether staff have sufficient time to plan engaging lessons within their contracted hours.
- Providers should be required to ensure all teaching and advice staff receive awareness training in Specific Learning Difficulties.

## 7. Through-the-Gate

### The problem

OLASS 4 pre-dated the 'Transforming Rehabilitation' reforms and therefore there are no references in the contracts to providers needing to work in partnership with CRCs/Probation Trusts. Although providers do work with external partners such as CRC's, NOMS/ESF providers, employers and local education providers, the contract does not incentivise the forming of partnerships with a specific focus on securing places in education, training, employment or volunteering after release. For example the contract should emphasise the importance of partnerships with community-based National Careers Service, FE colleges, universities, Community and Voluntary Sector organisations, volunteer bureaux and employers.

***Women here are gaining certificates in education, but then I see them come back to prison again and again. There is obviously something missing. They are not being helped to make use of the education they got in here when they are outside. Woman prisoner speaking to the PLA in 2015.***

Monitoring progress through-the-gate is resource intensive and difficult to achieve using current systems. Moving towards an outcome-focused funding model requires contracts that promote working more closely with organisations through-the-gate and systems to enable the monitoring of learners' progress after release. Given that all prisoners will now be supervised for at least a year in the community, this is an opportunity to ensure more joined up working so the qualifications gained in prison can be effectively built on and utilised in the community with further education, training, employment, self employment or volunteering activities.

Often prisoners don't get to find out about former prisoners who have used their education to turn their lives around after release. Prisoners tell us these success stories would help inspire them.

***Hearing from people who have been there and come out the other side – real life people, success stories we can aspire to and think – they did it, so can I. Woman prisoner speaking to the PLA in 2015.***

### Suggested solutions

- Establish best practice, monitored through prison inspection, for providers to make connections with external organisations to facilitate learners continuing their learning journey on release.
- Monitor the number of prisoners securing places in education, training or employment or volunteering roles within three months of release. Incentivise prisons and providers to focus on this rehabilitative outcome through key performance indicators.
- Work with NOMS to develop extensive, nationally driven data sharing arrangements and provide additional funding, unattached to accreditation, to enable providers to monitor progress through-the-gate.
- Issue guidance to help facilitate prisons and providers to be able to bring in former prisoners who have turned their lives around through education to speak to prisoners and help with engagement activities and/or teaching.



## 8. Leadership and accountability

### The problem

Ofsted has reported that



**Leadership and management of learning, skills and work activities in prisons remain very weak. Too many governors of prisons inspected this year did not take provision of learning and skills sufficiently seriously. Ofsted FE & Skills Annual Report 2013/14**



The whole service across the prison needs to work together to deliver rehabilitation outcomes. The PLA believe that ultimately the Prison Governor is the only individual with which this accountability for integrating services can sensibly reside. Governors have responsibility for education and learning across the prison, including OLASS provision. Governors are also responsible for ensuring a joined up approach between the prison regime and different agencies working in the prison and through-the-gate, including the CRCs and Probation Trusts. They are also responsible for the number of prisoners engaged in 'purposeful activities' on a weekly basis, as a means of reducing the risk of violence, self-harm and suicide. But whatever the nominal responsibilities of Governors for managing education contracts (which NOMS have recently taken steps to re-assert), they are constrained by the OLASS contract. They cannot reasonably ask providers to deliver services which they cannot fund under the contractual arrangements, for example a volume of learning which meets demand for purposeful activity but is not accredited. Many Prison Governors therefore do not feel they have the degree of control to integrate delivery as they would like, making a 'learning culture' across the prison more difficult to achieve. The PLA observes that services can be better integrated in some private prisons where the prison contractor has clearer responsibility across the full range of services.

### Suggested solutions

- a) Make the Governor accountable for the integration of education within the wider prison regime to achieve a prison-wide learning culture and for improving outcomes. This requires the contract to be flexible enough for the Governor to manage and exercise control over it effectively.
- b) Make the Governor accountable for improving learning outcomes by introducing a relevant KPI.
- c) NOMS and HMIP should develop best practice in integrating services and a 'learning culture' across a prison, taking account of practice in the contracted out estate.
- d) Governors should be given the flexibility to manage contracts by directing efforts towards attaining 'good' and 'outstanding' Ofsted inspection results. Providers should be incentivised to achieve these results, as they are in the new YJB contracts for the youth estate.
- e) Develop training for Governors and other leaders to access Continuing Professional Development to enable them to effectively promote and manage education provision within their prison, to improve learning outcomes and develop a rehabilitative learning culture.







Prisoners' Education Trust

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