



Government Response to the
House of Commons Education
and Skills Committee Report -
Prison Education



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Presented to Parliament by the
Secretary of State for Education and Skills
By Command of Her Majesty
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**House of Commons
Education and Skills Committee
Prison Education: The Government's Response**

Introduction

The Government welcomes the attention paid by the Education and Skills Committee to the learning and skills provided for offenders in prisons. As the Committee notes, this area has in the past had too low a profile. Yet it is of potentially great importance to the rehabilitation of some of the most disadvantaged members of society. The Government is heartened by the Committee's affirmation of the importance and value of education for prisoners, its key role in improving the employability of offenders and its mission to reduce re-offending.

The Government shares the Committee's desire to bring about a step-change in the quality and responsiveness of learning and skills for offenders, in prison and in the community. Improving offenders' skills, and helping them to get sustainable jobs on release from custody, is crucial for them and for society. There is a high correlation between offending, basic skills needs, and low achievement and truancy while at school and many offenders have experienced long term unemployment. It is in society's interest, as well as the individuals' interest, that we put more effort into tackling their skills needs because, if they can secure stable jobs on release, they are less likely to re-offend.

We welcome also the fact that many of the Committee's recommendations go firmly with the grain of current developments in offender learning and skills, and the plans that we have set out for the next 18 months to reform delivery of the service. As will be clear from the response to the detail of the Committee's recommendations, we believe there is a significant measure of common ground and a shared agenda for the ways in which the service should seek to improve.

However, the Government believes strongly that it is important to recognise where we are starting from and how much is already being done. Far from offender learning being a low priority for the Government, as the Committee suggests, the National Offender Management Service in England is focused on the importance of education and training for prisoners more strongly than in the past, and to a greater extent than many other custodial systems around the world. The Prison Service is one of the largest providers of education for language, literacy and numeracy in the country, with prisoners contributing ten per cent of achievement against the national *Skills for Life* target. Achievement of these qualifications by prisoners has risen from 25,300 in 2001-02 to 63,500 in 2004-05, representing the first large-scale systematic introduction of nationally-recognised skills training for offenders. Following the Labour Manifesto commitment of 2001 to improve the quality and quantity of education for prisoners, there has been a big increase in funding for offender learning in recent years: an increase of 50% from £97 million in 2003-04 to £151 million for 2005-06. As well as increasing the volume and the quality of

learning available for offenders in custody, this extra funding has enabled significant improvements in capacity, for example through the creation of senior Head of Learning and Skills posts in prisons, which the Committee welcomes as a step forward. Other innovations, such as the application of external inspection to prisons on the same terms as for mainstream education and training providers, are beginning to exert an upward pressure on quality. These developments and others have undoubtedly led to improvements in the quality and quantity of education in prisons.

Against that background, it is disappointing that the Committee should have chosen to paint so negative a picture: describing the service as 'unacceptable' and suggesting (paragraph 108) that 'little has changed in prison education since 2002'. We accept there is more to do, but this significantly underplays recent progress and also the extent to which developments are already in hand to address the concerns that the Committee has rightly highlighted. The Government would freely acknowledge that there is much more to do to raise further the standards and outcomes from offender learning services. We also recognise that there are inevitably constraints on the funds available given that there are many other claims on public funding across all public services, so hard choices have to be made about priorities and affordability.

But we would want the Committee to recognise the extent to which many of their concerns already lie at the heart of the Government's agenda for change, and the extent to which this agenda is already being driven forward with vigour. The new Offenders' Learning and Skills Service, which the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) will deliver, has been designed explicitly to address many of the concerns that the Committee has raised. The service has at its heart the principle that education and training for offenders should be more flexible and learner centred. Providers of learning and skills will be required to assess offender need and deliver interventions according to the results of that assessment. Information, advice and guidance will be provided for offenders throughout their sentence and an individual record of their assessment and learning (the Individual Learning Plan) will accompany them as they move around the criminal justice system.

Literacy, language and numeracy will rightly continue to be a high priority for offender learning. But the new service will for the first time bring together the education service with vocational training, in the context of a broader curriculum.

The existing service – and much of the Committee's report – is largely limited to prisons. But in future the LSC will plan and fund a learning and skills service that goes with the grain of the Government's reforms in offender management. Just as the new National Offender Management Service will provide a new integrated approach to the management of offenders, whether in custody or community, so the LSC will support an integrated approach to learning and skills for offenders, creating a seamless learning journey for offenders across prisons and probation and up to release.

The Government was surprised that the Committee should express concern

about a lack of drive or energy in moving things forward in this field. In fact the timetable for reform of delivery is rapid. The new Offenders' Learning and Skills Service will take full effect in three development regions (the North East, North West and South West) from August 2005. The aim is to roll out the service to the other six English regions from August 2006. At that point, learning and skills (including vocational training) for all offenders, whether in custody or community, will be part of the mainstream responsibility of the LSC, the national body responsible for the learning and skills of everyone in England post 16 outside higher education.

There is accordingly a clear and ambitious plan of reform taking us forward to a new delivery model for offenders learning and skills by the summer of 2006. Looking forward, Ministers have already made clear (for example in evidence to the Committee in December 2004 and in the recent Skills White Paper in Part 2, paragraph 203) that they are considering ambitions for the Service beyond that immediate improvement process. The Skills White Paper made it clear that the Department for Education and Skills, the Home Office and the Department for Work and Pensions will publish proposals later in the year, setting out a joint reform programme to build a service that is more effective in improving skills and qualifications and in getting offenders into sustainable employment. In that context, the Government very much welcomes the Committee's initiative in launching scrutiny of this important area of education policy. Many of the Committee's observations, for example those relating to the importance of employer engagement in offender training, will be valuable as the Government develops thinking further. We shall accordingly look forward to continuing the dialogue on these issues in the future.

1. The purpose of education and training in prisons should be to play a key role in improving the employability of prisoners and therefore contribute to reducing recidivism. However, we would wish the purpose of prison education to be understood in broader terms than just improving the employability of a prisoner. We would emphasise the importance of delivering education also because it is the right thing to do in a civilised society. Education has a value in itself and it is important to develop the person as a whole, not just in terms of the qualifications they hold for employment. The breadth of the education curriculum is important and employability skills should not be emphasised to such an extent that the wider benefits of learning are excluded. (Paragraph 22)

The Government shares the Committee's conviction that education and training are right in a civilised society. While an offender is in custody, learning activities contribute to the delivery of a humane and constructive prison regime. It is right that individuals should have opportunities to use time in custody constructively and, so far as practicable, to pursue learning that matches their interests. That is why, for example, the Department for Education and Skills is funding 1,300 prisoners to pursue higher education or access to higher education courses in 2005-06.

Nevertheless, the nature of the offender learning group, and the fact that funds are not unlimited, requires a focus on some key priorities. Prisoners have complex needs, but those needs have some common features. Over half of prisoners have no qualifications of any kind, and over a third do not have the reading skills expected of an eleven year old. 58% of all adult prisoners are re-convicted within 2 years of release.

Accordingly, the Government believes that there continues to be a strong case for focusing on improving the literacy, language and numeracy skills of offenders. Prisoners have achieved more than 96,000 qualifications in literacy, language and numeracy since 2000: more than ten per cent of achievement towards the national *Skills for Life* target.

Two thirds of prisoners are unemployed on release, even though sustained employment is closely associated with reduced re-offending. As the Select Committee points out, the cost of recidivism to the tax payer is an estimated £11 billion a year (although this cost is not directly linked to education). Half of all prisoners do not have the skills required for 96% of jobs. Prison education aims to reduce reoffending through generating higher skills and employment. Therefore, it is to society's advantage that the skills offenders develop contribute towards employability.

The Government is convinced that it will remain right to focus efforts on improving offenders' employability. Within that aim the learning needs of many offenders are likely to require a continuing focus on literacy, language and numeracy. The Committee is right that this should not be the only goal of offender learning. That is why the above priorities will be delivered within a context of a broader curriculum, which includes enrichment activities such as

arts programmes from August 2005. But, given the stark figures presented above, ensuring that offenders are helped to gain basic functional competence in literacy, language and numeracy will remain the first priority.

2. We urge the Government to give priority to undertaking the necessary research to demonstrate the impact of education and training on recidivism. It is unacceptable that this research has not been undertaken previously. It is essential to the future of prison education. (Paragraph 34)

and

3. We are concerned that existing prison education policy, with its heavy concentration on basic skills qualifications, is based on little more than a 'hunch'. While basic skills are vital, they are not by themselves sufficient to ensure employment on release. We urge the Government to undertake thorough and robust research to identify what type of education and training provision will have the greatest impact on meeting the individual learning needs of the prisoner and providing them with real alternatives to crime on release. (Paragraph 47).

The Government is committed to strengthening the evidence underpinning offender learning and skills policy. We accept that the current research evidence base is not conclusive. However it would be misleading to suggest that current policy is not founded on reasonable evidence. Stable, quality employment is associated with reduced reoffending and a lack of skills is one of the most significant barriers to employment¹. Offenders and, indeed, others with basic skills needs are substantially more likely to be unemployed than those without basic skills needs.

The evidence that offenders are excluded from jobs by low skills is robust. Although the Committee dismisses the Social Exclusion Unit's 2002 report *Reducing Re-Offending By Ex-Prisoners* as 'one finding', 'not tested empirically', this report drew on a wide range of other reliable studies and data. Its contention that half of all prisoners do not have the skills required for 96% of jobs was based on a comparative analysis of the Home Office's *Prison statistics England and Wales* and The Basic Skills Agency and Institute for Employment Studies audit *Basic Skills and Jobs*. It is therefore unconvincing to argue that the figures making the basic case that offenders benefit from a focus on Basic Skills 'have never really been tested empirically'.

The Government agrees that courses must be delivered to offenders according to identified learning needs. By themselves, basic skills are not sufficient to ensure employment on release. To this end the initial and ongoing assessment of learners is being enhanced to ensure education and training provision is more closely matched to need (see response to recommendation 9). In addition, good quality courses are being developed to provide basic skills embedded within vocational training programmes. Finally, offenders are being offered a range of services, such as job search and accommodation support, to assist entry to employment.

¹ *Skills for Life Survey*, DfES, 2003

Looking forward, we have plans to strengthen the evidence base. The Government has commissioned the Institute of Education (IoE) to review the existing research evidence. The IoE's initial remit is to identify which interventions have the greatest impact in reducing reoffending. The IoE's work will ensure full use is made of current knowledge about barriers to employment and the effectiveness of interventions, such as training, to overcome these. It will also clarify any gaps in our evidence base.

In addition, the Home Office is developing Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR), a new study to assess the impact of interventions, including education programmes, within the context of other prison programme areas such as drug treatment, cognitive behavioural therapy and custody to work. This will increase understanding of how different programmes can best be made to work together for prisoners. The survey will be longitudinal, based on successive interviews with a large cohort of recently sentenced prisoners: when in custody, then prior to release and finally in the community. Initial interviews will give a clear picture of prisoners' problems when entering custody. Follow-up interviews will document patterns of interventions and the range of outcomes experienced by prisoners during and after imprisonment. The final stage will be a reconviction study, looking at routes taken post release. This four year study is due to start in late 2005, and will be followed by a study of probationers in 2006.

The development of the new Offenders' Learning and Skills Service will be supported by an action research project to help increase knowledge and understanding of the most effective ways to deliver offender education and training, allowing comparison of the delivery models across three prototype areas. The findings from the prototypes will be made available to all service deliverers to allow them to draw on this information in planning and delivering their own offender learning and skills services.

More investment is needed in preventative measures

4. We urge the Government to focus on improving education provision for the almost 50% of students who do not achieve 5 A-Cs at GCSE, and particularly the 5% that leave school without any GCSEs. (Paragraph 52)
and

5. We wish to highlight the importance of the Government's Every Child Matters programme of reform, on which we will be publishing our recommendations to Government shortly. (Paragraph 53)

The Government strongly agrees that early investment in education must be an important part of the overall approach to reducing exclusion and the extent to which young people become drawn into offending.

It is important that every young person is able to achieve to their full potential. The Key Stage 3 (KS3) National Strategy is one way in which we are supporting schools through materials, catch-up provision, a KS3 pilot looking at curriculum development for low attainers, and materials focused on

Special Educational Needs pupils. The 14-19 White Paper set out our plans for an education system focused on high standards and much more tailored to the talents and aspirations of individual young people, with greater flexibility about what and where to study and when to take qualifications. A critical priority is an engaging curriculum with clear progression routes, so that all 16 year-olds achieve highly and carry on into sixth form study, an Apprenticeship, or work with training until at least the age of 18.

Every Child Matters sets out our ambitious agenda for promoting the welfare of children and young people. We shall of course respond in due course to the Committee's separate set of recommendations on *Every Child Matters*.

The need for a clear purpose and overarching strategy.

6. We concur with the findings of the Home Affairs Committee which said it was 'disappointed with the elementary nature of many of the National Action Plan's action points', and that 'the National Action Plan should be re-issued in an expanded form.. setting a clear timetable for implementation.' The National Action Plan fails to provide an overarching strategy for the rehabilitation of prisoners in which the role of prison education can be clearly identified. (Paragraph 62)

The Government rejects the Committee's assertion that no overarching strategy is in place. In the context of wider Government action to reduce reoffending, we have taken vigorous action to improve the skills of the offender population. Building on the recent success in achieving qualifications in literacy, language and numeracy, our focus is now on broadening the curriculum offer, ensuring more integrated and effective delivery through the Learning and Skills Council, and improving the quality of provision.

The *Reducing Reoffending National Action Plan* sets strategic direction for comprehensive action at national, regional and local levels. Education, training and employment is the second of seven main pathways. It draws together important activities, including: developing the new integrated learning and skills service with new partnership arrangements for offenders both in prison and in the community (the new Offenders' Learning and Skills Service); engaging employers and the voluntary and community sector, and improving standards of learning and training.

The action plan provides a well-understood overarching strategy for reducing reoffending under the new National Offender Management Service (NOMS). It was based on consultation with stakeholders, and has been in place since July 2004. The action points identified by the plan are realistic and achievable commitments with unambiguous target dates for implementation. Clear leads and partners are identified to take forward action in partnership. In responding to the *Home Affairs Committee Report on Rehabilitation of Prisoners* (Cm 6486), the Government accepted the recommendation that it should report annually to Parliament on progress with the Plan.

The Government will not immediately reissue the Action Plan. This risks unnecessary confusion for those engaged in its implementation. We will

consider in due course how best to reflect continuing developments in NOMS and its strategic partners.

As part of this process, the Government believes that a more comprehensive strategy is needed for education, training and employment within the overarching plan for reducing reoffending. That is why we gave the commitment in the Skills White Paper of March 2005 to publish further proposals for reform later in the year.

7. Neither the Government nor the media have done enough to communicate the importance of prison education to the general public. This Committee believes this is unacceptable. A change in public attitude must be driven by political leadership. The Government must act on its responsibility to inform the general public of the purpose and importance of prison education as part of a broader strategy to rehabilitate prisoners in order to reduce recidivism for the benefit of the wider community. (Paragraph 77)

The Government has made clear the importance it attaches to improving offenders' skills and qualifications, as part of the wider strategy to reduce reoffending. Most recently the Skills White Paper, *Skills: Getting on in Business, Getting on at Work*, stated that 'improving offenders' skills and helping them get sustainable jobs on release from custody is crucial for them and for society' (Part 2, paragraph 198). It recognised that the education and training service we currently offer for offenders is good but, in too many areas, is too narrow in focus and patchy in quality. The White Paper promised an ambitious agenda of change.

The Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit has a range of established ways of communicating with the sector. Bimonthly stakeholder events facilitate a two-way conversation to help shape the Government's future agenda. They are hosted by a Minister and include representatives from the Confederation of British Industry, charities and offender practitioners. This is in addition to widely-circulated newsletters and two annual national conferences.

The Government intends to publish a strategy document later this year, setting out proposals for going further in reducing reoffending through skills and employment. We expect, as part of that strategy, to set out clearly the case for action to improve offenders' skills and employment. The document will be supported by a comprehensive consultation process.

Flexible and learner-centred provision

8. If the system of prison education is intended to be learner-centred, there needs to be much more flexibility. Learning needs to be relevant, learner-centred, and key skills should be embedded in employment-focused training. (Paragraph 81);

9. A learner-centred system of prison education should deliver a programme of assessment to identify learning needs, including special education needs. This assessment should then be clearly linked to a defined entitlement to provision to meet those needs. This should be delivered through an Individual Learning Plan, owned by the individual, and embedded in their overall Sentence Plan. (Paragraph 82);

10. The initial assessment of a prisoner's education level is totally inadequate at present and we urge the Government to completely overhaul the existing system. There is an urgent need to put in place a system of assessment that can identify the learning needs, including any special educational needs, of each individual prisoner. (Paragraph 93);

and

46. Motivation of the learner in prison is extremely important. Much more needs to be done to provide a wide range of high quality education programmes that should be available for prisons to meet the needs and different learning styles of prisoners to engage them in learning. (Paragraph 271)

The Government broadly accepts these recommendations within the limits of the funding available.

Education and training in prisons has not always in the past been sufficiently responsive to individual needs. However, the Committee has not sufficiently recognised the extent to which improvements in this area are at the heart of the reforms – currently underway – to deliver a better and more coherent Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS), progressively from August 2005.

The key features of the new service are outlined in a document called the *Offender's Learning Journey*, available at www.dfes.gov.uk/offenderlearning. The *Offender's Learning Journey* specifies the content of the Offenders' Learning and Skills Service to be supported by the LSC in three development regions from August 2005, and throughout the rest of England from August 2006.

The *Offender's Learning Journey* sets out new arrangements for assessment, requiring an early, intense focus on initial and diagnostic assessment of learning needs as well as good quality information, advice and guidance and an induction programme. The provider must ensure that each learner has an Individual Learning Plan, linked to the sentence plan and the Offender Assessment System (OASys), with detailed goals and a record of progress in

all learning and skills activities. The Plan will move with the offender as he or she progresses through the criminal justice system and on into mainstream learning and skills. Assessment must identify potential dyslexia indicators and other additional learning needs.

The National Offender Management Service approach to integrated offender management uses the sentence planning process as a means of integrating assessment and planning for the offender's whole sentence. This integrated approach will be reflected in the development of the National Offender Management Information System (NOMIS). Educational assessments and the inclusion of Sentence Plan objectives to improve educational achievements will be an important part of the Sentence Plan for many offenders.

The DfES Skills for Life Strategy Unit has funded the development of a comprehensive suite of national assessment materials for literacy, numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and an electronic individual learning plan. The materials and associated training are available free of charge to prison teachers. Prison providers have also been encouraged to take an active part in piloting the assessment materials to ensure that they are suitable for custodial settings.

The goal of the Offenders' Learning and Skills Service is a learning journey for offenders based on the delivery of learning and skills to meet learning requirements identified by assessment. This offer is necessarily qualified by what it is possible to make available within the constraints of a particular establishment, and within the resources available. But the Offenders' Learning and Skills Service puts into practice the Committee's observation that learning begun in prison can be continued and expanded in the community where, indeed, there is a greater variety of mainstream provision than it is possible to replicate within a prison.

11. From the limited evidence we have of the complex learning difficulties of many prisoners we believe that every prison should have a special educational needs coordinator specifically to support the special educational needs of prisoners. We urge the Government to extend the provision of special educational needs co-ordinators from Young Offender Institutions to every adult prison. (Paragraph 99)

and

12. The introduction of Learning Support Assistants to the juvenile estate has been a great success and has enabled a much greater focus on the individual needs of prisoners. We recommend the provision of learning support assistants in adult prisons. (Paragraph 102)

The Government agrees that offenders with special needs should be appropriately supported. However it does not agree that introducing a special educational needs coordinator and learning assistants to every adult prison is necessarily the right solution. Under the Offenders' Learning and Skills Service, learning providers will be required, within the terms of their contract and the resources available, to:

- Introduce an effective and comprehensive inclusive learning strategy;
- Assess individual additional learning needs and provide individual support if required, within the available resources;
- Make sure that teachers have all the Department for Education and Skills and Youth Justice Board-produced support materials for learning difficulties and disabilities;
- Ensure that teachers and trainers have access to in-service training to keep their learning difficulties and disabilities practice up to date; and
- Make sure that at least one member of staff has, or is working towards, a specialist Learning Difficulties and Disabilities teaching qualification.

13. We recommend that investment in young offenders is brought up to meet the level of additional investment that the Youth Justice Board has delivered to the juvenile estate. With some of the highest reconviction rates, young offenders represent a vital stage of any strategy to reduce recidivism, and this discrepancy in investment cannot continue. In particular, we recommend that the prescribed entitlement to education, and the introduction of special educational needs co-ordinators and learning support assistants are extended to young offenders. (Paragraph 104)

The Government accepts that there is a significant gap between the level of learning and skills resource for juveniles and for young offenders, due to the differences between the two groups. This partly reflects distinctions made within the education service at large between the entitlements of those within the statutory school age range compared with older people. Juveniles are required to undertake full-time learning to provide them with the skills and training they will need for life, but adult offenders (18 and over) are not under the same compulsion. The two groups are consequently given a substantially different offer in custody.

Through the Young Adult Offenders Project and the forthcoming cross-departmental strategy document, the Government is investigating the future management of young offenders in prison and in the community in the light of sentencing changes which include the introduction of the new under one year sentence (Custody Plus). Custody Plus includes a substantial period under supervision at the conclusion of the sentence. The Government is also examining options for smoothing the change in resource levels by introducing new funding arrangements for young offenders. The strategy document planned for later this year will set out specific proposals to address the particular needs profile of young offenders.

14. Prisoners should be given an entitlement to have their identified learning needs met. In principle, the Committee recommends that all prisoners should have an entitlement to have these learning needs met,

but we recognise that this would be a long-term goal and that learning needs might have to be met on release for some prisoners. (Paragraph 111)

As will be clear from our response to earlier recommendations, the Government is committed to building an offender learning service that is more responsive to individual needs. We see no case for guaranteeing prisoners an entitlement to training and skills that is greater than the entitlements available for the adult population at large. But we agree that the range of support being introduced under the national Skills Strategy should benefit prisoners along with others.

We also want to widen participation in learning. The *Offender's Learning Journey*, as the reference document for the new LSC-led offender education contracts, expresses an aspiration 'to widen participation rates so that at least 50 per cent of offenders are engaging in learning and skills provision'.

The Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) is designed to increase the effectiveness of the training offenders receive by supporting a seamless learning journey for offenders, including during transitions between establishments and from custody to community settings and from there to mainstream learning and skills provision. Learners will remain engaged and will be more likely to secure positive outcomes.

The Committee is right to suggest that some offender learning needs may be met more fully and consistently when provision continues in the community. Under the new sentencing arrangements it is anticipated that far more offenders will serve all or part of their sentence within the community. Three new sentences - Custody Plus, Intermittent Custody and Custody Minus (a suspended sentence) - will support offenders' continued links within the community and the opportunity to continue and build upon education, training and employment. The completion of educational objectives in the community, either continuing from learning started in prison or as a separate activity, can form part of the sentence plan.

15. We believe that the entitlement to free Level 2 education for all adults should be applied equally to the prison population. (Paragraph 112)

The recent White Paper *Skills: Getting on in Business, Getting on at Work* promised national rollout of an entitlement to free tuition for a first full Level 2 qualification (originally introduced in the 2003 Skills Strategy). This offer applies to offenders in the community. It will apply to those in prison subject to the constraints of the custodial setting and available resources.

The Level 2 entitlement is effectively a promise that learners will receive free tuition when they access training towards their first full Level 2 qualification. The Level 2 entitlement is not carte blanche for learners to demand a particular course: it is dependent on the courses already being run by providers. The Learning and Skills Council will aim, through successive rounds of its annual planning and funding cycle, to expand provision of full Level 2 programmes,

particularly those which best support employability. This approach will apply within OLASS as well. All training of this nature for prisoners is free of charge. Prisoners will therefore receive the same benefits as those conferred on members of the general public by the Level 2 entitlement.

The Level 2 entitlement will apply in full to offenders in the community, by far the larger group. There was a population of 173,000 offenders in the community in 2003, compared with only 72,780 offenders in custody. The key challenge for Government is ensuring that these offenders and the professionals supervising them are aware of the entitlement. This will be taken forward in the forthcoming policy statement on skills and employment.

16. The Government must deliver on its commitment to implement a system of Individual Learning Plans linked to Sentence Plans. The haphazard nature in which this is undertaken at present cannot continue. This should be a priority for delivery. (Paragraph 117)

and

17. The transfer of records across prisons is a disgrace. The overcrowding of prisons and movement of prisoners across the prison estate is no excuse. The fact that prisoners are repeatedly put through initial assessments and Key Performance Target tests because their records cannot be transferred is unacceptable. The Committee recommends the urgent delivery of an electronic system for the transfer of records. The refinement and implementation of the Offender Assessment System (OASys) must be stepped up with no further delays. (Paragraph 122)

The challenge of ensuring coherence of learner information, in a context where offenders may be required to move frequently at short notice, and where security and safety are the prime considerations, should not be underestimated. Nevertheless, the Government agrees that significant improvement is needed to systems for holding and transferring offender learning records. The immediate priority is to establish effective individual learning plans at the heart of the new Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) from August 2005. In the longer term, it will be important to ensure that these plans are fully integrated within the wider assessment and sentence planning process.

This is an urgent priority as part of the implementation of OLASS. The three OLASS development regions have been testing elements of the new service since January 2005, including data transfer arrangements. From August, an Individual Learner Record for every offender learner in the three development regions will be held centrally and will be available to all education providers involved in delivering offender learning services.

In the interim, while this electronic system is being tested, we are piloting a paper based system which also allows for electronic transfer (where internet facilities allow) for 2 months in the East Midlands. If successful, this will be modified for roll out in the six non-development regions from August 2005.

OASys focuses on offender assessment, having some sentence planning capacity. In contrast, NOMIS is the sector's forthcoming offender management information system. It is anticipated that this tool for coherent offender management will contain a learning section with headlines from the Individual Learning Plan (ILP). Work is currently underway to prepare for the long term offender management context by specifying the ILP requirements, or 'headlines', which will be included within NOMIS. The full ILP will be held on a separate database which links both to NOMIS and the Learning and Skills Council's Individual Learner Record.

18. The Government should ensure that education provision is flexible enough to adapt to the different types of prisons and prisoners. Local prisons that hold prisoners with very short sentences, for example, should have their purpose clearly defined as being focused on information, advice, and guidance activity linking to rehabilitation and education services available in the community on release. (Paragraph 132)

The Government agrees that education provision should be flexible so as to adapt to the different profiles of prisoner need in different types of prison. The objective of the more joined-up Offenders' Learning and Skills Service is to allow strategic planning by region and, therefore, specialisation by prisons.

The delivery of appropriate information, advice and guidance (IAG) is a high priority at all stages of the offender's learning journey. Contractors are required to ensure that IAG on learning and work is offered to all offenders at induction, during learning, when planning progression and preparing for release and resettlement and during any community-based part of their sentence. For offenders in custody approaching release, access to information and advice on learning and work as prescribed in the Department for Education and Skills National Policy Framework and IAG will ensure effective access to housing and benefits advice through efficient referral to agencies such as Jobcentre Plus. Any provider of any information and advice service supported by LSC core funding must be accredited to the **matrix** Standard.

Where learners are held on short-term sentences, contractors will be encouraged to provide short provision, which includes intensive, 'bite size', IAG provision. The standards for IAG set in the Offender's Learning Journey describe the quality and range of services that should be available in all areas.

The continuation of provision on release

19. If the purpose of providing education and training in prisons is to reduce reoffending by enabling prisoners to gain secure employment, then the continuation of support and programmes on release is essential. The Government needs to: produce an overarching resettlement strategy for prisoners; commit to the continuity of provision of education and training on release; and deliver on its

commitment to provide the full-package of support necessary through the National Offender Management Service. (Paragraph 136)

The Government agrees that 'through the gate' support for prisoners is essential. With the introduction of Custody Plus no prisoner will in future be released without a period of supervision after release of at least six months (as compared with the 60% of prisoners who are at present released without any supervision). The establishment of end-to-end offender management under the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) will enable the custodial and supervision periods to be managed as a whole. Offender Managers will identify the full range of support needed by offenders within the seven pathways of the Reducing Reoffending National Action Plan (accommodation; education, training and employment; mental and physical health; drugs and alcohol; finance, benefit and debt; children and families of offenders, and attitudes, thinking and behaviour). The Criminal Justice Act allows community sentences similarly to be tailored to an offender's needs, with the courts drawing from a menu of twelve possible requirements including education and training (alongside attitudes, drug misuse, etc).

Within this context, the new Offenders' Learning and Skills Service will apply this end to end approach to offender education and training. The move to an integrated service will greatly increase the likelihood of comparable provision being available to the offender following release and enable them to complete most courses in the community. NOMS' Corporate Plan includes a commitment to contributing to the development of the integrated learning and skills service for offenders and publishing a Reducing Re-offending Strategy for each region to be approved by the Regional Offender Manager.

At delivery level, and in consultation with Jobcentre Plus, the Learning and Skills Council and Probation Areas, training providers will develop provision that meets the identified needs of offenders seeking to return to the workplace. Local arrangements will involve other key partners such as IAG providers and regional and local employer representatives. Training providers will use the Individual Learning Plan to record activities relating to continuing learning post-release and communicate them to community colleagues as well as working to make links with key agencies inside and outside the prison.

The Government does not accept the assertion that, with regard to employment, training and education, 'there is absolutely nothing provided from those who are discharged from prisons' (paragraph 134). The Prison Service Plus programme delivers employment support to targeted prisoners. In Phase 1 (to August 2004) it supported 17,000 prisoners in 28 establishments with £29 million (of which £13 million was European Social Fund money). Prison Service Plus 2 will run from September 2004 to December 2006 and will extend to 40 establishments and work with 53,000 prisoners.

Pre-release, Jobcentre Plus Employment & Benefit Surgery Advisers are available to undertake jobsearch activity with prisoners, discuss employment

and training opportunities, and advise prisoners about working age benefits and how they can claim them. On release, Freshstart appointments with Jobcentre Plus are available to assist offenders to enter employment. 20,000 offenders attended Freshstart appointments in 2003-04, and 14% of Freshstart customers gain employment within 3 months of discharge. This is about 40% higher than for those who fail to attend.

The structures for delivery of prison education

20. We consider that changes in the formal structure for the delivery of prison education at the national level have yet to deliver a positive outcome for prisoners' experience of education and training because of the absence of an overarching strategy across the different Government departments and a lack of ownership and championing of prison education at the national level. (Paragraph 139)

As we have made clear above, the Government considers that the Committee has underestimated the progress made in recent years in improving learning and skills in prisons. There have been significant developments in resources, in qualifications and outcomes for learners, and in operational capacity within prisons. Building on that foundation, further improvement will be driven by the implementation of the new Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) progressively from August 2005.

This reform means that by August 2006, we shall have in place a more coherent and integrated service for offenders in custody and community, delivered to a demanding specification which sets out a wider range of skills delivery and learner support than exists at present. The new learning and skills service will be organised regionally, matching the regional focus of the National Offender Management Service.

None of this could be achieved in the absence of a clear strategy, shared between the relevant Government departments. Nor could such rapid change be implemented in the absence of high-level ownership within each organisation involved. A strategic partnership between the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the Home Office has been operational since April 2001, supported by the Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit (OLSU) from within the DfES.

Clear and focussed ownership and championing of offender learning and skills is provided at national level by Phil Hope, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Skills at the DfES and Baroness Scotland, Minister of State at the Home Office. At official level, this work is overseen within the context of the inter-departmental Reducing Reoffending Board, chaired by Martin Narey, Chief Executive of the National Offender Management Service. The acting DfES Director General for Lifelong Learning, Peter Lauener, is a member of this Board, and has operational oversight of the OLSU.

21. We are very disappointed that the LSC has not included prison education in its statement of priorities. (Paragraph 142)

and

22. We urge the Government to prioritise, and provide the necessary funding for, the process of bridging the gap between education inside and outside prisons through the involvement of the Learning and Skills Council. Prison education must not simply be ‘bolted-on’ to the LSC. The Government must take responsibility for making prison education a priority for the LSC. (Paragraph 145)

The Government welcomes the Committee’s recognition of the benefits of giving the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) responsibility for delivery of offender learning and skills.

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills’ annual remit letter to the LSC includes, for 2005-06, specific reference to offender learning. Transfer of responsibility for planning and funding offender learning will see the progressive re-allocation of the bulk of the DfES resource that currently funds delivery of offender learning to the LSC. With the switch of responsibility for planning and funding offender learning, and the progressive transfer of the necessary resource, the place of offender learning in the LSC’s annual statement of priorities and the annual remit letter can be expected to assume greater prominence.

The LSC considers prison education to be an important part of its future responsibilities and will ensure that the needs of this particularly disadvantaged group of learners are appropriately met by LSC-funded provision. The LSC *Annual Statement of Priorities* refers explicitly to the successful transfer of responsibilities for offender learning in the section on targets and resources.

More broadly, the six priorities contained within the *Statement of Priorities* are:

- Make learning truly demand-led so that it better meets the needs of employers, young people and adults;
- Ensure that all 14-19 year olds have access to high quality relevant learning opportunities;
- Transform further education so that it attracts and stimulates more business investment in training and skills development;
- Strengthen the role of the LSC in economic development so that it provides the skills needed to help all individuals into jobs;
- Strengthen the LSC's capacity to work at regional level effectively; and
- Improve the skills of the workers who are delivering public services.

All of these priorities are applicable to offenders in varying ways. In future, offenders in custody will fall under the remit of the LSC, and offenders will accordingly be included in the measures designed to address those six priorities. As part of the mainstreaming of prison education, these disadvantaged learners will, in the long term, have access to the offer which is available to all LSC-funded learners, subject to the constraints of resourcing and the prisoner's sentence.

Managing delivery through contracts

23. Under current contracting arrangements in prisons education and vocational training continue to be organised separately. Furthermore, the recent reforms to contracts have created such uncertain working conditions that many experienced and highly qualified teachers have left prison education because of this. (Paragraph 149)

and

24. The DfES has failed in its responsibility to inform those working in prison education of the guiding principles underlying the reform of contracts as well as the progress of implementation of the new proposals. The DfES must clearly outline the rationale behind the three prototype models for contracting, and the criteria on which they will be assessed. Finally, they must outline a detailed timetable of implementation for new contract arrangements and commit to meeting this timetable. (Paragraph 154)

It is clear that the current contracting arrangements are flawed: as the Committee recognises, that fact has been known for some time. Project REX was designed to resolve those problems. The Prison Service, advised by the Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit (OLSU), planned to let successor contracts that would introduce a much improved service for offenders in custody.

The publication of Patrick Carter's report *Managing Offenders, Reducing Crime* and the announcement of the National Offender Management Service meant that it was no longer appropriate to proceed with a project to introduce revised arrangements only for offender learners in custody. Project REX was cancelled by Ministers, and a new process began immediately that aimed to introduce an integrated learning and skills service for offenders in custody and in the community. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) was already heavily engaged in the delivery of the latter and it clearly made sense to ask them to take on responsibility for planning and funding all offender learning. The OLSU's network of regionally-based Learning and Skills Advisors transferred across to the LSC on 1 April 2005 to help support the transfer of responsibility. The existing contracts were extended by the Prison Service in order to secure a service for offenders in custody whilst the new arrangements were put in place.

The new delivery arrangements are being prototyped in three development regions (North East, North West and South West England) from August 2005, with some minor testing of elements of the new arrangements from January

2005. The rest of England introduces the new arrangements from August 2006. The revised service for offender learners is very different from the existing arrangements, and the three regions in which prototyping will take place exhibit different characteristics. The development regions are, therefore, adopting different approaches which will be evaluated whilst underway through a process of action research. The Government believes the rationale for introducing the prototype service in the three development regions is clear. Activity has progressed under the direction of a clear project plan that sets out key milestones and specific dates by when detailed activities will be undertaken, and that national project plan is mirrored by more detailed plans in each development region. As we work towards August 2006, the remaining six English regions are developing similarly detailed plans, building on the experience of the development regions in determining exactly how the service will be delivered in their regions, which may be different in each case.

Throughout this process, the Government has sought to ensure that those working in prison education were kept informed about the principles underlying contract reform or progress in implementing new arrangements. But we acknowledge more could have been done and we are committed to improving communication with all the partners concerned about progress in the three development regions and the appropriate approach to securing the new service in the six remaining regions.

25. The Committee believes that the funding methodology for prison education must be fit for purpose. It should be flexible enough to fund the various forms of education and learning programmes that are suited to the type of establishment, to the prisoner population within it, and to the patterns of movement to and from that prison (Paragraph 158);

26. We recommend that the LSC is given the appropriate resources necessary to apply its standard funding methodology so that prisons have access to all of the funding streams available to mainstream Colleges. In particular, we wish to see the Additional Learner Support funding approach applied to prison education (Paragraph 164);

and

27. We recommend that the Government undertakes a fundamental review to come to conclusions on what it wants to achieve through prison education and funds education provision at a level sufficient to meet this chosen outcome. Existing budget constraints, based on historical levels of provision, should not continue. A clear strategy for prison education should be costed and appropriately funded (Paragraph 168).

The Government welcomes the Select Committee's recognition of the increased resources invested in offender learning. Funding in offender education has risen from £97 million in 2003-04 to £151 million for 2005-06. In this short period, therefore, offender education funding has increased by 50%. As investment is increasing substantially, the challenge is now to get best

value out of the funds available and transforming quality. It is expected that the new service will give better value for money. It will be a higher quality service meeting the needs of individuals.

The Government agrees that there is a need for appropriate funding approaches to support delivery of learning and skills in prisons. The Learning and Skills Council's (LSC's) work to date, in preparation for the new service, has identified that the current funding approach for prison education may not be effective in supporting the learning and skills needs of offenders. Funding allocations are based historically on the level of activity in place in each prison, and upon providers' ability to negotiate appropriate prices with the Prison Service. This has created a wide range in provision costs across the prison estate with little apparent correlation with learner numbers, type of establishment or learner need.

So, from August 2005, the LSC will start testing new approaches to planning and funding education provision for offenders in the three development regions of Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS), prior to implementing its approach across England in August 2006. In the three development regions, the LSC is initially taking a prudent approach in reviewing current funding arrangements:

- A standard hourly rate will be introduced for contractors delivering learning and skills to offenders.
- The costs associated with management and administration of education provision will be separated from the current 'teaching hour' rate. The objective is to gain a better understanding of the true costs of delivery, so that we can channel the majority of funding to front-line delivery.
- An 'achievement element' will be introduced to recognise the achievement of learning aims by individuals. This will provide an incentive to providers to achieve meaningful learning aims for offenders. The current funding approach is based on teaching input, and therefore provides little incentive to providers efficiently to deliver and complete meaningful learning outcomes with offenders.

The above elements will enable significant progress towards achieving consistency and transparency in the funding of prison education and securing a funding methodology that is fit for purpose. Value for money will be easier to identify through a common purchasing system, and the thrust of the approach will be based upon achievement of outcomes. This will lead prison education towards a funding approach similar to that of mainstream LSC-funded provision.

Future levels of funding for offender learning will be determined in the normal way as part of the spending review process. That will balance the service's resource needs against the many other priorities for funding within the overall constraints on public expenditure.

28. The appointment of Heads of Learning and Skills is a welcome progression but, in many cases, they have not been able to fulfil their intended role. (Paragraph 172)

and

29. We recommend that the DfES and the Home Office jointly champion the role of Heads of Learning and Skills and increase their profile within the senior management of prisons with clear direction and accountability. (Paragraph 172)

The Government welcomes the recognition of the importance of prison Heads of Learning and Skills. These posts have been supported by significant additional investment by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), working in partnership with the Prison Service. For the future we anticipate that the Head of Learning and Skills role will continue to be pivotal in ensuring the effective operational management of learning and skills for offenders.

As with any such innovation, it has taken a little time for these new senior posts to become fully established in prisons and there is a range of practice according to the particular circumstances of each establishment. But there are no grounds for uncertainty about their role. Indeed in January 2005 the head of the Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit (OLSU) and the Prison Service Director of Operations wrote jointly to governors and area managers to reaffirm governors' accountabilities and the role expected of Heads of Learning and Skills. The statement clarified line management arrangements and detailed the way in which the funding from the DfES to resource these posts should be spent.

The OLSU is working with Prison Service Training Unit to develop improved training courses to raise awareness of the Head of Learning and Skills role for all staff and to support the development of a specific learning-focussed module within a new resettlement staff training programme.

30. In order to prevent further loss of staff from the profession, and to help improve recruitment, the Government must ensure that the specialist role of teaching staff in prisons is properly recognised and rewarded. The professional isolation of these teachers must be remedied through the new role of the Learning and Skills Council in delivering education provision. At present there is no specific funding identified for this purpose. The Government should properly identify, fund, and drive this process forward. (Paragraph 178)

The Government agrees that teachers and trainers need appropriate training in order to teach offenders, and that this is a valuable role which needs to be properly supported. There is some evidence that managers, teachers and trainers in prisons have at times experienced barriers in securing access to the training and development opportunities enjoyed by their colleagues in mainstream education. However, the Committee's report does not recognise the significant distance travelled over the past two years.

Literacy, language and numeracy teachers in prisons are now taking an active part in a range of post-16 training and development activities funded by Government. These include:

- The *Skills for Life Quality Initiative* which is providing a wide range of national, regional and local training funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), including support for managers in prisons and training specifically for prison teachers. 111 prisons and young offender institutions, out of a total of 140, had the support of a facilitator during 2004-5 and 453 offender educators have been trained.
- 46 professionals from different offender settings have been involved in a national learning difficulties pilot, and staff from 9 prisons are involved in piloting dyslexia teacher training.
- The *Move On* project, which supports learner achievement in the national literacy and numeracy tests, has involved 82 prisons.
- The PLUS Strategy provides on-going literacy and numeracy support and development in the juvenile estate.

In addition, Government has funded:

- The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) Standards Unit *Subject Learning Coaches* initiative which will improve the quality of work-related training in prisons.
- A Family Learning project which aims to embed family literacy, language and numeracy as part of the prison curriculum.

The DfES Standards Unit is reforming initial teacher training across post-16 education, including the offender learning sector. DfES has funded the development of a specific initial training programme for prison teachers and three in-service training modules for offender educators. The Standards Unit has raised the profile of prison teachers via the STAR award's new category of *prison tutor of the year*.

Some staff who have not yet benefited from these arrangements will soon come under the remit of the new Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS). For the first time, teachers in vocational workshops will work for organisations whose primary focus is the delivery of effective learning and skills. Contracts for the service reflect standard LSC terms and conditions, including a requirement to provide suitably qualified staff and offer continuing professional development. We do not anticipate variation in reward levels from a provider's standard arrangements.

Taken together with the high quality standards set out in the *Offender's Learning Journey*, we believe this will encourage staff with good qualifications and experience to apply for work in the offender learning sector and secure proper rewards for their skills.

The resettlement Key Performance Target

31. It is clearly extremely important to find a way to measure education, training or employment outcomes for prisoners soon after release, and the Prison Service or National Offender Management Service should make this a priority. (Paragraph 189)

The Government agrees that fuller information on employment levels of ex-prisoners should be sought. The National Offender Management Service is working with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Jobcentre Plus on obtaining prisoner consent to improve the access to data on the outcomes of Freshstart interviews, which provide offenders with advice and guidance about education and employment and link them into the benefits system. The first run of national data is due to be delivered by DWP in June 2005.

Prisons have exceeded their targets for positive Education, Training and Employment outcomes on release since they were introduced in 2002-03. The Government does not consider it appropriate to change the existing Resettlement Key Performance Indicator at this time: it is settling in and providing a run of data through which annual performance can be gauged.

Value-added targets

32. We recommend that existing qualification-based targets, and their impact on education provision, are reconsidered. Key Performance Targets have distorted the provision of education and training within prisons leading to prisoners taking classes which may be completely inappropriate for their needs. What is needed is a system of delivery whereby prison education is assessed against its stated purpose. We recommend that value-added targets are implemented to enable education provision to be focused on the individual needs of prisoners. (Paragraph 199)

The Government agrees that learning should not be delivered to fill quotas, but rather to meet assessed learner need. To this end, the *Offender's Learning Journey* sets demanding new standards for all education provision offered under the Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) contracts: from assessment (see response to recommendation 10) to learner support (response to recommendation 11) and an up-to-date learning plan, adhered to by providers, which follows an offender as he or she moves around the system (response to recommendation 17).

However, the Government does not accept that targets for achievement of qualifications are in themselves the problem. Qualification targets, if offered as part of the package described above as one element in performance management, encourage the achievement of measurable outcomes. They are an important part of a framework focussed on accountability, high standards and transparency in assessing progress towards objectives. We make no apology for a strong focus in recent years on achievement of targets for qualifications, in literacy, language and numeracy. These are a clear priority in

view of the educational background of many offenders in custody. The Government believes that the Committee has not given sufficient recognition to the substantial achievement of recent years that has, for example, resulted in more than 10% of achievement of the national *Skills for Life* target being gained by offenders.

Looking to the future, the new partnership with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) can be expected to lead to some refinement of the nature of the performance measures used in prisons. Success will be measured by the number of offenders achieving qualifications. Furthermore, the LSC will broaden qualification performance measures to include full Level 2 vocational qualifications as well as literacy, language and numeracy qualifications.

When offenders are included in the LSC's planning and funding system it will become more straightforward to track individual progress against learning aims.

Delivering effective education and training

33. Current provision of prison education is unacceptable. Whilst the Government has provided a substantial increase in resources it is failing to fully meet its manifesto commitment to 'dramatically increase the quality and quantity of education provision'. In 2004, still less than a third of prisoners had access to prison education at any one time. There needs to be a fundamental shift in approach to prison education and a step change in the level of high quality provision that is suited to meet the needs of individual prisoners to provide them with a real alternative to crime on release. (Paragraph 214)

and

34. The quality of existing education provision remains a major concern. 60% of provision inspected by the Adult Learning Inspectorate was inadequate. This is unacceptable. There must be rapid progress towards meeting external standards of provision of education and training in prisons. (Paragraph 224)

As will be clear from responses to earlier recommendations, the Government agrees that there is a need to improve significantly the delivery of good quality learning and skills to offenders in custody. It is for this reason that the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is leading the new Offenders' Learning and Skills Service from August 2005 (see response to recommendation 8). The *Offender's Learning Journey* sets the aspiration to increase to 50% the number of prisoners engaged in learning. Given that prison learning is not compulsory, this represents a substantial level of engagement.

The Government considers that the Committee has underestimated the extent to which the quality and quantity of prison education has already been improved. There has been a substantial increase in investment in prison education: Department for Education and Skills funding for prison education has increased by 50% from £97 million in 2003-04 to £151 million for 2005-06. In comparison, since 2001-02, the prison population has increased by only 16%.

The number of nationally-recognised qualifications in literacy, language and numeracy achieved by prisoners has risen from 25,300 in 2001-02 to 63,500 in 2004-05. This represents the first large-scale systematic introduction of nationally-recognised skills training for offenders.

There have also been significant developments in improving the quality of learning on offer. The Common Inspection Framework, against which prisons are judged, is used to make quality judgements across the whole of post-16 education. It is right to judge prison education by the same demanding standards applied across mainstream learning. But in doing so we need to recognise the different circumstances. For example, prisons have had less time to develop their quality assurance processes than most of their counterparts in post-16 education. Colleges, for example, have been inspected since 1993, whereas prisons have been inspected only since 2001/02. Until 2003 there was no senior manager to lead quality improvement in learning and skills across each prison establishment.

It is true that overall inspection grades for prisons have so far been significantly weaker than for other providers. But there are signs of quality improvement in this sector. For example:

- HMP Dartmoor has recently been awarded a grade 1 for construction training (April 2005). This was the first grade 1 ever awarded to a prison for any area of learning. In 2003-04 only one provider in the entire post-16 sector achieved a grade 1 for construction.
- HMP Foston Hall was the first prison to be recognised by the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) as a top post-16 provider in 2003/04 and was judged 'good' in every area in its recent inspection; HMP Bullingdon succeeded in improving its Leadership and Management from grade 5 to grade 2 in its recent re-inspection.
- There is growing evidence that inspection is working: inspection grades improve on re-inspection, with an average improvement of nearly one grade (on a 1-5 scale) in ratings for leadership and management.

The sector is working hard with key partners in order to drive up the quality of education and training. Initiatives include:

- Development of coherent quality arrangements for the future service delivery of offender education under the LSC;
- Development of an accountabilities framework with robust targets, penalties and incentives for both prisons and education providers;
- Work with the ALI's Provider Development Unit to support prisons facing re-inspection; and
- Work to identify and disseminate promising practice in the offender education sector.

Internet access

35. We believe that lack of access to the internet is a significant barrier to learning. Access to the internet clearly must be controlled and properly supervised, but the internet is essential both as a learning tool and as a key skill for employment. We recommend that the Government prioritises progress in this area and sets out a clear timetable for implementation of access across the prison estate. (Paragraph 229)

The Government agrees that use of information and communications technology to support learning, including appropriate access to web-based material, is increasingly important in improving the skills and employability of offenders. But the challenge is to deliver ICT skills and e-learning access while maintaining security.

A number of recent developments has helped to address the issue. For example, PICTA (Prisoners' ICT Academy) allows students to access learning tools usually available online, by downloading them onto a sterile server (accessible only by the PICTA Instructors). The information is then downloaded from this server to the other computers in the workshop. As an extra security measure, the PICTA sterile servers are only linked to websites which have been agreed previously with IT security in the Prison Service. The training leads to a substantial range of accredited ICT skills, including a Cisco Certified Networking Professional qualification and British Computer Society Affiliate Membership. The project is currently live at 15 sites and is rolling out to another 5 sites. Around 300 prisoners at a time will have access to a library of learning tools, which will enable them to become qualified in a range of computing skills.

We are committed to building on these innovations and developing fuller ICT use. Two prisons (HMP Rye Hill and HMP The Wolds) already allow direct internet access for prisoners. This is in workshops run by a commercial web design company. We will not, however, take inappropriate risks. Prisoner risk assessments regarding suitability to use the Internet must be subject to regular and rigorous review. This is because prisoners may be bullied, coerced, or threatened to undertake inappropriate searches or e-mails.

A commercial design for a secure "internet kiosk" is to be trialled at open prison HMP Leyhill. The security aspects (which must preclude inmates from visiting inappropriate sites, or using the systems to intimidate other parties, as well as ensuring that prison operational systems cannot be subverted) will be tested rigorously. Experience at HMP Leyhill will inform the future strategy. It is planned that this pilot will be underway by July 2005.

36. An over-emphasis on basic skills driven by Key Performance Targets has narrowed the curriculum too far. Whilst aiming to meet the basic skills needs of prisoners the Government must endeavour to broaden out the prison education curriculum and increase flexibility of provision to meet the much wider range of educational needs that exists within the prison system. (Paragraph 237)

As indicated in the response to recommendation 32, the Government continues to see value in clear targets, and considers that they have helped to drive impressive achievement of *Skills for Life* qualifications by offenders. The need to improve the literacy, numeracy and English language skills of offenders should not be underestimated, and is key to underpinning success in vocational and employment training. However, these have never been the sole objective of learning and skills for offenders. For example, funding from the Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit currently supports 1,300 prisoners to pursue higher education or access to higher education courses. Increasingly, as we develop arrangements for the new Offenders' Learning and Skills Service, providers will offer a broader curriculum.

In the three Development Regions, from August 2005 onwards, work related learning will aim to deliver only qualifications that are relevant to the needs of, and valued by, employers and will be an equal priority with basic skills for the Learning and Skills Council. *The Offender's Learning Journey* sets out robust service specifications for work-related training, including the requirement to:

- Work with the Head of Learning and Skills, National Probation Service Education, Training and Employment managers, local LSC and Sector Skills Councils to develop programmes in line with national policies;
- Meet the needs of employers and the labour market into which the offender will be released;
- Offer training in transferable work skills and progression routes to employment or further training;
- Contribute to the co-ordination of courses at regional and/or national level to support continuity for learners transferring between prisons and from prison into the community; and
- Provide appropriately qualified and experienced vocational instructors and continuing professional development to keep skills up to date.

As well as literacy, language, numeracy and work-related learning, the *Offender's Learning Journey* sets out other key elements of a broad and balanced curriculum for offenders, including ICT, creative and arts courses, higher education, personal and social development and programmes which help offenders to maintain family relationships. The need for learners to enjoy their learning or training and take responsibility, often for the first time, for their own skills development is a prime consideration and one of the growing successes in the best prisons.

37. We recommend that the Government gives further consideration to how basic skills might be embedded in more practical learning experiences right across the prison estate, on a much greater scale than is available to prisoners at present. (Paragraph 241)

and

38. Part of the difficulty in embedding basic skills in more practical learning is the separate nature of education, vocational training, and work in prisons. This cannot be allowed to continue. (Paragraph 242)

The Government accepts the desirability of embedding basic skills in training and work. Integration of education and vocational training is indeed one of the main drives for establishing the new Offenders' Learning and Skills Service under the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). Since last year the Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit (OLSU) has provided additional funding to prisons, to pay for Heads of Learning and Skills posts in most prisons, intended to assist governors in taking a strategic look across the regime to identify and exploit learning opportunities. Their role is to lead the strategic planning process for learning and skills activities throughout the establishment – education, vocational training, careers, personal development, library provision and any other externally provided programmes in the establishment – and includes encouraging the embedding of basic skills in as wide a range of education and training as possible.

The Department for Education and Skills and the Learning and Skills Council are promoting programmes of embedded learning. The Government has already commissioned a comprehensive suite of projects to explore and encourage embedded learning, including:

- Free embedded learning materials to develop the literacy, language and numeracy skills needed for specific jobs such as Trowel Occupations, Social Care and Horticulture, for cross-sector employability skills such as health and safety and for other important topics such as family health.
- In-service training modules to support vocational teachers to embed literacy, language and numeracy, currently being piloted as part of the Skills for Life Quality Initiative and accredited teacher training at Level 3 in the National Qualifications Framework.

Embedding will expand under the new service arrangements when all prison workshops in which the primary purpose is skills development transfer to LSC lead responsibility.

The Government accepts that the development of accredited training programmes in prison industries workshops has been slow. While these workshops will not transfer to the LSC, the Prison Service is committed to implementing a skills strategy across industries workshops. In the last 12 months Enterprise and Supply Services has been working closely with Heads of Learning and Skills in establishments to broaden the scope of learning and skills provision in industries. There is also a project underway with prisons in the South West to develop a model for increasing the efficiency, effectiveness and strategic development of industries workshops across the area. This project is in its infancy but it is hoped that the model will ultimately be appropriate for full implementation across the Prison Service.

Job-related training

39. Vocational training that does not offer the skills needed in today's job market should not continue. Vocational training should be geared towards the needs of the prisoners, not the historic availability of provision at a given prison. A broader variety of vocational opportunities as well as work opportunities need to be offered that prepare prisoners for employment. (Paragraph 245)

The new Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) will alter significantly the range and nature of vocational training delivered to offenders in custody. It will ensure that the qualifications towards which learning and skills provision leads are ones which employers will recognise and value. A key benefit of the shift of responsibility for planning and funding offender learning and skills to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is that, in future, the provision of education and training in prisons will be incorporated within the LSC annual business cycle. That business cycle is designed to reflect employers' needs at national, sectoral, regional and local level in determining the planning and funding of training programmes.

Looking further ahead, Ministers have already made clear their commitment to develop proposals for a joint Department for Education and Skills, Home Office and Department for Work and Pensions reform programme to build a service that is more effective in improving skills and qualifications and getting more offenders into sustainable employment. Further consideration of the Committee's views will accordingly be taken forward in that context.

40. We fully support the excellent work of the Young Offender Programme, led by National Grid Transco, and recommend that the Government should take steps to enable and encourage many more of these partnership arrangements with employers. (Paragraph 248);

41. As with the Young Offender Programme, led by National Grid Transco, the Committee would like to see more identification of skills shortages within areas local to the prison, and partnerships developed with businesses to meet these skill shortages. (Paragraph 249)

and

42. Working with employers has to be the future of vocational education provision and this has to be driven and funded by the Government. The direct relationship between the private company that is providing the training and the prison, including the prisoners themselves, is of vital importance and needs to be maintained. (Paragraph 251)

The Government agrees that prisoners will be better placed to secure employment on release if the skills they acquire are more closely linked with those needed by employers. We welcome the committee's support of the National Grid Transco Young Offender Programme and its recommendation that steps be taken to enable and encourage more of these partnerships with employers.

The cross-departmental White Paper of March 2005, *Skills: Getting On In Business, Getting On At Work*, emphasises the importance of working closely with employers so that training programmes give learners the skills needed for employability. The Government has committed itself to developing the National Employer Training Programme to support businesses to identify and meet skills needs. Curricula and qualifications are to have a far greater employer input, and the role and influence of Sector Skills Councils and Regional Skills Partnerships is being strengthened. The Prison Service and the National Probation Directorate have produced an Employer Engagement Strategy that aims to co-ordinate such developments within a single strategy for the National Offender Management Service (NOMS).

NOMS, in partnership with Jobcentre Plus, is working with employers to overcome their concerns about employing offenders. Examples of such links already exist and will be developed further as part of NOMS's work with the Learning and Skills Council.

NOMS is also developing strong links with employers and the business sector. These include strategic links with employers in sectors that have significant labour shortages and where prisoners are developing the skills employers in these sectors need. It is developing links through employment-focused resettlement programmes such as Prison Service Plus, which operates in 39 prisons and 2 probation areas, and at establishment level through Heads of Resettlement, Heads of Learning and Skills, and prison education and training providers. Prison Enterprise and Supply Services also have links with businesses that provide work for prisoners. NOMS is working with National Grid Transco at strategic and operational level to develop its work with the gas industry and with employers in other sectors.

Real work—real pay

43. This Committee recommends that the Government considers placing a much larger proportion of short-term prisoners in open prisons so that they can continue their links in the community with a full week of work or education or both. (Paragraph 261)

The Government supports the principle of enabling prisoners to retain links with their communities. The National Offender Management Service is currently piloting Intermittent Custody, based at HMP Kirkham in Lancashire and HMP Morton Hall in Lincolnshire, which is designed to enable offenders to maintain their links with the community in relation to education, employment or caring whilst serving a custodial sentence.

The present open prison population is largely divided between low risk short-term prisoners who have been transferred to open conditions at an early stage of their sentence, and other prisoners coming towards the end of longer determinate or life sentences. Those prisoners engaged in schemes of full-time education, employment or unpaid community work come primarily from the groups of longer-term prisoners who are assessed as suitable for open

conditions. Open prisons dedicate significant resources to delivering good quality employment and education outcomes for these prisoners.

However a short-term sentence does not, of itself, denote suitability for open conditions, nor for the responsibility of maintaining full-time education or employment. Many of those coming into prison on short sentences have on-going problems of substance abuse and offending behaviour issues which render them unsuitable for the less controlled regime of an open prison.

44. The Committee urges the Government to give 'real work, real pay' proposals full consideration as a possible solution to reducing recidivism. (Paragraph 264).

The Government acknowledges the importance, for some prisoners, of real work, real pay proposals. Some 1,500 prisoners in resettlement prisons go out to full-time work and pay each day. Many prison workshops provide realistic working and training opportunities and the Prison Service is supporting the proposed 'real work, real pay', pilot already planned at HMP The Mount, in co-operation with the Howard League. However, as the Committee acknowledges, high pay for work may then be viewed by some as a disincentive for prisoners to attend education.

Where prisons have been able to find suitable work in which to place prisoners at a normal rate of pay, they have encouraged prisoners' understanding of social responsibility by ensuring that these prisoners pay tax and National Insurance as appropriate. Prisons will continue to look for work opportunities that will allow them to pursue such a policy.

45. We would like to see the Government encouraging a great deal more entrepreneurial activity within prisons both in terms of business enterprises to provide real work for prisoners and in terms of forging much closer links with local Further Education Colleges, Universities, and employers. (Paragraph 267).

The Government accepts that partnerships with the private sector are invaluable in providing opportunities for prisoners on release. Developing links with employers is a key part of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) Custody to Work initiative. NOMS has identified a number of sectors that have significant national and regional labour shortages. The sectors that have been targeted are: construction, catering, industrial cleaning, utilities, sports and fitness, driving and distribution. These sectors were identified following consultation with the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), the Employer Services Division of Jobcentre Plus, the Department for Education and Skills and the Sector Skills Councils for these sectors. Funding amounting to some £14 million is invested each year through this initiative to support schemes and projects designed to meet the resettlement needs of prisoners. This includes providing links with housing agencies and employment advisers. NOMS is working to pilot employment projects for offenders with major employers in the retail sector.

The Government acknowledges the value of the National Grid Transco (NGT) approach as it delivers guaranteed jobs for prisoners selected for the scheme. The scheme is business-led and contributes towards meeting the recruitment needs within the gas sector. The Prison Service has also developed a partnership with a large multi-national company that provides quality work experience for prisoners in the production of office furniture. It is hoped to expand the number of prisons involved in this venture and the Prison Service is actively seeking a further major contract with another company later this year.

Significant effort is being invested in sourcing new, quality work to sustain existing workshops while providing increasing numbers of prisoners with the opportunity to seek and gain relevant vocational qualifications and work experience. Looking ahead, engagement with employers will be a significant strand of the work to prepare for publication of Government's strategy for further reducing reoffending through skills and employment.

47. We recommend that pay must be equalised across all activities undertaken in prison with immediate effect. There must be equal pay for education as for all other activities. Workshops that offer tedious, unskilled work should be phased out as they contribute nothing to the employability of a prisoner on release. (Paragraph 280).

The Government does not believe that this proposal is practical at this time.

Pay schemes continue to be a devolved responsibility enabling governors to devise pay schemes which reflect the opportunities for prisoner and regime objects of their establishment.

There are already national standards. Prison Service Order 4460 on Prisoners' Pay sets out the minimum rates of pay which must be paid to prisoners who participate constructively in the regimes of the prison. Chapter 1 of PSO 4460 requires that pay schemes are audited on an annual basis and that there must be no disincentive between pay rates for educational and other employment opportunities such as industries workshops. This also has implications for 'real work, real pay' proposals. See response to recommendation 44.

An increase to pay rates for education would require substantial additional funding. Unless there was an increase in funding to prisons, the increase in pay for education would need to be funded by a decrease in payments to prisoners taking part in other regime activities which is unacceptable.

The Government's response to the Home Affairs Committee indicated that the problem of tedious, unskilled work is being addressed where possible. The implementation of the Prison Industries Review includes measures to enable prisoners to progress through industries and undertake a variety of different tasks. The Prison Service has recently introduced a new performance standard for industries providing a strategic framework within which all industries workshops will operate. The standard echoes the principles of the

sentence planning section of the Offender Assessment System (OASys) and requires establishments to allocate work in accordance with identified needs and objectives, thus targeting work on those who will derive most benefit from it. Simultaneously establishments are required to consider the needs and skills gaps in their local area and reflect those in the range of work opportunities available to prisoners. Even those workshops that offer the simplest tasks can – if targeted at the right prisoners or at the right time of a sentence – offer potential benefits. The Prison Service is working to ensure that all industries workshops provide meaningful activity.

48. We have been impressed by the success of various mentoring programmes run by charitable organisations and urge the Government to look at significantly increasing the role of mentoring in prison education, including supporting existing successful programmes on a national basis. (Paragraph 283)

The Government agrees that mentoring programmes can add value to the learning offer. It has noted the success of the Toe by Toe initiative and the HMYOI Glen Parva 'Study Buddy' initiative, which advertises for volunteers to help others and work toward an accredited mentoring/volunteer award. HMP Ford has also developed a course, validated through the Open College Network (OCN), to train peer support workers. This OCN course enables offenders to claim accreditation for prior achievement if they want to gain further qualifications on release.

During 2004-05, the Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit (OLSU) has funded an evaluation of the Toe by Toe scheme in order to identify its success factors and its potential for mainstreaming within the national *Skills for Life* initiative. The OLSU is currently considering the report's recommendations. The report will be made available to the Shannon Trust as objective evidence of the Toe by Toe scheme's benefits, and to allow the Trust to make better links between the Toe by Toe materials and the national curriculum for adult literacy.

Both the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) are developing approaches to working with voluntary and community sector schemes. We are encouraging organisations to contact LSC and NOMS to help identify how their work can fit into the NOMS and LSC voluntary and community sector strategies. The *Offenders' Learning Journey* requires learning and skills providers to work closely with voluntary organisations to support learners. Voluntary sector organisations will be warmly welcomed as partners in delivery.

Work of charities in prison education

49. We welcome the significant contribution to prison education that is made by the voluntary sector. However, we strongly believe that the Government cannot devolve its responsibility to provide education and training to the voluntary sector. We recommend that the Government undertakes a thorough review of the different charities working in the

prison sector and those that are successful are given national recognition, funding, support, and enter the quality assurance regime. (Paragraph 285)

The contribution of the voluntary and community sector to learning and skills in prisons is recognised and valued. The role of the voluntary sector is however a complementary one to Government-led activity. There is no suggestion that responsibility for the provision of learning and skills should be devolved to voluntary groups. Instead, they are welcomed as partners in delivery for the contribution they make to basic and key skills and to the general enrichment of the curriculum for prisoners and offenders in the community.

The work of voluntary sector organisations was reviewed in 2003 and, following a process of consultation with the sector, the Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit (OLSU) published *Working with the Voluntary and Community Sector in Learning and Skills: the Development of a Strategic Approach*. This showed that there were 286 organisations working in 110 prisons delivering over 700 projects between them, with nearly 400 of these being delivered by arts organisations. Most organisations (76%) were only working in one prison. These organisations offered a wide range of specific skills and their activities provided interesting, challenging and varied experiences, often stimulating the prisoner to reconnect with learning.

The importance of linking charity provision to the quality assurance regime was recognised and *Reviewing Voluntary Sector Activities in Prisons: A Guide for Heads of Learning and Skills and Managers in the Voluntary Sector* was prepared for OLSU by the Charities Evaluation Service and Clinks. This was published in March 2004 and is designed to enable simple and effective monitoring and evaluation of voluntary organisations' activities.

50. The movement of prisoners at existing levels has to stop if the Prison Service is going to provide the stability required to deliver prison education and wider rehabilitation programmes. Without significant changes in this area, reform of prison education will not be effective. (Paragraph 292)

The total estimated number of prisoner movements in 2003-04 was about 100,000, which is around the same as for 2002-03. There are many reasons for these moves. Local prisons hold individuals for local courts, for example, and prisoners are moved once they are sentenced. Transfers may also take place when a prisoner has been re-categorised, as preparation for release or where there are discipline and security issues.

The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) aims to ensure that offenders sentenced to a period in custody are held in establishments which provide the degree of security they require, are suitable to their gender, age and legal status, provide facilities appropriate to their needs including education and training programmes and are near to their homes or (if unsentenced) to the courts dealing with their cases.

Prisons governors are required to consider regime and family contact issues before moving prisoners and, whenever possible, to avoid moving prisoners if it disrupts their participation in an educational course or treatment programme or consideration for parole. However this is not always possible and, if the Prison population continues to rise above projections, the problem of movement is likely to increase in proportion. One of the key intended effects of the new sentences, therefore, is to stop this trend.

A more stable prison population would increase the capacity to improve learning and skills, and other rehabilitation programmes. That is one of the aims of the Government's Offender Management reforms. However, in the short to medium term it will be important to continue to improve learning and skills within the constraints of the custodial setting, and the operational pressures on prisons.

As offender management is developed in NOMS there will be increasingly well structured systems for assessing, recording and responding to individual offenders' needs. This will ease the difficulties that arise when there have to be transfers between prisons. Regional Offender Managers will ensure that the Offenders' Learning and Skills Service – which is also being led at regional level – meshes into the broader offender management process. When offenders are transferred they will have access to provision from the same overall package. This will make the learning and skills progress offenders make immediately before they are transferred more portable. It will also make the transfer of Individual Learning Plans more straightforward.

Short sentences

51. It is clear that reforms to prison education cannot take place in isolation from wider reforms including addressing the existing sentencing policy in relation to short-term prisoners. The Government needs to ask the fundamental question of why the Courts are sending these people to prison for such a short period and what is being achieved by doing so. (Paragraph 300)

The Government is committed to reducing the number of ineffective short custodial prison sentences. Prison is the right place for violent, dangerous and seriously persistent offenders. However, for other offenders, an intensive community sentence which addresses offending needs and enables the individual to pay back to the community, while maintaining family and employment links, can be more cost-effective in preventing offending and cutting crime than a short custodial sentence.

That is why the new sentencing framework in the Criminal Justice Act 2003 expands the range of tools available to the court:

- The new community order enables the sentencer to design a sentence to match the offence and offender. This can include a range of interventions from unpaid work to drug treatment. Tagging and electronic tracking ensure a tough and intensive alternative to custody.

- The new suspended sentence, Custody Minus, enables the court, where an offender has crossed the 'custody threshold' to suspend the prison sentence on condition that the offender undertakes a programme of interventions in the community. Breach of the condition will usually result in immediate activation of the prison sentence.

Courts will be able to tailor these sentences to individual offenders who might otherwise have received short prison sentences.

The Sentencing Guidelines Council has published (on 16 December 2004) its guidelines on the new Act. This provides comprehensive and pragmatic guidance to sentencers on use of the new sentences, and will help ensure effective targeting of resources.

The establishment of the National Offender Management Service in 2004, by providing for the first time a single person responsible for the end-to-end delivery of the sentence, will underpin the successful implementation of these new sentences in a way which promotes rehabilitation and prevents reoffending.

52. We believe that there should be a capital element to prison education funding, and that a significant investment needs to be made to improve facilities across the prison estate. (Paragraph 303)

The Government accepts that the quality of facilities available for training varies across the prison estate, and has made significant investment to improve facilities.

Through the Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit's Capital Modernisation Fund Project (*Prisoners – From Learning to Earning*) £7.36 million was invested to provide new, fully equipped, classrooms adjacent to workshops. A further £4.46 million was spent upgrading workshop facilities and equipment with the specific intention of supporting Level 2 training and making it more relevant to employers' needs. The project has enabled the upgrading of 119 vocational training programmes and the building of 77 new classrooms to support vocational skills between 2002-04. In total, the Government has already invested £20 million in Capital Modernisation Fund money on providing better facilities.

In 2004-05, a further £5 million was made available as capital. This has been spent on innovations fund activities, library connectivity and equipment in prisons and probation areas in development regions.

53. We must keep in mind the fact that a prison is a prison and not a secure learning centre. Nevertheless, an investment in staff education and development would pay dividends to a Prison Service with chronic staffing problems, particularly in terms of developing a more positive attitude towards the role that education has to play in prisons. (Paragraph 310)

The Government agrees with the Committee on the importance of order and discipline in a prison context. The National Offender Management Service agrees

that investment in staff education is valuable and would further agree that better links between prison education and Prison Officer training will support the development of a positive learning culture for staff and offenders alike.

For this reason, the Prison Service's Training and Development Group is producing a new strategy which will focus on developing a culture of learning. Through the production of a Learning and Leadership Strategy, the Prison Service expects to be able to create an adult centred learning environment.

The Prison Service encourages all members of staff to develop and has a dedicated staff training function which will invest £18 million this year to fund centrally delivered training initiatives. Based on previous years' delivery, this should support delivery of 345,000 days of training over the year, which equates to 7.5 days per member of staff.

The Prison Service has also received significant new investment through the creation of Heads of Learning and Skills, who are responsible for producing a better integration of education into the management of the prison.

54. The initial training period of 8 weeks for Prison Officers is totally inadequate. The Government must encourage the development of Prison Officers if prison staff are to be expected to encourage the development of prisoners. The initial training period must be significantly increased to a level that reflects an appropriate investment to enable Prison Officers to play a key role in the education and training of prisoners. Furthermore, Prison Officers should have an equivalent entitlement to training and development once they are in post. (Paragraph 329)

The Committee paints an unduly bleak picture of Prison Officer working conditions. For example, in paragraph 314 it is suggested that 60% of officers joining the Prison Service between 2000 and 2003 left the service within two years. We do not recognise that statistic: the most recent figures show that only 10.1% of officers resign from the Prison Service within two years of being recruited.

The Prison Officer Entry Level Training (POELT) programme has recently been rewritten. The initial course has reduced in length to 8 weeks, but there is a greater emphasis on subsequent work-based learning. Entry level training is just that: the POELT course is only intended to provide new staff with a foundation level of training in core skill areas, communicating the underpinning theory of the job. It is not intended for new members of staff to cover all areas of their role within an initial period of foundation training.

Prison Officers remain on probation for their first year in post and during this period their learning is expected to continue in the workplace. Through the use of reflective journals and completion of the National Vocational Qualification in Custodial Care, officers' training continues throughout their probationary period. Through ongoing and end-of-course assessment, the Prison Service ensures that well trained and competent officers are returned to establishments to complete their probation and continue their training.

Once in post, all officers are able to access training and development opportunities through their development plans, which are part of the performance management process. All officers have opportunities to attend the courses identified on their personal development plans.

Barriers to education

55. The barriers to prison education that exist within the regime itself, including overcrowding, churn, staffing shortages, and staff attitudes to education, cannot be overcome by the DfES alone. These are complex and long-established barriers that need tackling from within the Prison Service itself if the provision of prison education and training is to be significantly improved. The Government should be aiming to develop a culture within prisons in which education and skills are a priority. The Home Office must take the lead in the large scale reform that is necessary to remove these barriers, and we encourage them to be bold in the reform of prisons and probation that is reportedly taking place at present. (Paragraph 332)

The Government agrees that further progress in improving offender learning and skills cannot be the concern of the Department for Education and Skills alone. Nor is it. This is an area of strong partnership working between the DfES and the Home Office, and increasingly the Department for Work and Pensions, supported by close working arrangements between the relevant delivery organisations, notably the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and Jobcentre Plus.

The Government is fully committed to developing a culture within prisons in which education and skills are a priority. The record of increasing investment and achievement in prisons, together with the appointment of Heads of Learning and Skills across the prison estate, provides a strong platform for further development. The National Offender Management Service will introduce a new way of working with offenders systematically throughout their sentence, both in custody and the community. Sentence plans will be based on consistent identification of need and risk. Resources will be targeted at reducing the risk of reoffending by providing the right interventions in a planned system. The new arrangements for the provision of an integrated learning and skills service through the Learning and Skills Council will go with the grain of NOMS' overall management of offenders.

There are, of course, practical constraints on the provision of education in secure establishments that will always need to be addressed. But the National Offender Management Service is committed to working with providers and the LSC to ensure that problems are kept to a minimum. NOMS acknowledges the particular issues arising from overcrowding and churn. They will be addressed in the context of NOMS' work to rebalance sentencing, stabilise the prison population and modernise the estate.



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