Report and Summary of the outputs from a one-day national conference hosted by the School of Education and Social Science at the University of Central Lancashire
December 2nd, 2011

'Inside out: what are the challenges to the effective assessment of learning and skills provision in HM Prisons and Youth Offending Institutions'?

A Knowledge Transfer Project

Contents

Executive Summary

The delegates worked in groups to synthesise some of the most significant issues arising from the discussions and questions and answers that arose during the speakers' presentations. The groups were asked to produce short recommendations/amendments that they felt were important to bring to the attention of policy makers, in order to inform the government's future policy making strategy around, generally, prisoners' education and, specifically, learning and skills provision in HM prisons and Youth Offending Institutions.

1. Clusters and localism

1.1 Clusters and the "localism" agenda
"Will the cluster model" (Hayes Review) support the localism agenda"?

Cluster groups are seen as problematic, because they appear to be based solely on geographic location. The Observation Classification and Allocation (OCA) function focuses on placing prisoners where there is space. This results in mis-matching of vulnerable prisoners to the appropriate prison. Often, a prison that is identified according to OCA criteria does not have the capacity to support prisoners who have very specific welfare needs. The curriculum offer needs to be adjusted to support prisoners' progression through the clusters.

1.2. Clusters working towards employment opportunities; measuring success
Prisoners' learning journeys: there is room for improvement to the effectiveness of implementing the learning journey from local prisons to open conditions. Qualifications should be relevant to the local job market. Policy should support rhetoric. The government and NHS should make it a policy to employ ex-offenders.

1.3. The challenges of localism in meeting the needs of the offender population
Target setting: there should be shared objectives for all partners involved, to avoid individual key performance targets being set in isolation, which may not be consistent with the needs the "end clients".

Policies into practice: existing policies should be put into practice, with specific regard to the main recommendations of the Corston Report.

2. "Plan 48"

The first 48 hours after release can be the time when ex-offenders are most likely to re-offend because there is no support for:

a) Housing, such as rent paid (for a fixed term) for prisoners whose sentences were less than 6 months induration.
b) Ring fence the funding for learning and skills. Heads of Learning and Skills should be employed by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills *and then be deployed into prisons.*

3. Procedures and practice

a) The disruption to prisoners' education by moving them between prisons (despite cluster links) results in educational failure.
b) It is crucial to involve the probation services in any discussion about what happens to prisoners on release.

4. Recommendations for an effective "through the gate" policy

"A holistic data management system (ICT) is required to provide effective "through the gate resettlement".

a) Professionals interrupt offenders' learning journeys through "silo" working.
b) Too many professionals are involved in the daily management of the offender (YOT, Mentors, Personal Officers, CIAS etc)...
c) All tracking records should be reviewed to ensure better sharing of information across prisons and their partners*.
d) NOMS should ensure that the systems developed and sold within the UK prisons system are accessible to all key partners.

5. Recommendations for a needs analysis and standardisation of assessment across the different institutions within the prison system

a) Individual needs assessments should be standard practice for offenders on entry to prison.
b) Education provision, qualifications and assessments, should be standardised across all prisons, which will create a final, universal qualification*.

6. Individualised learning support

a) Systems surrounding, and provision of learning and skills, should reflect local need. Therefore, prisons should be conceived in relation to their (local) communities, with people outside involved directly with those inside (staff and prisoners).
b) Systems are currently governed by time out of cell in "purposeful activity", which has no useful outcome in terms of getting into work.
c) Prisoners should be given a "passport" that is a learning record, (the equivalent to a medical record).
d) Learning "offers" in prisons are not diverse enough; they are too fractured and provide too few learning opportunities for prisoners to work with businesses in the community.

<u>Outputs:</u> formal recommendations for policy change

For consideration by the Ministry of Justice and the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills

Recommendations are listed in order of significance, as voted by delegates

1. **Will the "cluster" model (as recommended in the Hayes Review) support the localism agenda?**

   (14 priority votes)

The cluster group [issue] is seen as "highly problematic" because it is seemingly based only on geography. How will the cluster groups support the localism agenda?

Observation, Classification and Allocation – The OCA function must allocate appropriately; it is currently focused mainly on where there is a space for prisoners. (OCA units determine the categorisation and allocation of prisoners after sentencing (Prison Service Order No. 0900 Categorisation and Allocation). The complex issues associated with the fact that many offenders cannot be moved on; need to be recognised fully. For example, vulnerable prisoners are held at HMP XXXX, which is a Category C prison. This mis-match occurs because the nearest Category D establishment (for vulnerable prisoners who can be reasonably trusted not to try to escape from an open prison), cannot accommodate such prisoners. This suggests a "grey" area of prison categorisation, in which a particular set of prisoners' needs is not met.

Prisoners' Learning - There needs to be sharper clarity on OCA issues. A prisoner's learning journey should not be interrupted by untimely or inappropriate re-allocation. Learning and skills provision needs to be recognised across (HMP) establishments as being a fundamental key to reducing re-offending and be given the relevant priority. The curriculum offer needs to be adjusted to support progression through the cluster. NOMS (National Offender Management System) infrastructure needs to be adjusted accordingly to support this cluster arrangement.

The Virtual Campus - The perception of the Virtual Campus (VC) is that it will be a major instrument in supporting the localism agenda but, at present, there are insufficient resources to accommodate this vision. VC would be a useful tool for the cluster arrangement, but currently it is far from being effectively used.

Transfer of prisoner information – The transfer of information about prisoners' achievements and progress is problematic. Information sharing protocols need to be identified and agreed in order to support commissioning and partnership arrangements.

Non OLASS (Offender Learning and Skills Service) and OLASS provision – These need to have greater links to support learners throughout their learning journey in a coherent way.

2. Clusters working; employment; measuring success
(12 priority votes)

The key issues arising from discussion in this group are listed in bullet format.
 a) **Learning Journey** - There is a need to improve the effectiveness of implementing the offender learning journey from local prisons to open conditions, and the monitoring thereof.
 b) **Relevance of qualifications to local job market** - Prisons need to ensure that qualifications, skills and courses are all relevant to the local job market (for prisoners) and that work experience is provided.
 c) **Policy should support rhetoric -** The government and NHS should lead by example and make it a policy to employ ex-offenders. Potential employers need to be actively encouraged/incentivised to employ ex-offenders.

3. The challenges of localism/cluster working in relation to meeting the needs of the offender population
(11 priority votes)

 3.1. **The process of target setting -** There should be shared objectives for all partners involved with individual target setting, to ensure that all partners are working to the same goals. The time management governing this process should address the goal of *all partners involved*, not individual key performance targets in isolation, (which may contradict or be in opposition to the needs of the end client).

 3.2. **Policies into practice** - Attention should be given to putting the existing policies into practice, for example the Corston Report:

a) "…need for a radical new approach, treating women both holistically and individually – a woman-centred approach";

b) "….need for a "champion" to ensure that womens needs are properly recognised and met";

c) "….need for an integrated approach across government demonstrated by the creation of an Inter-Departmental Ministerial Group for women who offend or are at risk of offending….".

d) **Work providers -** There should be one work provider to specialise in offender needs, in order to ensure the seamless transfer from custody to the community.

4. "Plan 48"

(10 priority votes)

It is considered amongst the professionals that the first 48 hours of release from prison is the time in which the person/ex-offender is most likely to re-offend, based on the lack of the following for all prisoners:

a) Housing – rent is paid if sentenced to less than 6 months to allow accommodation on release;

b) Debt advisors in all establishments;

c) Peer mentors – 3 months post sentence.

4.1. **Ring fence funding for learning and skills –** This would be achieved by ring fencing relevant funding, and the direct employment of Heads of Learning and Skills (HoLS) by the Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS). This would improve offender learning by preventing dilution of the HoLs role, which occurs when other tasks are imposed on them, such as managing kitchens and gardens. They should have the space to concentrate on the task in hand of leading Learning and Skills provision, rather than managing the facility.

4.2. **Curriculum delivery -** In order to support higher educational achievement, the decision about the curriculum should be left with the teaching professionals.

5. Procedures and practice

(7 priority votes)

Position statement:

❖

"The disruption of continuing education, due to learners moving from prison to prison mid-course (despite cluster links in place) results in educational failure, low teacher morale and alienation from learning".

a) "The recognition that school aged offenders will incur greater levels of support for their learning, inevitably leads to disruption/ educational failure".

b) "It is crucial to involve the probation service in any discussion about what happens to prisoners on release". This strand of discussion was missing from the presentations in the earlier part of the conference.

Recommendations to address these issues:

a) There should be fully qualified teachers in prisons and youth offender custodial provisions.

b) There should be linked-up working/systems from court to the end of a prisoner's sentence.

c) Students in prison should have the same rights to continuing education as other students, such as not being removed abruptly from a course due to prison transfer.

d) To improve their general morale, women should be imprisoned close to their family, to take account of the risk of their self-harming, which may result from their stress at being a long distance away. This will have a negative impact on their learning, motivation and educational achievement.

e) There should be a higher profile for the crucial work of the probation service and Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) in sentence planning and the establishment of community links. This will help to minimise the risk of re-offending.

6. Effective "through the gate" policy

(6 priority votes)

<u>A holistic data management programme (ICT) is required to provide effective "Through the Gate" resettlement</u>

6.1. **Problem:**
   a) There is, currently, ineffective "through care" delivery service within our prisons.
   b) Professionals currently interrupt offenders' learning journeys through "silo" working; for example, constraints caused by the lack of shared information and no access for some groups to the prison ICT systems such as: CATS/p-Nomis/Vasco/LRS.
   c) Too many professionals are involved in the daily management of the offenders, for example: YOTS/Mentor/Personal officers/CIAS etc.

6.2. **Solution:**
   a) "A single electronic tracking record that is…accessible by all professional parties";
   b) A clear protocol for the acknowledgement of confidentiality of information, signed and agreed by all parties.

6.3. **Recommendation:**
   a) We advise that all current tracking records are reviewed to ensure better use of shared information across the prison and partners;
   b) NOMS to ensure that systems developed and sold within the UK prisons system are accessible for sharing by and with key partners.

Further comments from delegates.

❖ ***Consider that individual YOTs/Probation Services may already have this information; therefore it is probably a matter of collating it.***

7. **A needs analysis and standardisation of assessment across the prison system, irrespective of the type of institution**

(5 priority votes)

<u>Recommendations</u>

a) The group recommends an individual needs assessment is carried out on each offender on entry to the institution. This assessment should be used to inform the wider context, of the needs of the institution as a whole. This will allow for provision to be targeted at a more strategic level, at which the focus will be on the management of resources for each institution nationally. This will permit a national picture of the prison population to be established, which reflects the changing level and distribution of need over time.

b) The group also recommends the standardisation of education provision within and across prisons. This will allow prisoners, who transfer to other prisons, to continue their studies without disruption to their levels of achievement. As a consequence, prisoners will leave at the end of their sentence with a "standard" qualification from the many that are nationally available. This would reflect provision in schools nationally.

8. Individualised learning support

Discussion points:

    a) **Entry to and discharge from prison.**
    b) **Progression through the "right plan with the right support" will create an effective teaching pathway.**
    c) **An end to "demonising" offenders: prisoners are "people like us".**

(2 priority votes)

8.1. **Recommendations**
  a) **Rationale for prison sentences** – Prisons should be conceived in relation to their (local) communities, with people outside involved directly with those inside (staff and prisoners). Those on the outside will be the main points of contact and will provide supportive relationships when prisoners are discharged.
  b) **Role of Prison governors** – Governors have a responsibility to be Community Leaders. have a responsibility to be community leaders. It is suggested that job descriptions incorporate this role, so that it supports an established, sustainable pathway for ex-prisoners to return to the community.

c) **Systems –** Prisoners' 'time out of cell' is currently governed by the measurement of 'purposeful activity'. On its own, this serves no useful purpose in terms of getting prisoners into work. ("The amount of time that prisoners are able to spend out of their cells is a key determinant of the overall health of a prison". (HM Inspectorate of Prisons 2007 p. 5).[1] This aspect of provision tends to be driven by a measurable, evidence-based agenda which does not always result in educational outputs. ("A very small number of prisoners actually get educated").

d) **Short sentences -** Could there be a rationalisation of sentence provision for these prisoners, such as community prisons or a "local" prison?

e) **Prisoners should be given a "passport"** – This would constitute a learning record, equivalent to a medical record.

f) *Learning and skills, health, mentoring and care* - For prisoners, every aspect should be organised on a multi-disciplinary basis.

g) **There are several different and excellent learning programmes in existence –** For example, Adult Directions and LearnDirect packages. These could be used more often to provide prisoners with "instant" qualifications.

Afterword

Prisoners are students, however:

i. They do not know what is available to them on the outside.

ii. Very often, prisoners have no family or network of people to support them when they leave prison.

iii. Prisoners behave the way they do (re-offending, disruptive, finding it difficult to settle, lack of focus), because these are symptoms of the strategies they learned to survive "when inside".

iv. When they are due to be released, too many prisoners are planning the crime they will commit in order to get back inside, which they regard as their "safety blanket".

Format of Conference

Speaker presentations

Keynote Speech - the Rt Hon Lisa Nandy, MP for Wigan.

Q&A session with Richard Ward - Department of Business, Innovation and Skills

Dr Anita Wilson - Prison Ethnographer. "Give a little – expect a lot".

Workshops: Group discussions and recommendations for policy change

---

[1] HM Inspectorate of Prisons 2007 *Time out of Cell. A short thematic review.* London: HMI Prisons.