



Leading learning and skills

# Developing the Offenders' Learning and Skills Service: The Prospectus

September 2007

## Executive Summary

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has a single goal: to improve the skills of England's young people and adults to ensure we have a competitive, world-class workforce.

Our task within the OLASS is to bring together the latest thinking and initiatives concerning offenders, both those in custody and serving sentences in the community, and to combine these with the LSC's drive to link learning and skills as closely as possible to sustained employment and continuing employability.

This Prospectus covers proposals relating to all offenders in custody in English public sector prisons and to those under supervision in the community, including young people, and recognises the particular needs of this group. The Prospectus therefore aligns itself with the comments and actions contained in the section on young people in *Reducing Re-offending through Skills and Employment: Next steps* (DfES, 2006) and the principles within *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003).

The proposals contained in this Prospectus represent the LSC's response to the challenge of *Next Steps*. These proposals are provided in greater detail later in this document, setting out the way forward for OLASS.

Our proposals for developing the Offenders' Learning and Skills Service are set out within four broad objectives, as follows:

- developing and reforming the way in which learning provision for offenders **in custody** is planned, organised, delivered and funded. We will work with NOMS and other commissioners to move away from historical arrangements by prioritising the availability and range based on personalised learner and employer need. The principal focus will be on skills for employment and employability
- widening the scope, range and availability of learning provision for offenders **in the community**
- for **all offenders**, ensuring that the learning offer is explicitly linked and aligned to other services and interventions, in particular by developing strong joint commissioning arrangements with NOMS commissioners

- by supporting improvements in the quality of provision, ensuring that **all offenders** are able to benefit from existing provision and developments within the wider post-16 sector

In order to assess the feasibility of these objectives, we intend to commission criminal justice area reviews (CJARs) in conjunction with NOMS and other commissioners. Criminal Justice Area Reviews will provide in-depth details of the current landscape which will inform how and where our priorities can be delivered.

Prioritisation and targeting key groups and provision will lead to a re-distribution of resources. We are conscious that this cannot be undertaken in isolation, and we will work with our fellow commissioners and other key stakeholders and partners to achieve our agreed priorities.

The LSC's budget for provision for the population as a whole is insufficient to meet the scale of the demand for the entire population for all types of learning. The LSC must therefore prioritise the allocation of funds available to it. It does this by ascribing eligibility and priority to programmes and individual learners, in line with the targets and priorities set for it by ministers.

The Prospectus proposes that the OLASS system for funding learning and skills for offenders should be no different. Learning and skills (particularly when linked to stable employment) have been identified as a key contributory factor in the reduction of re-offending. We are planning further research in this area to help us understand exactly how the management and delivery of learning and skills might be undertaken to make the greatest contribution to the reduction of re-offending.

The budget available to the LSC for the provision of learning and skills to offenders in custody and in the community cannot meet the full demand from a sector of the population with poor levels of achievement. Once again, the LSC must prioritise.

To be eligible for funding, learning and skills activities must derive from the assessed needs of the individual **and** form part of an individual learning plan (ILP) (see *The Offender's Learning Journey*, SIOU, 2004). Learning and skills activities should focus on beginning and advancing an offender's learning journey. Similar activities delivered inappropriately and ad hoc, where the primary purpose is to occupy offenders' time will not attract LSC funding.

The targeting process will include consideration for each offender of the length of sentence and therefore availability for access to education. It will also consider each individual's readiness to learn

In addition OLASS is happy to accept the recommendation for learning and skills for women offenders in the Corston report that:

*Life skills should be given a much higher priority within the education, training and employment pathway and women must be individually assessed to be sure that their needs are met.*

Corston, 2007, Chapter 4, p. 48

The proposals will mean that:

- resources for learning and skills will be targeted according to priority, and discussions with commissioners will need to take place as to how to best undertake and respond to these priorities
- establishments must get approval from the LSC or relevant SSC before offering vocational provision, as well as relevant awarding body approval – provision in the community will already go through such a process
- arrangements for initial and diagnostic assessments and IAG will need to be differentiated to suit different curriculum offers (set out in full in Annex B) and sentence lengths
- the curriculum will be widely publicised to enable easy links with local providers. Ongoing access in the community will be an important determinant when considering particular offender curriculum areas.

### **Our intentions are as follows...**

- to develop a sound analysis of current provision as the basis for a strategic approach to further developments in line with our stated priorities and that are aligned to other commissioned services
- to introduce a mixed demand- and plan-led funding system for offender learning and skills
- to strive to meet the needs of learners not only by reforms to the learning experience itself but *to the system* that provides the context for offender learning and skills
- to work with employers to ensure that by working with ex-offenders they can have access to a pool of appropriately trained prospective employees
- to ensure that the provision on offer to offenders meets the LSC's priorities
- to prioritise the range, sequencing and availability of learning for offenders in custody, focusing on employability and employment
- to ensure that offender learning is embedded within *Pursuing Excellence: The national Improvement Strategy for the FE system* (Quality Improvement Agency (QIA), 2007)
- to commission independent research on the links between learning and skills, sustainable employment and reduction in re-offending
- to acknowledge through a revised funding approach the need by many offenders for additional learning support
- to consolidate our relationship with providers and to consider, as the sector matures, the possibility of a different relationship with them in the future
- to ensure maximum engagement by offender learning providers with QIA support programmes to create an environment among providers in which there is a constant process of self-assessment and commitment to higher standards and to ensure that, ultimately, only high quality provision shall continue to be funded

- to facilitate and make available the full range of post-16 provision for offenders in the community, and that, where specific niche provision is required, to commission this locally.

Our purpose in publishing this Prospectus is to share our plans for the future with the widest possible constituency – colleagues within the criminal justice sector, providers, the wider FE system and colleagues across the LSC. We would like response back no later than 26 October 2007. Having considered your feedback, in early 2008 we will publish a technical document which will clarify arrangements for the implementation of the proposals set out here.