

# The prison curriculum in England

A review for the Offenders Learning and Skills Unit

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for the Learning and Skills Development Agency

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## Abbreviations

ABSSU	Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit
ALI	Adult Learning Inspectorate
BSA	Basic Skills Agency
BICS	British Institute of Cleaning Science
CITB	Construction Industry Training Board
CLAIT	Computer Literacy and Information Technology
CSLA	Community Sports Leadership Award
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
FE	Further Education
GNVQ	General National Vocational Qualification
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IEP	Incentives and Earned Privileges. A reward system in prisons that encourages compliance with work, good behaviour, etc
ILP	Individual Learning Plan
KPT	Key Performance Target
LSA	Learning Support Assistant
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
LSDA	Learning and Skills Development Agency
Nacro	An independent voluntary organisation working to prevent crime. Formerly known as the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders
NOMS	National Offender Management Service
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OCN	Open College Network
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
OLSU	Offenders Learning and Skills Unit
OU	Open University

PLSU	Prisoners Learning and Skills Unit (replaced by the OLSU)
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
RDA	Regional Development Agency
SEU	Social Exclusion Unit
YJB	Youth Justice Board
YOI	Young Offender Institution

## Summary and recommendations

This review was commissioned by the Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit (OLSU) and prepared by the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA). The aim was to provide a preliminary overview of the curriculum on offer to both young and adult offenders in Young Offender Institutions and in prisons in England and to assist OLSU staff in identifying strengths, weaknesses and scope for improvement.

The report is intended primarily for an audience of OLSU staff and those working in the prison education sector. It may also interest a wider audience, including staff in the learning and skills sector.

We have used the term 'Skills for Life' in preference to 'basic skills' to refer to adult literacy, language and numeracy (except when quoting reports that use the term 'basic skills'). *Skills for Life* is the title of the government's strategy to help adults improve their literacy, language and numeracy skills.

### Main findings

1. Several recent reports, highlighted in the Introduction to the review, have identified systemic problems relating to the delivery of education and training and the role played by education and training in prisons.
2. The widespread criticism is that the core curriculum and the KPT system may have the unintended consequences of limiting the ability of the curriculum to engage prisoners and meet their needs.
3. The demanding reform agenda of the Youth Justice Board has prioritised the learning needs of juveniles set out in the National Specification for Learning and Skills. Unfortunately this is not replicated for young offenders aged 18-20.
4. Waiting lists continue to exist for education, work and training places, especially in institutions where the education department is popular.
5. There are particular development needs in the female estate where prisoners tend to have low educational achievement and little or no work experience. The breadth of the curriculum offer in some women's prisons, particularly the work-based offer, is considerably narrower than in most male institutions.
6. Prison transfers can interrupt prisoners' education and training. In many cases evidence of learning is not transferred with the learner. This lack of curriculum continuity means prisoners are unable to continue with learning programmes on transfer.
7. Though there were some examples of good practice in initial assessment, the assessment system in most prisons is not yet adequate for identifying and supporting the needs of learners.
8. Good practice and successful initiatives are not yet being effectively shared between prisons.
9. The current curriculum offer in most establishments lacks opportunities for prisoners to progress beyond Level 2.
10. Provision for ESOL learners is very uneven: some establishments provide little or no support for learners while others are working collaboratively to improve delivery. Prisons will need access to the new ESOL assessment materials being funded by ABSSU.
11. Prison education departments are often hampered by high staff turnover and difficulties in recruiting appropriately qualified and experienced staff. This may be attributable to various factors such as lower pay, a challenging environment and less



job security than that experienced by many FE teachers working elsewhere in the sector.

12. There is currently insufficient dedicated training for prison education and training staff, despite the particular demands faced by those who teach in prisons.
13. The vocational offer in prisons is often out of touch with current labour market trends, thus weakening attempts to improve prisoners' employability skills.
14. Prisoners may choose menial work rather than education and vocational training because it usually pays more. The results of the current government working group on incentives need to be disseminated widely.
15. For prisoners on short sentences there is a mismatch between the time required for training which leads to qualifications and the length of their sentences.
16. Prisoners often have little or no access to appropriate accreditation for vocational courses.

## **Recommendations**

At this time of significant reform in the system, there is the opportunity for a step change in the coherence and quality of the provision offered. Of particular importance are:

- the establishment of Heads of Learning and Skills posts in all prisons, Young Offender Institutions and the juvenile estate
- the introduction of a radical new approach to offender management in the shape of the new National Offender Management Service (NOMS).

### **1. Curriculum development and monitoring**

The current core curriculum and Key Performance Targets need to be reviewed and guidelines developed on curriculum design, entitlement and delivery. Curriculum development in prisons should be informed by a number of key principles. These should:

- reflect the needs of learners, taking into account the dynamic nature of the prison population (in terms of the natural turnover of prisoners), trends in society, and more radical strategies such as the re-rolling of prisons
- underpin effective resettlement strategies by providing well-informed and supported progression to opportunities in education, training and employment within the community
- provide the support that learners need to develop their language, literacy and numeracy skills as a continuing priority for all learners who are assessed as below Level 2 of the National Qualifications Framework in these areas. Innovative methods of delivery should help ensure that all those in need of Skills for Life support receive it
- provide a clear ladder of progression beyond Level 2 for those learners able to progress, as well as those entering the system above these levels. Skills for Life provision should not be at the expense of this ladder of progression
- exploit the opportunities arising from the proposed merger of education and dedicated vocational training departments across the Prison Service by providing both vocational and general education routes where learners can access elements of each through a more flexible system. This should allow prisoners to access a learning 'pathway' incorporating both the 'academic' or general education curriculum and the vocational curriculum.

To monitor the range and quality of the curriculum, a National Curriculum Development Forum could be set up, perhaps as a sub-group of the OLSU. The role of the Forum would be to:

- provide an ongoing opportunity to monitor the range and quality of the curriculum at local and national levels
- enable learning providers and those delivering education and training to share their expertise.

The forum could consist of Heads of Learning and Skills, Education Managers and tutors as well as representatives of awarding bodies, OLSU and others involved in the development of learning programmes.

We note that it is intended to take up and develop a number of these points as part of three new regional prototype projects for seamless management of offenders beginning in the summer of 2004.

## **2. Curriculum planning based on labour market trends**

Curriculum planning should be based on the latest labour market trends. Making use of the intelligence capacities of local LSCs and RDAs, it should have a clear focus on:

- emergent labour market sectors and occupations
- attitudes of employers to employing ex-offenders
- up-to-date information about appropriate skills development strategies.

A selected number of prisons, including institutions for women, should be invited to take part in a pilot project to redevelop their vocational provision based on labour market intelligence.

We note that establishments' quality improvement groups, self-assessment reports and development plans are already required to address the relevance of vocational training in the light of labour market information.

## **3. Credit-based learning in prison education and training**

Current national initiatives relating to Credit Frameworks offer an excellent opportunity to stimulate curriculum development in prisons. A Credit Framework for qualifications would:

- enable prisoners to 'bank' partial achievements of qualifications, knowing that they will be recorded as part of their achievement profile and will have a transferable value
- encourage tutors to register learners for qualifications even though they do not anticipate they will be completed in custody
- form the basis of a system for recording the achievements of each prisoner moving within the system and from custody to community.

## **4. Support for Skills for Life delivery in prisons**

A national initiative to support improvements in the delivery of Skills for Life provision should be undertaken to:

- support the development of more effective provision and delivery and help ensure access for all prisoners in need of Skills for Life support
- help to identify the staff development needs for integrating Skills for Life delivery across the curriculum
- address the needs of ESOL learners across the prison curriculum, many of whom are traumatised, receive insufficient support and have limited opportunities for progression
- help ensure that the Prison Service is taking full advantage of the national *Skills for Life* and *Success for All* initiatives
- ensure that there is no unnecessary trade-off between Skills for Life subjects and curriculum

breadth or balance and support the embedding of literacy, language and numeracy into vocational training.

By integrating literacy, language and numeracy development into learning and skills across the curriculum and moving away from a discrete delivery model, it may be possible to release resources for curriculum development in the longer term. In the short to medium term, however, specialist Skills for Life staff may be needed to support mainstream teachers who are not yet equipped to deliver Skills for Life.

#### **5. A review of prisoner remuneration systems across the prison service**

To confront the negative effects of payment systems in prisons on the development of a curriculum available to all prisoners, there is a need for a review of remuneration systems. As some prisons have moved to parity of pay between education and work, the review should:

- identify the impact of moving towards parity
- inform the emerging debate about bonus payments and rewarding educational achievement.

At the same time, the findings of the current Government working group on incentives should be disseminated widely.

# 1 Introduction

- 1.1. This review was commissioned by the Offenders Learning and Skills Unit (OLSU) and prepared by Michael Liggins, Engage Education, for the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA). The aim was to provide a preliminary overview of the curriculum on offer to both young and adult offenders in Young Offender Institutions and in prisons in England and to assist OLSU staff in identifying strengths, weaknesses and scope for improvement.

## **Aims and objectives**

- 1.2 The study was conducted against the background of recent and ongoing changes in the way that learning in prisons is organised and in related agency roles and responsibilities. Specific objectives were to:

- provide a holistic view of the curriculum, dealing not only with the nature of courses on offer but also with the environment in which they are delivered
- comment on factors that influence the successful delivery of education in prisons, including aspects of the prison regime
- identify the key concerns of prison governors, prison heads of learning and skills, education managers, learning providers contracting with prisons, and prisoners themselves
- identify aspects of practice that are judged to be helpful and merit wider dissemination
- draw out common themes and make recommendations for improvement.

- 1.3 The review was based mainly on an analysis of the literature, supplemented by a limited consultation exercise using focus groups and interviews. The sources used were:

- 103 reports of prison inspections conducted during the past four years and 12 additional key publications
- prisoner focus-group discussions in three prisons
- interviews with one Director of Prisons, three prison Heads of Learning and Skills, a contract holder and an ALI Inspector
- additional information from key websites.

- 1.4 The report is intended primarily for an audience of OLSU staff and those working in the prison education sector. It may also interest a wider audience, including staff in the learning and skills sector seeking to develop flexible approaches to the curriculum for further education and work-based learning.

## **Key themes**

- 1.5 The literature review, focus groups and prison interviews provided a broad picture of how prison governors, education managers, contractors and, most importantly, prisoners feel education is working in prisons. A pattern of common issues emerged. These related not only to prison education specifically, but also (and more often) to wider aspects of education and training in a prison environment. Thus, it is important

to view the prisons as whole entities, rather than focusing purely on the education departments, as the regime impacts greatly on Skills for Life provision. Therefore, in this report the education of offenders will be viewed holistically, recognising the need for improvements in several areas of the secure establishments.

- 1.6 Four reports offer a helpful starting point in understanding the main issues. A brief summary of their main themes follows; these are discussed in greater depth in subsequent sections.
- 1.7 The recent OFSTED report, *Literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages: a survey of current practice in post-16 and adult provision* (September 2003), which commented on 16 inspected prisons as well as colleges and work providers, stated that:
- there is no continuity of education
  - there is very little evidence of co-operation and links between education and training in the secure sector
  - there are too few literacy and numeracy classes on the timetable, and not many opportunities to progress from a Level 2 qualification to higher levels of study.
- 1.8 The Social Exclusion Unit's 2002 report, *Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners*, highlighted as problematic the following areas:
- the significant variation in funding between prisons, especially those of a similar size and type
  - financial disincentives (including worse pay) and restrictive timetables, which act as barriers to encouraging education in prison
  - insufficient connections linking education and training with other prison programmes, e.g. drug treatment and mental health care
  - confusion over who exactly is in charge of education provision – the prison or the contractor?
  - the overuse of classroom-based learning to teach Skills for Life, at the expense of more imaginative and engaging teaching
  - a failure in the assessment process to provide a complete picture of a prisoner's skills and learning needs, and the insistence on carrying out such assessments when the prisoner is disorientated and/or detoxing
  - prisoner transfers, which often lead to duplication of testing, loss of records of any prior educational attainment and disruption of exam timetables
  - general Skills for Life targets, which do not meet the specific demands of individual establishments
  - operational difficulties, with prisoners arriving in class too late or leaving too early and thereby causing disruption
  - a limited range of vocational training, with no additional funding or specific targets, and often based on prison instructors' own interests
  - a lack of appropriate provision, accommodation, materials, IT, libraries and staff, which '*... limits the numbers able to engage in education*'.
- 1.9 Other reports examined concur with these areas for improvement, while adding a few of their own. The earlier *Shared Responsibilities* report (Prison Reform Trust, November 2001), which surveyed the views of prison governors, education managers

and contractors, highlighted these additional problem areas:

- Prisons were struggling under the pressure to meet the set Key Performance Targets and thought that these and the core curriculum in general did not take into account the type and variety of prisons.
- Staff recruitment and retention were key problems, resulting from poor pay and conditions of service compared to those offered by local service providers.
- The demands of the Youth Justice Board meant that already stretched educational provision had to be focused on juveniles at the expense of younger and older adults.
- The report also showed, more worryingly, that opinions varied between prison governors, contractors and education managers about major areas of concern in prison education.

1.10 The more recent *Time to Learn* report (Prison Reform Trust, October 2003) sought the views of prisoners from a variety of establishments, with the exception of juveniles, for whom attendance at education is compulsory. Additional problems discovered, not already discussed above, included:

- the difficulty faced by many prisoners in accessing education. Waiting lists were a problem in all prisons and some inmates did not know if their applications had even been received. They also believed that favouritism was a factor in access to education
- long-term prisoners felt that their choice of classes was limited because of the focus on meeting Skills for Life targets
- prisoners resented the IEP scheme and thought it should be removed from education, which the SEU report, conversely, thought was beneficial
- attending education often meant forgoing other, understandably more attractive options such as hot showers, gym access and phone calls.

1.11 The report described education as ‘the dumping ground’ for prisoners who had nothing else to do or were waiting to get into work programmes. Prisoners were keen to see these ‘time wasters’ removed from the classroom.

### **Structure of the report**

1.12 This Introduction is preceded by a **Summary and recommendations**.

**Section 2** reviews the types of curriculum on offer for different categories of offenders/institutions. It identifies barriers to success and issues to be addressed, and comments on progress towards innovation

**Section 3** focuses on specific challenges relating to work-based learning

**Section 4** analyses the drivers and restraints on curriculum development in prisons

**Section 5** contains a list of the sources that informed the review including documents, websites, focus-group discussions and interviews.

## 2 Education in prisons

### 2.1 Prisoners' educational backgrounds and needs

2.1.1 *'Before they ever come into contact with the prison system, most prisoners have a history of social exclusion, including high levels of family, educational and health disadvantage, and poor prospects in the labour market.'* (Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), 2002). It is clear that these prisoners are caught up in a cycle of disadvantage in which problems continually impact on each other and on education. As the SEU report confirms: *'Most prisoners have had very disrupted experiences of school and, partly for that reason, leave with few qualifications and low basic skills – 52% of males and 71% of females have no qualifications.'*

2.1.2 *Time to Learn* (Prison Reform Trust, 2003) addresses the diverse needs of the prison population and lists three specific categories of prisoners disadvantaged by current curriculum provision:

- **female prisoners**, who are more likely than men to have a poor education history and few qualifications
- **black and ethnic minorities** *'... who tend to be more highly qualified than white prisoners and therefore miss out on education because of the emphasis on basic skills'*
- **young adults**, of whom *'... 25% will have stopped attending education by the age of 14'*.

#### Female prisoners

2.1.3 Female prisoners are particularly vulnerable; two out of every five have left school prematurely, according to *Justice for Women: The Need for Reform* (Prison Reform Trust, 2000). The SEU report (2002) states that: *'... the educational attainment of women in prison is significantly lower than for women in the general population and lower even than that for male prisoners... only 39% had any qualifications at all, compared with 82% of the general population, and significantly less than... male prisoners of 51%'*.

2.1.4 With so few qualifications these women will lack any sense of achievement. Their disillusionment with education makes it imperative that an innovative and appropriate curriculum, responsive to their needs and educational background, is offered.

2.1.5 Some female prisoners may be on medication or come from difficult domestic backgrounds, which can add to their lack of focus in classes. According to the Prison Reform Trust's report, around 40% of women in prison have been *'... diagnosed as harmful or dependent users of drugs; as many as half have been victims of domestic violence... and half of the women in prison are on prescribed medication such as anti-depressants or anti-psychotic medicine'*. The amount of medication taken is bound to affect the concentration levels and the emotional state of the women.

2.1.6 These problems are exacerbated by the rising number of female prisoners, which has increased by 40% in five years (*BBC News* website, 2003). Women now make up approximately 6% of the prison population (OLSU website, 2003). At the end of October 2003, five of the 17 female prisons were overcrowded (Prison Reform Trust).

## **Black and ethnic minorities**

- 2.1.7 The numbers of ethnic minority and foreign national prisoners are rising and constitute 19% of the male prison population and 25% of the female prison population in England and Wales (OLSU website, 2003. Source: *Prison Statistics, England and Wales*, 30 June 2002).
- 2.1.8 In one prison there were 136 foreign nationals at the time of inspection, about one quarter of the total population. At another establishment approximately 45% of the population were foreign nationals, and at another there were 192 foreign national prisoners of 39 nationalities, 30 of whom did not speak English.
- 2.1.9 Many female foreign nationals are serving long sentences. In 1997, 58% of foreign national women convicted of drug offences were sentenced to more than four years in prison, compared with only 15% of British nationals (Prison Reform Trust, 2000). Since many will be deported at their end of their sentences, it is important for prisons to consider the role that education plays while they are in prison.

## ***ESOL education***

- 2.1.10 Although the review did not identify a great deal of coverage about ESOL education, the inspection reports did provide information about the daily lives of foreign nationals and the issues they faced when accessing ESOL provision, such as:
- emotional distress due to sentence length, an 'unfair' sentence, or family separation
  - mistrust and inability to communicate with authorities
  - lack of contact with people of their own nationality
  - problems acclimatising to prison life.
- 2.1.11 Foreign nationals are distanced from their families. They can often feel isolated by language and cultural barriers: '*... not being able to speak English, they become increasingly mistrustful and fearful of authority. Lack of information exacerbates the problems*' (Hayman, 1996).
- 2.1.12 Many foreign nationals have difficulty telephoning their families or pursuing their cases with their legal representatives. At one prison, for the 120 foreign nationals with families abroad, a £2 phone card was provided at public expense in lieu of visits. Unfortunately, the phone card only allowed about 20 seconds of conversation to overseas destinations. Moreover, if the officer in charge of the scheme was not on duty, phone cards could not be issued.
- 2.1.13 This has a huge impact on the emotional state of ESOL learners. Learners who are disenchanted with the prison system may wish to withdraw from learning English and have little motivation for education. It will become increasingly difficult for them to integrate into prison life.

## **Young adults**

- 2.1.14 Thirty-four per cent of young adults have a literacy, language or numeracy deficit, with 72% excluded from school at some stage (SEU, 2002). Encouraging these young people to re-engage with learning represents an enormous challenge, given the numbers of young offenders. Currently there are approximately 10,000



male and 540 female juveniles and young offenders, 73% of whom are serving a custodial sentence in one of the 28 Young Offender Institutions (YOI) in England and Wales (HM Prison Service website, 2003).

- 2.1.15 The OFSTED report (September 2003), based on 16 prison inspection reports, points to a shortfall in literacy, numeracy and language provision in Young Offender Institutions. According to the National Specification for the Education of Juveniles in Custody, there should be provision for 30 hours of education and skills per week, with five hours specifically for each of literacy and numeracy and integrated literacy and numeracy across the curriculum. OFSTED notes that *'During 2002/3, the actual weekly curriculum hours were as low as five hours and, in some cases, there was little or no numeracy. In others, the hours were closer to 15 with perhaps three hours each of literacy and numeracy'*. The report suggests that *'... more literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision should be made available to meet the needs of the young offenders'*.

## 2.2 Review of educational provision

### Overall aims of education and training in prisons

- 2.2.1 The broad aim of education in prisons is to provide opportunities for offenders to attain a range of nationally-recognised qualifications up to Level 2, and where appropriate to give progression opportunities beyond that level.
- 2.2.2 The core curriculum for prisons, as specified in the Prison Service Orders, consists of the following subjects:
- Skills for Life (literacy, language and numeracy)
  - Key skills
  - English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)
  - Information and communications technology (ICT)
  - Social and life skills (each prison is expected to offer a minimum of three units)
  - Generic preparation for work.
- 2.2.3 All prisons have to provide a core curriculum that covers social and life skills, information technology and preparation for work, in addition to Skills for Life. There should also be increasing opportunities for prisoners to gain valuable work skills through a range of activities. However, the main focus is on Skills for Life; half of all prisoners have serious problems with reading, two-thirds with numeracy, and four-fifths with writing. These are viewed as the key learning needs in the drive to reduce the numbers of prisoners reoffending after they have been released.
- 2.2.4 The range of curriculum provision varies between prisons, with some offering a diversity of learning opportunities and others an impoverished programme. This can be attributed to several factors:
- Size and type of prison
  - Length of stay in prison
  - Staff shortages
  - Pressure to work towards Key Performance Targets (KPTs)
  - Funding.

- 2.2.5 According to the Inspectorate of Prisons Annual Report (2002), prison education is still too narrowly focused, and global KPTs can create a straitjacket. There is a need to construct education and training plans around individual needs assessments. Also, the focus on education should not be at the expense of providing recreational and cultural opportunities. More innovative courses are needed to motivate learners and provide further opportunities for incorporating Skills for Life into the wider curriculum.
- 2.2.6 There is, however, evidence of good practice. For example, one prison offered practical sessions such as parenting, money matters, family relationships and IT within the education programme. These were particularly popular, unlike the more academic sessions.
- 2.2.7 At another establishment all students took classes in mathematics, communication and IT. These classes were offered in three groups – a Skills for Life group, a General group and a Key Skills group. Optional classes were available in art and crafts, preparation for work, cookery and creative studies.

### **Curriculum provision in main types of institution**

#### *Curriculum in women's prisons*

- 2.2.8 Courses offered at female establishments included:
- Skills for Life – sometimes as part of other courses, but often as stand-alone maths and English classes
  - Key skills
  - Social and life skills
  - Cookery
  - Art and art history
  - Needlework
  - Hairdressing
  - Food hygiene
  - Pottery
  - Music
  - Parentcraft
  - ICT
  - ESOL.
- 2.2.9 However, the curriculum was usually quite narrow and, in some cases *'focused on vocational courses and life skills, with no obvious academic curriculum'* (Prison Reform Trust, 2003). A possible constraint may be the actual size of the prisons. According to the Prison Reform Trust (2001) *'Most women's prisons are small, which limits the education programme offered, particularly since there is a considerable mix of sentence length (one week to life) and age groups (15 to 65-year-olds)'*.
- 2.2.10 The low achievement of female prisoners highlights the need for curriculum development and expansion. Female prisoners' needs are clearly not being met and cannot be met while they continue to be included in the model for a secure system that was originally designed for men. As the SEU report (2002) emphatically declares *'... a "one-size-fits-all" approach does not work'*.

### ***Parenting classes***

- 2.2.11 According to the *Justice for Women* report (Prison Reform Trust, 2000), more than 60% of women in prisons are mothers and 45% had children living with them at the time of their imprisonment. Almost two thirds of women in prison are also primary carers of children under 16 (Inspectorate of Prisons, December 2002).
- 2.2.12 Family learning, child communication or parentcraft were not always common features of the education programmes in female and male prisons, despite social and life skills being a core curriculum requirement.
- 2.2.13 The running of these courses needs to be handled sensitively to reflect the diverse range of cultures in the prisons and therefore diverse views on families and children, but there is a shortage of suitable provision across the system. For male prisoners the issue had been tackled at one prison, which offered the OCN-accredited Social and Life Skills programmes, including Parentcraft and Family Relationships modules at Entry Level and Levels 1 and 3. There were waiting lists for places and learners spoke highly of the benefits of these courses, saying they had helped to improve relationships with their families.

### ***Curriculum in male prisons***

- 2.2.14 Courses on offer at male establishments included:
- Literacy and numeracy (sometimes incorporated into other courses, but mostly stand-alone classes)
  - ICT
  - Life skills
  - Cookery
  - Art and design
  - Preparation for work
  - Business skills (for those wishing to go into self-employment)
  - ESOL
  - Personal and social skills
  - Food hygiene.
- 2.2.15 All male prisons offer Skills for Life (that is, adult literacy, language and numeracy), with some providing a greater range of courses than others.

### ***Curriculum in Young Offender Institutions***

- 2.2.16 Courses on offer at the Young Offender Institutions included:
- Skills for Life – literacy and numeracy were nearly always run as separate classes, with little integration into other curriculum areas
  - Key skills
  - ICT
  - Life skills
  - Art
  - Cookery
  - ESOL

- Drama
- Music
- Family learning
- Home management
- Pottery
- Citizenship skills
- Hairdressing
- Drama
- Parenting
- Sociology.

2.2.17 A standard basic curriculum was on offer at most YOIs, one of which was described in its inspection report as having ‘... *a small but balanced programme covering the essentials of Art, Cookery, Basic Skills, ESOL and IT with separate classes for Numeracy and Literacy aimed at Level 2 and above*’. Unfortunately, the Basic Skills classes were generally overloaded, with ESOL and Level 1 literacy students in the same class, and there were no computers to support ICT in the Basic Skills curriculum.

#### ***Curriculum in maximum-security prisons***

2.2.18 Courses on offer at the maximum-security establishments included:

- Skills for Life (adult literacy, language and numeracy)
- Key skills
- ESOL
- ICT
- Life skills
- Art.

2.2.19 High-security prison education departments have a fairly narrow range of courses on offer with only some demonstrating diversity and innovation. All prisons offered Skills for Life and Key Skills up to Level 2. One prison offered GNVQs at Intermediate Level in Art and Design and in Information Technology, NVQ Level 2 in Hairdressing, ESOL and general preparation for work. Around 60% of prisoners at this prison were or had been involved in training or education, and 74% of respondents rated the quality of education as good or very good.

#### **Skills for Life in prisons**

2.2.20 *Skills for Life*, launched in 2001, is the government’s strategy for helping adults to improve their literacy, language and numeracy skills. It covers all post-16 learners on learning programmes at levels from pre-Entry up to and including Level 2 and includes work by the Prison and Probation Services as well as many other organisations. Skills for Life replaces the term ‘basic skills’, defined by the Basic Skills Agency as ‘*the ability to read, write and speak English and use mathematics at a level necessary to function and progress at work and in society in general*’.

2.2.21 According to the OLSU website, ‘... *around 50% of offenders have reading skills at or below Level 1, 65% have poor numeracy skills, and 80% have poor writing skills*’.

2.2.22 About 90% of prisoners surveyed by Braggins and Talbot (2003) stressed the importance of decent literacy skills. As one inmate said: *'A lot of inmates who haven't got reading or writing make up for their inadequacies in other ways like going out to thief. They should be given the abilities to read and write.'*

2.2.23 While the number of prisoners requiring Skills for Life support is high, several departments offer more traditional maths and English classes, which do little to inspire the learners who are reluctant to attend. Maths classes were possibly the least popular subject because they reminded learners of school.

### ***Female prisoners***

2.2.24 Many female prisoners require support with literacy, numeracy and language. For example, at one female prison, 24% of women are below Level 1 in reading and 38% are below Level 1 in numeracy. In another women's prison 54% of prisoners who complete a Skills for Life initial assessment on entry were found to need help with their literacy, language or numeracy skills.

### ***Male prisoners***

2.2.25 At one male prison 60% of prisoners needed help with literacy and numeracy skills, but help was only available to 15%. At another institution 422 prisoners were assessed for Skills for Life, of which 46% were below Level 1 for reading, 76% were at Level 1 for spelling, and 60% were at Level 1 or below for numeracy.

2.2.26 In another example very few prisoners felt they needed basic education, although the results of the BSA tests showed that nearly 80% had an education attainment of Level 1 or below.

### ***Foreign national prisoners***

2.2.27 *'Those following ESOL courses are usually at Entry or Level 1.'* (Braggins, 2001). Many of these are non-English speakers who also have literacy and numeracy needs.

### ***Young offenders***

2.2.28 According to the SEU report (2002): *'Over 34% of young adults have Basic Skills deficits'*. The report paints a depressing picture of 18 to 20-year-olds *'... whose Basic Skills, unemployment rate and social exclusion background are all over a third worse than those of older prisoners'*. However, all young offenders surveyed by Braggins and Talbot (2003) did not want to be back in prison again and were keen to gain vocational skills. *'The YOI group was the most likely to see the benefits education could bring; no one wanted to return to gaol.'*

### ***ESOL Learners***

2.2.29 While most prisons do provide ESOL teaching, there is very little information given on ESOL provision in the prison inspection reports, perhaps because ESOL provision has increased quite suddenly and many education departments have to make quick adjustments to provide suitable classes and information.

2.2.30 The provision ranged from very good to poor, often influenced by the fluctuating numbers of foreign nationals in the secure establishment or the availability of trained ESOL teachers to take classes. In one prison the inspection report stated that *'... the prison appeared ignorant about the scale of its foreign national population (25%) and therefore provision for them was inadequate'*.

- 2.2.31 Another prison, though receiving increasing numbers of foreign national prisoners, employed only one ESOL teacher, who had been in post for just six months. A new ESOL teacher was due to be appointed as soon as possible.
- 2.2.32 By contrast, one prison was praised for its good ESOL provision, showing ample evidence of diversity awareness through learning materials, displays and posters. Effective teaching of ESOL provided a sensitive and supportive service to foreign national prisoners.

### **Barriers to successful curriculum provision**

- 2.2.33 There are many barriers to successful curriculum provision in the secure estate and it is difficult to identify which is the most significant. However, all the inspection reports stress how the prison regime and structure can conflict with the aims of the education departments and the needs of learners. The result has often been a narrow focus on literacy and numeracy provision or wider provision that is not accessible to enough learners and provides poor equal opportunities.

#### ***Lack of evening/weekend provision***

- 2.2.34 Very few prisons offer evening classes or weekend courses, though as an exception one offered two classes one night per week. Several inspection reports saw this as a missed opportunity, especially for those who work during the day, to further extend the education provision by offering more creative courses in the evening.
- 2.2.35 One reason for the lack of provision was the difficulty in prison timetabling. At one prison, the regime could not provide learners with more than one hour in the evening. Such lack of opportunities can result in prisoners becoming increasingly frustrated. According to Braggins (2001) '*... many prisoners were disappointed in the disappearance or decrease in evening classes and the shortage of funding for academic, vocational and creative subjects*'.
- 2.2.36 However, one female prison provided literacy and numeracy classes in the evenings and on a part-time basis. This made education much more accessible to all women in the prison.

#### ***Poor IT facilities***

- 2.2.37 According to the inspection reports, several establishments have poor IT facilities for their literacy and numeracy classes, making it more difficult to incorporate these skills into the wider curriculum. Poor ICT facilities reduce opportunities for learners to develop skills and increase their employability on release.
- 2.2.38 Problems identified with IT provision include:
- varying staff expertise and experience in delivering ICT across the curriculum
  - poor standards of IT equipment. At one prison machines were breaking down regularly, and the rooms used for literacy and numeracy teaching lacked computers
  - Internet access for education staff was rare, making it difficult to maintain contact with other education departments and share initial assessment results electronically
  - prisoners studying for Open University courses were having difficulty accessing information online. In the case of one prison about one third of

a population of 403 prisoners was studying OU courses. As the OU wants all students to be online by 2005, it would be a great loss to prisoners if OU courses were withdrawn, given the range of subjects on offer from GCSE to degree level.

### ***Inconsistent rates of pay***

- 2.2.39 Although very few prisons pay prisoners the same wages for jobs as for education, some have addressed this inconsistency. Some did offer equal rates of pay, including one that had removed the bonus scheme from production workshops. In another example prisoners opting for full-time education were paid favourably in comparison to those in workshops. However, these are rare examples in a system where education often loses out. In one prison, education was one of the lowest paid activities (£7.50 per week compared with the maximum wage of £21 per week for those working in the kitchens). Braggins and Talbot (2003) ask: *'What message does this give out to prisoners about its (education's) value?'*
- 2.2.40 Inconsistent pay can act as a huge disincentive to taking up learning. According to Braggins and Talbot *'... most prisoners said that all other activities were better paid than education. For prisoners who did not have much private cash, this made matters hard, especially with things like phone cards, toiletries and tobacco to buy. It was worse for foreign nationals, who had to pay high rates for overseas telephone calls'.*

### ***Prison transfers***

- 2.2.41 In many cases prisoners spend short periods of time in prison before being transferred, without any proof of their previous academic attainment or ability. Transfers often prevent learners (particularly those serving long sentences) from sitting examinations. As one prisoner remarked: *'I moved prison when I was only one month away from doing exams – A Levels, and I couldn't do the exams. They wouldn't release my work'* (Braggins and Talbot, 2003). When prisoners are transferred in a hurry, vital coursework and information from their individual learning plans can be left behind.
- 2.2.42 Prison transfers also *'... lead to duplication of assessment'* (SEU 2002) as the initial assessment results rarely follow the prisoner from institution to institution. Indeed, *'... prison governors, education managers and contractors agreed that the transferal of student records was problematic. Whilst nearly all respondents said that they sent records on when prisoners moved establishments, only 33% of educational managers received them'* (Braggins, 2001).

### ***Induction process***

- 2.2.43 Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) and induction processes are central to improving the quality of provision. Induction programmes can vary in length, in the amount of information on offer, and in the initial assessment process they use. Many initial assessments take place shortly after the prisoner has arrived at the prison, giving him/her little time to acclimatise. According to the SEU (2002): *'The assessment process can fail to provide a rounded picture of a prisoner's skills and their learning needs and is usually conducted within 24 hours of reception when prisoners are still disorientated and/or detoxing.'*
- 2.2.44 Several assessments are also taken before the prisoner has had an opportunity to talk to a member of the education staff and find out more about what is on offer. Previous educational experiences may also act as a disincentive to perform

well in the initial assessment. Indeed, '*... more than one in three educational managers thought the existing induction process was inadequate as a guide to student educational need*' (Braggins 2001).

- 2.2.45 If a prisoner has been transferred from a prison with a poor curriculum offer, s/he will be unlikely to want to attend education in a new prison. This, coupled with a lack of information about courses, can contribute to a negative view of education as a whole in prisons. In addition, the pressure on staff to induct large numbers of prisoners in one session means they may not have adequate time to review the assessment results, clarify the needs of the learner, or fully explain the range of opportunities and courses on offer.

#### ***Special needs and ESOL prisoners***

- 2.2.46 Inductions were also an area of difficulty for foreign nationals. In one prison, the induction pack was not available in translation and the Prisoners' Information Pack was available in only nine languages, although additional languages could be provided if necessary.
- 2.2.47 In many prisons there is a lack of multilingual information, while in others induction and other procedures supporting ESOL were under-developed. At one establishment the induction procedure for ESOL prisoners relied entirely upon the services of a multilingual prisoner, who translated the English induction pack in a one-to-one interview. This prisoner spoke fifteen African languages in addition to English. When he was unable to communicate, he arranged for another prisoner with the necessary language to carry out the task.

#### ***Staff training and development***

- 2.2.48 Teacher expertise is an important factor in the curriculum offered, yet staff development opportunities are often insufficient. Prison education contractors are obliged to provide in-service training, but this element of the contract often has not been adequately monitored. There are also many part-time staff who may work in several prisons and lack time to attend staff development meetings. Rates of pay for these in-service training events are usually very low, providing little incentive to encourage part-time teachers to attend.
- 2.2.49 There has been little evidence to date of specific prison training for teaching staff. All staff receive an induction and are told about security issues, but it is rare to receive training on the implications of actually teaching and planning learning within a secure establishment. Most teachers have undertaken courses which focus purely on teaching and not on the very specialised area of teaching in secure establishments. An initial teacher training group set up by the Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit is currently developing a prison-specific teacher training module in conjunction with the University of Plymouth.
- 2.2.50 Training for staff in prisons which have been 're-rolled' (that is, prisons that change their cohorts, mainly from male to female but sometimes from one category of security to another) is important. The process of converting prisons has not always been successful, not least because of the speed of the changeover, compounded by the need to change the attitudes and practices of staff. For example, all prison officers emphasised how different it was to work with women (Prison Reform Trust, 2000). The Prison Reform Trust report also states that women's prisons require special training for staff and that training for work with women has generally been very limited.
- 2.2.51 While this report states that conversion has caused particular difficulties in terms



of security, this is also an area of development for education staff. Education staff, often trusted by inmates, tend to be perceived as 'not quite part of the regime'. This is a role that requires careful development and many staff would appreciate support.

### ***High staff turnover***

- 2.2.52 Staffing levels were of great concern for many prisons. One suffered from fluctuating staffing levels, while others suffered from shortages. In another instance there were inadequate arrangements to cover for absent staff, particularly on vocational courses and in work activities.
- 2.2.53 Examples of staffing problems included:
- difficulties in attracting and retaining qualified and suitably experienced teaching staff, and a heavy reliance on supply cover recruited through a local employment agency
  - the regular movement of staff from class to class to maintain cover for the curriculum with inconsistent teaching and lack of expertise in the area being taught
  - poor pay and conditions of service were universal problems. All three groups of respondents reported problems recruiting and retaining teaching staff because they were '*... in competition with local employers paying 50% more in colleges, especially in IT, maths and ESOL*' (Braggins, 2001).
- 2.2.54 Although one YOI was described as having a much improved curriculum offer, this was being hampered by high staff turnover and shortages.

## **2.3 Issues to be addressed**

### **Assessment**

#### ***Initial assessment***

- 2.3.1 According to OFSTED (2003), '*the results of the initial assessment do not always follow the learners when they are transferred to different institutions and they are rarely used to inform individual learning plans. Testing on arrival has been found to be unreliable. For many, there is the shock of their first experience in prison and others are going through withdrawal from drugs*'.
- 2.3.2 At one YOI all young people entering the establishment undertook the BSA screening test, but it was thought that little was done with the results, while staff at one prison could not supervise literacy and numeracy assessments carefully and so could not guarantee accurate results.
- 2.3.3 By contrast, a two-day induction at another establishment was carried out on arrival in education, followed by individual interviews with learners at the end of the week. During this induction, students were given an initial assessment and advised about courses and their content.
- 2.3.4 In another example the prison did not use the initial assessment results effectively to ensure that young prisoners were placed on programmes that matched their needs and tutors did not receive these assessment results to enable them to plan learning effectively.

- 2.3.5 In summary, in most prisons initial assessments:
- do not always accompany the offender from prison to prison
  - are not always shared with staff responsible for training, workshops or other relevant officers
  - are often repeated time and time again by offenders when transferred. The offender may already know many of the answers, having sat the assessment several times, or s/he may recognise that the assessment process is invalid and feel disinclined to try to achieve good results
  - are often not used to inform the individual learning plan
  - are often used for ESOL learners who do not fully understand what is expected
  - can be intimidating if learners are not yet acclimatised to their surroundings and already feeling uncomfortable. Many of these assessments are taken before the offender is interviewed by a member of the education staff and may provoke unhappy feelings about previous educational experiences.

#### ***Accessibility of assessment results***

- 2.3.6 Easier accessibility of initial assessment results is needed. In many prisons the results of the initial assessments were not routinely supplied to training instructors. This could be facilitated through the use of email to help to improve communication links between prisons.

#### ***Diagnostic assessment***

- 2.3.7 There was no mention of diagnostic assessment in the inspection reports we consulted. Because differing terminology involving tests, assessments, screening and initial assessments was used, there could be some confusion as to the purpose and placing of diagnostic assessments. However, many prison education departments have received Skills for Life training on diagnostic assessment and are enthusiastic about incorporating it into their assessment processes. There has been a delay in delivering and distributing diagnostic materials within the sector, which, once overcome, will provide invaluable support in assessing learners. It should be noted that computers are needed to deliver diagnostic assessment in the most efficient way, yet this review suggests that ICT infrastructure in prisons is seriously depleted.

#### ***Following up dyslexic screening***

- 2.3.8 While many prisons screen for dyslexia, little is done once a need has been identified and this needs to be rectified. However, at one prison a basic dyslexia screening was part of the induction programme. The establishment could then call upon the services of a part-time teacher to offer support to dyslexic students when a need was identified. ABSSU's new resources to support teachers of learners with dyslexia should be widely distributed among prison establishments.

- 2.3.9 At one prison good practice included giving the prisoners assessments upon entry to the prison in order to identify literacy and numeracy needs. Once prisoners started education, more detailed diagnostic tests were carried out to identify where specific support was needed.

#### ***Individual Learning Plans (ILPs)***

- 2.3.10 According to OFSTED (2003), ILPs are of poor quality in all prisons, with unclear targets and weak reviewing processes. There is also very little continuity when learners move from one prison to another – information from their ILPs rarely

accompanies them. As a result a great deal of information needs to be repeated for different teachers and learners' attainment levels and targets must be continuously reassessed. Rather than being a motivational tool, the ILP can often become a 'de-motivator'.

### **Accreditation**

- 2.3.11 While OFSTED (2003) states that: '*... in prisons there has been a move to more suitable accreditation*', it is important to note that poor ILPs and weak reviewing processes and initial assessments can make it difficult to assess the amount of learning that has taken place.

### ***KPT requirements***

- 2.3.12 Much of the focus on Level 2 accreditation springs from the need to meet KPTs . According to Braggins (2001): '*... all respondents thought that key performance targets in particular... did not pay enough attention to the type and variety of different prisons*'. Indeed, the same report states that '*the model adopted seemed based on the needs and requirements of medium-sized category C training prisons for men, ill-suited to the smallest, largest or short-stay and those with atypical populations*'.

### ***Insufficient support and motivation for progression***

- 2.3.13 Motivation is often provided through suitable accreditation. A good example was found at one prison where, although about 60% of courses dealt with Skills for Life needs, there was also support for higher-level qualifications. The inspection report stated: '*The range of courses was sufficiently wide and flexible to meet the needs of most learners. Courses leading to qualifications in Hairdressing, Computing, Social and Life Skills, Basic Skills, Key Skills, and Administration were provided. Learners on these courses benefited from the opportunity to achieve awards in addition to their target qualification, such as Food Handling, Health and Safety, and First Aid.*'

### ***Lack of opportunities for accreditation***

- 2.3.14 While much of the work undertaken by the prisoners was worthy of formal recognition, accreditation opportunities did not always exist.
- 2.3.15 Most prisons only offered accreditation up to Level 2. By capping accreditation at this level, prisons are minimising further opportunities for their learners, especially the more able.
- 2.3.16 At one prison the emphasis on Level 2 targets did not reflect the attainment profile of the students or their likely length of stay. This same situation was noted at several other prisons, one of which was described as having '*... limited opportunities for many prisoners to progress beyond Level 2 achievements*'. In many cases, the learners were offered good courses, but with little potential for progression or accreditation.
- 2.3.17 Accreditation seems to be more consistent in high-security prisons. At one such establishment the programmes focused on English, maths and IT at different levels, while also including choices such as creative subjects, languages and science. There were also good opportunities for Open University learning.

### ***Accreditation for ESOL learners***

- 2.3.18 ESOL learners encompass a vast range of nationalities. Their prison sentences

also vary widely from three weeks to several years. Because many students continue with ESOL for as long as they are in prison, there is little opportunity for moving on to other areas and they miss out on other courses.

- 2.3.19 The main qualifications offered to ESOL learners are the Pitman exams, popular with prisons because they require no more than six weeks' notice for delivery. However, these exams are quite academic and not entirely suitable for ESOL learners as they contrast quite sharply with the learning needed to cope in the prison system.

### **Skills for Life**

- 2.3.20 Skills for Life provision in female prisons varied, with most prisons focusing on literacy and numeracy courses up to Level 2. Although many prisons offered other subjects and courses, the primary focus was on literacy and numeracy. On the one hand this would seem to reflect need, but in several prisons it also indicates a fairly limited curriculum with little thought of integrating literacy, language and numeracy more creatively.
- 2.3.21 Several prisons offered only a 'basic' range of courses, following the national guidelines linked to the provision of Skills for Life, key skills and social skills. One prison had not changed its education provision for several years. It catered for those with Skills for Life needs but not for the more able learners.
- 2.3.22 An over-emphasis on literacy and numeracy can often limit the curriculum and offer less creative opportunities: *'Prison Basic Skills education is too often classroom-based and the drive to deliver Basic Skills has squeezed out more imaginative forms of learning'* (SEU, 2002).
- 2.3.23 Innovative courses are more likely to encourage learners to continue with their learning and development. Courses in which Skills for Life content is embedded, such as parentcraft with literacy support, offer a context that has direct relevance to daily life.

### **Lack of programmes and places**

- 2.3.24 The apparent widespread shortage of learner places may be attributable to a lack of classroom facilities, shortage of teaching staff and/or lack of funding. This is an issue that needs to be addressed by the new Heads of Learning and Skills in each establishment. It should be noted that the lack of information on full- and part-time provision makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions on the extent of the shortage of learner places. What follows is a list of examples, taken from various prisons:
- Provision fell short of demand; there were 260 learner places for education per day for a prison population of almost 1,000.
  - Although work and education are not the only useful activities available, at one prison 40% of prisoners were not engaged in work or education at any one time. Lack of places also affects foreign nationals. In another example only two prisoners were receiving ESOL education, although there were around 100 foreign nationals in the prison.
  - Several prisons offered a variety of courses but access to these was not evenly distributed. For example, at one prison only around 200 prisoners out of a population of nearly 900 participated in education.
  - At many prisons access to education and work was not based on prisoner

need, nor was it part of the sentence-planning process. Instead it was based on prisoner application and waiting lists. Prisoners therefore applied for work with the highest rates of pay rather than education, and were allowed to move between activities regardless of plans, targets or needs.

### ***Waiting lists***

- 2.3.25 Waiting lists were mentioned as a major problem by all respondents in the *Shared Responsibilities* report (Braggins, 2001). Up to 70 prisoners or more have their names on waiting lists for different classes and can expect to wait, on average, six weeks before a place becomes available. This can result in prisoners becoming bored and disillusioned. Braggins and Talbot (2003) observe that: *'It was striking how many prisoners not in education said they wanted to be "on classes".... They had been trying repeatedly, unsuccessfully, to get there.'* Getting on to classes seemed to be more a matter of luck, or of influence, rather than judgement: as one prisoner said: *'If [the administrator is] not here, it's down to luck.'*

### ***Young Offender Institutions***

- 2.3.26 Several YOIs simply do not have enough education places for the potential numbers of learners and many maintain long waiting lists. At one YOI, 75% of learners were placed on reserve lists where they could remain for many weeks, only coming into classes shortly before leaving.

### **Links between education and employment**

- 2.3.27 The secure estate consistently lacks strong links between the curriculum and preparation for employment and release. One of the inspection reports summed this up: *'Generally there was too little contact and sharing of expertise between education staff and instructors, and between education and physical education, catering and other departments with an interest in training. This had inhibited the embedding of Key Skills and Basic Skills learning into training programmes.'* This issue needs to be addressed by Heads of Learning and Skills through establishments' quality processes, including the quality improvement group, self-assessment report and development plan.
- 2.3.28 Despite having a broad range of courses on offer, one prison did not offer its learners enough opportunities to develop or use skills in the workplace. This lack of integration can have several effects: some prisoners feel that they are forced to choose between education and employment (with education usually being the lower-paid option); and others lack the motivation to follow courses that will not help them secure future employment or enhance their prospects.

### **Class type, duration and size**

#### ***Class type***

- 2.3.29 Roll-on, roll-off classes are common for literacy, language and numeracy due to the fluctuating number of inmates and varying lengths of sentences. While this can hinder successful Skills for Life provision (the teacher will have difficulties planning ahead and responding to the needs of individuals), it is a challenge that must be met. More on-demand examinations are needed to cope with the flow of learners (one of the reasons why ESOL teachers choose the easily accessible Pitman exams).

#### ***Class duration***

- 2.3.30 The length of lessons can cause problems with both teachers and learners struggling to maintain concentration and enthusiasm. In one case the lessons lasted 160 minutes or more, and at another prison one new young student, who had spent an hour at a computer, declared: *'I've got to stop, I've done my head in and I can't do it any more'*.
- 2.3.31 In several prisons, lesson times have been brought into line with workshop hours so that prisoner movement is easier to control and monitor. Though easier for the prison regime, it may mean longer lesson times leading to problems for the teacher, whose learners may become disruptive and bored towards the end of the lesson.
- 2.3.32 Because most prison activities are timetabled at the same time as education, teachers can often lose several members of their class for large chunks of time or even for the whole lesson. Classes can be further disrupted by students attending healthcare appointments, meeting a solicitor, or taking a shower. As one prisoner revealed: *'If you're on education you miss out on everything: exercise, showers, phone calls, kit change.'* Another joked: *'You know who's on education: they smell!'*

### ***Class size***

- 2.3.33 Poor attendance is often due to the constraints of the prison system. Officers can be delayed releasing prisoners from the wing, the roll-check numbers may not have tallied resulting in a recount of prisoner numbers or, as sometimes with evening classes, prisoners may simply be 'forgotten' and not brought to classes.
- 2.3.34 Fluctuating class sizes can be due to erratic attendance. At one prison attendance was low in all areas and only 40% of Skills for Life classes to support contract workshops had been run since March 2003. At another it appeared to be the norm that registers showed a class size of ten, but numbers actually turning up for classes could be as low as five.
- 2.3.35 Not only is attendance a problem, but also punctuality. In one prison in a single two-hour session, 70 minutes were lost to all classes through late arrival and early return. This is not atypical.

### ***ESOL class sizes and types***

- 2.3.36 For ESOL learners, the class sizes vary, very often according to demand and the fluctuating number of foreign nationals.
- 2.3.37 Furthermore, many ESOL classes contain learners with levels ranging from pre-Entry to Level 2 and above. Many need support with literacy, language and numeracy skills and particularly with literacy. This means that classes can be intimidating for non-English speakers and frustrating for higher-level learners wanting to progress.

## **2.4 Comments and recommendations specific to types of prisoners**

### **Women prisoners**

- 2.4.1 According to the Prison Reform Trust (2000) only 3% of women had been employed before coming into prison and over half were living on state benefits. This cycle of deprivation needs to be addressed by providing work-related

courses and training that will benefit women upon release.

### *The regime*

- 2.4.2 All too often women are placed in jobs simply because a vacancy has arisen and not because it matches their needs. A more holistic approach is needed to ensure women receive job placements that match their educational requirements and sentence-planning targets. The education department should provide literacy, language and numeracy support within the context of their jobs in addition to some type of work-related or Skills for Life qualification, or both.

### *Families*

- 2.4.3 Owing to the relatively small number of women's prisons, women are more likely than men to be held at a considerable distance from home in locations which are costly to access (Prison Reform Trust, 2000). Women will have fewer visits and less access to their children. This has understandable emotional consequences and thus affects their motivation for education.
- 2.4.4 The majority of imprisoned women who are mothers are also primary carers. Imprisoned women are three times more likely than women in the general population to be lone parents and much in need of social and life skills courses that could benefit them upon release. Some prisons do offer these courses but provision is inconsistent.
- 2.4.5 On a positive note, it has recently been announced that the women's prison estate is to be managed geographically instead of functionally from 2004. According to the Prison Service, this move '*... will enable female prisoners to better access services such as Job Centre Plus and healthcare which have a regional structure*'. It is felt that this geographical management would '*fully exploit the opportunities available for prisoners to address their offending behaviour and resettlement needs*'. This should help reduce the 55% of women who return to crime within two years of release (Prison Reform Trust), an increase of 17% from ten years ago.

### *Accreditation*

- 2.4.6 Many teachers emphasise how important it is for women who lack self-esteem and have histories of failure within formal education to experience a degree of achievement, however modest. Gaining Skills for Life qualifications can play a large part in this, but other vocational or more creative courses and qualifications would also provide valued support.
- 2.4.7 Overall, the range of accreditation in women's prisons was reasonable but needed to be extended to include more opportunities for nationally-recognised accreditation that could be gained in a short time. Particularly for young women, this would provide a good basis for progressively re-introducing them to learning and re-establishing their self-esteem.

### **Young Offender Institutions**

- 2.4.8 Young adult men show high levels of underachievement in education and of substance misuse. They are also among the most prolific offenders and the most likely to re-offend; 72% will be convicted of an offence within two years of leaving prison (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2002). It is therefore shocking that many of them are receiving well below their entitlement to education.

### *The regime*

- 2.4.9 Education and training, especially for a group of adolescents disenchanted by their earlier experiences, cannot be effective without being supported by, and integrated into, the wider regime of the establishment (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2002).
- 2.4.10 Lesson times need to be shorter to enable learners to get more out of their learning experience. Young people with gaps in their literacy and numeracy skills can feel embarrassed, stupid and angry. They will have developed coping strategies to hide such weaknesses by:
- withdrawing into themselves
  - avoiding situations where they may be asked to 'perform'
  - being disruptive
  - being difficult to manage.
- 2.4.11 Because all of the above will impact upon levels of concentration and motivation, courses must be stimulating with interesting contexts and lead to some form of accreditation.

### *Extending the curriculum*

- 2.4.12 Many of the recommendations below were suggested by the HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2002):
- Vocational courses and programmes should be developed.
  - There should be adequate provision for the significant numbers of learners at Level 1 or below and programmes should be delivered in such a way as to engage young people disaffected with traditional education.
  - Appropriate courses should be provided for those at Level 2 or above.
  - The use of key skills should be extended.
  - A more coherent curriculum is required; stronger connections should be made between education, training and employability.
- 2.4.13 All these proposals would help address the imbalance between the courses that students want and need and those currently provided.

### *Staff*

- 2.4.14 Inspection reports often comment on the need for further training and development of staff to support improvements in the delivery of literacy and numeracy provision.
- 2.4.15 Although one YOI had well-qualified staff, '*... formal staff training and development were not satisfactory...*'. At another YOI the quality of curriculum planning was poor, with teachers having insufficient time or opportunities to keep up-to-date with national developments, formulate policy or share good practice.
- 2.4.16 Many of the recommendations below are made by the HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2002):
- Appropriately trained and experienced teachers to work with juveniles should be recruited.



- An in-service training programme should be provided to ensure that teachers have up-to-date knowledge of national initiatives and issues.
- Specialist training should be organised in a number of important areas including working with learners with dyslexia and dealing with learners with behavioural problems.
- Classroom assistants should be appointed to support teachers in their day-to-day work.
- The appointment of mentors to provide one-to-one classroom support should be encouraged.

### **ESOL learners**

2.4.17 According to HM Inspectorate of Prisons (December 2002) there is a great deal of confusion within the Prison Service and in individual prisons about how to categorise and deal with foreign nationals. Nationality may be confused with ethnicity, language or parents' birthplace. Foreign nationals are in reality a very disparate group of people who may or may not have specific language or religious needs, and may or may not have family ties in the UK, or the right to live here.

#### *Regime*

2.4.18 Particular groups need to be identified and provision made for the specific needs of individuals and their eventual resettlement here or overseas. All too often certain nationalities are 'lumped together' purely because they have a home country in common. This leads to foreign nationals moving about the prison in 'cliques' with much less chance of integration.

#### *Accreditation*

2.4.19 Most ESOL learners work towards the Pitman qualifications and some teachers are using the National Open College Network to undertake portfolio work with their learners. Several teachers are frustrated by the examination options open to them and find Pitman exams difficult to map to the ESOL curriculum. This situation is likely to improve once the range of new QCA-approved ESOL examinations has been released for use from September 2004.

#### *Curriculum*

2.4.20 Many learners remain in ESOL classes until they leave prison. They are very rarely integrated into other educational courses. It would increase equality of access if more mainstream courses were open to ESOL learners, perhaps once a certain level of English had been attained.

2.4.21 More ESOL is needed to support prisoners in prison workshops. Foreign nationals can sometimes be difficult to allocate to jobs due to language barriers. They are often placed in jobs with fellow foreign nationals who can act as interpreters for instructions, or alternatively in more menial jobs which require little explanation.

2.4.22 Some prisons have produced their own learning materials which provide a suitable context for ESOL learners. The materials cover visiting the doctor, going to the canteen, etc, to prepare the inmate for prison life. These types of contexts are vital, as much of the curriculum seems to be based on traditional EFL methods rather than learning the language for communicative purposes. It is important that the recently-produced Skills for Life ESOL learning materials are widely distributed throughout the sector.

2.4.23 It is also important to have separate classes for non-English speakers and those

with very little English. These learners have to rely on the support of other inmates to survive within the secure establishment. Furthermore, many of the foreign nationals with little English also have poor literacy and numeracy. Some prisons are dealing with this by offering literacy classes to ESOL learners, but a lot more research is needed in this area to help teachers with little or no knowledge of teaching learners who speak languages other than English.

### ***Induction process***

- 2.4.24 Greater language support is needed during induction, including translation of all important documents and course publicity. This will open up more opportunities for foreign nationals and make them less reliant on the support of others.
- 2.4.25 Currently, many ESOL learners are undertaking the standard Skills for Life initial assessment whilst others with a low level of English take no assessment at all. Many teachers are still waiting for the new ESOL initial assessment from the Basic Skills Agency to provide invaluable support.

## **2.5 Progress towards innovation**

- 2.5.1 A more innovative range of courses and approaches to delivery, shown in a number of prisons, can motivate learners and, at the same time, widen the opportunities for different forms of accreditation.

### **Embedding Skills for Life into courses**

- 2.5.2 The emphasis on discrete provision of Skills for Life has been shown to be a significant limiting factor on the curriculum; greater emphasis on integration would free up more opportunities. A traditional approach to education does not take into account the difficulties that many prisoners have encountered with learning and may resurrect negative experiences of school days or draw unwanted attention to any academic weaknesses. Some prisoners rarely attended school and many will need to be inspired to walk into a classroom and stay there.
- 2.5.3 Inspection reports revealed that some prisons were taking bold steps to provide innovative courses that not only interested and motivated their learners but also often embedded Skills for Life. These courses provide skills that will be useful and help employability upon release.
- 2.5.4 Good practice examples are outlined below:
- One education department had managed to embed some Skills for Life work into other courses such as cookery, art, or needlework. This encouraged participation from learners who would otherwise lack the confidence to attend a class labelled 'Mathematics' or 'English'
  - The PE department in one prison offered numerous courses and awards in areas such as weightlifting, badminton, basketball, football, treatment of injuries, managers' courses and emergency aid. Links have been established with the education department to improve prisoners' Skills for Life with the Learning through Sport course. Footballers from the local professional team have visited the prison to coach interested prisoners. A number of prisoners have gained jobs in sports facilities after release as a result of the experience.
  - At another prison the Skills for Life content had been widened beyond immediate examination requirements to offer opportunities for poetry, including a joint poetry competition with another nearby establishment.

This offered the learners the opportunity to improve their literacy and language skills in a more creative and inspiring manner. Another prison employed a writer in residence to encourage prisoners to develop their creative abilities.

- One establishment was noted in its inspection report for providing courses that went beyond the standard curriculum: *'We were impressed by the innovative approach of the education department in inviting interesting people into the establishment to give talks or take part in debates with prisoners.'*

### **Resettlement work**

2.5.5. Work was being done to help resettlement prisoners at one prison, with innovative and effective curriculum developments such as the 'Welfare to Work' programme and collaborative work with Nacro and the Prince's Trust.

2.5.6 This resettlement theme was continued at another establishment where its 'Headstart' programme offered multidisciplinary support, including careers and employment advice and help with accommodation and educational needs. An education liaison officer worked with the Headstart team.

### **Young Offender Institutions**

2.5.7 The following two examples have been taken from different institutions to illustrate encouraging developments:

- The development of outreach provision at one YOI is supporting learners outside formal classrooms. A County Council initiative, 'Connecting Youth Culture' provides education through the medium of music through a four-week course, with three weeks' practical work and one week of theory, leading to a national literacy and numeracy qualification. The same YOI has also established strong links between the education department and the library. Students develop IT skills through research and are encouraged to review the books they have read. The writers of the best reviews are rewarded.
- In some YOIs motivation was provided through accredited creative courses. One showed good examples of individual achievement in music, where students composed and performed pieces, and in ICT CLAIT, where they made progress in preparing databases and word-processing.

### **Innovation in key skills**

2.5.8 Prisoners involved in work programmes need to access support for the development of their key skills portfolio and tests. Given that key skills is a component of the Modern Apprenticeship frameworks, a weakness in this area could inhibit young prisoners wanting to access MA programmes on release from prisons. Key skills are valued by employers and are therefore important for vocational learners to develop as part of a work-ready package. Flexible and responsive delivery of key skills is necessary to make them a reality for vocational learners.

2.5.9 At one prison a key skills curriculum was under development, which would offer better chances of accreditation. Another was training its staff in key skills as part of a new programme of staff development. The same prison had identified a need to develop and deliver a curriculum to meet the specific requirements of its prisoners and to offer progression and access to a range of qualifications.

## **Innovation in ESOL provision**

- 2.5.10 A number of institutions had adopted innovative approaches to ESOL:
- Two ESOL classes each week and peer partnership teaching had been introduced at one prison.
  - English as an additional language (EAL) was offered in addition to ESOL at another establishment.
  - The library provided an exceptionally good service for foreign national women in one female prison. Any woman assessed as needing ESOL or EAL teaching was offered the *Prisoners' Information Booklet*, produced by the Prison Reform Trust, in one of 20 languages, as well as a prison A-Z in one of seven languages.
  - The London prisons worked together to build their own supply of foreign language books. Each prison built up stock in three languages that they then made available to each other as required. These resources provide excellent opportunities for extending and supplementing the curriculum.

## **Innovation in delivery**

- 2.5.11 Some prisons have adopted an imaginative approach to the delivery of courses. For example, at one prison the courses were run on both a part-time and full-time basis, with the curriculum organised into *'bite-size chunks'*. This is a useful example to follow for other prisons with short-term prisoners.

## **Communication with families**

- 2.5.12 Courses encouraging better communication with families are an excellent way of extending the curriculum and preparing prisoners for release. One male prison has included a preparation-for-release course, highlighted in its inspection report as an example of good practice. It is short and intensive, run over four weeks, and designed to help prisoners improve communications with their families while in prison. Nine out of 13 prisoners completed the course and each achieved three qualifications. Coursework was accredited for OCN and most of the participants have gone on to other education courses.

## **Value of creative subjects**

- 2.5.13 The therapeutic value of self-expression was cited by 25% of prisoners surveyed by Braggins and Talbot (2003): *'... prisoners were enthusiastic about subjects such as Pottery, Drama and Music'*. Some sceptics dismiss the arts as a 'soft option'. However, creative subjects can reveal hidden talents and encourage those who have previously found education a negative experience to discover new depths. As one woman prisoner explained: *'I want to do an art college course (on release). I didn't think I could draw. I came to prison and I realised I can draw'*.
- 2.5.14 Koestler awards and the Jerwood Community Arts prize offer real incentives for learners on arts programmes. One prison achieved a range of Koestler awards for radio drama and personal development through creative writing. One prisoner had recorded stories on an audio tape for his children, while others had written books for prisoners who were learning to read and write.
- 2.5.15 It is important to note that these types of courses can also help to prepare prisoners for release and possible employment. Many crafts and creative activities have the potential to develop into micro-businesses.

### **Library provision**

- 2.5.16 The library can be used to extend the curriculum. At one prison, as part of Skills for Life, plans were well developed to work with students on the second-level English courses to set up a book club, or to study a novel or a particular genre in greater depth. Library staff had also drawn up a 'top ten' of the most popular novels and a fast-track system for prisoners wishing to borrow these.

### **Peer tutors**

- 2.5.17 The value of tutors was underlined at one prison where there was good use of peer tutors who acted as classroom assistants within Skills for Life groups. By providing good support to other learners in maths and English sessions, they demonstrated the benefits of gaining qualifications and developing skills. However, close monitoring should be carried out to ensure that quality of support is consistent.

### **Part-time provision**

- 2.5.18 Part-time and evening classes provide greater opportunities for all prisoners. In one case part-time classes were offered in Skills for Life, allowing prisoners to be released from their normal work. This example was followed at another prison where just over half the education provision had moved to part time, and there were plans to use the newly-constructed learning 'pods' (purpose-built classrooms within the workplace) to increase the opportunities for prisoners to access part-time education.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

- 2.6.1 While there is good provision and a wide variety of courses on offer in some establishments, recent reports have identified systemic problems in the delivery of education and skills in prisons and their place within the wider establishment. A great deal of work must be undertaken to improve education provision for all prison learners. Any model of reform must be flexible enough to account for the needs and experiences of the wide range of individuals who make up our prison population.
- 2.6.2 To summarise the main issues identified in this section of the report:
- A widespread criticism is that the core curriculum and the KPT system have the unintended consequences of limiting learner engagement and in many cases failing to meet learner needs.
  - Waiting lists continue to exist for education, work and training places, especially in institutions where the education department is popular.
  - There are particular development needs in the female estate where prisoners tend to have low educational achievement and little or no work experience. The scale of the curriculum, particularly the work-based offer, is considerably narrower than in most male institutions.
  - Prison transfers cause problems by interrupting prisoners' education and training. In some cases evidence of learning is not transferred with the learner. Lack of curriculum continuity means that prisoners are unable to continue with learning programmes on transfer.
  - Though there were examples of good practice in initial assessment, the systems in most prisons are not adequate for identifying and supporting

systems in most prisons are not adequate for identifying and supporting the needs of learners.

- Good practice and successful initiatives are not being effectively shared between prisons.
- The current curriculum offer in most institutions lacks opportunities for prisoners to progress beyond Level 2.
- Provision for ESOL learners is very uneven; some institutions provide little or no support for learners while others work collaboratively with other establishments to improve delivery.
- Prison education departments are continually hampered by high staff turnover and difficulties in recruiting appropriately qualified and experienced staff.
- There is insufficient in-service training and little evidence of dedicated training for prison education and training staff, despite the particular demands faced by those who teach in prisons.

### 3 Work-based learning

#### 3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 It should be noted that this section of the report is primarily concerned with vocational training in prisons rather than the paid work undertaken by prisoners, the main purpose of which is to provide an income for prisoners and an income and essential services for the prison.
- 3.1.2 Work and training, along with education, are essential components of any successful rehabilitation and resettlement strategy for prisoners. It is clear that prisoners greatly appreciate work-related skills development as an important part of their rehabilitation. They hold high expectations of the vocational training on offer in prisons as a pathway to employment.
- 3.1.3 Braggins and Talbot (2003) found that prisoners valued opportunities for skills-based and accredited learning so much that waiting lists for activities were not uncommon. All prisoners said they wanted more vocational courses, particularly in cooking and catering, plumbing, electrics and woodwork because in many cases these would offer better prospects for self-employment on release. As one prisoner summed up: *'Who wants to employ an ex-prisoner? You either have to start up your own business or lie.'*
- 3.1.4 While the ALI inspection reports suggest that work-based learning provision in prisons is satisfactory, the research for this report has identified a number of important weaknesses in the provision of vocational skills training which need to be addressed. These include:
- the need for closer links between education and training in prisons
  - prisoners opting for menial and repetitive employment because it is paid, rather than education and vocational training
  - a shortage of links with employers to help ensure skills training provides the skills and qualifications they require
  - teaching lacks innovation and motivation, and instructors are often out of touch with developments in industry and the world of training
  - the existence of a 'glass ceiling' on achievement; qualifications are often available only up to Level 1 when many industries demand Levels 2 or 3 as an industry standard
  - a lack of co-ordinated support for prisoners who require Skills for Life support while engaging in work-based activities
  - a mismatch in vocational offers between the male and female estates that restricts the employment opportunities for women on release from prison.
- 3.1.5 The SEU (2002) highlights the fact that some prisoners whilst in prison actually lose any skills they have learnt previously, thereby reducing their chances of successful rehabilitation: *'Existing skills can be eroded or become outdated during the sentence. [It] can reinforce negative views of education ...and can disrupt education in the community'.*
- 3.1.6 Though the features of work and training identified above are all too often exemplified in inspection reports, official reports and interviews, elements of good

practice can be identified, in particular:

- work and training provision at the centre of resettlement strategies
- impressive links with local communities and employers, providing highly appropriate work on Temporary Licence opportunities
- opportunities for prisoners to select vocational routes through the provision of 'multi-skills' courses, offering vocational tasters in a range of areas
- training workshops with 'learning pods' to provide support for prisoners wanting to develop their key skills and Skills for Life whilst working
- Skills for Life and key skills areas firmly mapped and integrated throughout the work-based curriculum
- vocational training leading to nationally-recognised qualifications
- 'Telecentres' offering multi-skill activities attuned to employment opportunities.

### 3.2 Constraints

3.2.1 Our research found that examples of good practice in some prisons do exist but that the harsh SEU assessment was generally accurate for the system as a whole: *'Vocational training is limited in range, without specific targets and is too often based solely on the interests of the prison instructors.'*

3.2.2 The SEU report added the criticism that where work was available it was not really provided with the interests of prisoners in mind: *'Much prison work is low-skill, low-capital workshop activities where as many prisoners as possible can be occupied in one place – a recent study found that nearly two in five prisoners worked in prison workshops at some point during their sentence. Such work is unlikely to help develop the social skills sought by employers, such as communication, teamwork and reliability.'*

3.2.3 Even where a highly developed and appropriate work-based curriculum exists, it is often undermined by long waiting lists.

3.2.4 A further issue relating to prisoners on short sentences is the mismatch between the time required for worthwhile training leading to skills and qualifications and the duration of their sentences.

#### **A prison's 'history'**

3.2.5 An ALL inspector told researchers that 'history' was one of the biggest factors in determining the work/training offer. If a particular vocational area had been offered in the past and there were still staff/facilities available to deliver it at present, then it would be offered as part of a resettlement package, regardless of whether or not it addressed labour market needs.

3.2.6 The situation is now being addressed through the OLSU's Capital Modernisation Fund 'From Learning to Earning'. This allocated £14m during 2002-03 to 70 major building projects in 50 prisons to improve facilities and in some cases convert old workshops into those providing the skills and qualifications to meet labour market demands.



### **Availability of training to support NVQs**

- 3.2.7 In many cases prisons are unable to offer NVQs because the learning environment, often for security reasons, does not meet awarding body requirements for 'on the job' assessment.
- 3.2.8 Where it might have been possible to support training leading to NVQs, the SEU (2002) stated that: *'National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) are available only in particular prisons and for particular subjects and there is a huge variation in the number of NVQs provided by any one prison – from one to 18. This usually depends on the availability of workshop space in each prison, the priorities of each Governor in the face of budgetary pressures and the specialisms of the prison instructors in place. The most common reason given for the provision of a particular NVQ was not that prisoners were interested, or intended to take up related work on release, but that this was what the instructor was qualified to teach'.*
- 3.2.9 Conversely difficulties in recruiting staff leads to well-equipped workshops in highly appropriate vocational areas being left idle – for example in a prison whose hairdressing and beauty salon could no longer be used because appropriate staff could not be recruited.

### **A focus on prison-specific needs**

- 3.2.10 Some prisons only provide a minimalist work/training offer related directly to activities of benefit to the core running of the prison. These included, in particular, catering and industrial cleaning. It may also include some textile workshop activities, making children's soft toys, working in the stores or horticulture.
- 3.2.11 Although prisoners in open and resettlement prisons often find work experience outside the prison with local employers, one inspection report commented: *'There is rarely a vocational offer that is at all related to opportunities within the local labour market. Rather, the prisons tend to focus vocational training on areas such as industrial cleaning and catering that are more likely to contribute to the productivity of the prison'.*

## **3.3 Benefits of lowest port of entry**

- 3.3.1 'Lowest port of (labour market) entry' occupational areas attract a lot of criticism, but many prisoners' experience of employment is likely to be at this level of entry initially. Such employment often involves a programme of training within an NVQ framework. Moreover, any positive learning experience is likely to help learners in prison develop their study skills, while instilling a sense of self-belief and self-esteem. It is also likely to help develop the employability skills that many prisoners lack, particularly the female prison population, of whom only 3% have had work experience prior to imprisonment.
- 3.3.2 The focus needs to be on how 'lowest port of entry' work is presented to prisoners, and how it is linked with other areas of the curriculum and personal and social skills development.

### **Industrial cleaning**

- 3.3.3 Industrial cleaning, available in almost all establishments, offers significant opportunities for skills development and advancement within the labour market well beyond the lowest entry points – up to supervisory level or self-employment.

A well-structured industrial cleaning course would meet the development needs of many prisoners by offering:

- industry standard qualifications, employability and transferable personal skills, perhaps underpinned with the achievement of wider key skills units
- language, literacy and numeracy skills through contextualised and embedded learning opportunities
- business start-up and self-employment skills.

3.3.4 Many prisons had demonstrated the value of industrial cleaning: in one example *'employment prospects were emphasised and prisoners were made aware of how much money could potentially be made from different cleaning services. They also had a good idea about the equipment costs that would be required to complete service'*.

### **Catering**

3.3.5 Catering also offers many opportunities for progression into employment, accreditation opportunities from Entry Level to the higher levels of the National Qualifications Framework, as well as numerous job opportunities (although it should be added that some posts are low paid and casual and may not lead to sustainable employment). Catering can also lead to other types of accreditation, as well as developing personal and social skills, personal budgeting, and other life skills to support successful rehabilitation into the community.

3.3.6 There are plenty of opportunities for accreditation in prisons, particularly at Level 1, often linked to other awards such as food hygiene. There are fewer Entry Level awards in catering, but numerous awards available to support Entry Level learners to develop industry knowledge and gain experience.

3.3.7 One reason why catering is not more widely used to develop Skills for Life is the pressure on kitchens to produce food for the prison when there is insufficient time for the integration of wider curriculum areas. Also, because catering is a very popular option in most prisons, the selection process might favour prisoners with higher ability levels who would be more productive early on.

3.3.8 Good practice in catering could be seen in several prisons. For example:

- At one prison, learners could choose each week a dish or product they would like to make, sometimes as evidence for a qualification but mainly to develop the learners' own creativity and have some fun.
- In the catering NVQ course of another prison, education staff supported learners for half a day each week to develop their portfolios, learn theory relating to NVQs or offer support in literacy and numeracy.

### **Construction**

3.3.9 Construction, characterised by lower and intermediate level labour, is also a sector that may be less likely to discriminate against those with a criminal record compared to other areas where risk assessments are more demanding.

3.3.10 There are some examples of good practice in construction. In one institution a Construction Centre was accredited by the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) for Carpentry and Joinery at NVQ Levels 1, 2 and 3. Those undertaking training had access to learning support from the education department for Skills for Life, key skills and ESOL at set times in the education centre. Practical skills in the wood skills programmes were provided by the instructor and by linking

experienced trainees with new ones. Certificates were awarded through Lakeside Training Centre. This represents an excellent example – perhaps an ideal – of quality provision, with access for all learners and providing a clear ladder of progression from Levels 1 to 3.

- 3.3.11 Young prisoners at one YOI could progress to higher-level courses in construction to meet the requirements of larger employers. It must be noted, however, that this institution has a large number of prisoners on medium or long sentences and this may have influenced its construction curriculum offer.

### ICT

- 3.3.12 Our own research showed that ICT motivates many prisoners and provides a gateway for developing other opportunities and skills. IT equipment, where available, was well used. However, some prisoners complained that computer software and hardware were outdated and lack of internet access affected those doing work at a higher level. Braggins and Talbot (2003) were: '*... struck by the variety of provision across the system, the vagaries of the curriculum and the variability of the equipment. It really seemed very much the luck of the draw whether you got a good IT learning experience or not...*'. This is a particular problem for prisoners doing work or training because IT may be the only medium available to pursue independent study through on-line distance learning.

- 3.3.13 To address shortages in IT provision, the 2002–04 Capital Modernisation Fund allocated £1.3m to improve ICT workshops and libraries. And initiatives such as Learndirect, the YJB's PLUS Strategy and Ufl have introduced some valuable learning resources into the system.

## 3.4 Recognised vocational qualifications

- 3.4.1 There is a very wide disparity in the number and range of nationally recognised vocational qualifications offered by prisons. Among the perceived difficulties faced by some prisons in running vocational qualifications are:

- lack of qualified staff
- large amounts of paperwork
- the effects of prison transfers
- an inability to create a genuinely commercial environment to enable prisoners to meet the strict evidence requirements.

- 3.4.2 The Inspectorate highlighted the problem of a lack of vocational training opportunities for prisoners: '*... many NVQs rigidly demand on-site experience which prisoners cannot access, and refuse to recognise experience gained in identical conditions within a prison environment*'. This is something the PLSU (OLSU) has to take up with the awarding bodies '*if prisoners are not to be permanently excluded from acquiring the marketable skills they need*'.

- 3.4.3 Examples of institutions offering limited opportunities:

- In one prison, the only qualifications on offer were in hairdressing and physical education. No prisoners were working towards qualifications in catering and hospitality.

- In another institution, there were no opportunities for prisoners to gain NVQs or any other accredited qualifications.
- One prison offered only four vocational qualifications relating directly to employment opportunities (painting and decorating, industrial cleaning, computing and hairdressing), and there were no arrangements for prisoners to utilise and maintain their skills after completing the courses. The lack of opportunity for practising skills once they have been acquired is less than satisfactory. It highlights the need for high-quality works provision and the possibility of follow-up Release on Temporary Licence placements to apply skills in a real work setting.

3.4.4 NVQ courses are offered in a wide range of areas although they are by no means available to all learners involved in work or training. NVQ courses were reportedly available in:

- Carpentry
- Catering
- Electrical installation
- Engineering: welding and machine orientated
- Hairdressing
- Horticulture
- Industrial cleaning
- Information technology (including desktop publishing)
- Motor vehicle repair and servicing
- Painting and decorating
- Plastering
- Plumbing
- Wall and floor tiling.

3.4.5 However, provision does not always reflect prisoners' particular requirements. One inspection report, included in SEU (2002), commented: '*... the education and training needs of prisoners, crucial for their future social inclusion, are too often subordinated to the commercial needs of the prison, and the need to meet Treasury-led income targets*'. Braggins and Talbot (2003), reporting on how prisoners regretted the lack of accreditation in skills-based workshops, include the comment: '*We're learning to sew, and cutting. But there's no NVQs, no certificates. It's a waste of time. It feels like slave labour*'.

3.4.6 Many departments struggle to meet demand from their current population, let alone provide through-care support. However, the wide range of accreditation opportunities viewed by the Inspectorate in prison workshops meant they refused to accept '*... the registration costs for prisoners embarking on vocational qualifications as a legitimate barrier to their implementation*'.

3.4.7 Some prisons, however, were running excellent initiatives in vocational qualifications:

- At one establishment NVQs in Hairdressing were available and accredited on a unit-by-unit basis. When a prisoner was nearing the end of her sentence, the hairdressing instructor would make an appointment with the local FE College in the prisoner's town of release

and arrange for the prisoner to meet the hairdressing department on release. The instructor would ensure the college had all the necessary documentation for the woman to continue the qualification.

- At another the engineering production workshop provided opportunities for progression and extension of prisoners' skills. In addition, a Welding and Fabrication NVQ was provided at Level 2. Individual support and training were available for learners who felt they needed it.
- Prisoners undertaking library training in one institution could work towards a nationally-recognised qualification (NVQ Levels 2 and 3) and many are already well qualified or experienced in construction and engineering.
- A printing workshop in another prison offered appropriate NVQs in an industry that has significant labour shortages, yet offers good terms and conditions and sustainable employment. Arrangements were in place to monitor the progress of trainees and to ensure that the qualifications were appropriately verified internally.
- In two prisons several learners had successfully completed supervisory management awards in industrial cleaning, placing them in a good position to aspire to supervisory roles on release from prison. However, in one of these cases this was the only work/training area that attracted industry standard accreditation.
- Another institution integrated Skills for Life into the industrial cleaning course, which was offered at Levels 1 and 3. One institution offered both the industry standard (BICS) and NVQ awards; particularly useful as NVQs tend to have greater transfer values in other related industries.

3.4.8 These exemplary pieces of practice are, sadly, rarely replicated across the prison system.

### 3.5 Specific problems with accreditation

3.5.1 For various reasons, prisoners often had little or no access to appropriate accreditation:

- A lack of internal quality assurance at one prison made staff reluctant to develop opportunities for trainees to achieve full NVQs or even course units in horticulture. It was put down to *'too much paperwork'*. Particularly in some of the larger prisons, there were difficulties in managing delivery. One education manager remarked: *'Everything [must be] roll-on, roll-off. Exams [must be] on demand'* (Braggins, 2001).
- At one YOI NVQs had been abandoned mainly because the learners were on short sentences. As an alternative, all vocational training was accredited through the OCN. This was criticised by the inspectors because OCN awards are not perceived as having the same currency as NVQs outside prison. The option of achievement of NVQ units had apparently not been pursued.

3.5.2 However, not all prisoners were convinced that accreditation was necessary to get value from their learning experiences. According to Braggins and Talbot (2003), some prisoners considered education a way of boosting their self-esteem precisely because they had managed to attain new skills. As one prisoner explained: *'The actual qualifications you get may not get you a job,*

*but [education] does help you to consider alternatives.... It's the process education gives you that's important'.*

### **Problems with sentence length**

- 3.5.3 The inability of prisoners serving short sentences to gain qualifications was a major issue in all the reports and interviews. In the case of one YOI the time required to achieve qualifications meant that those on short sentences of up to ten weeks could only work in laundry and tailoring, neither of which provided formal qualifications or training.
- 3.5.4 A report by HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2001) found that few prisoners could complete the required work within the restrictions of a prison environment and length of time available.
- 3.5.5 This raises a very important issue for the flexibility and responsiveness of the awarding bodies. 'On demand' testing pilots for key skills demonstrated that greater flexibility could significantly improve motivation for prison learners, knowing that they will be able to gain immediate access to the results of their assessments. A 'bank' system of crediting units of vocational achievement with priority response from awarding bodies on moderated work would help to promote achievement in vocational education and training, especially since prisoners could take their portfolio of learning with them on transfer between prisons. On release it could be used as evidence of their achievements with potential employers and learning providers.
- 3.5.6 Prisoners involved in Construction One at one prison had access to a CITB Intermediate Construction Certificate (ICC) in Bricklaying to evidence vocational knowledge and skills. Learners studied basic tool skills, mixing mortar and concrete, using masonry-cutting power tools, constructing half-brick walls, solid walls, cavity walls and piers, blockwork, building in and fixing door and window frames, and how to interpret drawings. As there were no final exams, most parts of the course were tested after an initial training period and the assessors advised learners when they felt they would be ready to try an assessment.
- 3.5.7 This course was recognised by the industry as providing skills that can lead to an NVQ Level 2, following a period of on-site experience. It offers an excellent opportunity for prisoners to develop their skills, acquire underpinning knowledge and an incentive to complete training either through Release on Temporary Licence work placements or on release into the community. The growth in unitised qualifications such as this example provides a much greater chance of creating a link between learning in custody and in the community.

### **The lure of the workshops**

- 3.5.8 Braggins and Talbot (2003) found that prison workshops often lured prisoners away from education and vocational training despite the monotony of the work, mainly because of the higher rates of pay offered. As one group member noted: *'If they did not pay so well they would be empty.'* The dilemma with the current system of remuneration in prisons is that the least rewarding work in terms of skills development (in the widest sense) offers the most money.

- 3.5.9 A focus group of prisoners were angry about what they described as a 'class system': prisoners who were financially supported by their families were 'privileged' and could access education, while others were forced into menial labour to pay for basic necessities and comforts. The differential in some institutions amounted to more than 450%. The whole system of remuneration in prisons will need to be reviewed if access to education is not to be inhibited by a reward system largely at odds with the desired outcomes in education and training set by government through organisations such as OLSU and others.

### **3.6 Integrating key skills and Skills for Life**

- 3.6.1 Vocational training workshops are not normally run by education departments in prisons. This can act as a barrier to the effective integration of skills development with work-based training. There is also the question of the relatively low level of staff development and training particularly for vocational tutors in Skills for Life education.
- 3.6.2 An ALI inspector interviewed had a bleak assessment of the effectiveness of adult literacy and numeracy development in prisons – only 10% of those with literacy and numeracy needs had these met in prison. This in part reflects issues such as capacity, the willingness of learners to attend classes, the learning experience, the expertise of teachers and the availability of learning resources.
- 3.6.3 The importance of Skills for Life was illustrated by a prisoner interviewed at a women's prison who was undergoing a course in reflexology. Because of the complicated nature of the terminology, she was finding it very difficult to keep up with the course. The language was Level 2 and above whilst her own literacy profile was under Level 1.
- 3.6.4 Since this issue is attracting a great deal of effort, we have identified a number of areas of good practice, including the following from six different establishments:
- The Community Sports Leadership Award (CSLA) was integrated with Skills for Life provision and liaison between the PE department and the education department was excellent.
  - Skills for Life provision was extended to the workplace in areas such as stores, kitchens and the gardens.
  - Skills for Life were recognised in curriculum planning, with some good, imaginative courses and responsive opportunities for a wide range of inmates. These included in-cell tuition and outreach to those at work, a little open learning, relevant short courses such as drugs awareness as well as longer vocational training courses and workshop-style Skills for Life and IT. However, many students had too few hours in education to take advantage of them.
  - The education department promoted itself as a 'college' and courses ranged from Skills for Life to university level. Prisoners could obtain qualifications in humanities, Skills for Life and key skills, cookery, IT, art and business skills. Many students commented on how the classes had helped increase their knowledge, skills and understanding, particularly in key skills, Skills for Life and ICT.
  - At one women's prison there were detailed plans to introduce NVOs, together with Skills for Life and key skills accreditation, into the production workshops. The prison had recently been approved to deliver NVOs at Level 2 in Catering.
  - The education department at a male prison adopted what the inspectors

described as 'a holistic approach', with plans to incorporate education and trade skills into all activities. Much progress had already been made in applying key skills and Skills for Life leading to 600 NVQ credits being obtained, including work in the kitchen, the garden and grounds.

3.6.5 Examples of poorer practice were consistently identified in a range of prisons:

- A male inner-city prison was reported to have no integration of Skills for Life within the employment workshops and limited opportunities to gain qualifications.
- At another prison inspectors found that, although almost 70% of prisoners required assistance with Skills for Life, the prison has targeted the acquisition of NVQs at Level 2.
- An unannounced follow-up inspection at a third prison was highly critical of the poor links between education and training where Skills for Life provision for learners was suffering. It said: '*... there are limited opportunities for accreditation of basic skills and key skills in vocational training. Links with the educational department and vocational training are informal only. There is no strategy to integrate education with training planning and delivery including support needs*'.

3.6.6 Clearly, we need an integrated approach to the development of Skills for Life in vocational education for learners to access their vocational courses while developing language skills. We have found encouraging evidence of moves towards this, but there is clearly a long way to go. The proposed merger of education and dedicated vocational training departments provides an ideal opportunity to remove some of the institutional barriers to the development of Skills for Life in work and training, but careful planning will be required to take full advantage of this new opportunity.

### **3.7 Staff experience and involvement**

- 3.7.1 The importance of staff involvement was highlighted at one prison. One of the PE instructors had completed a literacy and numeracy instructors' course to assist prisoners to link the work undertaken in the PE department with the education department. However, there is generally little evidence of staff development to support literacy and numeracy teaching across the curriculum. A much greater awareness of Skills for Life and achievement of Level 3 literacy, numeracy and language awards is necessary throughout vocational areas if serious attempts are to be made to embed literacy, language and numeracy skills across the curriculum.
- 3.7.2 At least one institution was attempting to raise the awareness of Skills for Life needs by vocational tutors: '*The inspectors were impressed with the use of education outreach as all workshop instructors had been trained in basic skills needs awareness*'.
- 3.7.3 At a YOI inspectors identified the need for more teachers with ESOL and special needs teaching experience and said that staff would benefit from training and support in classroom management skills (e.g. working with disruptive students). All staff were encouraged to take the Basic Skills 9281 qualification, though there was no guarantee that busy teachers would be able to cope with this on top of their teaching load. Since the last inspection, the institution has received several Learning Support Assistants (LSAs), whose job is to support the development of literacy, language and numeracy skills. Although they are restricted to the juvenile prisoners as the Youth Justice Board funds them, the experience of LSAs could provide some valuable lessons in the adult estate. In particular, they could provide an essential link between the soon-to-merge education and dedicated vocational training



departments.

### **3.8 Library access**

- 3.8.1 Although library access is extremely valuable for prisoners involved in work-based learning, it is extremely patchy across the system, with no sense of entitlement for prisoners. Library access can involve as little as an hour a fortnight for many prisoners.
- 3.8.2 Lack of access was the main complaint of prisoners concerning prison libraries. Some could gain access only if they were in education, while others had to choose between going to classes and going to the library.
- 3.8.3 Braggins and Talbot (2003) found that some prisoners thought their library was either good or excellent – both in terms of the stock and the assistance provided by librarians. There seems to be a positive correlation between the quality of the library and the respect prisoners have for the books and other resources. In one inner-city prison the modern, comfortable library was well stocked, and 70% of prisoners were regular visitors. Loss rate was low at 5.6%, even though the institution has notoriously long waiting lists for both education and work and a correspondingly high rate of unemployment among the prisoners.
- 3.8.4 With such solid proof of the positive effects of good library provision and access for prisoners, it is disappointing to find that many problems still exist:
- At a YOI equipment shortages, unreliable and poorly maintained computers and poor access to the well-resourced library prevented those involved in work – particularly work of a more menial nature – from pursuing wider interests or developing their language, literacy or numeracy skills through self-study. It also seriously inhibited prisoners who wanted to use additional resources to complete their independent study assignments.
  - In one establishment prisoners only had access to the library at weekends and on Tuesday nights. There was also limited provision for non-English-speaking prisoners, with only one audio-learning EFL course. Frustratingly, the library was generally well stocked, but prison staff seemed to be unwilling to allow prisoners their right to use it.
  - The local Adult Learning Services in one institution could provide qualified assessors and resources to prisoners who wanted to study for Library NVQs at Level 3, but the average time spent by most prisoners was considered too short to gain the award. However, the possibility of arranging follow-up placements in local libraries to complete the work experience element of the NVQ could be explored.
- 3.8.5 To address these issues, it should be noted that the Capital Modernisation Fund has spent £3.77m during the last two years to refurbish libraries in 67 prisons.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

- 3.9.1 Work and training in prisons, as we have illustrated, is extremely variable between institutions. Despite the great variation in practice standards from very good to very poor, those institutions achieving and meeting the needs of prisoners are not fundamentally different from those that are under-performing. Clearly, support is needed to ensure that good practice is captured and can be shared. This is not a matter solely for the training or education department but depends on a regime that has a supportive approach to the education and training of prisoners.
- 3.9.2 To summarise the main issues identified in this section of the review:
- The vocational offer in prisons is often out of touch with current labour market trends, thus weakening attempts to improve prisoners' employability skills.
  - There are insufficient opportunities for prisoners to gain valuable work-based qualifications and, even when they do, there are limited opportunities to practise their newly-acquired skills.
  - Because it is paid, prisoners choose menial work rather than education and vocational training.
  - For prisoners on short sentences there is a mismatch between the time required for training leading to qualifications and the length of their sentences.
  - Prisoners often have little or no access to appropriate accreditation for vocational courses.
- 3.9.3 A review of Skills for Life provision and delivery should be undertaken to ensure that there is no unnecessary trade-off between this provision and curriculum breadth and that Skills for Life development is better integrated into vocational training.
- 3.9.4 The forthcoming merger of education and dedicated vocational training presents an excellent opportunity to tackle some of the issues that have emerged from our findings.
- 3.9.5 The appointment of the new Heads of Learning and Skills provides the opportunity to address prisoners' learning needs. Both the Prison Service and learners themselves acknowledge that successful learning makes a major contribution to preventing prisoners from re-offending on release.

## 4 Drivers and restrainers in curriculum development

### 4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 This review demonstrates that, despite the existence of a core curriculum for prisons, the curriculum as delivered is of variable breadth and coherence.
- 4.1.2 Since it is very difficult for the curriculum to address work, training and general education for the whole of the prison system, it is hardly surprising that it cannot meet the needs of each individual prisoner. Attempts to define a set curriculum for prison learners are fraught with difficulties.
- 4.1.3 Our research has drawn attention to the different types of learners within and between prisons. Their vast range of educational ability and prior achievement creates tensions in a curriculum that, in the opinion of many education staff, focuses too narrowly on the attainment of key performance targets which are often above or below prisoners' capabilities.
- 4.1.4 A prescribed curriculum tends to limit the capacity of the education delivered by contracted providers, making it less responsive to the needs of learners. This is one of the most compelling criticisms of the system by the Inspectorate and by prisons, their staff and their inmates.
- 4.1.5 Whilst the support of governors and senior managers is very much valued, the determination of the curriculum should rightly sit with education and vocational training departments. Rather than prescribing a core curriculum, OLSU might consider setting out clear curriculum principles along the lines set out below.
- To reflect the needs of learners, the curriculum must take into account the dynamic nature of the prison population (in terms of the natural turnover of prisoners), trends in society, and more radical strategies such as the re-rolling of prison populations.
  - The curriculum should underpin effective resettlement strategies by providing well-informed and supported progression to a range of opportunities in education, training and employment within the community.
  - The curriculum should support learners in their language, literacy and numeracy skills as a priority for those who are assessed as below Level 2 of the National Qualifications Framework in these areas. Innovative methods of delivery should help ensure that all those in need of Skills for Life support receive it.
  - The curriculum should provide a ladder of progression beyond Level 2 for those progressing within the system, as well as for those entering the system above this level. Skills for Life should not be provided at the expense of other important components of this ladder of progression.
  - Curriculum content and curriculum delivery processes need to take full advantage of the benefits offered by the new seamless management of offenders through custody and into the community via the National Offender Management Service (NOMS).
  - Education and vocational training need to be better integrated, allowing learners to access a full range of skills through the more flexible offer. Such integration creates a 'pathway' of learning involving both the 'academic' or general education curriculum and the vocational curriculum.
  - Heads of Learning and Skills and prison senior management teams need to

consider providing comparable incentives for work and learning. The present situation often encourages prisoners to undertake menial jobs in exchange for immediate financial rewards but does very little to develop their skills.

- 4.1.6 Below we set out the barriers or 'restraining factors' that currently hinder development of a wider, fit-for-purpose curriculum. This list is, of necessity, rather long but it is accompanied by possible 'drivers' to facilitate a positive change agenda for prison education and training.

## **4.2 Restraining factors**

- 4.2.1 Restraining factors are those that negatively impact on the delivery of the curriculum whose key principles we have highlighted above.

### **1. Lack of employer and community links**

- 4.2.2 Some prisons provide inmates with an opportunity to access Release on Temporary Licence placements to develop their skills and take part in work experience, but in this review there is little evidence of good practice in relation to the development of community and employer links. Making links with the local labour market and community to enrich the educational experience of prisoners should feature prominently in any future development strategies. Links with employers will help to demonstrate the importance of work-related qualifications for prisoners as part of their rehabilitation strategy. Equally important, such links would help counteract some of the negative assumptions made by employers about employing prisoners and encourage a more constructive assessment of the employment of ex-prisoners.

### **2. Lack of an integrated approach to delivering Skills for Life**

- 4.2.3 While there is much to be done to integrate Skills for Life across both the general education and the work-based curriculum, there are areas of good practice we have identified to be shared across the system.
- 4.2.4 In contrast to the prevalence of discrete classes in literacy, language and numeracy, we see very little evidence of discrete key skills classes. Much of the key skills work takes place in an embedded environment, where learners pursue their primary learning goal, be it hairdressing, engineering or an AS Level in History or Art.
- 4.2.5 Key skills are not simply 'caught'; they have to be 'taught'. Likewise, learners, particularly between Entry Level and Level 1, need significant support to develop their literacy, language and numeracy skills. Within vocational and other contexts this would involve a shift in resources away from discrete Skills for Life delivery specifically in maths and English classes, which learners dislike, towards a curriculum that provides a range of opportunities to develop these skills through other subject areas. This will require a significant development agenda, equipping staff with both the skills and the positive attitudes that are necessary to support learners.
- 4.2.6 We repeatedly found complaints that the high priority allocated to literacy, language and numeracy has squeezed out opportunities for creative subjects such as music, arts and media. There should not be a 'zero sum' relationship between Skills for Life and these areas of the curriculum. Clearly, creative education and training helps to overcome the negative preconceptions of many prisoners about learning. By mapping Skills for Life into these curriculum areas we can extend the curriculum and ensure that more learners can access appropriate support.

### **3. Uneven provision for ESOL learners**

- 4.2.7 At its worst the system is failing ESOL learners who are often highly vulnerable and traumatised by the prison experience because they cannot understand even the most basic information that most prisoners take for granted. Where this is provided, it is often limited by mixing together learners who have wide-ranging levels of language ability and literacy with ESOL learners who have Entry 1 and Entry 2 language skills. This impedes the progress of learners and presents the tutor with an extremely challenging task that cannot simply be resolved with differentiation strategies.
- 4.2.8 While the development of language skills should be a gateway to access the wider curriculum, many prisoners remain on ESOL courses throughout their sentences, rather than progressing to other subjects or levels. This acts as a barrier to the integration of foreign language prisoners into the prison and eventually into the community on release.

### **4. Size of establishment, sentence length and curriculum offer**

- 4.2.9 There does seem to be a strong correlation between the size of the establishment and the range of the curriculum on offer. In particular, in some women's institutions, which tend to be small, the curriculum is far too conservative both in terms of general education and the vocational offer.
- 4.2.10 There is a similar correlation between the length of prisoners' sentences and the nature of the curriculum. In many Category A and B prisons, we see an ambitious curriculum offering GNVQs, as well as longer courses spanning a year or more, such as degrees. This is rare in institutions holding prisoners for shorter periods. With the unitisation of qualifications, and the modular structure of most qualifications, learners on shorter sentences should be able to undertake units of qualifications with a view to completing these later within the community.

### **5. Problems of recruitment and retention of appropriate staff**

- 4.2.11 The recruitment and retention of staff is a perennial problem within the prison service. It seems to be very difficult to attract qualified teaching staff who bring with them a range of experience and knowledge of the curriculum and curriculum development. Too many prisons have relatively inexperienced and often part-time teachers who cannot be expected to help plan a curriculum that meets the principles we outlined at the beginning of this section.
- 4.2.12 There is a strong connection between investing in staff training and staff retention. We have highlighted a number of areas where more emphasis on staff development is needed.

### **6. Lack of opportunities for progression**

- 4.2.13 One of the central themes to emerge from this review is the lack of coherence in the curriculum, particularly in relation to progression. Understandably, resources have been dedicated to developing prisoners' literacy, language and numeracy skills since the overwhelming majority are below Level 2 of the National Qualifications Framework. However, it is frustrating for many learners who, when they meet the Level 2 milestone, hit a 'glass ceiling' and cannot progress further. Progressing beyond Level 2 seems to be the responsibility of the learner, who must negotiate access to distance-learning materials.
- 4.2.14 The transition from Level 2 to Level 3 for adult learners needs the full support of tutors. It is essential to facilitate this support in the Prison Service. Given the

resource implications, cost-effective solutions should be explored such as developing FE-style supported learning centres, perhaps located within prison libraries. These would give access to the support of both tutors and learning support assistants for those who are involved in distance-learning courses.

- 4.2.15 Many employers value Level 2 qualifications and beyond as the industry norm – for example in engineering or construction. Interviews revealed prisoners frustrated by the lack of both post-Level 2 qualifications, and relevant work-related qualifications that would help them to find employment on release.
- 4.2.16 It is therefore essential that prisoners can access vocational training beyond Level 2 through a curriculum with progression opportunities that can enable trainees to meet standards required by employers.
- 4.2.17 As part of the research we identified a number of barriers to the delivery and support of vocational training within the system. Clearly there is a strong demand from learners for appropriately validated training, recognised by employers. Providers cite a range of reasons for moving away from NVQ provision towards other qualifications such as City and Guilds and OCN, including the pressures of paperwork and the requirement for an authentic work environment.

## **7. Deficiencies in needs analysis**

- 4.2.18 All education providers are required by the OLSU to undertake a needs analysis of their prisoners. However, it is clear that this has sometimes either been very superficial or has revealed significant needs that cannot be met.
- 4.2.19 There is a requirement for a much closer monitoring of the quality of needs analysis by education and works departments and for more robust methods of gathering the views of learners to ensure the curriculum addresses their needs. It is also important that needs analyses are reviewed periodically to meet the changing types and requirements of learners.

## **8. Lack of remuneration for education**

- 4.2.20 Remuneration systems that effectively encourage those with specific learning needs to access the most menial and unsupported activities, instead of addressing their skills deficits, are not fair systems. Access to education, training and work should clearly be geared towards the needs and choices of individuals rather than influenced by an unbalanced system of remuneration.
- 4.2.21 However, it would be too simplistic to expect that a move to parity of pay across the system would immediately solve the problem, as any change in remuneration systems creates new anomalies. For example, those who have been used to relatively higher wages in production departments would be loath to see their pay cut in favour of greater access to education. Nevertheless, learners canvassed through our focus groups were overwhelmingly in favour of a move towards parity. This should be the legitimate aspiration for future remuneration policies across the system.
- 4.2.22 Some education departments have reported significant benefits of having a bonus system for the achievement of qualifications whilst others – and this was echoed by prisoners we interviewed – felt that this was unfair. Clearly it is difficult to expect learners with little to show for their previous education to respond to a system of bonuses that relates solely to achievement.

- 4.2.23 A bonus system should address not only ability but also effort. Learners who have put a great deal of effort into the acquisition of, for example, Skills for Life qualifications, should have that effort recognised. Perhaps more emphasis should be placed on the celebration of achievement and effort than on monetary rewards— for example by displaying prisoners' work and celebrating their achievement at specific events. Either way, more work is needed to gain a fuller understanding of the current system of remuneration and the impact of any global changes that might be recommended by OLSU. These issues are currently being addressed through a Home Office working party on incentives.

## **9. Inadequate responsiveness to the labour market**

- 4.2.24 We need to be able to forge a system that is genuinely responsive to changes in the labour market, and that addresses emergent labour market opportunities. To equip prisoners with the skills they need for successful rehabilitation will require a significant programme of investment to enable curriculum innovation. It will also require the development of an appropriate vocational infrastructure, together with investment in staff.

## **10. Relations between education, training and the wider regime**

- 4.2.25 Our research has shown how a supportive ethos throughout the prison regime encourages education and training participation – for example, in institutions that run evening classes for those who work during the day to access key skills, Skills for Life and other curriculum areas.
- 4.2.26 However, there is evidence of evening classes being closed because of budget cuts or because prisoners cannot be brought to the education and training blocks to access classes. Where regimes cannot or do not sufficiently support education and training, a significant disruption of classes occurs, with constant turnover of learners and prisoner absences.
- 4.2.27 Furthermore, the lack of co-operation between regimes means that evidence of learners' achievements rarely travels between institutions, forcing them to repeat initial and other assessments. In the worst cases, partial achievements of qualifications are neglected and evidence is lost, adding to prisoners' disillusionment. The Heads of Learning and Skills must be made aware of these problems and develop strategies to help overcome them.

## **11. Problems of funding and transition**

- 4.2.28 Lack of funding places significant limits on the curriculum range. High costs of registration were cited by many different institutions as a barrier to extending the range of qualifications available to learners and may explain why such a narrow curriculum exists for many prisoners on short sentences. If it is likely that these prisoners will soon be moved to other institutions, staff may feel that they cannot take the risk of paying registration fees for them.
- 4.2.29 The system needs to provide a seamless transition between institutions, supported by education and training profiles including awarding body registrations. This would enable prisoners to switch their registration as they move to different institutions, or to take their profiles into the community and transfer their achievements and registration to other learning and training providers or employers. Perhaps there is a need to look at the relationship between KPTs, funding and the widening of curriculum opportunities.

## **12. Inadequate ICT resources**

- 4.2.30 For many learners, ICT is a highly motivating medium that engages them in learning often for the first time, providing an opportunity to leave prison with valuable transferable skills. Access to the Internet for many prisoners would enable them to obtain supporting educational materials and resources.
- 4.2.31 Clearly there are significant security implications for the Prison Service here, which we must respect. However, limited access to the Internet under guidance, either through the library, learning or IT centre, significantly boosts the capacity of learners to study – particularly for those on distance-learning courses or on daytime vocational courses who will want to access the IT facilities for supplementary education.

## **13. Need for better access to libraries**

- 4.2.32 There is a wide variation in access to libraries for prisoners on vocational and educational programmes. For these learners, library facilities have huge potential to help them develop their skills in a supported and well-resourced environment.

## **4.3 Curriculum development drivers**

- 4.3.1 We have made a particular effort to highlight good practice, to increase the value of this report as a tool for sharing good practice and ideas. Underlying good practice is a range of curriculum development 'drivers'. These would support a more 'fit-for-purpose' curriculum consistent with the principles identified at the beginning of this section.

### **1. A genuine awareness of learners' needs**

- 4.3.2 Institutions that take seriously the development of individual learning plans for their learners, as well as regular education needs analyses, are much more likely to be able to develop a responsive curriculum. Though not enough on their own, ILPs and needs analyses are necessary elements in developing an adequate level of provision to meet learners' needs.
- 4.3.3 The literature analysis and interviews conducted for this study demonstrate that learners have high expectations of prison education. They are perfectly capable of providing a constructive critique of the prison curriculum and suggesting ways forward that seem intuitively sound. The voice of the learner should be a key input to developing the prison curriculum: we need a common approach that makes this possible.

### **2. A strong relationship between education and training**

- 4.3.4 In a few cases there was a strong relationship between education and training which seemed to have stimulated significant curriculum development. In particular, it seemed to have given prisoners access to a 'pathway' approach to their individual learning plans, bringing together a combination of work experience, vocational training and qualifications, and other programmes such as key skills and Skills for Life.
- 4.3.5 While budget cuts in some education departments had led to part-time education provision, this mode of learning often created greater flexibility and gave those involved in work-based learning more access to education courses. Some institutions offer day release or half-day release for those involved in work-based learning. Other institutions have provided more evening classes which, again, have allowed those primarily engaged in the work-based route to access courses.



- 4.3.6 Often the links between the education and vocational training departments are indicative of a wider regime-based support for education and training. The impending merger of education and dedicated vocational training departments should encourage a unified approach to curriculum development by integrating the skills that are required, e.g. for completion of vocational training portfolios, with Skills for Life and key skills education.

### **3. Effective initial and diagnostic assessment**

- 4.3.7 Diagnostic assessment identifies what is required to consolidate learners within a particular level of learning, rather than making them go through an entire level which may be inappropriate to their needs. Where initial assessment as part of an education induction has been supplemented by diagnostic assessment, departments are better able to develop genuine individual learning plans with a more efficient system of, in particular, Skills for Life education.
- 4.3.8 The use of diagnostic assessment is currently in its early stages within the prison system, but we do know that it is widely available and significant numbers of teachers have been trained in how to use it.

### **4. The enrichment curriculum**

- 4.3.9 Our research exposed a commonly held view that the development of the National Core Curriculum and the shift in emphasis towards literacy and numeracy has brought about a much more utilitarian prison education and training system. To some extent this has been at the expense of the 'enrichment' curriculum embracing music, art, media and a range of other creative approaches to learning. Now that some departments have reverted to providing more creative learning programmes, perhaps mapped to Skills for Life needs, learners have become 'hooked' on education despite initial reluctance. They are often surprised to discover a latent talent for drawing or an ability to play a musical instrument, raising their confidence and providing them with an unexpectedly positive learning experience.
- 4.3.10 The promotion of positive learning experiences often stimulates other learning. As the experience of the Youth Justice Board and the PLUS Programme has demonstrated, the use of enrichment materials, such as those based on music technology, the development of a pond in prisons, and other initiatives, has great scope for the development of wider employability and Skills for Life.

### **5. Interactive ICT-based e-learning**

- 4.3.11 There is overwhelming evidence to demonstrate that learners are engaged and motivated when they have access to ICT facilities, particularly those involving distance learning and e-learning packages. An ICT infrastructure should significantly increase the flexibility of access to education through independent research in libraries, learning centres and, as some centres have demonstrated, ICT facilities available on the wings.
- 4.3.12 This has been tackled by the YJB PLUS strategy, to some extent in response to a critical report by ECOTEC on the provision of learning within the juvenile estate (ECOTEC, 2001). ECOTEC argued that there was very little available for higher-level learners who had achieved at school and needed a challenging curriculum. The availability of web-based or CD ROM-based courses provided a good opportunity to widen that curriculum base.
- 4.3.13 With the increasing availability of courses on CD ROM, ICT will play a major part in

developing and widening the curriculum, particularly for learners beyond Level 2. However, the active support of a teacher or a learning support assistant is still essential to further educational attainment.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

- 4.4.1 This section has summarised the curriculum development restrainers and drivers identified in this review. Recommendations for policy, practice and research are set out in the Summary and Recommendations section at the front of this report.

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HMP Styal – female prisoners

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HMP Styal – Head of Learning and Skills

Contract Holder

ALI inspector  
Director of Prison

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HMP Cardiff	Unannounced follow-up inspection, 27 Feb–1 Mar 2001
HMP Cardiff	Full announced inspection, 9–13 February 2003
HMP Channings Wood	Full announced inspection, 28 Oct–Nov 2002
HMP Chelmsford	Unannounced follow-up inspection, 9–11 May 2001
HMP Chelmsford	Full announced report, 12–16 August 2002
HMP Dartmoor	Unannounced follow-up inspection, 17–21 Sept 2001
HMP Dartmoor	Announced follow-up inspection, 17–21 Feb 2003

	2003
HMP & YOI Deerbolt	Full announced inspection, 8–12 October 2001
HMP Doncaster	Full announced inspection, 17–20 April 2001
HMP & YOI Doncaster	Unannounced short inspection, 7–9 April 2003
HMP Dorchester	Unannounced follow-up inspection, 25–29 June 2001
HMP Dovegate	Full announced inspection, 31 March–4 April 2003
HMP Drake Hall	Unannounced follow-up inspection, 8–9 January 2001
HMP Drake Hall	Full announced inspection, 18–22 November 2002
HMP Durham	Full announced inspection, 5–14 February 2001
HMP & YOI East Sutton Park	Full announced inspection, 14–18 May 2001
HMP Eastwood Park	Unannounced follow-up inspection, 1–3 October 2001
HMP Elmley	Announced inspection, 30 April–4 May 2001
HMP Elmley	Unannounced follow-up inspection, 12–14 May 2003
HMP Erlestoke	Unannounced follow-up inspection, 13–15 March 2001
HMP Erlestoke	Full announced inspection, 7–11 April 2003
HMP YOI Feltham	Full announced inspection, 14–23 January 2002
HMP Ford	Unannounced inspection, 7–9 May 2002
HMP & YOI Forest Bank	Full announced inspection, 17–21 June 2002
HMP Frankland	Full unannounced inspection, 5–7 February 2001
HMP Garth	Unannounced follow-up inspection, 2–4 October 2001
HMP Gartree	Full announced inspection, 2–6 July 2001
HMP YOI/RC Glen Pava	Unannounced short inspection, 4–6 March 2002
HMP Gloucester	Full announced inspection, 29 April–3 May 2002
HMP Haverigg	Unannounced follow-up inspection, 13–15 Feb 2001
HMP Haverigg	Full announced inspection, 5–9 May 2003

HMP Hewell Grange	Announced inspection, 22–26 October 2001
HMP High Down	Announced inspection, 19–23 November 2001
HMP Highpoint North	Full announced inspection, 30 Sept–4 Oct 2002
HMP Highpoint South	Full announced inspection, 30 Sept–4 Oct 2002
HMP & YOI Hindley	Full announced inspection, 11–15 June 2001
HMP Holloway	Full announced inspection, 8–12 July 2002
HMP Holme House	Announced inspection, 26 February–2 March 2001
HMP Holme House	Unannounced follow-up inspection, 31 Mar–3 April 2003
HMP & YOI Hull	Unannounced follow-up inspection, 2–4 July 2002
HMP Kingston	Full announced inspection, 12–16 February 2001
HMP Kingston	Unannounced follow-up inspection, 5–7 Nov 2002
HMP Kirkham	Short, unannounced inspection, 15–17 May 2001
HMP Lancaster Castle	Unannounced follow-up inspection, 4–7 Dec 2000
HMP Leicester	Short unannounced inspection, 12–16 February 2001
HMP Lewes	Full announced inspection, 10–14 March 2003
HMP Lincoln	Unannounced follow-up inspection, 5–7 Dec 2001
HMP Lindholme	Unannounced follow-up inspection, 29 Feb–2 March 2000
HMP Littlehey	Full announced inspection, 2–6 December 2002
HMP Liverpool	Unannounced inspection, 10–14 June 2002
HMP & YOI Low Newton	Full announced inspection, 30 July–3 August 2001
HMP Manchester	Full announced inspection, 11–21 November 2001
HMP & YOI Moorland	Unannounced inspection, 2–6 December 2002
HMP & YOI New Hall	Unannounced follow-up inspection, 8–10 Jan 2001
HMP North Sea Camp	Unannounced follow-up inspection, 23–25 July 2002

	2002
HMP YOI Northallerton	Unannounced follow-up inspection, 7–9 January 2003
HMP Norwich	Unannounced follow-up inspection, 17–19 Sept 2002
HMP Parc	Full unannounced inspection, 9–13 September 2002
HMP Parkhurst	Unannounced follow-up inspection, 28–30 Oct 2002
HMP Preston	Unannounced short inspection, 3–4 April 2002
HMP Ranby	Full announced inspection, 11–15 February 2002
HMP & YOI Reading	Unannounced follow-up, 25–26 February 2002
HMP Risley	Unannounced follow-up inspection, 7–9 May 2003
HMP Send	Full announced inspection, 15–19 January 2001
HMP Send	Unannounced follow-up inspection, 3–5 Sept 2002
HMP Stafford	Full announced inspection, 16–20 July 2001
HMP Standford Hill	Full announced inspection, 7–11 January 2002
HMP Stocken	Unannounced inspection, 15–17 October 2002
HMP & YOI Stoke Heath	Unannounced inspection, 29–31 May 2001
HMP & YOI Styal	Full announced inspection, 4–8 February 2002
HMP Sudbury	Short unannounced inspection, 9–11 April 2001
HMP Swaleside	Announced inspection, 15–19 July 2002
HMP Swansea	Unannounced inspection, 10–11 July 2001
HMP & YOI Swinfen Hall	Unannounced follow-up inspection, 19–21 Nov 2002
HMP The Mount	Unannounced follow-up inspection, 4–6 April 2002
HMP The Weare	Unannounced follow-up inspection, 14–15 Aug 2001
HMP The Wolds	Short unannounced inspection, 24–26 April 2001
HMP & YOI Thorn Cross	Full announced inspection, 14–18 October 2002
HMP Wandsworth	Unannounced inspection, 20–23 January 2003

HMP Wayland	Full announced inspection, 11–15 June 2001
HMP & YOI Werrington	Full announced inspection, 11–15 March 2002
HMP & YOI Wetherby	Full announced inspection, 12–16 March 2001
HMP Whatton	Full announced inspection, 18–22 March 2002
HMP Whitemoor	Unannounced follow-up inspection, 15–17 July 2002
HMP Winchester	Unannounced follow-up inspection, 26–28 March 2001
HMP Woodhill	Full announced inspection, 18–22 February 2002
HMP Wormwood Scrubs	Unannounced inspection, 10–19 December 2001
HMP Wymott	Unannounced follow-up, 25 April 2002