

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

The Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) in England:

A Brief Guide

Department for
**Innovation,
Universities &
Skills**

Introduction

- 1 The Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) went live across England on 31 July 2006 following a year-long trial in three development regions – the North West, South West and North East. The new delivery arrangements build on the partnerships established in April 2004 between the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the National Probation Service to address the learning needs of offenders in the community.
- 2 The introduction of the OLASS arrangements saw the establishment of new contracts between the LSC and a series of lead providers with – largely – geographical responsibilities. A list of providers is annexed. The new contracts replace those originally put in place by the Prison and Probation Services, and include too the functions formerly carried out by the Prison Service's Vocational Training Instructional Officers. These contracts are due to expire at the end of July 2009.
- 3 The main stakeholders in the new OLASS arrangements include the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS), the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), with the main operational focus coming from the LSC, the National Offender Management Service (NOMS, including HM Prison Service and the National Probation Service), the Youth Justice Board (YJB) and the Youth Offending Teams (YOTs), Jobcentre Plus and the Connexions Service.
- 4 OLASS is not a 'Service' in the same sense as the Ambulance Service or the Women's Royal Voluntary Service (WRVS). It has neither dedicated staff nor an organisation structure. Rather, it is a means by which existing delivery services are brigaded together and focussed on to the particular needs of a specific group of learners. The budget that meets most of the costs of OLASS is held by the LSC (with a significant sum controlled also by the YJB) but the explicit intention, recognised by all the partners, is to act in a collaborative manner, making the effect of the OLASS arrangements greater than the sum of its parts.

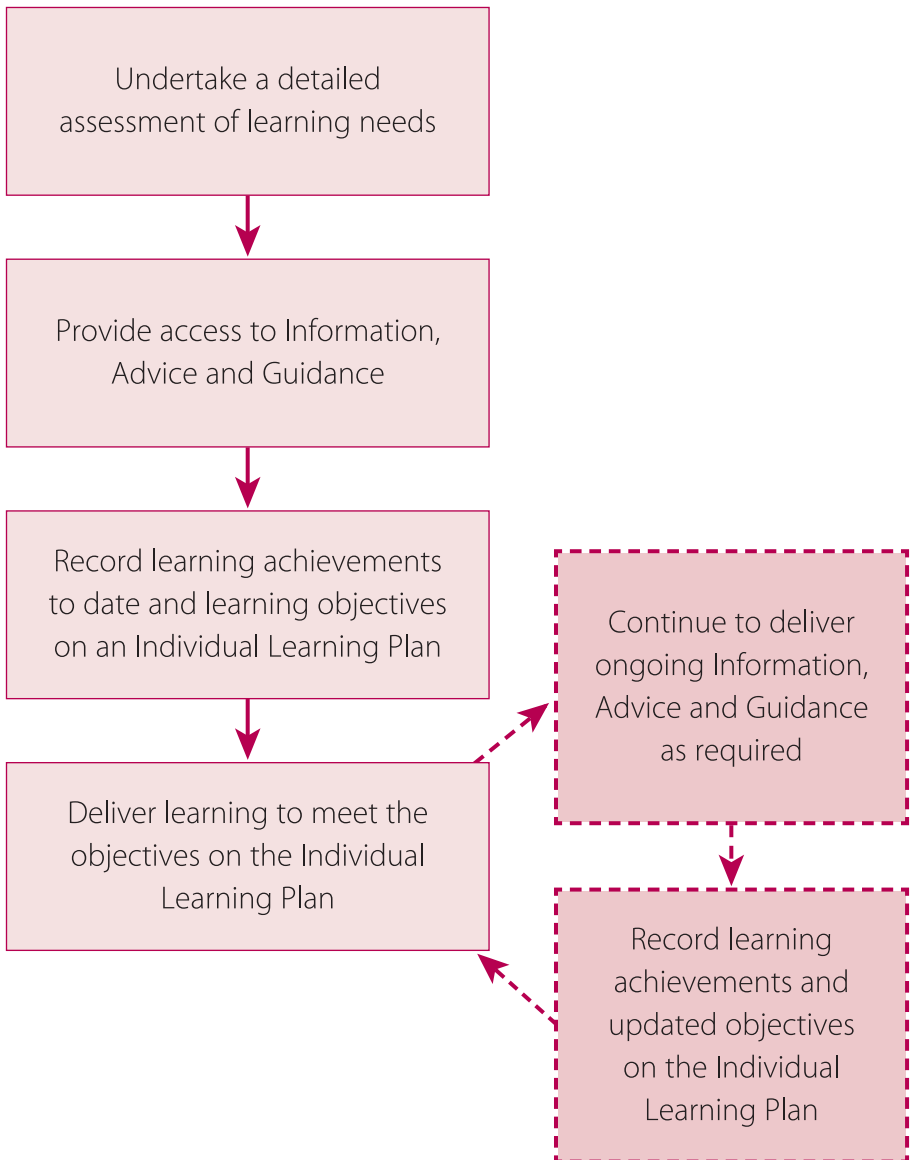
- 5 A separate strategy is being adopted in Wales through partnership working between the Welsh Assembly Government and the Director of Offender Management Services – Wales.

The Policy Aim

- 6 The overall direction of offender learning policy was set out for consultation in the Green Paper *'Reducing Re-Offending Through Skills and Employment'* [December 2005] and re-iterated as firm plans for the future in the follow-up document *'Reducing Re-Offending Through Skills and Employment: Next Steps'* published in December 2006.
- 7 The proposition is a straightforward one: ensuring offenders have the underpinning skills for life (literacy, language, numeracy and basic IT skills), and have developed work skills, will enable them to meet the real needs of employers in the area where they live or will settle after their sentence is complete. Getting and holding down a job is one of the key factors in reducing re-offending – and reducing re-offending benefits individuals, their children and families, the communities in which they live and wider society.
- 8 Offender learning is a key component of the Skills and Employment pathway, one of seven in the National Reducing Re-offending Delivery Plan. Other pathways cover accommodation; drugs and alcohol; health; children and families; finance benefit and debt; and attitudes, thinking and behaviour. Most offenders will have issues to be addressed across a range of these pathways – and solving one set of problems is likely to be less effective unless the range of issues affecting their particular re-offending behaviour is addressed.
- 9 Partnership working on offender learning, and ensuring learning needs are addressed within an offender management process that co-ordinates and sequences activity across the pathways, is critically important to the success of OLASS.

The Offenders' Learning and Skills Service

10 There is a straightforward process at the heart of OLASS:



- 11 This early, intense focus on assessing and recording an offender's learning needs should happen as soon as possible following contact with the criminal justice system. Understanding individual learning needs, how best to meet them and where long-term employment aspirations lie in the context of those needs being met is vitally important to the development of a personalised offender management plan. It will be a vital offender management function to tailor the plan so that arrangements to continue learning on release from custody or during elements of a sentence served in the community are co-ordinated with, say, addressing accommodation needs.
- 12 *'Reducing Re-Offending Through Skills and Employment: Next Steps'* sets out a plan for employment-focussed activity that builds on the development of learning and skills. It describes a regime of employer engagement that ensures the skills developed meet employers' needs, as well as a programme of activity aimed at enabling offenders to take up genuine work and employment opportunities that, in some cases, would straddle the period leading to, and following release from custody. The activity of the Ministry of Justice's Corporate Alliance will be important here, as will the work of job developers and mainstream Jobcentre Plus staff in working with offenders and potential employers to secure work.
- 13 Not all courses of study will be complete when an offender leaves the supervision of the Probation Service, or is released from custody. A key requirement on the LSC's OLASS providers is to 'join up' learning so that it can continue through to the achievement of the objectives set out in the Individual Learning Plan. Not all offenders will have the motivation or confidence, unaided, to pass through these points of transition and continue their learning. The role of OLASS stakeholders in motivating and encouraging a learner, who may have had very poor experiences of mainstream education in the past, to continue that learning is vital. That role is not restricted to teachers, lecturers and others engaged in learning delivery. Everyone who has contact with

the individual offender can have a role in this motivational activity: their Probation Officer/Offender Manager; their Personal Officer; their YOT Supervising Officer; their Jobcentre Plus Advisor; their Connexions Advisor.

The learning offer

- 14 The introduction of OLASS across England is based on a simple but comprehensive description of the end-to-end learning service an offender can expect to access. The *Offender's Learning Journey* sets out this offer, providing a detailed specification of the elements the learning provider is expected to deliver, personalised to the individual's needs. Although, for funding purposes, private prisons are not part of the OLASS arrangements, those establishments do aim to deliver a learning service that meets the *Offender's Learning Journey* requirement, and to link their learning activity with establishments from or to which prisoners are transferred. With some ten percent of prisoners held in private prisons, and with regular movement of offenders between public and private prisons, ensuring the smooth transfer of information between establishments and the delivery of a learning service that looks and feels the same in different places is an important requirement. Offenders moving between English and Welsh prisons will find a broadly similar system, albeit one that will increasingly reflect the devolved arrangements for education and training that apply in Wales.
- 15 The needs of adult offenders and those aged under 18 are different, and this is particularly the case for those below school leaving age. Mainstream educational policies setting out different entitlements for those aged 14–19 adds a further layer of complexity, as does the expectation that higher education will be available to those who have the ability to study at that level. This has meant the production of two versions of the *Offender's Learning Journey*, one for adults and one for those aged under 18.

- 16 The *Offender's Learning Journey* requirement aims to be comprehensive: its agenda means the needs of those with special educational needs, those with learning difficulties and disabilities, and those with particular issues such as dyslexia should all be assessed and delivered. Offender education arrangements are part of the national *Skills for Life Strategy*, so materials used for initial assessments, teaching and the improvement of standards in basic skills are all developed with the particular needs of offender learners in mind. OLASS providers in prisons are – and are likely to remain – among the largest providers of education for literacy, numeracy and language in the country.
- 17 The *Offender's Learning Journey* has a new focus on vocational training, signalling a clear increase in its importance and an expectation that, over time, the nature of the skills delivered will change to align more clearly with employer needs. This is unlikely to be a static process and the expectation is that delivery will continue to shift and alter over time. Opportunities for gaining national qualifications are also available to offenders undertaking unpaid work whilst under the supervision of the National Probation Service, and prisoners can gain a range of nationally recognised qualifications through activities such as PE, gardening, catering and cleaning as well as through work in prison workshops.

Delivering OLASS

- 18 OLASS is delivered by contractors appointed by the LSC. In many places, those contractors have appointed sub-contractors to assist them in delivering the broad service required by the *Offender's Learning Journey* and that list of sub-contractors includes organisations from the voluntary and community sector.
- 19 In the North West, South West and North East, providers are responsible for delivering learning to offenders in custody and in the community. As a result of experience from that first contracting round, providers in the rest of England are responsible for delivering in custody only, but with a direct requirement that they build bridges between their custodial provision and that broad range of learning provision available through mainstream post-16 learning providers and other commissioned services in the community. The LSC's engagement has already levered in substantial additional funds to boost the provision for offenders in the community.
- 20 The LSC's planning and funding responsibilities for offender learning bring other benefits too. For the first time, in some cases, the offender learning providers will integrate their provision with that delivered in their mainstream business. In the past, offender learning delivery activities (especially for offenders in custody) often operated almost wholly separately from, say, a Further Education College's day to day activity. This meant teaching staff were disengaged from professional interaction (apart from a narrow community of similarly focussed professionals in a prison establishment) and tended to miss out on continuing professional development and other developmental activities.

Delivering OLASS – looking forward

- 21 The document *'Reducing Re-Offending Through Skills and Employment: Next Steps'* set out plans to operate, in two test bed regions, a radical new way of delivering offender learning. The West Midlands and the East of England have been selected as the two test beds, starting operation in summer 2007. The campus model will take us even further towards integration of offender learning into mainstream delivery by joining up the existing range of services, augmented by some additional services designed specifically for the needs of offenders.
- 22 Subject to trial operation being successful, it is likely that the campus model will be put in place across England as the current round of LSC contracts comes to an end in July 2009.

Managing and controlling OLASS

- 23 There are a number of important relationships within and between the OLASS stakeholders, but the critical point at which the major operational decisions are made is at regional level. That is where the LSC and the Regional Offender Manager, and the LSC and the YJB, make their vital joint commissioning decisions about the learning and skills service to be provided. It is also at the regional level that strategic decisions are made on the basis of the LSC's contract monitoring information. This information will report achievement of outcomes against targets and data on the contribution OLASS is making to skills outcomes and ultimately the regional reducing re-offending target.
- 24 The regional interaction is the critical point in the system, but there are vitally important relationships at prison level (between the Governor and Head of Learning and Skills, the learning and skills provider, the LSC and, sometimes, the YJB) and at Area Probation Board level (between the Chief Officer, the network of learning and skills providers and the LSC). Important broader relationships exist at

regional level (through structures focussing on the contribution of skills and employment to the region's reducing re-offending delivery plan), at national level (through the LSC's National Executive Group and the Skills and Employment Sub Board, the latter a joint DIUS, DCSF, DWP, MoJ forum) and at Ministerial level through the Reducing Re-Offending Inter-Ministerial Group. The IMG provides vital leadership for implementing this policy.

- 25 A framework of accountabilities conditions these various relationships and establishes escalation processes for issues that cannot be resolved locally. The LSC has clear accountability for planning and funding offender learning, and for delivering learning outcomes, and both holds the budget and has the formal, legal relationship with the providers. But there is an explicit intention to operate collaboratively, with the Regional Offender Manager and the YJB having key roles to play in making joint commissioning decisions about learning to be delivered.
- 26 OLASS delivery arrangements are inspected by Ofsted, alongside the Prison and Probation Inspectorates, to exactly the same standards as all other post-16 learning. All their reports are published. The arrangements for quality generally are identical to those for the rest of the post-16 learning sector, with the materials produced and published by the Quality Improvement Agency applying equally to offender learning. Prisons are expected to prepare action plans following inspections setting out how they propose to address any areas for improvement that are identified by the Inspectors. They are also expected – like all post-16 providers – to prepare annual self-assessments and development plans.

Measuring the impact of OLASS

- 27 The introduction of OLASS was not accompanied by the introduction of a suite of new targets. Rather, the existing Public Service Agreement targets for education around basic skills (*'Skills for Life'*) and work related learning (First full Level 2 qualifications) to which offender learning had always contributed became the main measures by which learner achievement is assessed. The Prison Service's 'classroom efficiency' target was altered so that it measured effectiveness in getting prisoners to classrooms on time.
- 28 As the Qualifications and Credit Framework is implemented nationally, it is likely that a measure will be developed to show offenders' progress towards achieving qualifications based on the new credit framework.

Additional Sources of information:

The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills website at **www.dius.gov.uk/offenderlearning** contains additional sources of information including the following documents:

- The Green Paper *'Reducing Re-Offending Through Skills and Employment'*
- *'Reducing Re-Offending Through Skills and Employment: Next Steps'*
- *The Offender's Learning Journey:*

OLASS Providers

East Midlands

Derbyshire – City College Manchester
Leicestershire and Rutland – City College Manchester
Lincolnshire – Lincoln College
Northamptonshire – City College Manchester
Nottinghamshire – West Nottinghamshire College

East of England

Cross regional IAG – Tribal
Bedfordshire, Luton and Cambridgeshire – A4e
Essex and Hertfordshire – Milton Keynes College
Norfolk and Suffolk – A4e

London

Cross regional IAG – London Advice Partnership
North East Area – City and Islington College
South Area – Lewisham College
West Area – Kensington and Chelsea College

North East

Northumbria – Newcastle College
Tees Valley – Stockton Adult Education
Co Durham – Newcastle College

North West

Cumbria – A4e
Lancashire – Lancaster and Morecambe College
Cheshire – City College Manchester
Manchester – City College Manchester
Merseyside – Mercia Partnership

South East

Kent and Medway – A4e

Hampshire and the Isle of Wight – Isle of Wight College

Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire
– Milton Keynes College

Surrey and Sussex – Nescot

Offenders aged under 18 years – CfBT

South West

Unit 1 – Tribal

Unit 2 – Strode College

Unit 3 – A4e

Unit 5 – Norton Radstock College

Yorkshire and the Humber

Local prisons – City College Manchester

Other prisons – City College Manchester

West Midlands

Cross regional IAG – Fern Training and Development

East Sector – Derby College

West Sector South Group Prisons – City College Manchester

West Sector North Group Prisons – City College Manchester

You can download this publication at:
www.dius.gov.uk/offenderlearning

ISBN: 978-1-84478-981-8

PPMRP/D16(7231)/0807/53

© Crown copyright 2007

Published by the Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills

Extracts from this document may be reproduced for non-commercial research, education or training purposes on the condition that the source is acknowledged. For any other use please contact hmsolicensing@opsi.gsi.gov.uk

75% recycled

This leaflet is printed
on 75% recycled paper



When you have finished with
this leaflet please recycle it

Department for
**Innovation,
Universities &
Skills**