

## **NIACE Response to Coates Review of Education in Adult Prisons**

### **Introduction**

NIACE, the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education, has a long-standing interest and involvement in offender learning and we are grateful for the opportunity to respond to this important inquiry. Over many decades we have worked to influence policy makers to improve the accessibility, range and quality of learning opportunities for offenders and ex-offenders to enhance their lives and ultimately reduce re-offending. Our work has made a positive impact on curricula, resources and good practice, and promotes the learner voice to strengthen offender learning policy and practice.

### **Background**

NIACE believes that learning and preparation for employment can change lives for the better and, in the case of learning for offenders, these benefits not only affect the individual but can also bring advantages to the whole community, as learning and employment play an important role in reducing re-offending.

Enabling offenders to improve their skills and secure employment is at the heart of the government's strategy to reduce re-offending. The Green paper *Breaking the Cycle* put employment at the centre of interventions designed to support the rehabilitation of offenders. The importance of employment in reducing reoffending has placed greater emphasis on the need to develop offenders' employability and vocational skills. This includes a significant emphasis on developing the key skills of Maths and English and the vocational skills demanded by employers in the areas to which prisoners are to be released.

Offenders often have multiple needs, resulting in barriers to participation in learning and progression to employment. At the same time, learning and skills providers and stakeholders in prisons and the community need to develop effective multi – agency practices and partnerships to overcome the barriers to learning participation and employment. Personal barriers faced by offenders differ greatly from person to person. However adult offenders are likely to have multiple needs, categorised by the National Offender Management Services (NOMS) as Education training and employment; Accommodation and support; Health; Drugs and alcohol misuse; Finance; benefits and debts; Children and families; Attitudes thinking and behaviour

Our long-term research identifies a number of factors which contribute to overcoming these barriers. These include partnerships between prisons, providers, and other stakeholders including the voluntary sector, Community Rehabilitation Companies, careers advisors and employers. These partnerships are essential to prepare offenders for employment and resettlement in the community. In addition, offenders benefit from effective basic skills programmes, programmes which have good progression routes, programmes which incentivise learning and programmes which are supported by peer mentors.

### **Core Recommendations**

Alongside our more detailed response we would like to specifically highlight the following seven core recommendations as we believe these can vastly improve the impact of education in adult prisons and ultimately reduce reoffending.

Challenge / Opportunity	Core Recommendations
41% of prisoners don't engage in prison education due to lack of availability of higher level learning. Although providers will support prisoners to take out 24+ loans, take up of level 3 loans is very low.	1. Extend NIACE's research into take up of 24+ loans to cover the Prison Estate - enabling long term prisoners to access higher level courses.
Prisoners' access to higher level qualifications is severely limited. The number of level 3 courses supported by OLASS has halved since 2010 and access is falling. Expanding higher level course provision through wholly online courses would improve employment prospects using an economically viable model.	2. Procurement of higher level wholly online accredited courses with qualifications recognised by employers, especially for areas where large skill gaps are identified e.g. coding and professional technology qualifications
The current OLASS 4 contract framework is mainly based on outcomes of achievement of units and qualifications. However <b>"Transforming Rehabilitation"</b> aimed to move towards a model where payment is also based on reducing reoffending and increasing employment.	3. Include incentives in OLASS 5 contracts for prisons and providers to increase partnership between education providers and community based partners and to monitor progress through the gate.
Prisoners' motivation and negative attitudes to learning can be improved by using peer or volunteer mentors to support the learning journey <sup>1</sup> . Research shows almost a third of Prisoners have said that access to a mentor would have made learning easier <sup>2</sup>	4. Identify and share best practice to expand and sustain peer mentoring programmes; Support the development of progressive pathways for peer mentors, so mentors can gain qualifications and skills to increase their chance of employment
Motivation and attitudes to learning can be further improved by providing a range of learning opportunities and progression routes which better meet the needs of specific groups.	5. Commission much more flexible programmes, developed on the Citizen's Curriculum model which embed basic skills to meet the needs of female prisoners, young offenders and ESOL learners.
Whilst Prison staff are generally 'the key holders' to prisoner participation in learning, our analysis shows that many staff members themselves had negative experiences of education and do not have a strong track record in learning. This can have a negative impact on prisoners' access to engagement with learning <sup>3</sup>	6. Ensure that the message that learning is important to rehabilitation is reinforced consistently across the whole prison regime by providing staff with learning opportunities.
As well as providing a recognised pathway into work, engaging offenders in the apprenticeships and traineeships programmes will critically help Government to fulfil its 3m target.	7. There is a need for further research to monitor, track and document the development of apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships for offenders and to capture key features which could inform future initiatives

<sup>1</sup> Outside Chances: Offender learning in the community (City and Guilds 2011)

<sup>2</sup> Brain Cells, Third Edition. September 2014, Prisoners Education Trust

<sup>3</sup> Vocational Training and Employability Skills in Prisons and Young Offenders Institutions NIACE 2012

## Detailed Responses to Questions

**Question 1:** What do we need to change in order to ensure that education and training provision meets the needs and interests of all potential prison learners?

For example: males and females, long and short sentenced prisoners, prisoners with learning disabilities / difficulties and prisoners who have higher levels of education.

Although it is essential for prisoners to gain the vocational skills they need for employment, many prisoners are debarred from sustained employment and integration within their families and communities by other factors such as drug use or inappropriate responses to external pressures. PSD learning enables learners to acquire helpful behaviours, attributes and values through increasing their understanding of the links between their thoughts, actions and feelings and their knowledge of appropriate ways of thinking about and behaving in social situations.

PSD is primarily aimed at offenders who face multiple barriers to education and employment, such as low confidence and self-esteem, learning difficulties and disabilities, mental health issues and substance misuse. As PSD tends to be unaccredited and aimed at developing the whole person rather than a particular skills set, practitioners are able to take a more flexible, personalised and learner-centred approach to the provision. As well as a progression route to further learning, PSD can also result in learners' engagement with the wider prison regime and activities.

In 2014, NIACE evidenced the wider outcomes of various personal and social development (PSD) learning provision for offenders in custody through a series of pilot trials in Cat A, B, C and D prisons, Female prisons, maximum security prisons and one Young Offenders Institutes.<sup>4</sup>

Trials showed that for some / all learners, participation in a PSD programme resulted in:

- Positive changes related to learning
- Increased motivation and confidence
- Encouraged learner progression to other courses
- Improved communication skills
- Increased confidence to meet new people and increased self-esteem
- Reduced levels of anxiety and stress.
- Improved social relationships, including ability to work as a team.

PSD provision contributes to learners' employability by building personal and social skills required to acquire and sustain a job, such as communication, teamwork and motivation. The pilot programme demonstrated that tutors, education managers and providers interpret the funding rules differently, so adequate PSD provision is not always made available. The current funding framework supports vertical progression so learners are only funded once at each level once. For PSD some offenders would benefit from repetition of a course or completing another course at the same level.

### Policy Recommendations

- OLASS 4 providers should work closely with Governors and with NOMS to emphasise the benefits of PSD and ensure that PSD programmes are available for offenders as part of the core

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<sup>4</sup> THE IMPACT OF PERSONAL SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT LEARNING FOR OFFENDERS. NIACE March 2014  
[http://shop.niace.org.uk/media/catalog/product/t/h/the\\_impact\\_of\\_personal\\_social\\_development\\_learning\\_for\\_offenders.pdf4](http://shop.niace.org.uk/media/catalog/product/t/h/the_impact_of_personal_social_development_learning_for_offenders.pdf4)

offer.

### **Female prisoners**

NIACE has demonstrated that there are fundamental differences between men and women offenders. Learning for women in prison<sup>5</sup> identifies that we have to take account of personal, domestic and socio-economic circumstances for women before, during and after prison, how learning is key to responding positively to the issues and circumstances faced by women in prison and how programmes have been successful in progressing learning for work and reducing reoffending for women.

As well as ensuring women have access to a broad curriculum, progression routes and real life work experience, evidence supports a more holistic programme which recognises caring responsibilities, and the integration of personal and social development, alongside more vocational aspects. Women can often return to situations on release that merely lead them back to offending behaviour. Developing their skills through access to learning in prison, and on release, can enable them to break out of destructive patterns, develop the skills to access sustained employment and training, and also enable them to better care for their families, and become effective members of their community

Women's prisons face some of the same struggles faced by the male prisons in terms of delivering learning and skills provision to offenders: the disruption caused by the regime; lack of effective communication between prisons; limitations of closed facilities or available resources and; a lack of appropriate progression routes to further learning or employment. But women in prison face a range of particular and complex needs which can preclude progress and achievement in learning if unaddressed.

### **Policy Recommendations:**

- Develop specific curricula, ensuring that women in prison have access to a broader curriculum, which supports them to develop the life skills that will enable them to engage and progress with other learning and work opportunities
- Develop a framework for progression specifically for women so that career advisors, teaching and support staff can offer effective guidance on appropriate learning journeys for women offenders

### **Prisoners with learning difficulties / disabilities**

By January 2015, 30% of learners who were assessed in English or Maths reported having a learning difficulty or disability. Providers do give additional support if learning difficulties are apparent / reported, but there is not a systematic screening of learners with low levels of maths/ English who do not report their difficulties.

### **Policy Recommendation**

- Screen all learners with entry level assessments in Maths / English to identify and provide additional learning support needs , including increasing access to accessible learning resources.

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5 [http://shop.niace.org.uk/media/catalog/product/l/e/learning\\_for\\_wip\\_v3\\_final.pdf](http://shop.niace.org.uk/media/catalog/product/l/e/learning_for_wip_v3_final.pdf)

## ESOL learners

*More than a Language*<sup>6</sup>, the 2006 report of the NIACE national inquiry into ESOL provision, noted the 'deplorable' state of ESOL in prisons and called for a programme of action to improve the availability and quality of provision. Yet the most recent research finds little evidence of improvement in the ability of the prisons system to meet the needs of those prisoners – whether British citizens or Foreign National Prisoners – who have ESOL learning needs. *A Prison within a Prison*<sup>7</sup> notes that too little data is available about the scale and nature of ESOL needs within prisons, but what evidence there is suggests considerable scope and need to improve language provision alongside other basic skills such as literacy/English and numeracy/maths. NIACE Citizens Curriculum uses an integrated approach to basic skills delivery which has given been proven successful in prisons.

### Policy Recommendation

- Expand trials of the Citizens Curriculum in prison settings to include a focus on the value of embedded skills for ESOL learners

## Longer term prisoners

The current system prevents longer term prisoners' access to higher level opportunities as, since 24+ Advanced Learning Loans were introduced for learners aged 24 and over studying at Level 3, Level 4 or Advanced and Higher Apprenticeships, there has been a withdrawal of many higher level courses in prisons. This particularly affects long sentence prisoners who have the time to progress onto higher levels of learning.

Some providers do support prisoners to take out loans; however the number is very low. NIACE is currently working with JP Morgan to develop and trial new approaches to boost the take-up and impact of Advanced Learning in London.

### Policy Recommendation

- Extend research into prisons to identify effective approaches to encourage and support 24+ loans for prisoners

## Question 2: How could we better incentivise prisoners to participate in education?

Embedding basic skills is a proven method of incentivising learning in these areas. Over the past year, NIACE has developed, piloted and evaluated *the Citizens' Curriculum*<sup>8</sup> an integrated approach to basic skills delivery, which can support more adults to reach the levels of confidence, self-esteem, knowledge and skills which they need to make the most of their talents and to realise their ambitions in life<sup>9</sup>.

6 <https://www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/MoreThanALanguage-ExecutiveSummary.pdf>

7 *A Prison within a Prison* (Carroll, Hurry and Wilson, 2015)

8 <http://www.niace.org.uk/our-work/life-and-society/citizens-curriculum>

9 The Citizens' Curriculum concept is based on extensive research carried out for the NIACE Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning and published in its report, *Learning through Life* (Schuller and Watson, 2009). In its practical implementation, we have drawn upon research evidence that embedding basic skills can lead to better engagement of learners and improvements in achievement in English and maths skills (Casey, 2006; Eldred 2005)

In its practical implementation, we have drawn upon research evidence that embedding basic skills can lead to better engagement of learners and improvements in achievement in English and maths skills.<sup>10</sup> The value of a curriculum which is co-designed between learners and practitioners has been extensively reported on, for example in the NIACE project report *A New Curriculum for Difficult Times*<sup>11</sup> and in a prison setting, by Little (2015). Such approaches are well established in fields such as adult literacy and ESOL, which lie at the heart of the Citizens' Curriculum, and are well supported through the availability of practitioner materials such as *Reflect for ESOL*.

Our Citizens' Curriculum pilots in prisons and community rehabilitation settings have demonstrated the benefits for learners, practitioner and providers in offender learning contexts. These included improved attitudes and motivation towards learning, and the development of a more engaging and relevant curriculum – for example through a focus on health and civic capabilities which meet the personal and social development needs of prisoners - to help learners prepare for release and successful reintegration into the wider community.

Our pilots found:

- 59% were more positive about numeracy
- 48% were more positive about literacy
- 92% were more motivated to progress to other learning
- 53% were more motivated to find employment
- 35% were more able to access information about health
- 55% had increased confidence in managing money
- 87% increased their self – esteem
- 67% accessed drug and alcohol support

NIACE believes that the Citizens' Curriculum has the potential to form the basis of a 'programme of study' approach to funding and practice in basic skills and ESOL in Offender Learning, in which flexible programmes of learning could be commissioned in response to the identified needs of specific cohorts of prisoners – e.g. in the female estate, for young offenders, for prisoners with ESOL needs. Under the Citizens' Curriculum model, funding and delivery could be based upon a wider set of outcome-based success measures, including progression to learning and work, rather than on the simple achievement of qualifications. In prisons, the exact outcomes used in this process are likely to require tailoring to the context.

#### **Policy Recommendations**

- Identify how Innovation and learning support budgets can be accessed to offer the Citizens Curriculum in prisons.
- Identify and offer progression routes from the Citizens Curriculum to higher level learning opportunities. Apply a wider set of outcome based success measures to the delivery of the Citizens' Curriculum model in prisons , including progression to learning and work, rather than on the simple achievement of qualifications

#### **Intensive delivery**

In 2012, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) commissioned NIACE to conduct a feasibility study into intensive delivery of English and maths in custodial settings. The rationale for

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10 (Casey, 2006; Eldred 2005)

11 *A New Curriculum for Difficult Times* (Beer, 2013)

the intensive English and maths pilot in prisons developed from NIACE and the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC) *Armed Forces Basic Skills Longitudinal Study* which identified a range of factors central to the success of the Armed Forces delivery model for English and maths, including discrete intensive approaches. As a result, in 2011, NIACE explored the transferability of the model to the secure estate through pilot prisons and found:

- Where English and maths programmes were part of sentence plans, learner retention is high and progress towards agreed levels is compulsory.
- Both tutors and learners were in favour of using incentives, which included: access to popular activities (e.g. workshops); access to preferred learning pathways; phone credit; and longer visits.
- Where learning is part of an incentive scheme, if learners refuse to attend classes, education staff have the authority to issue an IEP, for example, television.
- While some prisoners are interested and keen to attend English and maths classes, many do not initially want to learn as some feel: they do not need English or maths; when they leave prison their job opportunities are limited and so there is no point; have had poor experiences of schooling and are nervous about a return to learning.
- The intensive programme made a statistically significant improvement in learners' attainment in maths. While English learners made improvements, this did not reach a significant level. Initial Functional Skills test results for learners in the pilot compare reasonably with previous Skills for Life test results.
- There were significant improvements to learners' attitudes towards the value of learning and levels of confidence in their ability to learn;
- There are some missed opportunities for prisons to provide consistent messages about the value of acquiring English and maths skills
- Works best in local prisons for learners on short term sentences when appropriate allocation to courses and attendance is supported by prison management
- Where maths learning has a clear rationale e.g. in YOIs as part of a vocational pathway
- In Category D prisons where learners are working towards release. Prisoners see there is more value to achieving in a short period of time in order to progress more quickly.

#### **Policy Recommendations**

- Consider, adapt and apply lessons from the study to incentivise where appropriate and likely to succeed
- Ensure that the message that learning is important to rehabilitation is reinforced consistently across the whole prison regime.
- More use is made of opportunities to convey the value of English and maths, including: induction; one to one IAG advice; initial assessments of skills; sentence planning; during course inductions; development of Individual Learning Plans (ILPs), formative assessment, vocational training, outreach activity.

#### **Peer mentoring**

Peer mentoring has a significant role to play in addressing the needs of people in prisons<sup>12</sup>. The opportunity to prepare for release through experience and qualifications in information, advice and guidance (IAG) is highly valued by prisoners and gives strong incentive to learn. For example, NIACE's research to scope learning provision available in women's prisons<sup>13</sup> found that the opportunity to

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/files/PIPs\\_Research\\_Briefing.pdf](http://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/files/PIPs_Research_Briefing.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Dixon, A. and Jones, E. (2013) Learning for women in prison: the role of learning and skills in responding positively to the issues and circumstances faced by women in prison  
[http://shop.niace.org.uk/media/catalog/product/l/e/learning\\_for\\_wip\\_v3\\_final.pdf](http://shop.niace.org.uk/media/catalog/product/l/e/learning_for_wip_v3_final.pdf)

gain IAG qualifications and work in the Peer-to-Peer call centre at HMP Send, enabled women to gain work experience, develop a healthy work ethic and communicate with a range of people. This also gave some learners the confidence and motivation to continue learning and complete further qualifications.

In recognition of the valuable role that peer mentors play in engaging prisoners in learning – and that the scale of the maths need in the offender population is higher than the estimated national average – NIACE developed *Maths4Prisons*<sup>14</sup>. This scheme was piloted in 2012 and has since been rolled out to more than 40 prisons across England, with the resources available online<sup>15</sup>.

Both mentors and learners reported improvements in their attitudes towards and engagement with learning, as well as their confidence in their maths skills.

This programme took a peer mentoring approach to encourage and support prisoners to engage with and progress in their basic maths skills.

Feedback from trials confirmed that adults in custody often struggle with maths or avoid it and many do not join the classes available to them. As a result of the programme there was a notable change in mentee attitudes to maths with an increase in participation in available maths courses. There were also benefits for mentees, with many building on their mentoring experience to progress to IAG accredited courses, improving their employability on release.

Building on this, NIACE developed the Maths Mentors programme which, in 2013 / 2014, was rolled out directly to prisoners, training over 90 mentors. In 2014/15 we adopted a train the trainer approach, training over 50 tutors and education managers to roll out the training directly to prisoners who have since rolled out the training in 18 prisons. The programme is currently being reviewed and mapped to a qualification/ne

Family Learning has a long successful history of delivery in prisons, allowing family ties to be maintained and developed. Since 2011, the more formal Prison Family Learning Programme has addressed the learning needs and interests of both parents and their children. Supporting those who are preparing for release and who have children is important if successful rehabilitation back into communities and integration with their families is to be realised. Between 2013 and 2014, NIACE piloted Maths4Mums in prisons<sup>16</sup>

Building on the maths mentor programme, the pilot showed that taking a Family Learning approach has positive learning outcomes both for adults and children as one of the strongest motivators for parents to learn is in order to support their child's learning and development and that a supportive peer mentoring approach in a prison context has positive benefits on both mentors and mentees

#### **Policy Recommendations**

- Review the impact of current mentoring programmes available across prisons in England to identify what is working and where improvements can be made. The findings could then be shared with NIACE National Peer Volunteering Advisory Group, coordinated to ensure peer mentoring through learning provision in prisons is included strategically in the work of the group at a national level.
- Support the development of progressive pathways for peer mentors, giving mentors the

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15 <http://www.niace.org.uk/our-resources/life-and-society/maths4prisons>

16 Maths4Mums a peer mentoring approach to family learning (NIACE 2015)



opportunity to gain qualifications and skills which will increase their chance of employment

- Leaders and managers should locally review how their Family and Community learning provision links with the priorities of their local prison/s to consider how to support prisoners' progression to rehabilitation.

**Question 3:** How could we better assess and measure the performance and effectiveness of prisoner learning?

We believe that there is a need to shift away from a narrow definition of prison learning from the sole perspective of education towards a definition and model which addresses and measures the whole learner journey, with input from all stakeholders, including careers advisors, health professionals, CRCs and workshop leaders as well as input from education providers.

A common assessment and impact framework should be applied with measurements from all stakeholders' input to produce a whole learner assessment. In partnership with Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) providers and HMPS staff.

NIACE is currently working in partnership with Heads of Learning and Skills, Heads of reducing Reoffending and OLASS 4 providers to develop and trial a health check process and resources to support a whole organisation approach to offender learning, aligning to the Ofsted 2015 Common Inspection Framework

This will ensure cross-sector collaboration resulting in improved partnership work – including employers, Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs), National Careers Service prime contractors, third sector organisations, and health agencies – and an enhanced learner experience and journey. We are piloting the approach with 18 prisons and evaluating the effect on improving performance, before roll out to other prisons.

The value of and need for a whole organisation approach is supported by NIACE's evaluation of the intensive English and maths provision in prisons pilot<sup>17</sup>. The study concluded that learning works best where it is fully supported by offender managers in a whole organisation approach where English and maths learning is seen as a critical part of reducing reoffending. This involves: consistent messages about the role of English and maths skills in reducing re-offending; incentives to learn, specifically the inclusion of English and maths learning in sentence planning; compacts to ensure attendance is maintained and prisoners are retained on programme before transfer or release; involvement by both offender managers and OLASS providers in appropriate allocation of learners to courses.

#### **Policy Recommendations**

- Build on NIACE's findings from the Intensive English and Maths pilot and on the tools developed in the Whole organisation improvement programme to produce a common method of assessing and measuring the performance and effectiveness of prisoner learning

**Question 5:** How could we make best use of different prison environments and facilities to deliver education?

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17 Novitzky, J. and Jones, E. (2013) Intensive English and maths provision in prisons: evaluation of pilots

**Question 6:** What is the potential for increased use of technology to support better prison education?

**Question 7:** What needs to change to enable technology to deliver this support?

NIACE supports the growth of technology enhanced learning in prisons, believing it can widen access to learning for prisoners, through higher levels of engagement and progression. It offers opportunities for personalised access to learning, where learners are no longer restricted by the face to face offers available but can progress their learning at a pace which suits them and progress to a wider offer of higher level courses which would otherwise not be economically viable or available.

Research from the Prisoner Learning Alliance shows that prisoners' access to higher level qualifications (level 3 and above) is severely limited. The number of level 3 courses supported by OLASS has halved since 2010 and access to higher level courses is falling. It is much more difficult to deliver higher level courses than those for basic skills, especially in curriculum areas where tutors have no / limited expertise or qualification, so much provision has concentrated on lower level skills which offer the highest return on investment, often at the expense of provision which matches national and local skill gaps. Qualifications required to meet these needs are often more numerate and science based (e.g. coding, instructional development, big data etc) are proven to be delivered successfully through wholly online learning. Expanding higher level course provision through wholly online courses would improve employment and self employment prospects using an economically viable model.

The VC is not currently being used to its full potential. Placement and access to secure machines is limited in many prisons, while shortages of prison staff and placement of secure machines limits access by prisoners and stakeholders to the VC. A recent NIACE survey of NCS advisors in custody found that a significant percentage of advisors and their clients are often unable to access secure machines.

Digital content is made available on the VC from various sources, including OLASS providers and individual tutors. In 2012, NIACE carried out an analysis of VC content and found that most VC content was static, especially basic skills content, and was unlikely to engage or motivate learners. Although there has been a recent increase in the amount of interactive content available, the VC would still benefit from investment in further interactive digital content and secure sites to engage more prisoners in learning, meet the needs of higher level learners, offer personalised learning to develop specialist skills which would lead to sustained employment and meet the needs of longer term prisoners who often are unable to progress their learning to higher levels through distance learning courses.

In 2013, NIACE developed "[MathsEverywhere](#)" – an app to boost adult numeracy using gamification to relate maths and numeracy to everyday tasks. Recognising its potential to engage reluctant audiences, the app was re-developed for the Virtual Campus. Each OLASS provider has used the app a variety of maths programmes and are currently including the app in Maths Mentor training and resources, extending its use to e-learning with peer support. As well as hosting the app on the VC, the app could be hosted simultaneously on the VC sister site, Bring On Potential, offering a seamless and continuing route to progression from custody to community.

Although many of the teething problems with the VC have been resolved, in many areas there are still issues of connectivity and bandwidth. The FE Area Based Review Advisory group (ABRAG) has indicated that Technology-enhanced learning, blended learning and online learning feature

prominently in the criteria for future provision with realignment of FE sector land and buildings to a more digital focussed delivery system.

For prison education, this would align with the current review and consideration of releasing prison assets to build more modern premises. Money realised could be partly used to ensure new prisons have robust digital infrastructure and in cell ICT provision, building on lessons from the HMP Thameside pilot

### **Accessible learning materials**

Since 2010 NIACE has promoted the use of the Virtual Campus through training and support programmes to ensure that OLAS and NOMS training, teaching and IAG staff were given the skills, knowledge and tools to enable them to use the Virtual Campus for the benefit of offenders undertaking learning or seeking progression to employment.

48% of prisoners have low literacy skills and find it difficult to learn using standard text based materials. However our analysis of content on the Virtual Campus identified few examples of suitable resources for these learners and the need for more engaging maths and English resource. As a result, in 2014 – 2015, we delivered a programme for prison staff and tutors to enable them to create interactive, accessible content, particularly basic skill resources, to cascade these skills to their colleagues and to promote the use of interactive resources for supported and self directed learning.

In 2014 – 2015 NIACE carried out a training programme for 30 tutors and 10 accessibility champions in the use of Assistive Technologies in prisons and the creation of accessible digital content for the Virtual Campus (ATVC) NIACE brought together best practice examples in the creation of accessible resources and use of tools to enhance interactivity and inclusion. These were collated in a “CPD in a box” resource to increase the capability of teaching staff. This has been provided to all OLASS providers and is used in CPD sessions to increase the creation of accessible digital content for many subject areas.

### **Training and digital skills**

To date, most OLASS tutor training in the use of technology has focussed solely on the acquisition of technical skills. Between 2009 – 2013 NIACE delivered training on the use of the VC to over 2000 OLASS staff, partly through a cascade model. This model and existing resources could be adapted to increase the pedagogical skills of staff to use e-learning effectively, resulting in more effective use of staff time

According to the European commission, by 2015, 90% of all jobs will require basic digital skills for almost every area of employment and digital literacy will be a basic need. Yet many prisoners, especially those who have served long term sentences, are released without these skills, providing further barriers to employment and to integration in society. The VC can offer opportunities to develop these skills, but current courses and content require improvement and funding flexibility to facilitate this

It is estimated that 745,000 additional workers with digital skills are needed to meet rising demand from employers between 2013 and 2017<sup>18</sup>, offering employment opportunities to ex-offenders. The development of IT academies which give prisoners opportunities for professional qualifications from Microsoft and Cisco with Novus and Weston College are an encouraging development, but these

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18 <http://www.ukdigitalskills.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Binder-9-reduced.pdf>

opportunities should be offered in more establishments. YOI institutions could benefit hugely from these to prepare young offenders for IT apprenticeships and traineeships.

Many IT jobs require not only qualifications but portfolios of work, IN 2013 – 2014, NIACE worked with HMP Long Lartin, where prisoners developed interactive digital content for the VC and worked towards a level 3 qualification in digital content creation. The results were promising, however a longer trial is needed to realise longer term benefits to employment prospects for more prisoners.

#### **Policy Recommendations**

8. Procurement of higher level wholly online accredited courses with qualifications recognised by employers, especially for areas where large skill gaps are identified e.g. coding and professional technology qualifications
9. Carry out a whole scale access review across all prisons and relocate VC access points where necessary to widen access for staff, learners and other stakeholders (e.g. NCS advisors and CRCs). Require governors to review and change arrangements for prisoner access to the VC by making alterations to restrictive regimes
10. Develop clear advice and guidance from the Skills Funding Agency on funding possibilities associated with online learning in prisons. Encourage more online learning to be included on the SFA framework, and host more digital learning courses on the VC
11. Increase investment and partnerships to host more interactive digital content on the VC , increasing access to online learning and training opportunities in line with FELTAG recommendations
  - Make use of capital assets released by sale of prison assets to provide robust infrastructure and increase in –cell IT capability. Develop the pedagogical as well as technical training for OLASS staff to increase use of online / blended learning models resulting in staff efficiencies and increased self directed learning by prisoners, especially if combined with in –cell IT provision.
  - Develop a common basic digital skill course to be offered to all prisoners, funded through flexible funding models (e.g. use of the Innovation Code). Carry out a longer term trial of the HMP Long Lartin pilot to identify long term impact on employment and employability.

**Question 12:** How could we enable commissioners of prison education to work more effectively with relevant partners?

The current OLASS 4 contracts were awarded to four learning providers. Since the contracts preceded “Transforming Rehabilitation”, we do not believe that the contracts incentivise partnership working to increase education, training, volunteering or employment after release.

#### **Policy Recommendations:**

- OLASS 5 contracts should include incentives for prisons and providers to increase partnerships between education providers and community based partners such as National careers Prime contractors, Community Rehabilitation Companies, Community learning providers, employers, Third Sector organisations and Local Enterprise Partnerships to increase education, training, volunteering or employment after release.
- NIACE has created a new regional mapping document to encourage greater partnership working amongst support organisations, both inside and outside of prisons, in each of the regions of England. This guide will help users identify relevant support for offenders nearing the end of their sentences, although it can also be used for forward planning with any

custodial sentence. It would benefit advisers and others new to National Careers Service In Custody work, informing of the range of employment and learning support available to offenders and ex-offenders. The mapping should be maintained and developed to support wider engagement by agencies inside prisons with those in the community

**Question 14:** Is there anything further that you would like to add that may fall outside of the scope of the previous questions, if so please add any additional comments below :

In 2012, NIACE undertook a study<sup>19</sup> to identify effective practice in vocational learning and employability skills provision across prison estates and young offender institutions (YOIs). This identified a number of factors which contribute to the successful delivery of vocational training and employability skills for offenders, including:

- Good partnerships between prisons, providers and employers
- Programmes with embedded Functional Skills and have good progression routes
- Programmes which are supported by peer mentors

The report also identified some of the challenges in delivering a vocational training and employability skills programme within prisons including:

- Issues with staffing
- Poor progression routes
- Establishing effective partnerships and links with employers

Following this study, NIACE published “*Supporting Transitions into Employment for Young Offenders (STEYO)*” . This investigated the viability of delivering traineeships in prisons and attempted to pilot the approach with OLASS providers. This identified a number of barriers and challenges to achieve this, concluding that it is virtually impossible to deliver a traineeship in prison:

- Providers need the requisite grade to deliver a traineeship
- Criteria for trainee excludes most prisoners ( age, work readiness, level of qualification)
- There are difficulties accessing the ASB funding needed for traineeships in prison
- Work experience in prison does not count towards a traineeship

In 2015 – 2016 NIACE will build on these findings to identify effective models of Traineeships, targeted at the specific needs of eligible young offenders. This project will focus on young offenders who are on Release on temporary licence (ROTL) to increase quality of provision that supports young offenders to make positive transitions to employment.

#### **Policy Recommendations**

- There is a need for further research to monitor, track and document the development of apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships for offenders and to capture key features which could inform future initiatives
- A national Offender Engagement Forum including CRCs, Prime Contractors, Third sector agencies, LEPS, prisons, Head of Learning and Skills, education providers and employers should support efforts to develop a more co-ordinated approach to engaging a wider range of employers

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<http://www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Vocational%20Training%20and%20Employability%20Skills%20in%20Prisons%20and%20Young%20Offenders%20Institutions.pdf>

- Many prison staff themselves have not had positive experiences of education and may not have a strong track record in learning. This can sometimes have a negative impact on prisoners' access to engagement with learning. This should also be addressed as they are literally the key holders to prisoner participation in learning.