



National Audit Office

Meeting needs? The Offenders' Learning and Skills Service

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SUMMARY

1 Providing learning activities for offenders while they are in prison or serving community sentences is an important way to help them improve their basic literacy and numeracy skills, or to gain more advanced or directly vocational qualifications. Enhancing their skills can help individuals to find employment, which evidence suggests reduces the likelihood that they will re-offend. As at the end of June 2007 there were in England 78,000 individuals in custody and 245,000 offenders under supervision by the Probation Service.

2 Addressing offenders' learning and skills needs is challenging because they are more likely than the general population to be disadvantaged in multiple ways; often having poor educational backgrounds, being drug users before conviction, not having permanent accommodation, and having mental health disorders.

The prison and probation services also have to deal with these additional problems, many of which will be high priority issues for individual offenders, in the context of rising numbers of offenders in prison and under supervision in the community.

3 Prior to July 2005, learning and skills services for offenders in most prisons were delivered by providers, mainly colleges, under contract to the Prison Service and Instructional Officers employed by the Prison Service. These contracts had been due for re-tendering in 2004 but prior to that, in 2003, Ministers decided that the Learning and Skills Council (the LSC) should take on responsibility for planning, funding and, alongside Regional Offender Managers, commissioning delivery of a new learning and skills service for offenders in all 130 public sector prisons and for offenders under supervision in the community in England.¹

¹ The LSC's learning and skills service for offenders does not operate in the 10 PFI prisons in England, where PFI contractors are responsible for providing a learning and skills service. Co-ordinating provision in these prisons and in public sector prisons is crucial, however, because offenders move between publicly managed and PFI prisons.

4 Roll out of the new Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) began in 2005 and was completed in July 2006. The LSC spent £109 million on OLASS for adults² in its first full year of operation, the 2006-07 academic year; the bulk of money, £98 million being paid to providers for learning and skills courses offered in prisons. Some £9 million of funds specifically for offender learning was spent on basic literacy and numeracy skills provision delivered directly to offenders in the community, and offenders in the community can also access mainstream education. This compares with £93 million spent on equivalent services for offenders in custody and the community in 2004-05.

5 Ensuring that OLASS works effectively is complex, because it depends on partnership working between several organisations which have very different core responsibilities. The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills sets the overall policy framework and holds the budget.³ The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) leads on policy to reduce re-offending, and Regional Offender Managers, employed by NOMS, co-commission with the LSC the learning and skills provision required for their region. The LSC awards contracts for learning and skills provision, which includes a dedicated information, advice and guidance service, to providers, which are mainly established further education colleges and private companies.

6 In custody, the 21 providers under contract to the LSC are responsible for identifying offenders' learning needs and for developing the curriculum offer, working with Prison Service staff. The Prison Service is responsible for encouraging offenders to take up opportunities while they are in custody. In the community, the National Probation Service screens and encourages offenders under their supervision to take up learning and skills opportunities. Ofsted inspects the adequacy of all learning and skills provision across the whole of the prison service and in the community. In a wider context, an Inter-Ministerial Group on Reducing Re-offending, set up in 2006, co-ordinates cross-department working on the seven strands of the National Reducing Re-offending Delivery Plan and 'locks together' the OLASS partners.⁴

7 Policy on reducing re-offending through skills and employment has not changed direction but it has continued to be refined, since the decision by ministers to create OLASS. The Green Paper consultation document, *Reducing Re-offending through Skills and Employment*, was published in 2005 and set out for consultation proposals to place a greater emphasis on employment, aiming to equip offenders with skills that more directly meet employers' needs and encouraging greater involvement of employers in the design and delivery of learning provision. The proposals built on the drive, through the engagement of the LSC, to integrate offender learning with mainstream education delivery arrangements. A *Next Steps* document in 2006 responded to the consultation, setting out more detailed aspirations for engaging employers, employability contracts with offenders and an emphasis on skills and jobs in prisons and probation areas. These new plans are being trialled in two "test bed" regions, the West Midlands and the East of England. Most recently, the LSC published in September 2007 a *Prospectus* for developing OLASS, which responds to the *Next Steps* document and sets out how the LSC proposes to develop offender learning arrangements.

8 The primary objective of OLASS provision is to increase employability and thereby reduce re-offending. OLASS provision may also contribute to reduced re-offending by improving individuals' basic and life skills, increasing their ability to function in society. In prison, OLASS provision also helps the Prison Service to meet its objective to treat prisoners humanely and decently by providing them with purposeful activity, which is very important for the maintenance of well ordered and secure establishments. As well as helping the eventual resettlement of prisoners, the Prison Service sees purposeful activity as an important tool for the settlement of prisoners whilst they are in custody. OLASS provision also needs to be co-ordinated with other learning and skills provision that may be delivered by the Prison Service and other providers outside the OLASS framework, and other commissioned activities designed to rehabilitate offenders. Rising numbers in prisons and the associated need to move prisoners between prisons mean that continuity in the provision of learning and skills is more difficult to achieve.

2 Figures relate to adult offenders only. Juvenile offenders, under the age of 18, were outside the scope of our examination. The figure of 78,000 individuals in custody (referenced in paragraph 1) is a total which includes those in PFI prisons and juveniles.

3 The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills holds the learning and skills budget for public sector prisons and a specific budget for improving the basic literacy and numeracy skills of offenders in the community.

4 The 'OLASS partners' are the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills; the National Offender Management Service; the Learning and Skills Council; the Prison Service; and the National Probation Service.

9 Against this complex and challenging background, this report examines how effectively OLASS has been implemented, looking both at the delivery partners' overall strategy towards funding and procurement of OLASS and at how well OLASS works on a day to day basis from the point of view of the offender. There is insufficient comparable data on the performance of the system before OLASS was implemented to enable us to judge at this stage whether OLASS has improved outputs or outcomes. It is too early to assess whether OLASS has yet made any additional contribution to reducing rates of re-offending and we have not at this time examined this issue. Provision in Wales, where OLASS does not operate, and for offenders under the age of 18, is outside the scope of this report.

Conclusions

a) The partners' overall approach to the implementation of OLASS

10 From the start of assuming responsibility for OLASS, the LSC recognised that it had inherited a number of significant problems from the previous system, which have continued to be issues that impact adversely on the effectiveness of OLASS. These include levels of provision at each prison not necessarily being linked to current learning and skills needs, contracts not rewarding outputs or outcomes, and insufficient management information on the achievement of the policy objectives.

11 Notwithstanding the policy framework put in place by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and NOMS, there remains an unresolved tension about the purpose of learning and skills in custody – in respect of its role to enhance life chances and also as a way of providing activity to occupy prisoners, which may not be linked to the wider objectives of offender learning and skills. At the implementation stage, this tension meant that the LSC had to preserve historical allocations of learning hours at each establishment in order to avoid destabilising provision levels in prisons. Whilst historical allocations may have been appropriate to the regimes and populations in each prison when they were constructed, there is no evidence to suggest that these allocations meet the current learning and skills needs of each prison's population. There has been very little reallocation of provision between establishments since OLASS was implemented.

12 There is evidence drawn from the wider population that improving individuals' basic literacy and numeracy skills increases the likelihood of them being in employment. There is little evidence, however, on the impact that learning and skills provision in general, other than that which aims to improve basic skills, has in reducing re-offending, and the evidence base for the particular mix of learning and skills provision for offenders that will be most likely to achieve greater employability and reduce re-offending is poor. This means that, despite the emphasis in the recent policy documents on the need to provide skills for employability, there is not a clear statement at the national level as to what the mix of learning and skills provision at each prison establishment should be. The LSC has outlined proposals in its *Prospectus* for commissioning research on the links between learning and skills, sustainable employment and reduction in re-offending. The LSC also intends to carry out reviews of the existing provision and demand for provision in each criminal justice area, and proposes using these reviews to develop a planned approach for the whole system. Pilot reviews commenced in the East of England and West Midlands in January 2008.

13 There are practical difficulties in a custodial environment with holding providers to account for learning outcomes, such as course completions and qualifications achieved, which form part of the funding incentive for mainstream further education colleges. Offenders' movements between prisons and some incidences of non-attendance, for example due to court appearances, mean that individuals' courses of study are sometimes delivered by multiple providers and those providers do not have complete control over learning and skills achievements. The OLASS partners found no way to overcome this difficulty before contracts were let. Payments to OLASS providers are made according to hours of learning provided, irrespective of attendance level or learning outcome. The OLASS partners are now working on ways to address this in future contract rounds.

14 A considerable amount of management information is held locally, for example by prisons, probation areas and providers, which would allow the LSC to monitor the effectiveness of OLASS, but the management information systems are not effective as ways to capture key data centrally. The LSC has gathered data centrally, for the first time, on the courses that individual offenders are working towards and the qualifications that have been achieved, applying the system that it uses for mainstream further education. However, this system does not currently provide the partners with information on the proportion of offenders who are meeting their personal learning needs, why offenders do not meet their learning needs, and what impact the provision has on employment and re-offending rates.

b) Day to day delivery of OLASS

15 We found that there is no consistently applied process for identifying individual offenders' learning and skills needs and planning how to address them, in either the custodial or community setting. A third of the learning plans we reviewed did not specify the courses to be undertaken and fewer than half recorded progress made. Offenders do not always enrol on and attend the courses their assessments and learning plans have identified them as needing. Around one fifth of the offenders in our sample in custody who had been identified by OLASS providers as having basic literacy and numeracy skills needs had enrolled on a literacy or numeracy course. No information is systematically collected as to why offenders with learning and skills needs do not devise learning plans and enrol on courses, although reasons could include the need to address other risks associated with re-offending, such as drug and alcohol problems. Participation in learning and skills is voluntary for adult offenders, although offender managers have a role to play in motivating offenders with learning and skills needs to engage, and in custody, the Prison Service can influence the incentives to do so, for example by dictating that the amount that offenders are paid to attend learning and skills is at a rate comparable to pay for other activities in prison, such as prison work.

16 Not all courses offenders start are completed. Our file review indicates that approximately one third of the courses commenced in custody are not completed. Although some of the uncompleted courses may result from policy decisions, such as the early release programme, that are outside the control of the delivery partners, we observed that several factors that resulted in uncompleted courses could be better controlled. About half of all uncompleted courses in our sample arose as a result of the release or transfer of prisoners. Moving offenders between prisons causes disruption because there is inconsistency in provision across prisons and because offenders' records are often not transferred. Offenders who do not complete the courses they start will not achieve a qualification that could demonstrate to a potential employer the skills acquired, undermining the core purpose of OLASS of increasing employability. On this basis, we estimate that uncompleted courses could be costing the LSC as much as £30 million. In practice, offenders who start programmes and do not finish them are likely to derive some benefit. As an illustration of what the cost might be, if 5 per cent of expenditure is wasted through uncompleted courses, the cost would be £5 million.

c) Overall conclusion on value for money

17 In our view, based on the findings above, the value for money of OLASS across almost all aspects of delivery is below the level of which the service is capable in time. Many of the problems which led to the establishment of OLASS have not been substantially overcome since its introduction. The day to day delivery of OLASS in the community suffers from a number of the same issues that reduce value for money in prisons. The partners recognise the problems, and the LSC, as the lead procurer, is currently in public consultation on the range of issues above that impact adversely on value for money.

Recommendations

18 As the partners take forward their plans to reform OLASS, we recommend the following priorities:

To address tensions surrounding the different objectives met by learning and skills provision in the prison system:

a **Tensions between meeting the learning and skills needs of the individual offender and the Prison Service's need to occupy prisoners in purposeful activity are a brake on better value for money, and now need to be resolved.** The primary objective of OLASS is to increase employability and thereby help reduce re-offending. For some individuals, in the prison system, a focus on employability is inappropriate, and the objective of learning and skills is to increase life skills to reduce re-offending. The Prison Service fully shares this objective, and it also relies on OLASS as a means with which to provide prisoners with purposeful activity, as part of maintaining a secure and orderly custodial environment. Tensions between the different objectives of OLASS have prevented a re-allocation of OLASS resources across the prison system and continue to result in confusion at the delivery level about where provision ought to be targeted. This confusion is compounded by the lack of clarity surrounding the role of Heads of Learning and Skills in prisons.

Drawing on the support of the Inter-Ministerial Group on Reducing Re-offending, all the **OLASS partners** need to formally recognise and reconcile the multiple objectives of OLASS, and clearly communicate these, and the priorities attached to each objective, throughout the delivery chain. This will depend on effective mechanisms for collaboration between all the partners, and engagement between policy-makers and those responsible for delivery at national and regional level. Resolution of this tension will assist with the reallocation between prisons of resources for learning and skills provision (**Recommendation c**), and facilitate better decision making at the delivery level about the allocation of offenders to provision. The **OLASS partners** should also decide and clearly communicate the objectives of Heads of Learning and Skills.

b **Define a core curriculum to be in place at each prison establishment and, in line with the LSC's proposals, bring more consistency into the other courses that providers deliver, to allow greater continuity when prisoners are transferred.** The **Learning and Skills Council** should define a minimum core curriculum to be in place at all establishments, and require providers to work together to bring more consistency into the specific qualifications they deliver at prison establishments between which prisoners are likely to transfer. The **Prison Service**, at an establishment level, should give regard to the importance of offenders completing courses, all else equal, when making transfers.

c **Consistent with the LSC's proposals, draw up and agree with all partners plans which reallocate resources for learning and skills provision in custody and the community, based on offender need and likely effectiveness of intervention.** The reallocations will need to be phased over time to minimise the risks associated with disruption to prison regimes, but re-allocations should commence in contracts beginning in August 2009. The **Learning and Skills Council** will need to consult fully the **National Offender Management Service** and the **Prison Service**. In parallel, learning and skills allocations should be reflected in the standardised operational specifications for each category of prison, to be implemented in the light of Lord Carter's Review of Prisons.

In order to maximise the available learning and skills provision for offenders, the **OLASS delivery partners** should explore the scope to draw on other funding streams in order to benefit offenders, including the Train to Gain service, Learndirect and ESF funding, as proposed in the LSC's *Prospectus*.

To meet more effectively offenders' learning and skills needs:

d **Gather robust evidence to fill the knowledge gap as to what mix of learning and skills provision is most likely to increase offenders' employability and reduce the chance of them re-offending.** The **Learning and Skills Council** has stated its intention to commission independent research on the links between learning and skills, sustainable employment and reduction in re-offending. These plans should be taken forward as a matter of priority, building on existing evidence and considering what will motivate offenders to learn, involving **all OLASS delivery partners** and the **Department for Work and Pensions**.

e Improve screening of learning and skills needs for offenders in the community. Probation areas should screen all offenders under their supervision for learning and skills needs, and prioritise referrals to learning and skills providers on the basis of the offender's level of learning and skills need, motivation and chances of gaining employment and reducing re-offending.

f Facilitate access to information on offenders' learning needs, progress and achievements by providers and offender managers. The LSC is developing an IT system that will facilitate access to information on offenders' learning by all providers, in particular, when offenders move between prisons and from prisons into the supervision of the Probation Service. This is in line with a recommendation made by the Committee of Public Accounts in 2006, on which further progress is now needed. We recommend that the **Learning and Skills Council** continues to develop its IT system and that OLASS partners work together to ensure that offender managers (in the prison and probation services) have appropriate access to this information, so they can monitor referrals to learning and skills and sequence interventions effectively. The system should allow learning and skills providers working in PFI prisons to access and input information, which they cannot do at present.

To improve the quality of learning and skills provision:

g Hold providers to account over their contractual obligations to devise learning plans that set clear targets and record progress. The **Learning and Skills Council** should enforce contracts which state that providers must document individual learning plans, including results of assessments, qualification(s) being studied towards, records of progress and records of regular reviews. The **Learning and Skills Council** should monitor the results of Ofsted inspections to assess improvement in this area, and take action to apply sanctions where appropriate.

h Improve performance measures to incentivise delivery partners to act in a way that is wholly consistent with the policy objective for OLASS. All delivery partners should work together to devise a shared and mutually reinforcing performance measurement and management system that motivates providers, the **Prison Service**, and the **Probation Service** to facilitate offenders' attendance and encourages offenders to take up learning and skills opportunities which have the greatest prospect of contributing towards increased employability

or reduced re-offending. The performance measures in the Prison Service should include whether individuals undertake their identified learning and complete it, rather than, at present, measuring classroom occupation. In the Probation Service, performance measures should incentivise offender managers to screen all offenders for learning and skills needs; refer those offenders with learning and skills needs to providers able to meet their needs, where appropriate; and follow up referrals and provide support and motivation to offenders engaging with learning and skills.

i Draw up new contracts for offender learning and skills provision in prisons, which reward providers for progress made by offenders. The **Learning and Skills Council** should design contracts, to be in place for the next round of contracting in 2009, that include rewards for providers that demonstrate progress made by offenders to address their learning and skills needs, as well as teaching hours input. The Learning and Skills Council has collected data on participation and achievement at each prison during 2007-08, and we support the LSC's intention to use this data to set target participation rates and achievement levels for each provider in the 2008-09 academic year, and minimum levels of performance from 2009 onwards.

j Implement an OLASS management information system to monitor overall performance and effectiveness. The **OLASS partners**, including Ofsted, should agree what core set of high level indicators is needed to monitor delivery and effectiveness and, consistent with the Learning and Skills Council's plans, put in place systems to collect and report relevant information. The indicators should include the extent to which:

- offenders' learning and skills needs are assessed;
- offenders' learning plans are met;
- provision is of good quality;
- progress is made towards learning and skills attainment milestones; and
- offenders enter sustained employment.



PART ONE

A new learning and skills service for offenders was rolled out across England in August 2006

Education, Training and Employment is one of the Government's seven pathways towards reducing re-offending

1.1 Giving prisoners and offenders serving community sentences opportunities to learn and acquire new skills can bring the benefits of learning and skills available to the wider population to people who would otherwise not easily have access to them.⁵ Improving basic literacy and numeracy skills, and gaining more advanced or directly vocational qualifications, enhances individuals' prospects of getting and keeping a job, which has been shown to reduce the likelihood of re-offending. Importantly too, learning and skills provision contributes to the Prison Service's objective to provide safe, secure and decent regimes for offenders in custody which include purposeful activity.

Provision of learning and skills for offenders is challenging

1.2 As at the end of June 2007, there were some 78,000 individuals in custody in England and 226,000 offenders under supervision by the Probation Service in England.^{6,7} The most recent published research, reported in 2002, found that prisoners typically have a poor level of basic skills and a disappointing education and employment record, compared to the rest of the population, more than half having left school with no qualifications, and

a third with literacy skills at or below those expected of an 11 year old (**Figure 1**). Addressing offenders' learning and skills needs is challenging, because offenders are often disadvantaged in multiple ways: 60 to 70 per cent of prisoners were using drugs before imprisonment⁸, around one sixth were not in permanent accommodation⁹ and over 70 per cent suffer from at least two mental disorders.¹⁰

The Learning and Skills Council started to take over responsibility for offender learning and skills provision in 2004

1.3 The Learning and Skills Council and Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (formerly the Department for Education and Skills) have become increasingly involved in the development and delivery of learning and skills to offenders since 2001. A joint policy unit was set up between the Prison Service and the then Department for Education and Skills in 2001, to encourage partnership working on prisoner education. In 2003, the Prisoners' Learning and Skills Unit's role expanded to encompass learning and skills for offenders supervised by the Probation Service as well as those in custody and it was renamed the Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit. Responsibility for planning and funding basic skills provision for offenders under supervision in the community passed to the Learning and Skills Council (the LSC) in April 2004.

5 Throughout this report we use the term "learning and skills" to refer to all the provision available through OLASS, including basic skills for life (literacy, language, numeracy and basic IT skills); vocational training which will help individuals to increase their likelihood of employment; and for a relatively small number of offenders, further or higher education.

6 The prison population at 29 June 2007 was 81,040. Of this, 2,712 people were held in prisons in Wales. Source: HM Prison Service, *Monthly Population Bulletin* – June 2007.

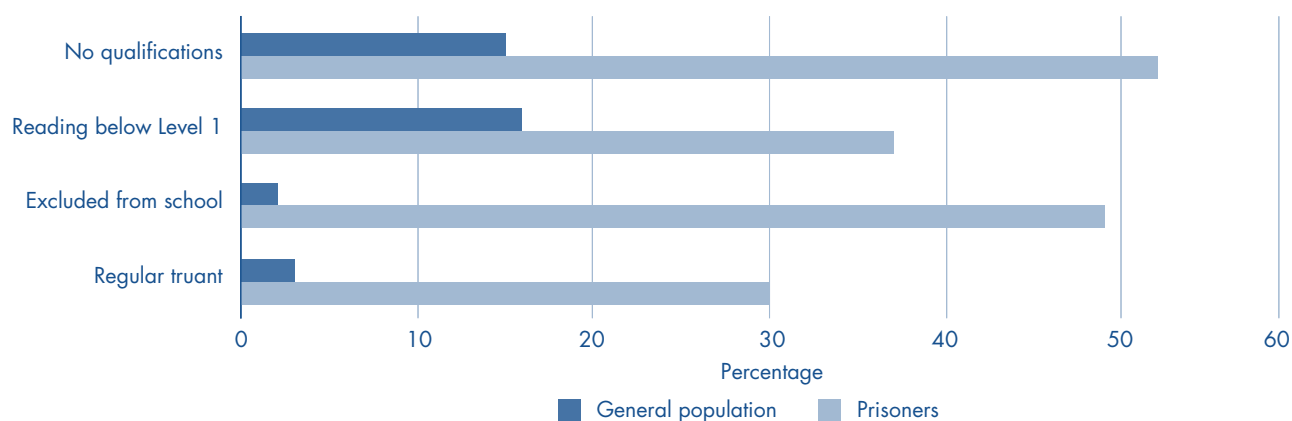
7 At 30 June 2007, 239,468 individuals were being supervised by the Probation Service. Of these, 13,586 were under supervision by Probation areas in Wales.

8 Social Exclusion Unit (2002), *Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners*, London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

9 Niven and Stewart (2005), *Resettlement Outcomes on Release from Prison in 2003*, Home Office Research Findings 248.

10 Singleton et al (1998), *Psychiatric Morbidity among Prisoners in England and Wales*, Office for National Statistics.

1 The educational experiences of prisoners are considerably worse than those of the general population



Source: National Audit Office analysis of data published in Social Exclusion Unit report (2002) *Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners*

NOTE

Literacy Level 1 is broadly equivalent to the level of skill expected of a competent 11 year old.

1.4 At this time, learning and skills services for offenders in custody were delivered by providers under contract to the Prison Service, and by Instructional Officers employed by the Prison Service. These contracts had been due for re-tendering in 2004, but prior to that, in 2003, Ministers decided that the LSC should take on responsibility for the planning and funding of a new learning and skills service for all offenders in custody and serving community sentences. The intention was that the LSC, with its experience in commissioning mainstream further education, would drive up the quality of provision, and through the creation of a single, integrated service for offenders in custody and the community, cross the organisational boundaries of the Prison Service and Probation Service. A straightforward statement of the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills' policy objective for the new Offender Learning and Skills Service is:

*"Ensuring offenders have the underpinning skills for life (literacy, language, numeracy and basic IT skills), and have developed work skills, to enable them to meet the real needs of employers in the area where they live or will settle after their sentence is complete."*¹¹

1.5 Between August 2005 and July 2006, the LSC trialled elements of the new learning and skills service for offenders in three "development regions": the North West, the North East and the South West. New contracts were let to providers, most of whom are further education colleges, for the delivery of learning and skills services to offenders in custody and the community. The Offenders' Learning and Skills Service, as it became known, was rolled out across the remaining six English regions in July 2006 (**Box 1**).

BOX 1

What does OLASS look like?

The majority of providers in prisons are well established further education colleges (a full list of providers is at Appendix 3). Most providers in prisons have an appointed Education Manager, who leads a team of tutors to deliver basic literacy and numeracy courses, courses designed to equip offenders with life skills, such as communication and team work, and specific vocational skills training, such as plastering, construction and catering. Most OLASS-funded learning takes place in classrooms and workshops within the prison, although some learning may also be embedded in other areas of prison life, such as vocational physical education qualifications acquired through work in the gym or food hygiene or catering qualifications in kitchens. Prisoners are also provided with information, advice and guidance about learning and skills opportunities through OLASS.

In the community, most OLASS provision is targeted towards increasing offenders' basic literacy and numeracy skills. Offenders can access mainstream further education for other provision. There is a diverse range of OLASS providers in the community, including both large and small further education colleges and voluntary sector organisations. Some learning is delivered on probation premises, whilst in other areas offenders access OLASS by attending mainstream colleges.

¹¹ Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (2007), *The Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) in England: A Brief Guide*.

Policy has continued to evolve

1.6 Policy on reducing re-offending through skills and employment has continued to develop alongside the implementation of OLASS (Figure 2). The Government published a Green Paper consultation in December 2005, which set out proposals to place an emphasis on employers driving the design and delivery of programmes; ensure training providers are able to provide the skills offenders need to get a job; and motivate and engage offenders with a “balance of rights and responsibilities”. This was followed up with the Government’s document *Reducing Re-offending through Skills and Employment: Next Steps* in December 2006. A new Inter-Ministerial Group on Reducing Re-offending, co-chaired by the Minister for Skills and the Minister responsible for prisons and probation, was set up early in 2006 to further strengthen partnership working.

1.7 More recently the LSC published in September 2007 a further consultation document, *Developing the Offender Learning and Skills Service: the Prospectus*. The document responds to recommendations in the *Next Steps* paper and describes the LSC’s proposals for developing OLASS. Formal consultation on the proposals closed at the end of October 2007, and the LSC expects to publish in early 2008 a technical document describing how it proposes to implement changes.

The establishment of OLASS took place against the background of wider changes

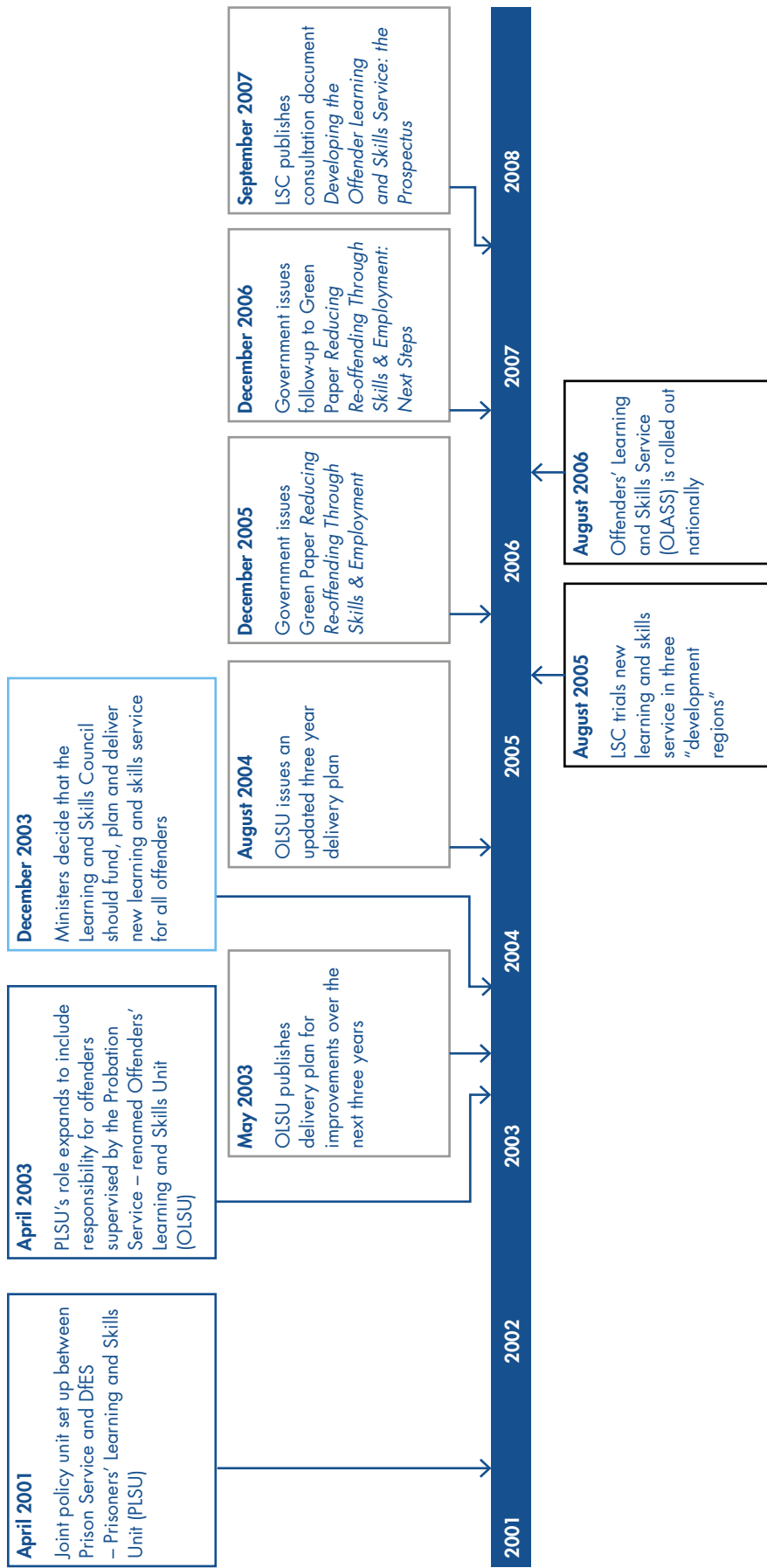
1.8 Implementing OLASS was a substantial change exercise, requiring partnership working between the then Department for Education and Skills, the LSC, the National Offender Management Service, the Prison Service and the National Probation Service. The establishment of OLASS took place against the background of wider changes. In 2004, the Government created the National Offender Management Service to integrate prison and probation services with a view to providing end to end offender management. More recently, there have been substantial further changes. In 2007, the new Ministry of Justice assumed responsibility for offender management from the Home Office. The former Department for Education and Skills’ responsibilities for youth and adult learning and skills have been split between the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, with the latter taking on responsibility for adult offender learning and skills.

Offender learning and skills is not the sole responsibility of any one department or agency but relies on partnership working

1.9 Figure 3 on page 14 sets out the main relationships between the various bodies involved in OLASS provision. The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and the Ministry of Justice both have roles in setting policy on offender learning and skills and reducing re-offending. The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills leads the Offender Skills and Employment Programme Board, which is a vehicle for sharing information and driving forward policy and includes representation from the Ministry of Justice, the National Offender Management Service, the Prison Service, the Probation Service, and the Department for Work and Pensions. This Board reports to the National Reducing Re-offending Board in the National Offender Management Service, which in turn reports to an Inter-Ministerial Group on Reducing Re-offending. The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills funds the LSC, setting out its priorities and budget in an annual grant letter, and providing a ring-fenced budget for OLASS. At a regional level, OLASS Partnership Boards are responsible for co-ordinating learning and skills provision in prisons and probation areas and increasing the involvement of employers. The OLASS Partnership Boards normally include representation from the LSC, NOMS, the Prison Service, the Probation Service, the Youth Justice Board and Jobcentre Plus, although their composition is not uniform in all regions.

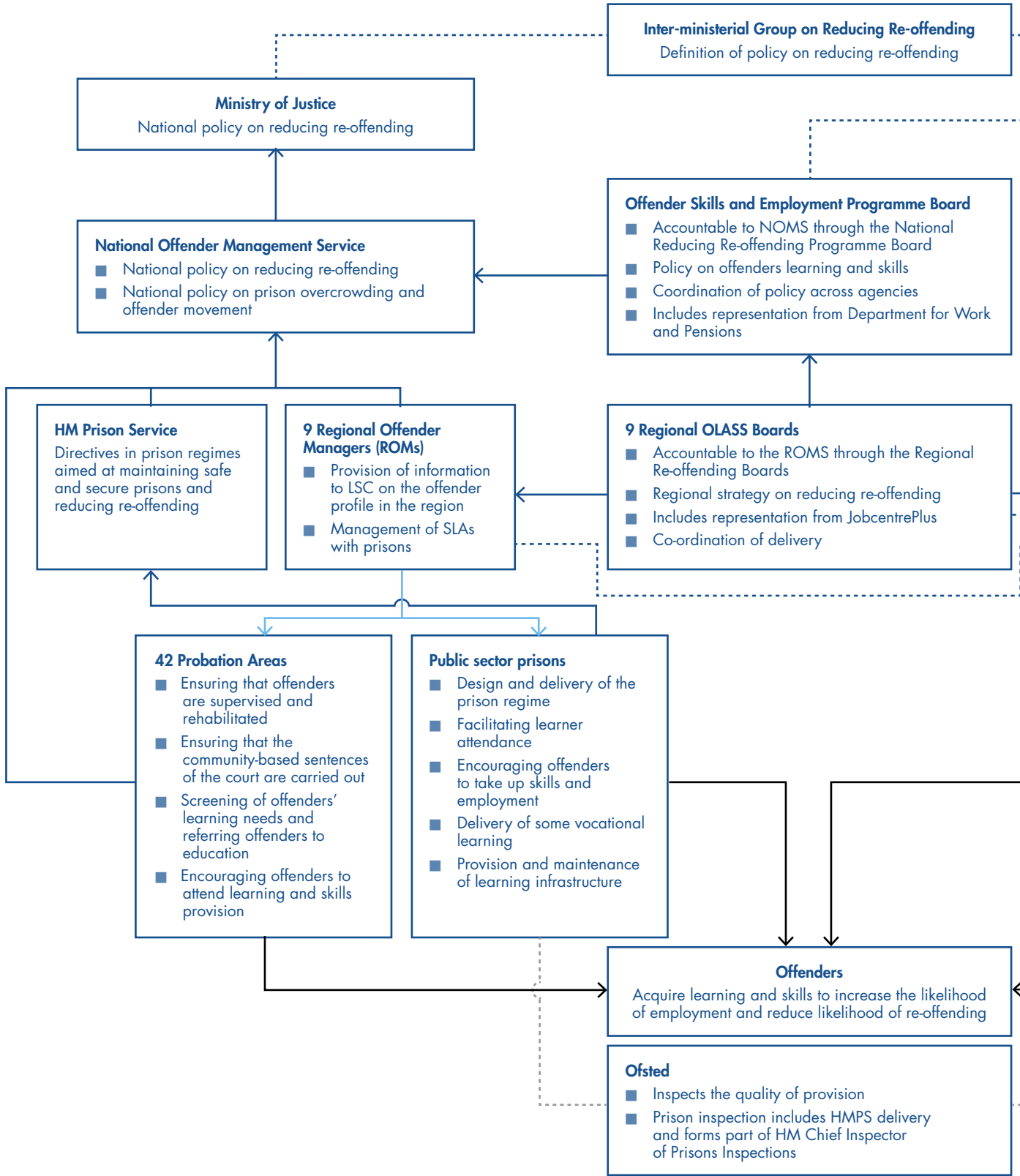
1.10 Learning and skills services for offenders in publicly managed prisons in England are jointly commissioned by the LSC, working through nine regional offices, and the National Offender Management Service’s nine Regional Offender Managers. There is a contractual relationship between the 21 learning and skills providers and the LSC, and there are separate delivery plans between providers and the Learning and Skills Council covering each of the prisons they work in. The LSC pays providers to deliver set volumes of learning and skills provision. The Prison Service itself is primarily responsible for ensuring that offenders arrive for tuition, for encouraging and motivating offenders to take advantage of the learning opportunities on offer, and for preventing timetable clashes with other competing activities that are within the Prison Service’s control. Heads of Learning and Skills, employed by the Prison Service and funded by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, are strategic managers based in prisons responsible for promoting learning and

2 Policy on reducing re-offending through skills and employment has continued to develop alongside the implementation of the Offenders' Learning and Skills Service



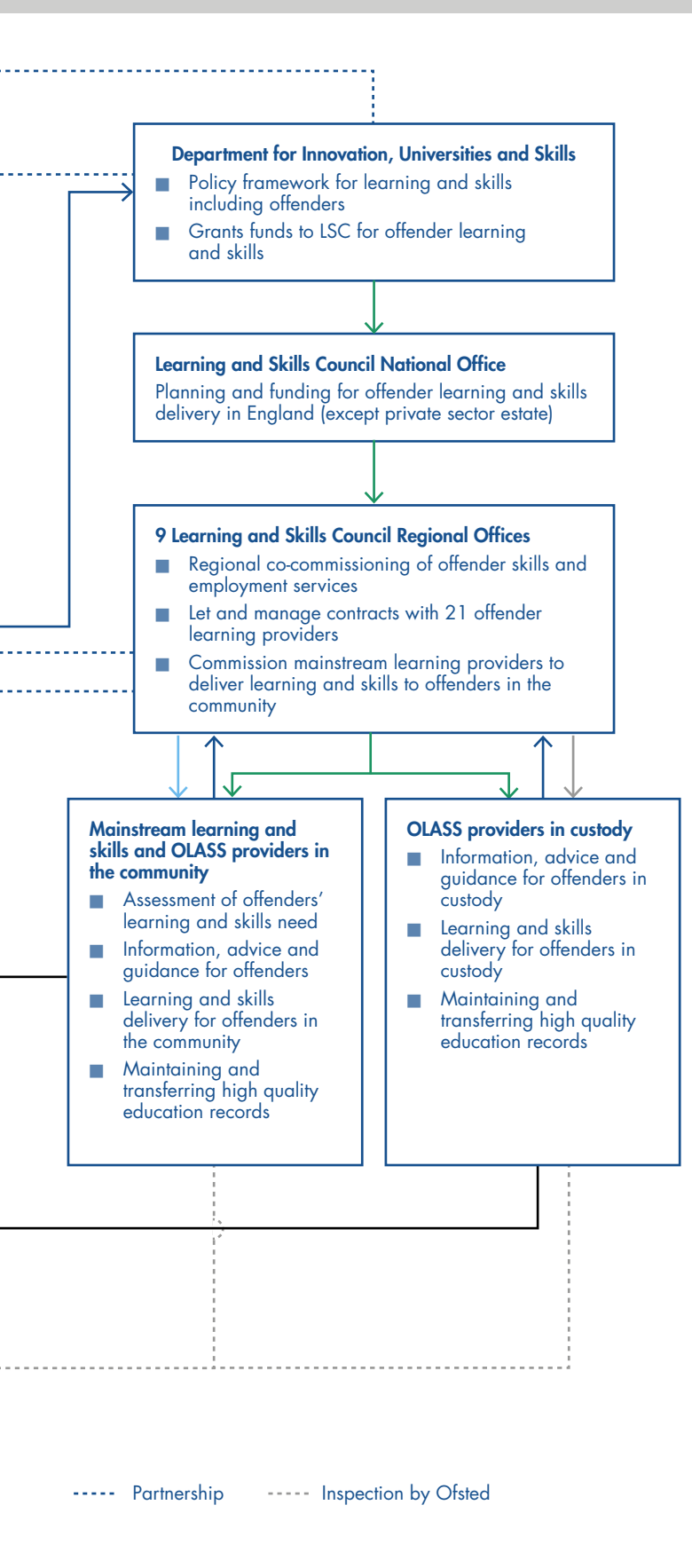
Source: National Audit Office

3 The main relationships between the various bodies involved in the delivery of OLASS



→ OLASS funding stream → Accountability line → Delivery → Contractual relationship → Commissioned relationship

Source: National Audit Office



skills opportunities throughout the prison. They also act as a link between the Prison Service and contracted providers. In most prisons, Education Managers, employed by providers, manage the learning and skills service delivered. Partnership agreements between regional Learning and Skills Councils, individual prisons and their providers, set out the responsibilities of each party and agreements for the sharing of information.

1.11 In the community, probation areas are responsible for screening offenders for potential basic skills needs, referring offenders to the appropriate provider for further help and encouraging and motivating offenders to participate in the learning and skills opportunities open to them. The LSC jointly commissions with Regional Offender Managers some specific provision for offenders in the community. Offenders in the community can also access mainstream education services open to all members of the public. Education, Training and Employment Leads in each probation area have a strategic role in co-ordinating skills and employment interventions for offenders in their area.

1.12 Ofsted helps to assure the quality of the learning and skills being delivered, and inspects provision in custody and the community. It provides reports to the LSC, and also contributes to inspection reports by HM Inspectorate of Prisons and HM Inspectorate of Probation.

1.13 There are other sources of funds and provision for offender learning and skills outside OLASS that are not reflected in the diagram, for example the European Social Fund provides £45 million to support learning and skills provision in custody and the community. Contractually managed prisons are outside the scope of OLASS. Service providers managing private prisons have responsibility for specifying and arranging delivery of all learning and skills services within the establishments they operate. In practice, service delivery is often sub-contracted, for example to a college. In the future, new contractually managed prisons, including the two currently under development, will fall within OLASS. Provision for offenders under the age of 18 is funded by the LSC from resources allocated to it by the Youth Justice Board. This funding stream is outside the scope of the study and not reflected in the diagram.

The LSC spends some £109 million a year on adult offender learning and skills provision

1.14 Roll out of OLASS began in 2005 and was completed in July 2006. In the first full year of operation, the 2006-07 academic year,¹² spending on OLASS was £109 million. This money pays for a range of learning and skills provision in custody and the community, including basic skills courses designed to improve offenders' literacy, numeracy and language skills, vocational skills courses that equip offenders with specific skills for employment, and personal and social skills courses, such as parenting skills and communication skills. The majority of the learning and skills provision funded by the LSC leads to qualifications that are accredited by national awarding bodies such as City and Guilds and the National Open College Network. A policy team at the LSC's national office and the staff in regional offices responsible for managing OLASS contracts are separately funded through the LSC's administration budget, at a cost in the academic year 2006-07 of £1.2 million.

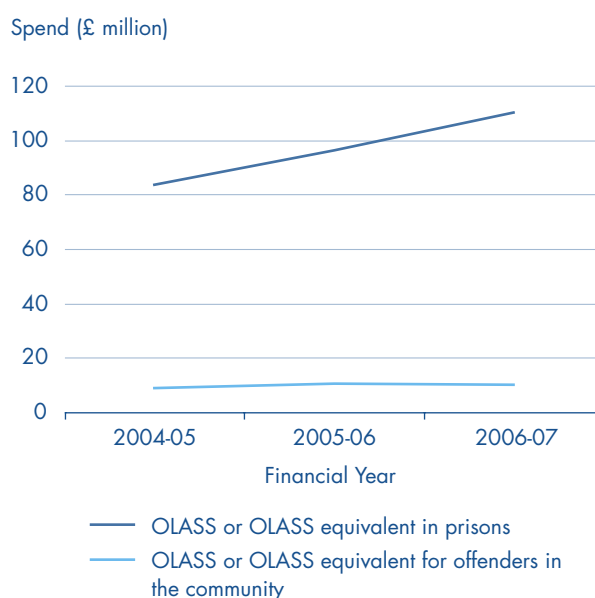
1.15 The bulk of the money, £98 million, was the cost of delivering learning and skills services in prisons. This level of expenditure compares with £84 million in the last full year of the operation of the previous arrangements, 2004-05. At any one time during the 2006-07 academic year, around 27,000 people in prison, a third of the prison population, were in receipt of some form of learning and skills provision. A higher proportion participated over the course of their sentence. In total, the LSC has recorded some 226,000 course starts in custody during 2006-07. The Prison Service itself also funds and provides activities with an educational benefit for prisoners, including physical education and some vocational training in prison industries and prison work.

1.16 The LSC is allocated far less, £9.4 million in the 2006-07 academic year, to spend directly on basic skills services for offenders in the community, as the expectation is that this group also has access to the whole range of mainstream education. This budget has remained the same since 2004-05, when the LSC became responsible for funding offender learning in the community and Probation areas were first allocated specific learning and skills provision. The LSC's actual spend against this budget in the 2006-07 academic year was £8.6 million. The LSC does not have data on how many individuals participated in the specific provision it funds for offenders in the community. The Probation Service referred 60,418 individuals to

learning and skills provision during 2006-07 against a performance target of 48,000, some of which was OLASS funded provision, but it has no information nationally about how many offenders enrolled on courses. It does know that offenders achieved 10,436 qualifications in 2006-07, against the Probation Service's target of 10,000 qualifications, although it cannot break down the total to distinguish basic skills and vocational courses.

1.17 Figure 4 charts the change in the total amounts spent on offender learning and skills between 2004-05 and 2006-07.

4 Spend on offender learning and skills since 2004-05



Source: National Audit Office analysis

NOTES

OLASS rolled out in three "development" regions in August 2005.

OLASS rolled out in the remaining six English regions in August 2006.

These figures show actual spend on offender learning and skills by the Prison Service and the Learning and Skills Council in the financial years ending 31 March 2005, 31 March 2006, and 31 March 2007.

Over the same period, the prison population increased from 75,177 (average population 2004-05) to 78,676 (average population 2006-07).

In order to compare spending by the Prison Service on offender learning and skills contracts with OLASS, we have excluded from the graph some £12 million a year spent by the Prison Service on libraries and Heads of Learning and Skills. The Prison Service was unable to provide a breakdown of actual spend but we have used budgeted figures to apportion actual spending to education contracts similar to OLASS and other activities. The difference between the total budget and total actual spend is negligible.

¹² The academic year runs from 1 August to 31 July.

The LSC recognised that it had inherited a number of significant problems, but it had to ensure that the implementation of OLASS did not compromise stability in prison regimes

1.18 From the outset in 2004, when it was about to assume responsibility for offender learning and skills, the LSC recognised that it had inherited a number of significant problems from the previous system of provision, which included levels of provision at each prison establishment not necessarily being linked to current learning and skills needs. The provision of learning and skills opportunities for offenders in custody has historically served the dual aims of equipping prisoners with skills needed for employment and occupying prisoners in purposeful activities, thereby contributing towards the Prison Service's objective to provide safe and well-ordered establishments in which prisoners are treated humanely and decently. The need to maintain existing prison regimes and levels of purposeful activity limited the extent to which the Learning and Skills Council could address some of the inherited problems at the implementation stage, when the partners' prime objective was to ensure a smooth transition to the new arrangements.

1.19 The overriding objectives of the criminal justice system to deliver justice and protect the public will continue to impact on what OLASS can achieve on a day to day basis, for example because offenders may be required to attend court. Increasing prison populations and consequent movement between prisons because of overcrowding raise issues which too may limit what can be achieved within current resources.

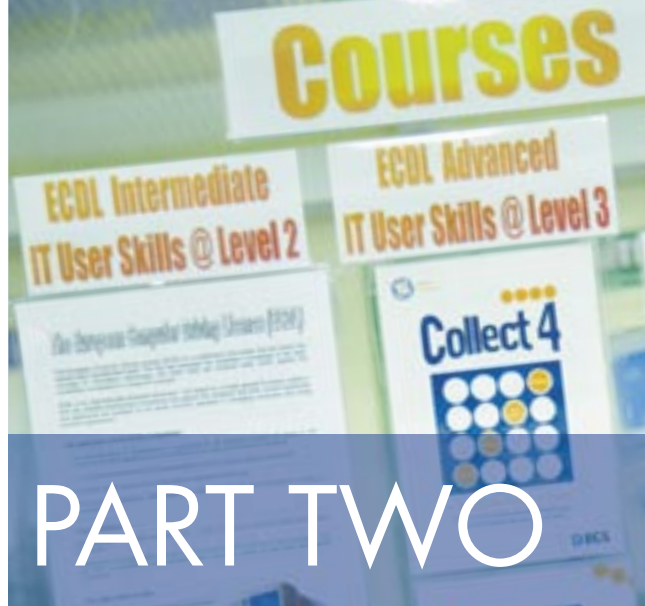
The scope of our examination

1.20 This report examines how effectively OLASS has been implemented; looking both at the approach the OLASS partners took to the overall design of the new system, and at how well OLASS works on a day to day basis, in the prison and community setting, where the LSC works in partnership with the Prison Service and the National Probation Service. It is too early to assess at this stage whether OLASS has yet made any additional contribution to increasing employability and reducing rates of re-offending and we have not at this time examined this issue.

1.21 Part 2 of this report looks at the partners' **design and strategic management** of OLASS, including the new contracts it has put in place, the allocation of resources, partnership working between the Learning and Skills Council, the National Offender Management Service, the Prison Service and the National Probation Service, and the information systems underpinning the delivery of learning and skills to offenders. Part 3 examines the **day to day delivery** of OLASS and includes examination of whether offenders' learning and skills needs are being efficiently and accurately identified, and whether offenders enrol on, and complete, the courses that they have been identified as needing.

1.22 As part of our examination, we reviewed the learning and skills records kept locally by providers for 1,600 offenders evidencing, to the extent that the available records were maintained, assessments of learning and skills needs, participation in learning and skills, and the courses completed. In most cases the records are on paper, not stored electronically. Within this total, 800 individuals had been given custodial sentences in September 2006, 500 commenced community orders in September 2006, and 300 were released from custody on licence, under the supervision of the Probation Service, in January 2007. To capture comprehensively the views of providers, the Prison Service and the Probation Service, we carried out written surveys of all Education Managers, Heads of Learning and Skills, and Education, Training and Employment Leads, and invited submissions from Regional Offender Managers. Our methodology is described in more detail at Appendix 1.

1.23 Learning and skills provided for young people under sentence under the age of 18, which more closely follows the national curriculum delivered in schools, is outside the scope of this study because the standards for delivery are significantly different from those relating to adult offenders. There are also different arrangements in place in Wales, which are outside the scope of this examination.



The overall framework for OLASS needs several improvements

2.1 This part of the report examines the progress that the partners involved in delivering OLASS have made in establishing an appropriate operational framework within which offenders' learning and skills needs can be met effectively.

An unresolved tension remains between the objectives of the different delivery partners for offender learning and skills provision

2.2 Though learning and skills provision can help meet more than one objective, it is unhelpful if joint objectives are not articulated clearly and conflicts are not openly recognised or resolved. Our discussions with the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, the Learning and Skills Council, the National Offender Management Service and the Prison Service indicated that, in practice, full agreement has not yet been reached on the primary role of OLASS for offenders in custody.

2.3 The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills considers that the primary objective of learning and skills provision for offenders is to equip them with the skills needed for employment. Both the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and the LSC recognise that employment may never be the focus for some individuals, and that there needs to be a balance between provision explicitly aimed at gaining subsequent employment, and provision for the personal and social development and personal interest of individuals. The National Offender Management Service recognises too the importance of employability to its reducing re-offending agenda, and also considers that learning and skills can play a wider role in reducing re-offending, for example by equipping offenders with basic life skills.

2.4 The Prison Service also supports these objectives, but currently relies upon learning and skills provision to provide prisoners with appropriate levels of purposeful activity. This contributes towards the Prison Service's overriding objectives to hold prisoners securely for the protection of the public, provide safe and well-ordered establishments and reduce the risk of prisoners re-offending. The Prison Service's intention is that purposeful activity should either involve work towards national accredited qualifications, or where it will not do so, that it is signed off by the Prison Service Area Manager or the Purposeful Activity Panel as beneficial in some other way in its contribution towards the reducing re-offending agenda. The Prison Service's approach is not necessarily inconsistent with the primary aim of OLASS to reduce re-offending through skills and employment, but because learning and skills provision can serve several purposes there is confusion about where scarce resources ought to be targeted, both nationally and locally. For example, learning and skills provision for long sentence prisoners will meet the Prison Service's purposeful activity targets and help to maintain a safe and decent environment, but, particularly if delivered early in individuals' sentences, may have very limited impact on eventual employment or re-offending outcomes. If financial resources, staff or available classroom or workshop space are limited, offering well qualified prisoners, for whom lack of qualifications does not present barriers to employment, access to further learning and skills provision, may put pressure on what can be made available to offenders with the greatest level of learning and skills need.

2.5 Current performance measures for the partners involved in delivering OLASS incentivise a range of behaviour that, whilst consistent with the multiple objectives of OLASS, may not be consistent with the overall policy aim for OLASS, defined by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills as developing offenders' skills for life and for work (Figure 5).

5 Performance measures surrounding offender learning and skills and their possible adverse impacts

Delivery chain partner	Performance measures	Possible perverse incentives
Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills	<p>Improve the skills of the population on the way to ensuring a world-class skills base by 2029. Achievement of this Public Service Agreement is measured in terms of the number of adults achieving basic, intermediate and higher level skills qualifications.</p>	<p>Target provision towards those who are most likely to achieve qualifications rather than those who are most likely to reduce their chance of re-offending through learning and skills.</p>
Ministry of Justice	<p>Reduce re-offending through the improved management of offenders. No target has been set for the rate at which re-offending must be reduced.</p> <p>Prison Service and Probation Service activities will also contribute to this objective.</p>	
Prison Service	<p>Classroom attendance measure to maximise the number of offenders attending OLASS funded classes. Classroom attendance rate is defined as actual number of attendees divided by planned number of attendees. A target of 80 per cent is set for each establishment.</p> <p>Purposeful activity targets. All establishments are required to provide a certain level of purposeful activity, calculated as the total number of eligible hours divided by the population. A range of activities qualify as purposeful activity, including all learning and skills.</p>	<p>Encourages the Prison Service to fill class spaces without consideration for who is participating.</p> <p>Does not incentivise enrolling “hard to reach” groups which are less likely to attend regularly.</p> <p>Does not incentivise prioritising provision for those offenders with the greatest learning and skills needs. Individuals working in prison industries may, in some cases, learn transferable skills, but may miss out from being assessed for, and accessing, the learning and skills offer within OLASS.</p>
National Probation Service	<p>Target for referrals to learning and skills. A different target is set for each probation area. For 2006-07, the target number was 48,000.</p> <p>Target for getting offenders into work. A different target is set for each probation area for the number of offenders achieving and sustaining employment for four weeks or more. For 2007-08, the national target was 13,200.</p>	<p>Encourages maximum referrals but there is no need to consider who is being referred or to follow up on the outcomes of referrals.</p> <p>Staff may attach higher priority to getting offenders into work regardless of sustainability, which could mean addressing the learning and skills needs they have over a longer term is less of a priority.</p>
Providers	<p>Deliver contracted number of teaching hours.</p>	<p>Does not incentivise the achievement of qualifications and learning progression.</p> <p>Does not incentivise revising the curriculum to deliver more expensive courses, even if these would meet need or increase employability prospects.</p>

Source: National Audit Office analysis

2.6 Differences in view over the primary objective of learning and skills provision and conflicting performance measures gives rise to the risk that staff on the front line will be confused as to where provision should be targeted. Our survey of Education Managers (employed by learning and skills providers, and in place in most public prisons in England¹³) confirmed that this was the case. **Box 2** provides a view as to what this means in practice.

2.7 The delivery partners have recognised the requirement to target learning to the individual's needs, but it is not until recently that the issue of prioritising the use of offender learning monies has been set out formally for consideration. The Learning and Skills Council's consultation document published in September 2007, *Developing the Offender Learning and Skills Service: the Prospectus* states that "there has been an over-reliance upon learning and skills in some settings to maintain purposeful activity" and that "the role of learning and skills as part of purposeful activity within prison regimes needs urgent clarification".¹⁴

To avoid destabilising prison regimes, the Learning and Skills Council agreed to maintain a funding and contract model for learning and skills in custody that had been seriously criticised in the past

2.8 A report commissioned by the Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit in 2002 highlighted, as issues that needed to be addressed, the fact that funding of learning and skills services in individual prisons was not based on a robust assessment of need, and that contracts were focused on purchasing inputs rather than outputs, making it difficult to assess value for money.¹⁵ Having taken on lead responsibility for offender learning and skills, the Learning and Skills Council led the development of a new funding and procurement model, with the intention of aligning the approach as closely as possible with that which the Learning and Skills Council uses for mainstream further education provision, where part of the funding is based on demand and achievement.

BOX 2

Education Manager, Category C Training Prison

"The prison purposeful activity target is in direct conflict with the aims of the OLASS provision. Purposeful activity is more concerned with bums on seats rather than the right learning and skills programme for the offender."

2.9 The Learning and Skills Council was however restricted in the extent to which it could make changes during the implementation stage because the partner organisations recognised the overriding need to maintain stability in levels of purposeful activity within prisons. The Learning and Skills Council did not carry out any analyses to see what impact an allocation based on need would have had on provision in individual prisons, because data had not been collected on the learning and skills needs of the population at each establishment. In the event, the OLASS National Project Board¹⁶ directed the Learning and Skills Council to maintain existing levels of learning and skills provision at each establishment within OLASS contracts lasting initially for three years to 2009. The LSC's *Prospectus*, published in September 2007, proposes to make changes to provision levels across the prison estate from the award of new contracts in August 2009.

Preserving the historical volumes of provision in custody means that OLASS provision is not targeted where it is likely to have most impact

2.10 **Figure 6** shows that the number of teaching hours currently allocated to individual prison establishments ranges from 13.8 hours per person per year to 95 hours per person per year. Even excluding the extremes, there is substantial variation around the midpoint, from 22.3 hours to 35.6 hours between the lower and upper quartile. These figures are averages, and within each establishment individual offenders could receive substantially more or less education. Some offenders will not participate in learning and skills activities at all.

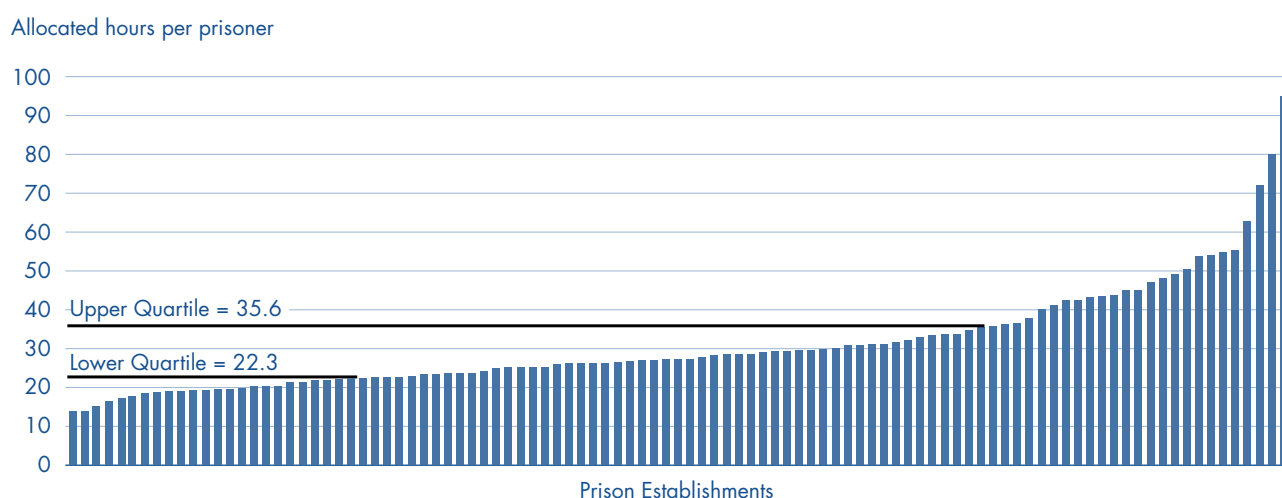
¹³ There are slightly different arrangements in the South West, where more than one provider is employed in the same prison to deliver different parts of the learning and skills curriculum.

¹⁴ Learning and Skills Council (2007) *Developing the Offenders' Learning and Skills Service: The Prospectus*.

¹⁵ PricewaterhouseCoopers report (2002) *Review of the funding and procurement of education and training in prisons – final report to Prisoners' Learning and Skills Unit*. Not published.

¹⁶ The OLASS National Project Board oversaw the implementation of OLASS. It included representatives from the then Department for Education and Skills, the Learning and Skills Council, the National Offender Management Service, the Prison Service and the Probation Service.

6 Annual teaching hours per prisoner allocated to providers for offender learning and skills at prisons in England and Wales, 2006-07 academic year



Source: National Audit Office

2.11 We analysed the extent to which different factors accounted for the variation in the number of teaching hours purchased for each prison, looking at the size of the population at each establishment, whether the establishment holds juveniles as well as adults¹⁷, the sex of the offenders held, whether the prison is a local prison and the category of the prison. In the absence of a robust measure of learning and skills needs across the population, we used as a proxy the proportion of offenders who were engaged in entry level basic skills courses. None of these factors showed a statistically significant correlation sufficient to explain the variation in hours allocated, showing that allocations are based on historical provision. Further details of our analysis are in Appendix 1.¹⁸ Whilst historical levels of provision may be linked to the need and space for learning and skills activity at the time at which prisons were built or expanded¹⁹, there is no evidence that the current provision correlates to current levels of learning and skills need.

2.12 The delivery partners have not yet progressed towards any reallocation of funding or volumes of provision. The December 2006 *Next Steps* document proposed revising funding allocations to target the specific needs of individual offenders and prospective employers. This agenda was taken up in the LSC's consultation document in September 2007. Its *Prospectus* states that "a wholesale review of provision levels and associated funds is required".²⁰

17 Establishments which hold only juveniles are excluded from this analysis. Some establishments hold young adult offenders (aged 18 to 21) and juveniles (under 18) as well as adults, and these are included in the figure.

18 It is, however, the case that a number of the prisons in Figure 2 with the highest allocations were establishments that hold juveniles as well as adults. Re-running our analysis excluding these establishments did not improve the level of explanation.

19 Historical levels of learning and skills provision are based on assessments of need, and assumptions of what the prison regime should include, at the time at which prisons were built or expanded. Prisons such as HMP Coldingley, HMP Ranby and HMP Wealstun for example, were designed to be industrial prisons in which prisoners were expected to be occupied primarily through work. Historically, these prisons were built with relatively limited classroom space, and with fewer teaching hours allocated per prisoner. Consequently, they have lower teaching hours per prisoner.

20 Learning and Skills Council (2007) *Developing the Offenders' Learning and Skills Service: The Prospectus*, p.21.

2.13 The LSC now proposes to allocate funding according to priority groups of learners (set out in Figure 7).

There are currently no data on the true level of need and demand for learning and skills provision at each establishment or in probation areas, and the LSC intends to address this by carrying out reviews of the existing labour market needs and learner needs within each criminal justice area. The Learning and Skills Council also proposes mapping existing levels of provision, the physical capacity to deliver learning and skills in prison establishments, offender population characteristics and resettlement patterns for each criminal justice area.

These reviews will cover offenders in custody and in the community. The reviews are being scoped currently and the LSC intends that the results will feed into the next round of contracts, tendering for which will commence in October 2008.

The co-commissioning relationship between Regional Offender Managers and the LSC has yet to realise the potential benefits

2.14 Central to future arrangements will be the co-commissioning relationship between Regional Offender Managers and the LSC. Regional Offender Managers, working with the LSC, can bring together an understanding of the criminal justice system, across prisons and in the community in the region, and expertise in procuring learning and skills in the mainstream. The Adult Learning Inspectorate concluded in its *Review of the Leadership and Management of Offender Learning* that the role of the Regional Offender Manager is yet to have a significant impact on the range of learning and skills provision. One respondent to our survey of Regional Offender Managers said that the co-commissioning model had “removed the artificial barrier between learning in the criminal justice system and learning generally,” although there was recognition that the joint role was still developing.

7 The Learning and Skills Council proposes to attach different priorities to different groups of learners

Offender learning curriculum area	Learner target group	Purpose of learning and skills provision	Priority for LSC OLASS funding
Skills for Employment offer	Offenders with sentences less than 12 months to serve	To provide a short intensive programme and direct offenders to provision on release, acknowledging the limits on provision for those in custody for short periods	High
Skills for Life offer	Offenders needing basic skills provision, who are ready to learn, who will require at least a year to make progress	To address needs of those with basic skills needs, working towards national qualifications following further assessments	High
First full level 2 offer	Offenders with at least two full years prior to release and preparing for resettlement	To provide further assessments of need and learning support requirements, and provide a full programme of learning and skills to NVQ Level 2	High
Young people	Young people in custody	To provide a full range of learning and skills	High
Learning for living and work: communication and personal skills	Offenders with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	To provide additional support to enable engagement with learning	Medium
Higher level and personal interest learning	Offenders wishing to progress beyond NVQ level 2	To provide higher level learning at A level or equivalent	Low

Source: Learning and Skills Council (2007) *Developing the Offender's Learning and Skills Service: The Prospectus*

The contracts for provision in custody reward providers only for delivering inputs, with no recognition of outputs or outcomes, and provide no incentive to improve effectiveness

2.15 The LSC contracts with the 21 providers stipulate the number of hours to be delivered in each prison. Teaching hours are defined in terms of the hours spent by employees of the provider delivering courses in each prison covered by the contract. Payments are made irrespective of offender take-up, offender attendance rates and whether offenders progress, complete courses or achieve qualifications. Contracts exclusively for the delivery of information, advice and guidance to offenders specify the number of hours of information, advice and guidance to be delivered.

2.16 Contractors are required to “take all reasonable steps to minimise drop out rates and deliver high completion and achievement rates and appropriate progression, ensure competent and appropriately qualified staff deliver and assess learning, and offer equality of access to learning opportunities and close equality gaps in learning and outcomes.”²¹ The contracts do not, however, quantify the measures or set minimum standards by which these requirements can be assessed.

2.17 Ten per cent of funding for mainstream providers is dependent on learners’ achievement, and there are further uplifts to take account of programme weighting, disadvantage, and area costs. The LSC had originally intended to reward OLASS providers in a similar way. It considered, however, that in a custodial environment, the significance of the role of the Prison Service meant that it would be difficult to hold providers to account for learning outcomes, such as course completions and qualifications achieved. In custody, providers depend on the Prison Service to release offenders from their cells and escort them, when necessary, to attend their classes. Offenders may fail to attend classes if other activities such as offending behaviour interventions, for example, drugs awareness programmes or other activities, such as work in prison, are given a higher priority, or because there are constraints such as court appearances outside their control.

2.18 Rewarding providers for learners’ achievements is further complicated by offenders’ movements between prisons and from prison into the community. Not only does this impact on the likelihood of offenders completing courses they have started, but even if they are able to continue a course they started elsewhere, apportioning credit for offenders’ final achievements between all the providers they have engaged with is complicated. The LSC believes that the Qualification and Curriculum Authority’s proposed introduction of a Qualification and Credit Framework – a unit-based qualification framework underpinned by a system of credit accumulation – should assist with attributing achievements, if necessary, to different providers. The Qualification and Credit Framework is currently being trialled in the mainstream further education sector.

2.19 The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and the LSC have stated that they continue to aspire towards contracts that reward providers for the achievement of outputs or outcomes. However, although the aim is reflected in the LSC’s recent *Prospectus*, little progress has so far been made with developing a workable model for offender learning and skills.

The hourly rate paid to providers is not based on an analysis of what it costs to provide the particular learning and skills most likely to enhance employability

2.20 Historically, providers under contract to the Prison Service were paid between £29 and £56 per hour of learning delivered. With the roll out of OLASS in 2006, the LSC calculated a standard hourly rate of £41.20 by dividing the total funding available by the hours required to maintain current volumes of provision in each prison. The hourly rate is the same for delivery of teaching hours and delivery of information, advice and guidance to offenders. Some providers have negotiated variations to take account of their local circumstances, such that the effective rate varies between £41.20 and £46.50 per hour.

21 OLASS Contract for Services – Schedule 1 – Service Specification.

2.21 The LSC did not conduct its own independent analysis of the costs of providing the services and, because the LSC's tendering exercise was conducted on the basis of a fixed hourly rate, it did not test this rate in the market. As a consequence, neither the LSC nor its delivery partners can demonstrate that the prices are value for money. The way the tendering exercise was carried out gives the delivery partners no assurance that some providers might have been able to deliver the same volume of provision at lower cost. Equally, in view of the fact that providers have discretion over the courses they deliver, there is a risk that the LSC is not providing sufficient funds for them to deliver profitably the courses that will be most effective in increasing employability.

The partners have insufficient information about the content of learning and skills provision that is most likely to achieve greater employability and reduce re-offending

2.22 The evidence base for the provision of learning and skills in custody and the community that will be most likely to achieve greater employability and reduce re-offending is poor. There is, however, academic research that recognises a link between employment-focused offender learning and reduced re-offending. There is also evidence drawn from the wider population that shows that increasing individuals' basic literacy and numeracy skills increases the likelihood of them being in employment.²² The OLASS delivery partners have not commissioned their own research to build up a clear picture of which elements of the current provision are most successful in increasing employability and reducing re-offending. The LSC recognises the importance of adequate research to underpin the future development of the Service, and has said in its *Prospectus* that it intends to commission independent research on this subject. The results of this work are unlikely to be available for several more years.

2.23 Offenders in the community are able in principle to access the whole variety of mainstream courses open to any member of the public. In contrast, the curriculum at each prison is determined by the LSC's providers, working with senior staff in the prison such as Heads of Learning and Skills. In view of the greater focus in policy statements on learning and skills that would increase an individual's employability, we asked Heads of Learning and Skills if the introduction of OLASS had led them, in consultation with others, to consider and implement changes to the curriculum.

2.24 In response to our survey, 62 per cent of Heads of Learning and Skills said that changes had been implemented. Our analysis of the explanations for these decisions showed that in some cases this was prompted by changes, such as the Offender Learning Journey, associated with the implementation of OLASS, but it was also often a response to internal needs analyses, changes in the population of their establishment, and employer requirements.

2.25 The LSC had started collecting data on the courses in which individuals were participating, but this was not complete at the time we were carrying out our fieldwork. We asked each of the 21 providers in custody to provide data in August 2006 on the courses that they were currently delivering. We received returns from only 15 providers, which limited the analysis we were able to undertake. The data we did receive showed that the extent to which an individual offender could leave off and then take up the same course after transferring between establishments was often limited, even where provided by the same contractor. From our survey, two thirds of Heads of Learning and Skills and half of Education Managers confirmed that inconsistency of courses across prison establishments was a major or key difficulty in arranging continuity of provision following prisoner transfer.²³

2.26 This means that there is a greater risk that an offender transferring from one prison establishment to another will be unable to complete the courses that they have commenced. There is no evidence that the lack of consistency is a reflection of local circumstances, and it is likely to result in the non-availability of courses to meet the greater employability objective.

²² Research reported in the Leith Review of Skills states that numeracy skills at Level 1, equivalent to the standard needed for a GCSE Maths at grades D-G, are associated with a 2–3 percentage point higher probability of being in employment. Level 1 literacy skills are associated with a 10 per cent higher probability of being in employment.

²³ The Committee of Public Accounts, in their 44th Report of Session 2005-06 concluded that overcrowding results in prisoners being moved around the prison estate at short notice, disrupting education programmes intended to reduce the likelihood of re-offending, and recommended that HM Prison Service should look to develop modular training programmes to facilitate continuance of education when a move is unavoidable.

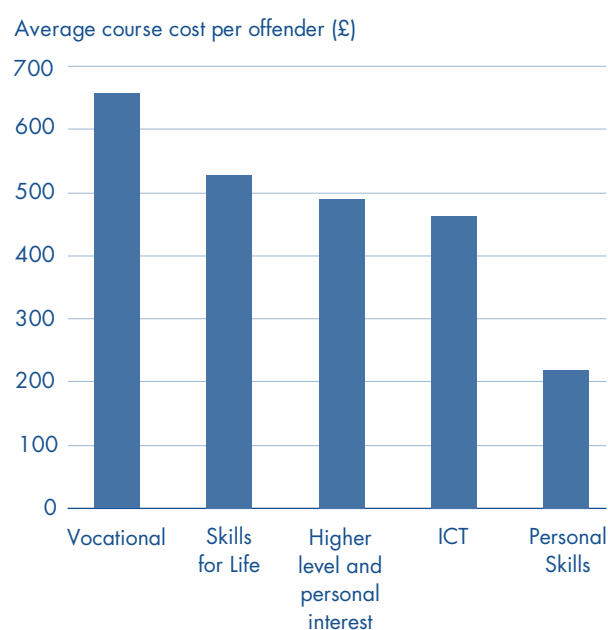
2.27 There were also wide variations in the extent to which basic skills courses (literacy, numeracy and language courses), vocational skills (qualifications in work-based skills, such as construction or hospitality), life skills courses (such as parenting classes) and personal interest learning (such as A-levels in academic subjects) were offered. To an extent, the courses provided locally reflect historical precedent, but the mix and distribution of courses highlights the continuing need for the partners to reconcile the employment-focused objectives of OLASS, and the Prison Service's objective that prisoners are occupied with purposeful activity. Personal interest learning, for example, contributes towards the Prison Service's purposeful activity target, but it is not clear how it would contribute to the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and National Offender Management Service's objective to reduce re-offending through increased employability.

2.28 We have estimated the cost to the LSC of delivering courses, collated under the five categories described below (**Figure 8**). We built up these costs using data collected from providers on the average number of guided learning hours needed to complete individual courses; combined with estimates based on the courses offenders have engaged in, of the total proportion of funding spent on each category of provision. Because courses cost different amounts, any changes to the curricula will alter the number of courses that the partners are able to deliver within their current resources.

Ofsted has assessed the quality of learning and skills provision in custody as still below a good standard in many cases

2.29 The LSC relies on Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) to formally monitor, through Ofsted's risk-based inspection programme, the quality of learning and skills provision delivered by its providers in custody and the community. Further details of the scope of Ofsted inspections are at Appendix 2.

8 Because they take different lengths of time to complete, the average cost of delivering different types of course varies



Source: National Audit Office analysis

2.30 The Adult Learning Inspectorate, whose function was incorporated into the new Ofsted on 1 April 2007, had reported an improvement in the quality of delivery of learning and skills in prisons over the three years leading up to the national roll-out of OLASS (**Figure 9 overleaf**).²⁴ The Chief Inspector reported in 2006 that 84 per cent of institutions were satisfactory or better, and all 34 institutions re-inspected in 2005-06 had improved to at least satisfactory standard.

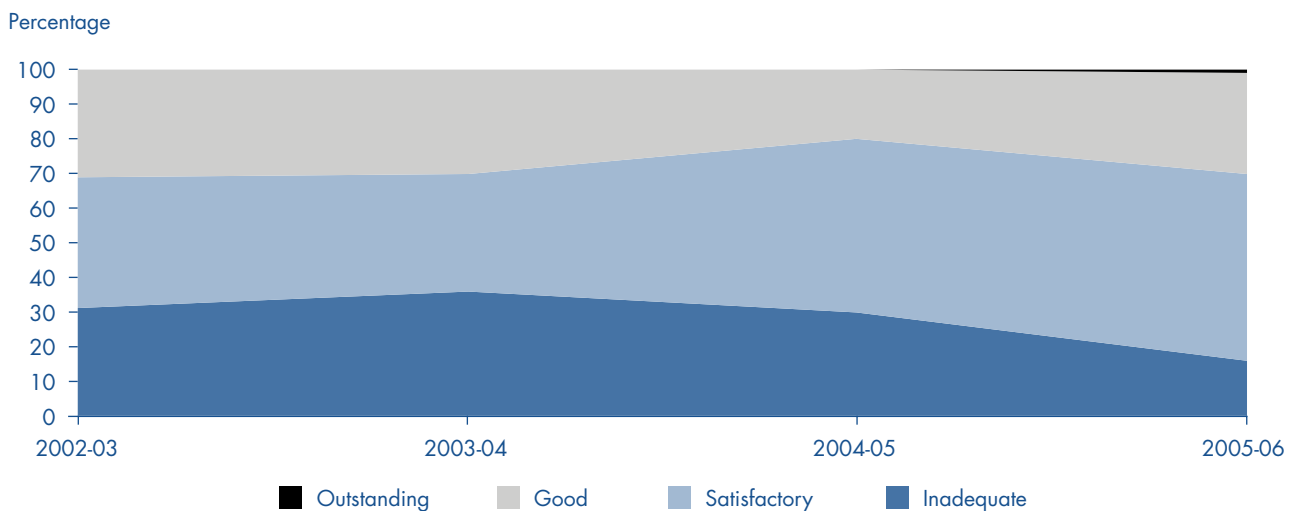
2.31 Ofsted's remit covers all learning and skills provision in prisons, including that which is delivered by OLASS as well as the Prison Service and other providers. HM Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills reported in 2007 "in many prisons there is little teaching and learning that is good or outstanding".²⁵ During 2006-07, 19 full inspections were carried out by Ofsted in prisons, 10 of which rated the prison's learning and skills provision as "satisfactory", 3 rated it "good" and 6 rated it "inadequate". Although the methodology for inspections has changed since the Adult Learning Inspectorate was incorporated into Ofsted, Ofsted believes that the results can be directly compared with those from previous years.

²⁴ Adult Learning Inspectorate. *Annual Report of the Chief Inspector, 2005-06*.

²⁵ *The Annual Report of HM Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2006-07*.

9

The proportion of prisons with learning and skills provision rated inadequate was declining before OLASS was implemented



Source: Adult Learning Inspectorate Chief Inspector's Annual Report, 2005-06

The Learning and Skills Council has put systems in place to record information on what is being delivered, but there remains a lack of data on whether policy objectives are being met

2.32 The LSC inherited a system in which there was no central data collected on how well provision was meeting offenders' needs or the factors that prevented the system from running smoothly. Learning and skills staff in prisons and probation areas and education providers collect a variety of information to monitor delivery, for Prison Service and Probation Service performance targets and for the management of prison regimes. This includes information on attendance at classes, initial assessment scores, qualifications awarded, and in the community, referrals made to learning and skills providers.

2.33 We observed during our visits to prisons, however, that the information collected by learning and skills staff and education managers is not collected or used consistently, or aggregated to determine trends or monitor the performance of providers. Ofsted has also raised concerns about the use of information, stating "the use of information by managers is often poor, particularly in relation to learners' participation, progress and achievement. There is insufficient sharing of information between providers of learning and prisons."

2.34 In order to improve its understanding of what provision offenders are participating in, the LSC has applied to OLASS the information system that it uses in

the mainstream further education sector. This system, the Individual Learner Record (ILR) collects information at five points throughout the academic year on learners engaged in LSC funded provision and the start dates, end dates and outcomes for each programme they are participating in. The system does not adequately meet the data needs for OLASS because offenders enrol on courses throughout the year and drop out or complete them at unpredictable times. The ILR system was designed predominantly to cater for the further education sector, where individuals generally complete courses with the same provider they started the course with, but offenders may move between prisons and from prisons to the Probation Service at any point during the year. The LSC intends to move to a monthly collection of ILR data in the 2008-09 academic year.

2.35 The LSC has made progress by introducing a new return for providers (the OL1), to collect information, at establishment level, on the number of teaching hours delivered against those ordered, the proportion of the population at each prison engaged in learning at the start of each month, and the courses they are engaged in categorised as basic literacy and numeracy courses or other provision. There is no equivalent return for providers serving offenders in the community. However, neither the Individual Learner Record nor the OL1 dataset yet provides the LSC and other delivery partners with information at a national level on whether the learning and skills provided meets the needs of offenders and whether individuals are achieving the aims set out in their learning plans and gaining employment.

The role of Heads of Learning and Skills is not clearly defined, hampering efforts to integrate learning and skills into prison regimes. In the community, Education, Training and Employment Leads are well placed to make better links between learning and employment

2.36 Heads of Learning and Skills were recruited into each adult prison establishment in 2004 at the instigation of the Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit, at an annual cost of some £7.4 million, and previously had responsibility for managing the contracts held by the Prison Service with learning and skills providers. This role is now performed by contract managers within the Learning and Skills Council's regional offices.

2.37 Since the implementation of the Offenders' Learning and Skills Service, the role of Heads of Learning and Skills has not been redefined, leaving scope for confusion over the respective responsibilities of Prison Service managers, LSC staff and learning and skills providers and how their roles should be co-ordinated. Ofsted has reported that "the responsibilities of the head of learning and skills in each prison varied widely between regions and prisons, and in many cases their precise roles remained unclear, hindering their ability to make improvements". The majority of LSC contract managers we spoke to had designed processes that involved Heads of Learning and Skills, but 53 per cent of the Heads of Learning and Skills we surveyed did not agree with a statement that their role under the OLASS model is well-defined and includes clear objectives.

2.38 Education, Training and Employment Leads within the Probation Service currently have links with learning and skills providers and employers, both through the Department of Work and Pensions Job Centre Plus and via relationships built up with local businesses. In response to our survey however, while two thirds of ETE Leads believed they had sufficient contact with Offender Managers and learning and skills providers, only a quarter felt that they had sufficient contact with employers. Some 40 per cent said they had adequate contact with prisons but the same proportion felt they did not.



PART THREE

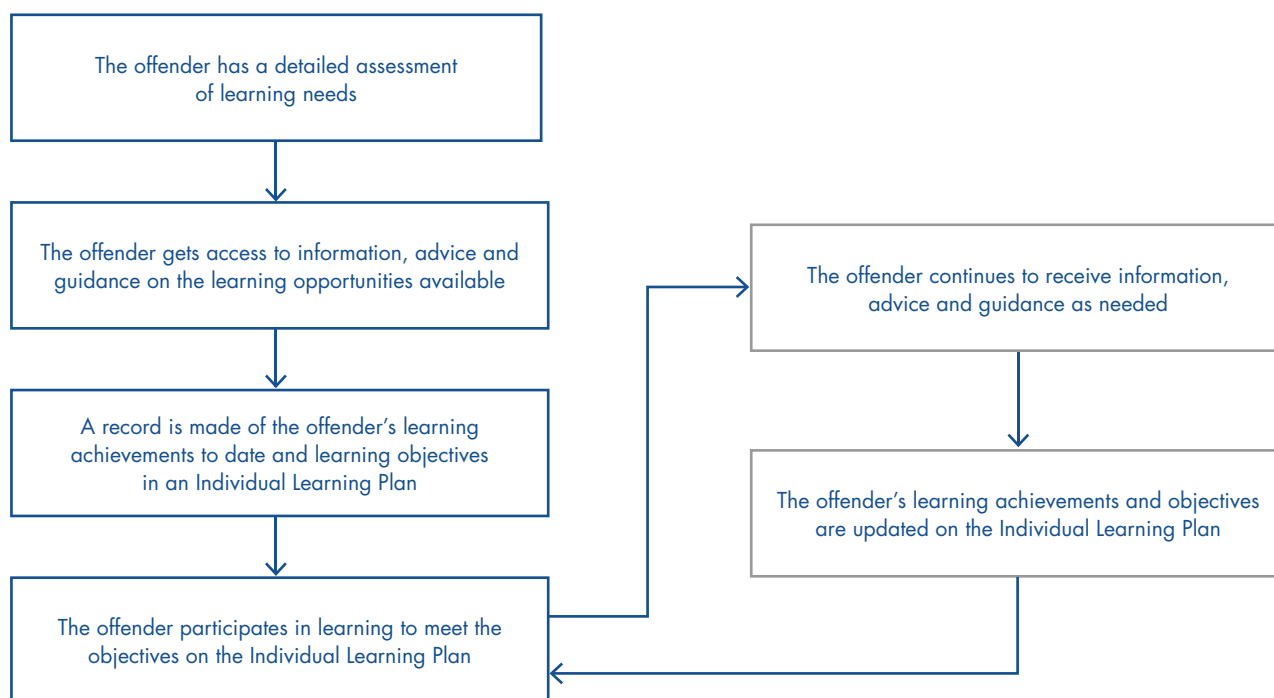
The Offender Learning Journey is in practice not working as well as it could

The OLASS partners envisage an ‘Offender Learning Journey’ in which offenders have the opportunity to gain learning and skills relevant to their personal needs

3.1 The Offenders’ Learning and Skills Unit describes the model learning and skills experience that it expects offenders to receive from OLASS, whether in custody or on community sentences, in terms of an ‘Offender Learning Journey’ (Figure 10). One of the key principles

in the Offender Learning Journey model is that offenders should engage in relevant learning and skills which satisfies the personal learning needs identified at the outset of their sentence. Informed by an objective assessment of learning needs, and with appropriate information and support, offenders who participate in learning are expected to be able to take ownership of a personal Individual Learning Plan which they can continue to use as a record of progress towards the learning and skills goals they have set themselves.

10 The Department’s model Offender Learning Journey describes OLASS in terms of providers’ ability to provide a personalised service



Source: Based on Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (2007) *The Offenders’ Learning and Skills Service in England – A Brief Guide*

3.2 To find out how successfully the Offender Learning Journey is working in practice, we examined the learning and skills records kept by the providers, the Prison Service, and the local probation areas. Where offenders had been in more than one prison establishment, and for those who had been released from prison on licence, under the supervision of the probation service in the community, we asked for offender records from all relevant prisons and probation areas. Details of the samples we used are in Appendix 1 and we were careful to ensure full confidentiality and protection of sensitive data in the process of collection and analysis.

3.3 The response rates varied but allow us to draw conclusions on a number of aspects of the Offender Learning Journey, but not all. Within the returns we did receive, some information was missing. This again limited the extent to which we could carry out detailed analyses, but we were able to investigate major issues.

At least a quarter of prisoners in our sample had no record of a learning needs assessment

3.4 Policy statements do not make it clear whether all offenders should be screened quickly or assessed fully for potential learning and skills needs. The Offender Learning Journey states that all offenders on reception into prison should have an initial assessment within five working days where the results of screening indicate a particular need. The Prison Service Order on induction procedures states that a learning and skills needs assessment must be carried out for all prisoners entering the system for the first time. Evidence that offenders had received any form of assessment or screening was weak. In response to our requests for information about offenders sentenced to prison in September 2006, we were provided with records of learning needs assessments or screenings for 76 per cent of individuals still in custody and for 55 per cent of the offenders in our sample who had been released. For the remainder, the lack of evidence that offenders' learning needs had been identified suggests that some offenders may be missing out on the learning and skills opportunities that they need.

Many people on community sentences do not receive a full assessment of their learning needs

3.5 In the first instance, the majority of offenders are screened using the OASys²⁶ system, which enables courts to give sentences and offender managers to manage offenders in a way that is consistent with their own offending risk factors. OASys is not specifically designed for the purpose of screening for learning and skills need and as such, offenders in the community are meant to be routinely screened for their learning and skills needs by the Probation Service using other tools. The evidence from our file review, however, indicated that probation areas used additional screening tools only for 22 per cent of relevant cases.

3.6 Following screening by the Probation Service, Offender Managers are responsible for deciding whether to refer offenders serving community sentences to a learning and skills provider (such as a local further education college) for a more comprehensive assessment of learning and skills needs. The provider should complete a detailed assessment and help the offender develop an Individual Learning Plan. Records for offenders in the community were poor, but we estimate that 39 per cent of those with an employment and skills need identified in their OASys assessment were referred to learning and skills providers for further help.

3.7 There is evidence that this proportion should be higher. In about half of cases, there are valid reasons why offenders are not referred to a learning and skills provider, for example if the offender has more pressing drug or alcohol problems that need to be addressed first, or because they are already participating in mainstream learning. In the other half of cases, reasons were not recorded or there had simply been administrative breakdowns between the probation service and local learning and skills providers, or the offender had moved to another probation area and not been followed up.

26 OASys, the Offender Assessment System, is a standardised process for the assessment of offenders that has been developed jointly by the National Probation Service and HM Prison Service. It includes a module assessing education, training and employability.

Not every offender engaged in learning had a learning plan and, of those who did, their Individual Learning Plans were often deficient

3.8 The Offender Learning Journey states that every learner engaged on a learning programme must have an individual learning plan, which sets out the learning goals for a specified period of time for an individual learner, the milestones for achievement of goals and the outcomes of regular reviews at which progress is discussed. For those in our sample for whom we had information, and who were engaged in any learning and skills activity, we found that less than two thirds (61 per cent) had a learning plan on their file.

3.9 Moreover, **Figure 11** shows that many learning plans for those in custody had weaknesses, and in many cases, more than one. In particular, a third of the 302 Individual Learning Plans in our sample did not specify the courses to be undertaken and less than half recorded progress the individual had made.

3.10 For offenders in the community, we found that only a quarter were completed to a good standard, failing in three quarters of cases to specify the courses that would need to be undertaken to address identified needs, and less than 15 per cent recorded progress and achievement.

The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills' aim for 50 per cent participation in learning and skills activities is being narrowly missed

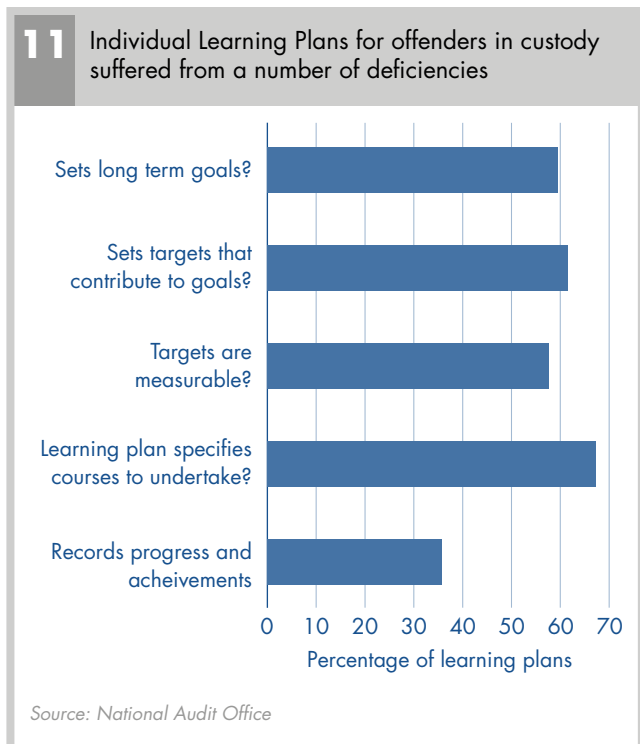
3.11 The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills' vision is to widen participation rates so that at least 50 per cent of all offenders are engaging in learning and skills provision.²⁷ Our case file reviews showed that this target was not quite met: 42 per cent of offenders starting custodial sentences in September 2006 had at least registered for a learning and skills course in the nine months between then and June 2007.

3.12 However, progress towards this target needs to be interpreted carefully. The 50 per cent threshold aims only at overall participation rates, irrespective of whether or not participants are undertaking activity that meets the objective to enhance their employability.

The majority of courses for which offenders registered are likely to address, directly or indirectly, OLASS employment and re-offending objectives

3.13 **Figure 12** shows the courses taken by offenders in prison, including both provision funded by OLASS and courses delivered under other funding streams, and indicates that most were directed towards the increasing employability objective. Skills for Life courses (literacy, numeracy and English language) formed the largest proportion of courses taken (about a third). Vocational courses also formed a significant proportion (23 per cent). Fewer than ten per cent of courses were for personal interest. These results closely reflect the distribution of courses across the five categories within the LSC's recent data on courses being funded by OLASS.

3.14 Our focus groups showed that vocational courses were popular with offenders, who felt that they needed vocational skills to gain employment (**Box 3**).

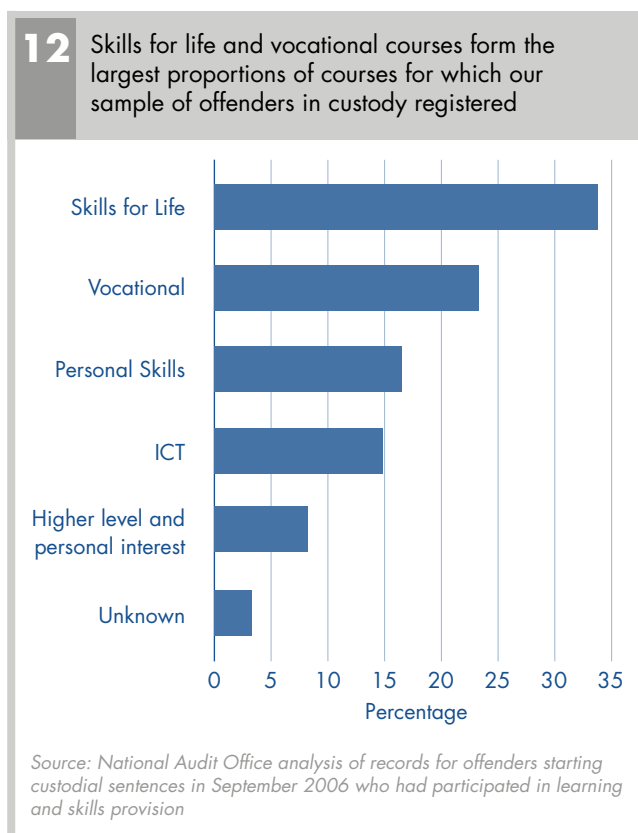


27 Department for Education and Skills (2004), *The Offender Learning Journey*, p.5.

There is nevertheless a substantial shortfall in meeting offenders' basic skills needs

3.15 For those with low basic skills, meeting only the ability level of nine year olds or younger, our analysis of records of the courses these offenders had undertaken shows a substantial shortfall in meeting their needs.

Figure 13 shows that only about one fifth of those assessed as having very low levels of basic literacy and numeracy skills had actually enrolled on literacy or numeracy courses.



BOX 3

Focus group member, male training prison

In response to a question on what types of courses they felt they needed:

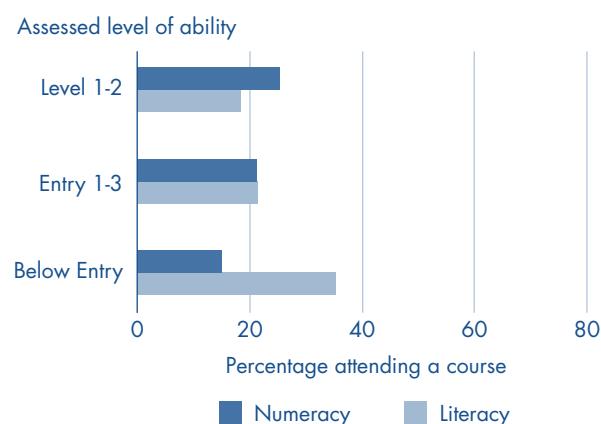
“... not just basic educational stuff, what I need to do is learn a skill ... A trade, ... yeah, a trade, so I can actually go out and get a job.”

There are difficulties in encouraging offenders to participate in learning and skills, but stronger incentives for them to do so could be provided

3.16 For offenders in custody and for most of those with community sentences, engagement with learning and skills provision is voluntary. We asked Heads of Learning and Skills, Education Managers and Education, Training and Employment Leads what they saw as the key obstacles to ensuring that offenders engage with learning and skills and register for the courses they need. They identified the main issues as:

- the availability of appropriate courses;
- negative perceptions of education among prisoners;
- the fact that prison regimes placed greater importance on other activities; and
- the lack of strong enough incentives for offenders to attend.

13 About 80 per cent of identified basic skills needs are not being met for offenders with very low levels of basic skills



NOTE

'Level 1' is equivalent to the standard expected of an 11 year old, and 'Level 2' equivalent to a GCSE grade A* to C.

'Entry levels' 1-3 are broadly equivalent to the attainment levels of 5, 7 and 9 year olds respectively.

'Below entry' is pre-primary school.

3.17 When asked how these problems could be overcome in prisons, both Heads of Learning and Skills and Education Managers suggested taster courses for offenders and embedding basic skills education into vocational courses. Education Managers also emphasised the importance of effective induction and advice.

3.18 In the community, Education, Training and Employment Leads particularly highlighted offenders' negative perceptions of education. Offenders are likely to have had negative experiences of education in the past, which make them reluctant to return to mainstream colleges. Both before OLASS and under the current arrangements some teaching is done on probation premises as a way of overcoming offenders' negative perceptions of formal education. The Leads' view was that more needed to be done to break down offenders' pre-conceptions about education, including through better guidance and motivation provided by Offender Managers.

3.19 Some offenders in custody participating in our focus groups said that they were keen to participate in the learning and skills opportunities, but pointed to the disparity in the rates of pay between education and workshops that acted as a particular disincentive to choosing to participate in learning and skills (**Box 4**).

Data quality is poor but we estimate that classroom occupancy averages 83 per cent, and is less than this in a significant number of prisons

3.20 The Prison Service is accountable for ensuring offenders attend classes and has set key performance targets for each prison. These targets are however focused on ensuring that all classes are full rather than ensuring offenders attend the learning that they need. Prisons have started to collect data on classroom attendance for each class that is running and report an aggregated figure for its overall learning and skills programme.

BOX 4

Focus group member, male training prison

“If you want people to rehabilitate themselves in jail and learn something, you need to be able to put a pay packet on the education, to get more people.”

3.21 The Prison Service data shows that, for public prisons in England, classroom occupancy is currently 83 per cent, (**Figure 14**). Our analysis shows that the majority of prisons perform at a similar level to the national average but a significant proportion achieves a higher occupancy rate. The Prison Service recognises that there are weaknesses with this early data. For example, prisons are known to overbook classes to ensure full attendance – resulting in the possibility of prisons showing attendance over 100 per cent.

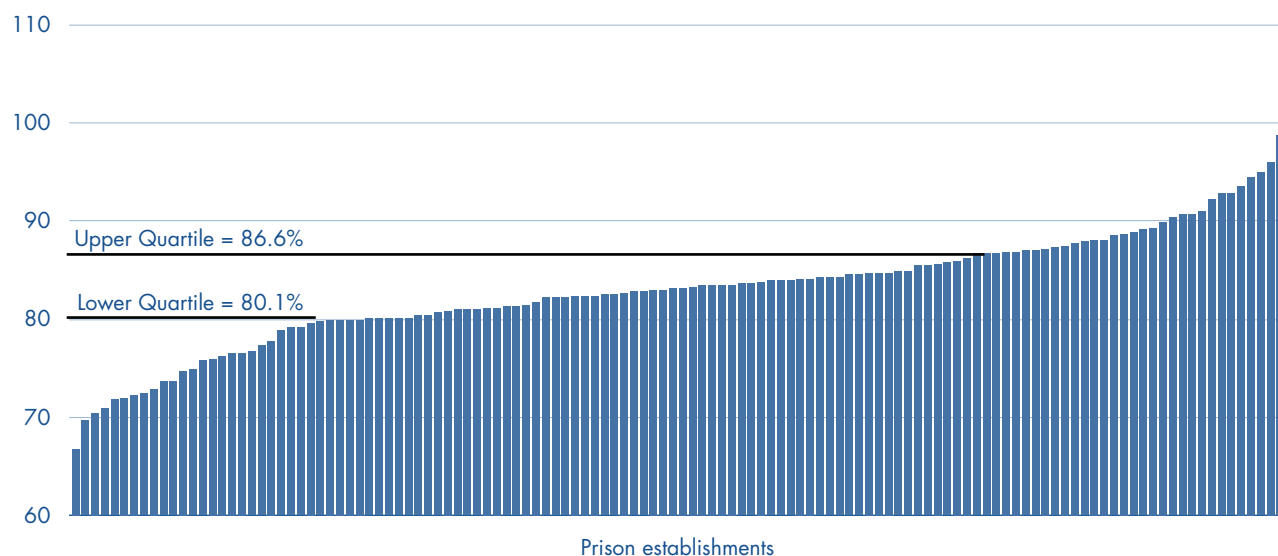
Some of the reasons why offenders fail to attend the courses they have enrolled on are unavoidable, but they are not all inevitable

3.22 The data collected by the Prison Service show that some reasons for absence from courses are unavoidable (**Figure 15**). The largest category, however, is “other” reasons, where specific reasons for absence were not recorded as they were classified by Prison Service staff as “other”. The Prison Service is proposing to revise the categories in 2008-09. It is currently not able to determine the true reason for these incidences of non-attendance, however, it believes that most are adjudications, where the offender is required to appear in front of the prison governor as a result of poor discipline. In response to our survey, half of the Heads of Learning and Skills and Education Managers cited factors outside their control, including court visits and medical appointments, as among the main reasons for offenders not completing their courses. Offenders are often involved in other offending behaviour interventions such as drug and alcohol counselling. Over 15 per cent of non-attendance was caused by clashes with other regime activities.

3.23 It is not possible to estimate the attendance rate for offenders in the community as neither the Probation Service nor providers collect the information. Whether offenders attend the courses they have enrolled on is dependent on the strength of their own motivation to do so. Offender Managers do, however, also have a role in encouraging offenders to continue the courses they have started.

14 Classroom attendance in prisons is 83 per cent nationally but there is variation across the prison estate

Classroom occupancy (percentage)

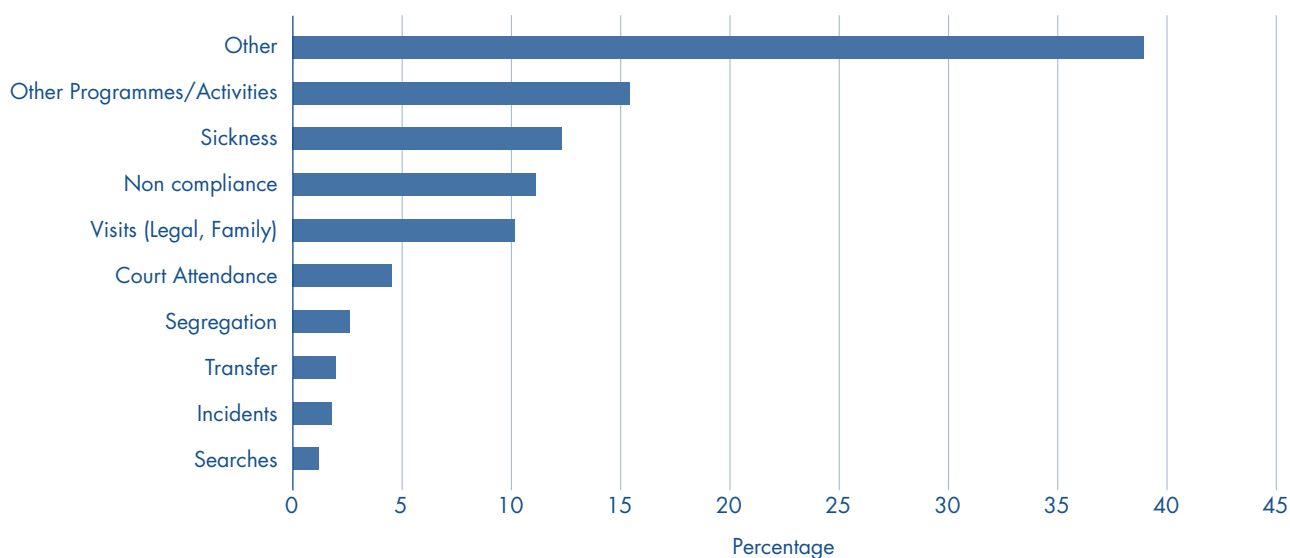


Source: National Audit Office analysis of Prison Service data

NOTE

HMP Kennet and HMP Dover are excluded from this analysis as no data was available at the time of publication.

15 Reasons why offenders in prison did not attend their courses



Source: National Audit Office analysis of Prison Service data

Transfers between prison establishments and from prison to probation are disruptive because offenders' records are not always forwarded and courses in different establishments are not consistent

3.24 Prisoners are likely to move between establishments over the course of their sentence. Offenders with longer prison sentences are usually received from court into local prisons, before transferring to training prisons to complete their sentence. Of those in our sample sentenced to prison in September 2006, 50 per cent had been in more than one prison by May 2007, and 15 per cent of offenders had been subject to more than one movement between prisons.

3.25 The transfer of prisoners in response to overcrowding is often at short notice. The decision is taken by the Prison Service, taking account of the offender's security rating, court demands, the vulnerability of the individual and other interventions they may be engaged in. We estimated in our earlier report, *Dealing with Increased Numbers in Custody*, that the cost of disruption to courses as a result of movements between prisons to deal with overcrowding was substantial.²⁸ With OLASS provision in prisons costing £98 million a year, if only five per cent of this expenditure was wasted because courses were not completed due to prison transfers, re-assessments and re-starts, the cost would be £5 million a year.

3.26 A large majority of both Heads of Learning and Skills and Education Managers, 64 per cent and 73 per cent respectively, believed that population movement is a major difficulty in helping offenders achieve the aims set out in their learning plans. This finding is supported by the evidence from focus groups (**Box 5**).

3.27 Transfers between prisons are less disruptive when offenders' learning and skills records are complete and are transferred with them. More than a quarter of Heads of Learning and Skills rated the "variable quality of records received" as a key difficulty. A third of Education Managers rated "incomplete or missing records" as the key difficulty in arranging continuing participation in learning and skills provision following the transfer of a prisoner (**Box 6**).

Our review of case files showed that only 48 per cent of assessment records were on the offender's current learning and skills file, or on the file at their last prison establishment. Similarly, only 43 per cent of the records of courses taken with which we were provided were returned by the offenders' current or last establishment.

3.28 A similar problem affects offenders with sentence lengths over 12 months who are normally released into the supervision of the Probation Service half way through their sentence. In response to our survey, 43 per cent of Education, Training and Employment Leads rated "incomplete or missing records" as a key difficulty

BOX 5

Focus group member, offender at male training prison

"None of your stuff has followed you from one establishment to another and so you come here and you're just a blank page again, so then you're waiting weeks and months to try and get on the courses that you'd already done in a different establishment! ... It's just like, what is the point?! ... That's more disheartening because you're told at one establishment 'yeah, everything will be passed on to where you're going, so hopefully you should be able to just carry on where you left off.'"

BOX 6

Daniel¹ did not continue with the same courses following a prison transfer

Daniel was convicted and sentenced on 15 September 2006, and sent to a local prison. His literacy and numeracy skills were assessed on 5 October as being equivalent to that expected of a seven year old. His learning plan set out an aim to improve his literacy skills and gain a qualification. He enrolled on Adult Literacy and Adult Numeracy courses, which he did not complete before being transferred to another prison on 14 December 2006. His assessment results and learning plan were not transferred to his next prison. Daniel did not continue with courses on literacy and numeracy, and instead enrolled on courses in Alcohol Awareness, Sex and Relationships and Drug Awareness. He was released on 16 March 2007.

NOTE

¹ Not the offender's real name.

²⁸ National Offender Management Service: *Dealing with Increased Numbers in Custody*, HC458, Session 2005-06, paragraph 13.

in arranging continuing learning and skills, where appropriate, following the transfer of an offender from custody into their probation area. Only seven per cent of the learning and skills records we reviewed for offenders on licence from custody contained records from prison.

3.29 The failure to transfer records of assessment and learning and skills undertaken can result in assessments being repeated and learning plans being drawn up again. Over a third of the offenders in our sample who had made at least one prison-to-prison transfer had had further unnecessary assessments, involving fruitless expenditure.

3.30 In the community, the Probation Service rarely receives prisoners' learning and skills records and it has to carry out further screenings to inform decisions about whether or not individuals on licence from prison should be referred to learning and skills interventions.

3.31 The delivery partners explored in 2005-06 whether the National Offender Management Information System (known as C-NOMIS) could be used to capture and share offender learning data. It was decided at the time, however, that it was not practical to extend C-NOMIS functionality to support OLASS requirements in this way.

3.32 The Learning and Skills Council has developed two interim solutions. In the regions that piloted the Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (North West, North East and South West) the Learning and Skills Council employed a management information system owned by one of the providers, Tribal Group plc. In the remaining six regions,

the Learning and Skills Council have implemented a Learner Summary Record, which it requires providers to email one another when an offender transfers.

3.33 The LSC commissioned the National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE) to evaluate the interim solutions which providers had put in place, and concluded that these could not be sufficiently developed to form the basis for a national solution. The Learning and Skills Council has now scoped a proposal for a management information database that will allow offender learning and skills records to be available to all providers. The planned implementation date for the new database, 'Managing Information Across Partners', is September 2008. Our interviews with LSC contract management staff has shown that in one region at least, they felt that progress had been too slow and they had commissioned and developed with providers their own local IT solution.

About one third of the courses offenders started were not completed

3.34 Although the data we received on offenders' enrolments onto courses is incomplete, the data we had indicated that at least 28 per cent of courses commenced by offenders in our sample in custody were not completed. Using the average course cost per offender, we estimate that uncompleted courses could be costing the LSC £30 million (**Figure 16**). Offenders who start programmes but do not finish will probably derive some educational benefit, but they will not achieve a qualification that could demonstrate to a potential employer the skills acquired.

16 Twenty eight per cent of courses in prisons go uncompleted, costing up £30 million

Course type	Estimated courses started in 2006-07	Incompletion rate Percentage	Incomplete	Incomplete course cost £000
Skills for Life	71,320	29	20,699	10,921
Vocational – First Full Level 2 Offer	49,272	22	11,024	7,249
Personal Skills: Learning for living and work	34,873	34	11,791	5,449
ICT	31,273	22	6,736	1,475
Higher level and personal interest	17,324	49	8,549	4,190
Not recorded	6,975	19	1,350	652
Grand total	211,037	28	60,149	29,936

Source: National Audit Office analysis

3.35 Not all of the factors that contribute to whether an offender completes a course are within the control of either the Prison Service or the LSC. There are, however, factors that can be controlled including better management of offender transfers and the consequences of offender movements and greater motivational support (Box 7). By way of illustration, if the non-completion rate could be reduced by five per cent without affecting the interests of the client group, the LSC would usefully save £5.3 million.

There is limited information on offenders' views of OLASS, but a recent survey of learners in 18 prisons reported a generally high level of satisfaction

3.36 The Learning and Skills Council is exploring ways in which it can extend its National Learner Satisfaction Survey to offender learners. It carried out a pilot survey of learners in 18 prisons and young offender institutes in three regions in 2007. The findings, whilst not wholly representative of the prison population, indicate that offenders have a high level of satisfaction with their overall learning experience, with 81 per cent satisfied, very satisfied, or extremely satisfied. The large majority of those surveyed, 85 per cent, were also satisfied with the quality of teaching, and four in five believed that their course or training would help them get a job in the future. Only a quarter of students had not experienced any specific difficulties during their course, with learners citing other students making noise or arriving late as particular disruptions.

3.37 Information on the views of offenders accessing OLASS in the community is not systematically collected.

BOX 7

Lee¹ attended only two classes before giving up, despite having clearly identified learning needs

Lee left school at the age of 15 with no qualifications. He was remanded into custody on 10 July 2006. His literacy and numeracy skills were assessed on 31 August 2006 as being equivalent to those expected of a nine year old. He was transferred to another establishment on 6 November having been convicted and sentenced for handling stolen goods. He was re-assessed at the new establishment and the results were the same. A learning plan was devised, which stated an agreed action to start literacy and numeracy courses. Lee attended two classes and then gave up.

NOTE

1 Not the offender's real name.

APPENDIX ONE

Methodology

Review of case files

1 We examined the learning and skills records for 1,600 offenders. Within this total, 800 individuals had been given custodial sentences in September 2006, 500 commenced community orders in September 2006, and 300 were released from custody on licence, under the supervision of the Probation Service, in January 2007. Our samples of offenders were extracted from the Inmate Information System and probation receptions data. We excluded offenders under the age of 18. For our sample of offenders in the community, we excluded offenders serving orders that were not relevant to the study, for example, Drug Testing and Treatment Orders. The samples were selected at random and then analysed against a number of characteristics (Figure 17) to ensure that they accurately reflected the stratification of the overall populations.

2 We wrote to Prison Governors and Chief Officers of Probation Areas to ask them to collate the records, from all the OLASS providers working in their prison or probation area, and referring queries to colleges in the community as necessary. We have confirmed directly with the providers operating in prisons that the most up-to-date records that they hold are those maintained within the prison establishment.

17 Characteristics used to confirm the stratification of the samples

Offenders in custody	Offenders in the community
Age	Age
Gender	Gender
Nationality	Ethnicity
Ethnicity	Probation Area
Sentence Type	Order Type
Sentence Length	Offence

Source: National Audit Office

3 For those offenders who had been in custody, we analysed data on their movements from the Inmate Information System to establish which prisons they had been held at. We requested prison governors to liaise with Heads of Learning and Skills and their learning and skills providers to send us individuals' learning and skills records. For those offenders who were on community orders or on licence from custody, we requested Chief Probation Officers to liaise with learning and skills providers to send up individuals' learning and skills records. The records that we asked for are set out in Figure 18.

18 Details of the learning and skills records we requested for offenders in custody and the community

	Requested for prisoners	Requested for offenders supervised by the Probation Service
Assessments that had been carried out	✓	✓
Education questionnaires and/or interviews carried out at the assessment stage	✓	✓
Learning plans	✓	✓
Details of the courses that offenders enrolled on, and where applicable, completed	✓	✓
Examination attempts and the outcome	✓	✓
Certificates in respect of module or final course exams	✓	✓
Attendance records	✓	✓
Preparations made for release specifically in relation to learning and skills or employment	✓	

Source: National Audit Office

Surveys

4 We surveyed Heads of Learning and Skills, Education, Training and Employment Leads in probation areas, Education Managers and Regional Offender Managers. The topics covered by each survey and their response rates are set out in **Figure 19**.

19 The topics covered by our surveys and their respective response rates

Survey	Topics	Response rate
Regional Offender Managers and the Director of Offender Management in Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Identifying offenders' needs, and planning how to address them ■ The courses which offenders undertake and complete ■ Learning and skills as part of the resettlement plan ■ The implementation of OLASS ■ The co-commissioning relationship ■ The role of the Regional Offender Manager ■ Best practice examples in the region 	8 out of 10
Heads of Learning and Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The role of Heads of Learning and Skills ■ The changes in prison learning and skills since the implementation of OLASS ■ Planning provision for the prison population ■ Difficulties with assessing prisoners' learning needs and planning education programmes ■ Allocation of prisoners to courses ■ Integration of learning and skills with other prison regime activities ■ Obstacles to ensuring prisoners engage with learning and skills and register ■ Catering for those on shorter sentences ■ Involving employers and meeting employers' needs ■ Difficulties in helping individuals to achieve the aims set out in their learning plans ■ Difficulties following the transfer of a prisoner ■ Records and data management 	103 out of 122 (84 per cent)
Education Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The role of Education Managers ■ Planning provision for the prison population ■ Difficulties with assessing prisoners' learning needs and planning education programmes ■ Allocation of prisoners to courses ■ Obstacles to ensuring prisoners engage with learning and skills and register ■ Catering for those on shorter sentences ■ Involving employers and meeting employers' needs ■ Difficulties in helping individuals to achieve the aims set out in their learning plans ■ Difficulties following the transfer of a prisoner ■ Records and data management 	77 out of 123 (63 per cent)
Education, Training and Employment Leads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The role of ETE Leads ■ The changes in offender learning and skills since the implementation of OLASS ■ Screening and assessing offenders' learning and skills needs ■ Involving employers and meeting employers' needs ■ Encouraging offenders to engage with learning and skills ■ Obstacles to offenders signing up for courses ■ Difficulties in helping individuals to achieve the aims set out in their learning plans ■ Difficulties following release of prisoners on licence ■ Records and data management 	21 out of 38 (55 per cent)

Source: National Audit Office

Analysis of provider data on courses being delivered

5 We requested data in August 2007 from each of the 21 providers operating in custody on the courses that they were currently delivering in each prison. We asked providers to complete a standard form detailing for each course its name, the qualification it led to, the awarding body, the course guided learning hours, whether it was modular, whether it was funded by OLASS, and which prisons it was being delivered in. We received responses from 15 of the 21 providers.

6 The data submitted by the providers formed the basis of our average course cost calculation. Due to incomplete returns, we calculated the average hours to complete the course for all the courses delivered at a sample of prisons. The sample was stratified by prison type and represented 20 per cent of the national prison population. The average cost of delivering the course was calculated by multiplying the average hours by the standard hourly rate. In the absence of any robust data, we have assumed an average class size of eight offenders. This assumption is broadly consistent with the observations that we made during our prison visits and the limited data that we received from individual prisons as part of our review of contracts.

Multivariate analysis of learning hours allocated to prisons

7 We conducted a multivariate analysis, using a multiple regression that included dummy variables, to understand if any factors could explain variation in the number of learning and skills hours allocated to each prison. The variables used in the analysis included:

- the gender of the offenders held;
- whether the establishment held young offenders as well as adults;
- whether the establishment held juveniles offenders as well as adults;
- the capacity of the prison;
- whether the establishment was open or closed;
- the category of the prison;
- if the establishment was a local or training prison; and
- the average number of offenders engaged in learning and skills provision.

We were unable to obtain or calculate an accurate measure of need. Instead, we included a proxy measure; the average proportion of offenders that were engaged in entry level basic skills provision.

Focus groups with offenders

8 We carried out five focus groups with offenders, four of which were in prisons and one was with offenders being supervised by the Probation Service. The characteristics of the prisons and the probation area we visited are set out in **Figure 20**. Members of the focus groups were invited to comment on:

- their experiences of learning and skills;
- the induction they had undergone;
- the types of courses they had undertaken;

20 Characteristics of the prisons and the probation area in which we carried out focus groups

Prison or Probation Area	Characteristics	Region	Operational capacity
HMP Belmarsh ¹	Male local prison, all categories of prisoner accepted	London	799
HMP Doncaster	Contractually managed male prison, all categories of prisoner accepted	Yorkshire and Humberside	771
HMP Erlestoke	Male closed training prison, category C	South West	426
HMP Low Newton	Female closed prison and young offender institution, all categories except Category A accepted	North East	316
Essex Probation Area	One of 42 Probation Areas that deal with offenders serving community sentences and on licence from prison	Eastern	N/A

Source: National Audit Office

NOTES

- 1 HMP Belmarsh has a dual role in that it also holds Category A prisoners. Our focus group was conducted within the local part of the prison.
- 2 Operational capacity taken from the Prison Service's Monthly Prison Population Bulletin – September 2007.

- the extent to which they believed the teaching they received had improved their skills and knowledge in a way that would help them on release;
 - whether individual learning plans were up to date, remained accessible to them, and were transferred with them between establishments; and
 - their experience of the prison system as a whole, and the impact this had on their learning and skills.
- 9 As we could only invite a relatively small number of prisoners to attend our focus groups, their views are not necessarily representative of the offender population as a whole.

Interviews with Learning and Skills Council contract managers and review of contracts

10 We conducted semi-structured interviews with Learning and Skills Council contract managers to inform our review of the robustness with which the LSC oversees contracted providers. We also reviewed terms and conditions, including payment regimes and incentives, included in the contracts between LSC and OLASS providers.

Consultation with stakeholders and key interest groups

11 We invited written comments from the following organisations from a wide range of organisations with an interest in offender learning and skills, in custody and in the community. We received submissions from the following organisations:

- Apex Trust
- Prison Reform Trust
- HM Inspectorate of Prisons
- HM Inspectorate of Probation
- University for Industry (learndirect)
- NACRO
- NIACE
- Ofsted
- Prince's Trust
- Prisoners' Education Trust
- Prison Governors Association

Consultation with the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, the Learning and Skills Council, the National Offender Management Service, the Prison Service and the National Probation Service

12 We interviewed operational and policy staff in the departments and agencies responsible for offender learning and skills, in:

- The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
- The Learning and Skills Council
- The National Offender Management Service
- The Prison Service
- The National Probation Service

13 Where available and relevant, we have drawn upon existing departmental data and research. This included data extracted from prison service and probation service records of receptions into custody and individuals starting community sentences; data on movements between prison establishments; OASys assessments, and summary Individual Learning Record data maintained by the Learning and Skills Council.

APPENDIX TWO

The scope of Ofsted inspections of OLASS providers

The size and frequency of Ofsted inspections vary according to risk, which is determined by the outcomes of previous inspections. Generally, all providers are inspected by Ofsted at the same time as inspections are carried out by HM Inspectorate of Prisons and HM Inspectorate of Probation. For those providers which receive “satisfactory only” ratings in their inspection, monitoring visits are carried out, usually 15 months later. Full re-inspections are carried out on providers judged to be inadequate 12 to 15 months after the original inspection.

The main purposes of Ofsted’s inspections

- Give an independent public account of the quality of learning and skills, the standards achieved and the efficiency with which resources are managed
- Help bring about improvement by identifying strengths and areas for improvement, highlighting good practice and judging what steps need to be taken to improve provision further
- Keep the Secretaries of State for Education and for Skills¹ and Work and Pensions, the Learning and Skills Council for England and Jobcentre Plus and other key agencies informed about the quality and standards of learning and skills
- Promote a culture of self-assessment among providers, leading to continuous improvement or maintenance of very high quality and standards

What Ofsted examines

- Achievement and standards
 - How well do learners achieve?
- Quality of provision
 - How effective are teaching, training and learning?
 - How well do the programmes and activities meet the needs and interests of learners?
 - How well are learners guided and supported?
- Leadership and management
 - How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners

NOTE

¹ There is now a Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills, and for Children, Schools and Families.

APPENDIX THREE

OLASS providers in prisons in England

Establishment	Learning and Skills provider	Information, Advice and Guidance provider
HMP Acklington	Newcastle College	Newcastle College
HMP Albany	Isle of Wright College	Isle of Wright College
HMP Ashwell	City College Manchester	City College Manchester
HMP/YOI Askham Grange	City College Manchester	City College Manchester
HMYOI Aylesbury	Milton Keynes College	Milton Keynes College
HMP Bedford	A4e	Tribal Group
HMP Belmarsh	Lewisham College	London Advice Partnership
HMP Birmingham	Derby College	Carter and Carter Group
HMP Blakenhurst	City College Manchester	Carter and Carter Group
HMP Blantyre House	A4e	A4e
HMP Blundeston	A4e	Tribal Group
HMP/YOI Brinsford	Derby College	Carter and Carter Group
HMP Bristol	A4e (arts curriculum) and Strode College (basic skills and work related learning)	Tribal Group
HMP Brixton	Lewisham College	London Advice Partnership
HMP Brockhill	City College Manchester	Carter and Carter Group
HMP Buckley Hall	City College Manchester	City College Manchester
HMP Bullingdon	Milton Keynes College	Milton Keynes College
HMP/YOI Bullwood Hall	Milton Keynes College	Tribal Group
HMP Camp Hill	Isle of Wright College	Isle of Wright College
HMP Canterbury	A4e	A4e
HMP/YOI Castington	Newcastle College	Newcastle College
HMP Channings Wood	A4e (arts curriculum) and Strode College (basic skills and work related learning)	Tribal Group
HMP/YOI Chelmsford	Milton Keynes College	Tribal Group
HMP Coldingley	NESCOT	NESCOT
HMP Cookham Wood	A4e	A4e
HMP Dartmoor	A4e (arts curriculum) and Strode College (basic skills and work related learning)	Tribal Group
HMYOI Deerbolt	Newcastle College	Newcastle College

Establishment	Learning and Skills provider	Information, Advice and Guidance provider
HMP Dorchester	A4e (arts curriculum) and Strode College (basic skills and work related learning)	Tribal Group
HMP Downview	NESCOT	NESCOT
HMP/YOI Drake Hall	City College Manchester	Carter and Carter Group
HMP Durham	Newcastle College	Newcastle College
HMP/YOI East Sutton Park	A4e	A4e
HMP/YOI Eastwood Park	A4e (arts curriculum) and Strode College (basic skills and work related learning). Norton Radstock College is the provider in the juvenile section of this establishment.	Tribal Group
HMP Edmunds Hill	A4e	Tribal Group
HMP Elmley	A4e	A4e
HMP Erlestoke	A4e (arts curriculum) and Strode College (basic skills and work related learning)	Tribal Group
HMP Everthorpe	City College Manchester	City College Manchester
HMP/YOI Exeter	A4e (arts curriculum) and Strode College (basic skills and work related learning)	Tribal Group
HMP Featherstone	Derby College	Carter and Carter Group
HMP/YOI Feltham	Kensington and Chelsea College	London Advice Partnership
HMP Ford	NESCOT	NESCOT
HMP Foston Hall	City College Manchester	City College Manchester
HMP Frankland	Newcastle College	Newcastle College
HMP Full Sutton	City College Manchester	City College Manchester
HMP Garth	Lancaster & Morecambe College	Lancaster & Morecambe College
HMP Gartree	City College Manchester	City College Manchester
HMYOI/RC Glen Parva	City College Manchester	City College Manchester
HMP/YOI Gloucester	A4e (arts curriculum) and Strode College (basic skills and work related learning)	Tribal Group
HMP Grendon	Milton Keynes College	Milton Keynes College
HMP/YOI Guys Marsh	A4e (arts curriculum) and Strode College (basic skills and work related learning)	Tribal Group
HMP Haverigg	A4e	A4e

Establishment	Learning and Skills provider	Information, Advice and Guidance provider
HMP Hewell Grange	City College Manchester	Carter and Carter Group
HMP Highdown	NESCOT	NESCOT
HMP Highpoint	A4e	Tribal Group
HMYOI Hindley	City College Manchester	City College Manchester
HMP Hollesley Bay	A4e	Tribal Group
HMP/YOI Holloway	City and Islington College	London Advice Partnership
HMP Holme House	Stockton Adult Education Service	Stockton Adult Education Service
HMP Hull	City College Manchester	City College Manchester
HMP Kingston	Isle of Wright College	Isle of Wright College
HMP Kirkham	Lancaster & Morecambe College	Lancaster & Morecambe College
HMP Kirklevington Grange	Stockton Adult Education Service	Stockton Adult Education Service
HMP Lancaster	Lancaster & Morecambe College	Lancaster & Morecambe College
HMP/YOI Lancaster Farms	Lancaster & Morecambe College	Lancaster & Morecambe College
HMP Latchmere House	Kensington and Chelsea College	London Advice Partnership
HMP Leeds	City College Manchester	City College Manchester
HMP Leicester	City College Manchester	City College Manchester
HMP/YOI Lewes	NESCOT	NESCOT
HMP Leyhill	A4e (arts curriculum) and Strode College (basic skills and work related learning)	Tribal Group
HMP Lincoln	Lincoln College	Lincoln College
HMP/IRC Lindholme	City College Manchester	City College Manchester
HMP Littlehey	A4e	Tribal Group
HMP Liverpool	Mercia Partnership	Mercia Partnership
HMP Long Lartin	City College Manchester	Carter and Carter Group
HMYOI Low Newton	Newcastle College	Newcastle College
HMP Maidstone	A4e	A4e
HMP Manchester	City College Manchester	City College Manchester
HMP/YOI Moorland Open	City College Manchester	City College Manchester
HMP/YOI Moorland Closed	City College Manchester	City College Manchester
HMP Morton Hall	Lincoln College	Lincoln College
HMP The Mount	Milton Keynes College	Tribal Group
HMP/YOI New Hall	City College Manchester	City College Manchester
HMYOI Northallerton	City College Manchester	City College Manchester
HMP North Sea Camp	Lincoln College	Lincoln College
HMP/YOI Norwich	A4e	Tribal Group
HMP Nottingham	West Nottinghamshire College	West Nottinghamshire College

Establishment	Learning and Skills provider	Information, Advice and Guidance provider
HMYOI Onley	City College Manchester	City College Manchester
HMP Parkhurst	Isle of Wright College	Isle of Wright College
HMP Pentonville	City and Islington college	London Advice Partnership
HMYOI Portland	A4e (arts curriculum) and Strode College (basic skills and work related learning)	Tribal Group
HMP Preston	Lancaster & Morecambe College	Lancaster & Morecambe College
HMP Ranby	West Nottinghamshire College	West Nottinghamshire College
HMP/YOI Reading	Milton Keynes College	Milton Keynes College
HMP Risley	City College Manchester	City College Manchester
HMP Rochester	A4e	A4e
HMP Send	NESCOT	NESCOT
HMP Shepton Mallet	A4e (arts curriculum) and Strode College (basic skills and work related learning)	Tribal Group
HMP Shrewsbury	City College Manchester	Carter and Carter Group
HMP Spring Hill	Milton Keynes College	Milton Keynes College
HMP Stafford	City College Manchester	Carter and Carter Group
HMP Standford Hill	A4e	A4e
HMP Stocken	City College Manchester	City College Manchester
HMYOI Stoke Heath	City College Manchester	Carter and Carter Group
HMP/YOI Styal	City College Manchester	City College Manchester
HMP Sudbury	City College Manchester	City College Manchester
HMP Swaleside	A4e	A4e
HMYOI Swinfen Hall	Derby College	Carter and Carter Group
HMYOI Thorn Cross	City College Manchester	City College Manchester
HMP The Verne	A4e (arts curriculum) and Strode College (basic skills and work related learning)	Tribal Group
HMP Wakefield	City College Manchester	City College Manchester
HMP Wandsworth	Kensington and Chelsea College	London Advice Partnership
HMP Wayland	A4e	Tribal Group
HMP Wealstun	City College Manchester	City College Manchester
HMP Wellingborough	City College Manchester	City College Manchester
HMP Whatton	West Nottinghamshire College	West Nottinghamshire College
HMP Whitemoor	A4e	Tribal Group
HMP Winchester	Isle of Wright College	Isle of Wright College
HMP Woodhill	Milton Keynes College	Milton Keynes College
HMP Wormwood Scrubs	Kensington and Chelsea College	London Advice Partnership
HMP Wymott	Lancaster & Morecambe College	Lancaster & Morecambe College

GLOSSARY

Basic skills

- Below Entry
- Entry Level 1
- Entry Level 2
- Entry Level 3
- Level 1
- Level 2

Defined by the Basic Skills Agency as “the ability to read, write and speak in English, and to use mathematics at a level necessary to function at work and in society in general”.

- below that which is expected of a 5 year old
- equivalent to that which is expected of a 5 year old
- equivalent to that which is expected of a 7 year old
- equivalent to that which is expected of a 9 year old
- equivalent to that which is expected of a 11 year old
- equivalent to a GCSE grade A*-C

Basic Skills Agency

Originally a NIACE Agency with aims to develop literacy language and numeracy by identifying, developing and disseminating innovation and knowledge in basic skills teaching and learning nationally.

Now fully merged with NIACE to form the Alliance for Lifelong Learning.

C-NOMIS

National Offender Management Information System, originally planned to hold offenders’ learning and skills records centrally alongside other offender records. Storage of learning and skills records on the system was abandoned due to rising costs.

Category A Prisoner

A prisoner whose escape would be highly dangerous to the public or the police or the security of the State and for whom the aim must be to make escape impossible.

Community sentence

A combination of community orders and other punishments aimed at changing an offenders’ behaviour and making amends.

Community order

A specific punishment that does not involved paying a fine or attending a prison such as a Curfew order, Drug/Alcohol rehabilitation order or treatment for a mental health problem.

Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills

The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, formed in July 2007 to bring together functions from two former departments: science and innovation responsibilities from the Department of Trade and Industry and skills, further and higher education responsibilities from the Department for Education and Skills.

e-learning

Electronic learning, computer-enhanced delivery of learning and skills.

Education Managers	Head of the provider team responsible for delivering the required hours of lessons according to the learning and skills contract.
ETE Lead	Education, training and employment lead, responsible for reviewing processes at prisons.
European Social Fund	The European Union's main financial instrument for investing in people, providing money to support employment, education and skills programmes in member countries.
Delivery Plan	A specific outline of how the learning and skills contract is to be delivered by the learning and skills provider.
Further education	Post-secondary (post-compulsory) education.
Head of Learning and Skills	An individual who manages the development and improvement of learning and skills provision and vocational training for prisoners.
Prison Service	Body granted the responsibility to serve the public by keeping in custody those committed by the courts, looking after them with humanity and helping them to lead law-abiding and useful lives in custody and after release.
Individual Learning Plan	Record of learning and skills goals an offender has set themselves, set in the context of the wider Sentence Plan, along with a record of progress towards these goals.
Individual Learner Record	Designed to collect information from providers at five points throughout the academic year on learners engaged in LSC funded provision and the start dates, end dates and outcomes for each programme they are participating in.
Inmate Information System	Centralised database allowing authorised Prison Service staff access to a range of information regarding inmates.
Instructional Officer	Person responsible for providing prisoners with a high level of vocational training over a wide range of subjects, such as woodwork, engineering, tailoring.
Learndirect	Online course provider.
LSC	Learning and Skills Council, responsible for planning and funding high quality learning and skills for everyone in England other than those in universities.
NACRO	Formerly the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders, Nacro is a crime reduction charity aiming to find practical solutions to reducing crime.
National Probation Service	Body granted the responsibilities to rehabilitate offenders given community sentences and those released from prison; to enforce conditions of court orders and to take whatever steps in their power to protect the public so as to minimise the impact of crime on communities.
NIACE	National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, a non-governmental organisation working to promote the interests of learners and potential learners in England and Wales.
NOMS	National Offender Management Service.
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification.
OASys	Offender Assessment System.

Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit (OLSU)	Unit responsible for improving learning and skills for offenders. Previously the Prisoners' Learning and Skills Unit renamed upon inclusion of both those people on probation and those in custody.
Offender Learning Journey	The model learning and skills experience that the OLSU expects offenders to receive from OLASS, whether in custody or on community sentences. This is to include objective assessment of learning needs, administration of relevant learning and skills, and creation of personal Individual Learning Plans for all offenders.
Offender Manager	Working with the National Offender Management Service, Offender Managers manage, supervise and administer all offenders through their planned sentence.
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills.
OL1	A supply of information from establishments detailing the number of teaching hours delivered and the proportion of the population at each prison that is engaged in learning at the start of each month broken down into the courses they are engaged in by skill level and whether they are basic literacy and numeracy courses or other provision.
OLASS	Offenders' Learning and Skills Service.
Pathway Board	One of seven groups, each responsible for taking forward plans for that pathway set out in the National Reducing Re-offending Delivery Plan. Pathways include Housing and Homelessness; Education, Training and Employment; Mental and Physical Health; Drugs and Alcohol; Finance, Benefit and Debt; Children, Families and Support Networks; and Attitudes, Thinking and Behaviour.
PICTA	Prisons Information and Communication Technology Academy, an HMP Regime Services managed and funded project that aims to promote IT training within Prisons.
PSA	Prison Service Agency.
ROM	Regional Offender Manager.
SLA	Service Level Agreement.
Skills for Life	Government-funded national strategy to improve the nation's literacy and numeracy.
TUPE Regulations	Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) 1981, preserves the employees' terms and conditions should a business be transferred to a new employer.
University for Industry	The organisation behind Learndirect who aim to use technology to transform the skills and employability of the working population, in order to improve the UK's productivity.
Vocational skills	Non-academic, practical skills related to a specific trade.