



# Unlocking potential – three years on

**In May 2016, Dame Sally Coates published her influential review - *Unlocking Potential*<sup>1</sup>, which set out a holistic vision for prison education. Following publication of the report, the government accepted the main recommendations in principle. However changes in government and administration meant that a detailed implementation plan was not published.**

The Prison Safety and Reform White Paper in November 2016 drew heavily on the Coates Report and plans were made for hugely significant changes in the way prison education was funded and governed. Governors identified the education provision they required and prisons were divided into 'lots' (groups of prisons, usually by geographical area). The PEF (Prison Education Framework) contracts were awarded to deliver core education provision. The DPS (Dynamic Purchasing System) was also introduced for governors to commission smaller bespoke education services.

In this briefing, we outline progress on the main recommendations<sup>2</sup>. Overall, our assessment is that fair progress has been made in some major areas. However, it is too soon to assess the effectiveness of the new funding arrangements and the new contracts that underpin them. It is hard to give a more positive assessment until further improvements have been realised for prisoner learners.

This is a pivotal moment for prison education and the reforms need to be supported by specialist training for staff and effective data management systems if they are going to deliver as hoped. A number of recommendations have not been implemented yet and we hope that these will now be reviewed.

**In this briefing, we assess progress on the main recommendations, out of a top score of three.**

**1 Every prison must use a consistent and rigorous assessment mechanism to set a baseline against which to measure individuals' academic performance and screen for learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD).**

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Following the Coates Review the government made a clear commitment to assessing progress and attainment. From April 2019, there are now contractual requirements regarding assessment and screening of all sentenced prisoners on reception. These include an assessment of maths and English and a screening of LDDs.

While screening for LDD has been implemented, roll out of the national screening tool has not yet happened and prisons are using

a variety of measures. Further assessments of maths and English should now take place on transfer and prior to release.

**2 Every prisoner must have a Personal Learning Plan that specifies the educational activity that should be undertaken during their sentence. This should be in a consistent digital format that can follow the prisoner through the system if they move prisons.**

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It is a positive development that as of April 2019 the infrastructure is in place to enable this in PEF provider prisons. The centralised system means that Personal Learning Plans (PLPs) can be accessed on transfer by other providers. HMPPS have also confirmed that the intention

is that in time, prison learners will have electronic access to their PLPs, including on release. It is also not yet clear how much input prisoner learners themselves, keyworkers and other staff in the prison will have into plans and this needs clarifying.

**3 A core set of educational performance measures should be used by all prisons. Such data should be monitored consistently to drive continuous improvement.**

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The majority of education providers<sup>3</sup> are now required to enter the same monitoring data. However, the new system is in development and while it is being tested, existing monitoring systems are running alongside it, for an expected six months. Governors will be able to use this data to monitor the effectiveness of their education provision and to work with providers on improvements if needed. Accountability measures for governors around education are still being formulated.

**4 Ofsted should carry out inspections using the same framework as for the adult skills sector, with inspection intervals and follow-up arrangements driven by performance data and levels of performance.**

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Ofsted use the same criteria for prison education as for further education in the community. Their new framework, expected in September, is welcome, as it will make a more holistic assessment of progress in education. Currently, follow up inspections follow the prison inspectorate's timetable which is driven by safety considerations. However, Ofsted are working on new ways of supporting prisons where education is failing.

**5 HMIP should give prisons an overall performance measure, with educational performance (as measured by Ofsted) receiving a separate, distinct assessment. This will be made available to the Governor concerned much closer to the 25-day Ofsted timetable in its work in schools and colleges than currently. It should not be possible for a prison's overall performance to be more than one grade higher than the measure awarded for its education provision.**

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The Ofsted score for education is a distinct measure within HMIP inspection reports. Following the Coates Report, HMIP reviewed their assessment measures, which increased the weight given to education included within the test for Purposeful Activity. This score cannot now be higher than the equivalent Ofsted score, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

**6 Governors, senior leaders, teachers, prison officers, instructors and peer mentors must be given appropriate professional development to support them to deliver high quality education.**

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There has been limited training available to governors and senior leaders on capability and commissioning. More positively, though, all new POELTs now undertake a module in education 'Learning at the Heart of the Regime'<sup>4</sup> as part of their basic training. Keyworkers (prison officers who support individual prisons to make progress in custody) are also receiving additional training, focused on motivating prisoners.

Providers have to demonstrate that relevant teaching staff hold an accredited teaching certificate. The quality of teaching will be monitored in the first year of the PEF contracts and providers can lose up to 5% of funding if they do not make progress against the Teacher Quality Management Plan.

Under the new policy framework, Governors must ensure that prison staff delivering learning (including instructors) receive effective Continuing Professional Development.<sup>5</sup>

Peer mentors support prison education through roles as classroom assistants, reading mentors, advisors, and library workers. Training, support and supervision for peer mentors remains varied. While excellent in some prisons, with the opportunities to undertake NVQs or other qualifications it is under developed in other establishments.

**7 The recruitment of high quality teachers needs to be developed.**

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A review of the last six months published inspectorate reports shows that only two received Ofsted's top grade for quality of learning. Progress in this area is too slow.

There is no overall HMPPS strategy on recruitment and development of high quality teachers although providers now have to produce an annual Teacher Quality Management Plan.

## **8 A new scheme to attract high calibre graduates to work in prisons for an initial period of two years should be introduced.**

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In September 2017 Unlocked<sup>6</sup>, a leadership programme modelled on Teach First was set up. It recruits graduates to work as frontline prison officers for two years and has placed 150 officers in 14 prisons. The first cohort of officers trained through this programme does not graduate until June 2019 and so there is no data on retention, completion or progression rates yet.

## **9 The current mechanism for funding prison education should be revised so that Governors and/or providers can design a curriculum that meets the individual needs and Personal Learning Plan of each prisoner for whom they are responsible.**

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Progress on this recommendation has been positive and the mechanisms for funding prison education have been completely overhauled. Governors now have more control of the education provided in their prisons. They can tailor this to their specific prison populations and local jobs market. It is worth noting that the funding mechanism of 'lots' was not a recommendation made in the Coates Report, but the Ministry of Justice decided that it was more economical and straightforward than contracts with individual prisons.

## **10 Governors should be free to design a framework of incentives that encourage attendance and progression in education.**

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The Coates review identified a number of potential disincentives for prisoners around attending education. Governor input into commissioning education services means they have the opportunity to design services that engage and maximise participation in education. In theory, services across the prison can be better coordinated.

However, the long awaited new Incentives and Earned Privileges policy framework consulted on in September 2018 has still not been published. Without this the parameters of governors' powers around incentives and privilege remain unclear.

## **11 Governors and providers should begin from a planning assumption that there will be substantial numbers of prison learners who will have significant learning support needs. Every prison should adopt a whole-prison approach to identifying, supporting and working with prisoners with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (LDD).**

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Provision is gradually improving and the prison inspectorate found that over half of prisons inspected in the last year were actively identifying and supporting prisoners with LDD. The PEF contracts contain specific requirements - alongside reception screening, governors must also ensure that education providers' staff (and other prison staff who deliver learning) are appropriately trained and qualified to meet the additional support needs of prisoners with LDD. While prisoners entering prison on reception or transferring between prisons should receive screening systematically, it is unclear whether prisoners already in custody, with unidentified needs will be screened. Very few prisons have a whole prison approach to supporting prisoners with LDD.

## **12 Governors should be able to use their education budgets to fund learning at Level 3 and above.**

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Level 3 (equivalent to A levels or NVQ level 3) education can now be facilitated through either the PEF or DPS commissioning system. Governors have the flexibility to decide on the variety and level of education qualifications provided in their establishment. The only mandatory requirement in the policy framework requires maths and English to be provided to 'at least level 2'. Early indications are that some prisons' current provision is very similar to the level and choice under the previous contract.

**13** The planned investment in digital infrastructure should be used to enable more flexible learning across prisons.



It is encouraging that funding has been sourced to refresh the Virtual Campus. It is also encouraging that a Digital Innovation Strategic Group has recently been established. However, the potential of in-cell technology and personal devices, which is the key to flexible learning in prisons, remains unrealised. Despite some good initiatives and pilots in place, there remains confusion and uncertainty about security requirements. An overarching strategy, which ideally will contain clear guidance for governors, is in progress.

**14** The security arrangements that currently underpin the use of ICT in the prison estate should be reviewed. Governors should be allowed to develop an approach that allows suitably risk-assessed prison learners to have controlled access to the internet to support their studies and enable applications for jobs on release.



There has been a little progress in this area with establishments receiving sensible advice on security measures for Virtual Campus operations. Further investment has been made in the sites with poorer access. However, the Virtual Campus remains underused on the ground with access being problematic in some prisons.

**15** The roles and responsibilities of existing organisations supporting prisoners into employment should be reviewed with opportunities to rationalise these roles and responsibilities explored.



The Coates review was concerned that provision of employment and training advice to prisoners nearing release was not co-ordinated. In December 2017 it was announced that the Education Funding Agency National Careers Service contract for careers advice would end in March 2018. At the time governors were not

allocated any funding to replace the service but were expected to make appropriate arrangements for their populations. The equivalent amount of funding for the NCS was put into the overall education budget but was not ring-fenced for Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG).

While it is positive that many prisons are commissioning IAG through the DPS, this is not being monitored centrally. It is also unclear whether individual establishments have required services to coordinate with Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) providers. From April 2019 CRCs have additional responsibilities to provide bespoke support around Employment, Education and Training.<sup>7</sup>

**16** The government should continue to develop an approach that encourages and supports employers to work in prisons and to employ prisoners on release.



HMPPS set up the New Futures Network in May 2018. This scheme has employment brokers working with groups of prisons. They build partnerships between prisons and employers to offer job opportunities for former prisoners on release. So far, 140 employers have signed up.

**Total scores out of three**



Three years on, prison education reform remains a work in progress and the ambitious vision in the Coates Report has not yet been fully realised. The PLA will continue to monitor progress on the recommendations and plan a further update to this briefing in May 2020.

**End Notes**

- [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/524013/education-review-report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/524013/education-review-report.pdf)
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