HOUSE OF COMMONS

Education Committee

Oral evidence: Prison Education, HC 86

Tuesday 25 May 2021

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Robert Halfon (Chair); Apsana Begum; Jonathan Gullis; Tom Hunt; Dr Caroline Johnson; Kim Johnson; David Johnston; Ian Mearns; David Simmonds; Christian Wakeford.

Questions 56 - 104

Witnesses

I: Lisa Capper MBE, Director of Education and Skills, Nacro; Shereen Lawrence, Peer Adviser Network Co-ordination Manager, St Giles Trust; and Julian Stanley, CEO, Bounce Back.

II: Simon Ashworth, Chief Policy Officer, Association of Employment and Learning Providers; and David Hughes, Chief Executive, Association of Colleges.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Add names of witnesses and hyperlink to submissions]

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Lisa Capper, Shereen Lawrence and Julian Stanley.

Q56 **Chair:** Good morning, everyone. Welcome to our Committee session today. Thank you very much for coming. For the benefit of the tape and for those watching on Parliament TV and the internet, could you kindly introduce yourselves, your title and, very briefly, what your organisation does?

Shereen Lawrence: My name is Shereen Lawrence and I work at St Giles Trust in our skills and employment team. My title is peer adviser network co-ordination manager, and that involves delivering training projects in the community and also working with prisoners on release, on licence—prisoners on ROTL—and through education projects in the prison.

Lisa Capper: Good morning. I am Lisa Capper, director of education and principal at Nacro. Nacro is a large, national social justice charity, and we deliver further education and skills in the community and in secure settings, including in prisons, youth offending institutions and secure training centres. We also deliver resettlement work extensively across the country and run a national resettlement helpline, so we have a unique view of the prisoner journey from beginning to end.

Julian Stanley: Hello and good morning, everybody. Julian Stanley, chief executive at Bounce Back Foundation. We work primarily in London and the south-east, but we do some national projects as well. We are also part of the Change Grow Live community. We work with offenders in prisons and also in the community. We also work with young people, and with the Metropolitan Police in particular at the moment, working with people who are trying to get support as they go into police stations in custody, coaching so that they have options and opportunities. That is part of Bounce Back Youth, which is a new initiative. We have extensive experience, particularly in the field of construction, which is our specialism, and have seven training centres in London.

Q57 **Chair:** Good morning and thank you for that introduction. I will start off with a couple of questions before I pass to my colleagues. How feasible would it be for every person who becomes a prisoner to be assessed for their education, ability and skills, not just the qualifications they have, but properly assessed, and a tailor-made package made and offered to those prisoners?

Shereen Lawrence: It is something that could be done if there was some real structure in place. That might also involve working with external organisations to support that. At St Giles we strongly believe in the peer adviser model, which could be having trained peers, people with lived experience, so those in the prison system serving a sentence, to support them and deliver assessments.

Julian Stanley: I think it is possible. We would like to see much more strategy around the things you mentioned, so everything from assessment at the very beginning when people go into prison and through the journey. Essentially, a lot of the wraparound work that we do with individuals is about giving them the confidence and the ability to cope with coming back out at the other end of it, as well as upskilling them in technical terms. That wraparound support is often very hard to get funding for, so charities like ours have to work very hard to look around for sponsors, supporters, corporates, trusts and foundations, rather than having the extra resources available that would fund that kind of work for us more easily. I think all the things you say in your opening question are doable, but they need some planning and strategy.

Q58 **Chair:** Lisa, what is your view? A proper assessment and a tailor-made package, is that going to be too costly? Is it realistic?

Lisa Capper: No, not at all. In fact, I think it is what providers want to deliver. In terms of having a proper assessment for literacy and numeracy, there are tools being used and there are assessments taking place. But alongside that, there needs to be screening around particular learning needs, learning difficulties and special educational needs, too.

Also the careers advice and support should start at the front end, because this is key to motivation for those prisoners. Many people coming into prison have low levels of qualifications, as we know, and have in the past probably—not always, but probably—been turned off by education, school and testing, and therefore the way this is done and the holistic approach to it is very important. If the front end is right, it is a lot easier to build those layers of different treatments and programmes for those prisoners.

One size does not fit all for the prison population and there are varying needs of prisoners, some who have high-level skills, who can do more advanced levels, and those in a longer stay who need that hope for the future, but also those who need to quickly upskill, who could get their English and maths qualifications with some ease and move very quickly into work. I think one-size-fits-all delivery of the curriculum is a very important thing to challenge. We should be looking at the different layers and strands of provision that we could offer. Apprenticeships are one of those strands. It is not—

Q59 **Chair:** I am going to come on to apprenticeships in a bit. A national study in 2018 found that prisoners who had taken part in education were 7.5% less likely to reoffend after one year of release, compared with prisoners who had not had any learning or education. That 7.5% figure is very welcome, but I would have thought it would have been higher. Why is it just 7.5% less likely to reoffend?

Lisa Capper: That study, if I am not wrong, was looking at quite a short-term timeframe. I think it goes up slightly over time. However, what we know from Nacro is that when people come out of prison, they face

further barriers to reintegration into the community, such as where they are going to live. It is great to have more money on release, as awarded this week by the Secretary of State, but still there are financial barriers, getting registered with a doctor—all those things they have to do—and trying to navigate their way around job applications, finding accommodation, finding their feet and reintegrating with their family. All those present barriers for why people can't get back into work.

Another single issue here is about literacy and numeracy skills. When you look at the range of job adverts for the different occupations that many prisoners will go to—there are some good studies on the destinations of prisoners leaving and the jobs that they go into—well over half of them require a functional skills, English or maths qualification. We know that many prisoners still don't have those when they come out, or they don't have them at the right level. That is the real barrier to them getting into the job market.

Q60 **Chair:** Do you have updated figures on the reoffending rates, any of you, for those who do have proper education in prison?

Lisa Capper: I think we can get it for you.

Julian Stanley: Yes, I am sure we can. Certainly in the work that we do, we notice that the recidivism rate is much lower for those who attend our courses. I think part of this is about the work. The preparation for release almost has to be tailored around the length of sentencing. There needs to be a channel so that people have the confidence to come out, by having the skills and opportunities while they are in prison, and not be thinking about it at the tail end. This is also where potentially ROTL, release on temporary licence, can be very effective. Obviously there have been concerns about absconding and people not returning, but that needs some linking up.

This is where the strategy piece around basic skills, employability skills, emotional intelligence, starting to address the issues of communication and managing the process of being back in the outside world has to start much sooner. Typically we try to work with people six to 12 months in advance.

Q61 **Chair:** How well is education for prisoners reaching those with the lowest levels of attainment?

Julian Stanley: Certainly we find there are a number of people who were unemployed before they came to prison, so the motivation piece is very important, and then getting them on to the early levels, level 1 and 2 qualifications, is very important. It is also about raising aspirations because some people have never had the opportunity to think about what else they might do. It is trying to interest people and encourage them to think about what they might do and how they might go on a journey. Generally speaking, the important part is getting people engaged in the idea that training for a skill and education is something that they can do.

That is a very important piece, the whole encouragement piece, and a strategy towards getting people into courses in the first place can be quite a journey.

Shereen Lawrence: It is important that education for those in prison is done very early on in their sentence. It enables an individual to see how they are going to get to that end goal, and that will start with the functional skills. It is also important to remember that some people in prison haven't had good educational experiences, so it is about developing the educational spaces that prisons have.

I know they did very well with the young men in Feltham. They put the signs on the floor, because the men tended to walk with their head down. This was a few years back, and they identified that people were attending lessons more. They weren't walking with their head high going into the education block, they were tending to walk with their head down, and by having the signs that way they were able to be guided into their lesson. Again, it is about changing the environment in the educational space to make it less of a school environment for people to want to come, to be more encouraged to go to these lessons.

Lisa Capper: I also think we have to acknowledge that around 47% of the prison population are coming in with no or very low qualifications, and not everybody is attending education. How prisoners end up in education is or can be somewhat precarious. Prison officers, for example, are not trained or able to guide or support prisoners into education. Some prisoners may be deterred from entering education because they feel they have a particular need that can't be overcome, or they are deemed as not suitable for education because they would not be able to cope with the education on offer or perceived to be on offer.

There is something in your initial question, around the assessment that takes place and how and when we guide people into those education courses and what proportion of the prison population is getting the chance to attend education. Then, of course, tackling those issues of the barriers to why those individuals have such low abilities or low levels of qualification and what kind of courses we can put on there to give that confidence and motivation.

Also incentives for prisoners to attend education. I know it is a different subject, but how do we incentivise prisoners who have had poor experiences? There are a range of things there, including pay, which is an important factor, but also peer support and advice, the sort of work that Shereen does, where you have individuals who have similar experiences who can encourage that participation in education. Otherwise you have parts of the prison population not attending education who are the ones who would most benefit from that support. Just like we see in adult skills in the community, it is getting to those harder-to-reach adults and turning around their motivation, their aspiration and their hope for the future.

Julian Stanley: It is very important to say on the whole piece, particularly in construction, that there are jobs available. There are routes into construction and, therefore, getting people on to training courses and giving them the hope of a job very early on is very important. But at the other end, we have done work with, for instance, the Royal Astronomical Society. We have stuff on science, technology and space, just motivating people to think about the idea of being interested in something. Learning something different can open a door that leads them into something else from an educational perspective and motivates people. The motivation is critical.

Q62 **Chair:** My final question is on an area for which I have a big passion, which is apprenticeships. From what I have seen in the submissions, to make it happen, if we really want to have prisoners doing apprenticeships, there have to be some significant changes to legislation. How do we make prison apprenticeships happen? If you could all answer concisely, please, because we have a lot to get through. I may pick one or two of you to answer future questions, just because of time. Lisa, do you want to start off, please?

Lisa Capper: You are absolutely right, legislative change is needed around the employment contracts in prisons so that apprenticeships could be fully started within the prison environment. There are issues around how apprenticeships are funded in order for prisoners to be able to participate. For example, if a lot of the upfront learning is done in prison, it leaves very little funding for the community education providers to complete with that prisoner on release in terms of the placement in the workplace.

We have to think about the prisoner and their experience. Obviously apprenticeship pay is not necessarily as much as they need on release, so it is not always the most attractive option. The work that has been done already on apprenticeship pathways has been very positive. There is lots to learn there, but joining up the community provider on the outside with the education provider on the inside, and thinking about the economics of that situation for the individual, are all key factors.

Q63 **Chair:** Have you done any work on whether it would be beneficial for prisoners to have the opportunity to do apprenticeships?

Lisa Capper: I haven't done any work on it, although I know some of the four providers have, particularly Novus, which has been engaged in a pilot in the north-west, but we would also say that this is one pathway. It is not necessarily a panacea. There are other pathways that prisoners can take, and it is about having those different pathways available so that we can meet the individual needs of learners, but also employers, because some employers want apprenticeships, others want work-ready prisoners coming out with a licence to practise.

Julian Stanley: Lisa covered off the bit about the legislative rules that need changing around contracts, payment and how pay is defined. They

are complex matters that need addressing so people can use apprenticeships positively—the minimum wage and all those issues.

There is an opportunity for people on temporary licence to get on to apprenticeship programmes, and they would be a likely area to begin. The other one is in-prison training. The kinds of courses available for people in prisons can be quite limited, so are there other ways of introducing new types of courses and new ways of earning a living by learning a skill in prison?

Shereen Lawrence: I totally agree with both Lisa and Julian. St Giles has tried to make the peer adviser programme an apprenticeship. There are too many barriers to do that under the legislation.

Lisa Capper: Could I just make one further point?

Chair: In a nutshell, please, because we have a lot to get through.

Lisa Capper: Apprenticeships can be highly motivating for prisoners, and they are highly valued. In the YOIs in the youth estate, it is something that we should look at more.

Q64 **David Simmonds:** I had the opportunity to visit a number of prisons during my time as a magistrate, and I heard quite a lot about education and training and its beneficial effects. Perhaps framing this in the context of the differences between short-term and long-term prisoners, according to the MoJ around two thirds of prisoners were unemployed before they entered custody. Looking at the percentage of the prisoners and ex-prisoners with whom you work who were unemployed before being sentenced, how do you feel prison education is enabling them to be job-ready at the point of release?

Julian Stanley: We have lots of people who want to get on to courses. There is limited capacity in terms of the number you can have in any room at any one point, so they are driven by the capacity issue. In terms of the sentencing, obviously it is about getting through the bureaucracy in the system and getting to people. As you develop relationships in different prisons, you are able to get to people—Covid has prevented this in the last year—and tell them about what is available, but there is bureaucracy involved in people getting settled and being able to think about starting on a journey of any kind of training or education.

Those are systemic things that need to be addressed. We try to make direct contact through the staff and on the wings with prisoners as soon as possible to let them know what is available to them.

Q65 **David Simmonds:** I am particularly interested in the point about the difference between prisoners who may be on longer-term sentences and those on shorter custodial sentences because, clearly, it makes a big difference to the dynamics of the training that they have. Certainly the message I got is that it is very difficult to organise and focus on training for somebody who may be in prison for three or six months, but clearly if

somebody is in for a 20-year sentence, that is also a different dynamic. Do you have a view about that and where priorities might sit, in particular for prioritising apprenticeships versus other forms of training?

Lisa Capper: It goes back to having those different strands of delivery to meet the different needs of prisoners. On shorter-term sentencing, it has to be all about planning for release, the links with careers and, now, the new probation arrangements. That focus is on the measures that will prevent reoffending when back out in the community. We are not going to get through significant upskilling and qualifications in that time period, but there is work that can be done. That is very different from when you have the longer sentences. If we see more long sentences, those pathways and route ways will be very important so that the progression is there.

The difference is for those who were unemployed before they come in. When they are in prison, you have a captive audience and you have the opportunity to re-motivate and for individuals to reinvent themselves. Technical and vocational skills, time and time again, are proven in terms of people seeing themselves as a chef, as a motor vehicle mechanic, as a construction technician, where they have those skills, some value and self-worth and they can see how they can put money in their pocket and get a car, a flat and all of that.

The vocational and technical education is very important, underpinned and embedded with the literacy and numeracy, which will enable them to make the applications and meet the criteria to apply for jobs. The one size fits all comes in again here. It is the different treatments that we need. I don't think it costs more to do that, because it is about the way it is organised.

Q66 **David Simmonds:** Can I ask a specific question on that point? Do you think there is a role for community payback-type arrangements to give people the opportunity to use those practical skills? I am very aware that my local authority's probation service has had some success with that as part of community sentences, giving people who want to become, for example, landscape gardeners the opportunity to go and do some work with the Canal & River Trust, that kind of thing. I appreciate it is complex when people have custodial sentences but, particularly in the pre-release period, do you have a view about how we might use that?

Julian Stanley: The critical thing at the beginning is to make sure that everybody is allocated almost an organisation and an individual that allows them to connect up when they come out. Our work in the community, again, has to be funded. There is a funding issue about doing work in the community, and I think that could be resolved. There is a desire for employers to come in and understand what kind of people are around and what could be done. The important thing is providing people with some kind of mechanism of support that allows them, on short-term sentences, to know that when they come out they are not on their own and they are going to be guided.

For people who are in for a longer term, there is an opportunity to plan and inspire them to be involved in different styles and forms of education and training throughout their longer sentences. Again, this is about having different strategies for different kinds of sentencing.

Shereen Lawrence: Again, on shorter sentences, it is important. For someone who is in for only three to six months, it is about capturing that focus very early on in the sentence, the first couple of weeks of the induction period. Again, it is where external organisations can come in, like the Through the Gate project, so they are not waiting on the other side of the gate and that work starts very early in their sentence. Again, as Julian was saying, it is having an organisation or an individual assigned to them so that they can start that work, to start planning what is going to happen outside the gate, because that could change people's focus and their experience of their journey on even that short sentence.

David Simmonds: That has been fairly comprehensive, thank you.

Q67 **Tom Hunt:** Good morning. Written submissions to our inquiry highlight the high proportion of prisoners with a learning difficulty or disability, approximately one third of prisoners. How well is the current prison education system picking up and diagnosing specific learning needs and tailoring support to meet the range and complexity of needs that are present among prison learners?

Lisa Capper: The stat of one third is probably an underestimate because quite a lot of this is left to self-identification and there is a wide spectrum of need. That is the first thing to acknowledge. I think things have improved, and we have definitely seen that in the provision we are involved with. I know that current providers are working on various tools and assessment approaches, which are coming through.

Teachers do their best. Within the classes they are in, they will try to identify and support learners. However, it is a very different picture for more complex needs and how well that is being looked at and how well programmes can be put together under the current regime. When we looked at the community and the way that special needs and, particularly, high needs are funded through the current FE system, it is a very different picture from what you see in prisons. If we are serious about tackling that, we need to look at how it is working in terms of the structure for delivering to those particular groups.

In a previous role I had working with a group of adults who all had slightly different special needs, they were struggling on a day-to-day basis to function in the secure environment, so to be received and to participate in education in the way it is organised now is quite a challenge. We need to look at what the Government buy in terms of supporting those special educational needs prisoners and how that support and resource can be put in to make it work on the ground.

There is very much a will to do the right thing, but not necessarily the structure, resources and tools to do it. It is in all our interest to assess any barriers to learning and to make sure that we can do it early on, up front, which then gets things in the right place with a positive path forward for that individual. There are a number of struggles for those individuals, and we could make that a lot easier by getting the education pathway right. The assessment point that was brought up earlier comes in there, and some work is going on, but there is more to do with the resourcing. The way we are procuring it within the future-looking contracts is important.

Q68 **Tom Hunt:** It is interesting, what you say about 30% being a significant underestimate, and the point about how a lot of this is relying on self-identification. Roughly what percentage of that 30% knew they had a disability before they came to prison, and what proportion of that 30% found out once they got to prison?

Connected to that, we heard in our previous session that when every prisoner enters prison, they have a session to work out their learning needs, et cetera, but it did not seem to me that part of that was the potential of having proper assessment and diagnosis, like dyslexia tests and all these sorts of things. Do you think it would be helpful to make that a requirement so that every single prisoner coming in gets that kind of specialist test? It seems to me that this is important for two reasons—this is a bit of a question, a bit of shoehorning in a view—first so that we can provide the tailored support necessary for each individual prisoner, the support that is right for them. It also seems to me that we have no idea of the scale of the problem unless we know the true number of prisoners who have special needs. That goes right into the debate about we fund SEND from early years, and so on and so forth.

Shereen Lawrence: I think Tom said it. Everybody needs to be assessed from very early on. My experience with the prison education system is that there isn't an assessment. It is a classroom and you are given some basic provision. The classroom is not geared to support those who have special educational needs. However, if it was done very early on with everybody, we would have accurate numbers and we would know what resources we need to provide and we would know what funding we need to pump into it. Exactly as you say, Tom, we would know that we need to fund SEND very early on, in the early years.

Julian Stanley: Clearly a SEND strategy that was implemented from the beginning when people arrive and are assessed would be fantastic. It is a resource-heavy piece of work. SEND is a problem across the education sector generally, although we have done so much work on it over the years and have improved it in many, many ways. Funding that work is critical to somebody's outcomes at the end, so enabling them to learn, basically. Yes, we would certainly support that and want it as an ideal.

In the classrooms, I agree with Shereen. What happens is people do their best to assess and go through competency tests, to make sure we

understand the best that the teachers can give them with the limited capacity that is available to address the specific needs that they may have that don't get identified. This extends beyond what we classically of, dyslexia, dyspraxia and all these things; it also extends to things like trauma and injury.

There was an interesting session we had at Bounce Back yesterday about the impact of violence on people who have gone into prison and their brain functioning. There are a lot of very interesting initiatives out there about how you can assess people. I think we could make more use of digital to assess people, and that might speed things up and be a cheaper way of delivering more on assessing people.

Tom Hunt: Thank you very much. That is very useful.

Q69 **Kim Johnson:** Good morning, panel. My question is on education resources and capacity. The Prisoners' Education Trust believe that the infrastructure in many prisons is inadequate to support education, training and classroom-based activities, and that many prisons lack the equipment to teach prisoners some of the future-proof skills they need to enter the job market, with digital skills being a major area. How easy is it for prisoners to be allocated appropriate education and training that meets their individual needs and preferences?

Given the disproportionate number of black prisoners, I would also be interested to find out the take-up of courses by black prisoners.

Shereen Lawrence: Going back to the initial part of the question, digital skills are a must. They are one of the basic skills that are needed, alongside numeracy and literacy, to enter the job market in today's world. The prisons don't have the resources to do that.

I know that, many years ago, they were looking at an internal internet in some of the women's prisons, and in some of the men's estate as well, and it just wasn't fit for purpose—it did not work. Nothing really came of that, and it is important that prisons focus on it, because again for some of the low-level jobs on release from prison, the minimum wage jobs, you still need to have basic IT. There are many prisoners—and many people in the world—who don't have an email address, some of the basic things that you need to apply for a job nowadays. They don't have the basic skills to use Microsoft, and they don't have the opportunity to do that in prison.

For those on longer-term sentences, 10 years, the need for digital skills is increasing yearly, daily. Whatever they knew when they first went in, it is a new world when they get out: the phones are different, the access is different. It is important that we put the resources in to do that. Again, using the peer model to support education departments to support individuals, because many people who go into prison do have the skills required. I think what prisons need to start doing more is to use the prisoners, the peers, to support some of the more challenging and difficult learners that they may have.

Julian Stanley: Certainly where we work in training centres in the London prisons, the way we are resourced and the equipment we have, we have the capacity to do what we need to do. If we are talking about the wider picture in digital, clearly there has been money put aside to invest in that. It hasn't flowed through the system in the way that perhaps everybody would like to see. I think the opportunity to work both inside and outside the cell through digital is critical.

Employers outside are very keen to engage and to see people come out with digital skills that they could use. There is a mismatch there, because I think there is work available across the board. For instance, when we talk about construction at Bounce Back, there is a whole variety of things in the training centres that we do at a basic level, if you like: painting, decorating, drywall lining, all these kind of things. They are skills that are needed outside in the world. Jobs are available for people to take if they get through courses and they get their CSCS cards.

In addition to that, other people have aspirations to do other things in construction, whether that is CAD drawings, BIM or the modelling systems that go on. These are all digital, and they are all innovations that could be taught well inside prisons, but we need the infrastructure to be able to do that. It is about trying to speed up the opportunity to get into a digital mindset in the prisons. Lots of governors are keen to do that, and we are prepping a number of projects around the digital piece, but I think we all found it more difficult than we might have imagined because, obviously, the implementation inside the prison estate is slower than we would like.

Lisa Capper: I absolutely agree on the digital infrastructure. In order to deliver the curriculum for 2030, or even just now, there needs to be digital infrastructure the deliver the curriculum to support the skills of prisoners so that they are job-ready when they come out. There is also the wraparound support for all that delivery, so links with other providers, links with employers, how data is used in prisons, how the whole infrastructure operates, so it is at a number of levels for the digital aspect.

In terms of kit, resources, industry-standard kit and environment, there is a mixed bag. Obviously some of the newer prisons have better facilities. If you go to Pentonville, not so. You have that whole range. There are a few solutions in here. We have worked with Bridgestone Tyres in the West Midlands. It has sponsored a tyre-fitting workshop. Yes, it is fairly low-skilled, but it is getting people into jobs. That was relatively easy to pull off.

I think there are some employer solutions in here, and maybe linking in with the New Futures Network, but also looking at what we are doing with colleges outside of prisons with the launch of the new capacity fund. How will we invest in industry-standard workshops in the estate? I think all those things come together as a package, the digital and the industry

standard, so some nice examples of employer sponsorship that could be part of the solution.

Q70 **Kim Johnson:** Thank you for your responses, but no one responded to my supplementary question about the take-up of courses by black prisoners. Maybe you can send us that, which would be useful.

Moving on, my next question is about employability needs. How effectively are education and employment targets incorporated into prisoners' sentence plans on entry into prison, and how are these plans monitored? In May 2018, the Ministry of Justice education and employment strategy stated there were too many low-level qualifications being delivered that provided little or no reward for ex-offenders to secure a job. How have things improved since then, and what might still need to change?

Julian Stanley: I am interested in that. It is all about building the relationships with the staff in prison, so once you have those relationships in place, trying to work with people to get through the assessment pieces and get people on to courses is a critical part of that. I think your point is about whether we are aiming high enough for people, whether we are doing more to enable people to achieve beyond the basics, if you like. Certainly at Bounce Back we aim to get people to remain with us and we follow them afterwards so that, when they come out into the community, they are supported.

This is where the link between being in prison and starting off on some kind of education and training is so important, but there is also the follow-up when people have left prison so they are able to continue that journey and be tracked, monitored and supported, because for people who have never had an education—and many of the people we work with never got the opportunity to benefit from their schooling—it is a massive journey of discovery. Once people are on it and they see that there is a possibility and they have hope, they are more likely to stay on it.

I think it is about this joining up and connectedness through the system. That is a critical thing that needs to be addressed almost strategically, so that you have these elements of SEND, basic skills, apprenticeships, traineeships, not just for shorter sentences but for medium-term and longer-term prisoners. How do you plan all of that, and how do you keep it afloat when people leave the prison estate and go back out? That is the piece of work that needs joining together in a more fundamental way.

Chair: Just briefly, please, Lisa. We have a lot to get through.

Lisa Capper: My point is just about career pathways and route ways, so rather than talking about qualifications, it is about the journey for that career pathway, so what literacy and numeracy you need, what practical skills in the workshop, what is the fundamental qualification and the licence to practise and then what is the link with the employer on the outside. If prisoners move around the estate, there should be some synergies around those career pathways. We have to stop thinking in

terms of single qualifications and ticking things off, and think much more about that piece at the beginning: what you want to be, how you get on that career pathway and how you have it mapped out.

I know some of the current providers are doing that, but there is more to do on that. It links back to industry readiness and the work with employers on the outside so that those jobs are accessible for prisoners on those pathways.

Q71 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** I am interested in two groups of people who have not been mentioned. Most of the focus has been on readying people for work as the purpose of education, which is of course the right thing, but some prisoners, particularly older prisoners or those who have committed really heinous crimes, won't be released until after their retirement age. What role does education and training have for those prisoners, where it is not preparing them for a life of work outside of prison once released or if released?

At the younger end of the age spectrum, for young people who are moving from youth custody into the adult prison estate at 18, we heard in other evidence that they may be moved in the middle of an A-Level or BTEC qualification. What provision is made to ensure that those young adults can complete the education they were doing in the youth custody sector?

Shereen Lawrence: In terms of the second half of the question, we have seen challenges with that when people move from the youth offender estate to the adult estate, but also when adults move around different estates. There doesn't seem to be a provision that supports them to complete the education they have already started. That can knock someone's confidence. They are in the middle of something, they are coming toward the end of something and they are not able to complete it. Again, that is something we need to look at. How are we supporting that journey when they are moving around so they are able to achieve something and not keep starting again?

Lisa Capper: A digital passport is one of the options there, but it is how the information from the youth estate ends up at the next destination, which is an age-old problem. The information is not always available to the organisation that had those young people, they are not always allowed to know where they have gone. I think there are issues around the whole transfer of information around education. Of course one of the insurance policies on that is making sure the young person understands where they are on their journey so that they can advocate for themselves, but we shouldn't just rely on that. It should be that digital passport, that understanding and knowledge.

We have also had young people come back to the institution to complete their exam, which has also worked quite well, so support has been continued and then they come back into the place that they know in order to take the exam, which has also worked.

The former point, Caroline, about the intrinsic value of education and learning, it is those same themes of motivation, reinvention, understanding who you are and having some sense of value, of self-worth and of what contribution it can make back to yourself, but also the environment where you are. I think education should be valued intrinsically, as well as for the economic factors that we have been talking about. That should be well supported.

For things like Open University degrees, the digital piece is very important again, because you can have more access to do that higher level through online tutorials and things with Open University, which hasn't been available.

Q72 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** For young people in youth custody who turn 18, perhaps in the middle of what would have been their final year of school, is there a legal reason why they have to move into the adult estate before completing that course? Can they not wait until the end of the summer term, as they would at school?

Lisa Capper: I know there are examples where those who have turned 18 have stayed within youth custody to complete, and there has been a negotiation about the movement. I would have to check on the legal piece. I don't want to give you the wrong information, but I think there should be more room for that kind of negotiation because it is also about the wellbeing of that individual. Their chances of success are going to be much greater if they have that continuity and support.

Q73 **Ian Mearns:** I have a broad question to begin with. Are there any significant differences between the male and female prison estates in terms of what is being achieved? Is the offer appropriate for both?

Shereen Lawrence: From my experience of the female estate, yes and no. In the female estate they tend to focus a lot on what many years ago would have been "women's jobs", sewing classes, hair and beauty. There isn't much around some of the stuff that women get into around construction and other practical workshops. Is it fit? It works, but it could be better. I can't really comment on the male estate. I know the male estate tends to have a lot more broader options than the women's estate does.

Q74 **Ian Mearns:** The big question is whether that is something that needs to be addressed urgently from that perspective.

Shereen Lawrence: Yes. It can always be addressed, and there is always room for improvement. Expanding the skills offer would be what is needed.

Q75 **Ian Mearns:** An observation from my perspective is that successful education programmes for prisoners may seem expensive to some, but what are the long-term costs of not trying to offer appropriate education programmes to prisoners?

Julian Stanley: If you look at the cost of our programmes, let's argue that, on average, typically £3,000 can be spent on a programme that gets somebody through the gate and into employment, set against an average of, what, £42,000 per prisoner. There's a kind of no-brainer about the idea of education. Unfortunately, it is perhaps more about convincing the public and other politicians. That is a very important factor. You have a hearts and minds issue, if you like. Nobody is arguing against the need for prisoners to be held securely and to be categorised appropriately, but there is so much money spent on keeping people in prison.

On the women's estate, women in construction is a key theme. There is a massive range of opportunities for women in construction at all different levels. We have done some work in different women's prison estates—Leeds latterly—and I think there is a real opportunity there to do more, that is all I would say, and to offer more variety and to have greater expectations of what is possible, because there is work out there and there are possibilities.

Q76 **Ian Mearns:** The written evidence we have received points to successful partnerships between prisons and a small number of national employers, such as Halfords, Railtrack and Timpson. What enthusiasm is there among small and medium-sized employers on a local basis for helping to shape training in their local prisons in line with their own skills and employment requirements, or is that just a niche from the perspective of employers around the country?

Julian Stanley: In our experience, larger employers often have an infrastructure, so there is greater capacity to think about what is needed and to traverse the legal pieces and, again, the hearts and minds pieces. I think in smaller companies people are keen, but they often don't have the resources. It is why I think the apprenticeship programme could be very valuable here in linking smaller employers with prisons and getting to see people and meet people. Coming into forums that we run regularly for employers is very important, because it is about having people who have come through the process and have changed their lives, and helping employers see that it is possible to make a difference.

Lots of people want to make a difference, but we have to keep engaging employers in how it works, what they could get out of it, how people feel who have been through the process, seeing success stories, not just thinking that they are going to be the solution, but seeing what people can offer to their businesses and also what support will be available. Apprenticeships seem to be the obvious way forward.

Lisa Capper: We need to get the outcomes up for women coming out of prison in terms of take-up of employment and reducing those barriers, because the data is a lot less than it is for men. Some of that is curriculum, but it is also the barriers and the cultural issues that are faced on the outside.

In terms of small and medium-sized employers, our experience of working in the West Midlands and, indeed, around some of the youth custody has been that small and medium-sized employers often have a very strong sense of social and corporate responsibility and want to put back into their communities, but they don't have the time or capacity to be able to manage. It is the same with apprenticeships, and that is why there have been things like the AETs, where groups of small and medium-sized employers have come together and there has been a paid capacity to help them take on apprenticeships in the community, exactly the same for prison education.

The risks may seem too great, there is too much paperwork, and then you have all those support issues that both the prisoner and the employer need. One of the solutions here would be something like a prisoner premium where there is some paid capacity to support the prisoner on all the things they need to tackle, like travel, reliability and issues with their accommodation, and also supporting the employer with how to sustain that employment contract. That is feedback we have had from employers in the West Midlands.

Q77 **Ian Mearns:** One of the things that strikes me is that, in an area like mine, the employment base is heavily weighted towards small and medium-sized enterprises. If there are any good practice examples from around the country, on how we can get it to work on a broader scale, it would be very useful.

Following the 2016 Coates review, the Ministry of Justice took the decision not to extend the National Careers Service contract for prisoners. What has been the impact of this decision, and how well is careers guidance now being delivered to support prisoners in rehabilitation planning?

Lisa Capper: This is one area that definitely needs looking at and more work. That is not to say that the careers stuff out there isn't any good; it is about how it is managed and organised. Yes, it needs to be independent, but it absolutely needs to be hooked into those providers and it needs to start from the front end.

With the new probation service arrangements that we have, it needs to carry on. The new probation arrangements are both an opportunity and a risk in that respect, in that they are looking at the release plans from probation rather than it being in different teams within the prison. Those things have to work well together, and how that is organised at a local level is very important. It is very good to have the local arrangements, but it is about not allowing that to be fragmented and making sure it is fully embedded in those career route ways that we want prisoners to follow. Yes, I think there is definitely more to do on that.

Q78 **Ian Mearns:** One of the things that strikes me is that, as soon as someone becomes incarcerated in the prison estate, they probably need careers guidance straightaway because they need guidance on what

courses might be available and what training they can get in order to move on to what they want to do at a later stage. It is not just about post-training guidance; it is about guiding them into appropriate education courses. Everybody is nodding.

Lisa Capper: Yes, and it needs to start up front. I would go further than that. We run centres across the country for—I don't want to call them hard-to-reach young people—young people who get on better with us than they do in mainstream education, let's put it like that. That is where we need the support to start, because it is about reducing the risk of offending and understanding what the gaps are and how we can support those young people. I think it has to start even further back, but given this is about the prison service itself, then yes, I absolutely agree it should be up front.

Yes, we need independent careers advice and guidance, but we also need it embedded into the curriculum, and that should be acknowledged and funded so that you have that embedded as well.

Shereen Lawrence: Again, it is what Lisa said, and you mentioned it yourself, Ian. It is about identifying very early on in the sentence, in the first couple of weeks, what their end goal is and supporting that individual on that path. What training do they need to achieve in order to get to that end goal, what courses might they need to do upon release and what is on offer around the estate so that they can achieve what they set out to achieve?

Julian Stanley: I agree with all that has been said. It is going to be interesting to see the prison leavers fund and how those things shake out about the kinds of partnerships, because what I see is an appetite among probation and the prison estate—loads of people—to connect up. The trouble with reorganisation is there is always a kind of splintering and then a reorganisation of the reorganisation. I suppose it is not about anybody having ill-will; it is about trying to pull these strands together. That is possibly what this inquiry can pull out of its findings, in a way. It is those bits that could be focused on to create more cohesion around the different elements so that there is a bit more joined-upness.

I think the providers do their best. The big four providers—Novus, who we work with, and others—everyone is doing their best in their element, as it were, but there is a piece that is missing to join these strategies together, if you like.

Chair: It seems to me that, just as you have agreed, there should be a tailor-made education programme for every prisoner and there should also be tailor-made careers advice for every prisoner. Can I thank you very much, all of you? We have, amazingly, finished on time for once. This is probably a record for our Committee in the past year. I really appreciate the work you do. You have so much knowledge, all of you, that you could have probably spoken to us for two days and we still wouldn't have heard it all. Thank you for your time and your patience.

Please carry on feeding things through as the inquiry goes on.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Simon Ashworth and David Hughes.

Q79 **Chair:** Good morning, everybody. Thank you very much for coming to this session of our Education Committee inquiry into prison education. Just for the benefit of the tape and those watching on Parliament TV, can you kindly introduce yourselves?

Simon Ashworth: I am Simon Ashworth, the chief policy officer at the Association of Employment and Learning Providers. We are a membership body with about 850 members, and our members deliver a range of traineeships, apprenticeships and FE provision, including to prisoners.

David Hughes: Hello, everyone, and good morning. I am David Hughes. chief executive of the Association of Colleges. We represent three of the contract holders of the prison education contracts, as well as all the other FE and sixth-form colleges.

Q80 **Chair:** You are also, I should say, a regular attender in giving evidence to our Committee. I don't know if you were listening to the previous session about prisoner apprenticeships. They were suggesting that you need legislation to really make it happen. It seems to me there are two pathways to this one. The first pathway is just to change the legislation to allow prisoners to do apprenticeships while they are in prison, and the other is having a traineeship and perhaps getting them to do some of the off-the-job training at prison and then complete their apprenticeship when they leave. Which option would you go for? Would you go for both? If you went for the first option, how complicated is the legislation? Is it relatively easy or quite difficult to implement?

David Hughes: I would go for preparing people to get ready to start an apprenticeship as soon as they come out, perhaps starting an apprenticeship on the release on temporary licence route, because I think it would work better, it is easier to implement and it fits the pattern of prisoners as they move towards their last weeks and months in prison, being able to get that temporary release. Doing more than that is quite difficult. It would probably take legislative change as well, which might be difficult to fit in, because we know that the connection with an employer outside the gate, through the gate, is absolutely critical to the success of rehabilitation and getting people back in the mainstream.

Simon Ashworth: I probably have a slightly different view to David on that. I think the apprenticeship opportunity is potentially a game-changer, because it opens up additional funding around the apprenticeship levy. In terms of the kinds of challenges that you talked about, Chair, the eligibility of prisoners is obviously a key point to address in terms of employment status, pay and all the working conditions that go with that.

We already have some aspects within legislation around alternative English apprenticeships, which allow exemptions for certain pre-classified individuals or groups of individuals, so police constables, church ministers, apprentices who have been made redundant and who don't have a contract of employment. It would require a legislative change, but I think there is a role for both a traineeship opportunity through release on temporary licence and apprenticeship, which has a range of other prospects, even though it would be more challenging to implement in the short term.

Q81 **Chair:** The Ministry of Justice strategy published in 2018 set out plans for the prisoner apprenticeship pathway as a vocational route to gain qualifications and work experience while in custody, which could be continued after release from prison. The AELP called it "revolutionary" and said it would "save the taxpayer almost £15 billion every year in reoffending costs". Where did you get that figure from, and how did you work it out?

Simon Ashworth: The £15 billion is the total cost of reoffending generally, so I don't think the apprenticeship would necessarily generate a return such as that, but in terms of helping drive up employment rates and reducing reoffending, there are some staggering figures. It is something like less than 20% of—

Chair: You did say the prisoner apprenticeship pathway was "a revolutionary game-changing opportunity" which would "save the taxpayer almost £15 billion every year".

Simon Ashworth: The pathway is revolutionary, but I think the £15 billion a year is the total cost of which you would have a—

Chair: So it is not right, you are not linking it? Although from the quote you gave, it did link it to the prisoner apprenticeship pathway, you are just talking about reoffending rates in general?

Simon Ashworth: That is right, yes.

Q82 **Chair:** Why is it, in your view, that there have been no plans to implement this scheme, which was announced in 2018?

Simon Ashworth: Obviously the challenge we talked about is around the employment status of apprentices that need to be employed to undertake an apprenticeship, but also the funding that is available to support the high-quality training of the apprentice themselves. The budget for prison education is already stretched. There are some real challenges around 50% of prisoners being below entry level in terms of maths and English and lack of qualifications. Certainly there are some structural challenges around the requirements around apprenticeships and the funding for that, but also the infrastructure within some of the prisons. We heard in the previous session about access to technology, facilities and also the providers to deliver those as well.

Q83 **Chair:** With a magic wand, what needs to happen, apart from the change in legislation to create this apprenticeship pathway in prisons?

David Hughes: A lot of what you have heard today and I think last week from the panel with Sally Coates relates to this. There isn't stability in terms of prisoners' journeys out from prison through the gates. There is not an individual learning plan that follows them digitally; there is not the data that follows. What I think you need is a lot of stability, particularly in perhaps the last three months, maybe even six months for people on longer sentences, so that they can be in a prison near the community they are going to go and live in, they can have their learning plan, they can get the preparation to start the apprenticeships, they can do some work experience, they can get to the point where the employer wants to commit to them. I think there needs to be an incentive to those employers that is specific and particular to prisoners because the risks are higher for the employer.

I don't think that stability exists in terms of the way education is supported and the way prisoners are supported. They get moved around too often, and I think you have heard that a number of times. What you would have to have is a very conscious effort to give stability for at least three months and some work experience first.

Q84 **Chair:** Where are you in terms of using unspent levy funds to support a skills base and vocational pathways for prison education?

David Hughes: I think it should just be funded for what it is, a very important way to reduce recidivism. I don't think we should get tangled up with the levy. It is too complex.

Chair: You don't? That is interesting.

Simon Ashworth: Since the advent of the levy, we have been returning between £200 million and £300 million back to the Treasury each year with underspend on apprenticeships. We know there are a number of employers who have an appetite to transfer unspent levy either from corporate social responsibility or to use it as a feeder to help potentially train up prisoners and employ them once they move through the gates. There is definitely appetite from employers to facilitate it through the levy.

Q85 **Chair:** Have you estimated how much a proper apprenticeship vocational pathway would cost?

Simon Ashworth: We have not, to be fair.

Q86 **Ian Mearns:** The prison education framework is now contracted until March 2023. Under the framework, what scope is there for prisons and the four current education providers to work with local FE colleges in supporting individual prisoners' and ex-prisoners' needs? What change might be needed in the future?

David Hughes: I have spoken to the three colleges delivering this. One is an outstanding college, the other two are good colleges, and these are colleges that do fantastic things in the community. I think they are incredibly constrained by the contract, they are constrained by the way the contracts are set up, they are constrained by the way the contracts are managed. To put it very bluntly, if I may, I think the contracts are managed as if they were supplying blankets or food to the prison, not the kind of complex educational offer that needs to be made. I think we need to have another look at the way the contracts are managed, the way the contracts and targets are set.

There is inadequate funding. I don't know if you have the figures. I tried to find the figures. When I was managing OLASS contracts—offender learning contracts—about 15 years ago, the funding looked about the same as it is now. I don't think it has gone up since 2013 at least, and the prison numbers have gone up, so there is not enough money. There isn't capital. The learning facilities in many prisons are pitiful. The digital estate is completely underinvested in.

Ironically, because of lockdown, prisoners who have been able to get digital access in their cells have been able to access learning more effectively than when they were expected to go to classrooms or workshops. There is a lot that needs to be done to be realistic about what can be delivered.

There is also no funding that follows a prisoner out through the gate, so when they come out through the gate, they go out into the world in which the adult funding has been halved in the last decade, so there isn't that opportunity either. If this is a priority for prisons, if this is a core purpose of a prison—of course it is about punishment, but it is also about rehabilitation—let's put the funding in properly, let's give individual learning plans, let's get the settlement plans to include the educational outcomes, let's fund them in the community as well, let's give them access to the learning loans when they come onstream, let's give them access to the level 3 entitlement when that kicks in soon. I was involved in this heavily 15 years ago. Things haven't improved.

Simon Ashworth: Obviously, alongside the education framework, you have the dynamic purchasing system, so there is some flexibility for localised and niche provision. I think there are 300 providers on that. I guess it is about getting the right balance between core priorities, core provision and the specialist provision acquired by the governor to support local needs. Getting those to work better together is the key moving forward.

Q87 **Ian Mearns:** In your experience, how do the targets in place for prison educators drive the standards of education and training provision in prisons? What, if anything, needs to change in how the contracts work beyond 2023? You have already hinted at a lack of flexibility, and it sounds like we are trying to fill up tins with water more than educate

people.

David Hughes: There is no room for personalisation. There is a very strong focus on English, maths and digital skills, which is important, but for some it is a step too far and for some it is not a step far enough. You heard earlier from prisoners who have to repeat level 2 maths because that is the only thing on offer, and that is just dispiriting. Where is the level 3 offer? Where is the personal social development offer to get people interested in learning and give them confidence? I do not think there is an understanding of that.

Sally Coates is absolutely right that you need the governor to take responsibility for this, but in partnership with the education provider and other organisations that work in prisons, because it has to be a partnership. There is no clear accountability for who gets the culture right in the prison and who, therefore, makes all the allocation to education and all the attendance work effectively.

Lots of courses are 60% or 70% full because the prisoners have not been allocated to that course and then they are not able to attend because there are not enough staff to give them freedom to get to the classroom. It is a terrible place. When you see the governor who does take responsibility, and I have been to lots, it is fantastic. The culture is all about making the education work.

Q88 **Ian Mearns:** Given what we know about the prison population and the diversity of prior educational attainment, you are right that a level 2 course might not be challenging enough for some people. But for others it is a real struggle, even at a level 2 course. Let us not forget that swathes of our youngsters leave school at 16 without having achieved level 2 in English and maths.

David Hughes: Sometimes a level 2 course is unachievable because of the sentence. If you are in for six months, you cannot achieve level 2. Sally said last week that you need a modular approach to be able to bank it, but you then want through the gate to be able to finish it and make sure you maximise your chances of getting employment. That connection is not strong enough, and the modular nature of it is not there.

Q89 **Ian Mearns:** It is not just about preparation for employment. It could be preparation for another phase of learning. Some people in the prison estate have a steep learning curve generally for life.

David Hughes: I think the most profound shift for many prisoners is when they start to view themselves as a learner rather than just as a prisoner. I have heard from lots of prisoners saying that. That sense of self-worth is an incredibly important step forward in them thinking what they can do through learning to be able to get to a point where they can get a job and go straight.

Q90 **Ian Mearns:** In a nutshell, do we need to abandon these contract targets that currently exist or do we need to massively re-jig how it is being

delivered?

David Hughes: I think the latter. You need targets. We need to work with the Ministry of Justice and governors individually. The reason why the contracts are important is because prisoners move around so much and you want some continuity. When you have one provider of education across a number of estates that gives you the chance, if the digital join-up is there, to get the continuity, so even if they move, they can finish what they started because it is the same provider.

Q91 **Ian Mearns:** We hear too many times that, when a setting is changed and someone moves from one place, they have to start again, quite often, which is bonkers.

David Hughes: It is dispiriting for the learner, definitely.

Simon Ashworth: To pick up on the framework, the MoJ identified in their education and employment strategy that not enough of these qualifications are linked to employer demand, and that is where the apprenticeship opportunity comes in. I agree with what David said about the importance of continuity and this aspect of having a digital passport or a skills account. Prisoners' experience could be quite transitional as they move between different institutions, so they need to be able to pause that learning. I remember once going to a prison in the West Midlands and hearing from one prisoner who said they did their initial assessment four times at four different prisons. It is dispiriting for the individual, so better use of technology would be welcome.

Q92 **Chair:** To be clear, are you in favour of having much more localised FE providers as opposed to the giant national system we have of four different organisations doing it? Would it not be better, if there are local links, to be able to use them?

David Hughes: If you go back to the mid-2000s, there were more colleges involved.

Q93 **Chair:** Why can't a local FE college provide it? Would that not be better than the centralised system that we have at the moment?

David Hughes: I do not think it would, and the issue is that prisoners get moved around so often outside the areas they will be settled in, so that link of prison to local FE college does not work when they go through the gates. They might go through the gates locally to the college, but often they will move somewhere else back to where they originally came from, so that geography does not really work very well.

Q94 **Chair:** Just to have four providers, do you think that is fine?

David Hughes: I know all three colleges are great colleges doing fantastic work.

Q95 **Chair:** I am not arguing with that. I am saying it is a very centralised system. That is not to say they are not doing a brilliant job.

David Hughes: You could bring more providers in, but it is a very specialist provision. There is a certain culture in prison. The diversity of prisoners is enormous. The staff you need to work in there are very special people to have the resilience to be able to do that kind of work. I do not think that is the major problem here. It is resources, both revenue and capital, and the nature of the contract.

Simon Ashworth: There is definitely a role for a hub and spoke model. As David articulated, there are some real challenges in delivering that core provision, challenges around TUPE, so you need a fairly large encumbrance to deliver some of the core. A responsive model through the purchasing system complements each other, but as David said it goes back to capacity and infrastructure, to knit that together to have a more joined-up approach with some of these things.

Q96 **David Simmonds:** I want to ask a bit about the people who do the prison education work. I know it is a varied structure for employment, people in teaching, further education and so on. Can you tell us a little bit about how prison educators' pay and terms and conditions compare with equivalent jobs, for example, in the FE sector and how well, in your view, the current providers are managing to attract good quality people, especially reaching the needs of the more complex, more difficult to engage prisoners?

David Hughes: The simple answer on teacher pay is that the colleges pay basically the same for prison educators as they do for their own. They are on the same pay scales. They find it hard to recruit, and that is because you have to have a special mentality and commitment to work in a prison. They are unique environments to teach in, and there is a certain danger as well in that.

The best prison educators are very special, inspirational people in terms of their resilience and ambition, so pay does not change much. A lot of them are being moved around year on year through TUPE, every time the contract moves, so they do not have stability. They do not know what they are being expected to deliver, and that is a major problem. We need them to feel like they know what they are being asked to be accountable for and what they are trying to achieve.

Do they reach the hardest to reach? That is different in each prison. My experience of visiting lots and lots of prisons is in some places there is that inclusive atmosphere and it is so much down to how much the governor drives that centrality of education in the prison community and prison life. Where they do, all the staff in the prison are trying to encourage people to get into learning.

We know the barriers are enormous. They are for people out of prison in the community. Lots of adults do not see themselves as learners. It is the same in prison, and therefore you need that range. I remember going into Leicester prison and seeing a load of prisoners painting Mother's Day cards to send and talking to them about it, and the pride they had of

being able to achieve that was one of the first things they felt proud about. Doing those low-level first steps to positive engagement is really important.

At the other end you have people who could do and are doing part-time degrees. It is trying to create an environment in which all that can happen so everybody has the chance to progress, and when they get out they can use that to get employment.

Q97 **David Simmonds:** It is quite helpful to sense the general position. The question for me, especially given some of the issues we were talking about earlier, the need to get people employment ready, it is one of those areas where you would like to be sure you have the best quality, the most experienced people. Do you have a view about any changes that might need to be made to the way providers are structured or the way they approach recruitment to ensure the right people are finding their way into these roles?

Simon Ashworth: There is a core of staff who deliver these programmes, they TUPE from one to the other. The challenge is getting new entrants into the industry with links with employers and attracting them into jobs working in prisons. There is always a core, but we see it as a challenge about how you get individuals. You have good links with employers and you also have some networks already like the New Futures Networks, but trying to attract new individuals who have not worked in a prison before is a bit more of a challenge rather than retaining the core staff who have the hearts and minds of the delivery there already.

David Hughes: It comes back again to what we are asking them to deliver. The current contracts are too focused on numeracy and literacy and perhaps a bit of ESOL, which is absolutely vital, don't get me wrong. But if you want proper vocational technical education, and the Government are doing so many reforms about that at the moment and moving us in a good direction, we need to replicate that in prisons. We need the facilities to reflect the jobs. We need the staff to reflect the vocational areas and to be specialists in construction and digital. If the facilities and the staff reflected that, you would get better outcomes, but the funding is not there to do either of those things at the moment.

David Simmonds: In summary, it sounds like the issue is fundamentally resourcing for the system more than anything else, so that is fairly clear in the evidence.

Q98 **Kim Johnson:** Good morning, panel. I have a question about modular qualifications. The 2016 Coates review of prison education recommended more flexible modular qualifications for adults in prison. Do you believe that more modular qualifications enable prison learners to continue with qualifications and further education during their sentences and on their release? Has this been looked at, and do you see it working?

David Hughes: This is in the realms of theory at the moment, because Sally talked about a modular GCSE in English and maths and that does not exist. I think it should exist, and it is a really important idea, not just for prison, by the way. I think it is for adults generally.

Chair: I was about to say that I would like a modular approach across the board.

David Hughes: Let us try to reverse engineer it and make that happen. There are two things in addition. First, digital badges have a role to play here. There is some brilliant work by the RSA in the cities of learning in Brighton and Plymouth where they are working with employers to recognise digital badges that can reflect shorter episodes of learning, so not even a module but much smaller, and including work experience.

That should be looked at in the prison estate because it could be really powerful. Completing a module might take you half a term or a term and you might not be in the same establishment for that period, so even that might be challenging, whereas you might be able to achieve a digital badge in a few days or a week. If that was recognised by the employers, and in the cities of learning it is, that could be really powerful.

Secondly, and I think you have heard this a lot, you then need the digital systems to be able to go with the prisoner when they get moved and when they go through the gates so they have that as a portable record of their learning to show to a new learning provider or an employer.

Simon Ashworth: I think portability is key. I talked about the transient nature of how prisoners move between establishments. The development and implementation of that digital learning passport or account is key to taking it with them. Modularity, unitisation and bite-sized learning builds on accredited prior learning recognition and transferability. There is a range of work happening on this at the moment, and the DfE is looking at level 4 and level 5 and how you make qualifications more portable. We need to be looking at below level 2 for the types of learning qualifications that most prisoners will need as part of their learning experience.

Q99 **Apsana Begum:** My questions are around through the gate support.. David, you mentioned infrastructure and, in particular, digital infrastructure. Could you say a bit more? The Committee is looking at what is available, and I was drawn by what you said about what is sometimes available in some prisons being quite pitiful. I am conscious that some prisons are in quite remote areas, and I wonder if you have more you could share with us on that front. What is the reality in some of these prisons in terms of what is available?

David Hughes: We must remember that a lot of prisons are Victorian, and the facilities reflect that, sadly. I remember that, about 15 years ago, we invested in a motorcycle maintenance workshop in Wandsworth prison. I looked it up prior to coming here, and it is still running strong. We put about £200,000 in when I was responsible to buy new motorbikes

and all the equipment you need to be able to maintain them. We worked with a local employer and bought overalls for the prisoners for when they were training.

That small investment created a project that is oversubscribed all the time because prisoners want to do it. They are absolutely keen to do it. We need more of that, a connection with a local employer, the right kit inside the prison and treating prisoners as if they are on their way out rather than stuck in prison, and giving them skills that are relevant to the labour market. I do not think it needs massive investment, but it needs some investment. If we are moving from diesel and petrol cars to electric cars, where is the equipment in prison? What about plumbing, which is moving to air-sourced heat pumps and the training for that? What about all those green skills? Prisons could be fantastic places to invest capital in equipment, with the teachers linking to the employers, and we need more of that.

The digital bit of it is twofold. First, the data, the learning plan and the learning record that flows with the learner as they move around different estates. It is also giving them the digital skills and being able to learn in their cell as well as in the classroom or workshop. They have a lot of idle time and online learning can be incredibly powerful, but only if they are given the access in the cell to use that.

Q100 **Apsana Begum:** My next question is about the New Futures Network. In your view, how effective has it been? We have had several submissions to the Committee that would like to see a drive to build on it and expand on this, and there are no published figures available of people who have secured employment through the network.

Simon Ashworth: The New Futures Network is a fantastic concept as a principle. The feedback we get is that the capacity is fairly limited. For example, there might be one co-ordinator across a cluster of prisons and it is a really tough job brokering with employers and also understanding the needs of the prisoners in their local institutions. As a concept around brokerage and linking employers to prisoners and institutions, it is a good concept, but I just worry about the capacity of those individuals to drive those effective links on the scale between the prisons and the employers, which is key for good quality, sustained jobs.

Q101 **Apsana Begum:** Are you saying it lacks co-ordination and is quite fragmented?

Simon Ashworth: I would not say it is lacking co-ordination. I think it is more about the capacity. If you have a co-ordinator who has to work across a cluster of prisons, they have a huge task in terms of where you need a range of skills with the individual prisons. They are dealing with employers, brokering with other stakeholders, so it is more of a capacity issue rather than it being fragmented. The concept is a really good and welcome one.

David Hughes: You also need alignment of what is in the prison and what facilities and expertise they have. Some of that needs to be reflected in the prison education framework contracts at local level. It is that local relationship that works best, and it goes back to the Chair's question. You want local as much as possible, because that is where somebody can start to get experience with the employer, but they need to be working on the same kit inside as they will when they go out into the workplace, and sadly that does not happen very often.

Q102 **Apsana Begum:** That is helpful to understand. My final question is about the through the gate support. We know from the submissions we have had the range of wraparound support services that are needed for people leaving custody. Do you have any thoughts about what we should look into and do a deep dive on? In particular, what happens to education at that point? Does it become much lower down the priorities, and therefore people are not able to prioritise education and it sets them off on a different trajectory? Is that something we should look at? Whether it is dealing with mental health or trying to secure accommodation, all these things become priorities as soon as someone is released.

David Hughes: Absolutely, and there is an opportunity with the probation service coming back into Government after a failed trial in a sense. It is a complex business, the settlement plan. My experience of that is fairly limited. From what I can see there is not enough priority given to the education part. Often the housing, the welfare benefits, sometimes the health issues are so compelling that the education bit gets lost.

We would love to see some funding going with the prisoner as they come out to be able to take to a learning provider, to have a demand. Sadly, adult learning is underfunded anyway, so there is not that capacity when they come out into the community. Often, even if they want to find learning, they cannot find it because there is not the capacity to deliver. There certainly is not the continuity, and there is not an understanding of what they have already achieved in prison often because that learning record does not follow them. It needs to be much more joined up as a system.

Q103 **Apsana Begum:** Novus, one of the providers, has said that PEF funding provides one third of the funding under the adult education budget on a per learner basis, which is quite telling in terms of how much is really being invested. It seems quite urgent.

Simon Ashworth: I agree that this is probably part of the process that is fragmented, and it is not necessarily just the employment and skills aspects. It is pastoral support, housing, bank accounts, references; there are a range of stakeholders here. We talk about employers, the probation service, New Futures Network, the role of community rehabilitation companies. One of the real challenges is this mapping piece around where the prisoners will come out during their transition through different prisons, how that can link to the local opportunities and local support

networks. This is an area worth a deeper dive around the fragmented approach once the prisoner goes through the gates and those wraparound services to make sure they keep a job and help drive down reoffending, which is critical for everything that has happened before now.

Q104 **Chair:** In the previous session, they were talking about incentives for prisoners to do prison education. Do you agree there should be incentives and, if so, what should they be?

David Hughes: Absolutely there should. We know that if this population gets into learning they have a much greater chance of securing work, so it is in everybody's interest that they get into learning. They are also a group, as the earlier panel said, that probably had a very bad experience of learning, so you need to make it a more attractive option than doing some of the jobs that exist in the prison. It is not enough to pay the same, which is the case in many prisons now. It used to be less to go into education, and I think you should get paid more. We should say we value you doing education more than some of the mundane tasks that occur in the prison. It is a small amount of money, but when you are in a prison small amounts of money make a big difference.

To say one more thing on funding, lots of these prisoners have really high needs and there is no high needs funding. There is no additional learner support that you get out in the community. Many will have learning disabilities or other disabilities, and they are not reflected in the funding. Apsana, you quoted someone saying the funding is about one third. In some ways it is worse than that because there is not the other funding to support, whether it is dyslexia, as a good example, and you would get more support for that out in the community.

Simon Ashworth: I agree with David. The disparity between what prisoners are paid for education compared with some of the tasks and jobs they do seems perverse in terms of trying to drive prisoners into education that will help with their long-term outcomes. There are incentives for the individuals themselves, but also trying to encourage employers to support more prisoners once they go through the gate, whether that is tax breaks or cash incentives for targeted groups on apprenticeships. There are two aspects of incentives to try to achieve the outcome to get more prisoners into high quality and sustainable work.

Chair: Thank you very much for that. It is really appreciated. David, I thought I knew you well but I have learned a few more things about you today, particularly your motorcycle garage at Wandsworth prison, which is something I did not know you had done with your many skills. Thank you to the AELP and the AoC. We plan to visit some prisons to talk to prisoners, prison staff and educators as soon as restrictions allow. This is really helpful and much appreciated.

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