

Written evidence from LTE GROUP (TRADING AS NOVUS)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Novus welcomes the opportunity to submit a response to the Call for Evidence for the Women in Prison Inquiry. The inquiry is a critical opportunity to reflect on womens' prison education services following the implementation of the new Prison Education Framework, and the supporting Dynamic Procurement System. We have responded to questions 6, 10, and 11 as we feel we can add insight to these areas, drawing upon our current delivery experience as a custodial education provider in the womens' estate.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT – LTE GROUP

LTE Group is the first education and skills group of its kind. LTE Group reflects the combined strength of six leading organisations, with the support, expertise and power of a wider group infrastructure, working together for the benefit of learners, employers and wider communities.

The Group includes:

- **Novus** – with over 28 years' experience, Novus is recognised for its provision of offender services, including delivery of English, maths and vocational training, employment support and transformation delivery, working hand-in-hand with local stakeholders. Novus currently delivers education in 50 custodial establishments nationally, including four female prisons
- **The Manchester College** – The Manchester College is one of the largest Further Education colleges in the UK. The College is the largest single provider of 16-19, adult and higher education in Greater Manchester, with more than 25% of Greater Manchester's learning provision undertaken by the College.
- **UCEN** – UCEN Manchester delivers first-class technical and professional higher level skills to meet the priorities of Greater Manchester and the wider region, with a focus on vocational education.
- **Total People** – Total People is one of the largest providers of apprenticeships and work-based learning in the North West of England, with all profits re-invested for the benefit of learners and employers.
- **MOL** – MOL offers best in class learning for ambitious professionals and corporate clients. MOL is an established and experienced training provider of live online, classroom and blended learning.

ABOUT NOVUS

Novus is an established and successful provider of skills, employability and learning support to offenders and other 'hard to reach' individuals. We have 28 years' experience of delivering in a custodial setting, including 25+ years in the female estate. We deliver at 50 custodial sites nationally, including four prisons in the female estate. We currently deliver Prison Education Framework (PEF) services, and Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) services at HMP/YOI New Hall, HMP/YOI Low Newton, HMP/YOI Styal, and HMP Askham Grange.

Q6. DOES THE FEMALE PRISON ESTATE TAKE A WHOLE SYSTEM APPROACH (THAT CONSIDERS ALL OF THE OFFENDERS NEEDS) TO THOSE IN THEIR CARE?

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE?

ARE THERE ANY BARRIERS IN ACHIEVING A WHOLE SYSTEM APPROACH TO FEMALE OFFENDING?

Novus recognises the importance of a ‘whole system approach’ in effectively supporting women to fulfil their potential and address barriers to learning in custody. Dame Sally Coates’ Review of Prison Education (2016) recommended a ‘*whole-prison approach to ensuring the regime is appropriate to their needs*’, across the whole estate. The Farmer Review for Women (2019) highlights the importance of a whole system approach where multiple agencies work collaboratively to support women to reduce re-offending. As well as good relationships between agencies, supporting women to sustain positive relationships whilst in custody with ‘*families and significant others*’ (Farmer, 2019) is key to their development and success in custody.

Novus delivers custodial education across 4 female prisons (HMPs Askham Grange, Styal, New Hall, and Low Newton). This experience has provided us with understanding of the unique challenges faced by women in custody. For example, women in custody:

- account for less than 5% of those in prison, however they account for over 19% of self-harm incidents
- are more likely to have been imprisoned for non-violent offences than men
- have dependent children – an estimated 17,000 children are separated from their mothers by imprisonment every year
- are more likely to self-declare mental health as a disability/health condition compared to the male prison population
- are highly likely to be victims as well as offenders. Over half of women in prison report having suffered domestic abuse with 53% of women reporting having experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse as a child*
- are held, on average, 63 miles from their homes, with a significant number held more than 100 miles from their home,12 compared to an average of 50 miles for men13
- are less likely to be identified as having autism/ASD and ADHD, and therefore receive adequate support to enable them to progress at the same rate as their peers. This is due to

gender differences in the way these challenges are presented, for example both ASD/ADHD can be ‘masked’ by developed social skills in women, and see this replicated in prisons.

**Prison Reform Trust statistics.*

These unique challenges and complexities present challenges in providing a whole system approach for women in custody. We have outlined our thinking on existing good practice, and key challenges below.

What does this look like in practice?

Our understanding of what a ‘whole system approach’ should look like is based on our delivery experience in the female estate, and relevant policy and research (e.g. Farmer Review).

In practice, a whole system approach in the female estate would include the following:

- **Effective partnership working** – as highlighted in the Farmer review, multi-agency working is vital to ensure a whole system approach to supporting women in custody. For example, Novus staff in the womens estate link in with healthcare to discuss individual cases, and provide bespoke support for each individual. We have also rolled out ‘Hidden Disabilities’ training to prison and provider staff, ensuring a collaborative approach to learning support. Links between education providers and healthcare are particularly important to ensure that an individual’s needs are recognised
- **Effective data transfer** – to enable effective sequencing of provision, using digital technology e.g. Curious. Current delays in data transfer means that women cannot seamlessly continue learning/work after transferring Establishments and therefore there is an opportunity to further tailor induction/assessments/services to women’s need and aspirations. To ensure best practice, there should be a joined up MI system that ensures all key stakeholders have access and can support a joint prisoner support plan
- **Effective allocations process** – we would welcome a more multi-agency approach to allocations across the women’s estate. Prison departments/agencies bring specialisms/insight to inform allocations that are appropriate to the women – an ideal allocation would be informed by (as a minimum): Education, IAG, Security, Healthcare and Key Workers. Recognising the logistical challenges in prison (difficulty in moving around prisons/attending face-to-face meetings), we would welcome a digital system to allow all agencies to inform allocations remotely. The sequencing of interventions for women during their time in custody is also essential
- **On-programme support** – Novus has a wealth of experience in re-engaging women back into education after withdrawals. However, a more multi-disciplinary approach could reduce the number of withdrawals from occurring in the first instance. For example, rather than focussing resource on re-engaging withdrawals, we would welcome a multi-disciplinary approach to identifying potential issues that may lead to withdrawals before they occur e.g. healthcare informing us of medication changes
- **Collaboration with the wider prison regime** – Novus works closely with a range of key stakeholders such as Healthcare, Multi-faith, Security, Safer Custody and Residential to enable women to turn their lives around. Through open and transparent data sharing we

reduce duplication and improve communication – to provide more effective and seamless services to women in custody

- **Effective preparation for release** – this is vital to ensure that women are linked up with employers prior to release and have a clear transition plan in place. Novus effectively collaborates with HMPPS, relevant community organisations (e.g. substance misuse agencies for signposting), and employers. At present, there are many good examples of bringing employers into establishments, for example Novus has engaged North West Construction Hub to deliver talks to learners at HMP Styal. However, an area for improvement is facilitating two-way communications, e.g. where employers contact the prison/providers to provide details of opportunities. For example, Novus has built a relationship with Better Working Futures who contact us directly to provide details of vacancies within the DWP
- **Effective and well utilised assessment and progress measurement tools** – e.g. Novus’ ‘About You’ framework. Novus uses English and maths screening tools, diagnostic (in all subjects) and LDD assessments to support learner needs. For example, if LDD assessment highlights any issues, we run the rapid or in-depth screener which forms an LDD action plan through the LDD register. Staff use this information to inform their planning and individual support for learners
- Novus’ Teachers work build rapport with learners and, through effective partnership working are able to identify when learners are at risk of withdrawal. They will seek support from the wider prison to maintain engagement and implement strategies to support the learner.

Case study:

Novus’ successful partnership with Better Working Futures supported ‘Alison’ to gain a Case Worker role at DWP. Novus was contacted by Better Working Futures to notify us of suitable roles. We supported ‘Alison’ to complete her CV and personal statement, prepare for her interview and liaise with other providers to ensure she had everything needed for a successful interview and employment offer. For example, we sourced a risk statement from her Probation Officer to demonstrate her suitability for the role. ‘Alison’ was successful in her interview and offered employment.

- **education that goes beyond core education/training** – additional support and training that builds personal development and self-esteem is important to ensure that women have the confidence to make positive and informed choices and move towards employment. For example:
 - facilitating access to enrichment projects that build confidence and self-esteem, and provide therapeutic benefits e.g. Koestler – providing learners the opportunity to have their art displayed in community art exhibitions
 - supports learners to be involved in enrichment projects which provide therapeutic benefits, including Koestler Trust awards

- ensuring that Teachers have the skills and training to develop wider skills (including resilience, confidence, communication, and problem solving). Staff are trained in our ‘About You’ framework and provided guidance through ‘Schemes of Learning’
- Progress in personal development needs to be effectively measured. For example, Novus has implemented a progress tracking and support pilot across the 4 sites through collating wide feedback through ILPs and Nomis case notes. The results will be fed back to prison and wider stakeholders to inform identified best practice in progress monitoring.
- **highly skilled Teachers and staff with an understanding of trauma-informed approaches, and an ability to engage and build rapport with female offenders -**

recognising the high prevalence of learning difficulties / trauma / mental health needs (e.g. c.70% at HMPYOI Low Newton), we have partnered with MIND to provide our staff with a programme of training on Trauma-Informed Care. This can be accessed online and staff are supported to develop a trauma informed approach through studying at home/in Establishments.

Working with our learning difficulty specialist partner, The British Dyslexia Association, 12 staff across the women’s estate have achieved a Level 2 in Hidden Disabilities – providing a train-the-trainer model to disseminate learnings across the women’s estate e.g. how to identify behaviour traits of those with learning difficulties

- **recruitment and selection** – robust recruitment and selection processes are important to ensure that suitable candidates with the skills and approaches to engage women are successful. For example, Novus’ interview and assessment processes encapsulate our ‘Novus Way’ behaviours, designed to test appropriate skillsets for delivering in custody (e.g. competency based interview framework to ensure candidates demonstrate evidence of working effectively with relevant service user groups)
- **training and development for staff** – effective relationships between staff and learners is vital to build trust and ensure that women are open to receiving support in custody. To ensure our staff have the required skills and behaviours to effectively engage women in custody, Novus offers a range of peer led, online and face-to-face CPD opportunities. For example, in 2020/21, 10 staff have completed CAVA and IQA qualifications. Novus TED team has provided in-house training focused on developing teaching and learning. Sessions have included: ‘teaching in a pandemic – taking a flexible approach’; and ‘making learning stick.’
- **career progression for staff** – education delivery in custody requires a specialist skillset. We aim to reward our staff and offer opportunities for progression. Novus has engaged in a number of projects to upskill staff, and support personal development. For example, we are involved in the ETF project, “Outstanding Teaching, Learning and Assessment Phase 7 – Developing English and Maths practice in Further Education and Training.” This provides opportunities for delivery staff to be involved in shaping the design of education in collaboration with learners.

Are there any barriers in achieving a Whole System Approach to female offending?

There are a number of barriers in achieving a Whole System Approach to female offending:

- **funding** – there are significant funding issues in prison education, in comparison to mainstream community provision. For example, a comparison of the current Adult Education Budget funding compared to the Prison Education Framework (PEF) shows that only one third of the funding available under AEB is available per learner in PEF. This has a wider impact on attracting, recruiting and retaining good teachers. For example, this impacts on the ability to provide holistic support, e.g. sufficient numbers of learning support staff. To provide adequate support, Novus has a dedicated SENCo for the female estate. The SENCo is responsible for strategically managing the SEND provision across the 4 sites with the support of LDD leads on each site. Those staff are trained in a range of SEND related qualifications to support their work with learners, including Level 2 in Hidden Difficulties. In summary, it is unlikely that the level of funding available for prison education will ever fully meet the complexity and scale of need within the prison estate, however, we can be more targeted, and making sure that education is accessible to those who are furthest away from being able to improve their lives and economic success.
- **environment and infrastructure** – we understand the impact that the environment can also have on the ability to meet need. For example, in smaller establishments with limited facilities for education it can be challenging to provide variety and choice. There is also often a smaller staffing resources which means a narrower curriculum
- **regime structure and delivery methods** – how education is delivered within prisons, the majority on a roll-on/roll-off basis also means that learner groups can continually change, with often differing sentence lengths and individual needs that often results in a high churn of learners not experienced in mainstream education. Prison population pressures often also result in prisoners being moved part way through their programme. For example, some education courses are run infrequently (e.g. ‘Music in Prisons’ - twice yearly for 6 weeks). Therefore some learners on short sentences may not have the opportunity to participate in relevant courses and pathways that best meet their needs. This presents challenges in providing an individualised approach due to prison regimes and restrictions which are out of providers’ control. Sequencing and allocation is challenging and is informed by regime and timetabling rather than individual need

Areas of concern further identified by the Ofsted Annual report were:

- Attendance – there was found to be ‘poor attendance and punctuality at education, skills and work-related activities’
- Recording – ‘around half of prisoners did not have their newly gained skills and knowledge adequately recorded by teaching staff, and therefore these went unrecognised’
- **attendance** - specifically on attendance, learner attendance is too variable in our experience. Many opportunities for learning are lost due to regime challenges, such as late movement of prisons, interruptions to learner and prison transfers. We would like to see an increase in

attendance within our provision to ensure we effectively respond to the level of need as much as possible. This could be achieved through effective collaboration between the Governor and education provider, such as shared targets for education attendance and allocation. Deliver methods also need to be adapted to ensure that education is accessible through a range of different delivery models (which will ultimately increase engagement/attendance). For example, discrete classroom based delivery; in-cell learning; learning embedded in the wider regime (e.g. laundry, gardens); online learning to enable wider access for learners whenever required.

- **wider barriers to education and engagement** – women in custody often have multiple complex needs (e.g. substance misuse) which need to be addressed before they are ready or able to participate effectively in education. These needs need to be identified and addressed as early as possible, for example during induction, to ensure women receive prompt support to address any barriers, Effective partnership working is important to enable individual's wider needs to be addressed, for example signposting to healthcare services
- **financial and budgeting constraints** – for example, ADP planning is more difficult due to budgets being decreased by £1m over 3 years. This impacts on education's flexibility and ability to deliver to challenging requirements, e.g. two regimes
- **breakdown in relationships** – as highlighted by Farmer, *'relationships are women's most prevalent 'criminogenic need'*. Providers need to support learners to re-build existing positive relationships, e.g. through delivering family homework clubs which enables women to spend time with their children in a positive environment
- **challenges with joined up information sharing**, particularly in regard to additional support needs. There is often a lack of join up between different providers in custody, e.g. between education, healthcare, and offender management; and different systems (e.g. Nomis, Curious) do not work effectively together. There is a need for a universal MI platform which can be accessed by all relevant agencies as a single repository. This infrastructure is required to ensure that women are at the heart of the process and have visibility and access to the information they need to support ownership and autonomy
- **resettlement challenges** – Farmer highlighted that '13% of women were released from prison to no fixed abode and only 22% were released with secure permanent accommodation'. Due to the small number of female prisons and therefore sparse geography, many female offenders are in custody at significant distances away from their place of residence. This has a negative impact on family relationships and also presents challenges in linking offenders effectively with local employers. In addition, there is a risk of returning to an abusive home for many female offenders upon leaving custody and many may have restricted access to children. The Farmer review highlighted that providers should harness 'the benefits of communications technology, within bounds of appropriate safety and risk, by making virtual visits routinely available'. Novus has adapted to Covid-19 restrictions to provide access to digital technology which enables greater connections between learners and the community. For example, we have used prison i-pads for video interviews via Novus Works, and accessing 'seminars' with employers (e.g. Serco at HMP Styal).

Q10. WHAT SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE TO ENSURE THAT WOMEN ARE SUCCESSFULLY RESETTLED INTO THE COMMUNITY UPON RELEASE AND REDUCE REOFFENDING?

ARE THERE ANY BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE RESETTLEMENT, AND REDUCED REOFFENDING?

Support available to ensure that women are successfully resettled into the community

Novus has developed a broad range of tailored services to support women to successfully resettle into the community upon release. Our resettlement support provision has been strategically aligned to the MOJ's Female Offender Strategy (2018) and, where possible, informed by residents themselves.

The support that Novus provides includes:

- **Novus Works** – our employment brokerage service, drawing on 2900+ Northern employer links. We have a dedicated Employment and Resettlement Coordinator (ERC) operating from three Establishments: HMPYOI Styal, Low Newton and New Hall. Askham Grange (resettlement prison) has a substantial prison resettlement team in place, therefore our ERC resource is directed to other Establishments. In 2020/21 (during the Covid pandemic) we achieved 135 outcomes across the Women's Estate, including 51 employment and 25 education/training outcomes
- **Employer-sponsored Career Routeways** – drawing on employers that have signed out Novus Charter (e.g. Greggs) to provide co-designed curriculum and job opportunities for women on release
- **LMI-informed curriculum** – ensuring that women are acquiring the skills/experienced needed to secure employment on-release – utilising up-to-date LMI through EMSI/New Futures Network and our own research and planning team
- **Partnerships with community providers** – our Education Managers are empowered to develop partnerships with local community providers that can offer support to women in key resettlement areas. For example, at HMPYOI Low Newton we work closely with Recruitment Junction (Newcastle-based charity supporting ex-offenders back into employment) and Smart Works (North-East charity providing interview clothing for women). As a minimum, we will support women's resettlement needs by engaging:
 - New Futures Network – HMPPS' employment support service for ex-offenders
 - Enrichment partners – e.g. Music in Prisons, Koestler, TATE
 - LDD support – e.g. British Dyslexia Association/ADHD Foundation
 - Prison-based services – e.g. Healthcare, Chaplaincy, Safer Custody
 - Women community organisations, e.g. Home Start, Smart Works

- Apprenticeship providers, e.g. Total People
- HE/FE providers, including universities/Collab Group, e.g. Leeds Beckett/York St John universities
- Employment support providers – Job Centre Plus/Department of Work and Pensions and local organisations e.g. Tees Valley Routes to Work
- NPS/CRCs, e.g. Purple Futures/Shelter
- PEF/DPS providers
- Employers, e.g. Civil Service
- Work and Health Programme providers
- **‘About You’ Framework** – our contextualised delivery framework that supports women’s confidence across 10 key areas, empowering them to successfully resettle into the community. We deliver our core curriculum (e.g. English and maths) by contextualising learning to real world scenarios that enables women to become:
 - Self-confident
 - Career confident
 - Health confident
 - Relationship confident
 - Money confident
 - Tech confident
 - Work skills confident
 - Community confident
 - Family confident
 - Home confident
- **Novus ‘Advise’ service (our DPS IAG contract)** – comprising six IAG professionals and a complement of trained IAG Peer Support Workers, providing pre-release support, including:
 - Careers guidance – using Career Coach
 - Job-search (4 weeks pre-release)
 - Bespoke workshops – employment focussed and self-esteem boosting
 - Community support sessions – exploring what support is available in the community
 - Employment-focussed workshops – e.g. how to apply / interview.

Evidence

In practice, we develop close relationships with local partners (prison/community) to offer a tailored resettlement package to women in custody. For example, at HMPYOI Styal, we liaise with, and provide referrals/signposting to:

- **Smart Works** – for interview coaching and interview suitable clothing
- **Liverpool In Work** – for employment support (for Liverpool-based women)
- **Achieve North West** – a service aimed at supported offenders with multiple barriers to employment
- **New Futures Network (NFN)** – our ERC is Novus' Single Point of Contact, for the NFN Employment Hub, supporting job matching in-custody by providing an insight into our learners' aspirations, qualifications and experience
- **North West Construction Hub** – providing construction awareness sessions
- **Inside Connections** – providing community construction training and job opportunities
- **RIFT** – for self-employment/entrepreneurship support
- **Employers** – that are willing to employ ex-offenders e.g. Greene King/Greggs
- **Going Forward into Employment** – for employment support (resulting in 26 women securing employment in Civil Service departments).

Barriers to effective resettlement and reduced reoffending

The support that Novus provides women to support their resettlement is tailored to their needs – we understand that many women face significant barriers to effective resettlement, including:

- returning to a potentially dangerous and abusive relationship
- restricted access to children
- loss of family links
- lack of job opportunities
- access to only lower paid job opportunities
- lack of self-esteem/confidence/resilience
- poor mental/physical health.

We would welcome more effective sequencing to support women serving short sentences. Due to the complexity of need on entry (e.g. co-occurring mental health/drugs/low self-esteem), interventions which are of immediate need are prioritised such as healthcare. This means that education, training and employment (ETE) provision is often undertaken nearer to the end of their sentence which results in missed ETE opportunities due to appointment clashes.

Women in custody access approximately 20% of the funding available to their counterparts in mainstream education – with their needs being far more complex and challenging.

In addition, there is capacity for approximately 80 Cat D residents across the Women's Estate (at HMPYOI Askham Grange), compared to an Operational Capacity of 1,116. Novus believes that not enough residents are afforded this opportunity of managed transition into the community through the Cat D resettlement service.

Q11. WHAT SUPPORT DOES THE FEMALE ADULT ESTATE OFFER TO GIRLS TRANSITIONING FROM THE YOUTH CUSTODIAL ESTATE?

Although the numbers of girls transitioning from youth custodial estate (e.g. Secure Training Centres) to the adult estate is small, we support this transition through:

- **virtual visits** – using video conferencing, providing the opportunity for a pre-transfer Q&A with the education department of the receiving prison
- **effective data transfer** – using Curious (where possible), ensuring educational attainment / assessments are collated by the receiving prison, reducing duplication of assessments and promoting seamless learner journeys. We recognise that more rapid data transfer is needed; current delays in data transfer means that women cannot seamlessly continue learning/work after transferring Establishments. Digital Personal Learning Plans (when fully implemented) will provide instant data sharing between education departments, including between different education providers
- **shared digital strategies** – e.g. shared use of VC meaning that girls can continue progression in the receiving prisons (accessing saved CVs for job applications etc.). Shared digital strategies should enable different education providers to share data between Establishments e.g. through a shared Moodle using Virtual Campus 2
- **Engagement and Resettlement Workers** – from YOIs who provide 'check up' appointments for girls transitioning to the adult estate once they have transferred to an adult prison
- **aligning curriculum** – the roll out of Common Awarding Bodies (MOJ mandating specific Awarding Bodies for different curriculum areas) has benefited girls transitioning from the youth custodial estate. Those transferring between prisons can bank their prior learning and continue their progression on the same course.