

## Written evidence submitted by Wates

The Committee invites written submissions addressing any or all of the following areas:

- What is the purpose of education in prisons?

**In my opinion the purpose of education in prisons is to provide an opportunity to gain skills, qualifications, personal development, experience and insight that may not have been gained previously, or to upskill into new areas that have the scope to engage, inspire a new direction and facilitate sustainable work on release. This outlook should apply in Cat B as well as Cat C and D.**

- Does education in prisons deliver the skills needed by employers, and what more can be done to better align these?

**There is considerable variation between prisons and between the opportunities available to men and women. Also, skills or qualifications may be provided but with insufficient support to access opportunities and transition smoothly into construction. For example, where a person has new qualifications but little experience, they may need to build experience in a different role initially in order to later secure a role that makes full use of their qualifications but may struggle to take that initial step.**

**Women's prisons do not seem to offer the same opportunities as for men to gain qualifications and secure experience in construction, despite considerable appetite from the sector to recruit more women and address the under representation of women in the sector. Greater involvement of construction employers in prison education, including in women's prisons would be helpful. This could take the form of employer led workshops, virtual site tours (should the technology allow, which is an area that needs reviewing also), overviews of the breadth of roles available, practical taster sessions and employability support such as CV feedback and interview practice. Access to technology to support education and develop digital skills needs to be considered.**

**Greater soft and employability skills including digital skills are critical. This is an important part of securing and sustaining work. These skills should be taught alongside more formal skills and qualifications. Wrap around support is also key e.g. ensuring that post release ex-offenders have bank accounts, accommodation etc as these are key to sustaining work.**

**A national database of skills/qualifications, work readiness assessment, any learning or other disability/special needs and ROTL/post release employment opportunities together with planned release locations and key dates (available for ROTL/release) would help to facilitate the matching of individuals with opportunities. Communicating this would be key also.**

**Stronger support with transitioning into work would be beneficial. In particular consistent support with familiar staff who can journey with prisoners from inside into work rather than changing teams at this critical point.**

**Stronger support from MoJ and other Government departments to support the employment of ex-offenders within their own estates would be appreciated.**

- How can successful participation in education be incentivised in prisons?

**For individuals - Assessing work readiness is key. Perhaps opportunities to join work experience programmes could become part of the incentive to begin particular courses – akin to an interview to start training.**

**Opportunities to earn points that contribute towards causes individuals care about e.g. gifts, for family members, particularly children, could be considered.**

With a more individual focus, earning reward points that contribute to gaining construction PPE and tools on release and ensuring funded CSCS cards could also be considered. A lack of one's own tools or appropriate PPE or expired/lacking CSCS can often pose a barrier to those wishing to get into or back into construction.

For businesses – case studies to profile good practice. Financial incentives to train and recruit ex-offenders would help to reflect the additional effort involved in recruiting and supporting ex-offenders and the benefit to society of rehabilitation. More consistent support for employers once ex-offenders have been employed such as access to funded training to educate staff and supply chain.

- How effective and flexible is prison education and training in dealing with different lengths of sentences and the movement of prisoners across the estate?

Wates has seen success where offenders on ROTL placements have moved into employment on the same site 2-3 weeks following release. This model facilitates continuity and familiarity. In order for this model to work, a suitable ROTL placement need to be discussed in advance and made available in the area where the individual will be released to. Sufficient flexibility to enable and support the movement of prisoners to prisons in the vicinity of their release location should be encouraged, in order to encourage the take up ROTL opportunities with a greater prospect of consistent ongoing employment. Arranging ROTL can take too long to process which can reduce the opportunities available.

With regards to disclosure, I support full and frank disclosure in order for employers to make an informed choice about employment on a case by case basis. However, I think there also needs to be sensitive handling with minimal sharing of such details within the organisation.

December 2020