

The Implementation of OLASS

An assessment of its impact one year on

Karen Halsey, Kerry Martin, Richard White
National Foundation for Educational Research

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Executive Summary

1 Introduction

This is the third and final report from the evaluation of the new Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS). The evaluation examined the implementation of OLASS in three development regions (North West, North East and South West), prior to a national roll out in July 2006.

For the third phase of the evaluation representatives from each of the three development regions took part in a telephone interview, focusing on the impact of OLASS one year after its initial launch (August 2005). In total 51 telephone interviews were conducted with representatives from a range of agencies (including prisons, probation, LSC, Jobcentre Plus, Connexions, Youth Justice, providers and also Regional Offender Managers (ROMs)).

The interview invited comment on the following areas:

- the main impact of OLASS
- impact on assessment
- impact on monitoring procedures
- impact on information, advice and guidance (IAG)
- impact on the offender learning/criminal justice workforce
- impact on provision for offenders (in custody and community)
- areas for further development/improvement.

Where appropriate, interviewees were asked to assign a rating indicating the extent of improvements in different areas e.g. no change to assessment procedures, some improvement, much improved, less effective and unable to comment. They were then asked to elaborate on their reasons for the rating given.

2 Main impact of OLASS

The majority of interviewees (41 out of 51) described the main overall impact of OLASS in positive terms. Most commonly mentioned in their accounts were enhancements to the provision available to offenders, improvements to partnership working, a greater integration of services and a raised awareness of learning and skills for offenders.

Whilst most regarded the main impact of OLASS to have been positive, nine individuals from both prison and probation services (across all three regions) expressed more negative viewpoints. Most often this related to provision which fell short of their expectations (e.g. did not focus on needs of the

learners) or had so far, failed to develop further (e.g. no additional hours or extension of the curriculum). One area for development may be provision in the community, as there were probation staff in all three regions who felt that this had not benefited since the arrival of OLASS.

3 Assessment

Just over half of interviewees from across the three regions reported that there had been improvements in the assessment process in the first year following the implementation of OLASS. Improvements included the systematic administering of assessments; increased standards of assessment and increased assessment personnel as well as the implementation of new assessment tools/facilities and new assessment requirements.

Just over a quarter of interviewees expressed the view that there had been no improvements in assessment processes since the introduction of OLASS. Reasons for a lack of improvement included the continuation of effective services and procedures (therefore, assessment procedures had remained the same, rather than declined in quality), a lack of funding to improve assessments, the need for new assessment tools and low staffing levels and the introduction of inexperienced/unqualified staff.

4 Monitoring

Nearly three fifths of interviewees from across the three regions reported that there had been improvements in the monitoring of offenders' progress and achievements in the first year following the implementation of OLASS.

Improvements were linked to enhanced Individual Learning Plans (ILPs), improved data collection and data transfer as well as more systematic monitoring procedures and increased collaboration and communication amongst key partners. It should be noted here, that whilst interviewees expressed there had been improvements, some were keen to stress that the improvements were influenced by the effectiveness of monitoring systems in individual prisons prior to OLASS and that improvements had occurred in some establishments but not others within the same region.

Despite acknowledging improvements in monitoring, many interviewees also acknowledged there was still some way to go (particularly with implementing Maytas) until effective and efficient data exchange could be achieved across custody and community. Around a third of interviewees who reported monitoring processes as less effective or unchanged highlighted inadequacies in data collection and recording; poor data transfer and new provider staff and procedures as limiting factors.

5 Information, advice and guidance

Overall, when comparing existing services to those prior to the implementation of OLASS, interviewees reported that there has been improvements, with over half of interviewees (28) reporting that IAG had become some/much improved. This included improved standards and delivery of IAG; an increase in staff/hours of IAG provision available to offenders; improved multi-agency working and coordination of IAG services; an increase in staff development and a greater recognition and prioritisation of IAG.

Nearly one third of interviewees rated that there had been no improvements in the delivery of information, advice and guidance. Reasons for this included continuation of IAG services/staff (thus the service had remained at the same level). Where IAG had been found to be less effective, the main reasons were related to a decline in quality of IAG delivered; a reduction in the quality and experience of IAG personnel; funding arrangements for IAG provision and the coordination of IAG services.

6 Impact on the workforce

Feedback from interviewees suggests that there was a balance of positive and negative impacts on the workforce as a result of OLASS. Whilst some problems were reported, such as increased workload, a decline in morale and staff anxiety about the TUPE process, these may be perceived as temporary impacts arising from a period of change. In time, staff would hopefully adjust to the new service and some of the reported difficulties may subside.

Meanwhile, positive repercussions for the OLASS workforce included greater partnership working (facilitated by the regional boards) and increased opportunities for professional development (for out-of-scope staff, college tutors, workshop instructors and even prison officers).

7 Impact on provision

Around half of the interviewees (26) in each of the three development regions commented that there had been 'some' or 'much' improvement in the range and quality of provision available to offenders in custody settings. They attributed these improvements to reviews of the provision (which led to more targeted provision, which was better suited to the needs of offenders); an increase in funding (leading to additional teaching hours); the approach to provision (e.g. more offender led); and greater communication and partnership working (such as links with employers).

Only two interviewees suggested that the provision had actually deteriorated as a result of OLASS, whilst four (all in the same region) contended that there had been no change. Reasons for a lack of improvement included provision which was provider, rather than offender led; inadequate staffing capacity (e.g. for particular courses, problems with staff cover); and a perceived over

emphasis on employability skills (where offenders had other learning needs). It should be noted that a sizeable proportion of interviewees (19) (the majority from community based services/organizations) felt unable to give a rating due to a lack of knowledge surrounding custodial provision.

The ratings given by interviewees suggests that so far OLASS has made a much stronger impression on provision available in prison settings, compared to community. For example, when asked to assess the progress of community provision 15 interviewees registered a 'no change' (compared to just 4 for provision in custody). Meanwhile, 16 interviewees reported some or much improvement in community provision, whilst a larger number (26) gave these same ratings in terms of custody provision. Again, a number of interviewees (17) (the majority of whom were custody based) felt they could not comment because they did not have sufficient knowledge about provision available in the community. Where developments were reported these were connected to the approach of new providers (e.g. training for staff, tailored courses for offenders). A lack of progress meanwhile was said to be related to a lack of funding for community provision, mainstream colleges failing to engage offenders (e.g. inflexibility regarding commencement dates for courses) and no extension of contractual requirements for community provision.

Interviewees were also asked to assess the degree to which provision in custody and community was more employment focussed. For custody provision, 25 interviewees considered that it was 'some' or 'much more focussed' on employment, whilst a lower number of interviewees (20) gave the same ratings for community provision. Progress was generally associated with an increase in vocational courses, greater employment engagement and new providers with a stronger emphasis on employability.

8 Integration of services

Almost three-fifths of interviewees (29) regarded the integration of services for offenders (across custody, community and mainstream) to have improved since the start of OLASS. Greater integration was associated with: the development of relationships, links and partnerships (e.g. which facilitated continuity of provision after release); involvement of a lead provider (e.g. enabling a more unified approach to provision), improvements to monitoring (e.g. to assist the continuity of provision, in terms of matching courses to offenders needs once in the community) and increased awareness of other agencies (which promoted the more integrated working).

Where a lack of progress or decline in integration was reported this was attributed to: a poor transfer of information between agencies, a lack of integration at an operational level (despite strategic level developments), difficulties stemming from the unitised model in the South West and problems

arising from bringing different working cultures together (e.g. mainstream providers working in prison environments).

9 The future development of OLASS

Interviewees proposed several ways in which OLASS could benefit from further development or improvement. Most often mentioned (by around 60 per cent of interviewees) were developments to the provision available to offenders, especially a greater focus on employability, vocational courses and establishing links with local employers. Similar numbers of interviewees highlighted improvements in relation to the OLASS contract, namely, more attention given to community provision, stronger contract management by the LSC and clarification of different agencies roles and remits in relation to OLASS. The collection and transfer of data was another aspect pinpointed for development – specifically mentioned was the collection of more comprehensive data on offenders (to assist planning and performance monitoring) and IT systems for enabling the exchange of data between agencies. Other nominations for development included: further integration of services (to prevent duplication), additional funding (for IAG, Connexions, capital equipment and provision in the community), greater partnership working between OLASS agencies and raising the profile of OLASS generally.

10 Conclusion

The purpose of this final report was to establish the overall impact of OLASS one year on from its initial launch. Each chapter examines a different dimension of OLASS, ranging from assessment to the integration of services. In nearly all areas (with the exception of provision in the community), OLASS was considered to have brought about ‘some’ or ‘much improvement’ by over half of interviewees. In addition, when given the chance to freely nominate the main impact of OLASS, the majority of interviewees (41 out of 51) described the main impact in positive terms, lending further evidence to its effects. At the same time, for five out of the six areas, around a third of interviewees registered a ‘no change’ or ‘less effective’ rating (of these, most reported a ‘no change’, rather than a decline in standards).

When invited to provide reasons for the ratings given, interviewees pinpointed a number of factors which had either facilitated or hindered the successful implementation of OLASS. From these factors, a series of recommendations are made:

- Testimonies from the three regions suggest that appointing the right provider (in terms of expertise, attitude, willingness to work in partnership) is a critical factor in effectiveness.

- With a suitable electronic data transfer system in place, it was felt that there will be a much greater chance that information about an offender will be recorded, monitored and made available to different agencies throughout the criminal justice system.
- In moving forward, interviewees advised that OLASS now direct more attention towards provision in the community and for young offenders to address a perceived imbalance.
- To ensure that relations between partners remain harmonious and productive, it was recommended that contracts/OLASS documentation should be specific about the roles, remits and expectations of the key partners (e.g. in relation to data recording, staff cover, etc).
- Partners in OLASS need to invest time in learning about the work, roles and cultures of each other's organisation. For example, staff new to prisons were felt to benefit from induction and support to acclimatise to a more unusual working environment.
- In order to meet some interviewees' desire to increase the vocational content of provision, steps may need to be taken to ensure the availability of funding and greater engagement of employers, an aspiration already expressed by the Government in its Green Paper *'Reducing Re-offending Through Skills and Employment,'* 2005.
- A specific development for community provision, suggested by interviewees, was to ensure opportunities were geared more towards the needs of offenders. In particular, flexible start times and support to help them progress into mainstream provision were mentioned.

1 Introduction

This is the third and final report from the evaluation of the new Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS). The evaluation examined the implementation of OLASS in three development regions (North West, North East and South West), prior to a national roll out in July 2006.

1.1 Background to the evaluation

Historically, learning and skills for offenders in custody has been provided by a mix of contractors, largely further education colleges under contract to the Prison Service, and in-house Prison Service staff ('Instructional Officers'). After the establishment of the Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit in 2001, it and the Prison Service took the opportunity, at the ending of those contracts, to develop and introduce a new delivery arrangement in prisons, joining together the education and vocational training elements of the service for the first time. This was to be implemented by Project REX. In 2004 and following the publication of the Carter Report (2003) that led to the establishment of the National Offender Management Service, the government announced that Project REX was to end and be replaced by a new Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS).

There were two key changes in the transition from REX to OLASS. OLASS was to cover offenders in both custody and community, and this integrated service was to introduce delivery arrangements planned and funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), the agency responsible for all non-higher post-16 learning in England. OLASS builds on the partnership arrangements in place since April 2004 between the National Probation Service and the LSC to address the learning needs of offenders in the community.

The main focus of OLASS is an early, intense focus on assessment, advice and guidance, leading to the production of an individual learning plan that will cover the offender as s/he passes through the criminal justice system. A broader, deeper curriculum offer is outlined in *The Offender's Learning Journey* (DfES, 2004) of which there are separate adult and under 18 versions. This is focussed on developing the skills necessary to improve significantly an offender's employability so that employment chances are greatly increased on release, leading to reduced reoffending. The aim is to develop an educational system, with an emphasis on quality improvement, that offenders can pursue through custody and in the community.

The new service has been rolled out in three stages. Three development regions began implementing, on a prototype basis, elements of OLASS in January 2005. They went live with the new service on a fully operational basis

in August 2005. The third phase saw the new service introduced to the remaining six developing regions in England at the end of July 2006.

1.2 Aims of the evaluation

The evaluation was intended to inform the national delivery of OLASS by identifying the main challenges encountered during implementation in the three development regions (documented in Halsey, et al, 2006) as well as measuring the overall impact of the new service (the focus of this final report).

Through the evaluation, the research team was asked to explore five key areas:

- initial assessment of learners
- monitoring of offender achievements
- the delivery of information, advice and guidance
- workforce issues (including impact on the workforce)
- the integration of services (including the extent to which services are coherent and continuous across the criminal justice system).

1.3 Methodology

For the third phase of the evaluation representatives from each of the three development regions were re-contacted and invited to take part in a final interview, focusing on the impact of OLASS one year after its initial launch (August 2005). Subsequently, 51 telephone interviews were conducted with representatives from a range of agencies. Table 1.1 shows the distribution of interviews across the three regions and by interviewee type.

Table 1.1 Interviewee sample

Interviewees by region		
North West	North East	South West
22	15	14
Interviews by agency/service		
Prison (including HoLS and area managers)		12
Probation (including basic skills managers and ETE managers)		12
Youth Justice		4
Providers		7
Connexions		3
Learning and skills council		5
Jobcentre Plus		5
ROMs		3

It should be noted that the research team was unable to re-interview 14 representatives who previously contributed to the research. There were a variety of reasons for this, such as a change of personnel, retirement, interviewees stating that they were too busy to take part or simply not responding to requests for an interview. It was originally intended that interviewee numbers should be approximately equal across regions, but for the reasons listed above, this was not achieved in the final phase.

The interview invited comment on the following areas:

- the main impact of OLASS
- impact on assessment
- impact on monitoring procedures
- impact on information, advice and guidance
- impact on the offender learning/criminal justice workforce
- impact on provision for offenders (in custody and community)
- areas for further development/improvement.

For most areas, interviewees were asked to assign a rating indicating the extent of improvements e.g. no change, some improvement, much improved, less effective and unable to comment. They were then asked to elaborate on their reasons for the rating given.

In order to capture the offenders' experience of OLASS a short questionnaire was also administered to 36 offenders during case study visits earlier in the evaluation. This aspect of the research sought to collect offenders' views on:

- the assessment process
- individual learning plans
- information, advice and guidance
- the courses and training available to them.

1.4 About this report

The chapters in this report are presented as follows:

Chapter 2	Main impact of OLASS
Chapter 3	Assessment
Chapter 4	Monitoring
Chapter 5	Information, advice and guidance
Chapter 6	Impact on the workforce
Chapter 7	Impact of provision
Chapter 8	Integration of services
Chapter 9	The future development of OLASS

In order to convey a sense of OLASS in each of the three regions, Appendix 1 includes regional profiles which have been compiled to highlight specific issues (successes, challenges, areas for development) within a region.

Appendix 2 comprises a short report detailing findings from the offender questionnaire.

2 Main impact of OLASS

When asked to assess the overall main impact of OLASS, the majority of interviewees (41) chose to nominate positive outcomes. Their responses were categorised into four main areas of impact:

- enhancements to the provision available to offenders
- improvements to partnership working
- greater integration of services
- raised awareness of learning and skills for offenders.

2.1 Enhancements to the provision available to offenders

Across all three development regions, interviewees (14) reported that the arrival of OLASS had led to improvements to the provision available to offenders. Extension of the curriculum, a greater focus on the learner, improvements to IAG and an increase in provision hours were cited as various ways in which the provision was deemed to have progressed. These developments were more often noted by prison representatives, but also by probation staff and the providers themselves.

2.2 Improvements to partnership working

The following three main areas of impact were all cited by a fifth of interviewees. Starting first with improvements to partnership working, one important aspect of OLASS was that it had brought together all the key agencies with a role to play in offender education and training. The regional boards, in particular, were regarded as important structures for discussions and inter-agency planning:

It's got people around the table, the key strategic players to talk about the real issues.... I've been speaking to people I never would have met or spoke to before.

Connexions, North West

However, creating forums for interagency collaboration did not necessarily lead to advancements in partnership working as this impact was not cited by any interviewees in the South West. This perhaps reflects some of the relationship issues reported in the region. Thus, whilst there are advantages to be derived from a multi-agency approach, there can also be challenges for the diverse agencies brought together in this more complex arrangement.

2.3 Greater integration of services

Related to improvements to partnership working between the key agencies, it follows that another main impact was a better integration of services and progress towards offering a seamless service to offenders. Interviewees, for example, suggested that there was now greater coordination of provision and better links between custody and community.

2.4 Raised awareness of learning and skills for offenders

The fourth main area of impact concerned an increased awareness of learning and skills for offenders. OLASS was felt to have heightened the profile of offender education amongst key partners generally; to have raised awareness in mainstream about their learning needs (due to the involvement of the LSC); and, in the case of prisons, widened their conception of the learning opportunities for offenders (beyond standard assessment and education opportunities traditionally offered in prison).

Interviewees also put forward a number of other main impacts, although less frequently reported than the four described above. These included:

- improved information exchange and data transfer between agencies
- a heightened focus on employability (particularly in the NE)
- improved assessments
- increase in the numbers of learners engaged (in prison)
- development of the LSC role.

2.5 Negative impacts

Whilst the majority of respondents regarded the main impact of OLASS to be positive, nine individuals from both prison and probation services (across all three regions), highlighted negative outcomes. Most often this related to provision which failed to meet their expectations. For example, in the South West two prison based interviewees felt that provision had actually become less focussed on the needs of the learners and was now driven more by the providers' agenda. Elsewhere, interviewees expressed disappointment that, as yet, there had been no change to the provision offered or the hours available. Certainly, the approach of the provider would appear to be a critical factor in determining the perceived success of OLASS. For example, one interviewee with a more regional perspective explained how the impact across the region differed. S/he attributed this to the quality of the provider, in terms of their

expertise in adult education and their arrangements for the professional development of their staff.

Three probation interviewees across the three different regions contended that offender education in the community had lost out since OLASS. One individual believed that funding had been diverted away from community into custody. Another felt that the transfer of education from probation to mainstream colleges meant that it was now less of a priority for probation officers and this would also be to the detriment of offenders because 'it's been taken out of the hands of the people who knew how to do it'. In the third region, there was a feeling that OLASS had not been implemented as well in the community as it had been in the custodial setting. The fact that these concerns were expressed by probation staff in all three regions implies that next stage of OLASS development may require a stronger focus on provision in the community, to bring it in line with the developments emerging in custody.

2.6 Summary

The majority of interviewees (41 out of 51) described the main overall impact of OLASS in positive terms. Most commonly mentioned in their accounts were enhancements to the provision available to offenders, improvements to partnership working, a greater integration of services and a raised awareness of learning and skills for offenders.

Whilst most regarded the main impact of OLASS to have been positive, nine individuals (across all three regions), expressed more negative viewpoints. Most often this related to provision which fell short of their expectations (e.g. did not focus on needs of the learners) or had so far, failed to develop further (e.g. no additional hours or extension of the curriculum). In addition, one area for development may be provision in the community, as there were probation staff in all three regions who felt that this had not benefited since the arrival of OLASS.

3 Assessment

This chapter focuses on assessment processes and how they have been affected by the implementation of OLASS. Interviewees were asked to compare the assessment of learners prior to August 2005 to assessment procedures one year on. They were then asked to assign a rating of how procedures had changed using a four point scale, ranging from 'less effective' to 'much improved'. This section presents the ratings given by interviewees and goes on to discuss the reasons for the ratings given.

3.1 Improvements in the assessment of learners

Just over half of interviewees (28) from across the three regions reported that there had been improvements in the assessment process. Of these, 11 interviewees rated assessments as 'much improved'. Improvements were linked to:

- systematic undertaking of assessments
- increased standards of assessment
- increased assessment personnel and staff professional development
- implementation of new assessment tools/facilities
- new assessment requirements.

3.1.1 Systematic undertaking of assessments

Of the interviewees who rated assessment procedures as being 'some' or 'much improved' since the introduction of OLASS, the most common reason related to procedures becoming more systematic (stated by 14 interviewees). Indeed, a range of interviewees from across the three regions reported that assessments carried out by providers were less 'ad hoc' (resulting in an increase in the number of assessments) and more were consistently applied. Furthermore, interviewees acknowledged that there was a greater structure to the assessment process (i.e. initial assessments were made more quickly on the arrival of an offender, assessments were followed by IAG interventions that linked to assessment results and ILPs were produced more systematically). In the North West, there was also evidence of greater standardisation in assessment procedures across prisons. For example, one interviewee commenting on improvements to the assessment process, noted a change in the way provision was contracted. Having one lead provider across a geographically coherent group of six establishments in the region was seen as a positive development and meant that:

We're actually bringing the six prisons together and discussing issues. The improvement has been in that we are beginning to standardise approaches to things and actually share good practice.

HoLS, North West

Increased collaboration and closer working amongst key partner staff was also highlighted as leading to more efficient assessments. An example of this was provided by a Jobcentre Plus representative in the North East who reported that advisors working in prisons were able to feed information already obtained from individuals who had participated in Jobcentre Plus initiatives in the community e.g. 'New Deal' to staff undertaking assessments in prison, reducing the need to re-assess.

3.1.2 Increase in standards of assessments

The next most common reason for improvements (cited by interviewees in the North East and North West) related to increased standards of assessment. This included fuller evaluations of offender needs, particularly through the implementation and increase in diagnostic testing as well as the production and increased effectiveness of ILPs (see Chapter 4 on monitoring for further details on ILPs). Here, one of the main ways in which increased standards of assessment had been achieved was through the introduction of new providers and the sharing of good practice. Such contractors were said to have extensive knowledge and experience in the area of assessment and brought with them mainstream standards and quality expectations. Furthermore, providers were thought to be prioritising assessments more. A number of interviewees (including ROMs and LSC representatives) acknowledged that the assessment of learners, prior to OLASS, had been carried out to a much lower standard. This was highlighted by a prison representative in the North East who referred to poor quality assessments that were comprised of basic skills scores without any full evaluation. Interviewees acknowledged that providers had to carry out much more preparatory work (e.g. staff training) prior to making progress in this area.

3.1.3 Increased assessment personnel and professional development

Interviewees across the three regions but particularly in the North East, reported that there had been an increase in staff whose role it was to undertake assessments as well as an increase in staff time dedicated to assessments (including increased management time). Probation representatives in the North West also referred to the introduction of qualified basic skills staff, which had led to improved assessments in the community. In addition, interviewees from the North East and North West reported improvements as a result of clearer staff roles. In some cases, staff were given particular responsibility for certain forms of assessment such as diagnostic tests which had led to improvements in

standards. Meanwhile, a Connexions representative in the North West reported that improvements had resulted from the fact that guidance workers carried out both assessments and IAG. It was felt that this allowed staff to establish better relationships with offenders, as well as providing personnel with better understanding of offenders' situations and capabilities.

A small number of interviewees across the three regions acknowledged that professional development undertaken by assessment personnel had led to 'some/much improvement' in the assessment process. Staff training in the areas of initial and diagnostic testing and production of effective ILPs had been implemented. Indeed, improvements in ILPs (as a result of such training) were reported to have been commended by ALI inspectors in the North East.

3.1.4 Implementation of new assessment tools/facilities

Seven interviewees mainly from the North West reported that improvements were due to the introduction of new assessment tools, including online assessments (rather than paper-based versions) as well as improved assessment facilities in prisons such as ICT suites. A Jobcentre Plus representative in the North West reported that assessment was 'much improved' due to the introduction of online testing. This meant that assessment results and test certificates were returned more quickly to offenders which enhanced their motivation. In addition to this, a YJB representative from the South West who gave a 'no change' rating acknowledged that better diagnostic tools, that were more appropriate to under 18s, were being used in a young offenders unit in the region.

3.1.5 New assessment requirements

In the North East and North West, a small number of interviewees cited that the assessment requirements set out in the new *Offender's Learning Journey* were more comprehensive than previous requirements and this had led to improvements. Moreover, contracting requirements and delivery plans had produced a clear specification detailing what was expected and what would be provided in terms of assessment.

3.2 No improvements in assessment of learners

Just over a quarter of interviewees (15) rated that there had been no improvements in assessment processes since the introduction of OLASS. Reasons for the lack of improvement reported by interviewees who had given assessment procedures a 'no change' or a 'less effective' rating included:

- continuation of previous assessment procedures
- lack of funding to improve assessments

- the need for new assessment tools
- low staffing levels and inexperienced/unqualified staff.

The most common reason cited by interviewees was due to the **continuation of effective assessment processes and procedures**, noted particularly by HoLS in the North West, and Probation Service representatives in both the North East and South West. Interviewees from Probation acknowledged there had been ‘no change’ in assessments as the provision had continued to be outsourced to the same providers. Hence, there was a continuation of personnel and a maintenance of pre-existing assessment procedures. For example, a Probation Service representative in the South West reported that ‘Next Steps’ provision had been offered through the Probation Service prior to OLASS and that this provision had been of a high standard.

Of the remaining interviewees who believed that there had been no change in assessment a year on from the introduction of the new service, three interviewees cited **funding** as a limiting factor. Namely, that there had been no additional funding in the community for services to improve assessment procedures and that there was no additional funding for increased hours/staff to undertake assessments in custody. Two interviewees in the North West also cited the **lack of assessment tools/software** to carry out electronic screening as a limiting factor.

The only interviewee who rated assessment procedures as less effective felt this was due to a decrease in the standard of initial assessments and a reduction in the volume of diagnostic tests since the introduction of OLASS and new providers. Further, that enhanced assessment procedures could not be achieved with current **staffing and funding levels**. In addition, other interviewees (one who did not give a rating and another who rated that there had been ‘no change’ in the assessment process) believed this was due to **untrained/unqualified provider staff** carrying out assessments. Previously qualified personnel with an education background had carried out assessments and such staff were felt to have greater empathy with learners and increased competence in promoting courses to learners.

Other reasons given for the lack of improvements included:

- the delayed availability of a fully operational electronic data sharing system and electronic/‘live’ ILPs
- poor quality ILPs – no smart targets
- a perception that the LSC placed a greater emphasis on outcomes achieved (e.g. qualifications) than the initial assessment process.
- a greater focus placed on IAG than assessments by new providers
- lack of assessment guidance.

3.3 Summary

Just over half of interviewees from across the three regions reported that there had been improvements in the assessment process in the first year following the implementation of OLASS. Improvements included the systematic administering of assessments; increased standards of assessment and increased assessment personnel as well as the implementation of new assessment tools/facilities and new assessment requirements.

Just over a quarter of interviewees rated that there had been no improvements in assessment processes since the introduction of OLASS. Reasons for the lack of improvement reported by interviewees included the continuation of effective services and procedures, a lack of funding to improve assessments, the need for new assessment tools and low staffing levels and inexperienced/unqualified staff.

4 Monitoring

This section considers the impact of OLASS on the monitoring of learners' progress and achievements. Interviewees were asked to compare the monitoring of learners prior to August 2005 to existing monitoring procedures following the introduction of OLASS and rate the progress made on a four point scale from 'less effective' to 'much improved'. This section presents the ratings given by interviewees and goes on to discuss the reasons for the ratings given.

4.1 Improvements to the monitoring of offenders' progress and achievements

Three fifths of interviewees (30) from across the three regions reported that there had been improvements in the monitoring of offenders progress and achievements in the first year following the implementation of OLASS.

Improvements were linked to:

- enhanced Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) and improved data collection
- improved data transfer
- systematic monitoring procedures
- increased collaboration and communication.

4.1.1 Improvements in ILPs and data collection

The most common reasons for improvements in the monitoring of learners' progress and achievements related to ILPs. Not only did interviewees report that there was a greater awareness of ILPs among key partner staff, ILPs were also felt to have become more widely produced, more consistent and more rigorous a year on from the introduction of OLASS. For example, a Connexions representative in the North West felt that development work on ILPs, so that all services were able to contribute to the plan, had led to improvements. ILPs had also improved because they were completed, reviewed and maintained by appropriately trained and qualified staff. In relation to this, a provider in the North East reported how ILPs had become more effective as staff were now beginning to include more 'SMART targets'. A small number of interviewees referred to offenders' use of ILPs in the community, for example, a JCP representative reported that a small number of offenders had taken their ILPs with them to initial meetings with JCP advisors.

Interviewees, particularly in the North East, also noted that there had been an increase in learner information available. This included an increase in the recording of data on retention and achievement. This meant that there was

greater awareness of offenders' progress, which in turn meant that staff were able to identify learner needs and target provision accordingly, as well as identify when gaps in provision became available and fill spaces when they were required.

4.1.2 Improved data transfer

Of the 30 interviewees who rated the monitoring of learners progress and achievements as being 'some' or 'much improved', nearly half reported that this was due to improved data transfer. Indeed, several interviewees (mainly custody based) across all three regions felt that there had been some improvement in the transfer of individual learning plans. For example, a prison representative in the South West reported that there was now electronic transfer of records and hard copies of plans sent to other regions when an offender moved. In the North East, a prison representative noted that they were receiving data from one or two establishments and that data was transferred more systematically and quickly to other establishments than it had been previously. Indeed, a Youth Justice representative reported that ILPs were 'starting to come through to the community' and be used by YOTs. The lead provider in the region acknowledged that there had been a substantial increase in administrative staff to facilitate data recording and transfer. Other interviewees reported that improvements in monitoring were anticipated, and related to the implementation of Maytas.

4.1.3 Monitoring more systematic/ procedures tighter

A further improvement as a result of the new service was that monitoring and data collection procedures had become more consistent and systematic. There were three reasons for this. Firstly, interviewees in the North West acknowledged that increased consistency was related to the fact that there were fewer providers and that all providers were working to the same requirements to produce the same level and quality of data. Similarly, the existence of one lead provider was said to have led to increased consistency in the monitoring process. Interviewees also believed that new providers had brought with them mainstream experience, as well as higher expectations and increased quality in data monitoring and recording. Finally, it was felt that the monitoring requirements outlined in the *Offender's Learning Journey*, along with new contracting arrangements between the LSC and providers had led to greater accountability for monitoring. Indeed, OLASS generally was said to have prioritized the reporting of learner information amongst providers (e.g. the number of ILPs transferred and received etc).

4.1.4 Increased collaboration and communication

A small number of interviewees (4) indicated that monitoring improvements were the result of increased collaboration and communication between

partners. For example, a representative from the YJB in the North West reported that education representatives within the YOTs had an increased knowledge of ILPs due to their attendance at OLASS partnership meetings. Interviewees also reported that it was the expectation of the OLASS contract that monitoring was a shared responsibility. Finally, an LSC representative from the region noted that the prisons which had made the most progress in terms of monitoring, were those that had developed a good relationships with the provider and where there were clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

4.2 No improvements in the monitoring of offender progress and achievements

A third of interviewees (17) rated that there had been no improvements in the monitoring of offenders learning and achievements including nine interviewees reporting that monitoring had become less effective. Reasons for the lack of improvement reported by interviewees who had given monitoring procedures a 'no change' or a 'less effective' rating included:

- inadequacies of data collection and recording
- poor data transfer and the delayed availability of a fully operational electronic data sharing system
- reduced quality of offender data
- new provider, staff and procedures.

The responses of interviewees who rated monitoring as less effective are discussed first, followed by the responses of those interviewees who felt there had been no change.

4.2.1 Reason for less effective monitoring

When asked to compare the monitoring processes prior to August 2005 to the current monitoring procedures, nine interviewees across the three regions rated the provision as less effective. One of the main reasons for this was the **inadequacies of data collection and recording** in custody, in particular the non-recording of learners' progress and achievements in out of scope activity¹. For several interviewees this was a major concern and was felt to result in an incomplete picture of offender learning. Indeed, one custody based interviewee from the North West highlighted how differing remits for the recording of offender data had led to the education department becoming isolated and un-integrated from the rest of the prison.

¹ The decision not to include out of scope activity was made by the DfES because Maytas was created as a short term measure and additional investment in expanding the system was felt to be inappropriate.

Other reasons for monitoring processes becoming ‘less effective’ cited by interviewees particularly in the South West related to **providers**, namely the poor communication and relationships between providers and contractors, poor quality provider staff responsible for monitoring and poor management of the project. In the North West, a probation representative noted receiving incomplete data on commencement and awards from the lead provider. This was due to the delay in local colleges transferring records to the lead provider and the lack of requirements in contracts identifying when such data will be delivered and how data will be shared.

A range of other interviewees who did not give a rating of less effective (e.g. instead indicated ‘some improvement’) also highlighted concerns in relation to the type and level of offender data collected. For example, a ROM in the North West reported that the data collected through OLASS focussed only on learning and skills and this data alone did not meet the needs of custody and community where data on other offender needs are also required². Furthermore, a representative from the same region reported specific difficulties for their organisation in relation to the data collected (e.g. YJB has a target for engagement in ETE for all young people from 10 to 17 so do not specifically measure as a discrete group the engagement figures for 15 plus, yet LSC and OLASS focuses on 15 plus).

Additional issues were raised by interviewees (who did not give a ‘less effective’ rating), included:

- inadequate specification of what data will be collected in contractual arrangements
- limitations of the ILPs – the ILP to be used with Maytas was felt to be inadequate³.

4.2.2 Reasons for no change in monitoring

Of the eight interviewees who reported that there had been no change in the monitoring of learners’ progress and achievements, the main reason was due to issues relating to **data transfer** particularly between custody and community (and visa versa). Associated with this was the delayed availability of a fully operational electronic data sharing system (i.e. Maytas) which meant that learner information could not be transferred, resulting in the continuation of repeat assessments. In addition, several other interviewees who did not give this rating (e.g. indicated some improvement) also cited difficulties with information transfer due to the lack of an effective MIS, indeed this was felt to be a significant limiting factor to improvements in monitoring. Interviewees also highlighted technical difficulties, security issues, and training needs as delaying the commencement of Maytas.

² This is to be addressed by C-Nomis.

³ Maytas was created as a short term measure, thus this issue may be resolved in the future

Other reasons given for the lack of improvements included:

- a lack of clear guidance about ILPs
- other key partner agencies such as Jobcentre Plus not included in data sharing agreements
- the need for staff training – to become accustomed to new provider paperwork and monitoring procedures
- OLASS' perceived focus on custody – limiting community developments.

4.3 Summary

Nearly three fifths of interviewees from across the three regions reported that there had been improvements in the monitoring of offenders' progress and achievements in the first year following the implementation of OLASS.

Improvements were linked to enhanced Individual Learning Plans, improved data collection and data transfer as well as more systematic monitoring procedures and increased collaboration and communication amongst key partners. It should be noted here, that whilst interviewees expressed there had been improvements, some were keen to stress that the improvements were influenced by the effectiveness of monitoring systems in individual prisons prior to OLASS and that improvements had occurred in some establishments but not others within the same region.

Despite acknowledging improvements in monitoring, many interviewees also acknowledged there was still some way to go (particularly with implementing Maytas) until effective and efficient data exchange could be achieved across custody and community. Around a third of interviewees who reported monitoring processes as less effective or unchanged highlighted inadequacies in data collection and recording; poor data transfer and new provider staff and procedures as limiting factors.

5 Information, advice and guidance

This chapter examines the impact of OLASS on the integrated delivery of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG). Interviewees were asked to compare the delivery of IAG prior to August 2005, to the IAG that was available one year on from the implementation of the new service. They then gave a rating of the current provision on a four point scale from ‘less effective’ to ‘much improved’. This section presents the ratings assigned by interviewees and goes on to discuss the reasons for the ratings given.

5.1 Improvements in the delivery of IAG

Over half of interviewees (28) from across the three regions reported that there had been improvements in the delivery of information, advice and guidance. Of these, around one third suggested that IAG provision was ‘much improved’. Improvements were linked to:

- improved standards and delivery of IAG
- increase in staff/hours of IAG provision available to offenders
- improved multi-agency working and coordination of IAG services
- increase in staff development and training opportunities
- greater recognition and prioritisation of IAG.

5.1.1 Improved standards and delivery of IAG services

Of the interviewees who rated IAG provision as being ‘some’ or ‘much improved’, the most common reason related to enhanced IAG delivery and increased standards.

In terms of improved delivery, interviewees suggested that there was greater continuity of IAG throughout an offender’s sentence. Other interviewees noted that whilst IAG was available throughout a learner’s journey it had become more tailored to the needs of an establishment (e.g. in a high security prison IAG was loaded more towards the end of the sentence). Improved provision of information was also highlighted, for example, interviewees commented that IAG interviews were more holistic including both immediate and long-term information (e.g. employment opportunities). A further impact reported by interviewees in the North East particularly was that IAG staff had a clearer understanding of learner needs and as a result IAG was now being targeted at offenders (e.g. to those not accessing any education or training and those offenders due for release). This also meant that offenders were directed towards provision appropriate to their needs rather than where there was availability. Indeed, interviewees reported that IAG services had improved as

there was evidence that offenders were better informed. For example, a JCP representative in the North East reported that offenders were making more informed choices about courses rather than choosing to attend the same courses as their friends.

Other interviewees suggested that as new providers were experienced in the delivery of IAG they had improved the standards and rigor in the provision of advice and guidance. Moreover, interviewees from both the North West and South West described how the IAG provision was working towards or had achieved the matrix standard (a national quality standard for organisations that deliver information, advice and/or guidance on learning and work).

5.1.2 Increase in IAG hours/staff

One of the main ways in which interviewees' believed there had been an improvement in IAG as a result of the new service was due to an increase in personnel/staff time dedicated to delivering IAG. Around a fifth of interviewees including prison based staff, LSC representatives and providers from across the three regions reported that additional IAG staff had been recruited to fill gaps in provision and to increase provision where necessary. Interviewees noted that the increase in qualified IAG staff was a significant development particularly in establishments which, prior to OLASS, had little or no IAG provision. Indeed, one interviewee from the North East noted that in some cases the numbers of IAG staff in establishments had doubled or tripled. It was reported that there were now IAG teams where previously IAG provision had been the responsibility of an individual member of staff. Other interviewees reported that the number of IAG hours had increased with existing part time IAG personnel increasing to full time and this, along with the recruitment of new staff, meant that more time could be dedicated to the delivery of IAG and thus the extent and focus of provision could be expanded.

We're not just doing inductions, which is what we were doing before, we're doing real guidance like would happen in the community, so yes that's one of the things that has improved.

HoLS, North West

5.1.3 Improved coordination of IAG services

In the North West and North East interviewees acknowledged that IAG services had become more coordinated. This included increased collaboration and multi agency approaches to IAG. For example, a representative from JCP in the North East noted how there were closer working relations between JCP advisors and IAG staff based within custody and as a result of this the IAG provided was felt to be more closely related to the local labour market. In particular, interviewees commented that staff had a greater understanding of

each other's roles and remits and there was more of a shared vision between the various IAG providers.

In terms of community provision, in both the North West and North East interviewees reported that OLASS has tightened multi-agency working between IAG agencies and other services/organisations. For example, one interviewee noted that IAG organisations were represented on OLASS boards and this had led to different services becoming more aware of each other and had led to an improvement in cross referrals etc.

Other ways in which IAG was felt to have become more coordinated was through the standardisation of IAG materials across establishments and through more systematic procedures for referral in the community. For example, in the North West region, a process map of the different services for offenders in the community was developed. Each member of staff delivering the different services were aware of their own and each others responsibilities and how that it fitted together with the provision offered by other services.

5.1.4 Staff development

Provider, prison and LSC representatives from the North West and North East cited that one of the main reasons for the improvement in IAG services was an increase in training and support provided to IAG personnel. Indeed interviewees believed that the workforce as a whole were now more competent as a result of the training IAG personnel had received and through the recruitment of appropriately qualified and experienced staff. In addition, interviewees reported that IAG staff had a clearer idea of what was expected of them in terms of information and advice and what constitutes IAG.

In addition to this, interviewees reported that IAG staff were now being better managed. For example, in the North East, the lead provider had introduced a management structure and in each establishment a curriculum lead with a focus on IAG had been employed to supervise IAG personnel, this along with positive staff attitudes was said to have led to increased effectiveness in IAG services.

5.1.5 Prioritisation of IAG

In the North West in particular, it was noted that OLASS had led to some/much improvement in the IAG services available to offenders due to the increased recognition and prioritisation of IAG in new contracting arrangements, as well as within the *Offender's Learning Journey*. Indeed, this document was recognised as being a critical factor in conveying the value and need for IAG, as well as providing clearer guidance about what IAG should involve and the standards of IAG to be achieved (e.g. matrix status).

Having identified IAG as one of the key elements of the OLJ gives me a lot of sway with HoLS. At the end of the day they determine what we can do within the prison, if the HoLS doesn't see the need for IAG then you're struggling. So, having that fantastic gold mine of saying, 'look you've got to follow the Offender's Learner Journey, there's got to be IAG offered at these four stages'.

IAG Provider, North West

5.2 No improvements in the delivery of IAG

Nearly one third of interviewees (16) rated that there had been no improvements in the delivery of information, advice and guidance. Reasons for the lack of improvement reported by interviewees who had given IAG delivery a 'no change' or a 'less effective' rating included:

- decline in quality of IAG delivered
- reduction in the quality and experience of IAG personnel
- funding arrangements for IAG provision
- coordination of IAG services.

The responses of interviewees who rated IAG as less effective will be discussed first followed by those who felt there had been no change.

5.2.1 Reasons for less effective delivery of IAG

When asked to compare the delivery of information, advice and guidance prior to August 2005 to the current delivery of IAG a small number of interviewees (5) rated the provision as less effective.

One of the reasons cited by interviewees was a perceived **decline in quality of IAG delivered**. This included the belief by one interviewee that the IAG now offered by advisors was based on availability of courses rather than offender need. Another interviewee felt that IAG was 'front end heavy' (e.g. focussed on induction and not pre/post release) and another interviewee questioned the accountability of IAG provision and noted that there was a lack of evidence in relation to the range and effectiveness of IAG now being offered to offenders.

In the South West, two interviewees felt that there had been a **reduction in the quality of IAG personnel**. One of the reasons for this was that transferred staff (under TUPE arrangements) had a change in role, which was more admin related and had subsequently resigned. Where staff had been replaced, their replacements were felt to have limited understanding of education and were not able to effectively motivate and encourage offenders to participate in learning. Further to this, staff were felt to be restricted in their delivery of IAG by contractual agreements.

A particular concern for probation representatives was **funding**. One interviewee in the North West felt that IAG was less effective as s/he perceived that funds for IAG had been withdrawn and they believed that the new funding arrangements for OLASS did not include IAG for offenders in the community. Another interviewee in the North East reported that sub-contractors received less funding for the delivery of IAG than they had done when the service was funded through NPS⁴. In turn, this had led to a restriction of IAG advisors and increased waiting times for offenders following a referral. This was felt to have significant impacts on motivating offenders to engage with ETE.

Other concerns related to the **coordination of IAG services**, in particular that there were less effective links between new IAG personnel and other departments and with services in other geographical areas. Further, IAG provided under OLASS was duplicating provision offered by other services based within custody (e.g. resettlement teams).

5.2.2 Reasons for no change in the delivery of IAG

One fifth of interviewees reported a lack of development in the delivery of IAG. This was due, in the most part, to the **continuation of IAG services** by the same provider and/or existing IAG personnel, delivering the same level and focus of IAG as they had done prior to the implementation of the new service. Indeed, it should be noted here that many interviewees acknowledged that existing IAG services were effective prior to the introduction of OLASS, particularly those services delivered to offenders in the community.

Interviewees also noted that IAG services had not developed further as there had been no **increase in staff** (or funding for additional hours) required to expand or improve delivery further, (yet OLASS was creating a demand for more IAG). In one case, an interviewee reported that even though staff had been employed, progress had been halted due to the recruitment of untrained IAG staff. Another interviewee referring to a remand centre reported that much of the IAG time was spent on induction. Due to the high turn over of offenders, development in IAG could not be made until provision had been expanded. YJB representatives also noted that IAG for young offenders under 16 years old was limited and no progress had been made in this area.

⁴ The decision to withdraw funds was made by the NPS and these funds were utilised to provide additional activity.

5.3 Summary

Overall, when comparing existing services to those prior to the implementation of OLASS, interviewees reported that there has been improvements, with over half of interviewees (28) reporting that IAG had become some/much improved. This included improved standards and delivery of IAG; an increase in staff/hours of IAG provision available to offenders; improved multi-agency working and coordination of IAG services; an increase in staff development and a greater recognition and prioritisation of IAG.

Nearly one third of interviewees suggested that there had been no improvements in the delivery of information advice and guidance. Reasons for this included continuation of IAG services/staff (thus the service had remained at the same level). Where IAG had been found to be less effective, the main reasons were related to a decline in quality of IAG delivered; a reduction in the quality and experience of IAG personnel; funding arrangements for IAG provision and the coordination of IAG services.

6 Impact on the workforce

The evaluation of the OLASS involved seeking views from seven different agencies - prisons, probation, the LSC, youth justice, connexions, providers and Jobcentre Plus. All were asked how their workforce had been affected by the new service. In organising their responses, it is possible to report that almost equal number of interviewees highlighted positive and negative impacts. Comparing responses across the regions, proportionately, it was the North East region where interviewees were most likely to speak of positive workforce impacts, where as in the South West, assessments of impact were predominately negative (just two interviewees highlighted positive outcomes here).

6.1 Positive impacts on the workforce

OLASS was regarded as having had a positive impact on the workforce in the following ways:

- improved partnerships and communication between agencies
- enhanced opportunities for professional development
- poor quality staff challenged by provider
- a better understanding and knowledge of offenders
- heightened profile for offender education.

One of the most commonly stated positive impacts revolved around **improved partnerships and communication between agencies**. Often this outcome was linked to regional boards and other opportunities for key players to come together. In doing so, it was felt that agencies were learning from others, they were no longer working in isolation and there were now channels for sharing good practice. Others felt that generally there was an increasing willingness to working together and as a result, the dialogue between agencies had opened out. Another form of greater partnership was observed between in-scope and out-of-scope prison tutors. Because of an increase in tutor hours, in-scope staff were able to offer skills for life in workshop settings, alongside instructional tutors.

Seven interviewees reported **enhanced opportunities for professional development** since OLASS. This offer pertained to out-of-scope staff, college tutors, workshop instructors (to be trained as assessors) and even prison officers (basic skills awareness training).

The remaining positive workforce impacts were all cited by smaller numbers of interviewees. Where staff were under performing, one provider (in the

North East) was said to be **challenging their performance** which would eventually improve overall standards. A Jobcentre Plus representative explained how greater inter-agency involvement meant that their **understanding and knowledge of offenders** had benefited: 'It's enabled us to get the bigger picture for the offender agenda and cascade that out to our teams'. Meanwhile, the transfer of instructors from the prison service to the college was deemed by the provider to have 'professionalised' the workforce due the support they now received. Within probation and Jobcentre Plus, interviewees felt that OLASS had given offender education a boost and generally **raised its profile** amongst their workforce. Some interviewees simply felt that the workforce was now able to offer a better service - they attributed this to tighter management on the part of the provider, such that 'the bare minimum isn't acceptable anymore'

6.2 Negative impacts on the workforce

As indicated earlier, equal numbers of interviewees mentioned ways in which the workforce had been negatively impacted by OLASS. However, when examined in closer detail it would appear that many of these impacts could be regarded as temporary difficulties, associated with a period of change, rather than lasting conditions.

For example, two of the most frequently mentioned negative impacts were an **increase in workload/stress** and **problems associated with the TUPE process**. Interviewees though acknowledged that the extra workload came from implementing a new service, developing systems and adapting to new environments (e.g. the experience of working in prisons for Connexions staff). Similarly the TUPE process was problematic in terms of dealing with different working terms and conditions and reassuring staff involved in the process. But again, in time, these issues would hopefully be resolved. The overall speed of implementation though was criticised and this was possibly a contributory factor to the stress reported by some interviewees. It would be important to recognise therefore, the significant adjustment that OLASS represents and ensure that the organisations affected are allowed time to implement the necessary changes.

The third main negative impact concerned the **role of the HoLS**. HoLS in all three regions were particularly vocal about a perceived loss of control. There was a sense that they had much less influence over the provision and where they were unhappy with the service, they did not feel adequately empowered to challenge the provider:

We're still unsure what authority we have, who do we actually discuss the thing that we need to change with? Is it the education manager, we've been told not, it's not through the LSC, but then they're reducing the amount of time they're actually meeting HoLS.

The result was that HoLS felt like they were ‘*bystanders*’ in the process rather than strategic managers. Clearly, this is an issue which requires attention as uncertainty about their role was said to have left a number of HoLS feeling frustrated and demotivated.

Low staff morale surfaced as a negative workforce impact. This was said to be an issue for prison administrators who felt torn between data collection for Maytas and administration for the education department. Clarification of the role and duties would go some way towards tackling this particular concern. Elsewhere, a lack of support from the provider was said to be the source of low morale amongst staff transferred over from probation and prisons. Providers perhaps need to invest more time in smoothing the transition for staff moving from one employer to another.

6.3 Summary

Feedback from interviewees suggests that there was a balance of positive and negative impacts on the workforce as a result of OLASS. Whilst some problems were reported, such as increased workload, a decline in morale and staff anxiety about the TUPE process, these may be perceived as temporary impacts arising from a period of change. In time, staff would hopefully adjust to the new service and some of the reported difficulties may subside. Meanwhile, positive repercussions for the OLASS workforce included greater partnership working (facilitated by the regional boards) and increased opportunities for professional development (for out-of-scope staff, college tutors, workshop instructors and even prison officers).

7 Impact on provision

This chapter looks at the impact of OLASS on the range and availability of provision for offenders. Interviewees were asked to rate separately the impact on community and custody provision using a four point scale ranging from 'less effective' to 'much improved'. For both sectors, interviewees were also asked to assess whether provision had become any more employment-focussed since the start of OLASS.

7.1 Improvements to provision in custody

In terms of provision in custody, around half of the interviewees (26) in each of the three development regions concluded that there had been 'some' or 'much improvement' since OLASS. (It should be noted that 19 interviewees, (most working in a community setting) stated that they were unable to comment because they had no knowledge or awareness of custody-based provision.)

The following factors were identified as contributing to improvements:

- reviews of the provision
- approach to provision
- increase in funding
- communication and partnership working.

7.1.1 Reviews of the provision

In terms of improvements in the quality and range of provision available, the opportunity to review and reconsider provision was highlighted most frequently as a significant impact of OLASS. Thirteen interviewees, including LSC, HoLS, ROM, Jobcentre Plus, Connexions and provider representatives across each region made such comments. These reviews were felt to be assisted by the increased availability of data on offenders and their needs. As a result, provision was felt to be better targeted and ineffective courses were being replaced by those that were shown to have a greater impact. Meanwhile, conducting needs-analyses ensured that the education and skills requirements of offenders were being addressed. For instance, an establishment catering for long term and life sentence offenders was now exploring the possibilities of a pre-retirement course for such inmates. In another establishment, a painting and decorating course had been introduced as a response to offenders' views.

7.1.2 Approach to the provision

Eleven interviewees (from a range of organizations) suggested that OLASS had impacted positively as a result of developments in the approach to, and nature of, the provision on offer. Over half of these respondents were from the North West region. The presence of new providers, coupled with a new approach to offender learning and skills was cited as another factor contributing towards advancements in the provision. Several identified the change in providers as underpinning improved provision through more effective delivery of the curriculum and the drive to explore opportunities for delivering education in more innovative ways. In addition, a move towards offender led provision, which focussed more closely on the needs of individual offenders, was also highlighted. The development and use of ILPs was felt to promote a culture shift from ‘prison education’ to more mainstreamed ‘offender education’.

7.1.3 Increase in funding

OLASS was said to have brought additional funding to offender education, manifested predominantly as additional teaching hours to enhance existing core and vocational provision, as well as newly identified curriculum areas. In addition, issues around waiting lists and course capacities were now being addressed.

7.1.4 Communication and partnership working

Two interviewees in the North West specifically identified issues of communication and partnership working as underpinning the improvements in provision. Within this, in terms of strategic oversight, it was contended that the development of structures and mechanisms, such as Quality Improvement Groups, HoLS meetings and OLASS Forums, served to bring relevant parties together to focus on enhancing the quality of provision offered.

The development of links and securing the involvement of other agencies and institutions, including local employers was also identified as a key factor in successful provision. For instance, moves to encourage prison visits by local employers was seen as particularly important, as this would serve to raise their awareness of the quality of training and skill acquisition opportunities available to offenders. Similarly, links between prison establishments were said to be developing through audits of provision and these highlighted further ways of linking resources and service delivery.

7.2 No improvements to provision in custody

Two interviewees (from the South West and North West) suggested that the range and availability of provision had actually deteriorated since OLASS.

Four interviewees (all from the North West) indicated that there had been no change.

Reasons for a lack of improvement included:

- provision that was provider, rather than offender, led
- removal of specific provision (arts related)
- staffing capacity
- a perceived over-emphasis on the delivery of employability skills.

7.2.1 A decline in provision

Two interviewees considered that the range and availability of provision in custody had actually worsened since OLASS.

It was suggested in one particular establishment that despite extra tuition hours, the number of offenders accessing courses and achievements obtained had dropped. This was said to have arisen from an approach to provision which was **provider-led**, rather than offender-led. Suggestions were made that the way in which certain providers approached delivery was counterproductive as far as mainstreaming was concerned. The presence of a specialised offender learning department was said, by one interviewee, to mean that offenders would not receive the same provision, or have access to the same resources and support as would those in the mainstream FE sector. Specialisation was thus seen as imposing restrictions on the range and quality of provision.

One interviewee commented that provision quality and range had declined as a result of the **removal of certain arts-related courses**, in favour of others with a greater employment-related focus.

It should be noted that amongst those interviewees who gave overall positive ratings (e.g. ‘some improvement’ or ‘much improvement’), there were several who signaled ways in which the provision was still not as effective as it could be. Their comments are discussed below.

There were a number of **staffing related issues** which in different ways were felt to affect the delivery of provision. For instance, providers’ initial inability to get teaching staff in post for the commencement of OLASS contracts was seen as having a detrimental impact on the quality of provision on offer. Similarly, the inability to provide staff to teach certain curriculum areas limited the range of courses and learning opportunities open to offenders. In one establishment, the lack of available staff was said to have meant that around one third of the curriculum had not been delivered. Others noted that waiting lists were still an issue and that there was not enough provision to meet all the offenders’ needs. Other interviewees highlighted difficulties in

managing the absence of staff, often resulting in sessions being cancelled. This was an issue highlighted frequently (but not exclusively) in the South West region as a result of the inability to provide cover for tutors/staff working for different providers.

Lastly, a perceived **over-emphasis on the delivery of employability skills** was seen as threatening the quality of provision available in one particular establishment. Here, offenders were seen as having other learning and skills needs that were of more immediate importance, but the providers focus on employability skills meant that their specific needs were not being fully addressed (according to the interviewee).

7.2.2 No change in provision

Four interviewees (from the North West) indicated that there had been no change in provision available in custody. This stemmed from the notion that **additional funding** had not been allocated to increase the number of tuition hours available. As mentioned above, it was suggested by another interviewee that the **increased emphasis on employment/employability skills** was not appropriate for all offenders. Certain young offenders, for example, were seen to have other needs, such as the development of basic and social skills that required addressing prior to tackling employability issues. In addition, the security demands of the prison were said to be of primary importance and the acquisition of learning and skills could be limited by institutional restrictions.

7.3 Improvements to the employment focus of provision in custody

Having rated the overall range and availability of provision in custody, interviewees were then asked to consider the extent to which provision was focussed on employment. Again, around half of the interviewees (25) suggested that progress had been made in this respect, assigning a 'some' or 'much improved' rating.

Reasons for improvements included the following:

- increase in vocational courses on offer
- employer engagement and involvement
- specialist posts and initiatives.

7.3.1 Increase in the vocational courses on offer

Most interviewees suggested that the increased employment focus was chiefly accounted for by the increase in the amount and profile of vocational and other work/employment related courses offered to offenders, often seen as being

linked to needs- and local labour market analyses. Interviewees in all three regions commented on the increasingly rigorous link between educational provision and future employment. This view was forwarded by ROM, HoLS, Youth Justice, LSC, probation and provider representatives.

7.3.2 Employer engagement and involvement

In addition, provision since OLASS was seen to have included an increased involvement of employers and/or the increasing development of strategies to include employers to a greater extent. In particular, attempts were being made to ascertain more clearly the skills that employers required, in order to employ offenders in the future. For example, whilst offenders might, through workshop instruction, develop a high level of competency in bricklaying, it was asserted that the speeds required by an employer might be lacking. Hence, dialogue between employment and education providers was seen as being of great importance. Those with strategic responsibility, such as ROM representatives, and those whose remit was focussed in this area commented in this way. One JCP interviewee, for example, identified the increased efforts to market offenders as potentially valuable employees to prospective employers as a result of OLASS.

7.3.3 Specialist posts and initiatives

Several interviewees commented on the introduction of specialist posts to focus, develop and coordinate the links between offender education and employment. Employment liaison personnel, for example, would match individual offenders learning needs to provision as well as possible employment opportunities. Such appointments would operate within and alongside the contexts of initiatives such as the Progress to Work programme. Through such personnel and initiatives, offender education, and offenders as ‘a hidden’ workforce, were seen to have a much higher profile.

Interviewees also identified the development of groupings and partnerships to address issues of employment within education and skills provision for offenders. This included plans for the creation of a recruitment agency which would work with offenders, providers and employers to match supply and demand of skills, training and employment opportunities.

7.4 No improvements to the employment focus of provision in custody

Five interviewees, (mainly HoLS in both the North West and South West regions) considered that the employability focus of provision had not changed since OLASS, and in one case, they reported a decline. This interviewee (HoLS) suggested that the perceived provider-led nature of provision was leading offenders to take courses that were available, rather than those they

actually wanted to do. In this way, the employment needs of offenders were not being met.

'No change' was registered by two interviewees and stemmed from the fact that employability was already regarded as a key focus of provision. Thus, the introduction of OLASS was seen to have complemented the situation. However, three respondents also noted that 'no-change' was not a satisfactory situation and that there was still capacity to improve. Two interviewees (from the North West and South west) noted that OLASS had failed to impact on the employment-focus of offender education because of the limitations imposed by prison infrastructure, such as the lack of workshop space. One interviewee also noted that no additional funding had been received to support this employment focussed provision and another suggested that although there had been talk, no concrete developments had yet materialised.

7.5 Improvements to provision in the community

Having examined the impact of OLASS on provision in custody, this next section turns to provision available to offenders in the community. The ratings given by interviewees suggest that so far OLASS has made a much stronger impression on provision available in prison settings. For example, when asked to assess the progress of community provision 15 interviewees registered a 'no change' (compared to just 4 for provision in custody). Meanwhile, 16 interviewees reported some or much improvement in community provision, whilst a larger number (26) gave these same ratings in terms of custody provision. (17 interviewees (many of which worked in custody settings) felt unable to comment, because they had no knowledge of provision available in the community.)

Reasons for improved provision in the community included the following:

- approach to, and ethos of, provision
- multi-agency involvement.

7.5.1 Approach to, and ethos of, provision

Roughly half of the interviewees who suggested that community provision had improved suggested that the approach to and ethos and content of that provision was of central importance. Interviewees in the North West region, and particularly those representing employment-focussed agencies, such as Jobcentre Plus, were most likely to comment in this way. A number of factors which had led to advancements in the provision were linked to the approach and ethos adopted by providers. These new approaches meant that provision was better targeted and more suited to the needs of offenders. For instance, the enhanced incorporation of education and training into the remit of probation and rehabilitation services was seen as boosting the educational offer to

offenders in the community. Meanwhile, lead providers were described as bringing experience and expertise to community-based provision. In addition, tutors were able to access support and professional development and generally, providers were said to have increased confidence in terms of delivering education to offenders, so were better equipped to offer enhanced provision. It was reported that community provision was being increasingly tailored to the needs of offenders - providers were running short certificated courses that were flexible and designed to encourage offender participation. In addition, offenders in the community were able to access improved and expanded learning and educational opportunities, through enhanced infrastructures, such as an OLASS centre.

7.5.2 Multi agency involvement

In addition to the approach, ethos and content of provision, the range of partners involved in delivering and supporting provision was also seen to have improved through OLASS. Again, representatives of employment-focussed organizations (especially in the North West) were most likely to forward these views. Multi-agency involvement and the development of closer links with community providers were seen as enhancing the educational opportunities offered to offenders. An example of this was the availability of college-funded mentors to facilitate and support access to education and training ‘through the gate’.

7.6 No improvements to provision in the community

Three interviewees (one from each region) concluded that the range and quality of provision had declined in the community. To expand on the reasons why, in one case, the perceived **dominance of one large provider** was seen as a deterrent to others offering provision – in particular, the perception that through the OLASS provider, all the education and training needs of offenders in the community were being met.

Some FE institutions were seen as being **reluctant to offer places** to offenders because of the problems of sustainability and course completion. It was suggested that colleges need greater incentives to allocate more places to offenders. Others noted that offenders had difficulties engaging with mainstream providers, including for example, the inflexibility of mainstream FE provision regarding starting times (e.g. offenders need to be able to start at different points in the year, rather than September entry only).

Awarding contracts on the basis of **pre-existing provision** was seen to have impacted negatively on provision in the community. It was said that the necessity to refer offenders to provision through OLASS had imposed serious restrictions on the range of provision they were able to access.

Fifteen interviewees across all three regions, including HoLS, Probation, LSC, Connexions, and provider representatives registered a rating of 'no change' in terms of the range and availability of community provision. Most often this was connected by interviewees to **a lack of funding** for extending provision. Perhaps linked to this issue was the perception that OLASS had focussed on development of provision in custody, rather than community. Thus, some interviewees noted that provision had continued as before, with no extension of the contractual requirements.

7.7 Improvements to the employment focus of provision in the community

As with provision in custody, interviewees were invited to comment on the extent to which community provision had become more employment focussed. In responding, 20 out of 51 interviewees concluded that provision in the community had a stronger focus on employability since OLASS (this was a slightly lower figure compared to provision in custody).

They highlighted the following factors as contributing towards this development:

- The provider approach
- An increased range of partners and providers.

7.7.1 Provider approach

Providers' strong tradition of understanding and valuing employment-focussed provision was seen to have enhanced the opportunities available to offenders through OLASS. Within this, it was said that college tutors were becoming increasingly responsive to the employability agenda. This view was forwarded by a probation representative in the North West, the region in which interviewees most frequently highlighted the improved situation regarding offender education in the community.

7.7.2 An increased range of partners and providers

Several interviewees noted that an increased range of partners and providers were involved as a result of OLASS, bringing with them employability remits. It was also said that funding incentives could increase the drive to improve the employability focus of provision. Partnership working between agencies and providers was seen in one region to be underpinning the development of a core curriculum offer, encompassing a focus on employability and skills for life in conjunction with vocational training.

7.8 No improvements to the employment focus of provision in the community

Two interviewees (South West and North East regions) felt the focus on employment had actually declined since OLASS. **Funding** was identified as the key issue underpinning the reduced employment-focus of provision under OLASS. It was said that funding levels were insufficient in the community to deliver the level of provision required under the OLASS contract.

13 interviewees, including HoLS, Probation (mainly from the North East and North West regions) gave a 'no change' rating, indicating that the employment focus had neither improved nor declined since OLASS. A lack of progress was associated with particular barriers that prevented the further enhancement of provision (e.g. a shortage of employment focussed mainstream courses such as plumbing and a lack of space in probation offices to offer employment orientated provision). In one region plans had been formulated to engage employers and gear provision towards the labour market. However, as yet, the plans still had to be put into action.

7.9 Summary

Around half of the interviewees (26) in each of the three development regions commented that there had been 'some' or 'much' improvement in the range and quality of provision available to offenders in custody settings. They attributed these improvements to reviews of the provision (which lead to more targeted provision, which was better suited to the needs of offenders); an increase in funding (leading to additional teaching hours); the approach to provision (e.g. more offender led); and greater communication and partnership working (such as links with employers).

Only two interviewees suggested that the provision had actually deteriorated as a result of OLASS, whilst four (all in the same region) contended that there had been no change. Reasons for a lack of improvement included provision which was provider, rather than offender led; inadequate staffing capacity (e.g. for particular courses, problems with staff cover); and an over emphasis on employability skills (where offenders had other learning needs). It should be noted that a sizeable proportion of interviewees (19) felt unable to give a rating due to a lack of knowledge surrounding custodial provision.

The ratings given by interviewees suggests that so far OLASS has made a much stronger impression on provision available in prison settings, compared to community. For example, when asked to assess the progress of community provision 15 interviewees registered a 'no change' (compared to just 4 for provision in custody). Meanwhile, 16 interviewees reported some or much improvement in community provision, whilst a larger number (26) gave these

same ratings in terms of custody provision. Again, a number of interviewees (17) were unable to comment, because they had no knowledge of, or information pertaining to, the provision available in the community. Where developments were reported these were connected to the approach of new providers (e.g. training for staff, tailored courses for offenders). A lack of progress meanwhile was said to be related to a lack of funding for community provision, mainstream colleges failing to engage offenders (e.g. inflexibility regarding commencement dates for courses) and no extension of contractual requirements for community provision.

Interviewees were also asked to assess the degree to which provision in custody and community was more employment focussed. For custody provision, 25 interviewees considered that it was 'some' or 'much more focussed' on employment, whilst a lower number of interviewees (20) gave the same ratings for community provision. Progress was generally associated with an increase in vocational courses, greater employment engagement and new providers which a stronger emphasis on employability.

8 Integration of services

This chapter focuses on the issue of service integration. Interviewees were asked to consider the extent to which the services for offenders across the criminal justice system (i.e. custody, community and mainstream) were consistent and coherent. In particular, they were invited to rate the integration of services prior to OLASS and how they perceived the situation at the time of interview (one year on from the start of OLASS).

8.1 Improvements to the integration of services

Just under three-fifths of interviewees (29) signaled that there had been ‘some’ or ‘much improvement’ in the integration of services. The following were given as reasons for improvement:

- development of relationships, links and partnerships
- involvement of a lead provider
- improvements to monitoring
- improved awareness of other services.

8.1.1 Development of relationships, links and partnerships

The majority of interviewees suggested that links, relationships, communication and partnership approaches underpinned improvements in service delivery.

Improved **links between community providers and those operating in the custody setting** were seen as crucial in improving the consistency of services. An example included the employment of mentors (funded through a provider) operating in the custody setting as a means of establishing good relationships with offenders. This meant that support systems and access to continuing education opportunities were in place as soon as the offender was released. This involved a high degree of cooperation between the prison and the mainstream providers. Similarly, the emergence of continuity, whereby offenders were able to start a particular course in prison and continue with it on release, was seen as an example of providers working together to join-up the provision, and reduce the silo-working that previously existed.

Improved **partnership approaches at operational and strategic levels**, were regarded as contributing to the push for greater integration. The function of the OLASS board and revised SLAs also further underpinned and formalised integrated service delivery. Similarly, the development of forums was seen as

a crucial step in bringing together FE and community providers to pursue a shared vision.

Interviewees (especially in the North East) commented on the improvements in **regional approaches, meetings and dialogue** that had occurred as a result of OLASS.

Amongst those that assigned an improved rating, several noted that there was still some way to go, especially in terms of engaging employers and securing their involvement to a greater extent.

8.1.2 Involvement of a lead provider

It was claimed that the presence of a lead provider had contributed to the improved integration of community and custody providers. Within this, specialised infrastructure developments, such as a community-based OLASS Centre, facilitated further progress towards an integrated service. The presence of a single lead or main provider was also thought to have resulted in an improved area/regional approach to provision, as opposed to the previous situation whereby multiple providers operated in the same geographical context.

8.1.3 Improvements to monitoring

Coherence of service delivery was also seen to be increasing as a result of the increased tracking and monitoring of offenders. ETE providers interviewing offender pre-release, for example, was seen as a way in which needs could be better matched to provision on release.

8.1.4 Improved awareness of other sectors

Several interviewees suggested that integration could benefit from the improved awareness and understanding of the issues and experiences of other sectors – providers, community and custody. Within this, however, it was also noted that there was still a long way to go in terms of the key partners fully understanding each others role, function and remit. One interviewee, for example, noted that providers were also engaging on a learning journey of their own, in developing these understandings.

8.2 No improvements to the integration of services

Thirteen interviewees indicated that there had been no change in the integration of services since OLASS. Four interviewees, all from the same region (the South West), suggested that integration had decreased as a result of OLASS. The main reasons for a lack of progress included the following:

- poor transfer of information
- a lack of integration at an operational level
- different working cultures
- problems connected with the unitized model of delivery
- OLASS being too custody focussed.

Interviewees suggested that one of the main issues of OLASS centred on the **transfer of information**, and it was noted that the systems and infrastructure for enabling this had taken a considerable amount of time to become established.

It was claimed that, despite the development of partnerships, forums and strategic development groups, integration had not yet materialised at an **operational level**. Issues were explored through strategic mechanisms, but solutions were not yet manifest at practitioner level.

Difficulties encountered in bringing together **different working cultures** emerged as a potential barrier to service integration. For example, it was contended that the requirements of prisons (namely security) could often be inconsistent with the needs of educational provision, so difficulties arose in trying to replicate or provide college/FE education in prison environments. Similarly, coherence was said to be impeded as a result of mainstream FE providers operating to the academic year framework, causing difficulties for the seamless continuation of an offender's learning journey on release.

Four interviewees, all from the same region (the South West), suggested that integration had decreased as a result of OLASS. This was largely attributed to the perceived confusion and complications said to surround the **unitised model of delivery** and the present limitations in data and information exchange. In addition, one interviewee suggested that OLASS remained **too custody-focussed** and further resources need to be directed towards community provision in order to improve the coherence of provision on offer as a whole.

8.3 Summary

Just under three-fifths of interviewees (29) regarded the integration of services for offenders (across custody, community and mainstream) to have improved since the start of OLASS. Greater integration was associated with: the development of relationships, links and partnerships (e.g. which facilitated continuity of provision after release); involvement of a lead provider (e.g. enabling a more unified approach to provision), improvements to monitoring (e.g. to assist the continuity of provision, in terms of matching courses to offenders needs once in the community) and increased awareness of other agencies (which promotes more integrated working).

Where a lack of progress or decline in integration was reported this was attributed to: a poor transfer of information between agencies, a lack of integration at an operational level (despite strategic level developments), difficulties stemming from the unitised model in the South West and problems arising from bringing different working cultures together (e.g. mainstream providers working in prison environments).

9 The future development of OLASS

Having encouraged interviewees to rate the impact of OLASS on different areas, the interview concluded by eliciting their thoughts on how OLASS could be further developed, pinpointing areas for improvement.

The responses generated by this question fell into eight main arenas, presented in order of frequency below:

- development of provision for offenders
- contract related developments
- data collection and exchange
- IT systems
- the profile of offender education
- integration of services
- partnership working between agencies
- funding.

9.1 Development of provision for offenders

The most frequently identified area for improvement (proposed by around 60 per cent of interviewees) concerned developments to the provision available to offenders. In particular, there seemed to be a desire for increasing the employability of offenders (articulated most often by interviewees in the North West). For example, it was suggested that provision should have a stronger vocational content, that links should be established with local employers and that provision matched the demands on the local labour market. A second key area of provision development revolved around supporting offenders as they moved into the mainstream. Probation representatives explained that entry to full time mainstream provision was simply too big a jump for some offenders to make. Providers, it was said, needed to give more consideration on how provision could be more suitably tailored to meet the distinctive needs of the offender population e.g. offer more shorter taster courses, flexible study programmes. A number of other provision related developments were proposed by interviewees, these included:

- more consistency of provision across prisons allowing learners to continue their education in the event of a transfer
- continued support for enrichment activities such as drama and art which allow the development of 'soft skills' (e.g. communication and confidence)
- extension of progression opportunities for offenders with Level 2 qualifications

- increased opportunities for learning through using a wider range of providers.

9.2 Contract related developments

Interviewees recommended a substantial number of developments which, in various ways, were related to the OLASS contract and its management. A common concern was that confusion remained over the responsibilities of the various agencies involved. This uncertainty was said to have adverse affect on working relationships. Thus, several interviews advocated more precise clarification of roles, remits and lines of accountability to ensure that all key players were aware of each others responsibilities.

Several interviewees asserted that the community dimension of the contract was unsatisfactory. One probation representative, for example, felt that community provision had been a ‘tag-on’ rather than an integral part of OLASS during its first year. Meanwhile, another interviewee noted that in comparison to the highly specific custodial contracts, the contract between the LSC and provider for community delivery was much more basic. Hence, interviewees recommended a much stronger focus on community provision in the future.

Other areas identified for improvement were to link the *Offender’s Learning Journey* more explicitly with the contract (to ensure that the OLJ aspirations were delivered) and a prison interviewee wanted arrangements for staff cover spelt out in the contract. In the South West, three interviewees maintained that the model of delivery should be ‘scrapped’, as they felt the current arrangements did not meet the needs of the offenders and the prison was no longer regarded as the customer. Instead they suggested that budgets be returned to the control of HoLS. Also in the South West, interviewees felt that OLASS would benefit from much stronger contract management, both from the regional board and from the LSC.

9.3 Data collection and transfer

A third aspect of OLASS which interviewees highlighted for development concerned the data collected on offenders and the performance of providers. Some felt that the data could be more comprehensive, such as more detailed performance data to enable the LSC to oversee properly the learning of offenders or more thorough offender data (covering ethnicity, gender) to assist planning (as highlighted in Chapter 3 on monitoring). It was also noted that in order to build up a complete picture of an offenders learning history it would be important to record all activity and not just in-scope provision. There were also concerns about the transfer of data (such as ILPs) and interviewees suggested that a culture change was necessary, whereby the OLASS workforce saw data transfer as part of their role and responsibility.

9.4 IT systems

To facilitate the appropriate recording and transfer of data it is not surprising that another specified area for development pertained to the installation of appropriate IT systems. Interviewees frequently noted that the aspiration of a seamless service could only be achieved once an electronic information system was in place, enabling the exchange of data between agencies. Additionally, comments were made that it should be accessible to all staff to make entries (Maytas is available on a read only basis for some personnel) and that systems should be tailored to the needs of different agencies (e.g. offender managers, for example, were said to require an overview of the ILP, rather than the detailed plan). Lastly, a couple of interviewees noted that there was still a requirement for electronic screening/assessment software in some prisons.

9.5 Awareness of OLASS and awareness of agencies

A fifth of interviewees (from the North West and South West regions) indicated various ways in which awareness of OLASS or the awareness of particular agencies within the OLASS partnership could be improved. To illustrate further, one interviewee suggested that the LSC needed to acquire a better understanding of the unique environment in which providers were working (i.e. prisons). An LSC representative felt that probation staff needed to recognise the impact that learning and skills could have on offending behaviour. In a prison context meanwhile, interviewees felt that prison staff needed to see education as a valued activity and not just time out of cells. Lastly, a Jobcentre Plus and a Connexions interviewee conceded that there needed to be greater awareness of OLASS amongst their staff and their specific roles in its operation. Thus, there is still a sense that staff within the agencies involved in the OLASS framework are not necessarily fully committed or aware of the principles of the new service. It is therefore important that a clear and coherent message is relayed to all contributors and that time is given for agencies to acclimatise to new environments or new approaches.

9.6 Funding

Requests for funding were made by 10 interviewees - where specified, they referred to additional funding for IAG; to assist the learning of young offenders through one to one support; for Connexions; and capital funding to maintain equipment and extend the provision on offer in prisons.

9.7 Integration

Eight interviewees chose to nominate greater integration and coordination of services as an area for development. This was seen as necessary in order to avoid duplication of effort and ensure a seamless service for offenders. To achieve this, interviewees recommended the mapping of services offered by different agencies, followed by the clarification of services roles and responsibilities.

9.8 Partnership

Whilst OLASS was generally felt to have brought about greater partnership working between the key agencies (as noted in Chapter 8), interviewees maintained that there will still room for improvement. They highlighted strengthening partnerships with voluntary agencies; ensuring regular meetings between LSC, the provider and prisons (soon to be reduced in frequency in one prison); maintaining support from the local LSC (rather than regional) and that prisons should recognise that they are now working in partnership with the provider (according to a provider representative).

9.9 Summary

Interviewees proposed several ways in which OLASS could benefit from further development or improvement. Most often mentioned (by around 60 per cent of interviewees) were developments to the provision available to offenders, especially a greater focus on employability, vocational courses and establishing links with local employers. Similar numbers of interviewees highlighted improvements in relation to the OLASS contract, namely, more attention given to community provision, stronger contract management by the LSC and clarification of different agencies roles and remits in relation to OLASS. The collection and transfer of data was another aspect pinpointed for development – specifically mentioned was the collection of more comprehensive data on offenders (to assist planning and performance monitoring) and IT systems for enabling the exchange of data between agencies. Other nominations for development included: further integration of services (to prevent duplication), additional funding (for IAG, Connexions, capital equipment and provision in the community), greater partnership working between OLASS agencies and raising the profile of OLASS generally.

Table 9.1 provides a summary of the suggestions for improvements described in this chapter.

Table 9.1 Interviewees suggestions for developing and improving OLASS

Area for development	Suggestions for improvement
PROVISION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of the vocational curriculum to increase employability • Links with employers/tailor provision to local employment gaps • Continuity of provision across prisons • Support for offenders moving into mainstream • Extend progression opportunities (beyond level 2 qualifications) • More flexible and tailored provision • Recognition of soft skills • More provision/extend to other providers
CONTRACT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify roles/remits • Clarify accountabilities • Change the model of delivery • Give HoLS more control • Stronger contract management by regional boards and LSC (more assertive with providers) • Develop the community aspect of the contract • Link the OLJ to the contract • Be specific about arrangements for staff cover in contract
DATA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More comprehensive data collection on offenders (e.g. ethnicity) to enable performance monitoring by LSC/ to assist planning • Recording of in and out of scope activity • Better transfer of data (ILPs) • Ensure data transfer is consider part of workforce role and remit
IT SYSTEMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IT system for transferring • Appropriate for probation staff (summaries of ILPs preferred) • A system that all staff can have access to • Electronic screening software/assessment
PROFILE/AWARENESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raised awareness of learning and skills for offenders amongst probation, Jobcentre Plus staff and prison staff (not just time out of cells) • Raised LSC awareness of LSC of prison environment • Raise profile of connexions in the community
INCREASE FUNDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For IAG • For Connexions • For equipment (to maintain and extend provision) • For community provision
INTEGRATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better integration/coordination to avoid duplication of services
PARTNERSHIPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between LSC, provider and HoLS/prison • With voluntary agencies • Local LSC support (rather than regional)

10 Conclusion

The purpose of this final report was to establish the overall impact of OLASS one year on from its initial launch. Each chapter has examined a different dimension of OLASS, ranging from assessment to the integration of services. This final section seeks to collate interviewees' comments to reach a conclusion regarding the impact of OLASS. Secondly, it highlights some of the key factors contributing to the success of OLASS, alongside some of the reported barriers.

10.1 Assessing the overall impact of OLASS

The table below brings together interviewee responses when asked to rate the impact of OLASS on specific areas.

Table 10.1 The impact of OLASS

	Interviewees ratings n=51		
	Some or much improved	No change/Less effective	Unable to comment
Assessment	28 (55%)	15 (29%)	8 (16%)
Monitoring	30 (59%)	17 (33%)	4 (8%)
IAG	29 (55%)	16 (31%)	7 (14%)
Provision in custody	26 (51%)	6 (12%)	19 (37%)
Provision in community	16 (31%)	18 (35%)	17 (33%)
Service integration	29 (57%)	17 (33%)	5 (10%)

The table shows that in nearly all areas (with the exception of provision in the community), OLASS was considered to have brought about some or much improvement by over half of interviewees. In addition, when given the chance to nominate freely the main impact of OLASS, the majority of interviewees (41 out of 51) described the main impact in positive terms, lending further evidence to its effects. At the same time, for five out of the six areas, around a third of interviewees registered a 'no change' or 'less effective' rating (of these, most reported a 'no change', rather than a decline in standards).

10.2 Key factors affecting the impact of OLASS

When asked to provide reasons for the ratings, interviewees pinpointed a number of factors which had either facilitated or hindered the successful implementation of OLASS. The most salient factors are presented below:

The approach of the provider

Very often, the successes of OLASS were found where providers were judged to be offering good quality provision, with suitably trained staff and opportunities for professional development. The involvement of new mainstream providers, with more systematic and standardised procedures (e.g. around assessment) meant that a more professional service was being received. In addition, positive impacts seemed more likely where efforts had been made to nurture good working relationships and effective communication between partners. Where this had not been achieved, discontentment amongst interviewees was apparent and work was more fragmented.

- Testimonies from the three regions suggest that appointing the right provider (in terms of expertise, attitude, willingness to work in partnership) is a critical factor in effectiveness.

Availability of a data transfer system

One of the significant limiting factors affecting the successful implementation of OLASS was the absence of an IT system to facilitate data recording and transfer. However, it is understood that steps are now being taken to ensure the availability and operation of Maytas.

- With this important mechanism in place, it was felt that there will be a much greater chance that information about an offender will be recorded, monitored and made available to different agencies throughout the criminal justice system.

A focus on community provision

Some interviewees contended that community provision had not received the same level of attention as custody based services within OLASS. They highlighted, for example, a perceived reduction in funding and a failure to extend existing contracts. Thus, compared to custody based provision, a greater proportion of interviewees assigned a 'no change/less effective' rating in summing up the progress of community provision. Similar concerns were articulated in relation to provision for young offenders, namely that there needs to be greater specification of the provision available in the youth sector.

- In moving forward, therefore, interviews advised that OLASS direct more attention towards provision in the community and for young offenders to address a perceived imbalance.

Multi-agency collaboration

The structure of OLASS requires that different and diverse agencies come together to offer a seamless service to offenders. This collaborative way of working however, can pose certain challenges. It was implied by interviewees that the various partners were not always clear about their specific role within OLASS, nor were they fully aware about the contribution and work of other agencies. New contracts were also bringing agencies into environments they were unfamiliar with e.g. Connexions staff working in prisons. Uncertainty about roles, remits and problems working in new territories was said to adversely affect working relationships.

- Hence, to ensure that relations between partners remain harmonious and productive, it was recommended that contracts/OLASS documentation should be specific about the roles, remits and expectations of the key partners (e.g. in relation to data recording, staff cover, etc).
- In addition, partners of OLASS need to invest time in learning about the work, roles and cultures of each other's organisation. For example, staff new to prisons were felt to benefit from induction and support to acclimatise to a more unusual working environment.

Continued development of the provision

Strengthening the connection between education and employment emerged as a key area for development in interviewees' aspirations for the future. Whilst some progress had been made, there was a feeling that more vocational provision could be offered and closer links made with employers. Extension of the curriculum was said by some interviewees to be restricted by a lack of capital funding to maintain and purchase workshop equipment.

- In order meet the desire to increase the vocational content of provision, steps may need to be taken to ensure the availability of funding and greater engagement of employers.
- A specific development for community provision, suggested by interviewees, was to ensure opportunities were geared more towards the needs of offenders. In particular, flexible start times and support to help them progress into mainstream provision were mentioned.

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Appendix 1

North East regional profile

The Model
<p>The North East region comprises of County Durham, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear and Teesside criminal justice areas. The region adopted a geographic model, including two providers, one with a remit for provision in the Teesside area, and another contractor responsible for delivery in the remaining areas.</p>
Successes
<p>A number of successes were cited by interviewees in the region, they included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the introduction of professional systematic and effective assessments • monitoring information more systematically recorded as well as an increase in the production and quality of ILPs (including the use of SMART targets) • increase in IAG provision • improvement in the overall quality of service - evident in inspection reports • expansion of the vocational curriculum in some establishments. • greater partnership working including closer working with the LSC and employers and increased communication between key partner staff • improvements in the integration of services (particularly at a strategic level and amongst key partners across the region).
Challenges
<p>The key challenges included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maytas was not yet operational therefore the transfer of information (particularly between custody and community) was felt to be limited • lack of awareness amongst key partners (e.g. what Maytas is for, which services they should be passing records on to etc). • lack of funding to extend provision in the community • insufficient funds for materials and equipment in custody.
Key success factors
<p>The following factors were cited as facilitating the implementation of OLASS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contractors were felt to have brought increased rigor and higher standards to the delivery of services for offenders • the implementation of management structures to support and coordinate staff had been effective • there had been an increase in staff to extend IAG provision in establishments as well as an increase in administrative staff to support the recording and transference of learner information • the introduction of training for new and existing staff (particularly in relation to assessment, monitoring and IAG) had led to improvements in standards • greater integration and communication of key partners had been achieved through the North East OLASS board and employer engagement group.

Areas for development

Interviewees identified the following areas for development:

- Maytas to become fully operational throughout the region
- cascading of training to use management information systems effectively
- development of community provision including access to alternative funding streams
- access to funding for materials and equipment in order to maintain and extend vocational provision and ICT facilities in custody
- increased partnership working – including building further links with employers and voluntary agencies
- greater coordination and rationalisation of provision (ensuring there is no competition and unnecessary duplication of work).

North West regional profile

The Model
The North West region adopted a geographical model for the implementation of OLASS based on criminal justice areas, with one contractor responsible for delivery to prisons and probation in each area.
Successes
<p>The extent to which the implementation of OLASS had been successful was said to depend largely on the experience of the provider and contractual arrangements with the provider (e.g. regarding data collection, replacement of staff absences etc.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements were experienced where providers had offered professional development and training opportunities in order to develop and integrate the workforce. • Improvements had also been experienced in some community settings because assessments and IAG were now being delivered by qualified tutors with educational expertise and backgrounds. Previously this task had been undertaken by probation officers, for whom education and learning was only a part of their remit. • In a number of cases having a lead provider in an area had improved the consistency and standardisation of the service delivered across the settings. • OLASS and the OLJ was felt to have brought a focus on key areas of offender learning in some instances (e.g. curriculum planning and employability agenda), which was gradually leading to more structure and rigor in procedures and delivery. Also, OLASS was felt to have brought a greater awareness of offender needs.
Challenges
<p>Interviewees highlighted the following challenges during the first year of OLASS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maytas was not yet operational so there was still poor transfer of information between custody and community. • Some areas of the probation service were experiencing a loss of funding since OLASS and this had resulted in a reduced IAG service in a number of instances and extended waiting lists. • The data collected remained inadequate for many different needs. • Lack of specification for the youth sector in the OLJ and OLASS.
Key success factors
<p>The following factors were cited as facilitating the implementation of OLASS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key partner meetings/regional board meetings • Employer Engagement group – to work on the employability agenda and try and engage and liaise with employers. • Monthly meetings between provider, establishment (probation or custody) and LSC

Areas for development

Interviewees highlighted the following as areas for development:

- ROM and LSC joint commissioning role – in order for this to work there needs to be structures in place for greater feedback from prisons and probation to the ROM about the progress being made.
- Transfer of information
- Training needs met with appropriate provision
- Specification of OLASS requirements and implementation specific to the Youth sector and community provision
- An IT system capable of collecting data relevant to different parties needs

South West regional profile

The Model
<p>OLASS delivery in the South West region was characterised by a unitised model, with four different contractors being responsible for delivering five individual units, four of which were universal to all the prisons. These units covered: initial assessment, screening, diagnostics, development of ILPs, IAG, vocational and skills for life, social and life skills and the development of e-learning systems. (The final unit comprised provision in a specialist unit within an individual prison).</p>
Successes
<p>Representatives of different agencies expressed a range of views on the perceived success of the OLASS and the model adopted in the South West. Within this, several successes were identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The model of unitised delivery allowed teachers/tutors to have the opportunity to focus on delivering the curriculum components, whilst the data/information element had become the responsibility of another provider. • Within educational delivery itself, distributing curriculum content across providers could mean that the most appropriate provider was contracted to deliver the elements that they were most qualified and equipped to offer. • Screening, assessments and diagnostics were being carried out, IAG was being delivered and ILPs and ILRs were being created. Systems were being developed for the transfer of this information.
Challenges
<p>Interviewees described the following challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data recording and transfer was regarded as a challenging area. Problems were noted regarding the difficulties that the provider had faced in installing and establishing the necessary systems and infrastructure. Access to data, and training issues were also noted. • Some interviewees highlighted the difficulties arising from multiple providers operating in the same establishment in relation to staffing flexibility. The delivery of different units by different providers was seen to mean that resources could not be interchanged, so that, for example, the absence of a tutor delivering education in one unit, could not be covered by another tutor employed by a different provider.
Key success factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships between key partners were said to have improved through OLASS and the unitised model of delivery as a result of the increased opportunities for communication and dialogue. (At the same time, it was also suggested that communication difficulties were apparent in this region, and that at times, relationships were not totally harmonious).

- The model was seen to have provided a unifying focus and common frames of reference for different parties to work towards the pursuit of a seamless service.

Areas for development

The following were noted as areas for further development:

- Improved data transfer and exchange.
- Development of interaction and communication between key partners.
- Improvement in the range and quality of provision in some units, with an increased focus on vocational and employment-orientated provision.
- Increased involvement of community-based providers and improved links with, and engagement of mainstream educational institutions.

Appendix 2

The offenders' viewpoint

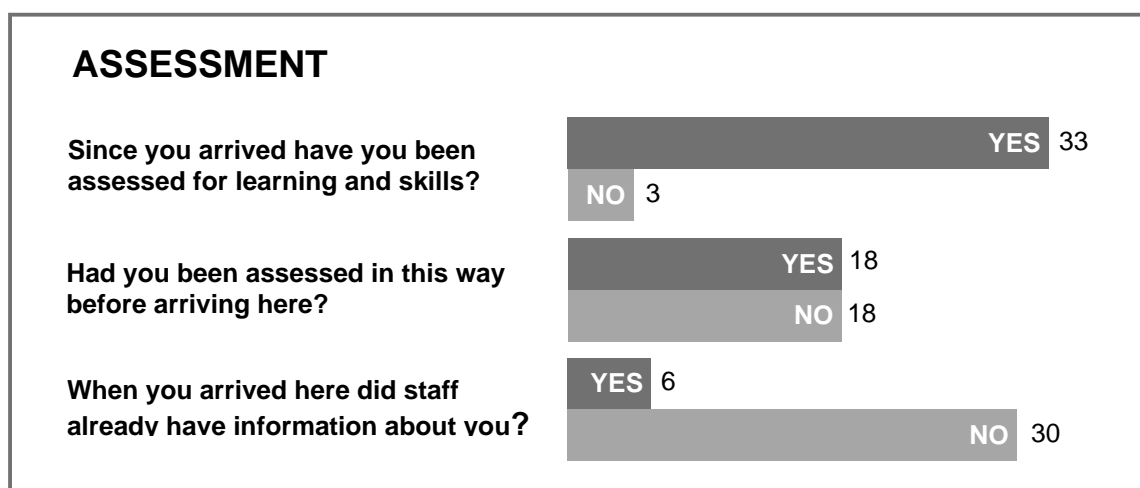
Introduction

In order to capture the offenders' experience of OLASS a short questionnaire was administered to 36 offenders during case study visits (22 offenders in custody (including 13 from YOIs) and 14 serving sentences in the community). Of the 36 offenders, 30 were male and 6 female. The questionnaire comprised a mixture of open and closed questions. Researchers read through the questions and recorded on paper the offenders' verbal responses.

This strand of the evaluation sought to collect offenders' views on:

- the assessment process
- individual learning plans
- information, advice and guidance
- the courses and training available to them.

1 The assessment process



1.1 Assessments undertaken

Offenders were asked whether they had been assessed for their learning needs. Thirty-three offenders noted that they had been assessed whilst three said that they had not. Most interviewees asserted that they had undertaken numeracy and literacy assessments. These were generally said to have been computer-based assessments, lasting between 30 minutes to a couple of hours. Most interviewees suggested that assessments took place early on in their sentence

(custody or probation), although several noted that they had just been assessed, five months into a custodial sentence. In one establishment, it was noted that after induction, offenders had a ‘mock’ assessment to get them used to the process, followed by the real assessment so that a genuine mapping of their abilities could be undertaken. Computer-based assessment was said to be useful (in several cases) as it provided offenders with immediate feedback on where they were going wrong.

1.2 Prior assessments

Half the sample indicated that they had completed similar assessments in the past. These assessments were said to have taken place in previous YOIs and other prison establishments (two noted this had taken place in prison six and 20 years ago). Several suggested that they had undertaken assessments prior to starting sentences, with agencies such as Connexions and Learn Direct. The transfer of offender information between agencies is a key concern of the new OLASS service. Of the 18 offender who said that they had been assessed before, six noted (or at least were aware) that the information had been transferred.

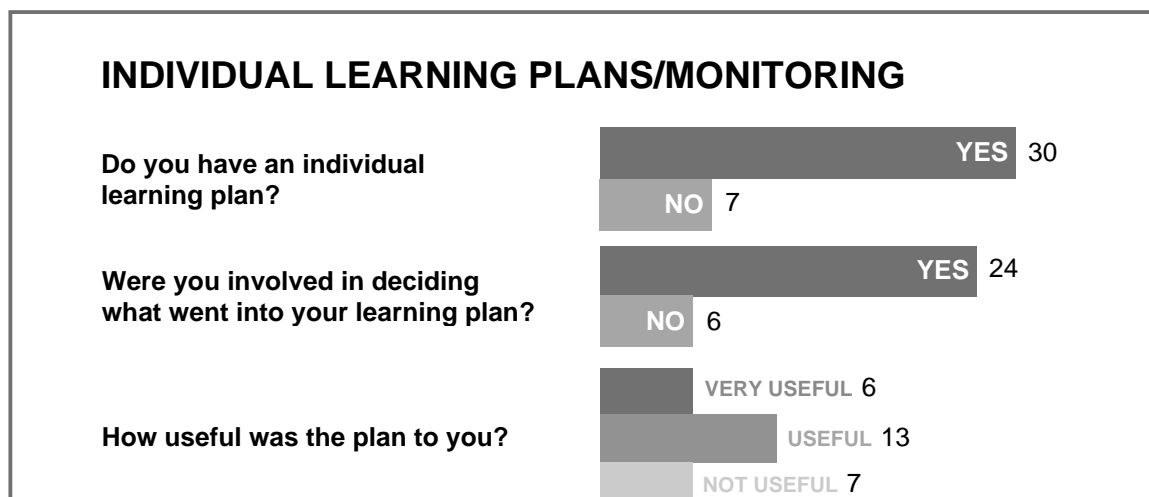
1.3 Improvements to the assessment process

Eleven interviewees contended that improvements could be made to the assessment process.

Suggestions included:

- better timing of the assessments so that they occurred as close to arrival as possible, facilitating earlier entry to courses
- one offender noted that additional help was required with the assessment, whilst another suggested that the level was too low, feeling that it was ‘patronising’
- one other interviewee suggested that the assessment had led to him/her having been allocated an unsuitable/inappropriate course.

2 Individual learning plans



2.1 Creation of individual learning plans

Thirty interviewees noted that they had an ILP, seven said that they did not (or were not aware of having one). Most interviewees commented that their ILP was drawn up following the initial assessment which took place either on arrival into prison/probation or on arrival to the education department of the prison. Several noted that there had been considerable delay (up to five months) in getting into education.

In total, 24 interviewees stated that they had been involved in the deciding the ILPs content, six said that they had not. In addition, 5 were uncertain, could not remember, or had not yet had an ILP developed.

2.2 Usefulness of the ILP

Six interviewees noted that the ILP was very useful, 13 said it was useful, whilst seven said it was not useful. A further eight interviewees were unable comment. ILPs were seen as being useful because they facilitated access to courses as well as highlighting areas for development. Several offenders noted that it was useful having a written document containing targets and goals to aspire to, giving them focus and direction in their education. Monitoring of progress and achievements was facilitated by this plan.

Those who suggested that the ILP had not been very useful to them generally were not aware that they had such a plan. Several others, however, noted that having a written document did not mean anything to them.

2.3 Improvements to the ILP

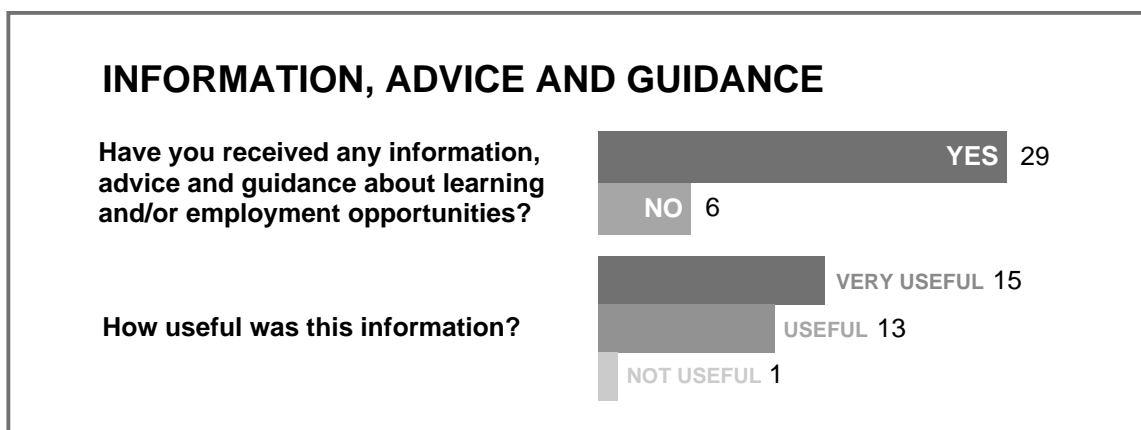
The vast majority of offenders (28) did not suggest that improvements were necessary and that the ILP was adequate as it was. The one interviewee who did make a suggestion, noted that targets contained in the plan should be linked to rewards/incentives within the establishment, such as earning more money for the canteen. The remaining interviewees were unable to comment (because they stated that ILPs had not yet been drawn up).

2.4 Review of progress through ILP discussions

Twenty-five interviewees commented that their progress in relation to the content of their ILP was subject to review, whilst six said that this was not the case. The frequency of reviews reportedly varied, from daily discussions, to termly reviews. In addition, it was suggested that a review would take place at appropriate stages, such as the completion of a full course or an individual element or stage of a course.

Course tutors were identified as being the key individuals responsible for reviewing progress, although it was suggested that Personal Officers could also have some interest and input into this process.

3 Information, advice and guidance



3.1 IAG received

Twenty-nine out of the 36 respondents reported that, since the start of OLASS (August 2005), they had received some information and advice about learning or employment opportunities.

Those identified as being key players in delivering IAG, included tutors/education department staff, Prison Officers, IAG workers, staff from Prison Service Plus, the Probation Service and Connexions. Other offenders and information within the prison, such as notice boards were also cited as sources of information, advice and guidance. Seven offenders mentioned receiving IAG from multiple sources.

IAG appears to have been delivered on arrival at the establishment during the initial induction, and/or on arrival into the education department. Several noted that there was a more regular pattern to IAG delivery, taking place on a weekly basis, or at monthly detention training order (DTO) meetings. One interviewee suggested that IAG was scheduled to occur six weeks prior to release.

The main thrust of the IAG delivered appeared to focus on the training and educational opportunities available either whilst still in custody or in the community. Information on college courses and other progression routes were available. Furthermore, the qualifications open to offenders, and their use in securing future employment were key aspects of this IAG. Practical advice was seen as being of particular importance – for example, one offender was given advice from an IAG worker on how to obtain a Construction Skills Certification Scheme card, so that prospective employers would be easily

aware of his skills and abilities. Offenders' employability was boosted by available IAG, such as through the development of interpersonal skills, and self-presentation techniques. IAG also sought to meet other needs of offenders, such as housing and health related issues.

3.2 Usefulness of IAG

The IAG received was generally seen to have been beneficial to the offenders, with 27 asserting that it had been 'useful' (12) or 'very useful' (15). Only one offender had not found IAG useful, largely because of a mismatch of required information (housing-related) and the advice available (employment orientated). One offender suggested that the issues and themes discussed at DTO meetings could become incorporated into his/her ILP, as was also the case for Connexions meetings.

3.3 Improvements to the services delivering IAG

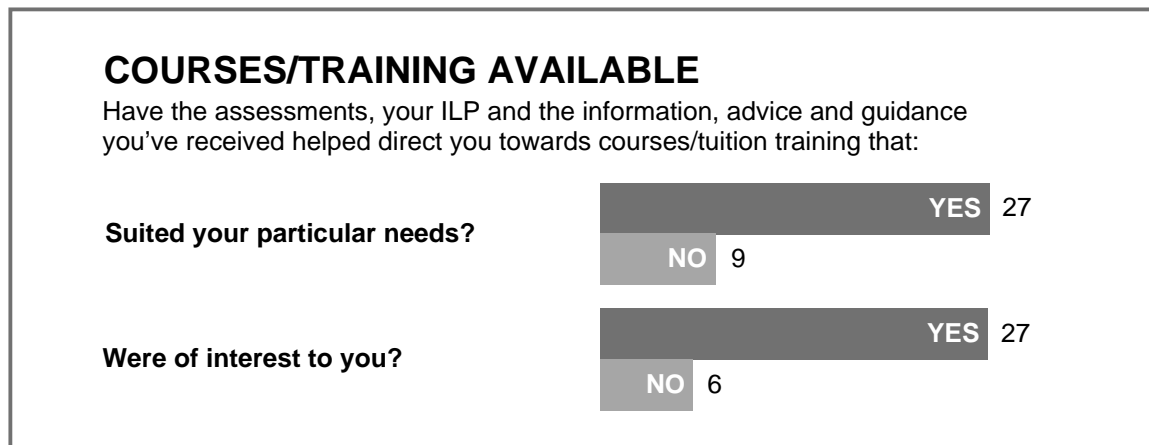
Twelve interviewees suggested that some improvements could be made to the services delivering IAG.

These included:

- better advertising of the courses available
- increased attention to meeting specific progression routes (e.g. to become a drugs counsellor).
- more resources in a probation office, in the form of additional computers, was also seen as a way of improving access to information.

Offenders were asked specifically whether there was any additional IAG that they would like to receive. Their responses largely revolved around having knowledge of the courses available to them in other prisons/ institutions. Several also spoke of particular subject areas that they were interested in but were not currently catered for; Driving Theory Test was seen as being particularly important (driving without a licence was one of the reasons why several of the offenders were currently in prison). It was also suggested that the amount of money paid to offenders for attending education should be made clearer.

4 Courses and training available



4.1 The impact of assessments, ILPs and IAG

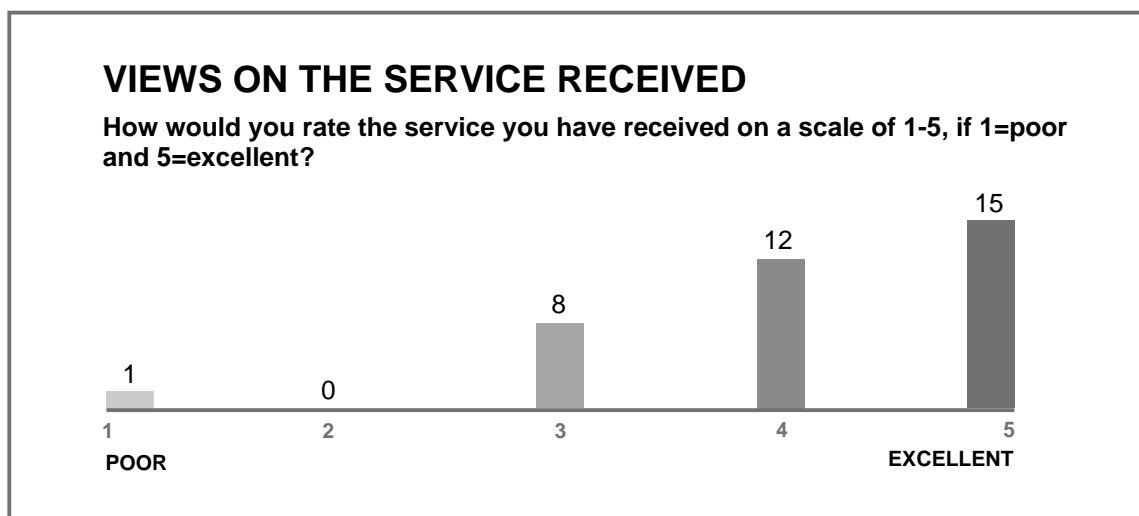
27 out of the 36 interviewees commented that the assessments they had undertaken, the development of an ILP and the receipt of information, advice and guidance had contributed to directing them towards courses and training that were of interest to them and that suited their needs.

4.2 Availability of courses and training

Offenders were asked whether they were any particular courses or training that they would like to undertake, that they had not been able to do so. Half the interviewees (18) indicated that this was in fact the case. Vocational courses were most frequently cited as those which offenders found unavailable or inaccessible. Several noted that they were on waiting lists for painting and decorating courses for example. Other trades that were mentioned included bricklaying, plastering, electrical and plastering (including dry-lining). Several noted some academic courses, such as psychology and modern languages, whilst driving theory test was also mentioned as being lacking in particular establishments. Hence, waiting lists and the unavailability of courses was seen to be impacting on offenders learning choices. One interviewee suggested that provision available was too heavily centred on what the establishment provided, rather than what the learners wanted.

It must be noted that most of these individuals still felt that the service had had an overall positive impact on them, so the unavailability of certain courses did not necessarily present a wholly negative situation.

4.3 Overall views on the service received



At the end of the interview, offenders were asked to assign an overall rating of the service they had received in terms of their education and training.

It is promising that despite some of the issues raised above, the majority rated the service as ‘excellent’. Reasons for this included the quality of service they had received from staff – those providing IAG services and those offering provision. The availability of ‘proper’ college tutors was seen to lend quality and status to the provision on offer to offenders. In addition, the quality of courses was also seen to be good, in terms of the academic opportunities – whether basic skills or GCSE and above, or vocational training – on offer. Preparing offenders to move on to positive progression routes was also seen to have been an outcome of this service. Those interviewees offering lower ratings did so as a result of dissatisfaction with their perceived lack of choice and autonomy over the provision available to them. In addition, it was felt that the courses available contained little leeway for effective differentiation, leaving the more academically able learners at a disadvantage.

5 Conclusion

Generally, offenders seemed very content with the service they received, with most assigning a positive rating. Several respondents mentioned a desire to undertake work related courses but were prevented from doing so due to long waiting lists or a lack of provision generally. Clearly, the value of vocational courses and training seemed to register quite strongly with offenders. The transfer of assessment data was another area which offenders indicated may not yet be functioning as effectively as possible.

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