

## Briefing Paper for the Education Select Committee on curtailment of contracts for the National Careers Service in-custody from 1 April 2018

This Committee briefing paper sets out key facts on the recent decision not to extend the contracts for in-custody National Careers Service from their current expiry date of 31 March 2018, to at least 30 September 2018. It considers the negative impact of the decision:

1. in creating a major 'void' of at least six months where prisoners will lose out on access to a specialist service provided by National Careers Service advisers that is over and above that provided by the Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) providers, DWP work coaches and Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs). Any new service commissioned directly by Prison Governors or Prison Group Directors will have to recruit, train and importantly, get security clearance (taking up to two months currently) for new staff;
2. that has resulted in wide-scale redundancies being issued to all the National Careers Service in-custody employees which means that the service is now losing valuable expertise and experience – that could take years to replace.

### Recommendations and actions

Education and Select Committee members are invited to:

- (i) Urgently review the rationale and impact of this decision that was provided to an estimated 65,000 prisoners in 2017/18 so far<sup>1</sup>
- (ii) Call for the reinstatement of the National Careers Service in-custody contracts to be extended until at least Autumn 2018 when Prison Governor procurement arrangements begin.

### Background

On 22nd December 2017, the Department for Education sent a letter to 7 prime contractors for the National Careers Service with responsibility for providing careers information, advice and guidance in prisons. The letter stated that in-custody service would **not be continued after 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018**. The decision came from Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPSS) in the Ministry of Justice (MoJ).<sup>2</sup> From September 2018, Prison Governors will be commissioning the in-custody careers information, advice and guidance, in line with the Dame Sally Coates 'Unlocking Potential'<sup>3</sup> recommendations. The decision will in effect mean **no specialist careers service delivery of over a minimum of 6-9 months for those in-custody** before any new service can be delivered.

#### 1. The reach of the National Careers Service in-custody

The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) annual report (SFA 2016/17)<sup>4</sup> states that: "In 2016/17, the National Careers Service provided expert careers information and advice to more than 696,000 customers to help them to enter or progress in learning and work. This included more than **100,000 interventions with adults in custody**." According to Careers England, the in-custody National Careers Service across England from April 2017 to December 2017 delivered:

- 65,160 prisoner interviews, resulting in a Skills Action Plan
- 51,080 follow-up interviews to review progress
- 26,300 subsequent interviews to monitor prisoners' progress towards achieving the targets in their plan.

Around 3,932 jobs were secured by prisoners on release or learning outcomes, which involved recruitment onto training courses on release. The National Careers Service contractors have also been responsible for the **Inspiration in Custody agenda October 2014 to resettlement prisons and extended to all prisons from April 2017**. DfE took the decision to also **end these contracts by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018**.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Figure provided by Careers England on behalf of NCS Primes

<sup>2</sup> HM Prison and Probation Service – Letter from Neil Richards to Prison Group Directors, dated 12<sup>th</sup> February 2018

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/524013/education-review-report.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/524013/education-review-report.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/skills-funding-agency-annual-report-and-accounts-2016-to-2017> p.20

<sup>5</sup> Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), Coventry

## 2. Inspection findings

Of the 41 HM Inspectorate of Prisons inspection reports published between September 2016 and August 2017<sup>6</sup>, 38 reports included grades for the quality of the careers information, advice and guidance service provided by the National Careers Service contractor.<sup>7</sup> A high proportion of these **(74%) were judged to be good or outstanding.**<sup>8</sup> Typical comments in inspection reports highlighted the benefit to prisoners of the **individual interviews with the specialist National Careers Service personal advisers** to enable them to formulate a skills action plan to aid their transition back into work and society in general, and to help plan the education and training activities they should undertake while in prison. Where the quality of the careers guidance provision was judged to **require improvement or to be inadequate**, this was often because the service was not promoted to enough prisoners by the prisons and the information on the skills action plan was not shared with the other partners by Heads of Learning in the prison.

## 3. The expertise of National Careers Service in-custody advisers

Just over 200 National Careers Service staff are currently employed – across 7 contractors with between 2 to 4 staff in each of the 117 prisons in England at an estimated cost of £12.9 million<sup>9</sup>. All these staff are specialist careers advisers who are **experienced, vetted and qualified** to a minimum of IAG level 4. Additional staff have joined the teams through the Inspiration in custody funding. **These staff have been given notice of redundancy from 31 March 2018.** This means that there will be **no impartial careers advice for In-Custody customers for best part of a year** during procurement and the subsequent recruitment, training and security clearance of new staff. The Heads of Learning and Skills are concerned that prisoners, **will not get the labour market information on jobs and training currently provided by National Careers Service staff and/or the specialist careers guidance** that currently enhances prisoners' preparation for future jobs and pre-release planning. The loss of specialist adviser expertise to support the prisons through their education and training programmes is significant.

## 4. Commentary

In her view of education in prisons, Unlocking Potential<sup>10</sup> (May 2016, pp3-4) Dame Sally Coates outlined her holistic vision for prison education. It includes:

- **advice and guidance** that ensures individuals make informed choices about education and future employment and career options; and
- **'through the gate' support** so that individuals can continue to progress through education, training and employment on release, and therefore avoid reoffending.

## Cost benefit returns of the National Careers Service in-custody service

Research has shown that there is a statistical correlation between ex-offenders who are subsequently employed after being released from custody are less likely to offend than their counterparts who do not gain employment. (MoJ, 2013)<sup>11</sup>. The average cost per day for the detention of a single prisoner is £143.67 (HoC, 2017).<sup>12</sup> A recent independent economic and productivity benefits report on the National Careers Service (Hughes & Hogg, 2018) in one region alone shows that through face-to-face interventions the fiscal benefits of the National Careers Service in-custody work linked to job outcomes outweighed the cost of the service by 1.8 times in 2015/16. In another region, since 1<sup>st</sup> July 2017, 222 prisoners found employment as a result of direct interventions. This represents a return of over £11.6 million over a 7-month period. If extrapolated this equates to almost £20 million per annum for this area alone.

<sup>6</sup> Prisons in England are subject to inspections by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons; inspection reports provide judgements on Safety; Respect; Purposeful Activity; and Resettlement. Ofsted provides the evidence for the section on Purposeful Activity and for Education, Training and Employment in the section on Resettlement, using Expectations, the criteria against which HMI Prisons inspects prisons.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/further-education-and-skills-inspections-and-outcomes-as-at-31-august-2017>

<sup>8</sup> 27 were judged to be good and one outstanding; 9 required improvement and one was judged to be inadequate.

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Justice Prisons: Vocational Guidance 125735 – 30<sup>th</sup> January 2018 *Note:* Expenditure in 2017-18 is not yet available (MoJ, 2018)

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/unlocking-potential-a-review-of-education-in-prison>

<sup>11</sup> MoJ (2013) Analysis of the impact of employment on re-offending following release from Custody, using Propensity Score Matching – March 2013.

<sup>12</sup> House of Commons Library - Briefing Paper – UK Prison Population Statistics –Number SN/SG/04334, 20 April 2017

The grounds for **urgently overturning the decision to curtail the contracts** are therefore:

- that the National Careers Service provides specialist advice and guidance that necessarily complements the services provided by DWP, OLASS, and the CRCs and **does not duplicate them**
- specialist IAG services by the **National Careers Service supports the vast majority of prisoners to identify realistic targets in a meaningful skills action plan** at the start of their sentence and review their progress mid-sentence and shortly before release (**from remand to through the gate support**)
- as shown in **HMIP inspection reports**, the skills action plans enable prisoners to plan their education and training activities while in custody to support employment or self-employment on release.
- the **expertise of the National Careers Service** is a critical service alongside the above mentioned services in prisons in that the guidance and skills action plans enable the prison and OLASS provider to plan the training and education that match prisoners' development needs and guides (inspires and motivates) the prisoners at the early stage of their sentence and mid-sentence to take up training and education so that they are able to benefit better for the services provided by the CRCs.
- the initial reoffending data for England (and Wales) since the Transforming Rehabilitation reforms show a 2.2% reduction from the rate in January to March 2011. However, the **frequency of re-offences per re-offender appears to be increasing**. Dame Sally Coates' indicated the CRCs, established in 2015, "are still in their early stages". In January 2018, the MoJ reported "two CRCs have met their frequency rate targets. The remaining 19 CRCs have not met their frequency rate targets."<sup>13</sup> Clearly, a **multi-agency partnership approach remains essential** until the new contracting, staff recruitment and vetting arrangements are in place.

### Voices of prisoners

*"I had the most help in 8 months than I'd had in 20 years and I got that help from the National Careers Service. Seek the help you need and pursue your effort for change, it's worth it. Don't fail yourselves. We all hope for a better tomorrow, but we first need to strive for today so get up and go, the National Careers Service is there for you."*

*"'Big star all around', 'advised in a way which I could understand in light of my ADHD, I am happy', 'found the staff very friendly and careful with their aims to help me with my time and how to use it to my best ability', 'She was outstanding in her work', 'the interview was friendly and helpful – in a private environment. I was immediately put at ease and grateful for the experience', 'thank you for everything you done for me today and please keep it up. Well done'"*

*"Prison is hard, difficult and unfair, things very rarely go the way you want them to. Healthcare, OMU, Probation and even your personal officer never gives you the help you need. After having bad experiences with all of these services N.C.S (National Careers Service) have gone above and beyond their normal duties even to say they've done the jobs that others are supposed to do. I think I can speak on behalf of a lot of others who have used N.C.S, by getting rid of this service would be devastating and cause a lot of stress and anxiety for those who need the help that N.C.S has to offer. It is nice to know that someone is giving you some hope that things might go your way. I do feel that if this service is no longer available to use it would be a big loss of a valuable service."*

**Dr Deirdre Hughes OBE**, Former UKCES Commissioner and Chair of the National Careers Council  
**16<sup>th</sup> February 2018**

dmh associates, 8 Rose Duryard, Lower Argyll Road, Exeter, EX4 4PB.

Email: [deirdre.hughes3@btinternet.com](mailto:deirdre.hughes3@btinternet.com)

Tel: 07533 545057

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/676711/crc-nps-final-interim-results-bulletin-jan18.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/676711/crc-nps-final-interim-results-bulletin-jan18.pdf)