PRISONERS' EDUCATION TRUST LECTURE
Thursday 21 April 2005

Thank you very much for inviting me to give this lecture tonight. I am an enormous admirer of the work of the Trust, not least because of its focus on the individual needs of individual prisoners. That is a theme I will be returning to in the course of this lecture. It is something that is, sadly if understandably, all too often missing from a prison system which is a mass provider of education and training for the 75,000 or so separate individuals that it holds.

We need to begin by recognising that the prison system in England and Wales is committed to providing education and training for prisoners in a way that has not always been the case, and is not the case in some other jurisdictions. An interesting story was told me when I first visited Parc prison in South Wales, one of the first generation of privately built and privately managed prisons. It was designed on a US model, to be the first 'keyless' prison. All doors were electronically operated, by a central computer: with, it was hoped, considerable savings in staff time and prisoner delays. Unfortunately, when it was full and it was time for all prisoners to move from the living units to workshops and classes, the entire system jammed. In the US prisons for which it was designed, prisoners did not move, or not in such numbers as to confuse a computer. Parc now has keys, and people who turn them.

The number of basic skill achievements in our prisons make them the largest adult literacy and numeracy provider in the country. We are looking at around 50,000 awards a year from entry level to level 2. The contracting out of education provision to further education colleges, and their inspection by the Adult Learning Inspectorate or Ofsted exactly as if they were colleges or schools, has undoubtedly improved quality. Moreover, funding has significantly increased (from £48 million in 1999 to £122 million in 2004); and, as importantly, is provided in a ring-fenced budget by the Department for Education and Skills, so that it cannot be raided by a governor looking for quick savings. Specialist Heads of Learning and Skills are responsible for the scope and quality of educational provisions in each prison; and, most recently, accountability will rest with local Learning and Skills Councils, as part of their general regional responsibility to meet education and training needs.

This has undoubtedly led to improvements in both the quantity and quality of prison education in the short time that I have been Chief Inspector. And it leads me to the first point I would like to make tonight: that in my experience, the quality and relevance of what happens in prisons is measurably improved once prisons are seen, and have to act, not as separate, hermetically sealed environments, but as part of society and community. Education and training, like the provision of healthcare and work on resettlement, has benefited hugely from the direct involvement of national and local agencies whose jobs and professional expertise are in education, health or work and pensions, rather than in criminal justice. Prisoners are people, and citizens, not simply a collection of offences. This is a two-way street: prisons need to learn that 'the way we have always done it' (where 'security' can sometimes be an excuse, not a reason, for not doing something) is not enough. But society also needs to recognise that it cannot shuffle off responsibility for people who are (often for a very short time) in prison; and indeed that that responsibility needs to be exercised upstream of prison, as well as during and afterwards. As is well-known, a large proportion (over 80% of male young offenders, for example) have been excluded from, or have simply not attended, school for much of their adolescence.

One of my constant themes as Chief Inspector has been that prisons need to be run, and to be accepted, as part of their communities: and the advances in education and training within prisons are a prime example of that. There are undoubtedly successes. Some involve joined-up thinking with the private sector: such as the Transco project, where young men are trained in prison, released on temporary licence to work and complete training and employed before they leave. Some involve developing good links between prisons and statutory and voluntary bodies in their region, like the North West prisons area strategy. Some involve individual attainment: like the 42 year old I saw recently in Wales, trained as a plumber in Swansea, sent to Prescoed open prison so he could complete training: who talked about his amazement when he looked at his first plumbing task and thought 'I did that!' – and who not only wanted to work as soon as he left prison, but also to train his 15 year old son, who would otherwise be unemployed on leaving school. Many times I have been in a prisoner's cell where the walls are plastered with the first certificates of attainment her or she has ever had.

It must therefore be dispiriting for many of those who have worked away within prisons and prison education, to hear the provision of prison education still being described as 'unacceptable' by the parliamentary select committee on education in its report last month. However, if we dig beneath that headline quote, we can draw out from that report, and our own inspection reports, examples both of what can be done and what needs to be done in order to progress further.

We can and must recognise the progress made, and the effort that has been needed to get us this far. But this has also made clear some of the barriers to further progress towards system that is genuinely geared, and resourced, to providing and following up opportunity, training and skills.

These are the barriers that will need to be breached by the new National Offender Management Service that is designed to offer a model of end-to-end case management of each individual offender in order to secure the best outcomes for each prisoner.

The first, and the most obdurate, is overcrowding. The prison population has, thank goodness, stabilised over the last year, thanks at least in part to the efforts of one of your Trustees, Lord Woolf, and the Chief Executive of NOMS, Martin Narey. But it has stabilised at a level of 24% overcrowding. I said in my last Annual Report that 'we have built overcrowding into the system'. I am confirmed in that belief by the first NOMS business plan, where one of its four targets for achieving decency in prisons is that public sector prisons should be 24% overcrowded and private sector prisons nearly 35% overcrowded. That is, of course, the current situation. That target may be both realistic and understandable, but it cannot be right.

The consequences of overcrowding, and its twin sister, population 'churn' (the movement of prisoners across the prison system) are damaging to all the Inspectorate's key criteria: safety, respect, purposeful activity and resettlement. They are undoubtedly a contributory factor to suicide and self-harm, and to undermining decency, when two prisoners share a tiny cell with an unscreened toilet where they may spend 23 hours a day. But their effect on education and training – and the follow-up to them – is equally corrosive.

Local prisons, in a pressurised system, effectively become transit camps. Neither staff nor prisoners know how long they will spend there before the next intake from courts requires an equal and opposite out-take. Many governors make valiant attempts to hold on to prisoners who are in mid-course, or mid-programme, but at the height of overcrowding it may not be possible even to receive back returned prisoners from court. The scale of the problem is evident, for example, at Pentonville, which receives and discharges around 3,000 prisoners a month. Realistically, local prisons do well if they manage to detoxify, keep safe and correctly assess the prisoners in their charge for sentence planning, education and drug treatment; and better if they manage to identify and deal with immediate practical resettlement needs at induction and follow them up before release. Some are creative about what they offer – for example modular courses, short drug treatment programmes. But most struggle with inadequate accommodation and increased populations. At Brixton, for example, two thirds of prisoners had no education or work at all; four out of the ten local prisons we inspected last year provided no opportunities for prisoners to acquire marketable skills. Indeed, one of the tasks I would set NOMS and its regional offender managers is to look again at the role of local prisons – many of them, in my experience, trying to hit too many targets and in some cases achieving none well enough.

We should, though, expect more – by definition – of our training prisons. Many of our training prisons have significantly increased in size over the last year or two. They have moved from relatively small to quite large establishments: such as Holme House, from 600 to 900, Highpoint from 600 to 800, Wayland from 450 to 700. Typically, a quick-build unit is put up (sometimes on what used to be the sports field). Some additional money is provided for regime activities – but it always arrives after the prisoners do (sometimes many months afterwards), and there is an even longer lead-in time to recruit (sometimes scarce) instructors and teachers. Moreover, it does not come with additional capital funding for additional workshops and classrooms. Other prisons, like Canterbury, have been re-roled from local to training prisons: but without providing the additional accommodation and facilities that title deserves. Time after time, therefore, we are recording training prisons where a third to a half of prisoners have no access to activities; or where the activities they can access lead to no qualifications or employable skills. Only 5 of the 18 training prisons we inspected last year had sufficient work and education for their populations.

Let me give you three recent examples, one from the private sector and one from the public sector. Prison A is a private sector prison, built as a local prison, but now operating as a training prison, with an increased population. In many ways, it is a good prison – good staff-prisoner relationships, a lot of time out of cell. But its change of role, and its 25% population increase, has not been accompanied by sufficient new resources or facilities. Prisoners, commendably, were out of their cells for most of the day – but to little purpose. At any one time, two-thirds of prisoners would be on the units, with little to occupy them. There were two excellent workshops, but they employed fewer than 40 prisoners. Many other prisoners were involved in education, at least part-time, but this did not satisfy their need for focused, skills-based work and training.

Prison B is a public sector prison, whose population has risen from 600 to 900. It operates partly as a local prison, partly as a training prison: but its increased population has been almost entirely the latter population. Again, it is a prison that is performing reasonably well on most of our tests. However, only 6)% of prisoners have access to activity, and of those a third are in domestic and cleaning jobs. Very few qualifications are on offer, and too little education. Senior managers are committed to education and keen to expand it – but they lack the space and facilities to do so.

Prison C, also a public sector prison, was criticised in a previous inspection for merely containing its prisoners, whom we described as 'bored, listless and under-employed'. Since then, it had expanded from 600 to 800 prisoners – but in spite of that, a re-inspection found that 95% of prisoners were in work, and most were being trained to accredited standards. Rigorous chasing of prisoners not in work has led to 95% take-up of activity places.

Prison C leads me on to the next barrier. Population pressure is a reality, and a damaging reality, in our prisons. But it is all too easy for that to become the excuse, rather than the reason, for deficits in education and training. Prisons, certainly if they are entitled training prisons, need to see themselves, and to be seen by regional and national managers, as places where education and training is central, not peripheral – where the regime is focused around genuinely purposeful activity, and not the other way round. In

one prison I inspected recently, the governor was complaining bitterly that his allocation for education was significantly less per prisoner than other neighbouring prisons. But less than two-thirds of his available activity spaces were being taken up: prisoners were either not got there at all, or up to three quarters of an hour late. The waste of resources, and more critically, the waste of opportunity, is one that we cannot afford to let prisons get away with.

This is often disguised by some creative accounting in relation to prisoners' time out of cell or access to activity. The Prison Service allows prisons to count 'cell cleaning' as purposeful activity – even where no cleaning could possibly take place, as there are no cleaning materials. We have come across prisons where returns are regularly made that add in 40 minutes per prisoner per day for this purpose. In others, statistical returns assume, in spite of all evidence to the contrary, that all prisoners are out at all the times that they would be if all were employed, or if association were never cancelled: one training prison recorded only 76 prisoners as unemployed at any time, while we counted up to 200 prisoners on the wings during the working day. Creative accounting in one small local prison resulted in a return that said all prisoners were out on average for 13 hours a day. This hardly seemed credible – and indeed was not. The prison held twice its certified normal accommodation number of prisoners. It was dividing total time out of cell figures by the number of prisoners it would have held if it were not overcrowded. This eagerness to hit acceptable targets is not helpful. It serves to disguise, rather than tackle, the real problems our prisons are facing.

We are also looking for real skills, not simply repetitive tasks, such as tea-bag packing. Though opportunities to acquire qualifications are increasing, our Adult Learning Inspectorate colleagues continually repeat the words 'lost opportunities' in their and our reports, as they see prisons failing to provide prisoners with the chance to gain or accredit employable skills. And there are still far too many prisons which effectively discourage education and training by paying pitifully little to prisoners who choose education, rather than repetitive contract workshops that gain revenue for the prison, rather than skills for the prisoner.

Private sector prisons have also suffered from contractual obligations that can provide perverse incentives. They have been contracted to provide a certain number of hours

out of cell each day, and fines if they do not. This undoubtedly means that prisoners in those prisons do not spend 23 hours a day behind their doors, as sometimes happens in the public sector. But it can also skew performance towards simply getting prisoners out of their cells, rather than doing anything creative with them. Managers and prisoners at one private prison we inspected were clear that they wanted less quantity of time out of cell – often aimless, or pointless, like putting handles on to plastic buckets – and more quality of training and education. Some private prisons have been able to negotiate this, through contract refresh procedures: but it is a warning that bare statistics always need to be examined for real outcomes.

That is why it is important that we inspect education in prisons jointly with the education inspectorates: the Adult Learning Inspectorate in adult prisons, and Ofsted for under-18s. By inspecting together, we are able to ensure that prison education and training benefits from the professional expertise and standards of the education inspectorates; but we are also able to gain a holistic picture of the whole prison environment, which is capable of either being a support, or a barrier, to education. I remember at one Young Offender Institution where young adults in particular were extremely reluctant to engage in education (that was 'for kids') and where these attitudes were accepted, and indeed colluded with, by staff. As a consequence, there was poor take-up of the inadequate number of education spaces available, and around a third of young people told us that they had less than four hours a day out of their cells.

It has been said by others before me that the Prison Service's focus on 'security, security, security', while understandable in the circumstances of some high profile escapes and disturbances, overtook every other objective for a time. I do not want to underplay the importance of security and safety: it is a prison's first duty to ensure the safety of society, staff and prisoners – and we should never take this for granted simply because we are now accustomed to thinking that prisons are, by and large, safe and controlled places. However, the Prison Service's statement of purpose goes wider than that. It commits prisons to helping reduce the risk of reoffending, and enabling prisoners to live 'lawful and useful' lives on release. The increased focus on education and resettlement has tried to implement that objective also.

But there are some parts of the prison system that have been slow to follow this lead. . In inspections last year, we found that much of the high security estate, the best resourced part of the Prison Service, which holds prisoners for many years and even decades, has given little priority to the provision of sufficient meaningful activity for men who may be held for years, or even decades. That part of the prison system is rightly heavily focused on security, and is to be congratulated for the fact that it now holds safely some of the most dangerous and challenging prisoners in the system: that has not always been the case. But that is not its only task. One high security prison we inspected had spaces for only half its prisoners, and managed to fill only a quarter of them. Even when it did, only one in ten of those in employment were able to gain qualifications, and basic skills education targets were not met. The great majority of those prisoners will at some point be released, and they will all be serving long sentences, during which most of them will experience significant periods when they are marking time between completing the programmes and interventions that will lead to decategorisation and eventual release. I was saddened to see, in a recent inspection, a life sentenced prisoner, who had spent 20 years in prison before being released on licence. He had deliberately set out to be recalled to prison because he could not cope with the outside world. He could neither read nor write.

At the other end of the scale, open prisons have traditionally been very relaxed places, under-populated and where largely compliant prisoners, grateful for home leave and eventually the ability to work outside the prison, have posed little difficulty for staff; and where staff have, in reality, often done little to engage with prisoners. Open prisons, in an overcrowded system, are now full, and full of prisoners who would not previously have been thought suitable for open conditions: some with short sentences, or early in sentence and barely detoxified. Many of them are unsuitable, either because of risk or length of sentence, for working outside the prison – but little else is available, except in some cases, drugs or absconding, both of which have risen. Our report on Wealstun open prison recorded that some prisoners' rooms had signs saying 'no salesmen'. Prisoners in some other open prisons have found the availability of drugs so problematic that they have fled back to the security of a closed prison. The response at first from open prisons was what I have called the 'British Rail excuse' (which should now of course be updated to the 'Southwest Trains' or 'Virgin Trains' excuse) – that they were receiving the 'wrong kind of prisoners'. Gradually, though, they are coming to accept

that they were in fact running the wrong sort of prison: that open prisons cannot just rely on the outside world to provide skills and resettlement opportunities, but need themselves to be places where prisoners can improve their education, life skills and job chances. And some are making that transition very effectively.

The idea of an education-centred prison is critically dependent, to borrow a previous election slogan, on 'integration, integration, integration'. Prisoners' educational needs, individually assessed, should be translated into individual learning plans which are wholly integrated into their sentence plans, and which are actually integrated into what then happens to them. Prisons are good at assessment; so good that they often do it over and over again (and can gain KPT points for doing so). Sentence plan targets have focused on timeliness, not quality: we have come across plans that look really good (sometimes because they have never been taken out of the drawer they were filed in) but may bear little resemblance to what the prisoner needs, or is getting. If those assessments and plans are not translated into action and outcome, it is almost worse than doing nothing. Many of those who end up in our prisons have lifelong experiences of being assessed by institutions. They are experienced consumers of professional attention and of structurally limited attention spans. They know when they are being used to meet organisational objectives; and each failure reinforces the last one.

At an institutional level, as I have said, education and training needs to be integrated into the core values of the whole prison. And that leads to another potential barrier. I have already said how valuable the involvement of the DfES and professional educators has been: bringing equivalence of expectations and standards as well as additional resources. But, as local Learning and Skills Councils take over the funding, planning and delivery of prison education, there is a considerable lack of clarity about accountability and responsibility. The modern prison governor is no longer the feudal baron of previous decades, able to run his or her prison as an autonomous unit; nor is the Prison Service any longer the monarch of all it surveys, in terms of being able to determine or directly control what goes on in prisons. Increasingly, governors are chief executives of a multi-disciplinary workforce, some accountable to outside organisations. But the relationship between Heads of Learning and Skills, LSCs, education managers and individual governors is already unclear; and will be further complicated with the advent of NOMS and its regional offender managers. There is a real danger that there will be confused

lines of accountability or demoralised staff. Project Rex, designed to transform workshop instructors into educators, has already gone badly wrong and been abandoned, having caused maximum confusion and with minimal gain. It is important that those now responsible for prison education and training both understand the prison environment and also give prisoners sufficient priority and funding.

As I have previously said, I very much welcome the fact that outside organisations provide services that treat prisoners as people (patients or learners) rather than offenders. That language can sound strange and challenging to a traditional prison setting. In one young offender institution we inspected recently, staff had clearly been reminded that young people should be called 'trainees'; time and again I spoke to staff who talked of 'inmates – I mean trainees' rather as though they were experiencing a computer malfunction. But it is equally important not to simply transfer prisoners from one box to another: to see them solely as 'learners' or potential employees. They are, above all, people. And many of them are people who have spent a great part of their lives avoiding, or being avoided by, education.

Inflexibility of approach is yet another barrier to getting people to the point of wanting to learn. Education often needs to be introduced by a side-wind: as part of something that is in itself attractive. That can be, and now more frequently is, in a work environment. Especially for young adults, this can seem much more 'grown-up' than a classroom setting – where maths is acquired in order to build a straight wall; or literacy in order to work a computer. Learning pods, in workshops, are increasing, and very welcome.

But we need to build flexibility into the system. We need to provide for the prisoner who has basic skills, and even educational qualifications, who needs to progress to A level, HND or degree level. Rather than crude, one size fits all, KPTs, I would like to see prisons being judged on added value: the difference they have been able to make to am individual prisoner between reception and discharge, through the individual learning plan.

We need also to provide 'soft' education for prisoners who are not yet ready for even work-based education, but for whom art, drama, music and so on can provide both

therapy and self worth. We also must allow prisoners to help each other: using skills and encouraging responsibility. These are areas where the Prisoners Education Trust, and other voluntary organisations, have done immensely valuable work. I am thinking, of course, of the vital grants you make, and courses you find, to enable prisoners to carry on their studies; I'm also thinking of men at Wormwood Scrubs embroidering fine cushions, or acting Shakespeare at Brixton; or prisoners teaching each other to read through the Toeby Toe scheme.

Those are essential and important activities; but the problem is that they are also dispensable. No governor is going to be chastised for not having a drama workshop; many governors, looking desperately for savings and space, will, even if reluctantly, find that the first targets are those which earn no KPTs, or do not contribute to the prison's place on the weighted scorecard. Moreover, the Prison Service as a whole has had no obligation to provide the infrastructure necessary to support some of these initiatives: I am thinking here particularly of the internet access which is now essential for many OU courses. Some prisons refuse even to allow teachers to bring in CD-ROMs.

Too often, in the current mass production line that is our prison system, we require prisoners to fit into the system, rather than constructing a pathway that can meet the assessed needs of the prisoner. I read recently that the person whom book publishers most look to, and fear, is the head of book buying at Tesco: her decisions can make or break a publication. There are of course some well crafted and popular books on sale there, and making them available in supermarkets will undoubtedly encourage reading by those who might hesitate to go into a bookshop. But imagine if that were all that got into print. Prison education has tended to go down that route of mass provision. That is not to discount the progress I have already paid tribute to, or the importance of key skills, which undoubtedly meet a deficit for a majority of prisoners. But it is to say that the fact that those activities round the edges are not measurable, or measured, does not mean that they are not important: both in themselves, and as a way of motivating and engaging those who have long been detached from education, and lack self-belief. Indeed the so-called 'soft' target of increasing self-esteem, without which nothing else will fall into place, is actually the hardest to achieve.

A formidable barrier is 'what happens next?' Prison is an interlude in lives that have often been chaotic, for people who have often been in practice excluded from society long before they were literally excluded from it in prison. Many prisoners have existed on the margins: without a stable home or family life, without accessing medical services, adrift from education or work. When I see young people in prison, I am often surprised, not that they are in prison, but that they have survived so far. It can, of course, disrupt those lives even further: breaking up such personal attachments as there are - not least by sending prisoners many miles away from home. It is a sobering statistic that in our annual digest of surveys of young prisoners, under 18, less than half said that it was easy for their families to visit; and a quarter of boys said they had never had a visit while in their current establishment.

At present, we have very imperfect mechanisms for ensuring that any good that has been done in prison is continued once someone leaves. I remember the Governor of Castington (in Northumberland) talking about young men whom he had released, for the first time 'laminated up to the eyeballs', but who he knew were going to one of the highest areas of male unemployment in the country, without any support or help.

It is well-known that the Youth Justice Board has significantly raised both the resources for, and the importance of, education and training for under-18s in our prisons: though the resources still fall far short of what it would cost for each young person if they were held elsewhere - the cost per place has doubled since 1997, but it is still only around a quarter of the cost of housing a child in a secure training centre or local authority secure facility.

The YJB has also put in place a joined-up system of case management, where a social worker from the Youth Offending Team is involved in drawing up and reviewing each child's training plan while in custody, and continuing to support the child in achieving this once released into the community. That is undoubtedly the best model we currently have. But the distance still to travel was evident when we and our Ofsted colleagues produced a report on girls in custody, drawing on the individual case histories of some of those troubled young women. We concluded:

> 'This review shows two things. The first is that the establishments in which they were held were still unable to provide sufficient quantity and quality of education, even though they had improved. The second is that this provision, even if inadequate, was still better than they had received before custody, or would be likely to receive on return to the community. Ill-equipped for their return to society, they were inadequately prepared or supported when they did so.'

Within the juvenile estate, things have improved since then: undoubtedly assisted by our and Ofsted's annual education inspection reports into juvenile establishments; as well as the joint inspections of Youth Offending Teams, which we participate in and the Probation Inspectorate leads. But that statement could stand for many of those, young and adult, men and women, in our prisons.

There are numerous examples of the failure to join up what happens in prison and what happens (or more often does not) outside. A young man leaving prison in November and wanting to continue or complete a course at a Further Education College may well find that no places are available, or that he needs to wait until a new course starts the following September. By then, motivation will have decreased and the temptation to go back to more familiar patterns of life greatly increased. The process of getting a grant, particularly given the nomadic lifestyles of some young people in particular, will be difficult.

The individual focused support that the hard-pressed probation service can offer to offenders who are not high risk is limited; and is non-existent for those over 21 and serving sentences of less than 12 months. There are mentoring schemes in some prisons – again almost entirely run and staffed by voluntary organisations – which aim to provide the one on one support that a prisoner is likely to need to grapple with bureaucracy and to overcome inevitable setbacks.

I see many prisoners who genuinely want things to be different once they leave prison, and who want to build on the skills they have acquired – indeed, in our surveys of young prisoners, nearly 90% of young men and women say that they want to stop offending. Some are confident they will be able to do so, and have family or other support; others

are much more doubtful. All, though, will experience difficulties and responsibilities that they have never had to face in the protected environment of a prison.

Resettlement, like education, is now much higher on the Prison Service's agenda than it used to be: thanks partly to a report from the Social Exclusion Unit, and a joint Prisons and Probation Inspectorate thematic report set in motion by my predecessor and released shortly after I became Chief Inspector. Those reports stressed the importance of 'through the gate' work, and in particular of prisoners having employment and housing on release. There is now a Prison Service Order on resettlement, and indeed a key performance target on employment – and there will shortly be one on housing.

That is welcome: but our reports still find a dislocated provision in many prisons, and between prisons and the community, particularly for the short-term offenders who make up the majority of the prison population; though there are exceptions which show that it can be done: like some of the excellent community links being identified at Holloway. But prisons, particularly local prisons, still have revolving doors – and indeed some staff and prisoners have grown to expect this. In one prison, the closest approximation to a 'normal' learning environment was to hear prisoners being told that they can carry on or complete a course 'next time' – almost 'see you next term'.

Targets in this area, as in others, can be a useful way of concentrating minds and signalling that something is a core activity: but here as elsewhere they do not always capture what is important, rather than what is easily measurable. A prison will score a whole point towards its employment KPT if a prisoner immediately goes into a job (any job); and half a point if he or she is given an appointment for a Jobcentre interview. I recently had a conversation with a very good resettlement team who were extremely dispirited. They tried to get prisoners into appropriate and sustainable jobs, which meant contacting employers and arranging for job interviews. Typically, this would take a number of days or even weeks after release. But this careful placement did not count towards the prison's measurable targets, whereas arranging a Jobcentre interview that a prisoner might or might not attend did.

There are some exemplary schemes, that reach into prisons and out into employment, and provide real training and skills. I have already mentioned the work of National Grid

Transco. It began with one scheme in Reading YOI, when Transco identified an unmet need in the local job market for fork-lift truck drivers. That then developed into much more intensive courses to train gas fitters and engineers, principally for Transco's largescale gas supply work. Young men are taught by Transco, to trade standards (in the process needing to demonstrate or acquire other educational skills). During sentence, they are released to complete their training on site, under temporary licence. Immediately on release, they are employed by Transco, at a salary that is a realistic alternative to reoffending. This scheme has now spread to other prisons; and I was recently at a seminar at which Transco were seeking to persuade other business leaders that it was in their business interests, as well as those of offenders, to provide similar opportunities and training. It was interesting to see business leaders adjusting their minds towards thinking of prisoners as a skills pool.

It is important not to overstate the effect of this. Necessarily, such schemes cherry-pick those who are able to complete demanding courses, who are motivated, and whose risk is low enough for them to be released on temporary licence. They will tend to be risk-averse: employers will quickly walk away if the failure rate is too high. But at least, if enough of the right cherries are being picked, they will offer a second chance to some prisoners, often a much better chance than anything that went before.

But there are other, less visible, schemes that deal with much more risky or less high flying prisoners. I have seen schemes, usually church-based, that offer help and support to sex offenders; and community chaplaincy initiatives to follow up prisoners in local church communities. Feltham had to turn away would-be mentors for its young men when it advertised for them. And there are many more organisations offering through the gate help and support at both local and regional level.

Crucially, all these interventions involve partnership with agencies, employers and citizens outside prison. Prisons, like many other statutory bodies, talk readily about 'partnership' and genuinely want it. But too often partnership means 'we decide, you do'. And too often partnership schemes are time-limited: usually as a result of short-term or uncertain funding, sometimes because the priorities of a prison, or an area, suddenly change. European Social Fund money has been critical in developing some innovative and important schemes; but it is no use if they then disappear once the grant ends. I

have seen too many pilot schemes that never get out of harbour, or 'seeding money' for projects where the crops fail for want of nurture. And I have enough experience of fund-raising in the voluntary sector to know the debilitating effect of constantly having to raise funds, rather than getting on with the work.

We need, at a systemic and consistent level, to have a whole menu of options, and a whole range of partners, that can meet the needs of particular prisoners. And we are talking about needing to be in it for the long haul. By the time many of the men and women I see are in prison, there is a huge amount of damage to be repaired. Crude figures about reoffending can disguise, rather than reveal, change and development: a lessening of offending or a gradual acquisition of skills and motivation. Of course, the work that any of us does needs to be evaluated: simply because something is done for the right motives does not mean that it is necessarily right for prisoners, who are a very vulnerable captive audience. But we do need to guard against the pressure for quick and measurable results: and the temptation that all governments have to dig thing up to see whether they are growing.

We now have an emerging National Offender Management Service, encompassing both prison and probation services. It is based upon two principles: that interventions and sentences should be based upon the assessed needs of each individual offender, rather than on what a service or institution is accustomed to providing; and that there should be case management of the offender that starts at the point of sentence and continues after release. Those seem to me to be at the heart of all that I have been saying tonight, and to be precisely what we should expect in an ideal prison system, geared towards rehabilitation. It has been described as a 'once in a generation opportunity'.

But we should be in no doubt that moving from what we have now towards that ideal is an extremely demanding task. It involves developing working practices between two organisations with entirely different cultures and structures. It involves equipping one of them, the Probation Service, with the resources and tools it needs to deal with those short-term offenders currently not covered by its statutory remit. It involves ensuring that the other, the overcrowded prison system, has the flexibility and resources both to provide the variety of interventions that prisoners need, and to get each prisoner to the right place where those needs can be met, and in the right order. It is a huge task of

structural re-engineering in systems that are already creaking under the weight of population pressure, often in unsuitable accommodation or facilities (memorably, for example, the prisoners who were rag-rolling medieval turret rooms in Lancaster Castle for their painting and decorating qualifications), which need also to maintain the fundamentals of safety and respect, and at a time when public spending is being reduced, rather than increased. The Youth Justice Board, which similarly tried to revolutionise the system for young offenders, began with the benefit of significant additional resources for young people: before, instead of, after and in custody.

Precisely because it is such an important and necessary change, it is important and necessary to get it right. There is considerable enthusiasm for the task, but almost an equal degree of concern about the process of getting there. My own view is that we need to proceed by stages and focus on outcomes. First, we must develop a robust system for managing offenders, using IT for more effective information exchange as well as the involvement of both prison and probation staff as keyworkers with all those in custody: remanded as well as sentenced prisoners. It would be a retrograde step, and one with very negative consequences, if prison staff became simply turnkeys, and probation staff and other professionals, such as education and medical staff, hi-jacked all the positive and proactive work. As I said before, prisons are holistic environments, and buy-in and support from residential staff is crucial. We have already seen, in some YOIs, prison staff being feeling disabled and undermined in establishments where social workers, child advocates, teachers and YOT workers appear to be driving all that is going on for children and young people - who in fact spend the greatest amount of time with prison officers on the landings.

Proper assessment and management systems will reveal what I believe will be very substantial gaps in provision, for individual prisoners and for groups of prisoners. One of those, which concerns us greatly, is the lack of proper provision for young adults of 18 to 21. They are among the most prolific offenders, with some of the highest levels of both need and potential for change. The reforms that have improved the custodial experience, and particularly the educational opportunities, for under 18s have barely touched them – as is evident every time we inspect a ‘split site’ holding both under and over 18s. In one, we recorded

> 'Vocational training for the juveniles was of a high standard. In contrast, the young adults had no access to vocational training that offered any form or accreditation or was relevant to their resettlement needs, apart from a recently-introduced catering NVQ. Many young adults were disappointed and resentful of the juveniles.'

But, as with individual prisoner assessments, mapping gaps is only of any use if they can be filled in. A focus on the needs of the 18-25 age group, with robust standards and ring-fenced funding, is much needed. And this can best be done in partnership with the other national and local departments and agencies that have responsibilities for this age group, or will benefit if they do not reoffend.

Finally, the establishment of NOMS throws into relief a final barrier – which is 'what about the staff'? We are rightly asking NOMS and the prison system to prioritise and provide the skills and training that prisoners need. Probation officers receive two years' training before qualifying. Prison staff get eight weeks in the public sector service. There is no mandatory training after that, except in control and restraint (apart from the roll-out of a specialist course for those working with children). Furthermore, we criticise prisons when prisoners carry out work but do not receive proper accreditation for the skills they develop. Yet, in the Prison Service, limitations on funding have meant the abandonment of proposals to offer more national vocational qualifications to prison officers to recognise *their* work skills. It will be difficult to put education and training at the heart of a 21st century prison service, if the rest of its body is not in tune with that objective. Prison officers who see their own experience and skills not being recognised or developed will be less likely to enthuse prisoners to develop theirs. That too is a task that NOMS must address if it is to create a joined-up service.

We often say to prisons, at the end of inspections, that the good news is that they have laboriously climbed a hill, but the bad news is that we are now showing them the mountain that now lies ahead. In terms of education in prisons, it is a mountain that, as the Select Committee said, can only be climbed if there is a central, over-arching strategy that prioritises and funds prisoners' education. That strategy needs to draw on and include all the accumulated experience of many of you in the room, including of course

the ground-breaking work of the Prisoners' Education Trust. It is worth ending with the Select Committee's own words:

> ' Prison education should be part of a wider approach to reduce recidivism through the rehabilitation of prisoners. [But it is] about more than just this. It is also important to deliver education in prisons because it is the right thing to do. Education as part of a broader approach to rehabilitation must consider the full range of needs of the prisoner and continue to support the prisoner on release. Prison education does not take place in isolation, and its purpose cannot be understood in isolation from these wider issues.'

The Prisoners' Education Trust has been seeking to do the right thing by prisoners for many years. I hope that it will long continue to do so, and that its objectives and values will be central to the way that the whole system seeks to operate.

Anne Owers CBE
HM Chief Inspector of Prisons