VISION FOR CHANGE

A guide to support individuals on completion of a sentence
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1. Introduction

What is the purpose of this Guide?

This Guide has been produced to assist practitioners working in mainstream information, advice and guidance (IAG) services in their work with clients who are ex-offenders. It may also be useful for information, advice and guidance practitioners supporting offenders.

It aims to equip advisers with the knowledge and skills to:

- understand the specific issues facing ex-offenders in relation to participation in learning and skills and employment;
- undertake initial assessments of client needs;
- support the client to make and act upon decisions in relation to learning and work;
- identify any wider needs that need to be addressed, and undertake effective signposting and referral to specialist sources of support as appropriate.

A companion Guide for clients has also been produced and will be available from www.advice-resources.co.uk in autumn 2007.

What is an ‘ex-offender’?

The term ex-offender refers to someone who has completed a sentence imposed by the courts. The sentence may have been served in prison, in the community, or a mixture of the two. On completion of his or her sentence, an ex-offender may be able to access mainstream public services.

The information in this guide may also be useful for information, advice and guidance professionals supporting offenders as they near the end of their sentence.

Potential recruits to some learning programmes and areas of employment are required to undergo Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks. These checks will disclose details of any criminal records incurred by the individual, not just convictions before the court. It is therefore possible that people who have not been convicted but have other criminal records, e.g. a police caution, may find themselves classified as ‘ex-offenders’ in specific contexts. Further guidance on this subject is included in Section 6 of the Guide.

What is IAG?

Information, advice and guidance (IAG) are terms over which many Guidance professionals have spent a great deal of time in the pursuit of clear definitions.
For the purpose of this document:

**Information is about:**
- learning and work opportunities;
- vacancies; voluntary opportunities; opportunities in self employment;
- qualifications and equivalence in the UK of qualifications gained overseas;
- routes to learning and work etc.

**Advice is about:**
- promoting the benefits to individuals of engaging in learning and work;
- raising awareness and motivation of users and potential users to access information on learning and work;
- enabling clients to understand the information in relation to their needs etc.

**Guidance is about:**
- helping clients to understand their own needs relating to learning and work;
- helping clients to set and review goals/objectives for learning and work;
- helping clients to produce learning and career action plans etc.

To deliver at each level you will need to have specific skills, knowledge and understanding. It is essential that you only deliver up to the level to which you are competent, and signpost or refer clients to further support as appropriate. For more details see:

- [www.lifelonglearning.co.uk](http://www.lifelonglearning.co.uk)
- [www.edexcel.org.uk/quals/nvq/adguid](http://www.edexcel.org.uk/quals/nvq/adguid)
- [http://www.nemocn.org.uk/Qualification%20units/Qualification_Units_IAG.html](http://www.nemocn.org.uk/Qualification%20units/Qualification_Units_IAG.html)

**What is included in the Guide?**

The *Guide* covers key topics and contains a range of resources including:

- background information on offender learning and skills and the issues facing ex-offenders in relation to learning and skills, work and wider needs;
- guidance on supporting clients into learning and skills, employment, and other activities that will develop their skills and employability;
- resources for advisers to use directly with clients covering a range of activities including needs assessment and action planning;
- contact details for organisations, networks and useful websites and publications, to enable advisers to refer clients on, access further information and develop their own skills and knowledge. Key contacts and references are listed throughout the *Guide*, and a national directory and list of references are included at the end.

**How to use the Guide**

The *Guide* includes clear sections on key topics. Either the whole *Guide* or simply the most relevant sections can be downloaded. The material is structured to enable you to find your way quickly to the information you need, with a list of topics covered at the beginning of
each section. Key contacts and further information are included as boxed text within each section, and shaded boxes guide you to relevant material in the toolkit.

A directory of national support agencies is included, but you need to be aware that there are likely to be other projects and agencies working locally that provide specialist services to ex-offenders. Space has been provided for individual advisers or provider organisations to develop your own tailored directory of local services.

Who produced the Guide?

This Guide has been produced by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) and Supporting Others through Volunteer Action (SOVA). NIACE is the national organisation for adult learning in England and Wales, and works to encourage more and different adults to engage in learning of all kinds. SOVA works to strengthen communities by involving local volunteers in promoting social exclusion and reducing crime. For further information please visit: www.niace.org.uk and www.sova.org.uk.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to staff at the following organisations who have contributed to the development of this Guide:

Apex Works  
Bradford College  
BSS / Careers Advice Service Leicester  
BSS / Careers Advice Service Manchester  
Careers West Yorkshire  
CK Careers  
Connexions Leicestershire  
Connexions Tyne and Wear  
Future Pathways  
HMP Wealstone  
Jobcentre Plus Leeds  
Leicester Probation Service  
Nottingham Probation Service  
nextstep Berkshire  
nextstep Black Country  
nextstep Bradford  
nextstep Leeds  
nextstep Leicestershire  
nextstep West Yorkshire  
Positive Steps Oldham
Issues for advisers working with this client group
2. Understanding your role

What this section covers:
- Why is effective IAG for this client group so important?
- How confident are you about working with ex-offenders?
- Checklist for IAG advisers

Why is effective IAG for this client group so important?

The offender population in England and Wales has been rising steadily and currently stands at over 80,000 offenders in prison and approximately 200,000 offenders supervised by the probation service each year in the community. One in three people re-offend within 48 hours of release from prison, and around two thirds re-offend within two years. Learning and skills and employment are not a panacea for re-offending, but evidence indicates that:

- learning and skills development is among the strategies that are effective in aiding reintegration into work, community and family life;

and

- where ex-offenders gain stable employment, or training with secured employment, the likelihood of their re-offending is reduced by two thirds.

Securing work and a regular income can help ex-offenders to establish stability in their housing and family situations, two significant elements in reducing re-offending. But ex-offenders face some of the highest levels of disadvantage and discrimination in the labour market.

By supporting clients into work, or into education and training that has real prospects of leading to work, IAG services can play a vital role in enabling individuals to break out of the personally and socially damaging cycle of offending behaviour. Currently, however, only 6% of discharged prisoners continue with education and training.

Research carried out by the Citizen’s Advice Bureau (2007) has highlighted the inadequacy of support to enable ex-offenders to deal successfully with the multiple problems that they face. It argues that there is an urgent need to improve advice on a range of resettlement issues for both offenders and ex-offenders.
How confident are you about working with ex-offenders?

You may be working with clients who are ex-offenders in any of a range of contexts: for example, as someone working on a telephone helpline at a college or other local provider; as at the Careers Advice Service; as a probation officer; or as a nextstep information, advice or guidance practitioner.

Research carried out by NIACE for the Learning and Skills Council (2007) into staff competence and capacity among IAG staff found that many providers feel that their staff are unprepared to meet the needs of offenders and ex-offenders, and need more support to develop their skills in this area. You may or may not have experience of working with this client group, and this is likely to affect how confident you feel in doing so.

Personal safety can be a major cause of anxiety, particularly if you have little or no experience of working with offenders or ex-offenders and are delivering IAG face to face. You may perceive clients to have a violent past, or to exhibit unpredictable behaviour linked to mental health difficulties, substance misuse, or frustration at their circumstances. Female advisers may feel particularly vulnerable. It is important to remember most convictions are not for violent or sexual crimes. However, you can legitimately refuse to work with a client if you feel threatened or intimidated.

The following checklist is designed to help you test your confidence in supporting this client group into learning and skills and employment. The questions relate to specific areas covered in this Guide, and will also help you and your service to identify areas for staff development. You can use this checklist to measure your own development: try doing it now, and then again in 6 months to see how your skills, knowledge and understanding have increased.

Using this guide as a resource for staff training within your organisation would be a great way to alert colleagues to some of the barriers and specific needs of the client group. For example, you could work through the guide section by section at team meetings. Or if you achieve mostly A’s on the checklist, you could become a champion for your organisation.

In the ‘Toolkit’

The checklist below is also included in the ‘Toolkit’ section of this guide.
## Checklist for IAG advisers

### Key

**A** I am confident about this and have established good practice.

**B** I haven’t done much on this yet, but I know what I need to do and how to go about it.

**C** I still need to do a lot of work on this.

### You and your client

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have the knowledge and skills to deliver effective IAG to clients who are ex-offenders, commensurate with my role.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am comfortable delivering IAG to people from this client group.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I understand why raising the level of participation in learning and skills and employment among this client group is an important policy issue.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I understand and can recognise the different barriers that my clients may face to engaging in learning and skills and employment.</td>
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### IAG issues and interventions

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<tr>
<td>I know how to identify and prioritise client need, and where to find up-to-date information about local organisations to which my clients can be referred for specialist support.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I maintain an up to date directory of national and local contacts and other resources to support my work with clients.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robust signposting and referral mechanisms are in place for clients.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am aware of the range of learning and skills and IAG that clients may have received during their sentence, and could use this knowledge to support my work with them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can give my clients accurate and current information about when spent and unspent convictions need to be disclosed in learning and work contexts, and about the circumstances under which they may be required to undergo CRB checks.</td>
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<td>I can advise my clients on the advantages and disadvantages of disclosing convictions in learning and work contexts, and provide guidance on the best ways of doing so.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I know where to signpost my clients for further information about disclosure and CRB checks.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I know what benefits and services my local Jobcentre Plus provides, including specialist provision for ex-offenders.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I understand how participation in learning and work can affect my clients’ benefits, and can advise them on where to obtain specific financial guidance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have access to a range of tools for supporting effective needs assessment and action planning, and can use them effectively with clients.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supporting clients into learning and skills and employment</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have the skills and knowledge to make accurate assessments of my clients’ learning and skills needs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can effectively match my clients’ needs to locally available learning and skills provision, including specialist provision.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am aware of the specialist techniques that are available to help develop clients’ motivation. I am either trained to use these techniques myself, or know where local provision exists to which clients who would benefit could be referred.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am aware of the various learning options that are available, and understand how different types of provision may be appropriate for different clients.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I know where to find out about funding.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I know how to find out which employers in my area are ‘friendly’ to ex-offenders, and am developing a directory of contacts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I know how to support effective job search for my clients.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I could explain to employers the potential benefits of employing ex-offenders, draw on case study examples and signpost them to further sources of information. I could advocate for my client with a prospective employer.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I could advise my clients on sources of further information and specialist support for clients seeking to enter employment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I could explain to a client the potential advantages of volunteering as a route into paid work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I could advise my clients on sources of further information and specialist support for clients seeking to undertake voluntary work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I understand the attractions of self employment for ex-offenders, and could explain the advantages and disadvantages to clients.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I could advise clients on sources of further information and specialist support in relation to self-employment, including issues around insurance.</td>
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3. Understanding your clients’ needs

What this section covers:
- What is distinctive about this client group?
- What are the main barriers to education, training and employment?
- Practical and material barriers
- Attitudinal barriers
- Techniques for prioritising client need

What is distinctive about this client group?

Even if you do not have specific experience of working with ex-offenders, you are probably already used to supporting clients who have varied and complex needs and many of the approaches and techniques that you use will be transferable to a new context. However, it is important that you understand the particular issues and barriers that face ex-offenders engaging in learning and skills and employment, so that you can provide appropriate support. In addition, you will need to be prepared to signpost or refer some clients to other agencies in order to address urgent difficulties in their personal circumstances, before they are realistically in a position to move into learning or work.

Offenders and ex-offenders make up one of the most marginalised groups in society. They are among those adults registering some of the lowest levels of participation in education, training and employment. Whilst not all of your clients will have profound education, training and employment needs, the information available on the social and educational backgrounds of prisoners indicates that the ex-offender cohort overlaps substantially with other socially excluded and vulnerable groups. For example:

- **Ex-offenders are at least eight times more likely than anyone else in the community to be unemployed**
  - 40% of those under 25 going into prison are unemployed.
  - 90% of all prisoners leave with no job to go to.
  - 50% of people on probation are unemployed.
  - 65% of those who have a job when they are imprisoned lose them at that point.

- **Low levels of qualifications and skills**
  - 52% of men and 71% of women prisoners have no qualifications at all, compared
with 15% of the general population. Nearly 60% of prisoners have poor literacy and communication skills. As many as 75% have poor numeracy skills. These are levels of skill low enough to exclude them from about 96% of available jobs.

- **Black and minority ethnic groups are disproportionately represented in the prison population**

![Bar chart showing percentages of male and female prison population and general population from certain BME groups compared.](chart)

**Multiple and complex support needs**

Many clients from this group are likely to have multiple and complex needs, which may present significant obstacles to participation in learning and work. They may be experiencing difficulties, even crises, in relation to a range of practical issues which need to be addressed as a matter of urgency before they are realistically in a position to consider starting a course or getting a job. You may need to support a client to resolve other difficulties in their life before you are able to give them effective IAG for learning and work.

It is neither expected nor appropriate to suggest that IAG advisers should themselves be able to meet the full range of support needs that clients may present. However, you already have a skill set for assisting clients to overcome a range of barriers to accessing education and training or employment and many of those will be appropriate to adapt for use with ex-offenders.

**What are the main barriers to participation in education, training and employment?**

Barriers facing ex-offenders wishing to gain employment or to access education and training fall into two broad categories:
• practical and material barriers;
• attitudinal barriers.

You must be able to distinguish between different factors, and to identify those where the client needs to be referred to specialist agencies before effective IAG for learning and work can take place.

**Practical and material barriers**

Signposting or referral on to address wider needs requires a comprehensive knowledge of referral agencies and organisations who either work solely with ex-offenders or who include ex-offenders in their target client group. Useful national contacts are included below, and in section 5 of this guide. This information is intended to act as a starting point for you to develop your own localised directory of organisations who work with ex-offenders.

**A criminal record**

Many of the practical barriers to participation in employment faced by ex-offenders are shared by other socially excluded groups. However, the need to disclose a criminal record presents a specific challenge and one that can be very difficult to overcome.

**Issues for clients**

Anxiety about disclosing their convictions and uncertainty about what they need to tell prospective employers may discourage ex-offenders from applying for work and exacerbate a lack of motivation and confidence in entering the labour market. You need to be able to give clients accurate and appropriate information about what they need to tell employers, and guidance on the best ways to approach disclosure in order to try and minimise its negative impact on their employment prospects. Section 6 of this guide provides detailed guidelines on doing so.

**Issues for employers**

It cannot be denied that ex-offenders’ fears about the impact of disclosure are well founded. Among the greatest obstacle to employment faced by ex-offenders is the negative attitudes of employers.

For about half of vacancies, employers are likely to reject most people with a criminal record. Those with more serious convictions (and even minor sex offences) will be rejected for about 90% of vacancies.

The way that information on criminal convictions is currently used in the recruitment process is largely discriminatory. Employers tend to reject people with a criminal record for the following reasons:

• they are seen as ‘undesirable’, outside the employers’ experience and alien;
• to show moral disapproval;
• because of concern that the employer would be held responsible for hiring a person with a criminal record who then offended at work.

Employers receive little advice and support to understand the benefits of employing ex-offenders or to implement human resources practices which would facilitate fair treatment of ex-offenders.
You can play an important role in helping clients to face negative attitudes from employers, both by engaging and advocating with individual employers on behalf of their clients, and by developing a directory of local employers who are known to be ‘friendly’ to the recruitment of ex-offenders. Further guidance on this subject can be found in section 9 of this guide.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key contacts and signposting</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Apex Charitable Trust Ltd</strong></td>
<td>St Alphage House, Wingate Annexe, 2 Fore Street, London, EC2Y 5DA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tel:</strong></td>
<td>020 7638 5931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>E-mail:</strong></td>
<td><a href="mailto:jobcheck@apextrust.com">jobcheck@apextrust.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Website:</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://www.apextrust.com">www.apextrust.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides employment advice, guidance and training courses to ex-offenders.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Bridging the Gap</strong></td>
<td>Bridging The Gap, PO Box 783, Croydon, CR9 1BT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tel:</strong></td>
<td>0870 027 3091 / 0870 027 3092 / 0707 781 0056</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Email:</strong></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@btguk.org">info@btguk.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Website:</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://www.btguk.org">www.btguk.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTG aims to help reduce re-offending by helping discharged prisoners settle into their communities after release. Working through a network of staff and volunteers, it can provide help with form-filling, explaining changes to the benefit system, pursuing accommodation options, finding free training opportunities, identifying employers who take on ex-offenders, preparing a good CV and developing interview skills.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development</strong></td>
<td>151 The Broadway, London, SW19 1JQ</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tel:</strong></td>
<td>020 8612 6200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Website:</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://www.cipd.co.uk">www.cipd.co.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information and resources for businesses thinking of employing ex-offenders.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Jobcentre Plus</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tel:</strong></td>
<td>0845 6060234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Website:</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk">www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Provides services to offenders in custody and in the community. Check website for local offices.</td>
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Homelessness and housing vulnerability

This is a critical priority for ex-offenders leaving prison. About a third of the 90,000 or so people released from prison each year in England and Wales have nowhere to live on release. Evidence suggests that many ex-offenders find it difficult to obtain permanent accommodation, and some local authorities will not re-house ex-offenders because they consider that they are not vulnerable and are intentionally homeless.

Lack of accommodation can seriously hamper an ex-offender’s chance of finding employment. Around a quarter of employers would not consider employing a homeless person. Pressing housing issues may need to be resolved before clients can contemplate making a commitment to learning or work.

For many women leaving prison, the issue of housing takes on a particular urgency because it is bound up with their efforts to get their children back. Sixty-six per cent of women in prison have dependent children under 18. Many have no prospect of getting their children back until they find accommodation, but their chances of securing accommodation are reduced because they do not have their children with them.
Key contacts and signposting

**Addaction**  
Addaction Central Office, 67-69 Cowcross Street, London, EC1M 6PU  
**Tel:** 0207 251 5860  
**Email:** info@addiction.org.uk  
**Website:** www.addaction.org.uk  

National charity offering help and support to people affected by drug and alcohol misuse; offers services to homeless drug users.

**Shelter**  
88 Old Street, London, EC1V 9H (Regional Offices)  
**Tel:** 0808 800 4444.  
**Email:** info@shelter.org.uk  
**Website:** england.shelter.org.uk  

Help and support for housing and homelessness.

**Women’s Link**  
**Tel:** 020 7248 1200 or 020 72475325 (Ex-offenders)  
**Website:** www.womenslink.org.uk  

Housing advice service run by women for single women without children. Advice and referrals on finding accommodation, for women prisoners and ex-offenders on accommodation. Produces a range of leaflets and booklets on accommodation and hostels.

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**Poverty and debt**

Financial stability in the period immediately following release is essential if ex-offenders are to resettle effectively into the community and avoid re-offending. However, poverty and financial exclusion are commonplace. Many prisoners are entitled to a discharge grant on release to help cover living expenses, until benefit claims are processed. The discharge grant has remained fixed at £46.75 since 1997, and CAB suggests that it is insufficient to last for a week, much less the 11 to 18 days in which benefit claims are meant to be processed.

Some newly released prisoners cannot receive their wages or benefits because they do not have any documents to prove their identity in order to open a bank account.

Financial difficulties and debt worsen for many prisoners whilst they are serving a sentence, meaning that on release ex-offenders are faced with unmanageable and spiralling debt. The main difficulties relate to mainstream credit cards and unpaid household bills.
**Mental health difficulties**

Seventy-four per cent of prisoners detained in 2005 were diagnosed as having some form of mental illness. The majority of these presented symptoms of two or more mental health conditions.

Mental health difficulties can be linked to a wide range of conditions, and the specific symptoms experienced can vary widely between clients. Where possible, you should engage with your client to find out what they want in terms of learning, employment and wider support. The specific nature of a client’s difficulty may mean, for example, that they are unable to participate in group learning but would engage with one-to-one tuition. You need to be aware, however, that people experiencing mental health difficulties may find sustained study difficult without additional support. For some, permanent and regular employment may be an aspiration rather than a current realistic possibility. In the latter case, you should explore with the client the range of other possible options, including learning and voluntary work. Medication may also have an adverse affect, for example on an individual's ability to concentrate, to work in a sustained way, or to undertake activities at certain times of day.
Alcohol and substance misuse problems

About 60% of prisoners have been using hard drugs before imprisonment. Among women, offending behaviour is disproportionately linked to drug addiction.

Forty-five per cent of offenders under the supervision of the Probation Service are estimated to be misusing alcohol or other drugs.

Alcohol addiction and substance misuse is often linked to chaotic lifestyles. Misuse of alcohol and other drugs may affect an individual’s ability to undertake regular employment and to sustain participation in learning and to progress. Being directly under the influence of alcohol or drugs is likely to impair an individual’s ability to engage effectively in learning, work or the IAG process and to retain information. It may also affect the way that they relate to and interact with you or a tutor, fellow students or work colleagues. The need to satisfy cravings linked to addiction will tend to displace attention to other issues, although individuals wishing to overcome addiction may find that participation in learning provides an effective distraction.

Key contacts and signposting

Addaction
Addaction Central Office, 67-69 Cowcross Street, London, EC1M 6PU
Tel: 0207 251 5860
Email: info@addaction.org.uk
Website: www.addaction.org.uk

National charity offering help and support to people affected by drug and alcohol misuse; offers services to homeless drug users.

Adfam
25 Corsham Street, London, N1 6DR
Tel: 020 7553 7640
Website: www.adfam.org.uk

National charity for family and friends of people with drug and alcohol addiction.
Lack of relevant qualifications and skills

Government policy on offender learning and skills is intended to help address the low levels of formal qualifications among this client group. However, the offender learning curriculum has a strong focus on basic skills. Although important, basic skills alone are not sufficient to equip clients for the majority of jobs. Research suggests that employers do not greatly value the low level qualifications that are normally gained in prisons.

Many ex-offenders also lack a wide range of other skills and qualities that are widely required for successful participation in the labour market. They often have limited work experience and a history of unemployment or experience of long term unemployment. They may have under-developed cognitive and social skills, reflected in a lack of the personal qualities that are valued by employers such as flexibility, problem solving, team working, communication and motivation. Employers express concern that ex-offenders do not have, or have lost, the discipline or habit of work.

Poor personal appearance and presentation may also make it difficult for ex-offenders to gain work. Released prisoners may have few clothes, and perhaps none that are suitable for job interviews.
Specific learning difficulties or learning disabilities

A regional study based in Yorkshire and the Humber (2005) has suggested that around 20% of the prison population has a hidden disability (dyslexia, dyscalculia or dyspraxia) that will negatively affect their performance in learning and work settings.

Recent research by the Prison Reform Trust (March 2007) suggested that 20-30% of people in prison (16-24,000 individuals) have a learning disability or difficulty that adversely affects their ability to cope. They are unlikely to receive the support they need whilst in prison, and may be cut out of rehabilitation provision.

It is important that clients’ specific needs are identified and they are referred to appropriate sources of provision. Your service may have staff trained in dyslexia assessment, for
example, but it is likely that you will need to refer clients on to organisations offering specialist provision.

## Key contacts and signposting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Tel</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Website</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adult Dyslexia Organisation</strong></td>
<td>Ground Floor, Sector House, Minet Rd, Loughborough Estate, London SW9 7TP</td>
<td>020 7924 9559 (helpline)</td>
<td><a href="mailto:dyslexia.hq@dial.pipex.com">dyslexia.hq@dial.pipex.com</a></td>
<td><a href="http://www.adult-dyslexia.org">www.adult-dyslexia.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>British Dyslexia Association</strong></td>
<td>98 London Road, Reading, RG1 5AU</td>
<td>0118 966 8271</td>
<td><a href="mailto:helpline@bdadyslexia.org.uk">helpline@bdadyslexia.org.uk</a></td>
<td><a href="http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk">www.bdadyslexia.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>British Institute for Learning Disabilities.</strong></td>
<td>Campion House, Green Street, Kidderminster, Worcestershire, DY10 1JL</td>
<td>01562 723 010</td>
<td><a href="mailto:enquiries@bild.org.uk">enquiries@bild.org.uk</a></td>
<td><a href="http://www.bild.org.uk">www.bild.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Care</strong></td>
<td>9 Weir Road, Kibworth Leicester, LE8 0LQ (central office)</td>
<td>0116 2793225</td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@care-ltd.co.uk">info@care-ltd.co.uk</a></td>
<td><a href="http://www.care-ltd.co.uk">www.care-ltd.co.uk</a></td>
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Work relates to adults with dyslexia (including in employment). Runs support groups and provides a helpline, provides training and tuition, and lobbies on behalf of adults with dyslexia.

Provides advice to teachers and employers on dyslexia issues, provides training for teachers, has a helpline for individuals on dyslexia, local associations, approves specialist training qualifications for teachers.

Information training and other services for people with learning disabilities in the UK.

Support for people with learning disabilities in their daily lives. Check website for local offices.
Dyslexia Action
Park House, Wick Road, Egham, Surrey TW20 0HH
Tel: 01784 222300
Email: info@dyslexiaaction.org.uk
Website: www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk
National charity providing services and support for people with dyslexia and literacy difficulties. Services are available from 26 local centres.

Mencap
123 Golden Lane, London, EC1Y 0RT
Phone: 020 7454 0454
Email: information@mencap.org.uk
Website: www.mencap.org.uk
Mencap is a learning disability charity working with people with a learning disability and their families and carers.

- **Issues facing women**

Female ex-offenders are confronted by practical barriers that are different from those of their male counterparts. Around two thirds of women leaving prison have dependent children. This means that women may not be ready to engage in learning or work because they have other priorities, or that the need to secure appropriate and affordable childcare prevents them from doing so.

Only a tiny proportion of women ex-offenders have committed crimes of violence. Most women in prison have been convicted of relatively minor acquisitive crimes such as shoplifting, or defaulted on fines imposed for other non-custodial offences such as prostitution. Over half have suffered domestic violence and around a third have experienced sexual abuse. 37% of women in prison attempt suicide. The Corston Report (2007) argues that many women in prison are vulnerable and the criminal justice system is failing to address their distinctive support and rehabilitation needs. Clients with profound unmet needs relating to their personal and family circumstances are likely to need specialist support.

Key contacts and signposting

Women’s Aid Federation of England
Head Office, PO Box 391, Bristol, BS99 7WS, England
Tel: 0117 944 44 11 (general enquiries only)
0808 2000 247 (helpline service)
Email: helpline@womensaid.org.uk
Website: www.womensaid.org.uk

National charity providing nationwide network of over 500 services to support women and children facing domestic violence.
Women in Prison
1a Aberdeen Studios, 22 Highbury Grove, London, N5 2EA
Tel: 020 7226 5879
Website: www.womeninprison.org.uk

Women in Prison (WIP) is a charity working with women at risk of going to prison, in prison and after release to promote their resettlement, personal development, education and training.

Women’s Link
Rooms 417 – 419, London Fruit and Wool Exchange, Brushfield Street, London E1 6SL
Tel: 020 7248 1200 or 020 7247 5325 (Ex-offenders)
Website: www.womenslink.org.uk

Housing advice service run by women for single women without children. Advice and referrals on finding accommodation, for women prisoners and ex-offenders on accommodation. Produces a range of leaflets and booklets on accommodation and hostels.

• Issues facing young offenders

Although your clients will generally be adults, it will help you to have some understanding of the specific difficulties experienced by younger people, especially if your work includes some contact with under-19s.

Many young offenders have, sometimes severe, mental and physical health needs, and evidence shows that these are often inadequately addressed whilst they were on sentence. Those who have been in custody are likely to be especially vulnerable. Levels of substance misuse are high. Experience of a disrupted home and family life is common. Young offenders are considerably more likely to have been in care, to have witnessed violence in the home or to have been the victim of crime than young people in the general population. Clients with profound unmet needs relating to their personal and family circumstances are likely to need specialist support.
# Key contacts and signposting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Childline</strong></th>
<th><strong>Tel:</strong> 08001111</th>
<th><strong>Website:</strong> <a href="http://www.childline.org.uk">www.childline.org.uk</a></th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>National free helpline for children and young people in danger or distress.</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Family Rights Groups</strong></th>
<th><strong>The Print House, 18 Ashwin Street, London E8 3DL</strong></th>
<th><strong>Tel:</strong> 0800 731 1696</th>
<th><strong>Email:</strong> <a href="mailto:office@frg.org.uk">office@frg.org.uk</a></th>
<th><strong>Website:</strong> <a href="http://www.frg.org.uk">www.frg.org.uk</a></th>
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<td></td>
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<td>Advice and support for families whose children are involved with social services.</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>YMCA England</strong></th>
<th><strong>640 Forest Road, London. E17 3DZ</strong></th>
<th><strong>Website:</strong> <a href="http://www.ymca.org.uk">www.ymca.org.uk</a></th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A Christian charity that has projects supporting young people in prison and after release. Check website for regional offices.</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Rainer</strong></th>
<th><strong>Rectory Lodge, High Street, Brasted, Kent TN16 1JF</strong></th>
<th><strong>Tel:</strong> 01959 578 200</th>
<th><strong>Email:</strong> <a href="mailto:mail@raineronline.org">mail@raineronline.org</a></th>
<th><strong>Website:</strong> <a href="http://www.raineronline.org">www.raineronline.org</a></th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rainer offers under-supported young people a range of services.</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>SOVA</strong></th>
<th><strong>SOVA Head Office (contact for projects in London &amp; South East Region, South West and for national enquiries)</strong></th>
<th><strong>1st Floor Chichester House, 37 Brixton Road, London SW9 6DZ</strong></th>
<th><strong>Tel:</strong> 020 7793 0404</th>
<th><strong>Email:</strong> <a href="mailto:mail@sova.org.uk">mail@sova.org.uk</a></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>SOVA Regional Office (contact for projects in West Midlands, Yorkshire &amp; Humberside, North West)</strong></td>
<td><strong>St. Silas House,18 Moore Street, Sheffield  S3 7UW</strong></td>
<td><strong>Tel:</strong> 0114 270 3700</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Attitudinal barriers

Attitudinal barriers can be the most challenging to overcome, because it takes time to alter an individual’s fundamental view of themselves and their relationship to learning and work. Sections 8 and 9 of this guide explore in more detail ways of addressing these obstacles with clients.

- **Negative experiences of education**

Poor formative experiences of education mean that many ex-offenders are likely to hold the view that ‘learning is not for me’. For example:

  - 30% of prisoners regularly truanted from school;
  - 49% of male prisoners and 33% of female prisoners were excluded;
  - 89% of men and 84% of women prisoners left school aged 16 or younger.

Clients may not see that education has value or relevance to their lives. Formal learning in particular may be unappealing. Offenders and ex-offenders are pre-eminently ‘outsiders’ and many will find entering into established forms of education and training, at least in the short term, a daunting prospect.

- **Cultural issues**

Many ex-offenders are likely to return to the communities which spawned the initial offending behaviour. They may continue to associate with, and live amongst, those who support negative attitudes to learning and work. Under these circumstances, it can be difficult for individuals who are already vulnerable to challenge the cultural values of their community and risk ridicule, rejection and isolation.

- **Psychological issues**

Low levels of self-confidence and self-esteem are common among ex-offenders. This often leads to a lack of readiness to take responsibility for oneself and one’s future and consequently a lack of motivation to participate in work or learning. Problems with motivation and personal responsibility are especially acute among those who have been in custody. The formal support structures of prisons are not conducive to the development of responsible independence, and disengagement from them can be difficult and disorientating. The term ‘learned helplessness’ has been used to describe the state into which many prisoners are conditioned.
Techniques for prioritising client need

If a client appears to have complex and multiple needs, you will need to work with them to identify and prioritise what issues have to be addressed, so that effective signposting and referral can take place. You will need to establish whether participation in learning and work is currently a realistic aim, or whether the client needs to deal with wider barriers first. Supporting your clients to deal with these concerns is a critical element of their reintegration into mainstream society.

In the ‘Toolkit’

The ‘Toolkit’ section of the Guide includes a ‘progress profile wheel’, a tool which can be used to support clients to identify where they are in terms of a range of issues facing them: attitudes and motivation, health, accommodation, family and money as well as education and training. It can be used again at a later date, to identify progress made.

Further information


Talisman: the newspaper for adult learning, issue 55, October 2006 (ALI).
4. Background to offender learning and skills

What this section covers:

• How will this chapter help you?
• What is the current policy context for offender learning and skills?
• Who is responsible for offender learning and skills?
• What IAG may ex-offenders have received during their sentence?
• What are the main shortcomings of IAG provision for offenders?
• What learning may offenders have received during their sentence?
• What are the main difficulties with the system of offender learning and skills?

How will this chapter help you?

Policy changes in recent years mean that, increasingly, ex-offenders are likely to have had access to some learning, skills or IAG provision during their sentence. For some, it may have been a requirement. With background knowledge of provision for offenders, you will be in a better position to understand your clients and where they are in terms of their journey in learning and work.

In addition, for various reasons, some clients will not find it easy to tell you what learning, skills or IAG they have received. For example:

• they may not understand what you are asking them about, because they do not recognise the terminology;
• they may not know whether they have received any provision;
• they may be unable to recall exactly what they have done, due to the disrupted nature of provision for offenders;
• they may not have a formal record of learning or IAG undertaken.

By having awareness of what provision clients may have received, you will be better placed to elicit information from individuals who are themselves unsure. Establishing your client’s starting point is essential if you are to provide appropriate IAG.
What is the current policy context for offender learning and skills?

The development of learning and skills provision for offenders is at the heart of the Government’s strategy to reduce the rate of re-offending. In 2005, the Government set out its strategy for improving the skills and employment outcomes for offenders in the Green Paper *Reducing Re-Offending through Skills and Employment*. In 2006 the Government published *Reducing Re-Offending through Skills and Employment: Next Steps*, which outlines how changes to learning and skills provision will be implemented.

The changes herald a new era for the development and delivery of learning and skills provision and a new emphasis on:

- increasing participation in learning and skills;
- increasing the number of achievements of basic skills and vocational qualifications;
- increasing the number of ex-offenders gaining sustainable employment;
- the involvement of employers in the design and delivery of programmes.

In the future we can expect:

- greater continuity between the education services offered to offenders in prison and in the community;
- the development of some prisons as specialist vocational training centres;
- the development of a campus model of learning and skills providing more personalised learning for offenders.

It is helpful to understand the different types of sentences offenders may have experienced as some may have been required to engage in learning as part of their sentence.

Offenders can be punished in a variety of ways, including payment of a fine, civil orders, such as anti-social behaviour orders (ASBO’s), community sentences and custodial sentences (prison).

Current community sentences (also called community orders) introduced in the 2003 Criminal Justice Act are intended to be rehabilitative as well as punitive. As such, they allow an offender to be released into the community on condition of good behaviour and fulfilment of certain requirements. Whilst some offenders may be prohibited from engaging in certain activities, e.g. football hooligans may be prohibited from going to football matches, some may be required to participate in certain activities, such as performing unpaid work for the benefit of the community or participating in education or training.

Importantly, as community orders are a sentencing option increasingly being used by the courts, more offenders will have been required to engage in learning as part of their sentence.

Who is responsible for offender learning and skills?

Responsibility for offender learning and skills sits with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) working closely with Regional Offender Managers in their commissioning role for Offender Management.
Offender learning and skills are now part of mainstream post-16 education provision. The LSC has responsibility for the planning and funding of offender learning provision. The Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) was implemented initially in three regions in England, the North West, North East and South West from August 2005. The Service was rolled out nationally on 31 July 2006. The National Offender Management Scheme (NOMS) was created in 2004 to commission offender management on a regional basis. The aim is to develop a more integrated system, focusing on the needs of the offender through, and after, their sentence.

Within each prison, OLASS contracted providers, working with the Head of Learning and Skills, to provide a learning service geared to the needs of the individual, as far as constraints of the establishment will allow.

The quality of learning and skills delivered in prisons and in the community is subject to external inspection by Ofsted.

The focus for OLASS is to help offenders gain relevant qualifications, in many cases Skills for Life qualifications in literacy, language and numeracy and national vocational qualifications (NVQ’s) and develop skills needed to gain employment on release.

What IAG may ex-offenders have received during their sentence?

The system for provision of IAG services for offenders has also changed dramatically in recent years as a result of the increased emphasis on learning and skills. The main changes are:

- a greater role for IAG in prisons and in the community, with greater emphasis placed on career choice and entry into employment;
- a continuous IAG service to be available to offenders in custody and in the community;
- IAG services to offenders in prisons and the community are delivered through a multi-agency approach, involving the LSC, Careers Advice Service; Connexions, Job Centre Plus and other private public or voluntary/community sector organisations;
- any provider of IAG supported by LSC funding must be accredited to or working towards the Matrix standard. At the time of writing (April 2007), 19 prisons and 6 Probation Service areas had achieved Matrix accreditation.

Offenders in prison and those supervised by the probation service should have had access to IAG services (which can include housing and benefits advice as well as advice on learning options and work). This should be:

- at induction;
- during learning;
- when planning progression;
- when preparing for release.

Most probation services provide IAG services, either in-house or through partnership arrangements with one or more local providers.
What are the main shortcomings of IAG provision for offenders?

The main shortcomings in the system of IAG provision for offenders highlighted by reports are:

- offenders in prison and the community may not see IAG as a priority, resulting in lack of motivation to attend IAG sessions;
- IAG may not be effectively promoted to offenders, meaning that they do not recognise the potential value of accessing the services available;
- IAG may be a priority at the start of a learning programme but not during it or at the end;
- failure to address clients’ unrealistic ideas of the employment opportunities open to them;
- incorrect information being given by advisers about career and learning options;
- access to IAG services disrupted when prisoners are moved to different prisons;
- failure to treat offenders as individuals with different needs;
- lack of continuity between IAG services available in custody and in the community.

What learning may ex-offenders have received during their sentence?

Offenders will have had varied experiences of learning, depending on their individual needs, the length and type of their sentence, the curriculum offer available at the prison(s) or probation service where they served their sentence and the levels of funding and facilities available.

Adults and young offenders (15-17 year olds), both in custody and in the community, should have access to learning and skills provision that will enable them to gain the skills and qualifications they need to hold down a job and play a positive role in society. Young offenders’ institutions have a formal curriculum and a requirement that young people undertake a set number of hours’ learning.

All offenders of whatever age should have been offered:

- IAG, both to enable them to choose appropriate learning programmes and to ensure that relevant progression routes between programmes are pursued.
- An individual diagnostic assessment to identify learning needs. This may include a dyslexia assessment.
- Development of an individual learning plan to identify learning and skills development required.
- Access to courses offering national qualifications, such as Skills for Life or National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs).
- Help to continue their learning after release by having access to courses in prison that are the same quality and covering the same curriculum as those available in the community. They should be helped to make contact with local colleges to continue their learning after release.
- A curriculum in prison designed to provide opportunities for personal development, to change behaviour and make a positive contribution to society. This can include:
• **Skills for Life and Key Skills** – prisons follow the national core curriculum and offer classes in basic and key skills, i.e. literacy, numeracy, English as a Second Language and information technology.

• **Social and Life Skills** – can cover a wide range of practical, academic and personal skills, such as cookery, parenting and money management.

• **Academic courses** – can include Open University courses, A-level and GCSE courses in a range of subjects.

• **Creative and Recreational Classes** – can include arts and crafts, sport and creative writing.

• **Business and IT** – computing classes and qualifications such as European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL).

• **Vocational Skills Training** – vocational courses leading to qualifications such as NVQ, City and Guilds or HNC may be offered in a range of skills, such as motor mechanics, industrial cleaning, food preparation, painting and decorating, engineering, fork lift truck driving, construction and generic preparation for work courses.

**What are the main difficulties with the system of offender learning and skills?**

• **Limited access.** Not all ex-offenders will have engaged in learning. Prisoners on remand are not required to participate in education or training. However they now fall within the scope of OLASS provision so may have undertaken some learning through that project.

• **Interrupted study.** Offenders on short sentences may have missed out on educational opportunities, as there may not have been sufficient time to complete a course and gain qualifications. Some offenders may be transferred to another prison before their course ends. Courses can be disrupted by security measures in prisons, e.g. shortage of prison officers to accompany prisoners to classes.

• **Motivation.** This group of learners may lack the motivation to engage in learning if their attention is focused on their trial. Some ex-offenders may have been unwilling participants in education. Those with negative experiences of school may be unwilling to participate. Sentenced prisoners also cannot be forced to attend classes but participation is often linked to incentive and earned privilege (IEP) schemes, meaning that prisoners may lose privileges or have their release date put back if they do not attend classes.

• **Insufficient attention to individual needs and limited provision.** Some ex-offenders may have been unable to take the classes they wanted or needed. Access to classes is limited and popular classes may have long waiting lists.

• **Over-emphasis on basic skills courses and few higher level courses.** Opportunities for progression can be limited.

• **Lack of continuity.** There may be little continuity between the types of courses and qualifications offered in prisons and in the community, with some prisoners being
unable to complete courses they began in prison because course start dates are unsuitable or courses are not available.

- **Over-reliance on short term project funding.** Funding for many courses in the community is often short-term from the European Social Fund (ESF), leading to lack of availability.

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**Further Information**

The website address for the **Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS)** is [www.dfes.gov.uk/offenderlearning](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/offenderlearning).


These can both be downloaded from [www.dfes.gov.uk/offenderlearning](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/offenderlearning) by following the links to Document Library/Offender Learning Publications.

The framework for offender learning and IAG is set out in the documents **The Offenders’ Learning Journey for Adult Offenders** (DfES, 2004), and **The Offenders’ Learning Journey for Juvenile Offenders** (DfES, 2004).

These can both be downloaded from [www.dfes.gov.uk/offenderlearning](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/offenderlearning) by following the links to Document Library/General Documents.

Several research reports have highlighted shortcomings in the system of offender learning and skills; for example, **Learning and Skills Network Research Report ‘Maximising the Benefits of OLASS for Female Offenders – an evaluation of the issues’**, E.Walker et al 2006 and **SOVA Women into Work project report ‘Moving Mountains – identifying and addressing barriers to ETE from the voices of women (ex) offenders’** 2003, by Caroline O’Keefe, published by Sheffield Hallam University.