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The Implementation of OLASS: Assessing its Early Impact and Examining the Key Challenges

Phase 2 Report

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department for
education and skills
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1 Introduction

This is the second major report from the evaluation of the new Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS). The evaluation focuses on the introduction of OLASS in three development regions, prior to a national roll out in July 2006.

The overarching aim of the evaluation is to investigate the implementation of OLASS, including any challenges encountered and solutions adopted. The research was asked to explore five key areas:

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

Data was collected through telephone interviews with 65 key partners from a range of agencies (e.g. prisons, probation, Learning and Skills Council (LSC), providers, youth justice, job centre plus).

2 Assessment

Interviewees were asked to consider the challenges of implementing the assessment requirements of the *Offender's Learning Journey* and identify any solutions to the challenges raised. The main challenge revolved around the transfer of assessment information and the lack of an electronic system to share such information between key partners, which led to further difficulties, e.g. repeated assessments. Hence, prior to the introduction of OLASS nationally, it would be important to ensure that the workforce is fully informed about (and committed to) the transfer of assessment information both within and between sectors and that an MIS system is in place to facilitate the effective transfer of records. When reviewing the overall impact of OLASS on assessments, interviewees did suggest there had been some improvement, in particular, that assessments were now more detailed.

3 Monitoring

The main challenge relating to the implementation of the monitoring requirements of the OLJ centred on the transfer of information about an

offender between custody and community. Other issues included problems around confidentiality/data protection which further impeded data transfer and the uncertainty amongst key partners regarding the type and detail of data to be collected. Despite some improvements (e.g. the standardisation of ILPs and the heightened profile and priority of monitoring), in general, interviewees accounts suggested there had only been slight changes to the monitoring of offenders since the introduction of OLASS.

4   Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)

Several of the issues identified by interviewees in implementing the IAG requirements of the OLJ related to funding. For example, that there was a perceived lack of funding for community based IAG. This lack of funding for IAG, in both custody and community sectors, resulted in capacity shortages and reductions in the quality of IAG provision. Other concerns related to the perceived focus of OLASS towards custody based improvements. Despite the challenges raised, a quarter of interviewees did suggest there had been some improvements to the IAG service available to offenders since the introduction of OLASS. Particularly noted, was an increase in the amount of IAG provision and that IAG was tailored more towards the needs of offenders.

5   Workforce issues

Interviewees were asked to consider the training needs of the workforce in relation to OLASS and also whether any thing else could be done to make the workforce more effective. Several of the issues raised concerned the workforce's general awareness of OLASS and their readiness/capacity to undertake the functions required. These concerns related to both learning and skills staff and staff within the criminal justice system. For example, interviewees reported confusion or a lack of clarity over the roles of partners; services not entirely understanding the work/culture of other partners; and staff (e.g. probation officers, tutors, prison officers) not yet being able to contribute fully to OLASS due to certain skill or knowledge deficits (e.g. ability to undertake assessments, experience of working with offenders). Hence, prior to the introduction of OLASS nationally it would be important to ensure that the workforce is fully informed about (and committed to) the principles of OLASS and that they are able (with the necessary training) to support offenders' learning and skill development.

6   Views on OLASS documentation

Interviewees most common request regarding the OLASS documentation was for it be streamlined (interviewees referred to the *Offender's Learning Journey* document, the delivery framework and the accountabilities framework). Whilst generally recognised as useful (especially for learning about the new

service), the sheer quantity of paperwork was said to be unmanageable at times. In terms of a national roll out therefore, services may find the documentation easier to digest if it is kept to a reasonable volume.

7 Integration of services

Interviewees were asked to consider the degree to which services for offenders were consistent and coherent across the criminal justice system. Over one third of respondents considered that there had been improvements (or potential for improvements) in the degree of integration of the services on offer. Communication, effective management and information sharing were identified as key elements in this. However, two thirds suggested that coherence and consistency had not improved.

Despite this, over two thirds of respondents felt that there were good working relations between the OLASS partners, generally suggesting that OLASS had made a positive difference in the way agencies and institutions were working together. Although the seamless service was not yet a reality, interviewees supported the notion that OLASS had facilitated improvements.

8 Concluding comments

The interviews for this report were conducted just six to seven months after the initial launch of OLASS in the three development regions. Inevitably therefore, the new service was still in its infancy and experiencing teething problems. Despite the reported difficulties, signs of progress were evident, in particular more detailed assessments, standardisation of ILPs and improved IAG services.

Interviewee accounts suggested considerable variation in terms of the extent to which OLASS requirements have been introduced. Some commentators reported that the necessary systems and procedures (e.g. around assessment) were already in place prior to the advent of OLASS. Others, however, concluded that there was still a considerable way to go before the aspirations of the *Offender's Learning Journey* could be fully realised. Clearly establishments, services and areas were working from very different starting points when OLASS arrived – thus, the degree of challenge experienced was also found to vary. When implementing the new service elsewhere, it would perhaps be helpful to undertake an audit of existing provision, systems and services in order to target support and effort where it is most needed.

The next phase of the research will include follow-up interviews with those who contributed to this report. These interviews will take place almost a year after the new service was first introduced and will focus on impact. Feedback will give further insight into the changes brought by the new service and in particular, how offenders themselves have been affected.

Introduction

This is the second major report from the evaluation of the new Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS). The evaluation is examining the implementation of OLASS in three development regions, prior to a national roll out in July 2006.

1.1   Background to the evaluation

Historically, learning and skills for offenders in custody has been provided by a mix of contractors, largely further education colleges under contract to the Prison Service, and in-house Prison Service staff ('Instructional Officers'). In 2004 and following the publication of the Carter Report (2003) that led to the establishment of the National Offender Management Service, the government announced that it intended to replace these contracts through a new Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS).

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

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

The new service is being rolled out in three stages. Three development regions began implementing, on a prototype basis, elements of OLASS in January 2005. They went live with the new service on a fully operational basis in August 2005. The third phase sees the new service introduced to the remaining six developing regions in England in July 2006.

The evaluation is intended to inform the national delivery of OLASS by identifying the main challenges encountered during implementation in the three development regions, as well as identifying and disseminating good practice on what worked well.

1.2   Aims of the evaluation

The overarching aim of the evaluation is to investigate the implementation of OLASS, including any challenges encountered, solutions adopted and also examples of successful implementation.

Within a flexible framework, the research was asked to explore five key areas:

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

1.3   Methodology

For the second phase of the evaluation each of the three development regions were contacted and invited to identify key partners involved in the implementation of OLASS. Subsequently, 65 interviews were conducted with representatives from a range of agencies. Table 1.1 shows the distribution of interviews across the three regions and by interviewee type.

Table 1.1: Interviewee sample

Interviewees by region		
North West	**North East**	**South West**
23	22	20
Interviews by agency/service		

Prison (including HOLS and area managers)	20
Probation (including basic skills managers and ETE managers)	12
Youth Justice	5
Providers	9
Connexions	6
Learning and skills council	7
Job Centre plus	3
ROMS	3

Telephone interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes and covered the five themes listed above. Interviews sought to determine:

- The main developments since the introduction of OLASS (e.g. in the areas of assessment, IAG, service integration, etc)
- Barriers encountered in implementing OLASS requirements
- How these barriers have been tackled/overcome

1.4 About this report
The current report documents the key issues and challenges in relation to implementing the requirements of OLASS. The chapters are presented as follows:

Chapter 2   Assessment
Chapter 3   Monitoring
Chapter 4   Information, advice and guidance
Chapter 5   Workforce issues
Chapter 6   Views on OLASS documentation
Chapter 7   Integration of services

Looking ahead, phase 3 of the evaluation will involve individual case studies to examine key OLASS themes (e.g. assessment, workforce issues) in greater depth. This will provide an opportunity to identify successful/effective practice. The final report (due September 2006) will therefore present the outcomes of this case study work, as well as data on the overall impact of OLASS.

2   Assessment

This chapter considers the implementation of the assessment requirements in the *Offender's Learning Journey* in each of the three development regions. It begins by discussing the issues or challenges in relation to the service

requirements and goes on to discuss the extent to which aspects of assessment (e.g. screening, initial assessment, diagnostic assessment and the production of an ILP) have been implemented since the introduction of OLASS. Finally, a summary table of key barriers and solutions to assessment issues is provided at the end of the chapter.

2.1 Assessment challenges

Overall, interviewees across each of the three regions identified six main barriers in relation to assessment:

- the transfer of assessment information
- repeated assessments
- level of workforce knowledge and understanding in relation to assessment
- volume of assessments
- offender reluctance / failure to attend assessments
- implementation of diagnostic testing and variation in diagnostic assessment tools.

2.1.1 The challenge of assessment information transfer

One of the challenges in implementing the assessment requirements (highlighted by just over a fifth of interviewees) related to inconsistencies in the transference of assessment data when offenders moved both within custody and between custody and community. It was felt that the transfer of information was often sporadic and varied between establishments. A custody based interviewee from the North East believed inconsistencies in the transference of data were due to a lack of awareness amongst the workforce of the necessity to transfer records. S/he noted that the workforce was not currently 'holding it in their heads yet'. It was also reported that there was a need for greater consistency in the transfer of information across providers and, in the case of the South West, between curriculum/unit areas. Poor communication was another factor identified, as was the prison regime itself (for example, offenders being moved several times during their sentence).

Implementing the assessment requirements of OLASS was felt to be problematic without an operational electronic database or Management Information System (MIS) such as Maytas. This meant that the sharing of assessment information between custody, community and mainstream was carried out via a paper-based system. It was reported that in some cases, assessment information did not reach its intended destination. In other cases, the exchange of information took time and resulted in repeat screening/assessments of an offender in the new setting. Further discussion of the challenges of transferring data (particularly those issues relating to management information systems) will be presented in Chapter 3.

Suggested solutions to the reported challenges associated with the transfer of assessment information included:

- the introduction of an MIS such as Maytas nationally
- coaching and support for those carrying out assessments to ensure that information sharing becomes the norm
- formalised processes and procedures for passing on information between providers.

2.1.2 The challenge of repeated assessments

Interviewees in the North East and North West reported that offenders were being assessed on multiple occasions throughout their learning journey. Notwithstanding the duplication of work, repeated assessments were felt to be particularly de-motivating for offenders. This was highlighted by interviewees based within custody and in the community, as well as those working across the two sectors (such as providers).

Repeated assessments were said to arise either because assessment information was not being passed on (as discussed in section 2.1.1) and or because the record that was received was insufficient or incomplete. Contractual obligations were an issue highlighted by interviewees from the Probation Service and Job Centre Plus. For example, it was noted that a subcontractor providing IAG in the community would be contractually obliged to repeat assessments even though an offender may have completed the same assessment pre-release.

> *If we referred someone to a college that wasn't* [name of provider] *and we had already done a basic skills assessment I couldn't say to that college 'he got 69 out of 72 so he's a level 1 because they wouldn't accept it'. They would say 'right, ok, that's fine but I'll still do an assessment anyway' because of the money that they* [the college] *are drawing down from the LSC they are required as part of their contract to have the paperwork to say they have done an assessment as well.*

> IAG subcontractor, North East

Suggested solutions to repeated assessments included:

- the introduction of an MIS such as Maytas nationally
- connecting assessments in with offender management
- modifying contracts (e.g. between the LSC and colleges) to avoid obligations to repeat assessments
- greater communication and joined up working between key partners and other agencies.

2.1.3 The challenge of workforce knowledge and understanding of assessment

A further barrier in implementing the assessment requirements (highlighted by a quarter of interviewees) related to the level of knowledge and understanding of the workforce whose role it was to carry out assessments with offenders. In some cases, interviewees (particularly providers) raised concerns in relation to the staff they had 'inherited' under the Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment (TUPE). It was suggested that some personnel were operating in an unfocussed and unmanaged way, particularly in relation to assessment and IAG. Other interviewees described how the new OLASS contract expected a lot more of the workforce in terms of induction/assessment and that existing personnel did not have sufficient experience or training to be able to carry out the requirements.

In particular, there was felt to be a lack of understanding among the workforce of the various forms or stages of assessment, with some of the workforce interpreting IAG as basic skills assessment for example. Interviewees also reported that aspects of the assessment process were not being carried out in accordance to the specification. For example, in one establishment in the North East, providers found that key personnel were using group talks as a substitute for one to one screenings. There were also some concerns about the appropriateness of staff carrying out assessments, such as guidance workers as opposed to skilled assessors. Indeed, several interviewees reported that certain types of assessment (e.g. diagnostic tests) were not being conducted as the workforce were not sufficiently trained.

Suggested solutions for increasing the effectiveness of the workforce around assessment included:

- training for key personnel carrying out assessments
- the need for specialist staff to undertake assessments (particularly diagnostic tests)
- funding to ensure the recruitment of additional assessment personnel
- disaggregating the work of assessment from IAG
- issuing new procedures /guidelines for the workforce, which outlines their requirements in relation to assessment.

2.1.4 The challenge of volume

An additional barrier reported by a small number of interviewees based both within custody and the community was the volume of assessments required to be undertaken. This was a particular problem for remand centres and 'overspill' prisons, which have a constant flow of new arrivals often serving short sentences. The barriers related to the short period in which the offender

could be assessed before they were transferred or released; the inability to plan due to uncertainty in the number of offenders requiring assessments; having enough staff to carry out assessments and a lack of suitable accommodation facilities.

Suggested solutions to the reported challenges included:

- additional funding available for recruiting staff to carry out assessments
- additional funding available to improve accommodation facilities for assessments to take place in.

2.1.5 The challenge of offender reluctance

In a few cases, interviewees reported that it was difficult to engage offenders in the assessment process and that young offenders in particular often resisted assessment testing and screening. An interviewee from the North East described how assessing young people when they were due to leave custody was especially difficult and led to problems in retrieving the required assessment information. Interviewees also reported that offenders were reluctant to attend assessment appointments with providers in the community and that undertaking assessments in a mainstream setting such as a college would be a particular barrier for some. Repeat assessments was one reason given for a lack of motivation on the part of offenders:

> *One prisoner can be diagnostically assessed several times throughout his journey and by the time he comes to us, because we're a Cat D resettlement prison, he can have carried out a diagnostic assessment four or five times and it's kind of 'oh no not again'.*

> HOLS, North West

Suggested solutions to offender reluctance/failure to attend included:

- the use of laptops – the assessment process was perceived to be less intimidating for an offender when they completed assessments on-screen. This provided offenders with more control over the process.
- providers to carry out assessments from probation offices so case workers can physically take the offender to the provider and offer reassurance.
- support workers to provide encouragement to the offender to undertake the assessment as well as provide information about it.

2.1.6 The challenge of implementing diagnostic testing and variation in diagnostic assessment tools

Finally, five key partners highlighted challenges in relation to diagnostic assessments particularly dyslexia assessments. In some cases, interviewees reported that diagnostic assessments had not been fully implemented and in

other cases, they reported that different assessments tools were being used across different establishments. In the South West, it was reported that diagnostic tests were being carried out, although they were still mainly paper based and the introduction of computer based testing was proving difficult, especially in local prisons where they was a lack of accommodation/facilities for such assessment.

Suggested solutions to diagnostic testing challenges included:

- increased funding to procure hardware to carry out computer-based diagnostics.

2.2 Improvements to assessment

Interviewees were asked to comment on the extent to which the assessment requirements in the *Offender's Learning Journey* had been implemented. Four main areas of improvement were identified. These included:

- improved dialogue and understanding amongst the workforce in relation to assessment
- less repeated assessment/improved consistency in assessment testing
- improved transfer of assessment information
- more detailed/enhanced assessments.

2.2.1 Improved understanding of assessment

In general, key partners spoke about awareness raising and increased dialogue amongst the workforce in relation to the assessment process. In some cases, particularly in the North East, interviewees reported that since the requirements for the assessment of learners had been outlined in the *Offender's Learning Journey* there was now clearer differentiation between the various forms or stages of assessment (e.g. differences between screening, initial assessment and IAG). In some cases, these had not previously been viewed as separate or distinct processes. In addition to this, it was felt that those carrying out assessments were clearer about what was required of them. Moreover, one interviewee based within custody in the North East reported that the workforce were thinking 'more creatively' in relation to assessment than they had prior to OLASS.

Interviewees referred to the providers' detailed knowledge of assessment as being a significant factor in the development of the workforces' understanding. Similarly, an interviewee from the LSC in the North East highlighted that an extensive review of practice by the lead provider had proved particularly helpful in increasing awareness and identifying issues in relation to assessment.

2.2.2 Improved consistency

As noted in section 2.1.2, the duplication of assessment testing was considered by interviewees to be a significant challenge. However, 12 interviewees (across the three regions) indicated that since the introduction of OLASS there had in fact been a reduction in the number of repeated assessments undertaken. This reduction was brought about by at least two factors, the first of which being a greater sharing of information between members of the workforce and the other being the use of Individual Learning Plans (now felt to be used more widely and consistently).

2.2.3 Improved transfer of assessment information

Five interviewees (across the three regions) considered OLASS to have either already improved or be likely to improve the transfer of assessment information. A representative from Job Centre Plus in the North East reported that although 'there was still a long way to go' there had been a much-improved exchange of assessment information amongst departments within custody and between custody and community. The introduction of online assessments and Maytas was anticipated to 'vastly improve' the transference of information (this will be discussed further in Chapter 3).

2.2.4 Improved detail in assessments

More detailed or enhanced assessments were the most commonly identified improvement to the assessment process brought about by OLASS. This was noted by around a third of interviewees and by interviewees in each of the three regions but most commonly in the North West.

Interviewees in the North East and North West talked generally about improvement in the quality of assessments. It was suggested by some that the introduction of OLASS had led to a more 'formal' assessment process. For example, one HOLS in the North East reported that prior to OLASS, administrative personnel carried out 'quick basic skills assessments' during the offenders' induction into the establishment. Since the introduction of the new service, a full time member of staff had been employed to carry out more detailed assessments independently from the induction. This in turn was felt to have led to an improvement in the quality of assessment data collected. Furthermore, an LSC representative from the same region commented that the lead providers in the region had been involved in an extensive review of practices and found that IAG was being used for basic skills screening. S/he believed that because of the providers' review there had been an improvement in the quality of assessments. Interviewees in the North West also noted improved screening and initial assessment. For example, one interviewee noted that a new initial screening format had been introduced and that all new

offenders were now referred for Education, Training and Employment (ETE) screening and then passed on to the provider for diagnostic assessment.

Further comments about improvements to the depth of assessments included:

- the use of computerised assessment tools which made the assessment process more efficient, leaving more time to focus on the outputs of assessments.
- more rigorous, in-depth diagnostic assessments being undertaken (noted particularly in the North West).
- in the North East, the introduction of a learning differences assessment which was being used to investigate learning styles and help to identify any sensory difficulties or mental health issues.

2.3 No change to assessment

Around a third of interviewees (across the three regions) felt there had been no change or improvements in relation to the assessment of learners since the introduction of OLASS. Here, interviewees (13) commented on it being 'early days' and 'too soon' to comment on changes brought about by the new service. Despite interviewees perceiving there had been little or no impact of OLASS in the area of assessment, several did anticipate changes to the assessment process as detailed in section 2.2.4.

In ten cases, (the majority being interviewees in the North West) it was felt that many of the assessment requirements outlined in the OLJ were already in place prior to August 2005 and no improvements had been made to these. In some cases, it was suggested that the workforce had continued to operate in the same way as they had done prior to OLASS in respect to assessments. One of the reasons for this was that assessments continued to be outsourced to the same providers (e.g. in this case, the Probation Service).

2.4 Summary comment

Interviewees were asked to consider the challenges of implementing the assessment requirements of the OLJ and identify any solutions to the challenges raised. Several of the challenges identified appeared to revolve around the transfer of assessment information and the lack of an electronic system to share such information between key partners, which led to further difficulties, e.g. repeated assessments. Hence, prior to the introduction of OLASS nationally it would be important to ensure that the workforce is fully informed about (and committed to) the transfer of assessment information both within and between sectors and that an MIS system such as Maytas is in place to facilitate the effective transfer of records. Despite the challenges raised, in general, interviewees did suggest there had been improvements to assessment

since the introduction of OLASS, particularly, that assessments were more detailed.

Table 2.1: Assessment of learners – key barriers and solutions

	Assessment	
	Barriers/challenges	**Solutions**
Transfer of assessment information	• Inconsistencies in the transference of data (between key partners and between curriculum/unit areas in the SW) • Lack of awareness amongst the workforce of the necessity to transfer records and poor communication • Variability in the quality / usefulness of the learner record being transferred • The prison regime (e.g. offender mobility) • Lack of IT facilities – reliance on paper based records	• Coaching and support for those carrying out assessments to ensure the sharing of information • The introduction of an MIS such as Maytas • Formalised procedures and protocols for information sharing between key partners
Repeated assessments	• Paper-based record system • Lack of an electronic system for data sharing • Variability in the quality / usefulness of the assessment information being transferred • Contractual obligations and targets	• The introduction of an MIS such as Maytas • Connecting assessments with offender management • Modifying contracts to avoid obligations to do repeat assessments • Greater communication and joined up working with other agencies and key partners
Level of workforce knowledge and understanding in relation to assessment	• Concerns about the appropriateness of staff carrying out assessments (e.g. guidance workers) • Lack of understanding of the various forms or stages of assessment • Lack of experience amongst existing personnel / training needs in relation the new requirements • Assessment process were not being carried out in	• Training for key personnel carrying out assessments • The need for specialist staff to undertake assessments (particularly diagnostic tests) • Funding to ensure the recruitment of additional assessment personnel • Disaggregating of the work of assessment from IAG

	accordance to the specification	• Issue new procedures / guidelines for the workforce outlining their requirements in relation to assessment
Volume of assessments	• Remand centres and overspill prisons have a constant flow of new arrivals – difficulties in carrying out assessments and completing paperwork in such a short period of time • Uncertainty in the number of offenders arriving into custody and the community requiring assessments – difficult to plan for • Lack of resources to carry out the volume of assessments required • Lack of accommodation facilities to undertake the volume of assessments required	• More funding available to recruit additional staff to carry out assessments • More funding available to improve accommodation facilities
Offender reluctance / failure to attend assessments	• Difficulties in engaging offenders in the assessment process – offenders resistance to assessment testing and screening • Reluctance of offenders to attend assessment appointments in a mainstream setting • Repeated assessments can de-motivate offenders.	• The use of laptops – the assessment process is less intimidating for the offender and gives them more control over the assessment process • Providers to carry out assessments from probation offices so that case workers can physically take the offender to the provider and provide reassurance • Support workers to provide encouragement and information about the purpose of the assessment
Diagnostic assessment issues	• Variation in tools used to undertake diagnostic assessments • Diagnostic testing is largely paper based • Lack of sufficient accommodation facilities to undertake computerised electronic diagnostic testing	• Funding to secure hardware to carry out computer-based diagnostics

3   Monitoring

This chapter considers the implementation of the monitoring requirements of the *Offender's Learning Journey* (OLJ), which include:

- monitoring progress with the learner via a 'live' Individual Learning Plan (ILP)
- maintaining one overall ILP for each learner across subject areas
- receiving/transferring ILPs when the learner moves
- collecting and transferring numerical data on retention, progression and achievement.

The chapter begins by discussing the issues or challenges in relation to implementing the monitoring requirements in each of the three development regions and goes on to discuss the extent to which the development regions had implemented the requirements. Following which, a summary table of key barriers and solutions is provided.

3.1   Monitoring challenges

Overall, interviewees identified five main barriers in relation to monitoring:

- collecting and recording monitoring data
- confidentiality and data protection issues
- limitations of ILPs
- poor transfer of information leading to difficulties in monitoring offender progress and achievement
- the implementation of management information systems such as Maytas.

3.1.1 The challenge of collecting and recording monitoring data

A key issue in terms of monitoring was the uncertainty amongst key partners regarding the type and detail of data to be collected. Requests for data varied between organisations, as did the interpretation of the data collected (for example, in one region interviewees reported that the terms 'start' and 'commencement' had different meanings to the Probation Service and the LSC). In some cases, the lack of a standardised approach to data collection resulted in variability in the data collected. Such disparity in the quantity and completeness of monitoring data meant that the information collected could not always be used to inform future planning (e.g. to determine the types of courses to offer). Further to this, interviewees expressed concerns that providers collected and recorded only 'in scope' education and skills data in

ILPs (i.e. provision that is funded by the LSC) and not 'out scope'. However, an LSC representative from the North East emphasised that they did in fact seek to measure such activity and that they, along with the providers, were in talks with establishments about how this could be achieved. Moreover, they were looking to see how OLASS could support the 'out of scope' activity.

A prison representative in the North East described how, unlike assessments, there was insufficient concentration upon collecting information about the offender on arrival. Particular difficulties in the collection of data included: the complexities in recording of monitoring information in general (e.g. due to the high turn over of learners in local prisons); collecting details such as National Insurance numbers from offenders; and continual requests for additional information from the LSC. In addition to this, several personnel-related issues were reported such as; small administrative teams with a lack of understanding of the importance of keeping such data; the need for training for such personnel; and the lack of a computerised system to record the information. One provider in the North East described how inputting monitoring data from establishments into the colleges' IT system was 'very time consuming', as establishments in the region did not have the technology to enable staff to input this data themselves. To help with the inputting of monitoring data, the college recruited temporary staff.

Suggested solutions to the reported data collection and data recording challenges included:

- agreement and clarification between key partners of the types of data that need to be collected and requests for data to be streamlined
- training for key personnel to ensure they understand the importance of collecting monitoring data and that data is recorded accurately
- increase the capacity of administrative staff to collect monitoring data
- the use of an MIS such as Maytas to record monitoring information electronically.

3.1.2 The challenge of confidentiality and data protection

Seven interviewees from across the three development regions highlighted barriers in relation to confidentiality. Interviewees within custody described the challenges of sharing information about a learner between subject tutors within establishments, as well as the use of prisoner numbers on documents transferred into the community on their release. In other cases, it was reported that those responsible for sharing information were at times reluctant to pass on records because they did not have the offenders consent.

Suggested solutions to confidentiality and data protection issues included:

- training for staff on the requirements and obligations of the data protection act

- requests for permission to data transfer from offenders should be made at the time of data collection.

3.1.3 The challenge of individual learning plans

A challenge highlighted by around a fifth of interviewees across the three development regions related to variations in the ILP, and the lack of a common format or definitive version. Indeed, it was suggested that a number of parties involved in OLASS championed their own ILP and that this hindered the development of an integrated service. In the North East, for example, an audit of the use of ILPs by the lead provider found that establishments varied in how 'live' these documents were, how they were used, and how much they were owned by the learners. ILPs also varied in quality between tutors.

Other concerns raised by interviewees related to the design of the ILPs not being 'fit for purpose' or rigorous enough to allow for the recording of specific information/details about a learner. For example, only 'in scope' education (e.g. classroom/subject based provision) was recorded in ILPs. Likewise, it was suggested that some of the fields of the ILR were not appropriate (for example, when an offender in custody is transferred to a different prison it appears in the ILR as if they have 'dropped out' of a course). It was suggested that such improvements to the ILR needed to be made to allow tutors to give individual support to learners, as well as to enable measurement of the effectiveness of OLASS.

In the South West region, interviewees commented on challenges relating to the lack of staff training to use ILPs, noting that staff required more training in both target setting, and in ensuring that reviews of ILPs were recorded in meaningful and specific terms. Other concerns, raised by HOLS, related to the lack of personnel within establishments with responsibility for reviewing and monitoring ILPs.

Suggested solutions to the limitations of ILPs included:

- early agreement of ILP formats between key partners
- national sharing of ILP documents and good practice in relation to ILPs
- training in the use of ILPs for key personnel
- increased capacity to enable ILPs to be reviewed and monitored effectively.

3.1.4 The challenges of data transfer

The most common challenge in implementing the monitoring requirements of the OLJ (highlighted by key partners from across the three regions) related to the transfer of information between custody and community. Here, the reliance on a paper-based system to transfer records, and the lack of a formalised

system for information exchange had resulted in an ad-hoc transfer of data between key partners when offenders moved or were released. HOLS and LSC representatives reported that ILPs were not being transferred in all cases.

In addition, the information that was transferred was also felt to be inconsistent, with interviewees reporting variability in the accuracy of information about offenders, and the amount of progress they had, or had not made. A representative from the Probation Service in the North East described custody as 'territorial', noting that information about an offender was not regularly transferred to other services or agencies working with offenders in the community.

> (If an offender completed a course in custody) *a year or two ago it's easier for them to sit the exam again and get a certificate quickly than for us to try and find any information...* (The lead provider) *in particular are very keen to make sure that changes but that's a slow process. Historically, I do know that trying to get information from prisons is a nightmare, it's very territorial.*
> IAG Subcontractor, North East

Custody based interviewees also referred to the difficulties in the transference of offender information to and from other regions, particularly in relation to those serving sentences in high security establishments, YOIs and female prisons, (e.g. where the smaller number of establishments meant that prisoners could be placed some distance from their homes). Although offenders could be transferred across the three OLASS development regions, more often, there is likely to be transfer to and from other prisons nationally where prisoners' learning is recorded in various formats. It was suggested that such challenges would continue to exist until all nine regions of the country are operating as part of a national OLASS system.

Communication issues were also believed to hamper the effective transfer of information, particularly for those serving sentences away from their home region. A Connexions Service representative from the North East described the need for a mechanism whereby information can be shared more effectively with the Connexions Service in the area the offender permanently resides. The interviewee reported that since the introduction of OLASS little progress had been made in relation to information sharing. A Youth Justice representative from the North East also described how the transfer of information about offenders due to be released into the community was often less effective as members of the education and learning service within a particular establishment rarely attended release meetings with key stakeholders.

Suggested solutions to the transfer of information included:

- the introduction of an effective electronic data transfer system

- enforcing the use of the data transfer system, to ensure all staff/services comply

- producing a clear memorandum of understanding/service level agreement between OLASS and its key partners such as Connexions (revisit working arrangements and formalise them)

- closer working between providers and key personnel to ensure that the information is passed on to the provider and to other services

- increasing joined-up working between key partners to ensure effective data transfer.

3.1.5 Challenges relating to Maytas

Linked to the challenges of sharing information was the lack of an operational IT system to facilitate the transference of data between custody, community and mainstream. However, interviewees described how the implementation of such an IT system brought its own challenges. Firstly, difficulties related to the installation of the IT infrastructure and hardware (e.g. cabling for internet/broadband access) into prison estates and probation offices due to security issues. Secondly, some interviewees (e.g. a HOLS and a Connexions representative) reported that MAYTAS was being used alongside existing systems. This presented difficulties in terms of crossover of information and it meant that there were two parallel systems operating rather than one single integrated system.

Additional concerns were also raised about Maytas by interviewees in all three development regions. For example, in the North West a provider felt that Maytas had been 'imposed' on establishments without adequate consultation. Further concerns were noted by interviewees in the South West who highlighted that Maytas had not been subject to any objective evaluation or testing. In the North East, an interviewee from the probation service felt that there had been a lack of official correspondence from the Probation Directorate in relation to Maytas noting that it seemed 'very word of mouth'. Interviewees, particularly in the South West raised concerns that Maytas was not fully operational and that this presented a major obstacle to implementing the monitoring requirements of the *Offender's Learning Journey*. Indeed, two HOLS from the region reported that the implementation of Maytas as 'a difficult and frustrating process'.

Suggested solutions to the challenges relating to Maytas included:

- carry out an evaluation of Maytas and disseminate findings to key partners
- provide official correspondence about the implementation of Maytas to key partners (particularly the Probation Service).

3.2   Improvements in monitoring

Interviewees were asked to comment on the implementation of the monitoring requirements in the *Offender's Learning Journey*. The main areas of development included:

- the standardisation and improvement of ILPs
- heightened profile and priority of monitoring amongst key partners
- improvements in the transfer of data

3.2.1 Improved individual learning plans

Despite interviewees citing limitations of ILPs as being a challenge to implementing the monitoring requirements of the OLJ (see Section 3.1.3) in general, a greater proportion of interviewees (across all three regions) reported that the introduction of OLASS had led to the standardisation of ILPs. For example, in the South West, a HOLS described how prior to OLASS there was no guarantee that offenders would have an ILP. Where there was an ILP in place, they were poorly structured and poorly completed, and targets were too vague and generalised. However since OLASS, there had been a regional consultation exercise to agree a standardised ILP. The interviewee noted:

> *That spawned the production of a single sheet, carefully sub-headed, good quality, carefully worded working document that was easy for the learners and staff to utilise…At the end of each learning session, the ILP is collected in and stored in a place accessible to tutors. When they* [offenders] *leave, they will take the ILP with them. As a result of the way the ILP is put together, suddenly, Learning and Skills is not peripheral – it is at the centre of it all, of any assessment when they come to any induction.*

> HOLS, South West

3.2.2 Improved profile and priority of monitoring

A further improvement highlighted by interviewees was that OLASS had raised the profile and priority of monitoring amongst key partners. For example, a North West representative from Job Centre Plus described how there were now monthly reviews of ILPs and a representative from the Connexions service spoke of how they had been working to make the tracking procedures much tighter. Changes to the monitoring process in the South West were noted by a HOLS, who described how the provider now carried out interviews with offenders who decide to leave a course as a means of monitoring the effectiveness/quality of the provision.

3.2.3 Improvements in the transfer of data

In some instances, interviewees reported that although there was some way to go, there had been improvements in the transfer of data since the introduction of OLASS. A custody based interviewee in the North East noted that since August 2005 there had been a heightened level of interest within prisons in terms of sending information out to the community. And representatives from Job Centre Plus and the Connexions Service in the North West described how more information was being transferred than had been previously, with positive effects for offenders themselves.

> *Offenders have more confidence in the system because they know that everything is tracked and they have an ILP that goes with them. It gives them the confidence that there is a good system. Everyone benefits from it.*
>
> Provider, South West

3.3 No change to monitoring

Overall, two fifths of interviewees (across the three regions) felt there had been no change or improvements in relation to the monitoring of learners progress and achievements since the introduction of OLASS. Here, seven interviewees commented on it being 'early days' and 'too soon' and that more time was needed to implement and embed the new requirements (particularly Maytas). Despite interviewees perceiving there had been little or no impact of OLASS, seven interviewees (all from the North West region) described how monitoring requirements were already in place prior to August 2005.

3.4 Summary comment

The main challenge relating to the implementation of the monitoring requirements of the OLJ centred on the transfer of information about an offender between custody and community. Despite some improvements (e.g. the standardisation of ILPs and the heightened profile and priority of monitoring), in general, interviewees accounts suggested there had only been slight changes to the monitoring of offenders since the introduction of OLASS.

Table 3.1 Monitoring – key barriers and solutions

	Monitoring	
	Barriers/challenges	**Solutions**
Collecting and recording monitoring data	• Uncertainty amongst key partners regarding the type and level detail of data to be collected • Requests for data vary between organisations • Interpretation of the data collected varies between key partners • Lack of a standardised approach to data collection results in variability of data collected • Providers collect only 'in scope' data (e.g., information on classroom/subject based learning) • Complexities in recording of monitoring information in general - (e.g. due to the high turn over of learners in local prisons); collecting details such as National Insurance numbers from offenders; and continual requests for additional information from the LSC • Personnel related issues – (e.g. small administrative teams with a lack of understanding of the importance of keeping such data; the need for training for such personnel; and the lack of a computerised system to record the information)	• Agreement and clarification between key partners of the types of data that need to be collected and requests for data to be streamlined • Training for key personnel to ensure they understand the importance of collecting monitoring data and that data is recorded accurately • Increase the capacity of administrative staff to collect monitoring data • Use of an MIS such as Maytas to record monitoring information electronically
Confidentiality and data protection issues	• Concerns amongst personnel re: sharing of information about a learner between subject tutors within establishments and the use of prisoner numbers on documents transferred into the community • Personnel responsible for sharing information were at times reluctant to pass on records without the offenders consent • A high security prison in the North East region would not permit the	• Training for staff on the requirements and obligations of the data protection act • Make requests for permission to transfer data from offenders at the time of data collection

	release information to the lead provider for the Individual Learning Record (ILR). Without such data offenders could not be tracked	
Limitations of ILPs	• Variations in ILPs - the lack of a common format or definitive version • Parties involved in OLASS championed their own ILP which hindered the development of an integrated service • An audit of the use of ILPs by the lead provider in the NE found that establishments varied in how 'live' these documents were, how they were used, and how much they were owned by the learners. ILPs also varied in quality between tutors. • The design of the ILPs not being 'fit for purpose' or rigorous enough to allow for the recording of specific information/details about a learner • Staff require training in target setting and ensuring that reviews of ILPs are recorded in meaningful and specific terms • A lack of personnel within establishments with responsibility for reviewing and monitoring ILPs	• Early agreement of ILP formats between key partners • National sharing of ILP documents and good practice in relation to ILPs • Training in the use of ILPs for key personnel • Increased capacity to enable ILPs to be reviewed and monitored effectively.
Poor transfer of information	• Reliance on a paper-based system to transfer records, and the lack of a formalised system for information exchange • Information that was transferred was inconsistent – there was variability in the accuracy of information about offenders, and the progress they had, or had not made • Custody is described as 'territorial' - information about an offender was not regularly transferred to other services/agencies working with offenders in the community. • Difficulties in the transference of offender information to and from other regions, particularly in relation to those serving sentences in high security establishments, YOIs and female prisons • Communication issues hampered the effective transfer of information. • Lack of sufficient forward planning to establish an electronic offender	• The introduction of an effective electronic data transfer system • Enforce the use of the data transfer system, to ensure all staff/services comply • Produce a clear memorandum of understanding/service level agreement between OLASS and its key partners (revisit working arrangements and formalise them) • Providers to work closely with key personnel to ensure that the information is passed on to the provider and to other services • Increase joined-up working between key partners to ensure effective data transfer

	data transfer system to 'link up' key partners	
The implementation of Maytas	• Security issues in relation to the installation of the IT infrastructure and hardware (e.g. cabling for internet/broadband access) into prison estates and probation offices • Incorporating Maytas into the prisons own MIS • Compatibility of Maytas with the ICT systems used by other OLASS partners • Maytas had not been subject to any objective evaluation or testing • Lack of official correspondence from the Probation Directorate in relation to Maytas • Maytas is not fully operational, this presents a major obstacle to implementing the monitoring requirements of the *Offender's Learning Journey*	• Carry out an evaluation of Maytas and disseminate findings to key partners • Provide official correspondence about the implementation of Maytas to key partners (particularly the Probation Service)

4 Information, Advice and Guidance

This section of the report considers the implementation of the Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) requirements of the *Offender's Learning Journey* (OLJ). The chapter begins by discussing the issues or challenges in relation to implementing the OLASS requirements for the provision of IAG and goes on to discuss the extent to which the development regions had implemented the requirements. A summary table of key barriers and solutions is provided at the end of the chapter.

4.1 IAG challenges

Overall, interviewees identified nine main barriers in relation to implementing IAG requirements:

- varying interpretations of IAG amongst key partners/personnel
- duplication of IAG provision
- IAG providers not able to meet the needs of all offenders
- offender reluctance/failure to attend mainstream IAG provision
- the cost/funding of IAG
- staffing issues
- lack of IAG provision in the community
- poor integration of IAG services
- offender mobility

4.1.1 The challenge of varying interpretations of IAG

Seven interviewees believed that the lack of a precise definition of IAG was a challenge to implementing the OLJ requirements. It was suggested that the OLJ does not specify clearly enough what is expected in terms of IAG and that this had led to inconsistencies in the provision of IAG across different organisations. An example of this was given by a provider in the North East who found, through an audit of IAG activity, that what was being interpreted as IAG by staff in one establishment was in fact basic skills assessments.

Suggested solutions to the varying interpretations of IAG included:

- greater clarification of what IAG is intended to cover through the OLASS contract
- ensure IAG is provided by appropriately trained IAG staff with an understanding of the IAG requirements.

4.1.2 The challenge of duplication in IAG provision

A small number of interviewees, mainly from the North East, expressed concerns over the duplication of IAG provision. An audit of activity carried out by the provider in the region revealed overlap and doubling-up of resources amongst the different services/agencies involved in the delivery of IAG to offenders both within custody and within the community. For example, in some prisons, IAG was provided by Job Centre Plus personnel as well as providers contracted to deliver careers advice and prison based job search teams. Notwithstanding the duplication of efforts, there were additional concerns that providers' approaches may be inconsistent or contradictory.

Suggested solutions to the duplication of IAG included:

- IAG providers to work together to discuss roles and remits
- offer a coordinated approach to the delivery of IAG so that staff provide specific aspects
- create a map of IAG provision to avoid duplication of effort and maximise resources
- allocate funding for specific IAG input from services to avoid replication.

4.1.3 Challenges relating to IAG providers

Interviewees in the North East and North West expressed concerns that IAG providers were not able to meet the needs of all offenders. In particular, concerns related to the IAG provision for offenders between the ages of 18 and 21. It was suggested, by a small number of interviewees, that the Connexions Service (whose remit is for young people between the ages of 13-19 and those up to the age of 25 who have learning difficulties or disabilities [or both]) mainly focus their provision on juveniles. Moreover, interviewees believed that the Connexions Service was reluctant to work with those over 19 due to limited budgets and the large number of young people within their remit. Therefore, 19 to 25 year olds with such difficulties were being largely ignored.

Other ways in which IAG provision was perceived to not be meeting the needs of offenders was for those in the community with Level 2 (or above) qualifications. The suggested reason for this was that nextstep providers remit is to provide IAG to adults aged 20 and over whose qualifications are below Level 2. Therefore, those offenders on release who do have a Level 2 or above qualification would not be entitled to IAG services from this provider.

Suggested solutions to the reported challenges of IAG providers:

- ensure there is an alternative source of IAG provision from nextstep for offenders in the community with Level 2 or above qualifications.

4.1.4 The challenge of offender reluctance/failure to attend

For all three regions, a barrier relating to the provision of IAG in the community was associated with offender's reluctance/failure to attend mainstream IAG provision. Here, six interviewees believed that offenders poor/lack of attendance was related to their previous negative experiences of education and lack of value for it. It was suggested that OLASS did not provide the necessary support to offenders to facilitate their engagement into mainstream services. There was a danger that any investment made in the secure estate would be dissipated without an appropriate transitional system to support those released into the community. The need for a greater degree of support (particularly for juveniles) was noted here.

> *The fact is the client group that we work with need to cross that bridge first of all, we bring a lot of provision in house, there is a lot of hand holding that goes on, offenders just won't walk into a college. The LSC say that the community provision is there, which is correct, however, there is a need for staff on the ground that can support the client into mainstream.*
>
> IAG Subcontractor, North East

Suggested solutions to offender reluctance/failure to attend included:

- provide IAG early in the sentence in order to motivate offenders to attend basic skills and skills for life sessions on release
- provide gateway provision in probation offices and support offenders gradually into mainstream. Allow the offender to build a relationship with the provider who is then a point of contact and familiarity
- key workers to support offenders into mainstream provision on release
- offenders to attend mainstream providers in a group so they feel more secure.

4.1.5 The challenge of funding

The most often reported challenge to implementing the IAG requirements of the OLJ and achieving an integrated IAG service related to funding, specifically, the insufficient funding of IAG provision in the community (highlighted by interviewees in the North East and North West). Interviewees from the Probation Service described how unlike custody, their service did not receive funding for IAG through OLASS, and that since the introduction of the new service funding for IAG provision had been considerably reduced. A suggested reason for this, given by an interviewee, was that under the new contract offenders ought to access IAG provision directly through the provider. However, the interviewee raised concerns that the client group would not access mainstream provision independently on release and that

there was a need for a gateway IAG service offered through Probation (for further details see section 4.1.1 on offender reluctance / failure to attend).

Despite this, interviewees based within custody also cited the funding of IAG as a challenge, a representative from the Connexions Service in the North West commented that: 'funding has drastically reduced, so instead of being able to expand what we've been doing, it's probably gone the other way'. Furthermore, a provider in the North East described how due to the lack of funding for IAG there were capacity shortages and this led to reduced IAG provision (for example, not all offenders received an initial, on-course and a pre-release one to one with an IAG worker). Moreover, if IAG provision were to be increased, in order to meet OLJ requirements, then this would be at the cost of other provision, due to set budgets.

A small number of interviewees had concerns that the funding of IAG was combined into the education budget of an establishment and that limited funds were devolved to the delivery of such provision as a result. Given this, interviewees reported that IAG was being 'tagged on to' the assessment process in order to reduce costs and as initial assessments were particularly lengthy, there was often no time for IAG. Here interviewees suggested the need for recognition that the delivery of IAG to offenders is a specialist area and that it should therefore receive a discrete funding resource.

Suggested solutions to the reported cost/funding challenges of IAG included:

- increase funding and/or a change in prioritisation of IAG resources
- provision of daily tutorial sessions to supplement IAG
- an audit of IAG provision - since OLASS was introduced the requirements have changed but the personnel required to meet this IAG requirements may not necessarily be available.

4.1.6 Challenges related to IAG staff

As noted in section 4.1.5, funding challenges were seen to have a negative impact on staffing. Here ten interviewees described how staff shortages were a particular barrier to implementing the OLJ requirements (see section 5.1.2 for further details on staff shortages). For example, a HOLS in the North West described how the lack of full time IAG personnel meant that the majority of staff time was spent screening, which left little time for the actual delivery of IAG. Recruitment issues were also noted such as delays in new providers appointing IAG staff and problems attracting applicants to prison posts 'not all that many people are keen to work within the prison environment' (Connexions representative).

4.1.7 Challenges of IAG in the community

The challenges of funding IAG in the community were discussed previously in section 4.1.5, and offender reluctance/failure to attend mainstream IAG provision was highlighted in section 4.1.4. Additional issues relating specifically to the provision of IAG in the community were further highlighted. Here, interviewees suggested that the new service focused more on the development of IAG provision in custody than it did in the community. Moreover, that there was poor integration of IAG services between custody and community and there had been limited developments in terms of IAG through OLASS due to its custody focus. Other issues included delays in implementing the new service in the community. In the North West, a provider described how there were delays in taking over the community part of the contract as well as delays in TUPE transfers of IAG staff.

> *We haven't got any IAG in the community at the moment. We have concentrated on getting the processes right in the prison and with existing resources I can't see we will ever get provision in the community. It would take either prioritising of resources that we have already got for IAG, and we are utilising our IAG fully at the moment or extra resources and I have to say, I think it should be the latter if there is a real commitment to IAG in the community.*
>
> Provider, North East

Finally, there were barriers in terms of delivering IAG provision on probation premises. Particularly, the lack of suitable space and facilities to deliver such provision.

4.1.8 The challenge of poor integration of IAG services

A further barrier highlighted was the lack of coordination and integration of IAG services. Interviewees from custody (HOLS) described how there was poor communication and a lack of joined up working between teams based within establishments such as Resettlement, Nacro and Supporting Others through Volunteer Action (SOVA). Moreover, it was reported that those delivering IAG were not always aware of what services these agencies could provide.

> *None of the partners think outside the box and the provider doesn't either. People think in very insular ways in prisons, they don't always think of linking up with someone in the next office or down the corridor, they have their own targets and they only see those.*
>
> HOLS, North West

Further to this, interviewees from both custody and community described how poor integration between the two sectors was a challenge. In some cases, it was reported that establishments did not have good links with the community

and were operating as isolated units, in other cases it was suggested that community based services such as Probation lacked efficient working relationships with other external agencies such as Job Centre Plus, and Connexions and vice versa. In one case, a provider suggested that a particular challenge to achieving an integrated IAG service for his/her organisation was in establishing consistent links with employers, although methods to engage employers were being sought (see section 4.2.5).

Suggested solutions to poor integration of IAG services included:

- having the same provider in custody and community to allow a greater focus on improving the interface between custody and community.

4.1.9 The challenge of offender mobility

A further challenge highlighted by eight interviewees was to provide appropriate IAG services to offenders not serving sentences in local prisons and ensuring that the IAG offered was relevant to the community in which they were being released.

> *We've got people coming for the last ten days of their sentence, which is just really stupid. At the end of their sentence they really should be in their home area so that the organisations that work with offenders can actually get in there and engage with them and help them.*
>
> Job Centre Plus representative, North West

As discussed in section 3.1.4 on monitoring, interviewees here also raised as a challenge, the transferring of information about the IAG received by an offender when they were transferred or released. One of the reasons for this was the large number of offenders within national establishments. Respondents felt that that when OLASS rolls out, it is likely to lead to a more consistent approach, as it will mean a similar set of arrangements for services throughout England.

Suggested solutions to the challenge of offender mobility included:

- ensure offenders are transferred to a prison in the area of their release (their home area) prior to their actual release.
- the introduction of Maytas to help with the transfer of IAG records.

4.2 Improvements to IAG

Interviewees were asked to comment on the changes to IAG delivery since the introduction of OLASS. Five main areas of improvement were identified. These included:

- improved IAG service

- improved consistency and co-ordination of IAG services
- staff dedicated to delivering IAG
- introduction of quality standards for IAG
- IAG focused on career and employment opportunities.

4.2.1 Improved IAG service

Just over a quarter of all interviewees reported that the IAG service offered to offenders had improved since the introduction of OLASS. Ways in which improvements had been made included an increase in the amount of IAG available to offenders in custody and community. For example, an interviewee from the South West reported that prior to OLASS, IAG was not delivered in the Devon and Cornwall probation service, and since the implementation of the new requirements each offender now received at least one thirty minute IAG session. As well as an increase in the delivery of IAG, other interviewees reported that IAG was bettor tailored to the needs of offenders. For example, one interviewee (a HOLS) described how the information profile of an offender had improved and that the IAG service was based more on an offender's particular requirements, and another interviewee (a Connexions worker) reported that IAG was more tailored to offender's sentence plans. Furthermore, it was highlighted that the recruitment of additional IAG workers meant that in some cases the quality of inductions had improved; offenders received more one to one work or were offered in-depth IAG interviews and IAG covered the four stages (on entry, during their sentence, pre-release and in the community).

> *We are well on our way* (with IAG) *I think it's one of the most positive things of the whole programme.*
>
> Governor, North East

> *We've got actually more hours, more money, from the LSC to provide IAG…So those hours have enabled us to deploy somebody in every part of the prison. In terms of volume and reaching out to more prisoners that is without a doubt happening, the penetration rate is much improved.*
>
> HOLS, North West

4.2.2 Improved consistency and co-ordination of IAG services

In total, eight interviewees from across the three development regions described how since the introduction of OLASS there was greater coordination of IAG services. This had been achieved in various ways; the first of which was the introduction of a new provider with an overarching remit to bring together IAG services. Improved consistency was also brought about by audits of provision and stakeholder meetings to address the roles and remits of various IAG providers. Indeed, a range of key partners (e.g. Probation, YOS,

JCP) described how communication and partnership working with other IAG agencies had led to a greater exchange of information and thus led to improved consistency in approaches. One interviewee suggested there was less repetition in the questioning of offenders by IAG workers as well as a reduction in the duplication of testing for basic skills. This was due to IAG workers sharing information with others more.

4.2.3 Staff dedicated to delivering IAG

Seven interviewees across each of the development regions highlighted that since the introduction of OLASS one of the improvements had been an increase in personnel/staff time dedicated to delivering IAG e.g. appointment of a full time guidance manager and training for prison officer staff to become vocational guidance workers. It should be noted however, that the majority of interviewees citing this improvement were custody based.

An additional change to IAG brought about by OLASS was the clarification and streamlining of the role of IAG workers including, in some cases, the removal of basic skills testing from core IAG staff to enable them to deliver a greater number of IAG sessions. Interviewees suggested that the increase in personnel and the streamlining of roles meant that there was now more time for IAG workers based within custody to establish links with colleges or training providers in the community and to access offenders in every part of the prison (e.g. library, IAG clinics, and on the wings etc). In the North East, interviewees described how induction work had been transferred from the responsibility of administrative staff to dedicated IAG workers and this has had a positive response from learner.

4.2.4 Introduction of quality standards

Interviewees in the North East and North West reported that the introduction of new providers meant that quality standards for the delivery of IAG had been introduced. Here it was reported that providers shared good practice on advice and guidance and had introduced training sessions for IAG workers. An interviewee in the North East reported that: 'it's as if the new service has brought with it a new professional approach to IAG that perhaps hasn't been there before'.

4.2.5 Improved IAG focused on career/employment opportunities

A small number of interviewees (5) described how OLASS had resulted in a greater employer focus to IAG. It was suggested that OLASS had brought about general awareness raising amongst staff about the wider aspects of IAG particularly in relation to employability. A provider in the North East described how in two establishments they had involved IAG staff in group-

work about careers education and it was hoped that such group-work would be rolled out to the other establishments in the region. In addition to this, the provider planned to make use of call centre facilities within the college to contact employers in the region and arrange work placements for learners on their release into the community. Additionally, in the North West, probation representatives described how they were working to forge closer links with employers (for example, through the employment regeneration partnership, involving Job Centre Plus and the social employment agency) and that offender employment IAG would continue to improve as a result of the new contract and increased partnership working with different IAG services.

4.3 No change to IAG

Despite the changes and improvements to IAG highlighted, nearly one third of interviewees (across the three regions) reported there had been no change/improvement in the information, advice and guidance offered to offenders since the introduction of OLASS in August 2005. Some felt that there had not been sufficient time to implement the OLJ requirements and that certain issues had to be resolved before changes to IAG provision could be made (for example, working conditions, salaries and staff training). Meanwhile, six interviewees (mainly from the North West region) described how IAG requirements were already in place prior to August 2005. In some cases, the existing providers of IAG (e.g. nextstep and Connexions services) had continued to provide an effective IAG service under the new OLASS contract.

It should also be noted that three interviewees from the South West region believed that there had been a reduction in the effectiveness of IAG provision since the introduction of the new service. The new providers were not thought to be as effective as those who had previously delivered IAG. For example, one interviewee stated that prior to OLASS, the IAG offered within custody was linked to resettlement and focused on broader areas (e.g. drugs, health and housing issues) and that the IAG now being offered was an isolated unit concentrating on education and training only.

4.4 Summary comment

Several of the issues identified by interviewees in implementing the IAG requirements of the OLJ appeared to revolve around funding. For example, that there was insufficient funding for community based IAG, and that a lack of funding for IAG in both custody and community sectors resulted in capacity shortages and reductions in the quality of IAG provision. Other concerns related to the perceived focus of OLASS towards custody based improvements. Hence, prior to the introduction of OLASS nationally, it may be useful to revisit the funding dedicated to IAG and to consider whether

there is perceived equality of OLASS (particularly in relation to IAG) across both custody and community sectors.

Despite the challenges raised, a quarter of interviewees did suggest there had been some improvements to the IAG service available to offenders since the introduction of OLASS. Particularly noted, was an increase in the amount of IAG provision and that IAG was tailored more towards the needs of offenders.

Table 4.1 Information, advice and guidance – key barriers and solutions

	Information, Advice and Guidance	
	Barriers/challenges 35	**Solutions**
Varying interpretations of IAG	• The lack of a precise definition of IAG • The OLJ does not specify clearly enough what is expected in terms of IAG, leading to inconsistencies in the provision of IAG across different organisations	• Greater clarification of what IAG is intended to cover through the OLASS contract • Ensure IAG is disaggregated from the work of assessment • Ensure information, advice and guidance is provided by appropriately trained IAG staff with an understanding of the IAG requirements
Duplication of IAG provision	• Overlap and doubling-up of resources amongst the different services/agencies involved in the delivery of IAG to offenders within custody and the community • Various providers are contracted to deliver IAG within establishments • Providers' approaches may be inconsistent or contradictory • Lack of coordination of IAG provision between custody and community	• IAG providers to work together to discuss roles and remits • Offer a coordinated approach to the delivery of IAG so that staff provide specialist input • Create a map of IAG provision to avoid duplication of effort and maximise resources • Allocate funding for specific IAG input from services to avoid replication
IAG providers not able to meet the needs of all offenders	• The Connexions Service are perceived to focus their provision on juveniles • The Connexions Service are perceived to be reluctant to work with offenders over 19 due to limited budgets and the large number of young people within their remit • The need to adapt adult IAG services to meet the specific needs of the youth sector • Offenders with Level 2 or above qualifications are not entitled to IAG services from nextstep providers in the community	• Ensure there is an alternative source of IAG provision to nextstep for offenders in the community with Level 2 or above qualifications
Offender reluctance/ failure to attend mainstream IAG provision	• Offenders poor/lack of attendance related to their previous negative experiences of education and lack of value for it • Lack of support to facilitate offender's engagement into mainstream services	• Provide IAG early in the sentence in order to motivate offenders to attend basic skills and skills for life sessions on release • Provide gateway provision in probation offices and support offenders gradually into mainstream. Allow the offender to build a relationship with a provider who is then a point of contact and familiarity • Key workers to support offenders into mainstream provision on release • Offenders to attend mainstream providers in a group so they feel more secure

5   Workforce issues

This chapter moves on to consider workforce issues connected with the implementation of OLASS. Interviewees were first asked whether they felt that the workforce (e.g. tutors, prison staff, probation officers, etc) would benefit from any further training to support them in their OLASS role. More broadly, they were also asked whether there was anything further that needed to be done to make the workforce more effective. In responding to these questions, a series of issues came to light which centred mostly on the training needs of specific sections of the workforce and factors which were considered to hinder the current effectiveness of the workforce. This chapter begins by presenting those workforce factors which were highlighted as potential barriers to the implementation of OLASS. It then goes on to discuss the training needs of the OLASS workforce.

Tables 5.1 and 5.2 at the end of the chapter provide a summary of the key issues raised in relation to the workforce.

5.1   Workforce factors affecting the implementation of OLASS

Interviewees reported four key staff issues which were viewed as potential barriers or challenges to the operation of OLASS:

- Cultural and attitudinal variations between the different OLASS partners
- Staff shortages
- Factors associated with TUPE
- Role of the HOLS

5.1.1 Cultural and attitudinal variations between the different OLASS partners

Whilst OLASS may hope to achieve greater integration of services and liaison between participating agencies, it was felt by some interviewees that the partners did not necessarily all share an equal understanding of each others work or indeed, possess a shared vision of OLASS and its underlying principles. This issue manifested itself in different ways across the interviewees.

For example, a few interviewees expressed the opinion that the prison service was 'not necessarily coming from a tradition of valuing education' (Provider). Similarly, a head of learning and skills felt that prisons needed to appreciate more the relevance of education and employment for addressing behavioural and offending issues.

> *OLASS is not represented enough in the whole prison re-offending agenda. Some prison officers do get involved with students learning but I think the focus of prisons is very much dictated by the governor and some prisons have come from a manufacturing background where manufacturing was top priority, learning was second priority and things have moved from that position, but there's still some way to go.*
>
> Provider

At the same time, there were interviewees who acknowledged that some services would benefit from a greater insight into prison culture and how the regime may impact on what can be delivered. A job centre plus interviewee, for example, admitted that before they became involved in custody based services they had not entirely understood the constraints of the regime e.g. in terms of offenders availability, IT facilities, etc.

There was a similar lack of understanding around the work of other services connected with OLASS. For instance, a probation representative described how staff generally associated the provider with offering basic skills when, in fact, there was a considerable focus on increasing the employability of offenders through education and training. In order to raise the profile of the providers' work, a probation officer had been seconded to work alongside the provider and relay back to their colleagues the broader context of what the provider actually offered. Meanwhile, a provider interviewee felt that the switch to OLASS was very much a cultural change and that there was a lot to be learnt in terms of how the LSC operates, in particular its planning and funding structures. From the perspective of an LSC representative, the working cultures/attitudes of the LSC and prisons was said to contrast quite dramatically and there was a need for greater partnership working between the two.

In light of these reported issues, time clearly needs to be invested in ensuring that all parties are informed about each other's work and are adequately prepared for the shift to OLASS. Indeed, one interviewee considered that OLASS had been rushed in and as a result, staff did not necessarily grasp what it entailed or why it was needed. This interviewee advised spending time on 'selling the vision' to make certain that staff are fully on board and in doing so, avoid potential resistance from the workforce. Therefore, whilst it may be important to ensure that OLASS is up and running in the specified time, it is equally important to consider the readiness of the workforce – in terms of their own awareness of OLASS, their understanding of the key partners and how different services operate and also, their abilities to undertake the duties required by the new service.

5.1.2 Staffing shortages and capacity

In the NE and SW (but not the NW) the issue of staff shortages was raised. In the NE region this related to recruiting specialist instructors for courses such as dry lining and bricklaying (it was acknowledged there was a national shortage). Also, in this region a provider felt that OLASS had highlighted where capacity needed to be increased, in particular, around administration and increased IAG services.

> *The really big workforce issue for me, bizarrely, is not training, it's getting bodies in the classroom. Because we've still got a large number of courses that should have been running since August that are still not running because they can't recruit staff or they offer you staff who are unsuitable.*
>
> HOLS

In the SW, two HOLS described problems of inadequate staffing. A HOL suggested that the shortage had arisen from uncertainty around the TUPE process which led to a 'staff exodus' in some prisons. Thus, the new provider was faced with having to fill a number of vacancies. As a result, in one particular prison, only 70 per cent of courses were being delivered. Both HOLS also reported difficulties with staff cover. In one case, when staff were ill there was no cover available and courses had to be cancelled. In the other instance, because there was not adequate staffing, a lot of cover was being provided but this was felt to have consequences in terms of consistency for the learner and quality of provision.

In previous chapters, a lack of staffing was also raised as an issue in relation to undertaking assessments and recording monitoring information. Thus, the overall impact of OLASS on offender provision may be affected by the reported problems with staff coverage.

5.1.3 Factors associated with TUPE

A few interviewees spoke of problems connected with the TUPE process – e.g. getting accurate lists of staff for TUPE, staff unhappy about changes to pension rights and salaries and changes to job content. One HOLS suspected that the providers did not actually want to take on vocational workshops because of a lack experience in subjects like plumbing and painting and decorating. However, some interviewees recognised advantages arising from TUPE. One HOLS felt that the transfer of vocational instructors to providers had helped professionalise their work, whilst another HOLS reported that instructors now had access to a wider range of professional development (which had helped address some of their concerns over TUPE). In another region, probation staff who had been TUPED over to the college were said to have benefited for similar reasons (i.e. more professional development and support).

5.1.4 Role of the HOLS

The fourth staff related issue raised by interviewees across all three regions concerned the role of the HOLS – namely, that some HOLS may feel slightly insecure in their role and that there is a need to clarify exactly how the HOL fits into OLASS. One HOLS felt that their peers were probably quite worried 'about the erosion of their own influence to order hours and plan a curriculum' and suggested that the LSC's vision may conflict with that of the HOLS. Again, as suggested earlier, clarification of roles would appear to be an important precursor to the implementation of OLASS.

5.2 Training issues

As well as discussing general workforce issues, interviewees also identified sections of the workforce that would benefit from additional training in order to support them in their OLASS role. This section discusses these training needs, alongside other general issues. It covers:

- raising awareness of OLASS across the workforce
- training needs of prison staff
- training needs of probation staff
- training needs of providers

5.2.1 Raising awareness of OLASS across the workforce

Before presenting the specific training needs of particular services, it should be noted that across services (e.g. prisons, probation, YOTS, etc) there were calls for increasing the workforce's general awareness of OLASS. Interviewees implied that those on the ground would not necessarily be aware of OLASS, its purpose or how they could contribute. Whilst there may be many discussions at strategic/managerial level, the implication made by interviewees was that this information was not always filtering down to those working directly with offenders. The quotes below from different agencies (all describing very similar scenarios), exemplify the widespread concern on this issue:

> *If you asked an education representative in a team they'll know about OLAS S. If you ask a worker in the teams, a case worker, about OLASS they won't know what you're talking about. One of the major challenges for OLASS is to get the information to the workers in the YOTs*
>
> Youth Justice board representative

> *The big issue is publicity, in all honesty if you went to most of our*

*practitioners who are working directly with young people and said
'what do you know about OLASS and what is its impact on you' , they
would look at your rather blankly. They would tell you all sort of
things about our work with young offenders but OLASS wouldn't be
part of that thinking yet.*

<div align="right">Connexions representative</div>

*There is an awareness for us for the rest of the prison staff in terms of
them being clear about what the changes are and how they fit into the
learning journey and how IAG can help them in their work with
prisoners.*

<div align="right">Prison governor</div>

The message therefore seems to be that OLASS requires greater promotion
amongst the workforce. For example, one provider mentioned having
discussed with governors the possibility of the college attending prison officer
training days to talk about OLASS and raise awareness. A provider felt that
more could have been done by the OLSU and the LSC to convey the key
principles of the new service, acknowledging that it had been 'quite a cultural
change'. Part of the problem may have been the speed of implementation –
interviewees in two of the regions acknowledged that things have moved very
quickly, leaving little opportunity to '*prepare the ground for it or convince
people of the benefits and that bit is critical*' (ROM).

One interviewee made the point that, with services increasingly working
together, there would probably be a number of common training needs across
the various agencies. Hence, the different partners may wish to undertake
joint training, informed by an overarching OLASS training plan.

5.2.2 Training needs of prison staff

It was intimated earlier in the chapter that traditionally, some prison cultures
have not always been supportive of education. Indeed a HOLS, a LSC
representative and job centre plus worker suggested that attitudes needed to be
challenged and that prison officers would benefit from training to move them
away from a purely 'lock and key mentality'.

*I think a lot of it has got to do with the education of the prison, the
prison officers. They can't just walk in the middle of a class without
knocking and just say 'oy, you out!' and that was happening. It's hard
for prison officers that are coming from the security aspects of the job.*

<div align="right">Job Centre plus</div>

In one region, an LSC representative explained that positive steps were being
taken to bridge the gulf between the sometimes conflicting priorities of

security and education. Prison officers were being trained as mentors in skills for life and were therefore better equipped to support learners.

Three interviewees in the same region highlighted a training need for instructional tutors (now working for the provider). A HOLS was not sure whether the instructors felt fully included within the providers framework and interviewees suggested there was perhaps a gap in terms of ensuring the instructors felt supported and had access to training.

> *There hasn't been a real training programme for the instructors who were subject to TUPE, they've just been tagged on really. I'm not sure how supported or included they feel, because they aren't teachers, they're trainers and I think there is a gap there in support and training and just including them, so that they feel a sense of inclusiveness*
>
> HOLS

A provider commented that in the longer term they would like to see instructors moving towards being teacher trained and similarly, an LSC interviewee felt that the skill levels of tutors needed to be more equitable, as some were well trained and fully qualified, whilst others were not.

5.2.3 Training needs of probation staff

In just one of the development regions the training needs of probation staff were discussed, both in terms of the positive steps already taken, as well as areas for improvement. Three probation representatives stated that staff had already had access to training opportunities e.g. basic skills awareness, skills for life initiative training and also a reference to the LSC having included probation staff in many professional development opportunities. Despite these activities, two of the interviewees felt it was important that training be offered on ongoing basis (to update staff on any developments in the field and to ensure that new staff remain fully informed). Follow up training on basis skills awareness was deemed particularly crucial, as one interviewee suggested that probation staff were not always fully committed to the basic skills agenda. Again, this problem signifies a lack of cultural/attitudinal alignment which can sometimes exist between OLASS partners thus:

> *There is a need for a rolling programme of awareness training because one of the great problems in probation is winning over the hearts and minds of officers to be fully committed to basic skills and at the moment, they are not.*
>
> Probation representative

Lastly, there was also a request from a probation interviewee for training in the use of Maytas. It was felt that probation staff were still unclear about their

role in relation to the system and that so far, no training had been given in how to operate the database.

5.2.4 Training needs of providers

Understanding the criminal justice system, the prison environment and working with offenders were seen as the main training needs of providers. In the North West two probation representatives and an interviewee from Youth Justice felt that providers needed to be brought 'up to speed' on the criminal justice system generally and also on the specific needs of offenders. Whilst acknowledging that provider staff may know how to teach, a probation interviewee felt that may need a better understanding of how to work with offenders, as a specific client group. The Youth Justice representative noted that mainstream providers in the community were struggling to deal with disengaged young offenders. However, they were looking at addressing this issue by employing specialist behaviour advisors to offer training to providers. In the same area, probation had also delivered training to IAG Next step advisors on working within the CJS and with offenders.

Similar points were made by interviewees from the South West. For example, a HOLS felt that the provider needed to have a greater awareness of the local establishment, as well as working with offenders. An additional problem reported in this region was that provider staff were not adequately skilled or equipped to undertake basic skills assessment, IAG delivery and one provider was not able to offer qualified assessors and verifiers (thus students could not be put through open college network courses). A HOLS felt that training for the staff of one provider had been 'hit and miss' and there had been a number of resignations due to staff stress and a lack of support. Again, if staff are not adequately prepared for OLASS then a number of obstacles may arise (e.g. lack of provision, staff leaving) which will hinder its full implementation.

In this region though, there were reports of providers receiving training (from probation) on specific topics such as the criminal justice act. One HOLS however, had encountered some resistance from provider staff to participate in training that was offered to them. It was mentioned that this may because it would detract from their teaching commitments. Indeed, this problem of finding time to attend training was mentioned in other regions.

In the NE, comments in relation to providers and their training needs were generally positive. For example, it was found that under a previous provider, appraisals had been done rather erratically and the new college was therefore catching up on this backlog. It was also reported that observations of teaching and learning had been undertaken, from which personal development plans had been devised based on staff's individual learning needs. At the beginning, it was said that staff needed to familiarise themselves with the new provider, for example, finding out how they could get support. It was felt by one

interviewee that the provider had managed this information-giving well and that any anxieties amongst staff had been addressed. Lastly, a governor noted that the provider had brought in curriculum leaders which was said to have made a 'big difference' by offering support to teaching staff.

5.3   Summary comment

Interviewees were asked to consider the training needs of the workforce in relation to OLASS and also whether anything else could be done to make the workforce more effective. Several of the issues raised appeared to revolve around the workforce's general awareness of OLASS and their readiness/capacity to undertake the functions required. For example, interviewees variously reported confusion or a lack of clarity over the roles of partners; services not entirely understanding the work of other partners; and staff (e.g. probation officers, tutors, prison officers) not yet being able to contribute fully to OLASS due to certain skill or knowledge deficits (e.g. ability to undertake assessments, experience of working with offenders). Hence, prior to the introduction of OLASS nationally it would be important to ensure that the workforce is fully informed about (and committed to) the principles of OLASS and that they are able (with the necessary training) to support offenders' learning and skill development.

Table 5.1: Workforce factors affecting the implementation of OLASS

Workforce factors affecting the implementation of OLASS	Key issues/impacts
Cultural and attitudinal variation between different OLASS partners	• A lack of support for education and training in some prison cultures • A lack of understanding amongst OLASS partners of each others roles/working practices/working environments • Confusion due to different terminologies used by partners – the need to agree a common language
Staff shortages	• Shortage of specialist instructors (e.g. plumbers) • A need for increasing staff capacity e.g. around admin and IAG • Inadequate staff cover • Too much reliance on cover staff, with implications for consistency of provision.
TUPE	• Staff concerns over changes to job conditions (salaries, pension right, etc) • Increased professionalisation of vocational instructors • Increased access to professional development for vocational instructors
Role of the HOLS	• HOLS feeling insecure about their role • Need to clarify role of HOLS in relation to OLASS

Table 5.2: Training needs/issues

Workforce sector	Training needs/issues
Prison staff	• The need to challenge traditional attitudes of prisons and prison officers towards education. • Ensure that prison officers value education and are aware of how they can contribute towards the offenders learning journey • Offer training to instructional staff to develop and enhance their teaching skills
Probation staff	• Provide training on an ongoing basis to refresh and keep staff updated on current developments • Regular training would also help ensure staff are committed to the basic skills agenda • Training requested on MAYTAS
Providers	• Increase providers understanding of the criminal justice system • Training on working with offenders (and their particular needs) • Ensure provider staff are equipped to undertake basic skills assessments and can act as assessors and verifiers
Connexions	• Training in assessment
Across the workforce	• Increase awareness of OLASS, its functions and key aims across all sectors of the work force (especially amongst operational staff) • Ensure that adequate time is set aside for training and that staff feel able to attend training (in spite of teaching commitments)

6 Views on the documentation accompanying OLASS

This chapter presents interviewees' comments on three key documents supporting the implementation of OLASS. Interviewees were invited to express their views on the:

- *Offender's Learning Journey*
- Accountabilities Framework
- Delivery Framework

6.1 The Offender's Learning Journey (OLJ)

When giving feedback on the OLJ, interviewees made the following observations:

- it is an aspirational document
- needs to be tailored
- needs to be streamlined
- requires promotion

Eight interviewees noted that, in many ways, the OLJ specification was still aspirational in its content: 'very useful, but very visionary' (HOLS) , 'a wish list' (probation). Interviewees felt that the OLJ was helpful in that it set out what services should be aiming for. At the same time, it was mooted that there were not sufficient resources to put all the requirements into practice.

> *It brings together all the ideas that have been swilling about within the service, the whole process and puts it all there in one document. But it's very, very aspirational and certainly with the amount of resources that we have at the moment, some of the things that are contained within, will not happen.*
>
> HOLS

One interviewee suggested that it may have been better to include incremental stages within the plan, rather than just presenting a final goal. This was felt to be a more realistic approach, with interim milestones that services could achievably work towards.

Perhaps because of its ambitious content, some interviewees reported not having used the document – for them, it was 'not a working document', 'the seamless journey is not a reality'. Others, though, had made use of the OLJ in various ways. Examples included probation and job centre plus using it to inform staff about the new service; a HOLS referred to the OLJ when designing the structure of the curriculum and a provider had used it to develop their delivery plan. The OLJ was also said, by one interviewee, to offer some form of national consistency in terms of what all services should be aiming for.

The relevance of the document to all establishments and to community services, however, was questioned by some interviewees. Two probation representatives and an LSC interviewee felt that the OLJ was currently geared towards custodial provision and needed revision in order to encompass offenders in the community 'it is 90 per cent about prisons and 10 per cent about offenders in the community' (Probation). Similarly, two interviewees felt that the OLJ would need to be tailored to reflect the context of individual establishments and areas. They cited remand centres where stays are relative short and thus, only certain parts of the OLJ would be relevant.

Five interviewees commented on the size of the document, recommending that it could be simplified and made more readable. Lastly, a governor interviewee advised greater promotion of the OLJ to make sure that it achieved a high profile within the prison service:

> *At the moment the OLJ means very little to anybody. I think it's a really good document but if you ask most governors in the prison in the country they would not have a clue what you were talking about.*
>
> Governor

To sum up, those who felt able to comment on the OLJ generally concluded that it was a useful document, although it was felt to be somewhat aspirational at this point in time.

6.2 Accountabilities framework

At the time of data collection, the Accountabilities Framework was still in draft form hence some interviewees felt unable to pass comment (as they had not used it). Those that were able to give feedback on the framework raised the following issues:

- it needs to state the roles of partners more clearly
- it could be streamlined
- it has been developed too late in the implementation of OLASS

Three interviewees across the three development regions felt that the framework should state more clearly and assertively the roles of the various partners, specifying exactly what was expected. As with the OLJ, there were also criticisms about its length and complexity, 'an immensely complex document'. However, given its draft status this particular issue is likely to be resolved – one interviewee suggested using diagrams to depict the roles and responsibilities of different partners.

A few interviewees complained that this document was being developed far too late in the day. As a key document for OLASS they felt it should have been in place at the outset of implementing the new service 'It was constantly being reviewed and it was never owned by anybody' (prison service representative).

Individual comments were also made about: the need to define the precise purpose of the accountabilities framework; that it is still quite vague and loose in its terminology; that it is custody focused; and that although it sets out how partners should work together, it is still 'too remote' and needs to made more operational in order for partners to make sense of it at a local level. All these issues seem to relate to the fact that the framework was still in a stage of development at the time of interviewing and that it possibly requires refinement before inviting further feedback from users.

6.3 Delivery framework

Interviewees who felt able to comment on the delivery framework generally found it a useful document as it showed organizations how they fitted into OLASS, set out the roles of key partners and it was seen as a helpful reference document for learning about the new service. Those who expressed concerns commented that:

- it was too custody focussed
- it needs to be tailored
- it requires promotion
- timescales are no longer correct

As mentioned in relation to other OLASS documentation, when asked to comment on the delivery framework, interviewees again complained that the document did not give sufficient coverage to community services, that it needed to be tailored to individual prisons and that it would benefit from more promotion, in order to heighten its profile.

A new issue which was mentioned only in relation to the delivery framework was that the stated timescales were now out of date and a HOLS also felt that some of the tasks given to providers were unrealistic.

6.4 Summary comment

Interviewees most common request regarding the OLASS documentation was for it be streamlined. Whilst generally recognised as useful (especially for learning about the new service), the sheer quantity of paperwork was sometimes said to be overwhelming:

> *The documentation has been good throughout the process but the main problem has been the volume of it, when you have got these enormous documents coming through that you are continually having to plough through as well as doing the day job, that is the difficult bit.*
>
> <div align="right">Governor</div>

As well as the size of individual documents, a few interviewees expressed the view that there were simply too many documents surrounding OLASS, with the result that 'we are confusing ourselves'. In terms of a national roll out therefore, services may find the documentation easier to digest if it is kept to a reasonable volume.

7 Integration of services

One of the overarching aims of OLASS was to promote closer integration of services to offenders and to increase the extent to which key partners worked together. This chapter therefore considers interviewees' perspectives on the effect that OLASS has had on improving the consistency and coherence of services provided, as well as exploring thoughts on the nature of interactions between the partners. The chapter concludes with a table presenting a summary of the main findings.

7.1 Views on the consistency and coherence of services

Interviewees were asked to give their views on the impact of OLASS on the coherence and consistency of the provision available to offenders, both in custody and in the community.

7.1.1 Improvements in the consistency and coherence of services

Over one third of interviewees (25) felt that services were more consistent and coherent since the introduction of OLASS. Improvements were said to stem from:

- changes to service delivery
- greater multi-agency working and communication
- improvements in strategic-level organisation
- improved information availability and transfer

Changes to service delivery

Changes in the ways in which services were delivered to offenders were identified as key elements in improving coherence and consistency. Examples of this included the same provider delivering services in both custody and community settings – duplication could be reduced and consistency improved through the concentration of delivery in the hands of one single provider. Other interviewees commented on the improved nature of delivery within prison establishments, through, for example, the increased and coordinated input of agencies, such as Connexions, YOT workers, substance misuse workers and social workers.

Multi-agency working and communication

Greater integration was linked, by some interviewees, to improvements in multi-agency working and communication. A provider suggested that more cohesive and integrated delivery had resulted from the opportunity for joint working and training across the prison, probation, and mainstream education (college) sectors. It was also asserted that coherence of service delivery stemmed from continued dialogue and mutual understanding at the strategic level, and as such, representation at strategic level meetings was seen as a means of ensuring that the remit of particular services would remain linked and complementary.

Similarly, increased opportunities for communication and dialogue, through meetings and forums, such as Criminal Justice Area meetings in the North West region, were seen as having contributed to improved coherence of delivery as a result of the opportunity to bring together all those agencies and providers that have an interest in offenders. Within this context, OLASS was seen as having been particularly beneficial in improving the integration of service delivery to disengaged young people because 'the right people' attend these meetings. Such personnel included the OLASS manager, LSC representatives and the Director of Children's Services.

Improvements in strategic-level organisation and management

Integration of service delivery was said to have benefited from developments in strategic-level organisation and management. Several respondents noted that the introduction of NOMS had facilitated and supported improved integration through its overseeing role. Within the prison establishments, a HOLS contended that improved coherence of delivery had stemmed from the development of closer links with the LSC, which had facilitated access to a greater range of funding and regional initiatives.

Improved information availability and transfer

Effective information sharing was also felt to underpin integrated service delivery. Through OLASS, agencies' improved ability to access information was reported to have improved the connections between those delivering IAG, for example, as practitioners became more aware of the issues and educational histories of offenders. Thus, the IAG delivered in partnership across providers, such as Job Centre Plus, Connexions, probation, and housing advice, for example, could become more coherent and meaningful for the offender.

7.1.2 No improvements in the consistency and coherence of services

Over half of the respondents (39) did not think that the implementation of OLASS had resulted in improved integration of service delivery. Reasons included the following:

- communication issues between partners
- relationship and management issues
- securing involvement of providers
- ICT and information issues
- inconsistency of curriculum
- lack of resources

Communication issues between partners

Problems in the communication between partners was seen as posing challenges to the integration and cohesion of services. This entailed difficulties manifest at different levels. For example, interviewees noted that at an inter-regional level, there could be lack of communication and coordination between those delivering education and support to juvenile offenders in custody and those involved in the offenders' home area.

Communication between providers within regions was also identified as a barrier, with interviewees suggesting that better links between custody, community and providers were required. Examples were provided of attempts to increase communication, such as the establishment of an Offenders' Learning Journey Steering Group in the South West that was designed to bring together representatives of the prisons, LSC, probation and key players from the mainstream setting (providers). Despite such attempts, however, interviewees felt little progress was being made in the overall integration of services.

Relationship and management issues

Some concerns were expressed in relation to the management difficulties associated with the implementation of OLASS. It was contended by a provider representative in one region that uncertainties within the LSC had led to inconsistencies in the management and introduction of OLASS, and the lack of time had led to the introduction of unsatisfactory contracts for providers. The perceived fragmented nature of delivery was suggested by one HOLS to mitigate against the provision of a cohesive, integrated, mainstream-like service to offenders.

A provider suggested that OLASS in one region lacked an identifiable driver or motivating force to promote integration and ensure effective communication between the current disparate elements. Such a post was suggested to ideally be located outside of the prison and provider estates.

Securing the involvement of providers

Interviewees from two regions suggested that more work was needed to secure the full commitment of providers to deliver courses to offenders in the community. This was seen as being of particular concern in the case of juveniles as it was suggested that the target of getting 90 per cent of young people into E2E may not be met. A Probation representative indicated that there were limitations to the willingness of FE colleges to accept offenders onto courses in mainstream settings. Some institutions were seen as being deterred from enrolling ex-offenders because of how it may impact on their retention and achievement statistics.

ICT and information issues

Perceived failings in the transfer of information and data were presented as barriers to integrated service delivery. In the South West region, considerable concern was expressed in terms of the Maytas system, either regarding doubts over the system's capacity to provide the information required, and/or concerns that the system had not been fully implemented across the region. Interviewees in the other regions also suggested that information exchange on an individual offender level was still adhoc and insufficient, compounded by the major partners employing different criteria to measure data.

Inconsistency of curriculum

Cohesive and consistent delivery was also said to be restricted by curriculum-related issues. Several respondents noted that differences were evident in the curriculum offer available to offenders in different establishments within the same region. In addition, concerns were expressed that the curriculum offer throughout the prison system did not offer sufficient progression routes to offenders. Consequently, it was suggested by a HOLS that the integration and coherence of services could be improved through changes in the level of education offered to offenders as they progress through the custody system. For example, this could entail basic skills courses in remand prisons, progressing to level 1/2 in Category B institutions, leading to the development of employment skills provision prior to release.

Lack of resources

The intention of providing a more integrated service was said by some to be restricted by a lack of resources, especially additional funding. Several interviewees suggested that they were being asked to deliver increased content within the same number of tuition hours. A HOLS contended that in order to facilitate the continuation of the education provision delivered in custody into the community and mainstream settings, additional LSC funding would be required.

As well as those suggesting that OLASS had, or had not delivered improvements to the integration of services, 13 interviewees asserted that it had brought with it the potential for improvement but that it was still relatively early in the implementation for these improvements to materialise.

7.2 Integration of services: awareness of offenders' previous education and learning

Interviewees were asked to comment on whether or not they felt more informed about the previous learning experiences of offenders as a result of OLASS. This question aimed to determine whether services were more now integrated, in relation to the transfer of information.

7.2.1 Improved awareness

Of the 34 interviewees who felt able to comment, 12 noted that since the introduction of OLASS, they felt better informed about the education and learning that offenders had previously received while serving a sentence in custody or in the community. The main reasons included:

- improved on-site information transfer and sharing
- improved communication amongst partners, via effective meetings and forums

Educational information/data relating to prisoners moving within the South West OLASS region was seen by a HOLS, to have increased, although this was not the case for inter-regional moves. Similarly, it was also suggested 'on-site' awareness of offenders' educational histories had improved in one particular institution as departments and agencies were communicating more effectively, although these changes had not materialised beyond the prison. Furthermore, a provider representative noted that despite improvements, it was still possible for offenders to miss out on initial induction and/assessments, so the full picture of their educational needs/histories could be absent.

Participation and inclusion in OLASS interactions, such as review meetings, prompted a Job Centre Plus representative to suggest that this particular service was becoming better informed about the learning/educational backgrounds of offenders. Similarly, improved ILP training for staff and the emerging electronic transfer of information were seen as underpinning improved knowledge.

Although acknowledging that some improvements had taken place, interviewees generally contended that there was still a lot more progress that needed to be made in terms of the quantity and quality of information flow

regarding offenders' learning experiences. Respondents were hopeful that the implementation of the Maytas system would bring about such changes.

7.2.2 No improvements in awareness

Of the 34 interviewees who could comment on their awareness of offenders previous learning, 22 noted that they did not feel any more informed since OLASS. One third of these respondents qualified this by suggesting that it was still relatively early in OLASS's implementation and that they expected progress to be made, especially as information systems became better established. Other reasons given for the lack of improved awareness included continued poor communication between partners and problems obtaining information on offenders (e.g. ILPS) from prisons.

7.3 Interactions with other OLASS partners

The second aspect of integration that interviewees were asked about focussed on the extent to which they thought that key partners worked well together and the opportunities that existed for interaction through OLASS.

7.3.1 Good and effective interactions between key partners

Over two-thirds (46) generally noted good working relationships with other OLASS partners. Where effective interactions were noted, these were linked to:

- Good working relationships at strategic level
- Cooperative working relationships at an operational level
- Inclusive ethos and practice of OLASS

Good working relationships at strategic level

Strong and effective management at a strategic level was seen as underpinning and promoting increased interactions between the key partners. The shared commitment and sense of purpose displayed by OLASS board members was seen by several interviewees in all three regions to be key in supporting closer working between partners. Others also commented on the robustness of a particular board and described a 'unity of vision' between the partners – college providers, the LSC, the probation area and individual prisons. The quality and strength of pre-existing partnership work was seen as having been advantageous to OLASS implementation.

Cooperative working relationships at an operational level

Interviewees cited numerous examples of ways in which different partners also worked cooperatively at an operational level. External providers were said by one HOLS to be 'very much integrated with the rest of the staff'. Providers were also said to be engaged in collaborative training ventures and involved in

the promotion and the financing of joint events, such as employment fairs where potential employers and offender education personnel were brought together.

It was also suggested that since OLASS's introduction, working relationships have improved where partners were willing to discuss and deal with issues openly and honestly. The possibility of secondment opportunities was raised by a Youth Justice representative as a means of further strengthening relationships between custody and community-based personnel.

Inclusive ethos and practice of OLASS

Good relationships between partners were said to stem from providing the opportunity for all involved in delivery to meet and interact. Several interviewees representing HOLS, providers and the LSC, for example, commented on the value of the monthly meetings they attended. According to a HOLS, these meetings were said to be effective because 'the key partners all want to make it work, they find solutions to problems'.

Similarly, the establishment of an Employer Engagement Group in another region was seen as a means of supporting the closer working between employers and those delivering education to offenders. The inclusion of employer representatives was said, by a LSC representative, to improve their understanding of the activities of the prison and probation services and assist in working towards increasing the willingness of employers to offer work to offenders.

7.3.2 Difficulties and challenges in key partner relationships

Despite the overall feeling that relationships were good, 11 interviewees (mostly from the South West region), also highlighted difficulties and challenges in terms of interactions with other OLASS partners. These challenges included:

- communication issues
- time constraints limiting interaction opportunities
- differences in institutional cultures
- strategic/management issues

Communication was felt, by some interviewees across the regions to be poor at times, and representatives of some agencies and services suggested that they felt isolated and not fully included in the OLASS process in all three regions. A provider representative in one region, for example, suggested that providers were the only interest not represented on the OLASS board, and as a result, it

was asserted that 'around 500 professionals delivering education are effectively disenfranchised'.

Time constraints and resource limitations were also suggested as reasons for the less than full integration and inclusion of some services. For example, relatively small teams/services or departments could experience difficulties in participating and interacting more fully with other OLASS partners.

Different institutional cultures and languages exhibited by different key partners were identified as possible barriers to closer working relationships. Several interviewees noted difficulties between the working culture of the LSC and that of prison establishments. For example, the Prison Service and Probation were seen as being 'risk averse' by an LSC representative, which accounted for some of the difficulties in implementing OLASS, a 'very risky project'.

Lastly, several interviewees in the South West region highlighted strategic-level difficulties and challenges in the relationships between the OLASS board and some of the other key partners.

7.4 Summary comment

Interviewees were asked to consider the degree to which services were consistent and coherent. Over one third of respondents considered that there had been improvements, or potential improvements in the degree of integration of the services on offer. Communication, effective management and information sharing were identified as key elements in this. However, two thirds suggested that coherence and consistency had not improved. This was echoed in terms of improved awareness of offenders' previous learning experiences. Of the 34 interviewees who commented, 12 suggested that they felt better informed about offenders previous learning experiences, compared with the 22 who did not. Again, issues of communication and information exchange were identified as the key determinants of this.

Despite this, over two thirds of respondents felt that there were good working relationships between the OLASS partners, generally suggesting that OLASS had made a positive difference in the way agencies and institutions were working together. Although the seamless service was not yet a reality, interviewees appeared to support the notion that OLASS had facilitated improvements.

Table 7.1 Integration of services

Integration of services	Key issues
Improvement in the consistency and coherence of services	• Changes to service delivery • Greater multi-agency working and communication • Improvements in strategic-level organisation • Improved information availability and transfer
No improvement in the consistency and coherence of services	• Communication issues • Relationship and management issues • Securing involvement of providers • ICT and information issues • Inconsistency of curriculum • Lack of resources
Improvements in awareness of offenders previous learning experiences	• Improved on-site information transfer and sharing • Improved communication amongst partners, via effective meetings and forums
No improvements in awareness of offenders previous learning experiences	• Systems not yet in place to facilitate effective information exchange
Improvements in interactions between OLASS partners	• Good working relationships at strategic level • Cooperative working relationships at an operational level • Inclusive ethos and practice of OLASS
No improvements in interactions between OLASS partners	• Communication issues between partners • Time constraints limiting interaction opportunities • Differences in institutional cultures • Strategic/management issues

CONCLUSION

This report has documented the main challenges associated with the implementation of OLASS, alongside interviewees' suggestions for overcoming some of these barriers.

Whilst asked to comment separately on assessment, monitoring, IAG, workforce, the OLASS documentation and the overall integration of services, some of the issues raised by interviewees were common across the different topic areas. This final section of the report therefore, teases out those issues which appeared to reverberate throughout and presents some key messages for the future roll out of OLASS.

Increase awareness of OLASS amongst key partners

According to interviewees, there were indications that some staff were unclear about OLASS in terms of what it entailed, why it was needed and what role different services played in its operation. Before the new service is implemented nationwide, therefore, time needs to be invested in 'selling the vision' to all participants, at both operational and strategic levels. Promoting the new arrangements would help ensure that all contributors are equally informed about the developments and aware of how the various partners fit into the OLASS framework. The availability of appropriate documentation (concise and accessible) would thus be an important vehicle for conveying this information. Additionally, highlighting the benefits and positive impacts of OLASS would also be a useful contribution to securing the support of the workforce.

Ensure that the workforce is suitably equipped for OLASS

In the development regions, concerns were aired about whether some staff were sufficiently trained to undertake functions such as assessment and the delivery of IAG. Others suggested that providers would benefit from further training on working with offenders and the criminal justice system generally. Thus, in addition to making sure that the workforce is generally aware of (and committed to) the purpose and principles of OLASS, it is equally important to assess whether they are suitably equipped (in terms of knowledge and skills) to undertake the various functions required. If a deficit is identified in particular areas, then this will need to be addressed through appropriate professional development and support.

Ensure that sufficient staffing is available to support service implementation

Interviewees highlighted staff shortages when discussing assessments, collecting and recording of monitoring data and the delivery of IAG. A lack of staffing therefore surfaced as a perceived common barrier to OLASS implementation. To ensure a comprehensive implementation of OLASS, services will need to consider the stock or capacity of the existing workforce to perform the requirements of the *Offender's Learning Journey*.

Ensure all necessary infrastructures are in place

In addition to the staffing requirements mentioned so far, another factor which would appear to facilitate the implementation of OLASS is the introduction of supporting infrastructures. For example, effective data transfer was felt to rely on having a suitable management information system in place. Similarly, computerised assessments could not take place without the necessary hardware. Thus, in order to fulfil the requirements of OLASS, services and establishments will need to consider whether they are appropriately equipped with the necessary systems to support such activities. Furthermore, given the emphasis of information exchange throughout the offenders learning journey, it is essential that systems across services are compatible.

Final word…………………….

Most of the interviews for this report were conducted just six to seven months after the initial launch of OLASS in the three development regions. Inevitably therefore, the new service was still in its infancy and experiencing teething problems which may well have been expected. Despite the reported difficulties, signs of progress were evident, in particular more detailed assessments, standardisation of ILPs and improved IAG services.

Interviewee accounts suggested considerable variation in terms of the extent to which OLASS requirements have been introduced. Some commentators reported that the necessary systems and procedures (e.g. around assessment) were already in place prior to the advent of OLASS. Others, however, concluded that there was still a considerable way to go before the aspirations of the *Offender's Learning Journey* could be fully realised. Clearly, establishments, services and areas were working from very different starting points when OLASS arrived – thus, the degree of challenge experienced was also found to vary. When implementing the new service elsewhere, it would perhaps be helpful to undertake an audit of existing provision/systems/services in order to target support and effort where it is most needed.

The next phase of the research will include follow up interviews with those who contributed to this report. These interviews will take place almost a year after the new service was first introduced and will focus on impact. Feedback

from these interviews will give further insight into the changes brought by the new service and in particular, how offenders themselves have been affected.