

## A tale of two prisons HMP Bullwood Hall and HMP & YOI Chelmsford



### Introduction

HMP Bullwood Hall is a Category C training prison taking convicted foreign national prisoners serving four years or less, with two years or less to serve. HMP & YOI Chelmsford is a Category B male local prison taking adults and 18-21 year olds.

Both prisons have received LSIS support in previous years and have made good progress in their maths, English and ESOL provision. This year they identified that a key challenge for them is employability - in particular, using vocational courses and tutors to improve outcomes for entry level learners whilst in prison and once they have left. Also, HMP & YOI Chelmsford had recently introduced the Employability Award into the curriculum and wanted to involve staff from across the education provision in delivery, in order to increase access for learners.

The prisons received support from ACER. This included consultancy, bespoke training, remote support, peer exchange groups and sharing of best practice. The work has been driven by two linked action plans. Each prison has their own action plan but they cross over at key points. For example, there are joint staff training activities and peer exchange groups.

### Meeting staff development needs

The initial meeting between the prison education staff and Bev Morris, the ACER consultant, was used to agree an action plan and to identify essential staff development activities. In particular:

- Planning and delivering QCF employability awards, for vocational staff at HMP & YOI Chelmsford.
  - Gym (Setting Goals)
  - IT (Introduction to ICT)
  - Laundry (Operating in a work environment)
  - Painting and Decorating (Attitudes and behaviours)
- What does that learner look like? Identifying and supporting entry level learners in vocational settings, for vocational staff at HMP Bullwood Hall.
- Engaging and motivating learners with challenging behaviour, for staff at both prisons.

### Supported providers

HMP Bullwood Hall

HMP & YOI Chelmsford

- Sue Saxton

### Improvement partner

ACER

- Bev Morris,  
Consultant

The staff development activities have been supplemented by one-to-one support from prison English, maths and ESOL specialists and ACER consultants throughout the programme.

It was also agreed that peer exchange groups for staff at both prisons would be important to share their knowledge and experience. This is because prison education is undergoing considerable change in terms of contracts, funding and purpose and it will be important to maintain the quality of delivery during this difficult period.

### **Thinking strategically using SWOT analysis**

The first peer exchange group was facilitated by Bev Morris and involved five key staff from both prisons. The first meeting centred on a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis and key sector documents challenging the role of English, maths and ESOL in prison education. This enabled the participants to think strategically about the way in which their provision is organised and delivered and whether this responds to competing stakeholder needs. It was agreed that this had been an essential activity for short and long-term planning and that a second peer exchange group was needed later in the programme to assess the future of prison education following the new contract and funding changes. It was also agreed that the SWOT analysis was a valuable tool for working with staff teams to help them buy-in to a whole organisation approach to English, maths and ESOL.

### **Embedding brings significant benefits for learners**

Vocational staff at HMP & YOI Chelmsford have taken part in two training sessions in which they identified what work they would need to do to plan and deliver the QCF employability awards in their subject. Each team has now created a teaching portfolio which meets the criteria for the unit and, most importantly, supports development of maths, English and ESOL skills. In order to do this, it was necessary to redesign the ICT classes. This was because learners with low literacy skills who wanted to learn ICT would not have been able to do so until they had improved their English skills. However, with appropriate support at the beginning of the course these learners can go directly into the vocational class. Similarly, learners in painting and decorating with low literacy levels have been enabled to participate fully in the vocational classes from the outset, instead of having to go to English classes first. This is a significant step forward. The support offered through this programme is seen as critically important to the success of the learners and the organisation.

“This has been incredibly valuable as it makes us focus on tasks which have been identified for improvement... The links with external providers, teachers in colleges and the support of consultants (CPD) have been really good.”

Diane Koppit, Head of Regimes and Education Manager

“Increasing employability is key to our strategy for the learning and skills aspect of reducing reoffending. This project has supported us in rolling out employability provision into different elements of our provision and, in particular, to engaging learners with lower levels of LLN skills in provision that will increase their employability.”

Sue Saxton, Head of Regimes, HMP Bullwood Hall and Head of Learning & Skills HMP/YOI Chelmsford

## **Next steps**

The action plans are now moving forward well and further continuous professional development activities are booked to support tutors, to manage challenging learners and to integrate English, maths and ESOL with employability. At the same time, managers will receive consultancy support to work through a very difficult time in terms of contractual and funding changes. This dual approach aims to ensure that English, maths and ESOL are at the core of strategic thinking and delivery, to improve outcomes for learners. This will be evaluated through learner satisfaction and achievements at the end of the project.