SPS
**SCOTTISH
PRISON SERVICE**

Learning for a Better Future

2025

A Development and Learning Strategy for people in custody.

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Scottish Prison Service
Development and Learning Strategy for People in Custody

Contents

Introduction

This strategy seeks to answer the following question:

> How can we provide a context for development and learning within our prisons that will enable people to have a better life beyond custody and increase the likelihood of desistance?

Enabling a person in custody to enhance their literacy, numeracy, oracy, digital competency, or learn to be a mentor and gain qualifications for employment. can change the direction of that person's life. Learning can be a 'hook for change' and help a person in custody to see their identity in a new way as, for example, a learner, a skilled worker, or a contributor to others' wellbeing. There are many reasons why development and learning should play a central role in places of custody, including building self-worth, using time well and supporting desistance. The strategy is therefore fundamental to achieving a safer Scotland.

'Learning for a Better Future' is founded upon the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) values and strategic priorities and contributes directly to each of the SPS aims.[1] It supports national policies in justice, adult learning and education, including Scotland's National Performance Framework, Scotland's Vision for Justice, The Adult Learning Strategy 2022, UNESCO Vision and HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland Standards. It is compliant with national and international human rights standards relating to imprisonment.[2] The strategy also provides a vehicle to ensure that the relevant obligations under the 2010 Equality Act and the Public Service Equality Duty are met.[3]

The strategy was developed through consultation and discussions[4] with people in custody and staff who work with them and engagement with advisors and stakeholders including Scottish Government and Education Scotland. The results of a comprehensive literature review together with additional research findings have provided the extensive evidence base for the strategy.[5]

'Learning for a Better Future' applies to all people in custody, as far as is possible in each person's circumstances, and complements the SPS Strategy for Women in Custody and SPS Vision for Young People in Custody.

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[1]For further detail please see accompanying guidance. https://www.sps.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-01/Learning%20for%20a%20Better%20Future%20-%20Strategy%20Guidance.pdf

[2] Human Rights Act 1998, Nelson Mandela Rules, Bangkok Rules on specific provisions for juvenile women in prison and the European Prison Rules

[3] See accompanying Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment

[4] Quotes from these discussions are shown in blue throughout the document.

[5] https://www.sps.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-01/Dr%20B.%20Nugent.%20Literature%20Review.pdf & https://www.sps.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-01/Diffley%20-%20User%20and%20staff%20voice%20report.pdf

Context

There are 17 prisons across Scotland, 16 directly operated by SPS and one operated by a private sector organisation under contract to SPS.

Since publication of the SPS *Learning and Skills Strategy 2016-21* there have been significant changes in the context within which the Prison Service operates, not least financial constraints and the impact of COVID-19. The size and balance of the prison population has changed. Knowledge and understanding of the life stories, characteristics, needs and risks of the people in SPS care have increased significantly and continue to be highlighted within research. In recent years the Scottish Prison Service has taken strides towards understanding the impact of trauma and adversity and neurodiversity amongst people in custody and the implications of these for practice. The SPS Mental Health Strategy sets out much of this evidence and its practical implications and sits alongside this strategy.

Profile of the population of people in custody in Scotland[6,7]

- **Around 14, 000 people spend some time in prison in any year.**
- **More than 95% of the people in custody are men.**
- **The numbers of people in custody have recently reached or been close to the capacity of the prison estate.** When the numbers of people in prison are high, access to learning and development activities will be more limited.
- **Approximately 18% of the current population are aged over 50 compared with 10% ten years ago.** The increasing number of older people in prisons is associated with increasing levels of age-related physical and mental frailty. It is therefore important to provide tailored learning and development activities which may assist with slowing the rate of cognitive decline due to social isolation and help to improve wellbeing.
- **Over the same period there has been a substantial reduction in numbers of young people in custody**, and 16- and 17-year-old children will no longer be remanded or sentenced to SPS custody.
- **The proportion of people in custody who are on remand represents a significant proportion of the total population.** For example, on 1 May 2024, 22% (1869) of the total population were on remand.
- **Just over half of the prison population are serving sentences of 4 years or more.** The proportion of individuals with sentences of one year or less on 01 May 2024 was 9.5% (791), and those with life sentences was 13.4% (1115).
- **Being on remand or having a short sentence length can place constraints on individuals' ability to participate in development and learning activities.**

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[6] https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-prison-population-statistics-2022-23/#
[7] Scottish Prison Service PR2 data

Inventive ways need to be found to enable as many as possible of the people in custody to have access to these activities, including those on remand or with a short sentence.

- **In 2022-23, 45% of the sentenced population had index offences in Group 1 (Violence). The proportion with Sexual index offences has been increasing and represented 22% of the average daily sentenced population in 2022-23.** People with high levels of risk and need require more intensive individual management and support. There can be constraints in the management and scheduling of different groups which require to be apart within an establishment for reasons of management or safety, making timetabling of learning activities more complex.

Incidence of neurodivergence, learning difficulty and disability among people in custody

There is continued high incidence and complexity of need amongst people in custody, including prevalence of neurodivergence, brain injury, learning difficulties and learning disability:

- **ADHD:** The estimated prevalence of ADHD amongst young people in custody is 25% and 10% amongst females.[8] ADHD is reported to persist into adulthood in 50% of cases.
- **Autism:** overall 4-5% of people in custody are estimated to meet the threshold for a diagnosis of autism[9]. In an investigation in HMP Barlinnie specialist wing, 7.5% met the diagnostic threshold for autism.[10]
- **Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN**): A high proportion of people in custody, estimated at 67%[11], have been found to have SLCN. These individuals may struggle to understand the spoken word and to express thoughts and ideas in words.

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[8] Young, S., Gudjonsson, G. H., Wells, J., Asherson, P., Theobald, D., Oliver, B., ... Mooney, A. (2009). Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and critical incidents in a Scottish prison population. *Personality and Individual Differences, 46*(3), 265–269., Young, S., Moss, D., Sedgwick, O., Fridman, M., & Hodgkins, P. (2015). A meta-analysis of the prevalence of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in incarcerated populations. *Psychological Medicine, 45*(2), 247–258.

[9] Fazio, R.L., Pietz, C.A. and Denney, R.L. (2012) 'An estimate of the prevalence of autism spectrum disorders in an incarcerated population', Open Access Journal of Forensic Psychology, 4, 69–80; Robertson, C.E. and McGillivray, J.A. (2015) 'Autism behind bars: a review of the research literature and discussion of key issues', Journal of Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology, 26(6), 719–36.

[10] Gallagher, A.M. and Rooke, N. (2007) Problem Assessment Study: Autism Spectrum Disorders, HMP Barlinnie, Glasgow: Autism Resource Centre.

[11] Bryan, K., Freer, J., & Furlong, C. (2007). Language and communication difficulties in juvenile offenders. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders, 42*(5), 505–520; Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (2018) Justice Evidence Base Consolidation. https://www.rcslt.org/wp-content/uploads/media/Project/RCSLT/justiceevidence-base2017-1.pdf; Turner, K. (2017) Reviewing the prevalence of SLCN in the custodial population. Unpublished PhD studies, University of Sheffield, UK.

- **Learning Difficulties and Disability** have been found to be widespread amongst people in custody, with the prevalence estimated to be around 33%.[12] Many of these learning needs and disabilities had not been diagnosed before the person entered custody.
- **Traumatic brain injury**: Between 65% and 76% of young people and woman in prison are estimated to have experienced a traumatic brain injury[13] which may be associated with poorer behavioural control and greater psychological distress than those who do not have such an injury.
- **The levels of literacy and numeracy amongst people in custody are mainly low.**

The majority of people in custody have neurodivergent conditions and many will have more than one of these conditions or needs (for example, speech, language and communication needs are often present alongside individuals' other neurodivergent conditions). These findings emphasise how important it is for staff to be able to understand the different needs of the people they are working with and be aware of how best to support them. In addition, this information underlines the need for appropriate specialist support to be available within each establishment.

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[12]Cleaton, M.A., & Kirby, A. (2018). Why Do We Find it so Hard to Calculate the Burden of Neurodevelopmental Disorders.

[13] McMillan, T., Aslam, H., Crowe, E., Seddon, E., & Barry, S. (2021). Associations between significant head injury and persisting disability and violent crime in women in prison in Scotland, UK: A cross-sectional study. The Lancet. Psychiatry, 8(6), 512-520 https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366(21)00082-1/fulltext

; Williams W, Mewse A, Tonks J, Mills S, Burgess C, Cordan G. (2010) Traumatic brain injury in a prison population: prevalence and risk for re-offending. *Brain Injury* Vol 24(10):1184-8.

School experience and experience of adversity

A major Scottish study on young adults' pathways into and out of offending sheds light on important aspects of the school experience of people in custody.

- **Many of the people who are in custody are likely to have had a disrupted education, and most will have been excluded from school**.[14,15] Many of those who had skipped or were excluded from school had specific learning difficulties which were undiagnosed.[16]
- **Women who have experienced custody are particularly likely to have had weak connections with their school** through, for example, truancy[17]
- **51% of people who had experienced custody were assessed by their teachers at age 13 as having poor attention and 45% as being restive and overactive**. This is likely to have implications for their capacity to concentrate, take instruction and follow through on tasks.

These school experiences may make it very difficult for an individual to engage in education again. Individuals may be carrying feelings of stigma and shame about gaps in their general knowledge and basic skills. These points reinforce the importance of making learning in custody as accessible, inclusive and supportive as possible.

In addition, people in custody are very likely to have experienced trauma and adversities in childhood and adulthood.

- **Approximately 24% of the adults in custody[18] have been in care** and 40% of young people in custody reported being in care as a child.[19]
- **People who continue to offend into adulthood have high levels of victimisation, a history of adverse childhood experiences, and adversities in adulthood** (such as bereavement, relationship breakdown, and having a serious accident or illness).[20]

Taken together, this evidence reinforces the need for practice to be holistic and trauma informed.[21] Each person will have been impacted differently by adversities and this complexity makes it essential to take a whole-person approach

[14] McAra, L. and McVie, S. (2010) Youth crime and justice: Key messages from the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1748895809360971

[15] Youth Justice Improvement Board (2017, updated 2018) Looking Behind the Data https://www.cycj.org.uk/resource/youth-offending-perceptions-of-the-problem-409/.

[16] McAra, L. and McVie, S. (2022) Causes and Impact of Offending and Criminal Justice Pathways: Follow-up of the Edinburgh Study Cohort at Age 35 ESYTC Report (4.3.22) (ed.ac.uk)

[17] McAra and McVie briefing for SPS 2024

[18] Carnie, J. & Broderick, R (2019) https://www.sps.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-02/17thPrisonSurvey_2019_Research.pdf

[19] 2019 Young People in Custody Prison Survey –

[20] McAra, L. and McVie, S. (2022) Causes and Impact of Offending and Criminal Justice Pathways: Follow-up of the Edinburgh Study Cohort at Age 35 ESYTC Report (4.3.22) (ed.ac.uk)

[21] McAra and McVie briefing for SPS 2024

to identifying individual needs and planning for support throughout a person's time in custody.

Finally, the evidence indicates that there is particular potential to have **beneficial impact on the life chances of younger adults aged 21 to at least 25** if they are able to have appropriate support and opportunities during this peri0d of their lives.

Digital technologies

The use of digital technologies for education and learning is developing at tremendous speed. Digital technologies can offer flexibility, open many new opportunities for learning and enable inclusion. Research shows that digital technologies are most effective when they supplement face-to-face learning. It is therefore important that teachers find the most appropriate balance of methods to meet the particular needs of their learners.

In addition, the ability to use digital technologies is now essential for work and daily life. This means that digital competence should be prominent within the curriculum as a gateway to learning, life and work, alongside oracy, literacy, and numeracy.

Principles

The following principles underpin the strategy's policies and practice.

- Founded on **positive relationships**.

- **Human rights based**, and **trauma responsive** – providing compassionate support and safe spaces for learning.

- **Inclusive and accessible** to all – believing that everyone has the ability to learn, actively addressing barriers to participation and having sufficient provision for additional support for learning.

- **Individualised** – based on assessment of needs, interests and circumstances, leading to straightforward plans for learning which are integrated with case management plans and processes where these apply.

- **Clear about purpose** – being aware what each development and learning activity may contribute to, for example, an individual's wellbeing, capacity to live independently, employment opportunities and desistance.

- **Providing opportunities for progression and supporting transition**, including support for successful reintegration following custody.

- **Evidence based** – using a diverse range of research-supported practices, with self-evaluation and evidence- sharing at the heart of the strategy.

- **Recognising all progress and achievements**, including through portfolios as well as certification and qualifications at appropriate levels.

- **Developed through co-design and co-evaluation,** and where appropriate taught through co-teaching.

- **Based on collaborative partnerships** – valuing and fostering the contributions of education partners and specialists of different kinds, local and national services, businesses and employers.

Pillars of the Strategy

'Learning for a Better Future' is based upon three pillars which emerge from the rationale and principles. These pillars are relationships, curriculum (the 'what') and teaching and learning (the 'how'). They are considered in turn below.

Relationships

Relationships between staff and learners are arguably the most important pillar of this strategy. There are two main reasons for this. First, the kind of learning that will lead to a better future as envisaged in this strategy can only take place in a setting where relationships are supportive and respectful. Second, through the conversations that take place, relationships can be an important way to build communication skills and explore ideas.

Where there is a positive relationship, day-to-day interactions can be a hook for learning. Every interaction that takes place with someone in custody, whether with a prison officer, peer learner or teacher, could help them change their conception of themselves, and help them to recognise their potential for a better future. We know that many of the people in SPS care have significant speech, language and communication needs, and formal and informal conversations can help to build the vital oracy skills that may make all the difference to having a better future.

'Effective education is fundamentally about the relationships established between the teacher and learner'. (Nugent 2024)

This statement applies not only to teachers but to everyone who works with individuals in SPS care. Staff, including personal officers, who work with individuals in the residential areas of the prison have an especially important part to play through the relationships they build with people in their care. Knowing the individual and their circumstances through daily life, they are in a good position to have day-to-day conversations with them listening and responding with empathy and compassion. These officers can play a key role in whether an individual sets out on this learning journey, supporting their choices and enabling them to feel personal control over their learning.

"It's great for building relationships, because when you're coming into education, you don't have any control over the people you're sat in the classroom with…you might find that you're not meshing well with somebody when they're around you [in the hall] but suddenly you get them in an education classroom and you're having a pleasant conversation and it kinda helps diffuse things from what's happening." (Learner)

The 'what' – curriculum

For people in custody, learning and personal and social development may serve a wide range of purposes. The four strands of development and learning set out below have emerged from consideration of the factors known to affect desistance and to improve life chances for individuals, their families, and communities. It is important that the spread of types of learning available – the curriculum - reflects these purposes. Within the curriculum, oracy, literacy, numeracy, and digital competence are 'gateway skills' which enable individuals to access wider opportunities.

LEARNING FOR A BETTER FUTURE - Strands for development and learning

Learning for health and wellbeing	Learning for empathy and citizenship
• Building mental, emotional, and social health and wellbeing • Addressing separation, loss, and trauma • Sustaining and building positive family relationships • Addressing needs such as alcohol and substance misuse, relationships and attitudes • Addressing barriers to learning • Ability to read, tell the time, use a calendar and plan • Building physical health and fitness, and knowledge of how to maintain health and wellbeing • Developing the skills and knowledge needed to live independently • Building resilience and motivation • Participating in sports and the arts	• Engaging in issues-based work such as anti-violence programmes • Understanding consequences; empathy, victim awareness • Developing skills to change and applying these to make positive choices • Building understanding of human experiences and perspectives through literature and the arts • Learning to express thoughts and feelings • Learning about and addressing ethical, social, and environmental matters • Participating in decision making and self-evaluation
Learning for life and work	Learning for the benefit of others
• Oracy, literacy, numeracy • Digital competence • Critical thinking and problem solving • Extending knowledge and carrying out research • Experiencing a workplace and gaining skills and qualifications for employment e.g. barista, fork-lift driving • Being an effective member of a team • Developing skills and knowledge for self-employment • Gaining qualifications and building a CV • Increasing motivation and capacity for further learning	• Parenting programmes • Family learning • Peer mentoring and/or teaching • Using personal skills in projects that will bring enjoyment or benefits to others e.g. through the arts • Engaging in restorative practices • Volunteering • Fundraising • Caring for animals • Renovating, repairing, upcycling • Supporting others to achieve a goal in partnership and in teams

The four strands form a basis both for planning an individual's development pathway and for evaluating and shaping the overall spread of provision within an establishment.

The 'how' – teaching and learning

It is important, from the outset, to recognise and address barriers that may prevent individuals from even considering that learning may be for them. Given their experience of schooling, some may find it difficult to bring themselves to participate in any activity which looks and feels like school. It requires careful support and actions to reduce the barriers to enable them to access learning at all. Some individuals will need specialist support to enable them to make a start with their learning. For others the plan may involve starting with one-to-one learning in the area of the establishment where they live. There is much good practice within SPS in this type of inclusion work.

The atmosphere for learning should always be one of dignity, respect and compassion.
Learning and teaching will take place through a blend of face-to-face teaching, group work, practical activities, and different types of digital learning.

People in custody should be able to learn in different ways: crucially, through day-to-day
interactions and relationships, and through workplace activities, programmes, and courses at a range of academic levels. Establishments should maximise the potential of libraries as places for learning and personal and social development.

As teachers know, flexibility and creativity are key to engaging learners in learning, for example capitalising on personal interests and using sports and the arts. Examples of teaching and learning approaches that can be particularly successful are, among other things:

- Project based work on topics that are new and/or engaging to learners.
- Learning through practices that are useful in their daily lives, such as household skills or getting better at reading to help their child to read.
- Learning through the arts, which can have multiple benefits including building empathy, providing a medium for complex issues to be explored, building skills and accomplishment and a sense of agency, establishing social connections, as well as wellbeing and therapeutic effects.
- 'Sneaky' or stealth learning, where things that might seem too difficult are made part of a practical exercise, such as a piece of joinery work or a piece of writing in the context of something that the individual feels motivated to complete.
- Peer learning and mentoring, where both learners and mentors can benefit greatly.
- Community learning and development and youth work approaches which start from where the learner is.
- Links with further learning in the community.

Prerequisites: what things will be key to achieving the aims of the strategy?

For teaching, learning and progression to be successful in this complex environment a range of prerequisites are needed. The following offer points of reference for planning and reflection.

- **Leadership** which demonstrates commitment to the principles of the strategy and provides support to staff and partners to achieve the intentions of the strategy.

- A **culture** within which everyone in the establishment recognises their role and contributions to the personal development and learning of people in their care.

- Being **trauma informed** which means building positive relationships, providing compassionate support and creating safe spaces.

- Comprehensive **staff development** so that all staff and partners are able to understand their contribution to realising the strategy and build up their expertise and knowledge to play their part.

- Recognising and capitalising fully on existing **expert knowledge and experience** within the organisation (for example expertise in learning needs and in teaching and learning).

- **Alignment** of contractual arrangements with the intentions of the strategy.

- **Alignment** of policies such as payment for activities, timetabling, quality assurance and performance arrangements with the intentions of the strategy.

- Making maximum **use of time and of spaces** within the establishment for activities that will contribute to individuals' learning and development, including maximising the use of residential areas as spaces for learning.

- Adopting **a Whole System Approach** through effective partnerships with services, including clear boundaries about what is in scope and out of scope of the development and learning strategy (e.g. mental health treatment and support and offending behaviour programmes would be out of scope).

What will the strategy look like in practice?

Individual

For an individual, the priority when they arrive in custody will be to address any wellbeing needs including mental health and addiction. As soon as possible after they arrive, or when they are ready, they will be invited to take part in assessment and to explore opportunities for learning and development that fit with their ambitions and needs.

- They will have an agreed individual plan, reflecting their needs, prior learning and the purposes of learning which are most appropriate for them at that stage.

- They will experience positive relationships with staff.

- They will receive the support they need to access their learning and begin with as little delay as possible. If they have come from another establishment care will be taken to build on what has gone before and achieve continuity of learning, as far as possible.

- Their learning may take place in different places and different ways, through a mix of teacher/tutor led courses and more informal activities such as book clubs, discussions, family learning or participation in the arts or theme- and project-based activities.

- Teachers/tutors will be skilled in addressing barriers to their learning, finding ways to make the learning accessible and relevant, and encouraging progress.

- Achievements and progress will be recorded within a portfolio and where possible recognised within the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).

- The planning and review process for development and learning will be embedded within case management so that a person's achievements will also be recognised within the case management process throughout their time in custody.

- They will take part in evaluating their experiences and outcomes. This will benefit them as individuals as well as the people who follow them.

- As far as possible, they will be able to continue and progress with their learning across any transfers and transitions into the community, building on their portfolio of achievement. They will feel able to use the knowledge and skills they have learned to live successfully in the community.

Local Establishment

The establishment will develop its local range of development and learning provision spanning the purposes of learning, in partnership with the contracted learning provider and others. This will be based on specific knowledge of the needs of the people in its care, alongside available data. The range of opportunities available will lead to a range of types of qualification or recognition of achievement. The establishment will:

- include development and learning outcomes within the local Annual Delivery Plan.

- draw together a tailored Annual Delivery Plan for the establishment.

- ensure that there is the necessary support to enable all in its care to participate in development and learning.

- support continuity and progression in learning when individuals make transitions into, within and out of the establishment.

- ensure that operations, policies and practices (e.g. daily routine, booking systems, Personal Officer roles and deployment), support the intentions of the strategy.

- maintain and build their network of collaboration with partners to enhance learning, training & employability opportunities, and pathways into work and further learning in the community.

- engage in collaborative self-evaluation of the quality of relationships and the experiences and outcomes of learning within the establishment and share this learning.

- identify development or training that would help staff to play their full part in achieving the outcomes of this strategy.

National

SPS at national level will provide establishments with advice, guidance, evidence, tools and policies aligned with the strategy to support them. They will:

- work with partners to ensure adequate provision of necessary services and staff.

- establish and foster forums or other mechanisms to facilitate learning from staff across establishments, supporting leaders and staff to exchange ideas and practice and participate in joint development.

- support local establishments to create, implement, and review their Annual Learning Plans.

- provide support, expert advice and ongoing training to local teams, including for learning difficulties and neurodiversity, curriculum design, contractual assurance and evaluation and monitoring, and share learning across the organisation about practices and outcomes.

- design and commission the contract for the national provider which is fully aligned with this strategy.

- implement a plan for digital infrastructure and its operating guidance, based on evidence of effective practice.

- maintain contacts with partners to provide relevant educational expertise and research findings to support the implementation of the strategy; and engage with Scottish Government in relation to national policies, legislation, and budgets.

Evaluation of the strategy and its impact

It is essential that the approach to evaluating the success and outcomes of the strategy is developed with the greatest care, to avoid adverse effects which could undermine its intentions. As stated in the literature review for the strategy:

*'There appears to be a shift therefore from purely **quantitative** outcomes to understanding the learners' experience, what matters to them and how this affects their lives using **qualitative** approaches...' (Nugent 2024)*

In practical terms, this means developing a combination of approaches to evaluation and monitoring which will involve collaborative evaluation by those involved in the strategy, most notably the learners themselves, alongside discerning use of quantitative information. The main strands of evaluation and monitoring should reflect the three pillars of the strategy and are likely to include the following questions and areas for exploration:

- How inclusive is the provision? The reach and mix of development and learning opportunities across the population of an establishment, most notably for those who face barriers to their learning.
- What are the outcomes of learning? Distance travelled in individuals' learning; progress towards their learning outcomes/targets.
- What is the quality of learning experiences? This includes quality of support and relationships.

The approach to evaluation is likely to draw strongly upon the community learning and development model. There is experience and good practice in self-evaluation in prisons in Scotland to build upon. Relevant 'Quality Indicators' will be developed and used to understand, for example, barriers to participation in learning activities. Selected Quality Indicators could be used in a local collaborative way to evaluate the quality of learning experiences and outcomes in an establishment.

Taken together, the elements of this approach will provide evidence and data to inform improvements in experiences and outcomes of learning and, by shedding light on the value and impact of development and learning activities, ultimately help to inform spending decisions.

"Education in prison is about providing an opportunity for individuals to become something different." (Staff)

"Worldwide, we know that education is the thing that has the biggest impact on prisoners and those that are leaving the prison system. Without that understanding of the value of education, there will continue to be a churn…people simply coming back." (Staff)

Next Steps

The strands of the proposed approach to embed the principles of this strategy are a combination of leadership, culture, and professional continuous improvement together with necessary enabling projects. Because there is alignment with the aims of other SPS strategies these are not, in the main, separate additional strands of work with large additional resource requirements.

Leadership and culture

Leadership through visible explicit commitment to the intentions of 'Learning for a better future': modelling the principles and ensuring consistent practice, allocating necessary resources and engaging with the community and partners.

Building a culture of curiosity and learning: embedding a culture within which learning is valued and shared and all are learning.

Developing and adopting the approach to self-evaluation and improvement which is described above and is key to the strategy. This includes tone-setting which sees self-evaluation as a mindset for learning and improvement, supported by simple tools to aid this.

Communication and professional development

Awareness raising across all staff and partners, to achieve a shared understanding of the strategy's intentions and rationale, and opportunities for them to reflect on how they, as individuals, contribute to achieving the outcomes of the strategy. In effect, this is a process of reinvigorating commitment to development and learning as a responsibility of all and embedding understanding of the differences that this can make.

Professional development and training for staff and partners: the strategy signals several areas where it will be important for key staff to receive support and opportunities for their own learning and development, including how to support people who have speech, language and communication needs and understanding how best to respond to neurodiversity. Much of this professional learning for staff will be closely linked to that for other current SPS priorities and could be readily integrated within broader staff development plans. As part of this, forums where staff exchange experiences and examples of promising practice would provide effective vehicles for this professional learning and would be at relatively low cost.

Enabling projects

Identification of policies/procedures at national and/or establishment level which may need to be adjusted to enable the strategy to have the greatest beneficial impact The principles of the strategy can be used as a basis for identifying any hindrances to achieving the intentions of the strategy. Examples of potential barriers might include arrangements for rewards and incentives, timetabling, and communications.

Procurement of new contract and preparation for all aspects of its implementation in line with this strategy.

Developing tools and procedures for assessment/screening; individual planning and recording of progress and achievement, connecting with any developments in national digital portfolios; timetabling.

Developing and implementing establishment Annual Learning Plans: agreeing a common approach to development of establishment annual learning plans that take account of the needs and characteristics of the people in each establishment's care and supporting staff in establishments to develop these plans in line with the principles and pillars of the strategy.

Maintaining up to date evidence: in collaboration with national and local partners, undertaking needs assessments regularly to inform the types and scale of support required for the people in our care, and continuing to gather and explore the implications of research findings.

Longer term dependencies

This strategy shares many interdependencies with the implementation of the **SPS Digital In-Cell Services project**. The development and learning strategy will evolve as new digital technologies become available and we understand more about how best these technologies can contribute to learning.

The strategy will be reviewed annually so that actions can be taken in response to findings from evaluation and monitoring, changes in the operating landscape and evidence from research.

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This strategy sets a challenging agenda, especially during a time of constraints. Evidence shows, however, that the approach set out here has considerable potential to improve outcomes for even our most vulnerable residents. More people in our care will be better able to move away from offending and contribute positively to their families and communities, helping to break intergenerational cycles of offending. 'Learning for a Better Future' can and will make a positive difference to people's lives.

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We would like to thank our strategic partners for their innovative and insightful comments and researchers who gathered relevant evidence together and generously shared their data. We would also like to thank our staff members and individuals in our care who shared their experiences, opinions and aspirations. All of these valuable insights have helped to shape this strategy and the opportunities we hope it will create for people in custody.

Dr Gill Robinson, Law School, University of Edinburgh
Sue Brookes, SPS
Drew Jardine, SPS
Janine McCullough, Education Scotland

Outline logic model; Learning for a Better Future

Short Term Outcomes	Medium Term Outcomes	Long Term Outcomes
SPS		
• The approach to development and learning (D&L) is strengthened through the development of a broad curriculum and mechanisms for collaborative working (or community of practice).	• Improved D&L policies with the leading education provider • Improved partnership arrangements with the leading education provider.	• Improved employability opportunities through the successful development of national partnerships
Establishment		
• D&L provision is contextualised from the core curriculum to be accessible, inclusive, relevant and trauma-informed to population needs and preferences.	• Pathways to employment and skills-based learning are strengthened through improved partnerships to support community reintegration.	• D&L is embedded in establishment culture and integrated with case management for a whole system (digitally monitored) approach to personal development.
Staff		
• Personalised D&L provision for people in custody becomes part of establishment level all-staff training, collaborative working culture and accountability.	• D&L staff and prison officers demonstrate confidence assessing D&L needs, supporting learner journeys and improving access for all through outreach and relationship building.	• D&L staff and prison officers contribute to a whole system approach including digital tracking of learner journeys and continuous information provision leading to holistic case management.
Learner		
• A greater proportion of people in custody engage with development and learning opportunities.	• People in custody engaging with D&L demonstrate improved knowledge, well-being, and self-efficacy attributable to their learning journey. • User feedback leads to D&L service improvements.	• People in custody demonstrate motivation and confidence to continue with D&L or employment opportunities on release leading to positive and sustained destinations.

The draft outline logic model, detailed in the accompanying guidance, lists the inputs and resources which will be used for implementation of the strategy, the main activities underway or planned outputs from these activities, and outcomes which will be used to gauge how far and how well the strategy is achieving its intentions. Responsibility for the outcomes will be shared by all partners. The outline logic model will be refined in parallel with the development of the quality Indicators and will be used as part of self-evaluation to assess progress towards achieving the intentions of the strategy.