



Accounting Officer Memorandum

Prisoner Education Service (PES) – Full Business Case

It is normal practice for accounting officers to scrutinise significant policy proposals or plans to start or vary major projects, and then assess whether they measure up to the standards set out in Managing Public Money. From April 2017, the government has committed to make a summary of the key points from these assessments available to Parliament when an accounting officer has agreed an assessment of projects within the Government's Major Projects Portfolio.

Background and context

The provision of education in prisons is a statutory duty and is understood to play a significant role in reducing reoffending. The Prisoner Education Service Programme began in 2021 with the objective of improving education services in prisons in England including the re-procurement of contract services that are due to expire in 2025.

This assessment has been made at Full Business Case (FBC) stage and has been progressed in two parts:

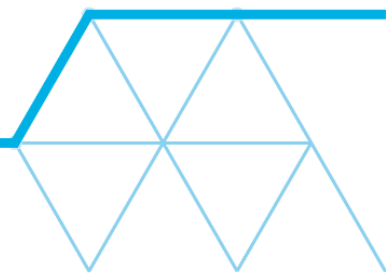
- The FBC seeks to award the contracts for Careers Information Advice and Guidance (CIAG) services starting in April 2025. The FBC also seeks agreement to the funding envelope for the whole Prison Education Service.
- An Addendum to the FBC seeks to award new contracts for Core Education starting in October 2025.

The new contracts will run for an initial fixed period of 4 years, whereupon the optional extensions for a further 3 years could be invoked.

Assessment against the accounting officer standards

Regularity

The Full Business Case and its Addendum for the Prisoner Education Service is assessed as regular. The provision of education in prisons is a statutory duty under Section 86 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009. Under the Prison Rules 1999, educational classes must be arranged at every prison, and every prisoner is able to profit from the education facilities must be encouraged to do so. Prison Rules also specify that a library shall be provided in every prison. The programme has been deemed affordable across the life of the contracts.



Propriety

The Prisoner Education Service is assessed as proper. The proposal for the re-competition and its implementation aligns with managing public money standards and obligations will be administered to a standard that meets public expectations. I am satisfied that all relevant governance and assurance procedures have been completed ahead of submission to HM Treasury and Cabinet Office for final approval.

Value for Money

The Prisoner Education Service is assessed as Value for money. The primary aim of prison education is to support rehabilitation, reduce reoffending and increase the employability of prison leavers, with the aim of more prisoners improving their reading, literacy, and numeracy, acquiring vocational and life skills. The programme is aiming to best meet this requirement whilst at the same time offering good value for money to the taxpayer and an affordable solution to HMPPS principal budget holder for the programme. Value for money has been addressed in the FBC and its Addendum. The new design includes a more consistent provision and better targeted education than the current service and is therefore expected to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

Feasibility

The Prisoner Education service is assessed as feasible. There are no significant concerns of the achievability of this programme. Programme and project management arrangements, internal governance and assurance processes are in place and embedded to control, oversee, and manage the programme. The programme is in the Governments' Major Projects Portfolio and is subject to independent Gateway Reviews at key stages of the project lifecycle.

Conclusion

I have considered this assessment of the Prisoner Education Service Programme against the four accounting officer responsibilities of regularity, propriety, value for money and feasibility and I am satisfied that these responsibilities have been met.

I have prepared this summary to set out the key points which informed my decision. If any of these factors change materially during the lifetime of this programme, I undertake to prepare a revised summary, setting out my assessment of them.

As the Accounting Officer for His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, I approved this memorandum on 20 March 2025.

This summary will be published on the government's website (GOV.UK). Copies will be deposited in the Library of the House of Commons and sent to the Comptroller and Auditor General and Treasury Officer of Accounts.

A copy has also been provided to the Principal Accounting Officer for the Ministry of Justice, who has seen my assessment and endorsed my decision on the basis of my assurance that my accounting officer responsibilities are met.



Amy Rees, HMPPS Chief Executive and Accounting Officer