



## **Developing a business in the Conference and Hospitality sector at HMP Askham Grange**

### **A Feasibility Study**

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## **1. Executive Summary**

Reducing re-offending is a key priority of the prison system, and creating employment opportunities for ex-offenders is high on the list of effective interventions.

An innovative and effective programme of skills-based training at HMP Askham Grange, built around a conference and hospitality service, a hairdressing salon and land-based or horticultural training, is designed to develop life and vocational skills for residents towards the end of their sentences.

This study is the first Phase in a programme. The second Phase will develop a business plan for the Conference and Hospitality Service at Askham Grange, and the third Phase will explore a replicable model.

This study has focused on the conference and hospitality service, and the policy environment in which it operates. It concludes that the service successfully creates significant and meaningful opportunities for residents; that it has the potential to create real work as well as training programmes; and that it offers the opportunity to bring the market for the service into the prison. We conclude that after more than a decade in operation, the service is ripe for development.

This is partly because there is an innovative, forward-thinking and creative culture in Askham Grange, and partly because the support mechanisms outside prison, which are vital if resettlement is to be effective, are now becoming established.

This study concludes that a new role of 'Enterprise Manager' should be created within Askham Grange with responsibility for supporting and stimulating entrepreneurial activity.

The study also concludes that a variety of internal improvements and innovations – including enhancing rewards to residents and creating greater opportunities – should be explored.

Finally, the study suggests that developing entrepreneurial activity at Askham Grange could form the basis of a pilot project which would test the concepts outlined in this study and examine which might be replicable elsewhere within the prison system.

## **2 Acknowledgements**

The Ideas Mine is grateful to the many people who have enabled us to research and produce this report.

We are particularly grateful to Carole Burke and Alexis Hanford who, despite their very busy diaries, have given freely of their time, knowledge and expertise.

Finally, we wish to thank our colleague, Liz Bishop, whose insights and knowledge have helped to give this report authenticity.

### **3 Background**

#### *3.1 The Social Inclusion Unit*

The last five years have been a time of rapid change and evolution in the prison system and the policy environment in which it operates.

The Social Inclusion Unit, with support from the Phoenix Development Fund (PDF), has been a significant contributor to this debate. It aims to promote enterprise in disadvantaged communities and amongst under-represented groups, as a means of tackling social exclusion.

The purpose of the PDF is to encourage fresh thinking about stimulating enterprise and providing business support. It is concerned with experimentation, the evaluation of new business ideas, and the identification and spread of best practice in an area where there is currently little knowledge.

#### *3.2 The conference and hospitality service at HMP Askham Grange*

When it was created in 1993, the Conference and Hospitality service at Askham Grange was ground-breaking.

More than a decade later, the climate may now exist for the service to develop and, potentially, deliver some of the outcomes that national and regional strategies aimed at reducing re-offending are looking for.

A research consultancy, The Ideas Mine, has been contracted by the Small Business Service to carry out a feasibility study into the scope, structure, and the resources required to develop the service. The study also identifies some of the opportunities, as well as some of the barriers and restrictions, to the process.

The Ideas Mine is a meeting point for the creative energies of leading social enterprise professionals in the North East. For the purposes of this study, the team has been augmented by a resident of Askham Grange who is actively involved in the Conference and Hospitality Service.

#### *3.3 HMP Askham Grange Women's Prison and Young Offenders Institution*

Askham Grange was built in 1886 by a wealthy factory owner; a mock-Tudor mansion, it retains many of its original features – including a paneled ballroom and a number of ancillary rooms – and sits in acres of well-tended parkland. It is the main house in the hamlet of Askham Richard, seven miles west of York.

HMP Askham Grange is one of only two female open prisons in the country. It had an operational capacity of 151 people, and includes a Mother and Baby Unit with capacity for 20 mothers and infants as at February 2004.

Usually, people arrive at Askham Grange towards the end of a sentence. If they have less than two years to serve, they enter 'Phase One' of a resettlement programme which involves tailored learning. At the end of the year, they go before a Resettlement Board, where their performance is assessed. If they have been successful, they move onto 'Phase Two'. They are now eligible for a number of privileges, including the right to apply for paid work, to move from the 'House' (the main prison building) into the Annex, (where they will have a room of their own), and to make more frequent home visits.

In 1993, the learning and skills team at Askham Grange identified a significant opportunity: using the natural advantages of the environment and the House, they established a conference and hospitality service. At that time, the concept of bringing people into the prison for such a purpose was considered radical and innovative.

Running successful conferences requires a wide range of skills, and the project therefore offered a number of learning opportunities, covering key skills areas.

## **4 Review of evidence**

### *4.1 Context*

Any initiative within the prison service must be consistent with the policy regime which governs it. Therefore, while the remit of this study is to assess the scope for developing the conference and hospitality service at HMP Askham Grange, we felt that it was important to review the national and regional policy context within which enterprise sits.

### *4.2 Reducing Re-offending*

Released prisoners are responsible for 18 per cent of recorded, notifiable crimes. Reducing re-offending is therefore crucial, and creating employment opportunities for ex-offenders is high on the list of effective interventions. Research indicates that this factor alone can reduce re-offending by between a third and a half.<sup>1</sup>

In 2002, the Social Exclusion Unit published '*Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners*', a challenging examination of the Prison Service's management of programmes specifically aimed at reducing the risk of re-offending, including the programmes relating to offending behaviour, basic skills education and drug misuse. It concluded that a more effective cross-government approach to rehabilitation and reducing re-offending was urgently needed.

In July 2004, the Home Office produced the National Reducing Re-offending Action Plan. A response, the 'Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Reducing re-Offending Action Plan' is currently out to consultation.

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<sup>1</sup> Social Exclusion Unit, 2002 '*Reducing Re-Offending by Ex-Offenders*' July

These publications all agree on one point: the need to adopt a more coherent, joined-up approach to the care and resettlement of offenders. The Government concurs: 'We have adopted an 'end-to-end' approach, which includes prevention, deterrence and conviction and continues through to rehabilitation and draws on the collective skills, knowledge and resources of a host of people and agencies.'<sup>2</sup>

An end-to-end approach would make the planning and delivery of bespoke learning packages designed to create vocational opportunities a viable possibility. This in turn means that a more ambitious approach to entrepreneurial activity at Askham Grange may be realistic.

#### 4.3 Resettlement

Effective resettlement, particularly for residents of Open Prisons on the way out of the system, is a critically important element of reducing re-offending. The issue was highlighted in a report by the chief inspector of prisons and probation<sup>3</sup> which noted that while there was much good practice in the area of resettlement, there was little continuity and no overall strategy. The report called for a national strategy to be drawn up and implemented.

'*Reducing Crime - Changing lives*'<sup>4</sup> contains the Government's plans for transforming the management of offenders, including the creation of a new National Offender Management Service (NOMS) from June 2004. NOMS merges the Prison and Probation Services into an integrated service for the management and supervision of offenders in custody and the community. The emphasis will be on greater use of community sentences for lower risk offenders and reserving custody only for serious, dangerous and highly persistent offenders.

Case management will also be a key feature of the new Service, with end-to-end management ensuring a co-ordinated and joined-up response to offenders' needs throughout the criminal justice process.

Responses to offending have generally been developed with male offenders in mind. But the fact that women make up only a small proportion of offenders – 6% of the prison population and 14% of offenders on community sentences<sup>5</sup> – does not reduce the importance of addressing their particular needs and characteristics. The custody rate and sentence lengths have been increasing across the board: the male prison population increasing by 50% over the last ten years – but over the same period the female prison population has increased by 173%.

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<sup>2</sup> Home Office, *Confident Communities in a Secure Britain* Home Office Strategic Plan 2004 - 09

<sup>3</sup> Owers, A, Morgan, R: 2001: *Through the Prison Gate*, October

<sup>4</sup> Home Office, 2004: *Reducing Crime – Changing Lives*. January

<sup>5</sup> Home Office, 2004: *Women's Offending Reduction Plan*, March

#### 4.4 *Women in the prison system*

The Government recognised the need to develop a more distinct and appropriate response to women's offending. *The Government's Strategy for Women Offenders Consultation Report*, (September 2001) signaled the intent to develop the Women's Offending Reduction Programme. The key messages from the consultation responses highlighted the need to strategically link efforts across government to reduce women's offending and to pursue alternatives to custodial sentences for women.

Since then, the Programme's action points were developed through discussion and negotiation with identified stakeholders. This established what actions were realistic and achievable given available resources, those which should be given priority, and timelines for delivery.

Among the key actions from this report are:

- The possibility of piloting multi-agency community based work using 'one-stop shop' access to services and support will be explored, building on existing provision at women's centres.
- Probation and other government and non-government agencies will develop partnership arrangements and access to community facilities which meet women's specific needs in support of community interventions (including health, housing, benefits, employment, training and childcare).

#### 4.5 *Yorkshire and Humberside*

The Reducing Re-offending National Action Plan fulfils the Government's commitment to reduce re-offending through greater strategic direction and cross government working.

In the past, the division between services in custody and the community has led to duplication in assessments, and offenders experienced a disjointed approach which continued on release because of a lack of integration with the services of Jobcentre Plus. This situation is being addressed nationally, and during 2006, a new integrated regional learning and skills service will be commissioned by the Learning and Skills Council in partnership with NOMS for offenders in prison and the community.

Recently significant progress has been made towards the achievement of a seamless service. Jobcentre Plus in West Yorkshire has seconded a member of staff to Probation, to develop a more integrated approach to offender employability as part of a national employment pathfinder project. They have also produced, with the assistance of the Prison Service, an Employer's Guide to assist with the recruitment of offenders.

Among the key aims of the Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Reducing Re-offending Action Plan,<sup>6</sup> which is currently out to consultation, are to:

- Co-ordinate rehabilitation services to underpin seamless offender management across the region
- Promote innovation, by testing new models of service delivery
- Provide a regional conduit, linking national policy through the National Reducing Re-offending Action Plan, with local strategic planning and service delivery.

The Action Plan identifies a framework of nine pathways for the delivery of services and interventions to reduce re-offending, including education, training and employment.

The Conference and Hospitality Service at Askham Grange has the potential to touch each of these pathways, but most directly education, training and employment, which aims to *'enable offenders to enhance and evidence learning and skills to assist finding and retaining employment'*, and to *'develop a co-ordinated approach to engaging employers in offering opportunities for skill development and employment of offenders.'*

Across the region, joint working protocols have been developed between Probation Areas and Jobcentre Plus, and the latter offer surgeries within the region's prisons aimed towards linking offenders into "Freshstart" appointments on release.

A protocol has now been established, along with an electronic information exchange system, to enable the transfer of prisoner learning achievement records between prisons, and from prison to Probation Areas. The extension of electronic data transfer will be explored with Jobcentre Plus.

Employers have been keen to engage with NOMS and are reassured by the offer of a point of contact where any concerns can be raised.

Yorkshire Forward has invested jointly with the Prison Service in the establishment of skills development sites in construction and bakery at Lindholme prison. Ministerial launches of these new initiatives have brought interest from employers who need to fill gaps within the workforce.

#### 4.5.1 Support

Early evidence shows that training and employment opportunities need to be underpinned by intensive support at the point of release, and through the transition

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<sup>6</sup> National Offender Management Service Working Draft, 2005: *Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Reducing Re-Offending Action Plan* 22 March

into paid employment or continuing education in the community. Yorkshire Forward has commissioned research from Sheffield Hallam University to produce recommendations to address this gap.

Significant ESF funding to support offenders into training and employment has been committed to the region, in particular through the SOVA “Women into work” ESF Equal initiative and the second phase of “Prison Service Plus“. A third phase bid from Probation may bring additional resources to support offenders in the community into employment, during 2006/07.

#### 4.6 *Other initiatives*

Seven resettlement 'Pathfinders', or pilots, were established by Nacro (The National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders), SOVA (Supporting Others Through Volunteer Action) and the probation service between 1999 and 2001.<sup>7</sup>

Emphasis was placed upon the importance of providing a co-ordinated approach, either directly or in partnership with the voluntary sector, to practical resettlement problems such as lack of accommodation, low educational attainment, and unemployment and substance abuse.

The barriers to effective delivery of resettlement services were found to include lack of commitment to the resettlement initiative from some partner prisons, a shortage of suitably trained staff, a high staff turn-over, time consuming assessment procedures, and major deficiencies in services available to prisoners and ex-prisoners, especially through organisations outside the criminal justice system.

Information gathered from case management records and interviews with project staff and offenders enabled the evaluation team to make a number of recommendations for improving the delivery of future resettlement work. These included the need for:

- strong, professional management and leadership
- genuine prison / probation / voluntary sector partnership in delivering resettlement services
- better prison facilities
- improved partnership working with JobCentre Plus, local authorities and relevant voluntary / private sector agencies

The Pathfinders demonstrated the potential to change offender attitudes and behaviour, whilst maintaining contact at a much higher level than previously demonstrated by voluntary after-care services.

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<sup>7</sup> Home Office RDS, 2003: *The resettlement of short-term prisoners: an evaluation of seven Pathfinder programmes* September

#### 4.7 *Seamless service*

Within NOMS, offender services will be commissioned at a regional level, and the Regional Offender Manager will be responsible for the end to end management of offenders, and for delivering a regional framework to reduce re-offending.<sup>8</sup>

The South Yorkshire Offender Partnership attracts resources to support offenders into employment and training, working both in custody and the community in the sub-region. This partnership offers a model for the co-ordination of both statutory and voluntary sector organisations in a joint approach to offender employability.

These initiatives are to be welcomed, as they create the apparatus which will support residents leaving Askham Grange and going into employment.

### 5 ***Conference and Hospitality Service Best Practice***

A commercial conferencing and hospitality service, such as those operated by major hotel chains and dedicated conference centres, is a sophisticated operation which requires a general manager, a sales and marketing office, an accounts department, a highly resourced and trained catering service, a conference and banqueting manager (who has overall responsibility for events, client liaison, and managing new business) and an operations manager (responsible for administration and the operational side).

Attention to detail is extremely important – the quality of the food, the attitude of the staff, the cleanliness of the facilities, and so on. Excellent communication and meticulous planning is essential, as is customer care.

Smaller centres offering conferencing facilities, or colleges and institutions offering conferencing as a revenue generating opportunity will be obliged to combine some the roles above, and may sub-contract catering provision to third-parties. Nonetheless the key functions described above need to be addressed and co-ordinated, and a well-managed, client-focused conferencing facility will ensure that client liaison is friendly, professional and efficient.

#### 5.1 *A typical model of best practice in the Conference and Hospitality Service*

*Communication is via 'function sheets', which are created and maintained by the conference and banqueting manager, and sent to each department. These record all relevant details, including the name of the client, the number of delegates, the style of the event, the catering required, the event timings, and so on. The sheets are updated – using a colour code – whenever new changes are made, and then circulated.*

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<sup>8</sup> NOMS, 2005: Yorkshire and Humberside Reducing Re-Offending Action Plan, 22 March

*As the event approaches, the conference and banqueting manager will ensure that the client's wishes are accurately understood, while the operations manager will ensure that the facility is appropriately equipped and made ready.*

*This will require porters (to fetch and install furniture and equipment, linen), cloakroom attendants, technical assistants (to install audio visual equipment when it is required), 'meeters and greeters', and reception staff.*

*A registration desk will be staffed and supplied with delegate packs and pre-printed delegate badges. If a banquet is to be served (rather than a buffet) menu and place cards (prepared in the conference and banqueting office) will be supplied to the operations team. Waiters will be supplied and briefed.*

*The Conference and banqueting manager will be on hand during the event to ensure that the client is satisfied and to resolve problems if they arise.*

*After the event, the room will need to be re-set; furniture returned to store, linen taken the laundry, and so on. The conference and banqueting manager will hold a post-event de-brief with the client to ensure that they were content with the process.*

Askham Grange already mirrors a number of the 'best practice' features in its delivery of conference events, and feedback from users is consistently positive about the standard of service achieved. However, there are aspects of the present arrangements which are limiting the capacity, effectiveness and potential of the conferencing service. These are addressed in the following sections.

## **6 Training and development at Askham Grange**

Training and development at Askham Grange is provided through three channels:

6.1 *The Education department.* The work of this department is outsourced by the Prison Service and is currently provided by City College Manchester. This contract is subject to regular re-tendering. The Education Department provides:

- literacy and numeracy training up to Level 2 standard
- an examination-based Business Administration qualification at Level 1, 2 and 3;
- Information Technology training to gain the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL).
- Pre-employment training in the form of a five day Preparation for Work programme which is accredited by the Open College Network (OCN)

In addition, the Education department is in the process of introducing a Group and Team work qualification which will be accredited by OCN. A Family Learning course operates four sessions a week and NVQ Hairdressing operates three full days per week.

- 6.2 *Prison Service staff, who assess and verify the Food Preparation and Cooking NVQ, as well as providing Essential Food Hygiene training,.*
- 6.3 *External colleges, universities and distance learning providers, which are contracted to provide ad-hoc qualifications for individual residents.*
- 6.4 *Examples of where these qualifications have been used include providing floristry, sports therapy and management training.*

The majority of the training and development provided by the Askham Grange Education Department and the Prison Service is delivered on site, with the prison kitchen used to provide training for the food related qualifications. External colleges include Askham Bryan College, York College, York University, Leeds Metropolitan University, Thomas Danby College (Leeds), and the Open University.

The Education department is contracted to deliver approximately 5,000 hours of training a year. Within these hours they have commitments to deliver literacy, numeracy and key work-related skills. The department used to run a full evening class programme covering broader educational courses, however these courses did not fit within the contract commitments and they had to be stopped.

Funding for residents to attend college and distance learning courses comes from a pilot project set up by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The Prisoners Education Trust and Women in Prison (both charities) provide funds for other training which does not meet the requirements of the LSC project.

The LSC funds 20 places for outside courses and applications have to meet certain criteria. Applications to the Prisoners Education Trust have to be backed up by references from the Education service.

Each resident is assessed by the Education Manager on arrival at Askham Grange. As part of this assessment, the resident's literacy and numeracy levels are checked and a personalised resettlement plan, detailing training requirements, is devised. This resettlement plan becomes the focus of the training and education provided at Askham Grange.

If a resident's numeracy and literacy are not at Level 2 standard they are required to attend numeracy and literacy training. Other than this, residents are not forced to participate in training and education. However, the Training Manager estimates that over 90% of residents choose to participate. When a candidate's level of education is above that of the training provided by the prison, or when they have jobs to return to when they leave, they often choose not to participate.

The type of training the resident can access will be dependent on the length of time they spend at Askham Grange. This is taken into account when drawing up the resettlement plan. The programmes last from five days for a Preparation for Work

course to around three months for an NVQ (depending on the time a resident can commit to the course and their previous experience). The courses are offered on a rolling basis (unlike, for example, external education courses which typically start in September or January). If the resident leaves Askham Grange before completing a qualification they can continue on release, and can be assisted in accessing this training by the education department and PS Plus.

In theory, residents can attend educational courses five days a week (representing 27 hours over a Monday to Friday), as long as the courses meet the requirements of their resettlement plan. Their pay is not affected by how much or how little time they spend in education. When the prison occupancy drops below a certain level, residents may be required to reduce their commitment to education in order to ensure the prison continues to run. However, this does not occur frequently.

One of the strengths of the Education department is the supportive learning environment that it provides. The department works to break down the barriers that the residents may have from previous educational experiences and provides training geared towards a resident's learning style. The Education department makes an effort to praise residents when they complete a qualification.

Other than through this praise, residents are not specifically rewarded for their success in educational achievements. They are not given a financial bonus. Instead, emphasis is placed upon the value of qualifications in the outside world.

The Education department is in the process of implementing a Personal Development and Achievement file in which residents can record all their achievements, not just qualifications obtained or courses completed.

The Education Manager has investigated the possibility of introducing Customer Service NVQs, which she believes would be the most useful of the available options. Of all the alternative vocational qualifications available she believes that this will be most useful for residents' future prospects. However, the Education department does not have the funding or resources to deliver this programme in addition to its current commitments.

## **7 Critical issues**

The problems in prisoners' lives are often highly complicated and inter-related. They require a co-ordinated multi-agency response, within prison, across the crucial transitions between community and custody, and sustained long after release. Without this, they are likely to fall into the gaps between services.<sup>9</sup>

We have found a number of other critical issues which impact upon the entrepreneurial activity within Askham Grange. They include:

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<sup>9</sup> Social Exclusion Unit, 2002 'Reducing Re-Offending by Ex-Offenders' July

### 7.1 *Priorities*

Residents value jobs unless they are “*too much hassle*”. Inside the prison a visit or a doctor’s appointment will take priority over work, and this can also apply to the staff.<sup>10</sup>

### 7.2 *Raising expectations*

Prison staff are usually attentive, and they care about prisoners. However, this is not necessarily the case outside. While the Conference and Hospitality Service does much to restore the confidence of residents, there is a real danger of creating safe spaces that lead to unreal expectations.

### 7.3 *Socio-political context*

Public attitudes to creative initiatives within prison are a significant issue. The community at large can be hostile to anything which appears favourable to prisoners or their families, and there have been instances of innovative projects being pilloried in the press (for example when HMP Standford Hill decided to commission a golf course).

A study by Nacro<sup>11</sup> found that employers are willing to employ ex-offenders but are reluctant to develop policies and procedures for their recruitment, or to do so openly, because of the critical response they might receive from the public. A group of leading employers recommended that the Government should work with a number of major employers in the development of policies for the recruitment of ex-offenders that can be used as case studies. It also recommended that a programme of public education should accompany the introduction of the Disclosure service.

Some employers were also concerned that adopting formal policies could give the impression to the public that they were actively seeking to recruit ex-offenders.

### 7.4 *Rewards*

Other than through praise, residents are not specifically rewarded for their success in educational achievements, and one of the disincentives to joining the Conference and Hospitality Service is the lack of remuneration. Even though working in conferencing requires extra hours over and above the relevant education module, and significant personal responsibility, residents are rewarded with a bonus of only 50p.

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<sup>10</sup> Treen, B, 2005: Interview 17 June

<sup>11</sup> Nacro, 2003: *Recruiting ex-offenders: the employers’ perspective*

### 7.5 *Continuity of service*

When the prison occupancy drops below a certain level, residents at Askham Grange may be required to reduce their commitment to education in order to ensure the prison continues to run. However, this does not occur frequently.

### 7.6 *The requirement to disclose*

For those who do increase their employability, the requirement to disclose their convictions to a potential employer can be a significant barrier, resulting in discrimination. The current arrangements do not get the balance right between the need to protect the public and the importance of enabling those who do not pose a significant risk of harm to move into legitimate employment.<sup>12</sup>

### 7.7 *Self employment*

The requirement to disclose, together with the prejudice and stigma attached to ex-offenders, means that finding a job will be a challenge. From this perspective, self-employment, which does not involve disclosure, is an attractive option.

However, evidence<sup>13</sup> shows that training and employment opportunities need to be backed by intensive support at the point of release, and through the transition into self-employment in the community.

While a number of organisations, including Business in Prisons, PSPlus, SOVA, the Princes Trust and InBiz support ex-offenders who are attempting to take this route, the success rate is low (and it is lower for women than men). There are a number of reasons for this, including the fact that the intensive support arrangements often break down; the success rate for the start-ups in the community at large is low; and because the challenge of starting a business is difficult enough, without the multitude of problems that many ex-offenders have to deal with.

### 7.8 *Organisational deficiencies*

The pathfinder project established by Nacro, SOVA and the probation service highlighted critical problems, including a shortage of suitably trained staff, a high staff turn-over, time consuming assessment procedures, and major deficiencies in services available to prisoners and ex-prisoners, especially through organisations outside the criminal justice system

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<sup>12</sup> Social Exclusion Unit, 2002 'Reducing Re-Offending by Ex-Offenders' July

<sup>13</sup> Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Reducing Re-offending Action Plan March 2005

## 8 *Exploring the boundaries of a market-led enterprise model*

Askham Grange is already achieving a great deal through its education programmes and the conferencing facilities:

- residents are gaining relevant vocational skills and qualifications;
- a variety of different work opportunities are made possible through the conferencing facility;
- users of the conferencing facilities are very positive both about the physical environment and about the quality of welcome when they visit.

How, therefore, might a more 'market led' enterprise model enable Askham Grange to achieve still more?

Working within the physical and political constraints of Askham Grange as a prison we see the opportunity to explore the development of the conferencing facility as an enterprise model in three ways

- *To become more 'market led' as a conference provider* – this may affect branding, publicity and information, pricing policy, making best use of the physical attributes of Askham Grange, targeting particular market sectors for custom
- *To become more 'market led' in the types of skills and work experience offered to residents* – this may involve forging stronger links with providers of hospitality and catering within the area, and promoting interchange of training, skills development and work placements
- *To develop the enterprise skills of residents by engaging them more in the management and operation of the conference business* – this may involve exploring the scope for creating a 'Management Committee' or 'Residents' Board' which would exercise oversight over the conferencing facility (within agreed parameters) developing enterprise skills and team working.

All of the above has the overall aims of:

- a) *Improving the employability of residents* by exposing them within the prison to as realistic an experience of the world of work as possible and encouraging them to develop the 'soft skills' of team-working and customer service to a high level
- b) *Enhancing residents' self confidence and self-esteem* by giving them a real stake in the development and success of the enterprise

- c) *Offering a pilot of enterprise development within the prison system which may have wider applicability*

## **9 A Market-Led Conferencing Business**

Askham Grange offers a very desirable conference venue within close reach of York and the A1. Existing users rate both the facilities and the quality of welcome very highly.

Nonetheless, evidence suggests that at present:

- The conference facilities sit idle much of the week – even if some rooms are used for internal prison meetings
- There is little/no marketing material to promote the conference facilities.
- New business comes by ‘word of mouth’
- Users from within the Home Office/Prison Service do not pay for use of the rooms and pay only a reduced charge for food/refreshments
- The process for booking, planning, delivering, and invoicing involves a number of staff and is not streamlined (although it has been simplified in the past year)
- A key limiting factor to the growth of the service is the availability of residents to staff the reception desk and undertake the food preparation

Whilst acknowledging that the conferencing facility must operate within the practical constraints of the prison (i.e. available hours are restricted, there are constraints upon the use of the building, there may be limits on the number of residents available/willing to work within the conferencing teams), there are opportunities to market the conference facility which would have a number of positive benefits:

- Marketing, responding to customer queries, preparing quotations, collecting customer feedback will create relevant work opportunities and experience for residents
- Increased use of the facility will create increased opportunities for learning and practising hospitality skills by residents
- Increased use of the facilities by external clients will have two positive effects:

- a) *Increased revenue generation* to be used to support the development of education facilities, to improve and develop the conferencing suite and to reward and enhance facilities for residents
- b) *Breaking down some of the stigma and prejudice* about employing ex-offenders. The latter is particularly relevant if the market focus was combined with an attempt to encourage use of the facility by staff and decision-makers from potential employers

A market-led conferencing facility would also create a work experience more akin to life outside (e.g. a less 'institutional' environment, with more demanding customers who are paying for a service and the development of a 'house style' and branding)

### 9.1 Constraints

A significant constraint upon the growth of conferencing at Askham Grange is the limited number of residents wishing to take part. There are a variety of factors which may affect a resident's willingness to work within the conferencing team, but significant amongst them is the wage and bonus structure (working in conferencing requires extra hours over and above the relevant education module, and personal responsibility. Those extra hours and the additional responsibility are rewarded with a bonus of only 50p).

Residents value employment opportunities. However, competing priorities often take precedence: a visit or a doctor's appointment, for example. This is as true for the staff as it is for the residents.

This is also a significant issue for a resettled female prisoner; children, safe accommodation, and staying off drugs are often more pressing than finding or continuing employment.

### 9.2 Market Led Skills and Jobs

While some of the constraints at Askham Grange are a necessary result of the demands of the institution and may be difficult to address, there is the potential to make progress on others.

- *Strengthen links with the hospitality industry.* Among the employers in York who have an established relationship with Askham Grange is the Travel Inn; there is the potential to develop links with others, and with the York Tourism Bureau, which runs a conferencing desk. This would create more employment opportunities, and put Askham Grange on the map as a conference venue.
- *Staff exchange.* There may be potential to develop a mentoring scheme which would bring staff from local organisations into Askham to develop the business and the skills it requires. There may also be work placement

opportunities in the community for residents to provide casual staff for external events (e.g. the University of York, York Race Course, and big conferences and events)

- *Temporary employment.* Expanding the Conference and Hospitality Service will place increasing demands on resources at Askham Grange. There may be opportunities to employ temporary staff to fill gaps when Askham is running at full capacity
- *Increasing opportunity.* Each of these initiatives will require a sophisticated degree of staff planning and other work skills, which could meet the needs of residents with higher educational and skill levels.

### 9.3 *Engaging Residents in the Management of the Business*

The Conference and Hospitality Service at Askham Grange offers a wide range of opportunities for residents. There is the potential to offer even more, through extending the opportunities into the direct management of the business. This will raise issues for the Prison Service (for example, residents would be involved in financial and human resource management) and for the Conference and Hospitality Service itself (for example, the loss of key individuals upon departure from prison, and the necessity to recruit residents willing and able to shoulder this level of responsibility). However, these are some of the aims and potential benefits which could be achieved.

### 9.4 *Skills*

NVQs and other vocational training courses tend to develop knowledge-based skills. Arguably they are less good at the developing the 'soft skills' of team working, planning and organisation, judgement and decision-making. These 'soft' skills (which are often very evident at interview or in a short work placement) are valuable in many spheres of work, and are particularly important for those considering self-employment.

### 9.5 *Confidence building*

It is already clear that residents have shown themselves able and willing to take responsibility and solve problems in the day to day delivery of conferences. Alongside the development of new markets for the conferencing facility, it would be possible to experiment with ways of working which would allow more collective involvement by residents in decision-making, planning and delivery of the conferencing service e.g. they could have delegated authority within certain parameters, for sending out marketing materials, handling enquiries, pricing, accepting bookings, staffing rotas, customer feedback and invoicing. Over time they might be constituted as a management committee or 'virtual' board, setting targets, monitoring performance and reporting results.

## 9.6 Business development

This type of devolved decision-making would not only considerably enrich the jobs (and thus the work experience) of residents and enhance their enterprise skills but it could also help to ensure that the growth of the conferencing business makes fewer calls upon the time of other prison staff. It might also provide an informative enterprise pilot for other part of the prison system.

The Room 13 project in Caol Primary School, West Scotland offers an interesting case study of this type of working. Despite operating within a primary school and facing all of constraints of a transient population and lack of business experience, the Room 13 Arts project operates as a company managed by the pupils who, within certain limits and with some external advice, manage the project, raising finances and deciding how surpluses should be allocated.

## 10 Social Enterprise

We have been asked to consider whether social enterprise offers an appropriate business structure for an expanded conference and hospitality service at Askham Grange. For the purposes of this study, we have adopted the definition used by the Foundation for Small and Medium Enterprise Development,<sup>14</sup> which states that social enterprises are '*enterprises, societies and associations formed to achieve specific social objectives and using business management and development approaches*'.

An example of a successful and profitable hospitality business which is also a social enterprise is Six St Mary's Place, Edinburgh. A bed-and-breakfast hotel which last year won the Scottish Thistle Award for customer care, it is one of five social businesses in a group (which also includes a laundry), in the city.

They were designed to run profitably, while at the same time creating opportunities for disadvantaged people. In the case of the Hotel, 18 training sessions per week are offered to people with severe mental health problems.

According to the manager<sup>15</sup> the first principle for all the businesses is to be commercially viable. 'That gives us the space to employ people with needs,' he said.

We believe that adopting this model would have a number of advantages for entrepreneurial activity at Askham Grange. Becoming a social enterprise would give the business a strong reference point within the social firm community; it would give innovative ideas legitimacy within the prison culture; it would make a clear statement about the aims and objectives of the businesses; and it would assist attempts to communicate the aims of the project to society at large.

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<sup>14</sup> Howarth, R and Sear, L, 2001: Understanding and Supporting Social Enterprise, a policy overview

<sup>15</sup> Sargent, J, 2005, interview with Tully, D, 24 June

## **11. *Employment opportunities through the development of the Askham Grange business model.***

An analysis of the Conference and Hospitality Service reveals that a wide range of skills are required, ranging from the sophisticated to the basic. When possible, residents are offered activities within the service which match their vocational aspirations.

For example, business administration learners, whose skills will be required by the Conferencing and Hospitality Service, may go on to work in offices; students acquiring catering qualifications may go on to work in restaurants.

We believe that there is scope to develop this model to create learning packages which are specifically geared to a particular employment opportunity. Arrangements could be brokered with large employers – the Thistle Hotel Group, for example – to accept residents when they leave Askham Grange. (Because residents disperse widely, a national chain is desirable. We are aware that this concept is not new, and is problematic; we will address this in our recommendations).

### *11.1 Case study: The Barista*

The recent explosive growth of the coffee house through chains such Starbucks, Coffee Republic and Costa Coffee is a very visible metropolitan phenomenon throughout the UK.

Alongside the changes to both the look of our high streets and our eating and drinking habits the import of the US style coffee house culture offers new opportunities for employment and self-employment. Starbucks, for example, employs nearly 97,000 people in both full time and part-time jobs, 14,700 of these being outside the USA.<sup>16</sup>

One of these new jobs, the Barista - a specialist in the selection and preparation of coffee - has its own unique training and enjoys higher status and remuneration within the sector. We suggest that offering 'real' coffee as part of the Askham Grange hospitality experience will enhance both the marketability of the Conference facility and offer significant potential for residents to undertake training which may lead to both employment and potentially self-employment when they leave.

Starbucks in-house training is part of the 'Coffee Masters Program' has a thirty-five hour module spread over eight shifts with a one-hour certification element for its Baristas. Costa Coffee has a four-stage program for its Baristas starting with 'Get on Board' and ending with 'On the Move'. Costa Coffee develops and promotes 60% of their staff from within the company,<sup>17</sup> and operates 300 UK wide stores both directly

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<sup>16</sup> Annual report 2004 [www.starbucks.co.uk](http://www.starbucks.co.uk)

<sup>17</sup> Costa Coffee website [www.costa.co.uk](http://www.costa.co.uk)

and has through a concession and franchise operation. There are ten Costa's within a forty miles radius of Askham Grange with a concession at WH Smiths in York itself.

Independently of the chains, an organisation called Coffee Community offers Barista training courses and supplies mobile Espresso Carts and Bars for use in a variety of venues and locations.<sup>18</sup> They offer a 'Community Cart' which can be used in conjunction with a pop up marquee for outdoor use. Their training is done face-to-face and by using a cd-rom which they supply.

A machine, including a full day certified training course and coffee for 1000 cups is available for £2,435.<sup>19</sup>

### 11.2 Enterprise Manager

Apart from the Conference and Hospitality Service, Askham Grange supports a successful hairdressing salon, and a gardening project (which supplies produce to the kitchens).

The new childcare facility offers another potential business opportunity: it already provides paid day care for the public and, potentially, crèche facilities for the children of delegates to conferences. Although this does not happen at present, NVQ training in childcare has been offered in the past.

Taking these businesses to another level will require a dedicated champion who understands the opportunities and constraints of the prison system, but who also understands the entrepreneurial culture, methods and approaches required for success in the business world.

We have produced an indicative budget (appendix two) for such a post. However, in making the assumptions underlying the budget, we have not addressed some key issues.

- *Rate for the job:* We have assumed a salary of £26,000, which is consistent with Management Grade G. This rate would need to be tested, but might need to be higher.
- *Job description:* As this role could cover all entrepreneurial activity within Askham Grange, the role will carry significant responsibility and may therefore warrant a higher grade. However, it is possible that this increase could be funded through surpluses generated by the businesses.
- *Market rate:* As this is an entrepreneurial role, there may be a case for building incentives into the salary (assuming that this is possible within the prison system).

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<sup>18</sup> [www.coffeecommunity.co.uk](http://www.coffeecommunity.co.uk)

<sup>19</sup> Cooper, K, in conversation with Limon, H, 16 June 2005 and at [www.pennineteaandcoffee.co.uk](http://www.pennineteaandcoffee.co.uk)

These are detailed issues, which should be properly explored and developed in a business plan. If there is a desire to progress, that will be the subject of Phase Two of this project.

## **12. Recommendations**

### *12.1 Enhance entrepreneurial opportunities at Askham Grange*

We have found that entrepreneurial activity at Askham Grange presents a number of significant opportunities, including providing meaningful and educational activities for residents, better preparing them for life after prison, and reducing the stigma attached to the institution. Growing these activities, however, will require specialist skills and experience.

*We therefore recommend* that a new role of ‘Enterprise Manager’ should be created within Askham Grange. The role would include supporting and stimulating the entrepreneurial spirit within the institution, growing the existing businesses, liaising closely with the Education Department, and becoming a key contact within Askham for the Regional Offender Manager.

Because residents need intensive support at the point of release and through the transition into paid employment, we would hope that the relationship between the Enterprise Manager and the Regional Offender Manager – and others involved in the care and resettlement of offenders – is seamless.

Another significant responsibility for the Enterprise Manager will be to broker occupational opportunities with employers. We know that this has been tried before, notably with a national food and clothing retail chain. Agreement to employ ex-offenders was achieved at Board level, but the process broke down when the appointments were left to the discretion of local managers, who did not always co-operate.

We believe that the process would require a multi-agency communication and education programme, directed below Board level. This issue should be addressed at the business planning stage.

### *12.2 Reward effort*

We have found that the rewards available to residents are currently very low, and therefore offer very little incentive to take on additional responsibility, or to work the extra hours that the enterprises demand.

*We recommend* that a remuneration structure – as near as possible to the market rate – is instituted and funded through business ‘profits’. This would create real jobs which would allow residents to claim work inside Askham as their legitimate occupation, and – assuming that they are at the appropriate stage in their sentence – trigger their move to the second phase of their stay. It would also be consistent with a social enterprise model.

We appreciate that this will create challenges. Under current arrangements, for example, residents at Phase One who are working within the Conference and Hospitality Service will not qualify for the same rewards as residents at Phase Two. However, we do not believe that this is an insurmountable problem, and it should be addressed at the business planning stage.

*We also recommend* that a Customer Service NVQ qualification should be offered by the Education Department to complement the other courses on offer, thus creating a complete vocational learning package within the Conference and Hospitality Service.

### *12.3 Role in running the service*

*We recommend* that roles in the direct management of the business, answerable to the Enterprise Manager, should be created for residents. This will extend the range of opportunities, and offer meaningful learning programmes to people who currently do not participate.

We understand that this may create issues for the Prison Service (the role may involve a level of delegated authority, for example, and may involve handling and being responsible for money) but we believe that the benefits will outweigh the disadvantages.

### *12.4 Pilot project*

We believe that extending the entrepreneurial activity at Askham Grange would not only have significant benefits for the prison, but may reveal useful insights for the service as a whole.

*We recommend* that a pilot project should be created at Askham Grange, with the aim of developing the Conference and Hospitality Service along commercial business lines. We envisage that it will be the responsibility of the Enterprise Manager to oversee the pilot. A detailed, costed business plan would be required, and the pilot would complement activity elsewhere in Yorkshire (skills development in baking and construction at HMP Lindholme, Doncaster, for example.)

Funding for the pilot may be available from various sources, including Yorkshire Forward (which part-funded the work at Lindholme), the European Social Fund, which has supported offenders into training and employment, and the Prison Service itself.

### *12.5 Phases Two and Three*

This project was designed in three free-standing phases. The second Phase, will develop a business plan to take the enterprise forward, and the third phase will produce a detailed case study for the process of developing a generic model of the service.

### **13 Next steps**

Following a presentation to the Governor of Askham Grange, the senior manager from the Small Business Service who commissioned this study, and staff responsible for the Conference and Hospitality Service, it was agreed that The Ideas Mine would proceed to the next Phase of the research.

## **Appendix One**

### **Terms of Reference**

This feasibility study has been commissioned by the Small Business Service (SBS) with the aim of identifying the scope, appropriate structure, resources required, barriers, restrictions and opportunities to develop the current conference and hospitality activities within HMP Askham Grange as a model for prison-based enterprise.

SBS asks for a comprehensive assessment of the scope for developing a sustainable enterprise within Askham Grange by developing/expanding the hospitality and conference services. Particular consideration has been given to the following:

- the most appropriate business structure (for example whether it should be some form of social enterprise or other business model);
- how the enterprise might best be managed in the prison;
- the level of resource needed to develop and run it as an enterprise;
- the training and development needs of the women running the enterprise;
- salary and other terms and conditions of engagement/employment;
- linking experience within the enterprise to employment/self-employment after sentence.

## Appendix Two

### Askham Grange Conferencing & Hospitality Indicative Budget

*A simplified financial model*

*Assumptions:*

Internal Tariff:

(presently £7.50 per head) is increased to £10.00 - including tea/coffee

External Tarriff

(presently £17.50 plus VAT) is increased to £20.00 - including tea/coffee

Cost of 'consumables' per delegate - food, drink, stationery - is £5.00, and allowance for room maintenance, furniture replacements is £1.00 (ie profit margin on external delegate is 70%)

'Bonus' of £2.00 is paid to residents supporting a conference event - on average a team of 9 residents is involved per event (6 on food preparation, three front of house')

Marketing Budget will cover brochures, advertising, mail shots, uniforms/logo etc.

*Activity*

**Low Activity** - One 'external booking' (30 delegates) each week, and one 'internal booking' (20 delegates) each fortnight - for 40 weeks per year

**Middle Activity** - two 'external bookings' (one of 20 delegates and one of 35 delegates) each week and one 'internal booking' (25 delegates) each fortnight - for 45 weeks per year

**High Activity** - three 'external bookings' (one of 15 delegates, one of 25 delegates, one of 40 delegates), and one 'internal booking' (20 delegates) each week - for 48 weeks per year

| <b>Revenue Model</b>                                 | <b>Low</b>       | <b>Middle</b>  | <b>High</b>   |
|--|------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Internal Bookings:                                   | £ 4,000          | £ 5,625        | £ 9,600       |
| External Bookings:                                   | £24,000          | £49,500        | £76,800       |
| Cost of Consumables                                  | (£8,000)         | (£14,625)      | (£24,000)     |
| Maintenance/Replacements                             | (£1,600)         | (£ 2,925)      | (£ 4,800)     |
| Residents' Bonus                                     | (£1,080)         | (£ 2,025)      | (£ 3,456)     |
| <br>   |                  |                |               |
| Operating Surplus                                    | £17,320          | £35,550        | £44,544       |
| <br>   |                  |                |               |
| Marketing Budget                                     | (£2,000)         | (£4,000)       | (£7,500)      |
| Enterprise Manager<br>(£26,000 salary plus on costs) | (£32,500)        | (£32,500)      | (£32,500)     |
| <br>   |                  |                |               |
| <b>NET</b>   | <b>(£17,180)</b> | <b>(£ 950)</b> | <b>£4,544</b> |

## **Appendix Three**

### ***List of interviewees***

#### *Askham Grange:*

Carole Burke, Head of Learning and Skills  
Alexis Hanford, Learning and Skills Manager  
Tim Turnbull, Hospitality and Catering Manager  
Carol Smith, Business Administration Co-ordinator

#### *Resettlement Service:*

Barbara Treen (Women's Team); Jan Bolton (Area Officer)

#### *York Tourism Bureau*

Kate McMullen, Manager

#### *Business in Prisons*

Heather McIntyre

#### *Social Exclusion Unit*

John Bentham

#### *PS Plus 2*

Helen Ramsay / Adele Bilson / Marek Musiol

*The Reducing Re-offending Team (Yorkshire and Humberside)*

Rachel Denham