

3.4 Education

Education should be central to the work of YOIs. However, in the early days of the first national lockdown, some under-18 establishments provided very little education; in-cell provision was woefully lacking and poorly delivered, largely consisting of distraction packs rather than learning materials, but there were pockets of good practice. Although this gradually improved, by the end of 2020 provision still fell well short of the level and standard it had reached prior to the pandemic. While teenagers in the community returned to school in early summer, there was a very limited return to education provision within YOIs.

At Cookham Wood, Novus education staff provided remote resources, including individual work packs, newsletters and prison radio podcasts that were pushed under room doors during lockdown. Within two weeks of 20 March, Novus had developed a risk assessed plan for partial return to education. This was supported and agreed locally by management, staff and unions. However, it was rejected at higher levels in the prison service by HMPPS Gold Command, though a very similar plan was implemented four months later. In mid-July, limited classroom-based education classes resumed in small groups. This only amounted to just over five hours of education per week. At Wetherby, most young people would have been classified as 'vulnerable' in the community. Therefore, the Board argued that they should have received at least some face-to-face education throughout lockdown. Instead, young people were provided with in-cell workbooks and distraction packs. The same was true at Werrington. At Feltham A, education staff remained on site to provide remote learning. This included staff delivering daily work packs to all young people from the second week of lockdown. These were collected and marked, with incentives for those who completed packs. Once back in the classroom in July 2020, small-group teaching was well received and most notably, attendance improved to a rate higher than it had been prior to lockdown.

It is clear that some education providers had not adopted a creative approach to delivery after many months into the pandemic, thereby severely disrupting the rehabilitation of many young people, and the education and skills needed to find a job upon release.

3.5 Progression and resettlement

Social visits were banned as the first national lockdown was introduced until July 2020. Even then, at Cookham Wood, there were restricted monthly family visits, with each young people allowed a maximum of three visitors. At Wetherby, the Board reported that only evening visits by adults were allowed, which disadvantaged those young people whose families did not live nearby and those who were fathers themselves.

Cookham Wood IMB also reported that the lack of IT and telephone capacity affected family contact and resettlement reviews during these months. Despite this, the resettlement team attempted to maintain relationships with families, carers and