

“A4e do not appear to understand or care about what education should be for.”

“The erosion of pay and conditions has led to the lowest morale I have ever known.”

“What training?”

A4e

a prison education survey

Background

We surveyed UCU members employed by A4e in Prison Education, about the Learning & Skills Council tendering process for offender learning. Almost 100 employees responded to our survey.

Overall experience of A4e employees

We asked what A4e was like as an employer and provider of offender learning. This is what they told us:

- ▶ 89.5 per cent employees would prefer to work for a college of further education.
- ▶ Over half (50.6 per cent) rate A4e as ‘Poor’ as a provider of quality offender learning.
- ▶ Over half (54.3 per cent) say offender learning has got worse since A4e won the contract.

They said:

“I believe that quality offender learning has been delivered due to the commitment and hard work of the staff who work in prisons despite the employer.”

“A4e have poor terms and conditions for teachers working within what is a uniquely difficult teaching environment.”

Staff development and training

We asked about opportunities for job development, the training A4e employees received and the support offered by A4e’s Human Resources Department. This is what they told us:

- ▶ Nearly a quarter (24.7 per cent) of respondents have received no training in the last two years.
- ▶ Of those who did, over a third (31 per cent) had no paid time off for the training
- ▶ Nearly half (47 per cent) said that A4e did not enable staff to meet their CPD obligations as set out by the Institute for Learning.
- ▶ 75.4 per cent said that there is no specific time off for staff development
- ▶ 41.7 per cent said they did not know how to access the A4e Human Resource Department
- ▶ Of those who did, nearly half found them unhelpful (47.6 per cent)

continued on page 2

A4e *a prison education survey*

They said:

"I am expected to do training in my own time or to take that day as annual leave."

"I had to complete a form to get approval from the regional manager. Then had to sign a form to say I would stay with the company for a certain amount of time to cover cost/investment in the course"

"My last training application was refused. I am now funding the course myself."

"What training?"

Should A4e be awarded the contract again?

Asked if A4e should be awarded the contract for offender learning again an overwhelming 81.6 per cent said 'NO'

We asked: "If you could tell the LSC one thing about A4e as a provider of offender learning, what would it be?".

They said:

"A4e do not appear to understand or care about what education should be for. In my opinion education should be about enabling offenders to further themselves as individuals. They seem to regard the contract as a business."

"The erosion of pay and conditions has led to the lowest morale among staff that I have ever known. Recruitment of good staff at the lower wages/holiday entitlement especially in a prison environment is very difficult. This has led to long periods of class cancellations or at best cover by unqualified staff who have no knowledge of the subjects being taught."

"This is the McDonaldsization of education."

Our position

We think the voices of our members who provide offender learning deserve to be heard. We are calling on the LSC to listen and act by ensuring that the tender goes to a provider who can redress these problems and provide stability, experience, and professional support. We do not believe this can be A4e.

For more information: Christiane Ohsan cohsan@ucu.org.uk / 020 7520 3289
