

## **ASKHAM GRANGE: RESETTLEMENT WORK NEGLECTED**

Askham Grange, an open prison for women near York, provides a safe and respectful environment for its prisoners but is failing to provide enough purposeful activity or resettlement support, says Anne Owers, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, in the report of a short inspection of the prison published today.

Sentence planning was impressive, as were the Action Plans produced by the SOVA (Society of Voluntary Organisations) project, which linked education, skills and employability.

However, the Inspectorate deplored cuts in education and training budgets, which had been made since the last full inspection in 1998. It also found deficits in resettlement work, which needed more active strategic management and was hampered by the absence of a pre-release drugs strategy and psychiatric input for the high proportion of prisoners with mental health problems.

Anne Owers said:

"Open prisons should not simply be places that can provide minimum supervision for 'easy' prisoners. They should also play an active and supportive role in preparing prisoners for release, giving them the greatest chance of post-release employment and bridging the often difficult gap between custody and freedom.

"Staff were keen to expand this work, and frustrated at the cutbacks. It is of great concern that, in spite of the Prison Service's commitment to resettlement, we found Askham Grange in a worse position to provide this than it was at the last inspection, three years ago."

Key recommendations of the report include:

- the senior probation officer should be placed in charge of driving resettlement policy forward.
- levels of funding for the education service should be restored to previous levels.
- resources should be identified for psychiatric assessments required for parole reports.
- that drugs strategy needs analyses should be used as a tool for identifying mental health needs.
- equal opportunity and race relations policies need to be strengthened.

- more support and staff should be made available for healthcare.
- visiting facilities need to be improved as a matter of urgency.

Martin Narey, Director of the Prison Service, said:

“Askham Grange is a decent and caring prison. It provides a safe and supportive environment for all prisoners and I am pleased that the Chief Inspector recognises this.

“I note the Chief Inspector's wish to increase investment in education. I share that wish but, at the moment that would require me reducing education spending elsewhere. I am not prepared to do that.”

#### **NOTES TO EDITORS**

1. The unannounced short inspection of HM Prison and Young Offenders Institution Askham Grange was carried out from 5 to 7 March 2002
2. Prison Inspectorate reports are available at [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmipris/hmipris.htm](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmipris/hmipris.htm)
3. Askham Grange is an open prison holding, at the time of the inspection, 124 women and young female offenders. It is situated in the village of Askham Richard, about 7 miles west of York.