Dear Minister,

**Termination of the contract for careers advice in prisons**

“I am sorry to have to follow up my letter of congratulation of 11 January so swiftly to raise an **urgent** matter. The issue stems from decisions made before your appointment; but the responsibility for explaining the situation does perforce fall to you.

“We have been informed that the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) has written to providers of the National Careers Service (NCS) to terminate that part of their contracts relating to careers advice for prisoners in custody from 1 April 2018. Although implemented by the ESFA, the decision to do this has been made by the Ministry of Justice; I understand that the ESFA have happily extended the rest of the NCS contracts in so far as they relate to careers advice in the community until the autumn while a procurement for the replacement service is carried out; the prison part of the contract is the one part being terminated.

“The Ministry of Justice team is, of course working on plans to provide replacement services for Information, Advice and Guidance services; but these cannot be in place until the autumn at the earliest. The effect of this decision is therefore that current NCS providers will either have to re-deploy or make redundant the hundreds of staff currently delivering careers advice in prisons from 1 April 2018 and the current service to prisoners will simply stop from that date without any clear alternative.

“The PLA is very much aware of weaknesses in how the current NCS contract operates in prisons; it is essentially designed for clients in the community and does not address needs in prisons very effectively. But despite the constrictions of the formal contact, many NCS staff deliver much needed and highly valued service to prisoners to assist them with their rehabilitation so that they can gain employment and lead constructive law-abiding lives on release. We are already seeing some disruption to planned careers related events and anticipate the loss of staff having a direct impact on support for wider development opportunities such as distance learning.

“I would be grateful if you could urgently clarify the rationale for this decision and how much needed careers advice and support will be provided to prisoners once the contracts terminate and any alternative is ready to be put in place.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Tom Schuller

Chair of the PLA”