

# HMP Ford

Prison education interim visit report

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## Interim visit

### Context and focus of visit

On 17 March 2020, all Ofsted routine inspections were suspended due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. As part of our phased return to routine inspections, we are carrying out interim visits to prisons and Young Offender Institutions (YOIs). Interim visits aim to help prisoners, parents, employers and government understand how establishments are meeting the education and skills training needs of prisoners during this period, including prisoners with special educational needs and disabilities. They also help to identify what next steps are needed as prisons start to return to full education and skills programmes, taking into account the need to ensure safety throughout. The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below.

### **What actions are leaders taking to ensure that they provide an appropriate curriculum that responds to the reasonable needs of prisoners and stakeholders and adapts to changed circumstances?**

Leaders and managers had been unable to provide education, skills and work to all but a handful of prisoners during the lockdown. At the time of the visit, two-thirds of prisoners had not experienced the employment-related benefits of being in an open prison. At best, this had left prisoners feeling frustrated and bored, at worst, some prisoners had lost the jobs they had on the outside.

Leaders and managers had not provided access to vocational training during the lockdown restrictions. Those prisoners who were due for release during the lockdown were supported to achieve units towards their qualification. Others were provided with in-cell work packs, but these were not based on their courses and were merely a distraction to alleviate boredom.

Prisoners who were studying for qualifications in English and mathematics completed in-cell work packs and received helpful feedback provided. However, those prisoners whose literacy skills were at entry-level struggled to complete these packs, despite support from reading mentors.

Prisoners enrolled on courses at local colleges and universities were disadvantaged by not being able to continue with their studies. This was due to a reduction in the number of students that colleges allowed on-site, to maintain social distancing. Also, these prisoners lacked suitable information technology (IT) and were unable to access learning when colleges and universities began teaching online. This was less of an issue for Open University learners, however, prisoners transferring to HMP Ford encountered a delay in their learning due to lack of access to IT, which impacted their overall results.

Leaders and managers had a strategy to get prisoners back into paid employment that met their employment aspirations and individual needs. Using labour market information, staff worked effectively with employers in construction, warehousing, haulage and manufacturing. At the time of the visit, the number of prisoners who had gained paid employment had started to increase again.

Managers had been unable to provide prisoners with the full range of careers advice shortly before their release due to the limitations of face-to-face meeting. Prisoners did not have in-cell telephony and the communal telephones were not used to support those whose release was imminent.

The group of prisoners interviewed by inspectors said they welcomed the reintroduction of education and skills. They described some of the new skills that they had developed, such as the use of basic hand tools in carpentry. In bricklaying, prisoners talked confidently about the importance of health and safety.

**What steps are leaders, managers and staff taking to ensure that the approaches used for building knowledge and skills are appropriate to meet the reasonable needs of prisoners?**

During the pandemic, vocational teachers had benefitted from a programme of training to develop their practical skills. They honed their practical skills through the refurbishment of a building to establish a new construction facility for prisoners. However, there was a limited emphasis on how teachers could develop their teaching skills.

Staff highlighted to prisoners the importance of gaining qualifications in English and mathematics. They used real job adverts to show prisoners that applicants for jobs in construction require a good level of English and mathematics. The staff planned to offer courses to prisoners in the evenings and weekends so that those who were Released on Temporary Licence (ROTL) to attend work could be supported to gain their qualifications.

Teachers had not enabled prisoners to continue to make progress with their learning during the pandemic. Prisoners in catering had not been able to complete their course due to the closure of the café, with many having now left the prison.

Teachers in mathematics had adapted their teaching to support prisoners who had started mathematics courses before lockdown. They recognised that the lockdown meant that prisoners had gaps in their knowledge or had forgotten concepts such as multiplication and division. They have planned to rectify these deficits through careful planning of sessions with small groups of prisoners.

Prisoners studying for IT courses continued to do so during lockdown using the Virtual Campus. However, this was largely based on the initiative of the tutor involved in delivering this course and not part of a wider approach to the curriculum.

The standard of work that prisoners completed in the mathematics and English learning packs were of an appropriate standard. The work became increasingly complex over time and enabled prisoners to further develop their knowledge. Teachers provided useful feedback to prisoners which helped them to improve their work and to better understand some of the key concepts.

### **Next steps**

Leaders and managers should increase prisoners' access to education, skills and work for prisoners as soon as possible.

Leaders and managers should increase the number of prisoners who benefit from high-quality work placements outside of the prison as soon as possible.

Leaders and managers should seek to improve the provision of IT facilities so that prisoners are not disadvantaged while attending courses at college or universities.

Staff should ensure that all prisoners due for release have access to the support they need to secure employment or further training in preparation for when they are released from prison.

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