

# **Ofsted report on education, skills and work activities**

## **HMP & YOI Norwich**

### **Dates of inspection: 19–29 January 2026**

This part of the inspection was carried out by Ofsted inspectors using Ofsted's [Handbook for the inspection of education, skills and work activities in prisons and young offender institutions](#).

Ofsted inspects skills and work in custodial establishments as part of its further education and skills inspection activity. These inspections cover four areas: quality of education, behaviour and attitudes, personal development, and leadership and management. The findings are presented in the order of the learner journey in the establishment. Together with the areas of concern, this is Ofsted's assessment of what the establishment does well and what it needs to do better.

## Education, skills and work activities

### Expected outcomes:

**All prisoners are expected and enabled to engage in education, skills or work activities that promote personal development and employability. There are sufficient, suitable education, skills and work places to meet the needs of the population and provision is of a good standard.**

Ofsted made the following assessments about the education, skills and work provision:

Overall effectiveness: Requires Improvement

Quality of education: Requires Improvement

Behaviour and attitudes: Requires Improvement

Personal development: Requires Improvement

Leadership and management: Requires Improvement

### What does the prison do well and what does it need to do better?

Although leaders had a clear vision for the future curriculum, much of the current education, skills and work (ESW) curriculum was not sufficiently ambitious or broad enough. Prisoners had fewer course choices than they did six months ago. Most skills-based training courses and workshops had closed, leaving prisoners with limited options that did not align well enough with their career aspirations or interests. Leaders had made sustained progress to rectify the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection such as improving the quality of careers advice and guidance for prisoners. Leaders continued to explore employer-led strategies to mitigate the ongoing challenge of replacing closed education and workshop provision.

Employer engagement required further improvement. Leaders had established useful strategic relationships with employers to enhance their vocational offer. Current plans included working with facilities, civil engineering, roadworks and highways maintenance employers to support prisoners into work on release from prison. However, most of the projects were at a relatively early stage of development and no prisoners had yet benefitted from them.

Prisoners received detailed careers information, advice and guidance. Careers advisors completed a thorough initial personal learning plan for prisoners during induction. These plans included helpful targets related to prisoners' health and wellbeing, drug support and housing. Reviews were carried out at frequent intervals and were mainly up to date. However, staff did not ensure the targets in prisoners' plans were sufficiently focused on improving their English and mathematical skills, particularly where initial screening and assessment results identified a need to develop those skills.

There were sufficient activity places for the population. Mostly allocations were well managed with relatively few prisoners waiting to start courses. Leaders had also increased class sizes and the number of spaces, such as in print and textile workshops, which had alleviated some of the pressures related to allocating activity places. Prisoners who were not allocated to ESW were either new to the prison or there were valid reasons for their inactivity. However, too many prisoners did not have access to education or vocational training, including those who needed to improve their English and mathematical skills, due to the reduced education offer.

Leaders had in place a fair pay policy to ensure that those studying education were incentivised to attend. Leaders had developed a pay structure for those who were in part-time education or employment to ensure they were paid for all the sessions they attended. Where full-time positions were unavailable, prisoners were often encouraged to take two part-time positions to maximise their pay and time out of cell.

The education provider, People Plus, offered education courses that were structured and sequenced logically by qualified teachers with appropriate subject expertise. Staff had planned the English and mathematics curriculum purposefully to develop prisoners' functional and employability skills. Topics were contextualised well to help learners apply their knowledge in real-life situations. This supported prisoners to understand the relevance of learning for progression to further education, employment and everyday life.

Leaders had in place appropriate processes to monitor and improve the quality of education for prisoners. Prison leaders worked closely with People Plus leaders. They conducted useful joint moderation and themed quality assurance activities such as lesson visits, analysis of attendance rates, and investigating reasons for course withdrawals. These activities helped leaders better understand the quality of their provision and where necessary improvements were required. Their joint activity also helped inform staff training and development events.

Prisoners with neurodiverse needs benefitted from well-planned and personalised support across the prison. Staff used initial and diagnostic assessments well to identify those needs. Prisoners were taught useful strategies to manage their behaviour and emotions which helped them to avoid negative consequences. Prisoners reported feeling more adequately prepared for transition to further learning, work and release.

Staff in education used assessment information effectively to adapt teaching and learning activities to meet prisoners' education requirements, including those with an additional learning need. Prisoners also received tailored support that enabled them to participate effectively and make good progress during their time in education classes. For example, in English sessions, staff ensured prisoners practiced techniques such as writing canteen sheets back on the wings with the support of their mentors. This helped prisoners develop and understand the importance of structuring clearly written notes.

Teachers used a range of effective, inclusive teaching strategies to help prisoners feel supported and confident in their learning. They provided practical adjustments to help reduce anxiety and remove barriers to participation. For example, prisoners who lacked confidence with their writing could choose a pen that was comfortable to use, and staff provided access to resources, such as fidget toys, to help prisoners stay focused.

Achievement rates for prisoners remained consistently high. Although mathematics outcomes were slightly lower for category B prisoners compared with category C, this was largely due to withdrawals following release, transfer to other prisons or removal from courses. Achievement rates in English were comparable across sites, and prisoners with additional learning needs achieved as well as their peers.

Several prisoners in industry settings benefitted from developing higher-level knowledge and skills through their experiences in training. These included using machinery and computers in print workshops, and woodworking tools and equipment in garden workshops. Access to these opportunities enabled prisoners to develop practical skills that supported their personal development and preparation for progression to further work and training.

Too many prisoners were employed as wing workers with too little work to keep them fully occupied. Prisoners viewed the work as an opportunity for time out of cell, to interact with their peers and socialise. They did not develop the workplace behaviours that would prepare them better for employment on release from prison. Prisoners working in the kitchens or serveries were deployed appropriately.

Leaders had recently designed a range of online training packages to replace the Virtual Campus to allow prisoners to access learning in their cells. Ongoing issues with computer hardware meant that planned courses had not been fully implemented. This resulted in most CV writing and job search activities still being done on paper by prisoners. Teachers then had to type up the CVs before sending them to employment agencies on prisoners' behalf.

Leaders had implemented a prison-wide reading strategy, which included new reading areas, trained mentors and well-stocked library facilities. Prisoners had access to weekly library sessions where staff promoted reading to small groups of men. Shannon Trust had trained numerous mentors across the establishment. Each mentor had a small caseload of prisoners to work with and had access to discreet, separate reading areas adjacent to libraries. The few prisoners with very low reading levels were identified during induction. Those prisoners who participated in reading activities, such as storybook dads, developed greater fluency because their learning had a clear purpose. However, the promotion and support for prisoners' reading skills was inconsistent, particularly for those employed on the wings. Leaders took the decision to teach prison related, non-accredited training to help the very few prisoners with English as an additional language adapt better to life in prison.

Attendance had improved since the previous inspection. However, it was still not good enough in subjects such as mathematics and English. In addition, too many prisoners were delayed getting to lessons due to the conflicting arrangements in the core regime. For example, prisoners who required treatment for health and/or substance misuse issues often arrived up to an hour late to sessions which interrupted or delayed their learning.

Prisoners largely exhibited positive behaviours. For example, in print workshops, prisoners worked diligently to production timescales, and they consistently met the volumes required for the prison printing contracts. However, in a few education classes, prisoners left the classroom to openly vape in corridors. A few prisoners used inappropriate language to draw attention to themselves when leaving the gym. These instances were not challenged appropriately by education or prison staff.

Leaders were developing a varied enrichment programme for prisoners. However, despite their intention, leaders had not fully implemented activities such as playing music, clubs, sports or social events. The few activities that prisoners could access were appreciated and generally well attended. For example, prisoners who attended the breakeven course relished the opportunity to participate. The few prisoners who got to work with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra as part of the 'Lullaby project', enjoyed participating and valued the opportunity to be involved.

Prisoners were provided with a range of workbooks to develop their understanding of British values, equality and diversity, and extremism and radicalisation. Although many prisoners did choose to complete these workbooks, there was minimal tuition or feedback on these subjects. Consequently, prisoners recall and understanding of these topics was relatively limited.

Prisoners in workshops developed their character and resilience well. They maintained a positive work ethic. For example, in gardens, prisoners understood the importance of working in all weathers to get the job done, particularly when harvesting produce. In tea packing, prisoners recognised that some work can be mundane and repetitive but still carried out their work diligently. They knew that orders needed to be fulfilled so the prison population could access their weekly canteen.

The few prisoners who were eligible for release on temporary licence benefited from high-quality, varied and relevant work placements. While on placement, many accessed valuable additional training such as fork-lift truck and digger licences, often sought after by employers. A high proportion progressed into sustained employment on release.

### **Priority concerns and key concerns**

#### **Priority concern**

Leaders had not broadened the education, work and skills provision sufficiently. The offer did not align to prisoners' aspirations or current labour market requirements.

#### **Key concern**

Leaders had not ensured that wing work was sufficiently demanding and impeded prisoners from developing positive attitudes towards their work.

#### **Key concern**

Attendance and engagement in education activities, particularly in mathematics and English, was still too low.

#### **Key concern**

Leaders had not provided prisoners with sufficient personal development opportunities to develop their interests beyond the education curriculum.