

Ofsted report on education, skills and work activities

HMP and YOI Ashfield

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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: Good

Personal development: Requires improvement

Leadership and management: Requires improvement

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

Leaders had taken suitable actions to rectify most of the concerns identified at the previous inspection. They had substantially increased the number of functional skills English and mathematics places so that there were sufficient spaces for prisoners to improve their skills and gain the qualifications they needed in these subjects.

Leaders had re-prioritised prisoners' schedules of activities effectively so that prisoners selected an appropriate balance of education, work and leisure activities, ensuring that the latter were planned at times that did not interfere with education and work activities. Prisoners scheduled their own education, work and leisure activities, developing their sense of independence and allowing them to take ownership of their training. The pay policy incentivised education and work equally, with higher rates of pay for those undertaking team leader roles.

Leaders provided sufficient activity spaces so that most prisoners worked and studied on a full-time basis. These were allocated taking each prisoner's current aspirations, background, offence and sentence into account, so that prisoners undertook activities that met their specific needs and goals. However, this approach was relatively new and those who had arrived at the prison before the redesigned process was implemented had been allocated to activities based on goals that, in too many cases, had been agreed several years before.

Leaders had improved their oversight of education, skills and work activities markedly since the previous inspection. They had recently reinstated the quality improvement group and introduced a sensible quality improvement cycle that included frequent lesson observations and learning walks. Some actions, such as bringing departmental heads together to increase

functional skills spaces and remove clashes between activities, were beginning to have an impact on the quality of education, skills and work that prisoners experienced. However,

quality improvement processes were in their infancy and not sufficiently well developed to capture accurately the areas for improvement that remained.

Leaders had carefully redesigned the curriculum so that it presented prisoners with a broad selection of training for employment on release, such as construction, business and digital production skills. Staff made creative use of prisoners working as team leaders to further broaden the curriculum to include activities such as music, podcasting and barbering skills. The curriculum included a small but increasing range of level 3 and 4 courses in subjects such as business and sport, so that prisoners could study at a higher level.

Leaders provided prisoners with a thorough and informative induction programme that included useful life and working skills. These included manual handling, food safety and food hygiene, customer services and a basic introduction to fundamental British values. Trained mentors and orderlies complemented the work of staff to provide prisoners with relevant context on the education, skills and work opportunities available and the merits of each. Prisoners valued the focus on their training and, in most cases, understood the relevance to work in and outside of the prison.

Prisoners' induction to purposeful activities at the prison included well-structured and individualised careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) provided by an experienced and qualified practitioner. A high proportion of prisoners attended the education induction and the CEIAG sessions they were allocated to. However, this process was relatively new and lacked the capacity to offer the same level of service to around half of the prison population who had arrived before its implementation. Consequently, too few prisoners received ongoing advice and guidance during their sentences, with the exception of those nearing release.

Leaders had ensured that most curriculums in education and work activities were coherently planned. A minority of curriculums, such as electrical installation and digital media production, were planned particularly well so that prisoners received training that replicated industry standards and expectations well, preparing those prisoners for future employment. However, prisoners with jobs on residential wings did not undertake work that sufficiently replicated industry expectations and standards. The English curriculum for speakers of other languages was not sufficiently well planned or taught to take into account the individual needs and starting points of prisoners.

Education and vocational training were provided directly by Serco. Most teachers and instructors had appropriate knowledge of the subjects they taught. Many had good levels of occupational experience in relevant trades. Most teachers had appropriate qualifications to teach their subjects well and with authority. Teachers and instructors placed importance on, and routinely reinforced, prisoners' use of vocational and subject specific language. For example, in electrical installation prisoners could only access and receive tools and materials from the store if they provided an accurate description and specification of what they needed.

Leaders made sure that teachers and instructors had good quality information about how to support most prisoners with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Dedicated and trained staff provided teachers and instructors with helpful information about prisoners' individual needs, which they mostly used well to plan education and training programmes that met these needs. Prisoners with additional needs achieved their qualifications in line with their peers.

Leaders did not ensure that prisoners studying education courses were provided with meaningful learning plans setting out the targets and goals that prisoners needed to achieve to develop their knowledge, skills or career pathways. Individual learning plans had been introduced very recently and were not used sufficiently well to be useful to staff or prisoners. The quality of these plans was poor and too many were not readily accessible and visible to staff and prisoners. Consequently, leaders, staff and prisoners were unable to accurately know the broader progress prisoners were making towards their goals and act accordingly.

In industry and work areas, instructors did not record or evaluate well enough the progress made by prisoners in developing employability and personal skills so that these could be further developed or celebrated. Prisoners working on the wings did not have job descriptions and were not interviewed for their role and, because of this, their roles did not reflect well the real work expectations and standards. Prisoners working on the wings did not receive progress reviews so that they knew what they were doing well and what they needed to improve.

Most prisoners, with the exception of those studying mathematics, achieved the qualifications and goals that they intended to achieve. Most prisoners' work was at the standard expected for their course, and a few prisoners produced work of a high standard which demonstrated high levels of practical skill and knowledge. Almost all prisoners who started accredited courses in English, catering, construction, electrical, horticulture and digital media production passed their qualifications at the first attempt.

Prisoners' attendance at activities was high and they arrived at their activities on time. They worked effectively in teams and produced work of a high standard. For example, in industrial cleaning, prisoners worked in pairs across wings and common areas, such as education and the gym, undertaking a range of cleaning tasks with minimal supervision. Prisoners behaved exceptionally well in education and work activities. Staff created a relaxed but purposeful atmosphere in classrooms and workshops, and prisoners were respectful towards each other and to staff. Prisoners in the majority of business-critical roles such as kitchens, wing work, gardens and servery work took pride in the quality of their work, which matched commercial standards .

Prisoners, particularly those studying distance learning courses, made good use of the Virtual Campus (VC). Staff uploaded course materials for Open University courses onto prisoners' in-cell IT portals so that they could continue their studies during down time. However, prisoners studying distance learning courses received insufficient administrative and practical support to complete their studies in a timely manner. The VC was used effectively for prisoners to search for jobs, research employment options and complete short, online taster courses.

Staff and mentors had devised an extensive equalities programme of events to observe important dates such as Stephen Lawrence Day and St George's Day. A dedicated team of prisoners worked on this programme, chaired forums and gathered the views of prisoners. However, these actions were sporadic in their implementation and events were not routinely actioned. This work, therefore, had a limited impact on prisoners' understanding of key observances and events.

Leaders had implemented an effective prison-wide reading strategy that prioritised prisoners with lower levels of reading ability as well as promoting reading for pleasure. Staff accurately identified prisoners' gaps in reading as part of their initial induction activities and used this information effectively to signpost prisoners to Shannon Trust mentors. Reading for pleasure was a well-embedded practice across the prison and workshops. Classrooms and work areas were well-stocked with a variety of books, magazines and trade manuals.

Leaders made excellent use of their partnership with the Shannon Trust to run the library and offer prisoners additional opportunities to further develop their English and mathematics skills. This had supported a few prisoners to gain qualifications, and a few had participated in external competitions such as the Koestler awards. Library staff ran clubs for prisoners that promoted reading for pleasure, including a creative writing group, and philosophy and poetry clubs.

Leaders provided staff working in education and industries with a suitable programme of all-staff professional development activities. These included training in supporting prisoners with neurodiverse needs and necessary prison education updates. Teaching staff who had not yet completed their teaching qualifications were undertaking a range of higher-level teaching courses such as the level 5 diploma in teaching. Although leaders had planned to provide individual training for staff based on needs identified during lesson observations and learning walks, this had not started.

Leaders provided prisoners with industry-standard, high-quality workshops in which to study and work. For example, the technical resources available to prisoners studying digital media production and electrical installation, such as digital design software and electrical testing equipment, were excellent. The majority of prisoners studying education courses were supported by relevant technologies to develop useful digital skills.

Priority concerns and key concerns

Priority concern

Staff did not set suitable targets for prisoners to work towards, or review these effectively. Staff did not adequately capture the knowledge, skills and behaviours that prisoners developed towards their overall targets and goals.

Key concern

Leaders had not ensured that there was sufficient staffing capacity to provide all prisoners with ongoing high-quality careers information, advice and guidance reviews.

Key concern

Leaders had been too slow to develop the quality monitoring processes required to accurately oversee the quality of education and training provided. The recently introduced processes were too new to have a significant impact on the quality of education, skills and work and did not accurately capture all areas for improvement.