

Ofsted report on education, skills and work activities

HMP and YOI New Hall

Dates of inspection: 27 to 30 April 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: Good

Personal development: Requires improvement

Leadership and management: Requires improvement

Leaders had an appropriate intent for the curriculum to equip women with the foundation skills they needed to function in society and to start on a journey towards employment. Many women had little or no experience of employment, had complex personal issues and were significantly lacking in confidence and self-esteem.

Leaders provided sufficient places in education, skills and work (ESW) to meet the needs of the prison population. Women attended education part time and took on work roles for the remainder of the time out of their cells. In our survey, women mostly said that ESW opportunities would help them once they had been released.

Staff absence had impacted on the range of opportunities women could access and two workshops were closed due to this. Leaders did not enable women to gain qualifications in industries to formally recognise their skills but aimed to address this through the recruitment of specialist instructors. Leaders also did not offer sufficient training and job opportunities in non-traditional roles such as construction.

Although leaders offered distance learning courses, they only provided limited access to resources such as course-specific materials, including books, software packages or the internet. Consequently, the very few women on these courses were unable to make enough progress and achieve the grades of which they were capable.

Leaders had rectified most of the concerns from the previous inspection. However, they had still not ensured that staff in workshops and in the workplace supported women to improve their English and mathematics skills.

Leaders and managers mostly conducted appropriate activities to assure the quality of education and work. Managers used the results to inform improvements and plan training for staff. Staff completed relevant subject updating and teachers in education completed refresher training for their pedagogical skills.

In industries, managers did not check instructors' training skills sufficiently. Managers did not offer instructors in industries support to develop their training skills.

Leaders were considerate of teachers' workloads. They provided wellbeing time fortnightly. Leaders fostered effective teamwork so that staff felt supported by managers and colleagues. However, instructors in workshops reported feeling under pressure due to staffing shortages, which negatively affected their workload.

The allocations process was effective in assigning women to ESW activities quickly once they had completed their induction to the prison. Staff prioritised places in education for women with shorter sentences who needed to develop their English and mathematical skills, so they could complete their courses before leaving custody. Almost all places were allocated to, and very few women were unemployed.

The pay policy was fair and equitable. Women attending education were paid at the same rate as those in work, based on their incentives and earned privileges status. Women could gain bonuses in education and work by achieving qualifications and for higher productivity.

Staff provided women with a well-planned induction to ESW. Women received helpful initial information, advice and guidance (IAG) to prepare them for their chosen pathway, and all were provided with a personal learning plan (PLP). However, IAG staff did not consistently review PLPs and at the time of the inspection there was a backlog that staff were working to reduce.

The education provider, Novus, delivered effective teaching in English, mathematics, digital skills, and vocational courses such as hairdressing, mentoring, cleaning and food hygiene. Financial constraints had impacted on the number of days Novus could provide education, the range of courses they could offer and their flexibility to cover for staff absence.

Novus' teachers sequenced the curriculum well to build on women's existing knowledge and skills. They identified women's starting points accurately and set appropriate targets in subjects such as English, mathematics, digital skills and personal development. Teachers ensured the curriculum was accessible to women with very low starting points. For example, digital skills teachers used adaptive technology such as voice functions to help women who were emergent readers complete tasks and develop their digital skills. Teachers used teaching strategies well such as recapping, quizzes and contextualised activities. For example, in mathematics teachers used an event to work out budgets for travel with different accommodation options.

Teachers assessed learning well in education. They consistently checked women's understanding in lessons and provided helpful verbal feedback where needed. Teachers used an effective marking strategy and provided helpful feedback on women's work to help them develop their English and mathematics skills. They underlined parts of a word and ticked the letters that were correct so as not to demotivate women. Women produced work of the appropriate standard for the level they were working towards and demonstrated pride in their work. Women made consistent progress through the different levels of the curriculum, such as from entry level to level 2 in English and mathematics. In digital skills, women learned how to use spreadsheets and produce zip files which could be used on release when setting up a business. Women in education mostly completed their courses, gained a qualification and were well prepared for their next steps.

Staff provided women who had special educational needs and/or disabilities with a tailored support plan that identified appropriate strategies to help them overcome their barriers to learning and to succeed. ESW staff used the support plans effectively to ensure women received the support they needed.

Staff used mentors effectively to provide support to women in ESW. For example, in textiles, the mentor completed inductions and initial training for new workers. In hairdressing, the mentor supervised women working with clients and supported tutors with setting up work areas. Women who were working as mentors had completed appropriate mentoring training and were suitably qualified.

Leaders had implemented a clear reading strategy. They promoted reading effectively in education and on the residential units. They had worked with prestigious authors to motivate women to read. Leaders encouraged women to critique storylines and suggest alternative endings to novels. The sessions provided by authors were well received and attended. Women visited the library frequently and were mostly enthusiastic about searching for and loaning books.

Reading champions were well established on most residential wings. They ensured that women had access to books and encouraged women to read and complete book reviews. Women who had never been able to read and write took their first steps towards being able to do so. They described being proud of their achievements and how reading was changing their lives, for example being able to do their own canteen order for the first time. However, reading was less well promoted across industries. Instructors did not actively encourage women to read or provide suitable reading materials. In our survey, women who needed to improve their reading said they mostly received the support they needed.

Work in industries was purposeful. Women learned and applied their skills effectively in textiles workshops, gardens, and the prison kitchen. Wing workers were productive, appropriately trained, and used their skills well. In the textile workshop, leaders had developed an innovative pilot scheme with the Textiles Centre of Excellence to prepare women for employment on release that was linked to local employers. There was a significant need for textile production skills in the local area. Women developed the skills employers required them to across a range of textile products.

Staff created learning and work environments that were well organised and welcoming. For example, when women arrived at education, their workbooks and resources were set out for them. This helped women settle quickly so they were ready for learning.

Attendance at ESW was high and women were mostly punctual. Attendance had been a focus since the previous inspection and dedicated employment officers were tasked to support this. They followed up on women who refused to attend and, along with ESW staff and the neurodiversity support manager, supported prisoners to remain in activities.

Women behaved responsibly and were respectful of staff and their peers. Staff set clear expectations at induction to ESW, which women adhered to well. There were no incidences of swearing or vaping observed in ESW areas and staff stated they would challenge these if they occurred.

Women valued their learning and work. They appreciated the importance of the skills they had learned and how these could support their next steps. Women were proud of their achievements and appreciated the support staff provided to help change their lives.

Women benefited from a wide range of enrichment opportunities to develop their interests and to support their wellbeing. In the library, staff promoted women's health issues such as raising their awareness of the menopause. Women could access virtual art gallery tours, Koestler awards and a poetry club. Women attended courses to reflect on their decisions, behaviour, crimes and what motivated them to not re-offend.

Instructors did not consistently promote British values in work and industries. Staff across ESW did not support women to gain a sufficient understanding of radicalisation and extremism and how this could affect them in their daily lives. In education, teachers promoted British values well through discussion topics and reading activities.

Staff provided women with helpful careers guidance and support to help prepare for release. Women were able to attend employer events and accessed computers and used the digital education platform to create CVs. They received useful information and support from the employability team including on links to employers in their specific area of release. However, too many women did not receive a pre-release review.

Priority concerns and key concerns

Priority concern

Leaders did not offer a sufficiently broad curriculum or include non-traditional opportunities for women to develop their knowledge and skills. Instructors did not support women to develop their English and mathematics skills.

Key concern

Leaders did not offer women the opportunity to accredit their skills in most workshops.

Key concern

Staff did not consistently support women to develop their understanding of British values or the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.