

Ofsted report on education, skills and work activities

HMP and YOI Five Wells

Dates of inspection: 18 – 21 May 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 made clear, measurable improvements across education, skills and work (ESW). They had strengthened their oversight of ESW, resulting in more reliable and purposeful quality assurance activity. Leaders accurately understood the strengths and weaknesses of the provision and used this insight to prioritise improvement. Despite this, they had not yet fully addressed all the recommendations from the previous inspection, which limited the overall impact of their improvement work.

Leaders acted promptly where the quality of teaching did not meet the expected standard and took proportionate action to address underperformance. They ensured staff completed appropriate support and development activities to strengthen their teaching skills. However, leaders had not yet ensured that teaching was consistently good across all areas.

Leaders had not provided enough activity spaces for the population. A small minority of prisoners could not access ESW activities. This limited their opportunity to develop valuable work-related skills, achieve relevant qualifications, and improve their readiness for release.

Leaders largely managed the allocations process well. Staff received information about prisoners' aspirations and prior attainment promptly. They allocated prisoners to suitable activities. Leaders ensured ESW spaces were used effectively. Activities ran at maximum capacity. Waiting lists were reasonable, and prisoners moved into suitable activities without unnecessary delay.

The curriculum mostly met the needs of the population well. Leaders used employer input, labour-market intelligence and prisoner feedback to design a broad, tiered ESW offer. This provided clear entry points from foundation to higher-level pathways, including Open University courses and distance learning. However, leaders had not developed the curriculum sufficiently to meet the needs of prisoners serving longer sentences. Prisoners in industries and work did not have enough opportunities to gain accredited qualifications that would be useful to them on release.

Novus provided the education courses and vocational training at the prison. Teachers were well qualified, and most had also received phonics training. Most teachers planned and taught lessons appropriately. They structured learning so that prisoners covered basic concepts before moving on to more complex work.

However, vocational training was not sequenced effectively when it linked to a work role or industrial workshop. The horticulture qualification was planned in isolation and did not align with the work prisoners completed in the gardens team. Prisoners could not make meaningful connections between what they learned in lessons and the tasks they carried out in their work role.

Teachers generally checked prisoners' understanding well during lessons. They used questioning and short tasks to identify what learners understood and the misconceptions they had, and adjusted their teaching appropriately. Most prisoners were able to understand new information during lessons.

However, in a minority of subjects, teachers did not revisit or reinforce key knowledge frequently enough. Prisoners did not have sufficient structured opportunities to consolidate their learning or commit essential concepts to long-term memory. Too many prisoners struggled to recall and apply prior learning with confidence.

Teachers mostly provided clear feedback on written work. Prisoners knew how to improve their work and most produced work to a reasonable standard. Achievement rates had improved. Almost all prisoners achieved their English and mathematics qualifications. Achievement rates for vocational qualifications were also high.

Instructors had appropriate industry experience, and a small number held teaching qualifications. Most instructors used information about prisoners' prior knowledge and skills to plan lessons and training activities effectively. Instructors in industries such as, textiles, ceramics and furniture restoration, ensured lessons were sequenced appropriately. However, in industry workshops such as copper mill and fluid master, Instructors did not plan activities effectively. They did not plan enough activities to ensure prisoners used their time productively.

Instructors mostly taught lessons well. They explained topics clearly and used demonstrations effectively. In most industrial workshops, they set demanding and

relevant work, projects and activities, which helped prisoners gain and improve their knowledge and skills. However, in a small number of workshops, instructors did not ensure tasks were sufficiently demanding, which limited opportunities for prisoners to extend their knowledge and skills beyond a basic level. Too often, instructors did not provide prisoners with sufficient feedback that helped them to know what they were doing well, how to rectify errors and how they could improve their skills further.

Most work and industries activities provided clear vocational development using commercial-standard equipment. Ceramics, textiles, furniture restoration, the media hub and waste management operated as professional environments that enabled prisoners to develop relevant industry skills. However, just under a third of prisoners were wing workers, and their daily tasks were not sufficiently demanding. Wing-based roles did not replicate realistic full-time working environments. Prisoners in these roles were frequently left unoccupied.

The reading strategy had not been fully established. Leaders had not ensured that appropriate reading materials were available for prisoners with low-level reading skills. Leaders did not ensure that there was enough targeted support for non-readers. Prisoners with the lowest reading levels did not receive sufficient opportunities to develop essential early reading skills. They also did not receive the support needed to begin reading with greater confidence. In a minority of industry workshops, reading materials were not appropriate for the population. The texts did not match prisoners' reading levels or needs.

Leaders had, however, established a wide range of initiatives, such as book clubs, frequent drop-everything-and-read activities, and extended library access. This supported prisoners with higher reading levels well and increased reading for wellbeing and enjoyment.

Most prisoners with neurodiverse needs were supported effectively. Managers screened prisoners swiftly to identify specific needs and develop useful support plans. Staff had received appropriate training and had a strong understanding of neurodiversity. They used 'about you' and 'this is me' profiles to ensure appropriate support strategies were in place. Prisoners who were neurodiverse achieved well.

Prisoners had frequent access to digital resources, with laptops available in all cells. They used the virtual campus (VC) effectively during induction and for assessments. Those nearing release used it to search for jobs, write CVs and complete personal statements. Prisoners completing distance-learning courses used the VC to develop independent research and digital skills. Staff and prisoners used the VC confidently, including for initial assessments, mock and online examinations. Prisoners studying open university and distance-learning courses could upload their work through the VC, supporting independent study and progression.

Leaders ensured that pay for prisoners in ESW activities was equitable. They introduced incentives that promoted attendance and the achievement of qualifications. This encouraged prisoners to progress into higher-skilled jobs with increased responsibility, such as workshop manager, industries foreman and mentoring roles. Prisoners were motivated to develop their skills.

Leaders and managers had introduced an extensive peer-led initiative that provided targeted, intensive support to prisoners with specific and often complex needs. A well-trained group of peer mentors worked closely with identified groups, including younger prisoners, those with challenging behaviour, individuals approaching release, unemployed prisoners and those reluctant to engage in ESW activities. Mentors met prisoners frequently, and prisoners valued highly the consistent, personalised support they received.

Induction to education, skills and work was informative and helpful, enabling prisoners to make informed choices about their next steps. Initial careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG) interviews were carried out sensitively and included clear, purposeful targets that supported prisoners to identify and work towards their personal, educational and vocational goals.

Leaders had not ensured that Novus, the CIAG provider, delivered sufficient ongoing support. They recognised that too many prisoners had been released without access to impartial CIAG. They had begun to take targeted action to strengthen this and were starting to ensure prisoners received sustained support throughout their sentence. However, at the time of inspection, too many prisoners could not recall receiving guidance that helped them prepare for their next steps.

Leaders had developed a comprehensive enrichment programme to support prisoners with their mental health and extend their talents and interests beyond vocational, academic or technical areas. These activities were well supported by peer mentors and were accessible to all groups. A very high number of prisoners attended these additional activities.

Most prisoners had a secure understanding of life in modern Britain. They were able to clearly explain how fundamental British values related to their lives in prison and in the wider community.

Leaders had significantly improved collaborative working across the prison. They ensured ESW remained a priority. This led to marked improvements in attendance and in prisoners' attitudes towards learning and work. Leaders, managers and staff set high expectations for behaviour, and prisoners responded positively. They treated others with respect and courtesy. Attendance at ESW was high, and prisoners arrived punctually and participated in activities promptly.