

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

## **HMP and YOI Brinsford**

### **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: require improvement

Personal development: requires improvement

Leadership and management: require improvement

Over the past six months, leaders and managers had implemented ambitious improvement actions for Education Skills and Work (ESW) under the dynamic direction of the new governor together with his senior team. Most of the team were recent appointees with highly relevant experience. They focused tightly on tackling the ESW concerns from the previous inspection and the numerous additional concerns they had identified. Leaders' self-assessment and quality improvement arrangements had mostly captured leaders' key priorities and actions well. Leaders worked cooperatively and productively in close partnership with Brinsford's education provider, Novus. This included joint lesson observations and 'learning walks' to determine the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

While much was work in progress, leaders had begun to have a positive impact on prisoners' experience of ESW, particularly in improving prisoners' understanding of the personal and technical skills needed to gain meaningful employment and build a career. Leaders had taken firm action to withdraw privileges from any prisoner who refused to engage with ESW. Prisoners were clear what sanctions would be applied and how to avoid this happening. The number of prisoners refusing to engage in ESW had reduced substantially in the past six months but required further reduction in order to maximise the utilisation of the available ESW spaces.

Leaders intended that every prisoner, however short their stay, left the prison with new knowledge gained through ESW which would improve their life prospects. They had implemented useful programmes to broaden prisoners' understanding of the world and the various ways in which they could engage positively in it. Leaders had implemented eight learning pathways which provided prisoners with solid foundations on which to build their practical knowledge and employment skills. Pathways included construction, hospitality and logistics which reflected prisoners' interests and realistic options for work on release. However, while leaders had ensured there were now more than enough full-, half- and part-time activity spaces to provide at least some purposeful activity, too few of these spaces were full time.

Prisoners' induction to ESW was effective. Their literacy and numeracy skills were assessed and any barriers to learning identified. Neurodiversity staff provided prisoners with access to relevant adaptive learning technologies and strategies, and teachers in education provided effective adjustments for prisoners with special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, the careers education information advice and guidance (CEIAG) offered during prisoners' induction to ESW had run at half capacity for some time due to a lack of staff. This reduced the number of prisoners receiving initial careers advice or subsequent reviews. The sessions that were offered were rich in information and options. An additional advisor had been appointed and was due to start work at the prison imminently, but it was unclear if this would meet demand completely. Leaders had set fair pay rates for ESW.

The allocation process to ESW was equitable and largely well-considered. However, allocation staff did not routinely keep pace with prisoners frequently changing their choice of ESW pathway or being transferred out of the prison. Leaders were introducing new arrangements to improve the efficiency and timeliness of the allocation process, but it was too early to see an impact. Prisoners' access to learning was slow on some courses. For example, classes in English and mathematics were not operating at full capacity while waiting lists for the most popular vocational activities were long.

The education provision provided by Novus was well-managed and teaching largely effective. Teachers and vocational instructors were well-qualified and experienced. They mostly used appropriate teaching methods to engage prisoners including interactive learning technologies, digital platforms, coloured handouts and overlays, vibrant workbooks and peer to peer assessment techniques. These helped prisoners develop and apply new knowledge and skills and gain self-confidence.

Most prisoners on education courses learned new knowledge and skills which were appropriate to the level of their course. Prisoners' achievement of qualifications was

mostly high or very high in vocational subjects and in work, but too low in levels 1 and 2 functional skills courses. The number of prisoners progressing to level 2 functional skills was too low. Prisoners in work were rightly proud of the jobs they did and how well they did them. Prisoners gained industry-recognised qualifications, for example in catering and hospitality, and were grounded well in health and safety practice from the start of their courses. Where qualifications were not available instructors were not always recording prisoners' new competencies in work skills well enough.

Leaders had reviewed and relaunched the prison's reading strategy and action plan, aiming to ensure staff were fully aware of the strategy. Five Shannon Trust-trained mentors provided wing-based tuition in phonics for prisoners with poor reading skills, although more mentors were needed to meet demand. Teachers and instructors implemented the strategy each week with dedicated reading time built into work and industries sessions. Books were freely available in and around the prison site. Teachers reviewed prisoners' reading support plans to gauge their progress in reading. Prisoners who completed plans mostly achieved a higher-level functional skills award. However, leaders had not integrated the reading strategy fully across the prison, notably on the wings.

Teachers and instructors had created calm and purposeful ESW environments, and those who attended had a positive experience. Leaders' actions had ensured that on average around three quarters of prisoners attended and engaged in the activities they were allocated to. This was a substantial improvement compared to the previous inspection, but still not high enough.

Prisoners in many ESW activities routinely arrived late for their sessions because leaders had staggered their movement from the wings in order to avoid violence between groups. While such violence was now the exception, it meant that prisoners were losing learning and work time.

Teachers set prisoners clear expectations. These specified acceptable and non-acceptable behaviours which prisoners very largely respected. Prisoners in education and industries felt safe and used the correct PPE equipment such as ear defenders, safety goggles and boots. They understood and complied with the no vaping and no food and drink rules in classrooms. In industries, prisoners complied with mandated dress codes and tool management.

Staff and prisoners in ESW challenged poor behaviours such as bad language. Prisoners were respectful to one another and staff. They were motivated, had a positive attitude towards their learning and worked well with each other. They could

explain fluently what work they did, together with the skills and knowledge they had learned and now implemented. Wing workers and servery workers were appropriately trained, and their work was to a high standard. They enjoyed what they did and the positive impact it had on the other prisoners.

Leaders had implemented a useful programme of personal development which included programmes to extend prisoners' understanding of the world and their place in it. Leaders had created new opportunities for prisoners to meet with employers and inspirational speakers. From these events prisoners gained an understanding of what employers want from a valued employee and were helped to understand how to change their lives for the better. Prisoners who inspectors spoke with who were nearing release said they felt empowered to make better choices and had become more secure in their self-worth and core beliefs. Prisoners who were currently involved in learning mostly echoed these comments. Prison data indicated that a small number of prisoners had recently gained employment with national employers in construction and hospitality.

In industries, prisoners applied the skills they had learned to take their next steps in life. For example, prisoners had designed a garden and entered the design in a national, prison horticulture competition. They had built a BBQ and pathways to enhance recreation areas. They had used waste products such as fencing panels to create planters for sale in the visitors' centre and produce from prison greenhouses was used in the kitchen. As a result, prisoners developed greater skills in design, creativity, working as team members and communication. Prisoners who were either self-isolating or reluctant to engage in the main regime could access in-cell activities such as art and music.

Leaders scheduled monthly themed discussion sessions using pictures and text collated in scrapbooks to inform and encourage debate by teachers, instructors and prisoners. Topics had included the prison's PE and health-related programmes, life in modern Britain, men's mental health, and exploring the etymology of a single 'word of the week'. Each scrapbook was unique and included prisoners' contributions. Prisoners were using a digital education platform using locked-down laptops which provided useful access to research topics for scrapbook sessions and job searches. This replaced the former Virtual Campus system.

Prisoners had a well-resourced fitness centre with opportunities to access qualifications and competitions such as racket sports, weekly football matches and the use of a climbing wall. Gym staff taught prisoners health- and fitness-related qualifications including a gym instructor course at level 2, qualifications in active and healthy living at level 1 and nutrition at level 2.

Prison staff completed annual training in a range of subjects including recognising and dealing with coercion, corruption, or radicalisation. In turn, they mostly discussed these topics with prisoners including how their involvement in or with drug dealing gangs could spiral into a cycle of debt and manipulation, making them acutely vulnerable to harm. However, at the time of inspection, leaders had not run planned formal discussions with prisoners on how to protect themselves from radicalisation and extremist views.

**Priority concerns:**

- Although leaders had substantially improved prisoners' engagement with and attendance at ESW, the number attending their activity was still too low.
- Leaders had yet to ensure that the allocations team could manage the high turnover of prisoners into and out of the prison, and cope with prisoners' changes of learning pathway. This meant that prisoners were not consistently being allocated to the activity of their choice.
- Leaders did not provide sufficient capacity for CEIAG during prisoners' induction to ESW. An additional advisor was due to start imminently but it was unclear whether this extra capacity would meet demand.

**Notable positive practice**

Leaders programmed monthly themed 'engagement' sessions for prisoners prompted by text and pictures collated in scrapbooks by teachers, instructors and prisoners. These were used widely across ESW activity to inform discussion and debate on a particular topic, such as the prison's PE and health-related programmes, life in modern Britain, mental health, to the etymology of a single 'word of the week'. Each scrapbook was unique and included prisoners' written input reflecting their research and opinions.