

Ofsted report on education, skills and work activities

HMP and YOI Chelmsford

Dates of inspection: 27-30 July

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 considerable progress to rectify most of the concerns identified at the previous inspection. They had strengthened quality assurance arrangements and introduced targeted professional development, leading to improvements in the quality of teaching. However, weaknesses in assessment remained. Although leaders had identified the vocational and employability skills that prisoners could develop in workshops and workplaces, they did not track these effectively enough to help prisoners to understand their progress or what they needed to do to improve.

Since the previous inspection, leaders had developed a purposeful reading strategy to support prisoners with low reading skills and promote reading for pleasure. Staff encouraged prisoners to read using initiatives such as book clubs, reading competitions, reader forums and book nooks. Staff promoted reading across the prison very well and most prisoners recognised its importance in supporting their development.

Leaders did not provide sufficient full-time activity places for prisoners to take part in education, skills and work activities, although there were sufficient part-time spaces. In addition, too many prisoners were unable to be allocated to suitable activities. This was because of regime restrictions or insufficient places in popular activities, such as the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) and the introduction to construction (multi-skills) courses. At the time of the inspection, only around three-quarters of places were allocated.

Leaders had reviewed and revised their curriculum offer to reflect their local and regional training and employment priorities. For example, they offered suitable courses in high-demand subjects such as construction, including multi-skills level 1 and CSCS card qualifications and a new course on introduction to sustainability in construction. This aligned well with the local council's focus on green skills in construction and met the interests of a significant proportion of the prison population effectively.

The curriculum largely met the needs of the prison population. Leaders mostly used information about prisoners' starting points and aspirations effectively to plan learning that supported progression and reflected the transient nature of the population. However, there were very few opportunities for prisoners to gain accredited qualifications or study at higher levels. This narrowed the curriculum for prisoners who were already qualified at level 2 or above.

The induction to education, skills and work that prisoners received focused overly on assessing their English, mathematics and reading levels and too little on the range of opportunities available to prisoners. Consequently, prisoners were not always aware of activities that may benefit them or be of interest to them during their time in custody.

The pay policy was equitable and promoted fair access to activities. Education activities were rightly incentivised over wing work and wing cleaning. Leaders awarded bonuses to prisoners on completion of qualifications and progression between levels, and celebrated prisoners' achievements with coffee mornings and individual recognition.

Tutors and instructors were knowledgeable and suitably qualified to teach their subjects. They used effective teaching methods to help prisoners understand new concepts, including discussions, verbal and written instruction, and demonstrations to teach new technical content and practical skills. For example, in multi skills, tutors used helpful verbal instruction and manuals, models and pictorial step-by-step guides to support prisoners in completing tasks. Prisoners produced toilet suites, multifaceted wooden joints and brick walls that met the required industry standards.

Tutors and instructors did not consistently use effective assessment strategies to check and deepen prisoners' knowledge and understanding. The use of assessment to check prisoners' knowledge and understanding, and to measure their progress, was too variable across the provision. In a few industry workshops, staff tracked prisoners' progress using 'progress in work' booklets to record the skills that prisoners' developed. These were not completed effectively to ensure the continuous development of prisoners' personal skills. Very few personal targets were set for prisoners and employability skills were not routinely targeted.

People Plus delivered the provision of education and vocational training in the prison. In most areas of the provision, tutors sequenced teaching and training logically. Prisoners incrementally developed foundational knowledge and skills before moving to more complex tasks. For example, in business, prisoners learned how to start a business and create a business plan before moving on to financing, tax, cashflow and the regulatory requirements of running a business. Almost all prisoners who stayed on their courses passed their final exams. However, pass rates for the CSCS qualification remained too low despite its importance in supporting employment opportunities.

Leaders maintained careful oversight of the provision. They had set up a series of quality improvement meetings that brought the functions of the prison together to hold each other to account and drive improvements. For example, leaders had implemented a specific purposeful activities group to complement the work of the quality improvement group and provide a clear focus on prisoners' experiences in education, skills and work activities. Leaders had an accurate understanding of the strengths and most of the weaknesses of the

provision and were taking suitable actions to improve the latter. However, many of these actions had recently been undertaken and it was too soon to see their full impact.

Tutors and instructors created calm and orderly learning environments for prisoners. Most prisoners enjoyed attending their lessons and workshops and they valued highly the support they received from staff. Tutors and instructors set clear expectations for prisoners' conduct in their classrooms and reinforced these effectively. Prisoners behaved well and felt safe whilst learning or carrying out their jobs.

Prisoners' attendance at education, skills and work activities was high in most parts of the provision. Most absences were a result of unavoidable clashes in prisoners' timetables, such as court and legal visits. Leaders incentivised prisoners to attend their activities effectively. This included awards for attendance, behaviour, progress and bonuses for completion of training courses. However, prisoners were frequently late to sessions and were often returned to residential units too early, resulting in lost learning time.

Leaders offered prisoners a wide range of personal development and enrichment activities targeted at specific groups of prisoners. These included courses developed in collaboration with external partners, such as Essex Fire and Rescue and a large construction company, to build prisoners' confidence and teach them about topics related to gambling and money management. However, too many prisoners did not know how to enrol on these and the full enrichment offer was not available to all prisoners.

Staff understood prisoners' needs well. Tutors made effective use of adaptive teaching strategies to support prisoners with neurodiverse needs. They worked closely with support staff and used assessment information effectively to plan learning and support. Prisoners with a neurodiverse need passed their exams and completed their training courses in line with their peers.

Prisoners did not receive sufficient information about their skills development or realistic aspirations. Targets were often too generic and focused on employment within the prison and did not support prisoners' readiness for the next phase of their education, training or employment on release. Leaders had recently identified this and had strengthened the process and quality of the careers information advice and guidance that prisoners received. This was in its infancy and it was too early to see the impact of these actions at the time of the inspection.

Leaders and staff developed effective and productive links with employers to introduce prisoners to the range of employment opportunities available to them on release. Staff organised new and innovative events, such as 'employment month'. This brought employers into the prison to run employment support sessions with prisoners to improve their knowledge of the opportunities for work available to them on release.

Education staff taught wider topics effectively as part of the curriculum. Staff carefully planned activities to broaden prisoners' understanding of themes such as fundamental British values, mental wellbeing and the dangers of extremism and radicalisation. For example, prisoners explored the concept of the rule of law through discussions about portraits of criminals in their art classes. In functional skills classes, prisoners completed a 'stress bucket' activity to identify sources of stress and explore positive strategies for managing stress.

triggers. Staff used this to signpost sources of support available in the prison and taught prisoners healthy coping mechanisms to support their time in custody.

Leaders had been too slow to provide prisoners with access to the virtual campus (VC) to support the development of their digital skills and help them to search for jobs. Leaders had advanced plans to relocate computers in education for prisoners to use as part of lesson activity and planned to add the VC to the 'launchpad' technology that all prisoners had access to in their cells. However, this was not available for prisoners to use at the time of our inspection. This limited prisoners' access to distance learning, higher level and specialist courses.

Leaders made excellent use of Coracle laptops to provide prisoners with additional online training that supported their development of knowledge beyond the classroom and broadened the curriculum offer. For example, prisoners studied courses in subjects such as health and safety, food safety in catering, environmental sustainability and employment skills. Almost all prisoners who started these courses successfully completed them and many improved their digital literacy and confidence in using online resources.

Leaders carefully selected prisoners to work as mentors across education, skills and work. This included a neurodiversity buddy scheme on one of the residential wings. Prisoners involved in this scheme received frequent and effective training to enable them to support their peers better. Teachers and instructors worked well with mentors in their classrooms and workshops. Resources were available for mentors to use but leaders did not provide any formal training for mentors, or keep records of the skills that mentors had developed for them to take with them on transfer or release.

Priority concerns and key concerns

Priority concern

Too few prisoners had a suitable record of the academic, vocational and employability skills they had developed during their time in custody.

Priority concern

Irregularities in mass movement impacted negatively on prisoners' punctuality at lessons and workshops resulting in too much lost learning time.

Key concern

Too few ESW spaces were offered on a full-time basis. Too many prisoners remained on waiting lists for activities even though activities were under allocated.

Key concern

Careers information advice and guidance was insufficient to support prisoners with their next steps. Prisoners' individual targets were not challenging or personalised enough to be relevant.