



# **‘Just passing time’: A review of work and training provision in adult prisons**

A thematic review by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

October 2025



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# Introduction

This report into the quality of work and training in prisons makes depressing reading. Although we found some effective provision delivered by dedicated, creative staff, it was only available to a small minority of prisoners. Too often, prisoners were leaving prison having gained few skills which would make a difference in helping them to avoid reoffending.

The lack of adequate purposeful activity provided to prisoners has been a criticism by the Inspectorate of Prisons since its founding in 1982, but since the pandemic things have got even worse. Despite attempts to promote a renewed focus on purposeful activity, we find prisoners are locked in their cells for longer than ever. Evening association, time in the gym and communal dining, which were once common, have become rarities.

In the last three years our inspection scores for purposeful activity have been terrible; 94 of the 104 closed prisons we have inspected have been rated 'poor' or 'not sufficiently good'. Only in open prisons do we regularly see prisoners involved in the sorts of training or education that will help them to resettle successfully when they are released.

This report shows that in many jails there are simply not enough activity spaces for the population. This has been compounded by overcrowding and the failure by the prison service to maintain buildings which are often dilapidated or, in some cases, out of use.

Even where there are sufficient spaces, attendance is atrocious. In the prisons we visited for this thematic report it was at an average of 67% – a level that would get any school or college closed down. Regime curtailments, security lockdowns or staff and prisoner indifference mean that many prisoners do not go to their allocated activities or arrive so late that it is hardly worth going at all.

For instructors and teachers, low attendance is incredibly demoralising and not knowing who, if anyone, is going to turn up may in part explain why recruiting or retaining these staff is so difficult. Many of the workshops or classrooms I visit on inspection have only a handful of prisoners in them and often they seem to be drinking tea or playing cards rather than working.

The working day in prisons is nothing like that on the outside, with even full-time workers often spending no more than five hours off the wing. Many are underemployed in wing work that bears little relation to any work in the community. The prison service has a comical definition of full- and part-time activity, which means that in jails we visit a prisoner who works for as little as 18 hours a week can be considered to be in full-time work. Part of the reason for poor attendance is that prisoners are not motivated by the work placements or courses on offer, or they do not get allocated to activities that will teach them the skills or help them to acquire the qualifications that they actually need.

The positive initiatives we did find, such as training courses directly linked to employment opportunities, were limited in scope, and at other sites we visited uncertainty around funding had resulted in valuable courses being closed.

Without adequate investment, prison leaders will have limited ability to make a meaningful impact on prisoners' prospects on release.

The prison service has a duty to protect the public by keeping those who the courts have sent to prison locked up, but there is also an obligation to protect the public by making prisoners less likely to reoffend when they are released. This report shows the failure of our prisons to fulfil this responsibility. With two-thirds of prisoners not in work or training six months after release, there is little doubt that many have left jail and returned to criminality, causing mayhem in their communities and creating more victims of crime.

Too many prisoners are spending their time in jail lying on their beds watching daytime television, often under the influence of drugs. Until leaders in the prison service take the provision of high-quality education and training more seriously, it is hard to see how appallingly high reoffending rates can be reduced.

**Charlie Taylor**

Chief Inspector of Prisons

September 2025

## Concerns

1. **Many prisons lacked sufficient activity spaces to occupy their populations.** Most prisoners could only work part-time or in wing-based roles, and across the sites we visited around a fifth were unemployed.
2. **Prisons did not always do enough to encourage or enable attendance at work.** Working hours were impacted by prisoners not being unlocked on time, and wing staff did not always encourage prisoners to take part.
3. **High-quality training and employment support for prisoners approaching release was only available for small numbers.** Funding was too limited as a result of national pressures, and uncertainty around Dynamic Purchasing System budgets had impacted on provision at some sites.
4. **Induction processes were inconsistent, and prisoners lacked awareness of the opportunities available.** Prisoners were often unaware of vocational training or work opportunities, and did not understand how the work that they were doing would benefit them.
5. **Working days were too short to replicate conditions in the community.** Prisoners in full-time roles often only worked around five hours or less a day, and education and training contracts did not include provision on Friday afternoons.
6. **Few workshops offered meaningful qualifications and progression opportunities for prisoners.** 'Progress in work' booklets were used inconsistently, and staff and prisoners did not see their value.
7. **The system to allocate prisoners to suitable training or education courses was not effective.** Many did not take account of information gathered in prisoner inductions. Data was not used effectively to monitor potential disproportionalities among those accessing opportunities.
8. **Not enough was being done to find viable routes into employment for prisoners convicted of sexual offences.** Prison leaders acknowledged that there was not enough provision for these men.
9. **Employer engagement in prisons was limited.** Employers described prisons as challenging environments in which to operate effectively.
10. **Release on temporary licence for prisoners was underused.** Few sites we visited were using it to provide prisoners with the opportunity to work in the community.

## Section 1 Background to the report

- 1.1 Education, training and work helps to prepare prisoners for release, providing a foundation for finding employment and reducing the risk that they will reoffend.<sup>1</sup> Good education and training provision should lead to fewer individuals being sent to prison saving the taxpayer money and reducing pressure on an already overcrowded prison estate. It should also play a key role in creating safe, purposeful environments, alleviating boredom and frustration which can lead to poor behaviour and drug use.
- 1.2 Yet in 2016, the [Coates Review](#) of education in prison found that recognition of the importance of education in prisons had dwindled. It recommended a range of measures, including a greater focus on individual needs, more flexibility in how prison education is funded, and prioritising the development of pathways into work on release through employer engagement in prisons.
- 1.3 The 2018 [Education and Employment Strategy](#) and 2021 [Prisons Strategy White Paper](#) sought to address many of the issues raised by the Coates Review, but progress has been very limited.

### Initiatives to improve provision

- 1.4 The establishment of the [New Futures Network](#) in 2019 and subsequent rollout of [Employment Advisory Boards](#) (EABs) in 2022 aimed to bring more employers into prisons to help prisoners into employment on release. HMPPS's [Employment on Release policy framework](#) (2024), set out the requirements of key staff involved, including the New Futures Network, Prison Employment Leads (PELs), Employment Hubs, ID and Banking Administrators, and Employment Advisory Boards. New regional Employment Councils were announced in 2025, expanding the EAB model to the Probation Service and offenders serving their sentences in the community. New Head of Education, Skills and Work and Neurodiversity Support Manager posts have also been introduced in recent years to help tailor provision to local and individual needs.
- 1.5 The introduction of the Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) in 2018 provided prison governors with a small pool of flexible funding to procure short-term courses or programmes targeted at the needs of their prisoners. The [Future Skills Programme](#), launched in 2023, offers short, sector-specific training courses linked to job commitments in a select group of prisons, as well as the HMP Academies, aimed at delivering training spaces in prisons hosted and branded by employers.
- 1.6 Changes to disclosure rules in 2023 mean that more convictions are now considered 'spent' at an earlier point (and therefore not disclosed

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<sup>1</sup> HMPPS/Sheffield Hallam 'Evaluation of prisoner learning' 2018, MoJ & DfE 'Exploring the outcomes of prisoner learners' 2018.

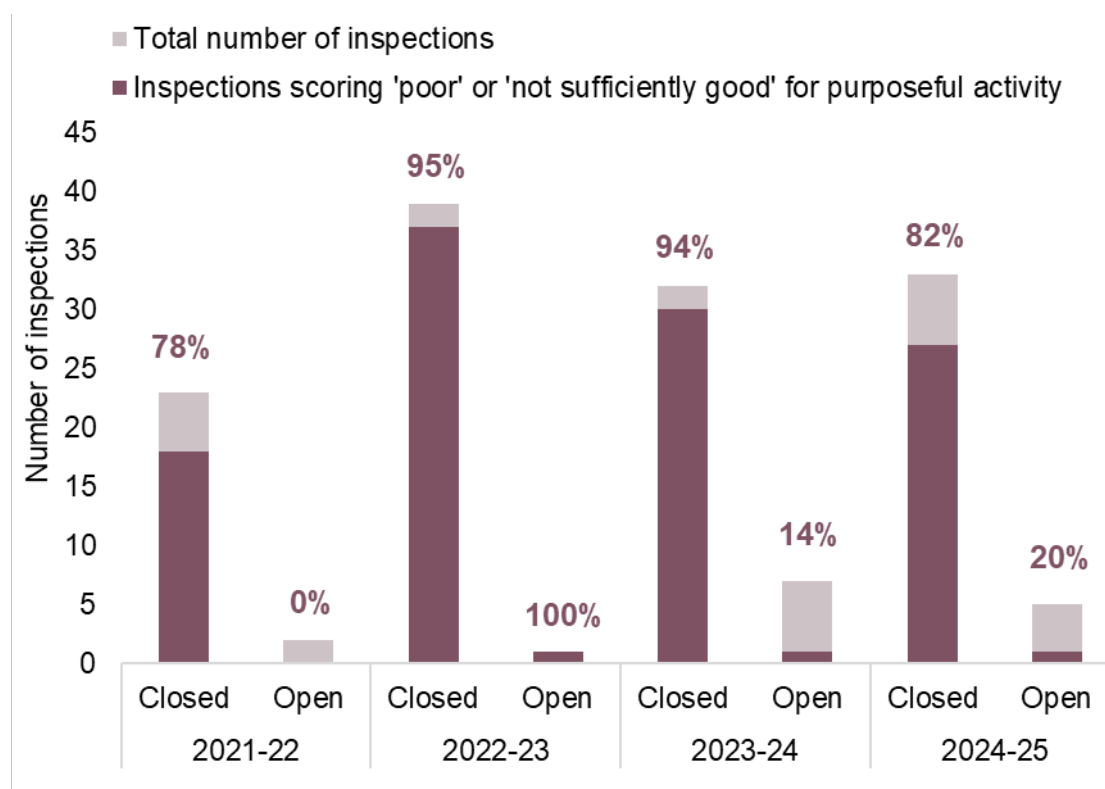


by an individual to an employer), reducing some of the barriers faced by ex-offenders seeking work. The [Get Britain Working White Paper](#) (November 2024) recognised that people with convictions can still face significant barriers in obtaining employment. It committed to looking at how employers might be supported and encouraged to hire people with convictions.

## Quality of activities and engagement

- 1.7 Despite various initiatives and clear expectations, the availability and quality of provision across the prison estate remains poor. While there are examples of good courses and work opportunities in some prisons, frequently we find that these are limited in scope and underused, with workshops sitting empty or only accommodating a handful of men or women.
- 1.8 We inspect purposeful activity with Ofsted in England and Estyn in Wales. While we primarily focus on the amount of time prisoners spend out of their cells, Ofsted and Estyn inspect the provision and quality of education, skills and work activities. In 2024–25 we published 38 inspection reports of adult male and female prisons, 28 of which were assessed as ‘poor’ or ‘not sufficiently good’ overall for purposeful activity. Ofsted judged 26 of the prisons to be ‘inadequate’ or ‘requires improvement’ for education, skills and work activities. Figure 1 shows how, over the last four years, open prisons have had better purposeful activity scores than closed prisons.

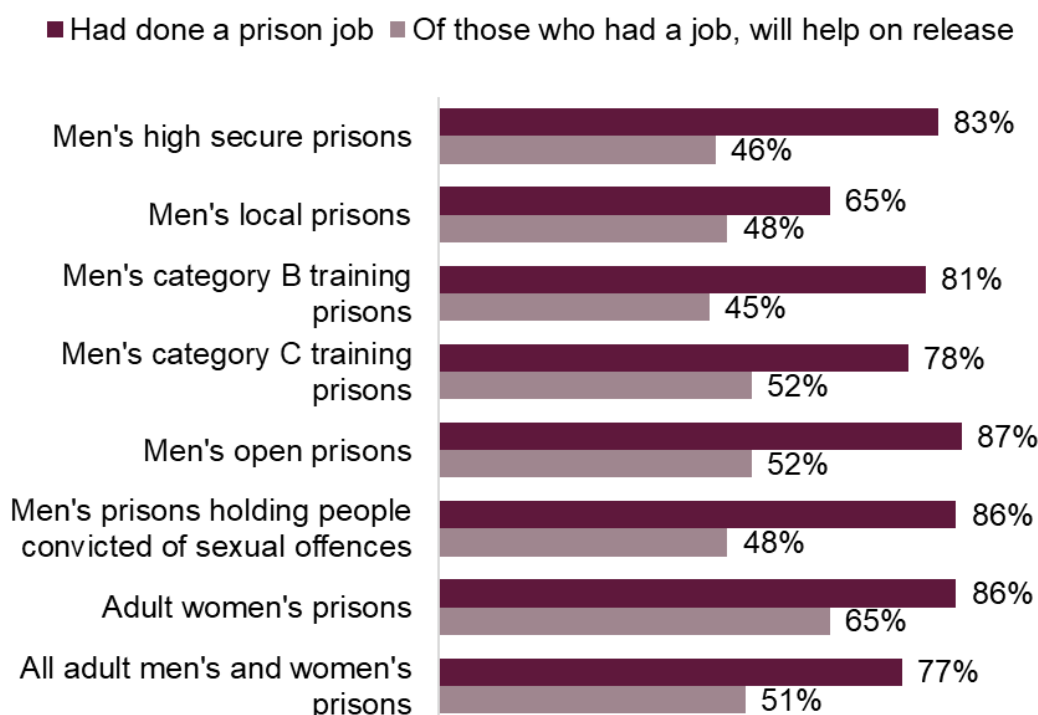
**Figure 1: The proportion of inspections which resulted in purposeful activity judgements of ‘poor’ or ‘not sufficiently good’ is lower for open prisons**  
Adult prisons in England and Wales



- 1.9 Engagement in purposeful activity (work, training and/or education) varies widely between prisons. The percentage of prisoners in at least part-time purposeful activity ranged from around a third at Isis, a category C training prison, to nearly 100% at some open prisons.
- 1.10 In our aggregated results from prisoner surveys published in 2024–25, 77% of prisoners said they had had a prison job, with 51% of them saying they thought it would help them when they were released (see Figure 2). These figures were fairly consistent between different prison types, though only 65% of prisoners in men's local prisons reported having done a prison job. The highest proportion of prisoners who reported having done a job that would help them on release was 65% in women's jails.

**Figure 2: The proportion of prisoners who had had a prison job who said it would help them on release was lowest in men's category B training prisons**

Men's and women's prisons England and Wales, 2024–25

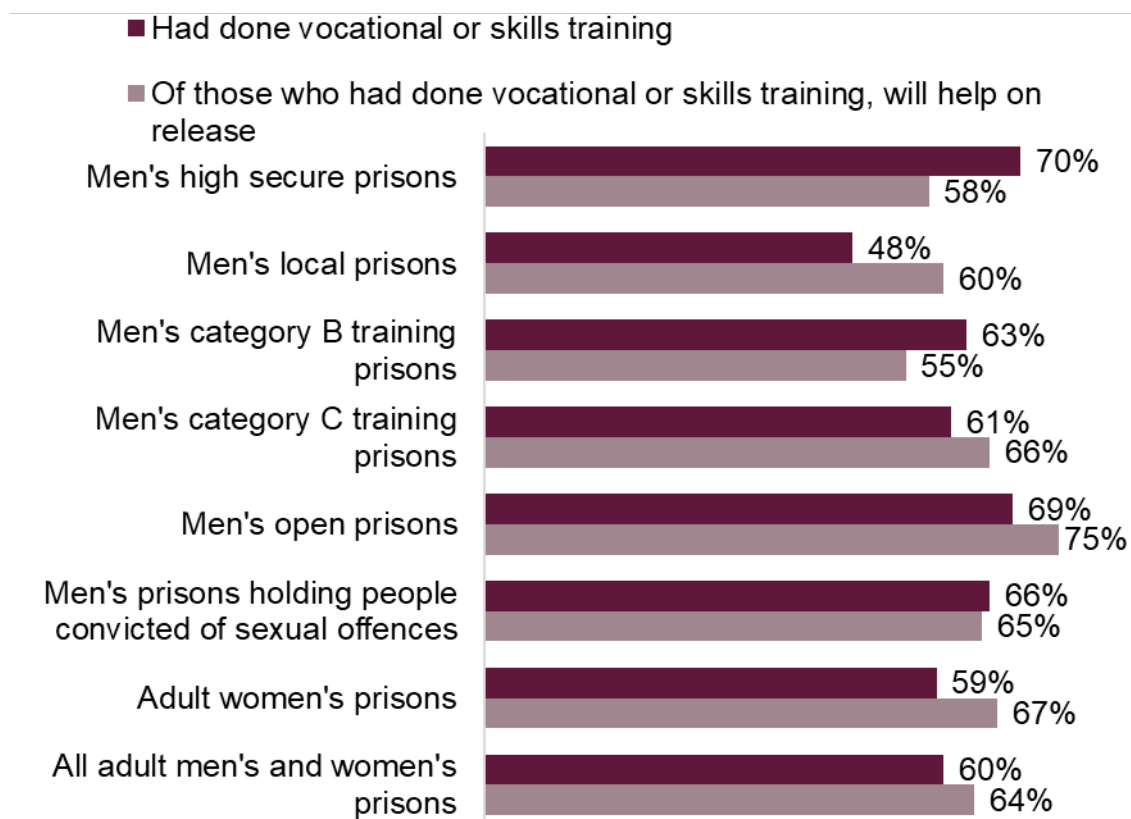


Source: HMI Prisons detainee surveys

- 1.11 Sixty per cent of the surveyed prisoners said they had taken part in vocational or skills training in prison, with around two thirds of these saying they thought it would help them when they were released (see Figure 3).
- 1.12 Prisoners' views on whether skills training would be helpful after release ranged from 75% in open prisons, to 58% in high secure and 55% in category B training prisons, where prisoners were typically further from their release date.



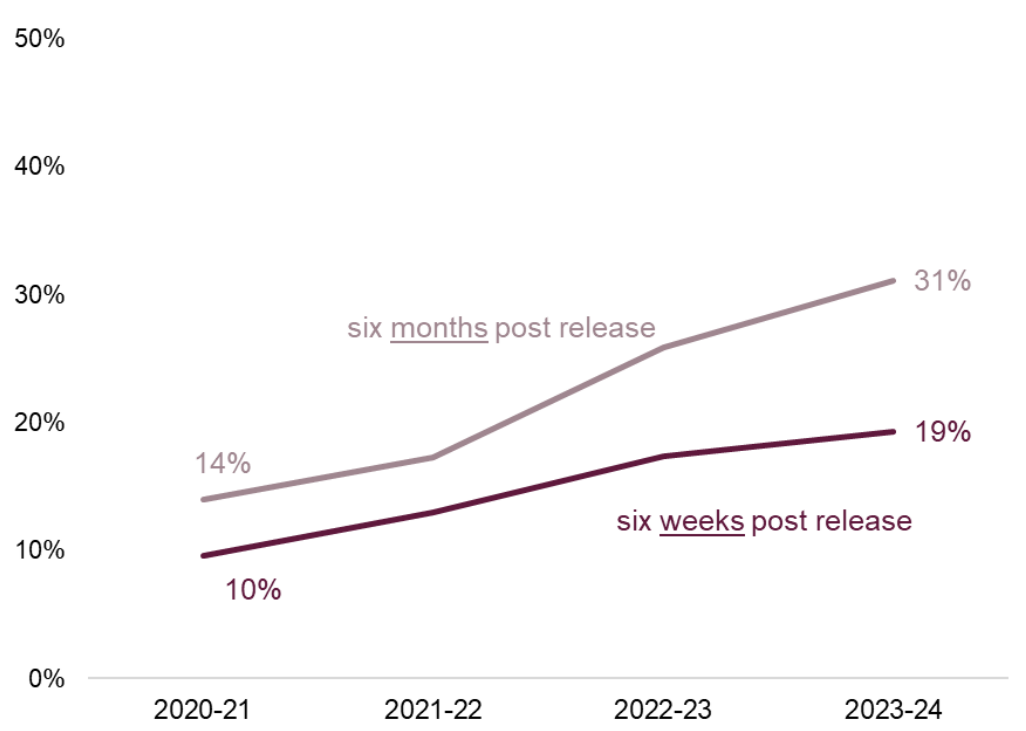
**Figure 3: Prisoners in men's open prisons were most likely to report that having taken part in vocational or skills training in prison would help them on release**  
Men's and women's prisons England and Wales, 2024–25



Source: HMI Prisons detainee surveys

- 1.13 According to figures published in 2024, around one in five prison leavers were in employment six weeks after their release, and just under one in three after six months (see Figure 4). Although these figures have been steadily rising since the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions, they remain too low, particularly with the labour shortages that are affecting many sectors around the country. This data does not, however, present a complete picture of prisoners released between these dates as it does not include those held on remand or those no longer subject to probation supervision following their release, which is a significant proportion of those released.

**Figure 4: Increases in the percentage of prison leavers in employment six weeks and six months post release**  
England and Wales



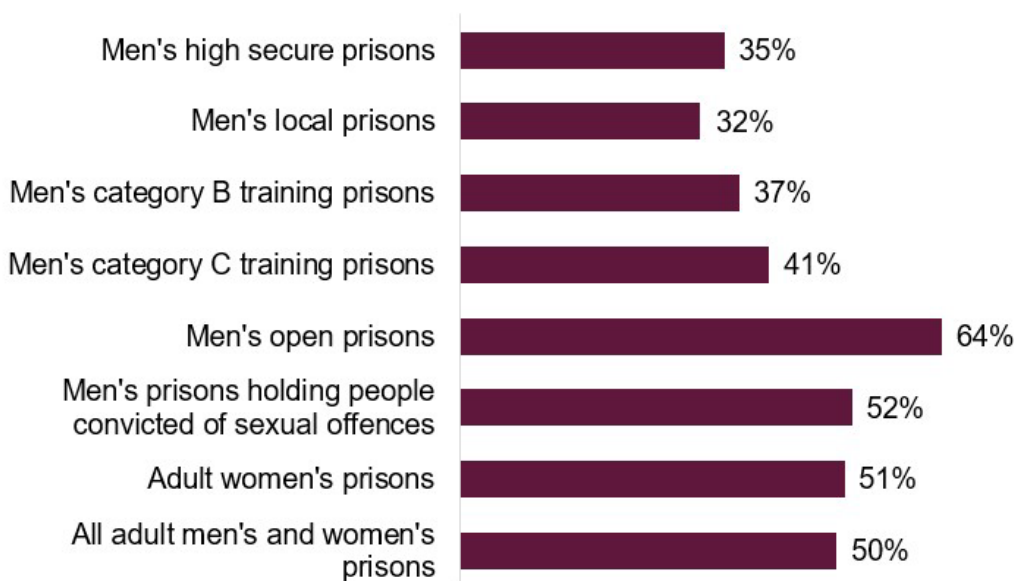
Source: Ministry of Justice, Offender Employment Outcomes, update to March 2024. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/offender-employment-outcomes-update-to-march-2024>

## Section 2 Culture and leadership

- 2.1 Purposeful activity is one of our key tests of a healthy prison, and an essential tool both in reducing reoffending, protecting the public, and providing a safe, rehabilitative environment for prisoners. Leaders and staff at all levels have an important role to play in prioritising it, developing work and training opportunities and driving consistent attendance.

**Figure 5: Prisoners in men’s open prisons were most likely to report that staff encouraged them to attend activities**

Men’s and women’s prisons England and Wales, 2024–25



Source: HMI Prisons detainee surveys

- 2.2 However, during our inspections, prisoners frequently tell us that a lack of activity, boredom and a sense of hopelessness are key contributors to, illicit drug use, debt, violence and self-harm.

### Pressures on work and training places

- 2.3 Many of the prisons we visited for this thematic struggled to provide enough full-time activity spaces, either due to a lack of workshop space or instructors. Often, full-time places were split into two part-time positions to enable more prisoners to participate (see paragraph 3.22).
- 2.4 At some sites our roll checks found large proportions of prisoners locked in their cells during the working day. Local data at some training prisons showed a significant number were unemployed, including around a fifth at The Mount and Parc, a quarter at Berwyn and 30% at Guys Marsh. At most of these sites, unemployed prisoners could only expect to spend around two hours out of their cells each day to exercise outdoors and complete domestic activities.

- 2.5 Deteriorating infrastructure also posed a challenge in some prisons. Equipment failures and ageing workshops resulted in occasional closures that disrupted work schedules, such as at Ranby, where there had been numerous breakdowns across several workshops. Staff frequently expressed frustration at the time taken to resolve these problems.
- 2.6 Higher numbers of prisoners held in overcrowded sites place additional pressure on activity spaces, and at some of the prisons we visited, such as Berwyn, The Mount and Styal, changing populations meant that staff were working with increasing numbers on short sentences or remand. Because curriculums had been planned to meet the needs of a longer-term population, managers' ability to offer appropriate education, training and work was limited.

## Getting prisoners to education and training

- 2.7 Prisoners at some of the sites we visited described uncertainty about whether they would be unlocked, and regularly missing significant portions of their workdays as a result of delays in being allowed off their wings due to incidents, overrunning roll checks or difficulties gathering prisoners for movement. At two separate establishments, prisoners who had been signed up to attend 'job fairs' with employers coming into the prison told us that they had missed them because they were not unlocked in time by staff on their wings.

"So, I applied for [a job fair] and they were like 'yeah, we'll book you in. You're in the window for getting out so you can come.' They said there'd be tea, coffee, whatever. So it was on the timetable, but then on the day I didn't get unlocked! I missed the event."

**Prisoner at HMP Berwyn**

- 2.8 Across the sites we visited, attendance at activities sat at an average of just 67%. Prisoners told us that staff often lacked the time or interest to find out whether they were taking part in activities and did little to encourage them or recommend opportunities. Staff were often dealing with competing priorities, which created routine challenges in getting prisoners unlocked, and this limited the opportunities for meaningful staff-prisoner engagement.

The staff on my wing, they're overrun. There's too many people asking them for too much stuff. They're overworked... It's too much for them, there's a thousand men asking for stuff... And I hate keeping on and on asking for things."

**Prisoner at HMP Parc**

- 2.9 Managers at some sites reported that residential staff did not recognise the importance of their role in making sure prisoners attended activity

consistently and promptly. At other jails, such as Lowdham Grange, frequent staff shortfalls affected their ability to move prisoners promptly and deliver a consistent daily routine.

- 2.10 In our surveys of prisoners across the sites we visited, only 48% told us that wing staff encouraged them to attend education, training and work. This was just 28% at Lowdham Grange.

“If you were a shy timid fella sort of thing, kept yourself to yourself, you'd be behind your door all day. There's no-one comes and says 'look, this is what you can do, you can go to this course, you can go to that course'...”

**Prisoner at HMP Winchester**

- 2.11 At The Mount and Styal, however, we saw some examples of positive staff-prisoner relationships, which were helping to encourage prisoners to take part in activity. At Foston Hall, 72% of prisoners surveyed said that wing staff encouraged them to attend work or education.
- 2.12 At Ranby, a dedicated Custodial Manager for activities was responsible for chasing up unacceptable absences at activities. The prison had also reviewed its gym and medication timings to avoid clashes with work or education, so that prisoners did not have to choose between them.
- 2.13 The introduction of Head of Education, Skills and Work posts across the prison service had delivered some more enabling cultures. The advent of a senior management role with responsibility for purposeful activity helped to create an advocate for attendance at activity, though senior managers at some sites acknowledged that achieving a cultural shift was difficult given competing pressures. Our thematic review on [Improving Behaviour in Prisons](#) identified several jails that had achieved this by creating positive, purposeful regimes.

“I have faith. I'm slowly starting to see, people are caring. They want us to do better when we go out... They're actually asking for our input now, they're not just second guessing what we need... It changes my views on prison officers. Everyone goes into prison thinking they're all against us, but you learn to realise they're not. Some of them are really not.”

**Prisoner at HMP The Mount**

- 2.14 Where prisoners lacked motivation to attend activities, this was for a range of reasons. As well as staff not necessarily encouraging them to work, prisoners told us that idleness, finding the work boring and low wages were factors. Roles which enabled them to accrue 'bonus' pay were considered desirable.

## Replicating work in the community

- 2.15 In almost all of the prisons we visited, morning and afternoon activity sessions were split by long periods where prisoners were returned to their wings for their midday meal and roll checks.

“It's nobody's fault, but when you're looking at trades, you go to work at 8am, you have lunch on site and stay until the light fades. The fact is that [our prisoners] are only doing 2.5 hours and then going back to sleep, and then go again for another 2.5 hours, purely due to the regime...”

### Senior prison manager

- 2.16 Often, we saw prisoners returning to their wings at around 11am and not starting work again until 2pm. In some prisons we visited, ‘full-time’ work entailed less than five hours a day of activity, far below what would be expected in the community. As a result, experiences of work in prison often failed to replicate or prepare prisoners for working on release.
- 2.17 The prison week for activities typically consisted of 4.5 days, with contracts not set up to provide work, education or training on Friday afternoons. Of the sites we visited, the sole exception to this was Fosse Way, which allowed prisoners to engage in a full five-day working week.
- 2.18 HMPPS has been planning pilot programmes in a handful of prisons, looking at the feasibility of continuing the working day through the lunch period, which is a positive development. However, the persistence of the issue reflects a failure to prioritise purposeful activity in prisons.



## Section 3 Offering quality training provision

- 3.1 Rule 31 of the [Prison Rules 1999](#) states that ‘a convicted prisoner shall be required to do useful work for not more than 10 hours a day, and arrangements shall be made to allow prisoners to work, where possible, outside the cells and in association with one another’. This means that all adult prisoners, excluding those on remand (i.e. unconvicted), the retired and those deemed unfit, for example for medical reasons, are required to take part in education, training or work during their time in prison.
- 3.2 Prisons provide a range of work and training opportunities. For the purposes of this report, we have split these into the following categories:
- **Prison industries workshops:** Workshops dedicated to the production of goods or services for HMPPS. For example, a laundry service for prisoners, or building furniture which is used in prisons across the country.
  - **Commercial workshops:** Workshops run on a commercial basis, either contracted by an outside business to produce a product or deliver a service, or directly run by an external employer.
  - **Vocational training workshops:** Workshops and courses focused on training prisoners in vocational skills, often with qualifications available. Common examples include painting and decorating, bricklaying, and barbering.
  - **Short courses:** Shorter, usually accredited, courses aimed at providing prisoners with a particular skill or qualification, often delivered closer to a prisoner’s release date. Examples include sector-specific courses such as the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS), and road traffic management.

### Accreditations, qualifications, and demonstrating progress

- 3.3 All of these types of work and training have a role to play in making sure that prisoners’ time is spent purposefully and contributes to their personal development, well-being and ability to reintegrate into society at the end of their sentence.
- 3.4 Prisons should provide a range of work to meet the needs of their populations. Some prisoners benefit from basic work tasks that instil a degree of routine and encourage the development of ‘employability skills’ such as timekeeping and a work ethic. This is likely to be especially important for those prisoners who may not have worked before or been in regular employment prior to entering prison. Others will benefit from opportunities to undertake more advanced vocational training.

"It's just a bit of routine, isn't it? You know you're getting up and you're doing that job. Rain or... Yeah. And I quite like that... Anything you can do to speed up your life while it's on hold in here, you do. Well I do, anyway. A lot of people turn the other way, turn to other... you know, narcotics and stuff, sleep and stuff, go into another world."

#### **Prisoner at HMP Winchester**

- 3.5 A key aim of work and training in prison is to make sure that prisoners re-enter the community equipped with the skills they need to find stable employment, supporting efforts to reduce reoffending. Achieving appropriate, relevant qualifications are an important part of this, as they demonstrate to employers that prisoners have achieved a recognised standard of expertise.



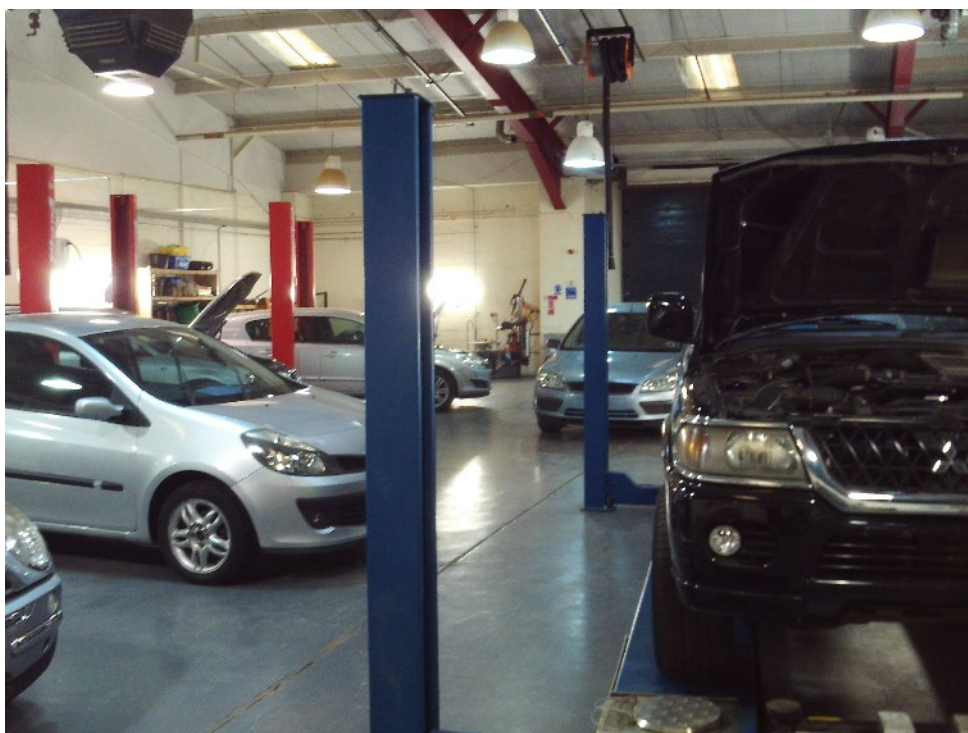
**Plastering workshop and classroom at Stafford**

- 3.6 Although we saw some well-equipped workshops and training facilities, most prisons we visited only offered vocational qualifications up to level 2, approximately equivalent to a GCSE qualification. Typically, these are associated with specific vocational training workshops offered by the prison's education provider, such as bricklaying, plastering and woodwork. Work in prison kitchens frequently also led to qualifications, with a focus on catering and food hygiene. As one prisoner told us:

"Doesn't feel like you're in a prison. It feels like you're attending a real job... by the time you get back to the wing the best part of the day is gone. By the time you've had a shower the day is done, instead of moping about on the wing."

### **Prisoner at HMP Parc**

- 3.7 We found limited opportunities for prisoners to attain qualifications at higher levels through workshops or vocational training. Where these opportunities did exist, they were frequently only available to a small number of prisoners, such as at Berwyn and Parc.
- 3.8 While level 1 and 2 qualifications can be helpful to demonstrate an individual's grasp of the basic principles of different roles, prisoners – particularly those serving longer sentences – were underserved by lower-level accredited provision which could be completed within months.



**Motor mechanics workshop at The Mount**

- 3.9 Many workshops we visited were not offering any formal qualifications at all, limiting the extent to which activities could help prisoners into sustainable employment on release. Frequently, we found that workshops fulfilling a prison industry function or commercial contracts offered prisoners little opportunity for meaningful progression, and did not appear to have a strategy in place to maximise the learning opportunities available to prisoners engaged in these activities. Prison managers cited the cost of delivering qualifications as one of the key reasons for a lack of accreditation.



## **Making the most of prison industries at Berwyn**

Berwyn's welding workshop was notable for its focus on prisoner progression.

The workshop was well-equipped, and served a prison industry function, supplying refurbished equipment, furniture and lockers to sites across the prison service.

Prison leaders had worked with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to fund NVQ level 1 and 2 welding certification courses within the workshop. Bays had been set aside to facilitate training activity alongside day-to-day work fulfilling work orders for the prison service.

At the time of our visit, 35 prisoners had undertaken qualifications, and three employers had visited as part of an employer day to discuss future opportunities in their industries with prisoners.



**Welding workshop, Berwyn**

## **Creating purposeful workplaces**

- 3.10 Unless prisoners believe that the education, training or work they are allocated to will help them on release, the incentivising effect of purposeful activity is likely to be reduced. In better performing prisons, high-quality work and training provides a genuinely meaningful

alternative to offset the boredom and frustration that leads to poor behaviour in prisons, in particular illicit drug-taking.

- 3.11 At several sites visited for this thematic, prisoners told us how their instructors encouraged them to progress by talking about how the skills they were developing would help them on release.

“As the teacher was teaching you, he was showing how you could use it in outside life... So we did a lesson on joining copper pipes together, welding, so the next day he comes in with things he'd seen on the internet for people hiring welders at £120 a day, and that sort of boosted everyone's confidence. 'I'm level one and I know how to join pipe, and you're talking about [£120] a day!' – it was enticing.”

**Prisoner at HMP The Mount**

“There's a lot of women in here that haven't had an education... they get encouragement and positive praise and stuff; it makes them want to work, and not leave here and turn back to crime.”

**Prisoner at HMP Styal**

- 3.12 However, in the absence of formal qualifications or progression opportunities, prisoners frequently told us that they saw workshops as a means of ‘passing time’ rather than giving them any useful skills.

“It helps to make the time go, don't get me wrong, that's probably the only reason I do go to work, because the routine makes the time fly a little bit more rather than being sat in the cell all day.”

**Prisoner at HMP Winchester**

“It's relaxing, but it's nothing good. It's just a prison joke job, know what I mean... I see jobs in here as just passing time. It's not exactly going to do anything for anyone, is it?”

**Prisoner at HMP Berwyn**

- 3.13 Prisoners we spoke to described this as disincentivising, discouraging them from attending or putting effort into their work. Frequently, we observed workshops with empty spaces because prisoners had not attended, despite the threat of receiving a negative entry on their record.

"Lot of people didn't even do the work. Me, I'm a worker, first day I was like 'What do I have to do?' and got told we have to do this, hit this target... I ended up doing so much work and I thought 'nah'. There's like 10 people in the workshop smoking spice."

**Prisoner at HMP Parc**

- 3.14 This was reflected in our surveys of prisoners at the sites we visited, where overall only 40% of prisoners told us that they thought the education, training or work they had been allocated would benefit them on release.

"If there was something where you get a proper qualification I think the lads would be more receptive to it... there's nothing that pulls you in."

**Prisoner at HMP Deerbolt**

"You're getting nothing out of there. I understand we've got to work, but it's just slave labour... the incentive is not there, and that's why a lot of the lads aren't bothered."

**Prisoner at HMP Berwyn**

"I've worked in lots of places, but when you do things here... it doesn't feel like you're working... it doesn't feel like a job."

**Prisoner at HMP Guys Marsh**

## **Recognising progress in work**

- 3.15 Managers had, in some cases, taken steps to help prisoners develop and evidence their progression in the absence of formal accreditation. Workshops where prisoners carried out mundane tasks such as cutting clothing into rags or packing items could still offer different roles, such as supervisory or quality control positions.
- 3.16 We saw some examples of this in action, such as in Winchester's textile workshop, where prisoners progressed from cutting materials, to sewing, and on to quality control and supervision, learning to use different equipment as they developed.





**Textiles workshop at Winchester**

- 3.17 Too often, however, we found prisoners in workshops undertaking routine tasks with no opportunities to progress or develop employability skills, and little incentive to work. Prisoners told us that they spent long periods allocated to these workshops, often receiving little training or encouragement.

"The workshops were completely useless. The CD workshop; people were just going there to get out of their pads. It's not really work. Mostly people'd go to get drugs... I hated it. Did it for four months, they wouldn't take me off it."

**Prisoner at HMP Berwyn**

"Learnt from one prisoner, to another prisoner, to another prisoner. We have actually had no proper training to do it."

**Prisoner at HMP Stafford, discussing workshop machinery**

"It was alright, but a bit boring. You just sit about playing cards. Obviously you have things to do, but when you've done them, you've got two hours with nothing to do. We were just playing cards, and I was like 'I can't be doing this'."

**Prisoner at HMP Parc, discussing working in the laundry**



aspects of prisoners' lives, such as their regular check-ins with their key workers.



**Workshop progression paperwork at The Mount**

- 3.20 Part of the challenge was that prisoners and instructors often could not see any tangible outcome from completing them. We did see some exceptions, such as at Lowdham Grange's carpentry workshop, where prisoners told us that progress in work meetings with their instructor provided valuable feedback which they hoped would be taken into account when they were considered for transfer to open conditions.

### **Over-reliance on wing-based roles**

- 3.21 Across many of the sites we visited we found intense pressure on activity spaces, with too few available to meet the needs of the population in prisons dedicated to training.
- 3.22 In the absence of enough spaces in education, workshops and vocational training, we often observed prisons making up the deficit through wing-based roles, such as cleaners, mentors, laundry workers, servery workers or 'buddies' who assisted those with disabilities.
- 3.23 Some of these roles were necessary for the functioning of a prison and could help to develop prisoners' 'employability skills', but often they lacked any meaningful progression, teaching or accredited training, and we saw wing workers who were under-employed over the course of a working day. Prisoners described working days as short as an hour, with little to do.



“We get out of room at 8.30, we do our rounds in 20 minutes, half hour at the most... then we're there sitting around for two hours, doing nothing.”

**Prisoner at HMP Foston Hall**

“You don't do nothing. I've literally put six beds together in five months I reckon... I haven't picked a paintbrush up since I've been here... and I'm the works party!”

**Prisoner at HMP Winchester**

- 3.24 At Guys Marsh and Parc, our roll checks identified that almost a fifth of prisoners were working on their wings. Across all of the sites visited for this report, we found an average of less than a third of prisoners involved in purposeful activity off their wings.

**A limited offer for prisoners convicted of sexual offences and vulnerable prisoners**

- 3.25 Several of the prisons we visited held significant populations of prisoners convicted of sexual offences (PCoSOs), as well as those too vulnerable to be held on standard wings.
- 3.26 Work and training opportunities for these prisoners were very limited. Because they were mostly kept separated from the general population, these prisoners had even more restricted access to activity.
- 3.27 Prison leaders attempted to counter this through dedicated workshops, but they often could not meet demand and lacked any training or accredited qualification. At Parc, three workshops had been set aside for these prisoners, but they were only able to offer around 50 places for a population of several hundred. At Berwyn, managers had attempted to introduce some variety in work through a multi-function workshop that included bricklaying, bicycle repair and other activities, but again, spaces fell short of demand.



**Workshop at Stafford**

- 3.28 Prison managers at sites holding mixed populations acknowledged that provision for vulnerable prisoners was too limited, both in terms of work and training and in preparing men for work on release. Managers told us that employers' reluctance to engage with PCoSOs was a barrier, and that they struggled to find them viable routes into employment.
- 3.29 Even at Stafford, a dedicated site for these prisoners, there was not enough support to find viable career pathways. None of the companies contracting work to prison workshops were willing to hire these prisoners on release, and leaders' attempts to establish links with employers had had little success.

"The first two weeks in prison [for a PCoSO] are no different to the last two. They are knocked down before they are released as they have been doing all this work and then they are told they won't be allowed [to do the job] when they get out."

**Prison staff member**

- 3.30 The issues we observed during our visits reflect a broader challenge across the prison estate in finding employment pathways for PCoSOs. Haverigg, which we inspected in April 2025, may offer some direction on how to address this.

## **Employment pathways at Haverigg**

During our fieldwork for this thematic review, we undertook a separate inspection of Haverigg, an open prison holding almost exclusively prisoners convicted of sexual offences. We found a prison that had managed to deliver an effective work and training offer to prisoners, despite the challenges posed by working with the PCoSO cohort.

Prison leaders had developed a curriculum that focused on prisoners gaining qualifications and skills in sectors that would be appropriate for work, given the nature of their offences.

Managers had also made effective use of alternative funding sources, in particular the Ministry of Justice Dynamic Purchasing System, to fund a range of relevant qualifications for target sectors, including heavy goods vehicle driving, welding, construction, sustainability and solar panel construction.

The prison had worked hard to establish links with potential employers in relevant industries and had leveraged its Employment Advisory Board to facilitate this. Good use was made of release on temporary licence (ROTL) to find men work in the community.

The work that the prison was doing was reflected in outcomes for prisoners. Local data indicated that, in the year prior to our visit, around three-quarters of eligible men released from the prison were in paid employment six months after their release.



## Section 4    **Allocating prisoners to activity**

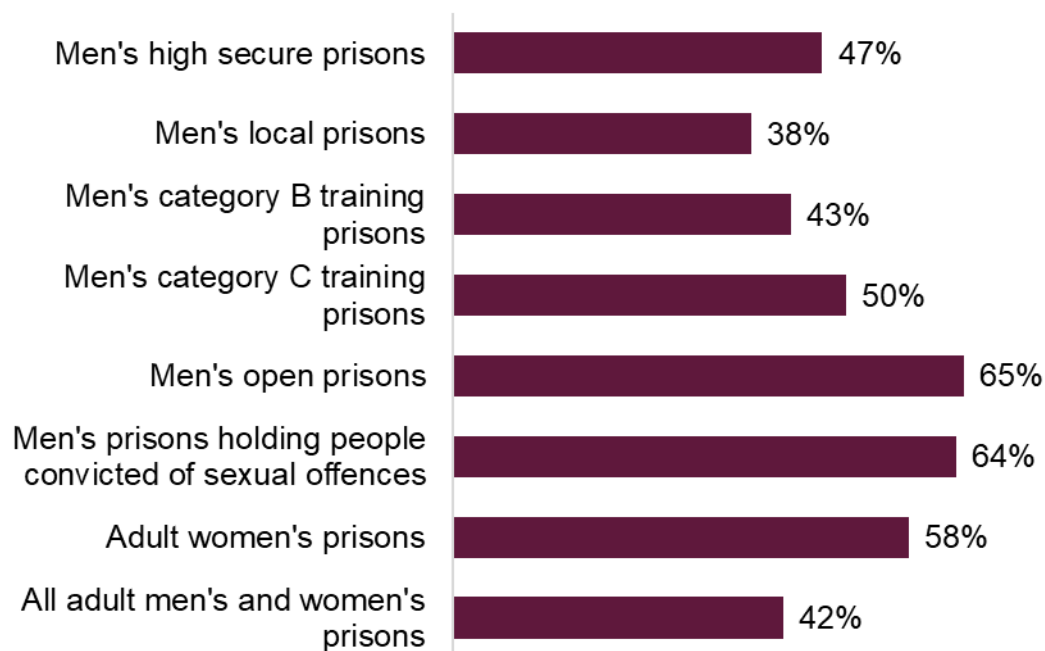
- 4.1      Allocations processes are essential to making sure that prisoners are placed into work, education or training opportunities that will benefit them on release.
- 4.2      Across the 13 sites that we visited for this project, around a fifth of the population were not in any form of education, training or work, despite most of these prisons having a primary training function.
- 4.3      Although this was due in part to a lack of workplaces to meet the needs of growing prisoner populations, it also reflected persistent challenges in allocations processes that left prisoners without work for weeks or months after arriving in prison.

### **Induction and communication**

- 4.4      Allocations typically take place soon after a prisoner arrives at an establishment. As part of their induction process, prisoners should have a conversation with the careers information advice and guidance (CIAG) provider, who will advise them on the opportunities available and find out their prior education and interests. This information is used to place prisoners in activity that, within reason, matches their aspirations.
- 4.5      In more than half of the prisons we visited, prisoners and staff told us of challenges with CIAG processes on induction. In some cases, services were unable to keep up with the number of prisoners entering the establishment, while at others communication between prison staff responsible for allocations and CIAG teams meant that information from interviews was not being considered when allocating prisoners.
- 4.6      In many prisons we visited we found allocations processes not functioning as intended. Too often, allocations were driven by where activity spaces were, rather than planned with prisoners' needs in mind.
- 4.7      In our surveys, only 42% of prisoners felt that the prison had allocated them to activities that would help them when they were released.

**Figure 6: The percentage of prisoners allocated to activities who said they would help them when they were released was highest in men's open and prisons holding people convicted of sexual offences**

Men's and women's prisons England and Wales, 2024–25



Source: HMI Prisons detainee surveys

- 4.8 Prisoners described induction processes around work and employment being cursory or, in some cases, not taking place at all. At Foston Hall, none of the women we interviewed recalled receiving any advice on careers or work opportunities.

"I didn't really get a proper introduction to what to apply for and how to do it. They asked what I'd like to do, why are you here, stuff like that. It was very vague and wasn't explained very well... I've got ADHD so I wasn't really interested in it, I just ticked a load of boxes and before you know it, I was put into maths and English."

**Prisoner at HMP The Mount**

- 4.9 This was particularly important for those who were arriving in prison for the first time and lacked understanding of how to apply for work.

"They assumed I'd been in prison before. So, they assumed I knew what they were gonna do, what was the next step, and I was looking at them like 'I don't know, I really don't'. So, I just put myself down for a workshop or something, just anything really. And they said, 'Okay, we'll look into that, keep an eye on the CMS [the prison's digital platform]', and I struggled with that; no-one showed me how to use CMS at all."

**Prisoner at HMP Parc**

- 4.10 A lack of communication with prisoners on job opportunities persisted beyond initial allocations. Prisoners often described not knowing what was available or finding out about courses by chance. One prisoner described getting the opportunity to take part in interview preparation sessions because his cellmate was unable to attend, while others talked about needing to know the right person to put themselves forward.
- 4.11 Prisons often advertised opportunities through notices on digital systems prisoners could access, posters around the prison or through word-of-mouth by education and vocational training staff. We observed little by way of creative initiatives to promote opportunities more widely, or systematic approaches to make residential staff aware of courses so that they could recommend them to prisoners.

"So, say you want to go on a scaffolding course, you have to go through a certain group of people and that doesn't get shared. And you'll see posters around saying 'email this person', and you think 'I'm in prison, how do I email them?' You ask the officers to help and they say 'I'm not emailing them, it could be anyone', so how am I supposed to get hold of them then?"

**Prisoner at HMP Parc**

## Using data to drive allocation and attendance

- 4.12 Most prisons we visited had a straightforward system for allocations, which started with an induction interview and ended up at an allocations board meeting where prisoners were placed into activity. Ideally this would be informed by information gathered through their induction to make sure they were placed in activity which aligned with their needs.
- 4.13 However, the use of data lacked consistency. Prisons gathered different information to inform allocations, and this was used in various ways across sites.
- 4.14 Many sites we visited examined data on allocations and attendance each day to assess whether activities were being attended and spaces being used. Often this focused on the activity spaces rather than the prisoners involved, meaning that it could not be used to assess whether specific groups of prisoners were overrepresented in those unallocated to, or not attending, assigned activities. This, in turn, limited leaders' opportunities to identify or address disproportionality.
- 4.15 We found that at sites where wing staff were responsible for recording prisoners' non-attendance at activity, data quality was often poor and the reasons for prisoners' absenteeism were not consistently recorded.
- 4.16 This had a knock-on effect on the ability of staff to understand and address the issues that were resulting in poor attendance, and to penalise prisoners where necessary. It limited managers' ability to

initiate improvement plans or prevent persistent absentees from taking up in-demand spaces.

## **Making effective use of spaces**

- 4.17 In an environment where every work place is at a premium, effective planning is essential. Prisoners and staff told us of allocations being dictated by where a space was available, rather than where prisoners would be best placed.

"So, say I finish my English course and I want to move onto plumbing, but there's a 12-week waiting list for plumbing, if they don't have anything for you, they'll just allocate you anywhere..."

### **Prisoner at HMP The Mount**

- 4.18 At Parc, a shortage of staff had led to backlogs in allocations, limiting leaders' ability to promptly move men into appropriate training or work. As a result, prisoners waited long periods to be allocated and some individuals stayed in courses even after they had finished them, taking up spaces that could have been used by others.
- 4.19 At The Mount, processes to remove prisoners from inappropriate allocations were not functioning effectively. Prisoners and instructors described needing three negative warnings to trigger an automatic removal from work placements that were not appropriate.

"For [my teacher] to get me off the course, the only way was for her to give me three negative marks... So, I got three negatives to throw me off the system. That made me intentionally unemployed... they said 'I'm really sorry, I didn't want to give you three negatives but it's the only way I could get you off the course.'"

### **Prisoner at HMP The Mount**

- 4.20 Some prisoners described having to push to find work or threaten to behave poorly to speed up the process or get assistance from staff, placing additional pressure on officers and undermining efforts to establish a purposeful, respectful culture.

"I've been trying to get a job since I've been in this place, if I didn't kick-off on the wing I wouldn't have got it... I said 'I've been behind my door for the last four-and-a-half months, I want to get out and do something, get off the wing'."

### **Prisoner at HMP Berwyn**

- 4.21 However, we found some sites where allocations processes were working well. At Stanford Hill, prison staff managed effective boards

that used a range of information to make sure men were placed into activities that would benefit them. At Styal, more routine allocations processes were also working well, with CIAG processes providing good input to decision-making, and prisoners understood the processes involved.

### **Allocations boards at Stanford Hill**

Stanford Hill, a category D open prison, had developed an effective induction and allocation process to make sure that prisoners were purposefully occupied and placed on pathways that aligned with their needs and ambitions.

The allocations process clearly set out what options were available to prisoners while encouraging them to take ownership by seeking out roles themselves.

Initial induction interviews were fed through to an allocations board held soon after a prisoners' arrival, attended by staff in education, industries and vocational training, careers information and guidance staff, senior managers responsible for work and training, the Independent Monitoring Board and, importantly, the prisoner himself.

By inviting the prisoner to these boards, staff were able to discuss options directly and explain the process for placing him into certain work, and to draw up personalised learning plans. If the prisoner's preferred role had a waiting list, he would be allocated temporarily to an orderly role until a space became available, or he found a role of interest through his own initiative.

In our survey, 63% of prisoners at Stanford Hill told us that they thought the education, work or training they had undertaken would help them on release, which was the best of the sites we visited for this report.

## **Sequencing: a positive approach but not yet delivering**

- 4.22 Several prisons we visited were attempting to deliver a 'sequencing' approach to allocations. Prisoners would be asked to select distinct pathways, such as construction or catering, and would then progress through relevant roles gaining skills and, potentially, accreditation.



#### **Waste management at Berwyn**

- 4.23 This was a sensible approach to maximise the value of prisons' limited activity spaces, with the potential to provide prisoners with a sense of progression and purpose during their sentence.
- 4.24 While this was a positive aim, in practice we found that too often it was undermined by day-to-day pressures. In prisons we visited, sequenced pathways often broke down after a prisoner's initial allocation, and their subsequent roles were chosen based on available spaces. Some senior managers told us that they struggled to maintain a sequenced approach when dealing with large populations of prisoners. Population pressures also contributed to this; at Styal, increasing numbers of prisoners on short sentences reduced the effectiveness of the prison's established 'pathways', which had been designed for longer-term prisoners.





**Posters advertising sequencing 'academies' at Berwyn**

- 4.25 In addition, prisoners frequently lacked any awareness of what their sequenced pathways were or how they would benefit them. At Parc, none of the prisoners we spoke to were able to say which pathway they had been allocated to, undermining the positive or incentivising effect the initiative was likely to have.

## Section 5 Engaging employers in prison

- 5.1 All of the prisons visited for this report were conducting some degree of outreach to employers to engage them in prisoners' work and training, with varying degrees of success. These efforts were typically led by senior managers for education, skills and work and reducing reoffending, as well as by PELs, who were responsible for developing relationships with outside employers.
- 5.2 Employer involvement in work and training in prisons can bring significant benefits. Workshops run by or on behalf of external businesses can provide a more structured and target-driven environment, and can offer higher rates of pay to motivate prisoners. Employers can also provide a pathway to employment on release.

### A challenging environment for employers

- 5.3 Many employers and staff we spoke to highlighted the challenges of the prison environment and the potential for inefficiencies.
- 5.4 Shutdowns can occur in prisons for a variety of reasons, such as power failures, incidents caused by prisoners or staffing shortfalls. These disruptions can leave workshops operating under capacity, for which private enterprises have limited tolerance. It is notable that some of the most successful prisons we visited were built more recently; Berwyn, Parc and Fosse Way all benefitted from higher-quality, modern workshops which helped to attract outside employers.

"Work may be available on paper, but getting the lads over to do it... moving around this jail is virtually impossible... if bad things are happening the first way to contain it is to lock everyone down."

#### Prisoner at HMP Fosse Way

- 5.5 We heard concerns about slippages to daily routines. At Lowdham Grange, staff and prisoners complained of long delays in being unlocked to attend workshops, impacting on production schedules.
- 5.6 Necessary security measures also create a barrier to employers working in prisons, as delays getting into a prison can take up valuable time. We were told of workshop staff spending 45 minutes passing through prison gates each day, and at a workshop at Fosse Way we observed delays moving a delivery vehicle through the gate, which halted production for an hour.
- 5.7 A lack of access to basic technology such as video conferencing within prisons was also cited as a source of frustration. Additionally, employers expressed concern that not all staff understood the complexities of their workshops and caused disruptions as a result, for

instance by turning off the power without warning or failing to arrange timely transport for prisoners working on license in the community.

## Employer-led work opportunities

- 5.8 We did however observe some excellent workshops being delivered by employers at some of the sites we visited. Berwyn's Modular Housing workshop, run by a local housebuilding company, offered prisoners opportunities to earn qualifications and develop skills in a relevant industry. At Fosse Way, a construction company was delivering a workshop creating moulds for concrete components, offering in-house training for prisoners to demonstrate the specific skills they had developed on release. These workshops excelled at providing prisoners with a quality work environment linked to sectors that offered a viable route to employment.



**Prisoner working in modular housing at Berwyn**

- 5.9 Employer engagement in some contracted workshops was limited, however, and prisoners working in them said that they did not see how the work they were doing would benefit them. In these cases, we found that employers were not offering prisoners opportunities for work on release, or accredited training through the work they were doing. At some sites we visited, staff acknowledged that employers could be doing more to support the prisoners who were working for them.

“...People were happy to have any old company come in [to the workshops]. I was asking "But what's the point? What's the actual point?" They weren't offering anything to the prisoners externally, when they got out.”

**Senior prison manager**

“If I phone the [employer running the workshop] and say 'Look, I was working for you as a prisoner', they'd end up putting the phone down. I need to know if I have to phone and what I need to say.”

**Prisoner at HMP The Mount**

- 5.10 In some cases, location created a barrier to employing prisoners on release. At The Mount and Berwyn, separate employers told us that, despite their best efforts to offer paid work to prisoners in the community, prisoners were often being released to areas too far from their work sites. Again, this was an issue exacerbated by population pressures, which resulted in prisoners being moved to prisons further away from their home areas. To provide pathways that meet prisoners' needs, prisons need to cultivate links with local and national employers who can support those leaving custody, regardless of where they will be living. We saw evidence of positive efforts by HMPPS to engage with national employers to alleviate this issue. This had led to some good partnerships with large employers such as Iceland and Greene King, providing opportunities for employment on release.
- 5.11 When employers offered training, guidance and interviews, prisoners recognised the value of the support. Prisoners at Styal were particularly positive about the work they undertook in the 'Remade with Hope' clothes packing workshop, which included some opportunities for release on temporary licence (ROTL), as well as the Recycling Lives workshop, where prisoners could access support in finding employment on release.

“Recycling lives has probably saved me; obviously I'm hoping I'll be in a paid position within six months of being released...”

**Prisoner at HMP Styal**

- 5.12 In some of the best employer-led workshops we saw, prisoners told us that they particularly valued the sense of normality that these workplaces were able to achieve, creating an environment which was similar to work in the community through high expectations, production targets and specific, responsible roles for each worker.

## Section 6 Support prior to release and in the community

- 6.1 As prisoners approach release, their needs should be considered and addressed. They will typically receive advice and support on finance, benefits, accommodation, transport and, if applicable, license conditions.
- 6.2 This may include guidance on careers, introductory meetings with potential employers and dedicated training opportunities to help them seek and find work on release. In some cases, this support may follow prisoners into the community. Some will need little support (for instance, those who have jobs to return to, or who have engaged in work or training in prison that provides them a pathway into work outside), while others will have little experience of formal work and unstable lives in the community, and will need extensive help and preparation.
- 6.3 Prison employment leads play an important role by helping to match prisoners with employment opportunities outside the prison. We observed a range of different approaches being taken in the prisons we visited, reflecting the varied needs of people leaving prison.

### Preparing prisoners for release and the role of PELs

- 6.4 Most of the prisons we visited had put in place 'employment hubs'; areas of the prison which co-located important services where prisoners could receive advice prior to release. Often, these hosted housing advisors, careers information and guidance, banking and ID support and the Department of Work and Pensions. Prison employment leads were frequently embedded in these, and we saw some sites where prisoners could access a good range of support, particularly in prisons with a dedicated resettlement function.



Employment hubs at Winchester (left) and Berwyn



- 6.5 Typically, this support is reserved for prisoners closer to release, as they enter the last few months of their sentence, to make sure that the advice and support they receive is relevant and up to date. However, some prisoners we spoke to described anxiety about not having received advice on work after release, or being seen too close to their release date for it to be helpful.

"Say me, now, I'm halfway through my sentence. They should be asking me where I'm going, but what are they doing?"

**Prisoner at HMP Berwyn**

"Sometimes it feels they're just doing it to tick their boxes. 'Oh look, we tried to rehabilitate people'... I found a job I like doing, I'm out soon, so how do I go about getting an interview?"

**Prisoner at HMP The Mount**

"If someone had told me, look, you have to come here and talk about all this stuff, I'd have happily gone to it, but nobody told me anything until the last minute. It's a joke."

**Prisoner at HMP The Mount**

- 6.6 We saw some good examples of prison and careers staff taking practical steps to support prisoners as they approached release. Basic assistance such as support with writing CVs, guidance on interviews and advice on job vacancies in the community, all contributed to helping prisoners prepare for work after prison.

"I've never had a sit-down with anyone and had a conversation about how you should speak to people in an interview. And that's a big thing, isn't it? If I sat down in a job interview, I wouldn't know what to say to them. Never had one, you know what I mean? It's little things like that, isn't it."

**Prisoner at HMP Winchester**

- 6.7 We observed PELs delivering some good work to build links with employers in the community. Several of the prisons we visited, such as Berwyn and Guys Marsh, had held employer events, focusing on specific industries, where prisoners could speak directly to employers about the opportunities available. Prisoners who had attended told us that they had received numbers to call on release, or interview advice.

- 6.8 We also saw PELs conducting good one-to-one work with some prisoners, such as at Styal, where women described receiving advice on careers that would suit them and support to develop appropriate

skills and to speak to employers in relevant industries. Despite this good work, we were frequently told that measures to find prisoners work placements were undermined by accommodation decisions made close to release, which could house them too far from their prospective employers.

- 6.9 We also saw examples of prison staff enabling employers to meet with prisoners directly to conduct interviews, such as at Parc, where a public sector employer was invited into the prison to conduct in-person interviews with a small number of prisoners for catering roles. One of the men involved spoke very highly of the support he had received from prison staff, such as the PEL, to prepare for the interview, and told us that the experience had given him confidence ahead of his release.
- 6.10 Some of the sites we visited also provided courses for prisoners on employability skills and, in some cases, advice on setting up a business and self-employment. At Parc, this extended to the 'Parc tank' competition, where prisoners developed business proposals to be judged by a panel, with the best being awarded a grant to assist with establishing their business on release.

"Some of the guys are like 'Yeah I've been here since I was 18, I was in a gang', gang members, violent. Now they're talking about business, what they're gonna do... I wasn't sure you could really rehabilitate, but I think now that you can."

**Prisoner at HMP The Mount**

- 6.11 While these measures were positive, they were generally accessible to a relatively limited number of prisoners and we found that many lacked awareness of them, particularly at sites holding very large populations. For example, we were told that a recent employment event at Deerbolt had been attended by 20 prisoners, out of a population of 403.

## **Short courses and creative approaches to funding**

- 6.12 Some of the best support took the form of short courses focusing on specific skills or qualifications targeting particular sectors or industries. In some cases, these courses were tied to specific work opportunities on release, or provided a degree of 'through the gate' support once prisoners returned to the community.
- 6.13 We saw these shorter vocational courses being run at several sites, sometimes funded separately to the prison's Prison Education Framework (PEF) provider as an 'add-on' to the vocational curriculum, and targeting specific sectors or labour market needs in the community. Governors and senior managers highlighted the value of being able to access funding that could be used flexibly to address local needs.
- 6.14 Examples of this included railway training programmes, such as at Parc, Guy's Marsh and The Mount, offering prisoners the opportunity to receive industry-standard training in working on railways, with work



placements on release. We also observed prisons such as Berwyn and Parc bringing in external providers to offer courses in scaffolding, roofing and forklift truck certification, some of which included employer events or guaranteed interviews.



**Railway training facility and forklift training at Parc**

"It makes me feel like I've got something to work towards when I get out, and something to focus on, rather than just being out, going to the job centre, finding work myself. I've got a really good opportunity now. It's that pathway to doing something good that's been set up through here."

#### **Prisoner at HMP Parc**

- 6.15 At Winchester, we spoke to prisoners who had been involved in the Saints Restart programme providing prisoners from the Southampton area with one-to-one resettlement support and mentoring, including education on employability skills and help finding work in the community.

"The lad who comes in [from Saints Restart], he's really good, helpful, he'll do anything to help you if he can, and I'll still stay in contact when I'm out... If you want to engage there's things they'll help you with, and that's really good to know."

#### **Prisoner at HMP Winchester**

- 6.16 In some cases, prison leaders were creative in finding opportunities to attract investment or funding for these kinds of courses to meet specific labour market or prisoner needs.
- 6.17 We visited prisons in Wales making use of Welsh government ReAct Plus grants to fund courses for small groups of prisoners (though this was only available to Welsh prisoners, despite the significant cohorts of English prisoners held at these sites), and others working with the Department for Work and Pensions or other government schemes to enable them to put on training and employability provision. At The Mount, we were told that the prison's CV writing service had been enabled through investment from employers who had visited the prison.

- 6.18 At several of the sites we visited, the Ministry of Justice's Dynamic Purchasing System was contracting a range of specialist courses and training provision. Through the DPS, prison leaders could choose to allocate some of their funding outside of their PEF contract, offering a more flexible means to fund targeted education and training provision. At the time of our fieldwork this funding was subject to some uncertainty, which staff told us had disrupted delivery and resulted in some courses being closed.

### **Working in partnership at Berwyn**

Berwyn had succeeded in putting on a range of specialised courses to equip prisoners with the skills and opportunities to find stable employment on release. Prison managers had established strong working relationships with external organisations and agencies to secure funding and support.

They had worked with DWP to provide several accredited training opportunities, including a regular slinger and signaller construction course started in prison and concluded in the community, a civil engineering course and welding qualifications.

Further funding was secured through the local authority to provide qualifications in bicycle maintenance and repair, as well as courses on self-employment.

Future Skills Programme funding had also allowed the prison to host scaffolding training, where employers were invited in to interview prisoners taking the course.

- 6.19 This provision was positive, but in most cases we observed it could only reach a limited number of prisoners. Often, short courses funded through external partners or the DPS only hosted 10-15 learners and ran relatively infrequently. Awareness of these opportunities was frequently low.

"The problem is you can only put a certain number of people through; like I did Safety Counts, for the railway, but I think only 15 people can jump on that course. I think they were only doing it twice a year... Think of the turnover you have of people going out and coming straight back. If you get more people opportunities, with things like CSCS training, people won't be coming back to jail."

### **Prisoner at HMP Parc**

## **Underuse of ROTL**

- 6.20 Although we visited a range of prisons dedicated to training opportunities, few were offering prisoners the opportunity to take part in work in the community through ROTL. Of those we visited, only the

open prison Standford Hill, and women's establishments Foston Hall and Styal, were making any use of ROTL.

- 6.21 Comprehensive risk assessments are vital, but used effectively, ROTL can provide significant benefits for preparing prisoners for release by easing them back into the community work environment. It can also provide prisoners with wages that are set aside to help them make a fresh start on release, providing a greater degree of security when they leave prison.

"They pay you a decent wage, take so much for room and board, a little bit for your private cash, but they bank the rest for when you get out! At least you've got a bit of a start then, you're not going out with nothing in your pocket. It's a good thing."

**Prisoner at HMP Berwyn**

- 6.22 Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, ROTL was being used to a greater degree in the closed estate to provide prisoners with the opportunity to experience work in the community, but this has fallen subsequently. Data from October to December 2019 shows 80,636 instances of ROTL so that prisoners could attend work in the community. Data from the same period in 2024 recorded just 53,522 instances, a drop of 34%.
- 6.23 Prison leaders we spoke to gave several reasons for its decline, citing falling appetite for the risks associated with temporary releases, conflicting priorities for offender management functions brought on by successive early release schemes to alleviate population pressures, and a lack of operational capacity to facilitate regular temporary releases.
- 6.24 We found managers at some sites attempting to establish links with local employers to restart ROTL placements, but these efforts were nascent, and we saw few instances of meaningful progress.

## Appendix I Methodology

The fieldwork for this thematic took place alongside 13 routine inspections conducted between October 2024 and March 2025. The following establishments were included; all had a training and resettlement function for prisoners.

Establishment	Location	Function	Education provider
Winchester	Hampshire	Category B reception	Milton Keynes College
Standford Hill	Kent	Open	Milton Keynes College
The Mount	Hertfordshire	Category C training	PeoplePlus
Stafford	Staffordshire	PCoSO	Novus
Styal	Cheshire	Women	Novus
Deerbolt	County Durham	Category C training	Novus
Guys Marsh	Dorset	Category C training	Weston College
Parc*	Glamorgan, South Wales	Category C training	Novus Gower
Foston Hall	Derbyshire	Women	PeoplePlus
Berwyn	Denbighshire, North Wales	Category C training	Novus Cambria
Ranby	Nottinghamshire	Category C training	PeoplePlus
Lowdham Grange	Nottinghamshire	Category B training	Novus
Fosse Way**	Leicestershire	Category C resettlement	Milton Keynes College

\* Parc is operated by G4S

\*\* Fosse Way is operated by Serco

In addition to HMIP's routine inspection activities (for more information see [How we inspect – HM Inspectorate of Prisons](#)) the following was also conducted at each of the establishments:

- a review of establishment activities, allocations, attendance evidence as well as information on employment hubs, links with external employers and outcomes in relation to employment on release
- review of Ofsted/Estyn findings in relation to Careers Information Advice and Guidance (CIAG) and the quality and achievements of work and training
- consultation with key staff involved in the delivery of work, training and employment in the prison and on release
- consultation with prisoners.

## **Review of evidence**

Evidence was requested from all establishments on activity spaces, allocations, and attendance monitoring. In addition, information on the length of the working day/week, the impact of employment hubs, effectiveness of links with external employers and outcomes in relation to employment on release were also collected and analysed.

Conversations were had with employment or activity hub managers regarding their use of data for allocating prisoners to activities, monitoring and managing prisoner attendance at activities and how they use data to ensure fairness in activity allocations and attendance.

## **Ofsted/Estyn evidence**

During the course of their regular inspection activity Ofsted and Estyn compiled evidence on the key areas of focus for this thematic, looking at themes including allocation to activity, the quality of training provision, careers information, advice and guidance and curriculum planning.

## **Consultation with staff**

Discussions took place with leaders and managers responsible for the delivery of education, skills and work provision within the prison, and also for the support provided to prisoners in preparation for employment on release. The following staff were included:

- Governor or Director
- Head of Reducing Reoffending
- Head of Education Skills and Work
- Manager of Prisoner Education Framework (PEF) provision
- Activities Hub Manager
- Industries Manager
- Prison Employment Lead.

Discussions covered how the prison met the needs of prisoners; how prisoners are allocated to the provision on offer; the education, work and training on offer

in the prison; prisoner attendance at activities; contact with outside employers; and how the prison monitors outcomes on release for prisoners.

In addition, discussions also took place with the Chair of the Employment Advisory Board, the New Futures Network and employers who work with the prison to support prisoners to gain employment on release.

## **Consultation with prisoners**

Interviews were conducted with 81 prisoners who were due for release in the six months following the inspection. The interviews asked about their experiences of education, work and training in the prison and any support they have received to help them get employment when they leave.

With consent, the interviews were audio-recorded. Having a full audio recording of the interview, rather than relying on interviewer notes, allowed for a more rigorous approach to analysis, and the inclusion of verbatim quotes throughout this report. These audio recordings and notes were summarised to facilitate thematic analysis, and direct quotations were also included in these summaries.

A thematic analysis was undertaken to identify key themes from the collected data and both interactions with staff and prisoners. For the prisoner interviews there was a focus on retaining the voices of the participants throughout the process of analysis. Verbatim quotes and case studies have also been used to illustrate themes and provide more detailed information on the specific experiences of prisoners.

The findings from all of these data sources were triangulated to come to our overall findings.

The review was conducted in line with HM Inspectorate of Prisons' [ethical principles for research activities](#).



## Appendix II Expectations

Ofsted and Estyn inspect education, skills and work activities against their own frameworks, which set out their expectations as follows:

### **Ofsted**

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.

Prisoners benefit from good quality education, skills and work.

Provision successfully promotes positive behaviour and attitudes.

Provision successfully promotes personal development.

The leadership and management of education, skills and work activities effectively improves outcomes for prisoners.

### **Estyn**

All prisoners are expected and enabled to engage in education, skills or work activities that increase their employability on release. There are sufficient, suitable education, skills and work places to meet the needs of the population and provision is of a good standard.

Prisoners achieve and attain the best possible outcomes and standards in their education, work and activities.

Prisoners feel safe in education, work and activities and develop behaviours that help them to minimise reoffending.

Prisoners benefit from good quality teaching and a relevant range of learning experiences that equip them for their release from prison.

The provision of care, support and guidance helps learners to overcome barriers and to plan their progress successfully.

Leadership and management of education, skills and activities improve outcomes that prisoners achieve.

## Appendix III Glossary of terms

### **Careers information advice and guidance (CIAG)**

Careers Information, Advice and Guidance in prisons aims to support individuals in developing their career aspirations, setting goals, and achieving sustainable employment upon release. This involves providing tailored advice, education support, and employability skills training to help prisoners transition back into the community.

### **Custodial manager**

The most senior uniformed officers in a prison. They manage prison activities, often across multiple departments. Responsibilities include managing people and resources.

### **Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS)**

The Dynamic Purchasing System gives prison governors access to a pot of flexible funding which can be used to fund specialist education services.

### **Employment Advisory Board (EAB)**

Employment Advisory Boards advise, support and challenge prisons on their training and employment offer to prisoners and prison leavers. Their goal is to see more people leave prisons and enter sustainable employment.

### **Head of Education, Skills and Work (HoESW)**

Role responsible for setting and leading the strategic direction for all education, skills, and work within a prison, with the aim of maximising opportunities for prisoners to access employment, education, and training on release.

### **Prisoner Education Framework (PEF) contracts**

PEF contracts are the contracts through which independent education providers are contracted to deliver education and training services.

### **Prison Employment Lead (PEL)**

Prison Employment Leads are the key points of contact for employment in prison. They are responsible for driving the employment strategy for the prison, working with employers and prisoners to match people to suitable jobs on release, and support prisoners to develop employability skills.

### **Release on temporary licence (ROTL)**

ROTL allows prisoners to leave the prison for a short time for specific activities, such as attending work or volunteering in community settings, or to meet family members.

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