Justice Committee

Inquiry into purposeful activity in prisons

Written submission from Edinburgh Prison Visiting Committee

The views expressed represent the perspective of the Edinburgh Prison Visiting Committee members and may not reflect views of SPS or prison staff.

Key points

Sentencing policy: too many remand and short term prisoners. Arguably reducing re-offending should begin with remand prisoners, who have no right to work, under the existing prison rules and have very few activities, including access to the excellent prison library.

Lack of access to IT and internet seriously disadvantages prisoners’ educational opportunities and also in rehabilitation and employment on release.

Operational priorities – prisoners moved around establishments, which can interrupt or terminate access to certain programmes.

Non commercial approach to work for prisoners – they cannot be seen to benefit financially from work.

1. What is meant by purposeful activity and how can this be measured?

Purposeful activity
- any activity or intervention that reduces pro-criminal and increases pro-social behaviours
- activity that improves the educational, social, emotional and physical development of prisoners
  - includes:
    - programmes to address offending behaviours and addictions
    - employment in training centre and support services
    - education
    - preparation for release
    - other - e.g. health, social care

Measurement
- could include:
  - development and monitoring of plans for individual prisoners through the Integrated Case Management (ICM) process
  - statistics on attendance and completion of programmes, education and work
  - reduction in re-offending
  - increase in successful rehabilitation
2. The extent to which prisoners have an opportunity to engage in such activity?

Programmes
- risk/need assessments are undertaken for all long-term and some short-term prisoners.

Employment
- SPS has no duty to provide work opportunities for remand prisoners
- there are currently 18 workshops in Edinburgh Prison, ranging from life skills to domestic appliance PAT testing. 13 provide an opportunity to gain vocational qualifications, with training provided by trained internal staff
- catering also provides work for 48 mainstream and offence protection prisoners in the kitchen and hall pantries
- all prisoners, except remand and those on very short sentences, have the opportunity to work, with a choice of at least two workshops for each category: allocation is carried out by an Activities Allocation Officer
- the category of prisoner attending a particular workshop can change according to demand
- a hobbies workshop is available to prisoners referred by the mental health team
- IT access is restricted to 4 stand-alone PCs, impacting the delivery and assessment of VQs.

Education
- no provision for remand, those with a sentence of less than 45 days, or those short term prisoners whose sentence is too short to complete a particular course
- foreign national remand prisoners are invited to attend ESOL (English as a second language) classes
- prisoners receive information from course brochure and induction sessions. They are assessed for suitability for courses, but there is no compulsion for prisoners to engage.
- no access to internet, restricting the courses available
- restricted access to IT in education centre limiting opportunity to develop relevant skills.

Preparation for release
- links with community based organisations for practical support and counselling
- passport (access to industry) support for employment
- lack of internet access restricting college and job applications.

Health
- all prisoners have access to a comprehensive programme of healthcare provided by NHS: includes medical, mental health and dental services.

Other
- prisoners can be selected and trained as Listeners by the Samaritans
the PE programme offers 35 sessions a week to all categories of convicted prisoners with satellite gyms in halls: prisoners need to attend an induction into safe use of equipment.

3. What are perceived benefits/Examples of best practice?

Perceived benefits
- reduction in addictions, offending behaviours
- improved literacy and numeracy, and education
- development of relevant interpersonal and practical skills and experience
- enhanced self respect and self worth
- transformation of personal identity (to quote LEAP).

Best practice

Programmes
- chaplaincy run 8-10 week group programmes for protection and non-protection mainstream prisoners. Programmes based either on Alpha course or address life issues. Liaise with Education to ensure consistent approach.

Employment
- kitchen, with appointment of new training officer to train all kitchen and pantry staff and develop links with Education and Throughcare regarding qualifications. Schedule allows for mainstream and offence protection prisoners to work at separate times
- PAT testing course is the first to be offered in Scotland: electrical equipment donated to a charity has been checked, returned and sold
- woodcraft has produced e.g. renovated tools, signage and benches for community groups
- contract to refurbish bikes for charity
- peer tutoring by prisoners with specific skills.

Education
- Edinburgh prison was the first to award a waste management qualification
- in addition to vocational qualifications there is a varied and innovative programme of courses e.g. English, basic IT, English as a foreign language, creative writing, provided by Carnegie College. College and library provide external speakers
- Microsoft Academy, enabling prisoners to develop advanced IT skills. This attracts prisoners, with ~8 passes a month
- peer tutoring in Ratho
- Napier University students as classroom assistants.

Preparation for release
- links with Timpson who will interview prisoners within 6 weeks of release date for positions: this builds on the successful Timpson's Academy working in England.
Other

- Clink radio station provides groups of prisoners with the opportunity to develop programmes of e.g. music, news, as well as promoting activities and events. Current initiative to promote Listener scheme to potential callers and volunteers.

4. What barriers may exist?

Programmes

- readiness/willingness of individual to engage
- sentence period or unplanned transfers may preclude completion
- relevant programme e.g. violence prevention, may require transfer to another establishment.

Employment (Regimes)

- too few places (~220) for the number of prisoners (average prisoner population 900)
- complexity of scheduling regimes for prisoner groups which have to be segregated e.g. mainstream males, protection prisoners, females
- perceived lack of relevance regarding e.g. age of prisoner, employment on release
- difficulty in obtaining outside commercial contracts: most contacts are with charities and voluntary organisations, see Appendix 1 below
- some work attracts a higher wage than others encouraging individuals to seek highest earning work
- the development of new workshops is time consuming: the most recent PAT testing took nearly a year

Education

- basic low levels of literacy and numeracy. Prisoners unwilling to admit to this preferring to avoid applying for courses. Lack of internet access prevents prisoners from being tested within workshop environment
- employment seen as a more attractive alternative
- many prisoners from home environment where education is not valued
- restriction on obtaining books. Prisoners can only obtain books from the library or through preferred supplier, which may prejudice those with learning disabilities (time pressure of loan period) and/or without available funds
- some vocational and educational courses and Microsoft Academy rely on single trainer to deliver, with no back up in the event of absences.

Preparation for release

- apathy at lack of employment opportunities
- insufficient support for job seeking/further education, with only one person dedicated to this: this post is dependent upon external funding.

Other

- prisoners have competing demands on their time e.g. employment, education, programmes.
5. **Is purposeful activity consistent across the prison estate? (Edinburgh prison)**

- men and women e.g. women have restricted access to chaplaincy although they can attend church services on a Saturday and Sunday and can also request to see chaplains. Education classes run in Ratho Hall every day: but the women only have access to education in the HUB on a Friday afternoon.
- restricted work opportunities for protection (offence and non-offence) prisoners
- no purposeful activity for those on remand.

6. **Can access be improved?**

- reduction in prisoner numbers through community based alternatives to remand and short-term sentences. Short term sentences often preclude participation in structured interventions. Recent overcrowding required unplanned transfers of prisoners thus disrupting their activities
- access to community based activities for short-term and remand prisoners, see Appendix 1 below
- IT and internet access for prisoners will increase opportunities in all areas of purposeful activity: proven technology exists to restrict access to inappropriate sites and interactive programmes are available that do not require internet access
- more emphasis given to role of personal officers to help, encourage and support prisoners in identifying and undertaking relevant activities
- de-stigmatising low levels of literacy and numeracy, possibly through Clink initiative, to encourage prisoners to address these in a supportive environment
- more holistic approach to education and vocational training. Generally, there seems to be no 'formal' link. Statistics for employment/VQs are collected and collated by prison staff: Carnegie College maintain separate statistics for education. There is a proposal that literacy and numeracy skills be developed within the workshop environment
- work regimes and education should, ideally, reflect the needs of the external market place. However, this needs to be balanced by the provision of basic skills development for those unwilling or unable to gain qualifications
- ways to increase attendance rates at all activities; e.g. through involvement of personal officers
- given that Edinburgh Prison is a community facing prison, an education contract with a local provider would enable prisoners to access programmes that can be completed or extended on release.

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20 January 2013
Appendix 1

Case example – in 2009 one of the VC members initiated a project for prisoners to sand and re-varnish the City of Edinburgh’s 1500 memorial benches. Many of these were badly in need of attention and the City’s Department of Parks and Recreation could not do all the work required with their own resources.

The Council were willing to transport the benches to and from the prison and to supply the materials needed.

The work was to be done in the joiner’s workshop, which was upstairs; but the benches could not be manoeuvred up the stairs or in the lift. Due to the chemicals used to strip the benches, this part of the work had to be done outside and was reported to be unsupervised by staff. The Council officials deemed the standard of work to be unsatisfactory and the project floundered within a few months.