



Life in prison: Food

A findings paper

by HM Inspectorate of Prisons

July 2016

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Introduction

- I.1** This findings paper is part of a series which focuses on daily life in prisons and young offender institutions (YOIs) holding young adults aged 18 to 21 years. The series explores particular topics that are regularly reported to us as concerns during our routine inspections, or which merit detailed and specific examination. We hope these findings papers will be of interest to practitioners, and that they will provide the public with an insight into the reality of life in prison and be used to encourage further discussion. We expect that the findings and good practice detailed in this paper will support the development of prison services.
- I.2** This findings paper draws on existing literature surrounding food in prison. It also draws on evidence from recent inspections of prisons and YOIs undertaken by HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMI Prisons) and survey data from inspection reports published between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016. This data is aggregated and overall responses for the year are presented. Comments from confidential prisoner surveys, conducted as part of the inspection process, are also included in this report; these quotes are not ascribed to individual prisons or inspection reports. The paper focuses on adult men and women held in prisons and young adults held in YOIs, and their experiences of the food provided.

Background

- I.3** Food plays a crucial role in our physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. Much of human social interaction is centred on food, and we use food choices and eating habits to construct our gender, ethnic, cultural and personal identities.¹ Food also represents an opportunity to indulge, communicate affection, and to experience religion and tradition.² In prison, mealtimes are a focal point of the day.³ They break up the monotony of daily life in custody, and provide opportunities for association with others.
- I.4** The majority of what prisoners eat in prison is determined for them. Unlike in the community, prisoners do not have the freedom to decide what or how much they want to eat, nor are they able to choose when they eat the majority of their meals.
- I.5** Having a limited ability to determine what, when, where or how much they eat, means that prisoners lose control over aspects of their health as well as this important part of their social autonomy. For some, this deeply affects their self-esteem and sense of identity.⁴ For these reasons, food is a considerable source of frustration and anxiety amongst prisoners, and thus extremely important to understanding life in custody. As recognised by the World Health Organisation, '[a]n understanding of the role of food in correctional settings and effective management of food systems may improve outcomes for incarcerated people and

¹ de Graaf, K. and Kilty, J.M. (2016) 'You are what you eat: Exploring the relationship between women, food, and incarceration', *Punishment and Society*, 18(1).

² Godderis, R. (2006) 'Dining in: The symbolic power of food in prison', *The Howard Journal*, 45(3); Lupton, D. (1996) *Food, the body, and the self*. London: SAGE Publications; Smith, C. (2002) 'Punishment and pleasure: Women, food and the imprisoned body', *The Sociological Review*, 50(2).

³ Cross, M. and MacDonald, B. (2009) *Nutrition in institutions*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

⁴ de Graaf, K. (2013) *Disciplining women/disciplining bodies: Exploring how women negotiate health and bodily aesthetic in the carceral context* – Master's thesis, University of Ottawa, Canada. Available at: http://www.ruor.uottawa.ca/bitstream/10393/26231/1/De%20Graaf_Kaitlyn_2013_thesis.pdf (accessed 8 December 2015); Godderis, R. (2006) 'Dining in: The symbolic power of food in prison', *The Howard Journal* 45(3); Ugelvik, T. (2011) 'The hidden food: Mealtime resistance and identity work in a Norwegian prison', *Punishment & Society* 13(1).

help correctional administrators to maximise the health and safety of individuals in these institutions.⁵

- I.6** While there is some variety across the prison estate, Prison Rules and Prison Service Instructions (PSI) set certain requirements for meal provision, to be followed by every establishment. Prison Rule 24 states that prisoners must be provided with three meals a day, and these should be ‘wholesome, nutritious, well prepared and served, reasonably varied and sufficient in quantity’.⁶ To provide variety, establishments are required to operate on a menu cycle of four weeks or more, and prisoners normally select their preferences in advance. Establishments are referred to the Food Standards Agency guidance for guidelines on nutritional content.⁷
- I.7** Neither the Prison Rules nor the PSI stipulate minimum daily calorific targets for prison meals. The Food Standards Agency guidance gives the average daily requirement for men and women between 19 and 74 years old, as 2,225 kcals, but the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) does not measure calorific content of individual meals provided.
- I.8** PSI 44/2010 states that NOMS has a responsibility to meet, not only nutritional, but also cultural and diversity needs. This means providing meals that meet medical as well as religious or ethical dietary requirements, such as Halal, kosher, vegetarian and vegan meals.
- I.9** Spending on food in prisons has been decreasing. In 2014–15, the total expenditure on food in prisons was £54.1 million, down from £55.1 million in 2013–14 and £59.6 million in 2012–13.⁸ The basic catering budget allowance per prisoner per day was previously £2.02.⁹ All prisons now have the autonomy to set their own food budget dependant on local requirements and in some prisons as little as £1.87 per prisoner per day was spent.¹⁰ In a handful of prisons, this is supplemented by produce grown at the prison, for example, at the open prison HMP and YOI Hollesley Bay (2015), where produce grown in the gardens is used in the kitchens and offered to prisoners to use in self-catering. However, to put this into perspective, the average daily spend per patient on in-patient food services in hospitals in 2014–15 was £9.88,¹¹ which is almost five times higher. This same basic prison catering budget needs to be used to purchase special-requirement meals (such as religious, vegetarian or vegan diets, but excluding medical diets), which can cost several times more than basic prison fare. It is also the funding source for celebration of religious festivals such as Eid, and for providing refreshments for family visits, which leaves establishments with very little to spend on the average prisoner meal.
- I.10** Poor nutritional provision can, not only have a lasting impact on the wellbeing of an individual in custody, but it is also costly to the custodial estate. Various medical complications that arise from poor nutrition, including nutritional deficiencies, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and high cholesterol, add burden to prison health resources. Food can also affect security resourcing and safety in prison, as frustration over food can serve as a catalyst for aggression and dissent.¹² Studies have also found that nutritional supplements reduce

⁵ Smoyer, A.B. and Minke L.K. (2015) *Food systems in correctional settings: A literature review and case study*. Copenhagen, DK: World Health Organisation Regional Office for Europe.

⁶ Prison Rules (1999) No.728, 24(2): *Food*.

⁷ PSI 44/2010: Catering – meals for prisoners; Food Standards Agency (2008) *Guidance on food served to adults in major institutions*.

⁸ House of Commons oral answers, Hansard, 29/4/2016.

⁹ Based on the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) catering benchmark.

¹⁰ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2013) *Report on an unannounced inspection of HMP Durham*. London: HMIP.

¹¹ Department of Health (2013) *Hospital estates and facilities statistics, 2014–15*.

¹² National Audit Office (2006) *Serving time: Prisoner diet and exercise – report by the Comptroller and Auditor General*.

disciplinary incidents, aggression and violent behaviour,¹³ pointing to the importance of nutrition to safety in prisons. In other words, prisoners eating well is not just a matter of prisoner wellbeing but is also of practical and financial concern to the prison service.

- I.11** In addition, instilling healthy eating habits aids in rehabilitation and reintegration into the community after release. A large proportion of prisoners may have led chaotic lifestyles in the community that put their health at risk.¹⁴ A major part of rehabilitation is education about and the promotion of a healthy lifestyle, and a crucial component of this is a healthy, balanced diet.

Our expectations

- I.12** HMI Prisons inspects against criteria known as *Expectations*.¹⁵ These are the standards by which we assess treatment and conditions for prisoners, and each inspection assesses the outcomes for prisoners held in that establishment against them. Each expectation is underpinned by 'indicators' which help test if the expectation has been met. Food in prison is assessed under the 'Respect' healthy prison area across all establishments.
- I.13** At all adult prisons, our expectations are that:
- prisoners have a varied, healthy and balanced diet which meets their individual needs, including religious, cultural or other special dietary requirements
 - prisoners' food and meals are stored, prepared and served in line with religious, cultural and other special dietary requirements and prevailing safety and hygiene regulations.
- I.14** In addition, we expect that:
- prisoners can purchase a suitable range of goods at reasonable prices to meet their diverse needs, and can do so safely
 - dietary and other lifestyle requirements of approved religions represented in the prison are properly fulfilled.

Our findings

- I.15** The findings of this paper are separated into three different areas: menu and quality, meal times and serving meals.

Menu and quality

- I.16** Recently visited establishments normally provided at least one hot meal per day. Breakfast usually consisted of breakfast packs, which contained cereal, milk, whitener, tea/coffee sachets, and in some cases some preserves. These were usually packed centrally and transported to establishments, often arriving in unappetising condition. We considered the quality and quantity of these breakfast packs to be inadequate on their own. (Important

¹³ Eves, A. and Gesch, B. (2003) 'Food provision and the nutritional implications of food choices made by young adult males, in a young offenders institution', *Journal of Human Nutrition and Diet*, 16(3); Ramsbotham, Ld D. and Gesch, B. (2009) 'Crime and Nourishment', *Prison Service Journal*, 182; Zaalberg, A., Nijman, H., Bulten, E., Stroosma, L., Van der Staak, C. (2010) 'Effects of nutritional supplements on aggression, rule-breaking, & psychopathology among young adult prisoners', *Aggressive Behaviour*, 36(2).

¹⁴ Department of Health (2002) *Health Promoting Prisons: A shared approach*, available at: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130107105354/http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_4034265.pdf, accessed on 8 April 2016.

¹⁵ HMI Prisons (2012) *Expectations: Criteria for Assessing the Treatment of Prisoners and Conditions in Prisons*. London: HMIP; HMI Prisons (2014) *Expectations: Criteria for Assessing the Treatment of and Conditions for Women in Prison*, London: HMIP.

issues surrounding the timing of their distribution are discussed in the next section of this report.)

- I.17** Good practice regarding breakfast was observed at HMP Lowdham Grange (2015), where we reported that the quality and quantity of food were generally good, with a more substantial breakfast than we often see, which included plenty of bread and cereals. Breakfast packs were also supplemented with toast at HMP Rye Hill (2015). Cases like these were rare, however. At North Sea Camp (2014) a cooked breakfast was provided, which prisoners appreciated. However, the commencement of activities for prisoners, along with staffing pressures, meant that there was little room in the regime to provide this at other establishments.
- I.18** Prisoners were generally offered around five options for lunch and the same for dinner. A typical prison lunch consisted of a sandwich, wrap or portion of pasta, served with a piece of fruit or crisps/biscuits. Typical dinners included a choice of curry, pie, baked fish or casserole, accompanied by rice, vegetables, potatoes, and a choice of dessert or fruit. Fruit available in prison is often limited in variety to inexpensive and easy to store items such as apples and oranges.
- I.19** At some establishments, on weekends the daily hot meal was served at lunchtime, with the evening meal consisting of a sandwich, for example. This meant that prisoners could go without a hot meal for more than 24 hours on weekends. This was the case at HMP Low Newton (2015) where women continued to have a cold evening meal on Fridays and weekends. A hot brunch was served at 10.30am at weekends, which meant women waited 24 hours between hot meals from Saturday to Sunday, and even longer between hot brunch on Sunday and hot dinner on Monday.
- I.20** Our inspections generally found the food served at prisons and YOIs to be of reasonable quality and quantity. However, only 29% of prisoner survey respondents described the food they received as 'good' or 'very good'. Many prisoners commented negatively on menu content and food quality. Examples include:

'There's not a good variety of fruit and veg at all. No greens in veg. No oranges, etc. We get apples only.'

'It's all chips or potatoes.'

'Too much fat and carbohydrates and not enough protein. Too much salt and processed food. Vegetables boiled to death. A poor and unbalanced diet that does nothing to promote or sustain a healthy mind or body.'

- I.21** In recent years, food quantity has become a prominent issue for prisoners. A number of letters to *Inside Time*, the national newspaper for prisoners, refer to food at dinnertime running out on a regular basis, or portion sizes being too small.¹⁶ Many prisoners commented about receiving insufficient food in our prisoner survey. For example:

'If there isn't seconds of food then I'm still hungry. I received seven chips, one sausage and a spoon of beans yesterday for my tea. I'm 6'2" and that won't fill up a kid.'

'More food. We don't get enough. It's terrible how little.'

¹⁶ Seeby, G. (2016) 'Where's our food?' *Inside Time*, available at: <http://insidetime.org/wheres-our-food/> (accessed 11 March 2016); Foster, B. (2015) 'Poor quality and quantity of prison food', *Inside Time*, available at: <http://insidetime.org/poor-quality-and-quantity-of-prison-food/> (accessed 11 March 2016).

- I.22** In our survey, prisoners also frequently commented about food being served cold or undercooked. For example:

'Having to buy food off canteen as food from kitchens is cold every day!'

'Sometimes the food is half cooked and not edible.'

- I.23** At many establishments, inspectors found that food temperature logbooks were not properly completed, but in most cases, the food inspectors tasted was sufficiently hot. However, at HMP Holloway (2016), many prisoners complained about food being cold and servery records showed that food was often served below target temperatures. Similarly, at HMP Styal (2015), the food that inspectors tasted was cold.
- I.24** Prisoners were well consulted about food across the prison estate, with catering staff attending prisoner consultation meetings, comment books generally available, and regular prisoner food surveys conducted. Survey response rates were low, however, and comments books were often poorly managed, with comments going unanswered. We reported concrete changes having been made in response to prisoner feedback at some establishments. At HMP Bullingdon (2015), for example, changes were made to the menu following prisoner feedback, and the results of consultation were published to prisoners.

HMP Peterborough (men, 2015)

The catering manager held monthly focus group meetings with prisoners to discuss catering, and the wing food comments books were checked regularly. A survey of prisoners' perceptions of the food had been carried out and some menu changes adopted as a result.

- I.25** Our recent inspections found that almost all establishments offered menu items that catered for a range of religious and other dietary requirements. Many establishments made special arrangements for prisoners during religious festivals which we welcomed. During the month of Ramadan, observing a fast from dawn until dusk means Muslim prisoners are unable to dine at the same times as non-Muslim prisoners. Meals were normally provided for Muslim prisoners in insulated containers during this month, as staffing and security constraints prevented the separate serving of fresh meals. Establishments also made arrangements to cater for other religious needs, such as providing drinking chocolate as a non-caffeine alternative to tea and coffee for Mormon prisoners, offering kosher and Halal meals, and ensuring that vegetarian and vegan options were available.

HMP Eastwood Park (2014)

Like many establishments, this women's prison held occasional themed meals to celebrate major religious and cultural events. In addition to this, inspectors welcomed the finding that prisoners in education had been allowed to use the kitchen to make a special cake for Diwali.

- I.26** However, prisoners with medical, religious or ideological dietary requirements were typically faced with little or no choice over the food they received, and many felt that variety was lacking in the meals they received. For example, one prisoner commented:

'There is never any red meat. Since Muslims do not eat pork we can only eat chicken once a fortnight. Also, chicken is available other times of the week but it is non Halal.'

- I.27** This was reflected in the results of our prisoner survey, with Muslim prisoners significantly less satisfied with the food served than their non-Muslim and white counterparts. Of Muslim prisoners, 24% described the food as either 'good' or 'very good', compared with 30% of non-Muslim prisoners.
- I.28** Prison Service Order (PSO) 4800 suggests that the specific needs of pregnant women should be met, and that caterers should receive appropriate training to cater for any pregnant woman held at their establishment. In some women's prisons, inspectors noted that pregnant women were provided with extra milk and supplements, as well as extra food. In women's prisons where there were mother and baby units, most women were able to cook meals for their babies, providing a practical way to exercise normal parental responsibility. However, this was not the case in all women's prison with this type of unit.
- I.29** There was no variation in portion size between young offenders (aged 18 to 21 years old) and adult prisoners, despite young adults (men in particular) being known to require a greater energy intake. Young adults (aged 18–21) were significantly less likely to rate the food as 'good' or 'very good' in our survey during the period, than prisoners aged 22 years or older (22% compared with 30%). At HMYOI Brinsford (2015), the main complaint of young men was the small lunch portions. Comments from young offenders at YOIs included:
- 'The size of the meals are tiny. Not filling at all. I starve every day.'*
- 'The food portions aren't big enough. I've seen kids' meals bigger than what we get. I am not full after any meal.'*
- I.30** Another group who were potentially disadvantaged in terms of food were vulnerable prisoners. Vulnerable prisoners are those prisoners who are at risk of attack from other prisoners, including for their offence (for example, sex offenders), or because of debt, bullying, or police informant status. While many establishments were taking active and adequate measures to ensure that the food provided to vulnerable prisoners could not be identified and contaminated in the kitchens, some were not. For example, at HMP High Down (2015) staff and managers told us of a number of incidents in which food for vulnerable prisoners in house block six had been tampered with and contaminated with items such as nails, drawing pins and cigarette ends. At this establishment, not enough was done to prevent this from happening or to alleviate vulnerable prisoners' legitimate concerns.
- I.31** At HMP Leicester (2016), where there is only one servery, vulnerable prisoners were served their meals last to reduce their interaction with main location prisoners and limit any potential victimisation. In practice, this meant food for vulnerable prisoners was likely to be less hot, with less options remaining, and this group was disproportionately affected by food shortages.

Meal times

- I.32** Food being served early was a problem we consistently found in the establishments inspected. In some establishments lunch could be served as early as 11:10am and dinner at 4:15pm. Serving dinner this early, coupled with meagre breakfast provision, sometimes meant there was a gap as long as 20 hours before the next substantial meal. Prisoner comments included:

'The food is served too early. Not hungry at the meal times but then hungry in the night.'

'The portions are small, the last meal is at 4pm which means we go the rest of the night until breakfast the next day hungry.'

I.33 Breakfast packs were normally distributed with the previous night's dinner, or at a handful of establishments, as early as lunchtime the day before they were due to be eaten. As mentioned above, this has been driven by the pressures of the core day and reductions in staffing. We have heavily criticised the timing of the distribution of breakfast packs, as some prisoners, particularly young adults, told us that they ate these when they were hungry during the night. This left them starting the next day on empty stomachs. HMP Peterborough (men, 2015) was an example of good practice, distributing the packs on the morning they were to be eaten. At HMP Spring Hill (2014), an open men's prison, breakfast was served every morning, although the meal was often delayed, which meant prisoners had little time to eat before leaving for work.

I.34 Between meals, little or no food is provided. Prisoners can purchase a limited selection of snack items, in advance, from the prison canteen with their own funds. However, the majority of these foods are unhealthy sweets or snack items high in fat, salt and sugar.¹⁷ In addition, these items are more expensive in prison than in the community, and it is not necessarily easy for prisoners to buy them on prison wages, which are often very low (for more information, see our findings paper, *Earning and Spending Money*). Survey respondent comments included:

'Too much of my "spends" go towards supplementing a very poor menu and standard of food.'

'Very fattening high-carb food. I eat as little as I can and try to get some of the healthier foods if I can. Spend more on food from canteen.'

I.35 In our survey, about two-thirds (65%) of prisoners said they were offered something to eat when they first arrived at the establishment. At HMP and YOI Holloway (2016), reception stocked microwave meals specifically for women arriving late to the establishment. In other establishments, prisoners could go hungry on their first night (for more information, see our findings paper, *The First 24 Hours in Prison*).

I.36 Not all establishments had adequate arrangements in place to provide meals for those arriving at the establishment late from court or returning from release on temporary licence (ROTL). At HMP Askham Grange (2014), arrangements for reserving meals for women working in the community sometimes failed. In other establishments, prisoners who worked full-time or attended gym in the evenings were forced to eat cold food for dinner. Survey respondents commented:

'When I go to the gym you don't get a cooked meal at teatime if you're a full-time worker and get gym in the evening.'

'Food is often served whilst prisoners are still at work, gym or other activities. Prisoners are being told if activities clash with servery time that we should only order cold meals as hot food will not be held. Pissed off at gym times as it is very hard to change what gym session you're on as waiting lists are long and very hard to keep track of.'

¹⁷ Ramsbotham, Ld D. and Gesch, B. (2009) 'Crime and Nourishment', *Prison Service Journal*, 182. The list of items available for purchase varies and in public sector prisons is selected by each establishment from a DHL national product list based on varying levels of prisoner consultation.

Serving meals

- I.37** Food is either prepared in on-site kitchens or delivered pre-cooked from outside the establishment. All food is then transported to wing serveries via trolleys. Delivery from outside can cause problems. This was evident at HMP Warren Hill (2016) where meals were prepared at HMP Hollesley Bay and transported to Warren Hill by van. We observed regular shortages in the amount of food delivered, resulting in requests for additional supplies, which caused unnecessary delays.
- I.38** Hygiene standards in kitchens and serveries were generally good, and prisoners working in these areas were given basic food hygiene training. However, cleanliness of trolleys used to transport food to the wings was often poor. At HMYOI Aylesbury (2015) we raised many concerns about food servery workers including that they did not routinely wear hats, some of their protective clothing was grubby, and some served food with their gloved hand rather than the appropriate utensil. In addition, serveries at this establishment did not have hygiene screen covers, and food trolleys were not fully cleaned. At HMP Pentonville (2015) we found that wing servery workers were untrained and had insufficient time to clean, which meant that serveries remained dirty overnight, exacerbating the reported problems with vermin. Many food trolleys were in an unhygienic state and had not been cleaned for some time.
- I.39** For many establishments, servery supervision was also a problem. Inadequate supervision led to bullying, favouritism in portion sizes and food running out for those last in line due to inadequate portion control. At HMP/YOI Stoke Heath (2015) we observed that supervision of the unit serveries was inadequate. Prisoners working there did not wear the appropriate protective clothing, and we saw some poor practice in managing portions. For example, at the end of one meal at this establishment, we observed a servery worker returning to his unit with three loaves of bread, but shortly after, prisoners returning from work said there had been no bread left for them.
- I.40** In our survey, prisoners commented:
- 'If I know the lads on servery I get good portions. If not then you don't. Staff seem to accept this practice as well.'*
- 'The food ain't great, but it is the queues that are the problem, people push in and take more than their share which leaves others without.'*
- I.41** While kitchens were generally equipped with designated tools for serving Halal food, in some prisons such as HMP Manchester (2015) and HMYOI Aylesbury (2015), such separate tools were not always used, causing concerns over cross-contamination. Muslim prisoners in some establishments were sensitive to rumours of such contamination, sometimes choosing to order only vegetarian options or simply go hungry. Prisoner comments included:
- 'Not labelled as Halal or not correctly. Reduces my choice of option as some things are mis-labelled. Very important.'*
- 'It is not right to mix the Halal food with non-Halal foods. It means most of the time I cannot eat it because of my religion.'*
- I.42** However, establishments such as HMP Dovegate (2015) and HMP/YOI Stoke Heath (2015) were taking positive action to address cross-contamination concerns, including sending prisoners on servery training courses and collaborating with the chaplaincy.

HMP/YOI Stoke Heath (2015)

The Muslim chaplain had devised a layout of how the food options could be presented (to prevent cross-contamination) on the server, which all the wing serveries were being asked to introduce. This followed spot-checks undertaken by the Muslim chaplain and the equalities officer to ensure that Halal, vegan and vegetarian food was handled and served appropriately. The catering staff also put in place a new system of stacking food trays in the hot trolleys to protect halal, vegan and vegetarian food choices, and the catering manager was trying to source raised dividers to place between the food on the serveries after a prisoner said he had seen something similar in use at another prison.

- I.43** Kitchens and serveries provide meaningful employment opportunities to prisoners, constituting a form of purposeful activity and source of income. This also gives prisoners the opportunity to learn skills and earn qualifications in catering and food hygiene to improve their employment prospects on release. Although some establishments took advantage of kitchens and/or serveries for this purpose, many we inspected did not provide opportunities to gain anything other than basic food hygiene. In contrast, HMP Lancaster Farms (2015) was an example of innovative good practice – baking equipment was being purchased so that prisoners could bake their own fresh bread at the same time as working towards baking qualifications.
- I.44** Prisoners' ability to eat communally varied across the prison estate. While most establishments unlocked prisoners at both lunch and dinnertime to collect their meals from an on-wing servery, in some establishments prisoners were then required to return to their cells to eat. This was sometimes due to staffing shortages, or simply because of an absence of dining facilities in communal areas. Some of these prisoners were being accommodated with another prisoner in a cell designed to hold one. This meant eating in cramped conditions, near often inadequately screened toilets. One prisoner commented:
- 'I feel no one should be forced to eat their food a couple of feet away from their toilet. Some sit on their toilet as a seat to eat. This is degrading and totally unhygienic.'*
- I.45** In other establishments, such as HMP Pentonville (2015), HMYOI Brinsford (2015) and HMP Wandsworth (2015), most prisoners were served lunch at their doors, reducing opportunities for interaction. At recently inspected YOIs, including HMYOI Brinsford (2015), Glen Parva (2014), Ayelsbury (2015) and Deerbolt (2015), young men were almost always required to eat their meals in their cells. Not allowing prisoners to eat out communally is a missed opportunity to encourage building of healthy prisoner-prisoner and prisoner-staff relationships. It also deprives prisoners of normal opportunities to interact socially at meal times.
- I.46** At many open prisons and several women's prisons, prisoners were allowed to eat out communally in a supervised dining room. For example, prisoners ate in large dining halls at open prisons HMP Hatfield (2016), HMP Spring Hill (2014), HMP North Sea Camp (2014) and HMP Kirklevington Grange (2015). At the latter establishment, prisoners used ceramic plates and metal cutlery instead of paper and plastic. However, at HMP Hewell (2014) we found that while in theory, prisoners could eat communally on dining tables on each wing, in reality space was severely limited. The dining room on the open site was too small to accommodate all prisoners, and only about a quarter could eat there at the same time.
- I.47** PSO 4800, which sets out the regime and conditions that should be provided for women prisoners, recommends that 'women prisoners, apart from those segregated, have the chance to dine communally.' Inspections have found that this standard is generally met. Inspectors described the dining room at HMP and YOI Askham Grange (2014) as 'pleasant', and at HMP Eastwood Park (2014), women in what were termed the category C units, could

eat outdoors. At HMP Foston Hall (2015), however, there was not enough dining space on the remand wing for all women to be seated at once.

- I.48** Some establishments provided bread, toasters, microwaves and kettles for prisoners to freely use on the wings. However, at a number of establishments prisoners did not have kettles in their cells to make hot drinks during lock-up. At HMP Peterborough (men, 2015), prisoners were only given a small flask to last them up to 16 hours overnight, and water in these flasks did not stay hot. At HMP Lowdham Grange (2015), microwaves on each wing meant that prisoners could prepare some of their own food, and they could also buy toasters for their cells, with bread provided daily.
- I.49** In high security establishments and units for longer-term prisoners, self-catering facilities provides variety and normality in a fundamentally unnatural environment. Examples of this were seen at HMP Full Sutton and Long Lartin.

HMP Full Sutton (2016)

A total of 140 prisoners catered for themselves in the popular 'opt-out' scheme. They were provided with food to the value of £10 to cook every week, and the cooking facilities on the wings were clean and well maintained. The list of items available changed on a two-week cycle.

HMP Long Lartin (2014)

Prisoners could cook their own food in small kitchens on the residential units and dine out of their cells informally on wing landings. Although some wing kitchens in this establishment were dirty and some of the equipment was poorly maintained, they were very popular with prisoners and we observed that they helped to normalise the prison environment.

- I.50** In contrast, at HMP Wakefield (2014), wing kitchens were small and had very limited cooking and refrigeration facilities, and no freezers. Prisoners valued the opportunity to cater for themselves, but the limited facilities meant this opportunity was not fully realised. The limited facilities at this establishment also caused tensions when prisoners cooked foods like pork, to which some prisoners had religious objections.
- I.51** We also welcome self-catering arrangements in low security establishments, such as open prisons, as they provide prisoners with a sense of autonomy and opportunity to build self-esteem, as well as a chance to develop their cooking skills. This can help prisoners prepare for self-sufficiency and reintegration into the community upon release. However, self-catering facilities at recently inspected open prisons were generally poor, making this a missed opportunity. For example, at HMP and YOI Hatfield (2016), prisoners were unable to cook for themselves on any of the units. At HMP Spring Hill (2014), 'self-catering facilities were limited to a water heater and microwave in each hut'. At HMP and YOI Hollesley Bay (2015) the self-catering facilities were inadequate with most wings having only one microwave, again causing tension between different groups of prisoners.

Conclusions and recommendations

- I.52** Food is very important to prisoners in a number of ways, providing not only nutrition and sustenance, but also opportunities for interaction with others and something to look forward to during what can be a mundane and difficult day. Although many establishments are making commendable efforts with the resources available, too often the quantity and quality of the food provided is insufficient, and the conditions in which it is served and eaten undermine respect for prisoners' dignity. This does little to improve what for many prisoners, is a history of an unhealthy lifestyle. It also potentially jeopardises prisoner and staff safety.
- I.53** Food budgets are very low, and we have consistently found that this is a major barrier to improving food in prisons. However, we believe that within current budget constraints more can still be done to provide variety, improve food hygiene, and prevent bullying and contamination.

Recommendations

To NOMS

- I.54** Minimal specific nutritional values and the conditions under which food is eaten should be set out by NOMS in a binding PSI regulation, based on advice from the relevant professional bodies.
- I.55** NOMS should ensure that new prisons are configured in a way to ensure prisoners can eat out of their cells communally, and ensure that governors fully utilise opportunities for prisoners to do so.
- I.56** NOMS should ensure that governors place greater emphasis on providing opportunities for self-catering, particularly for long-term prisoners.
- I.57** NOMS should ensure that governors arrange meal times to reflect what is considered the norm in the community.

Acknowledgements

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