

# HMP Peterborough (women)

Prison education interim visit report

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**Visit dates:** 09-10 March 2021

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## Interim visit

### Ofsted context and focus of visit

On 17 March 2020, all Ofsted routine inspections were suspended due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. As part of our phased return to routine inspections, we are carrying out interim visits to prisons and Young Offender Institutions (YOIs). The visit was conducted by Ofsted alongside HMI Prisons. The visit was conducted fully remotely.

Interim visits aim to help prisoners, employers and government understand how establishments are meeting the education and skills needs of prisoners during this period, including prisoners with special educational needs and disabilities. The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below.

### **What actions are leaders taking to ensure that they provide an appropriate curriculum that responds to the reasonable needs of prisoners and stakeholders and adapts to changed circumstances?**

Leaders acknowledged that the education offer had been too limited during the pandemic. They prioritised the delivery of English, mathematics, English as a second language (ESOL) and art programmes through in cell learning. Leaders reported high numbers of women achieving these and other qualifications, such as health and safety and food hygiene. The curriculum offer had been further affected by staff absences.

Leaders ensured that the allocations process for education, skills and work activities worked adequately. Leaders placed greater emphasis on women's sentence length and release dates in allocating activities. As a result, leaders acknowledged that women on shorter sentences or recall were less likely to be allocated to activity spaces.

Fewer women were engaged in activities than prior to the pandemic. Staff provided activity packs for all prisoners and additional activities for women who requested them. For example a small number of women requested business studies work, and instructors set some women in-cell sewing crafts to complete. Leaders acknowledged that quality assurance was too informal during the lockdown and they did not monitor participation effectively. They did not know which women were not engaging in learning activities.

Leaders had comprehensive plans in place for re-opening education, skills and work safely. They had carefully considered how to maximise the number of women who would be able to access both face to face and in-cell learning. Part of the leaders' preparation for a return to classroom teaching was ensuring that teaching staff undertook additional training on classroom management.

Leaders worked with external employers and charities to plan the post-pandemic curriculum offer. They recognised the impact of the reduction in employment opportunities in the hospitality sector. They had plans to introduce horticulture and rail engineering qualifications to respond to workforce shortages national employers had identified. They had already increased the number of cleaning roles and associated qualifications, in response to employment opportunities relating to infection control.

The small number of women that inspectors spoke with were positive about the learning and work opportunities they had accessed during the pandemic. They were highly motivated to improve their English and mathematics skills. Women felt effectively supported to make progress and achieve qualifications. They recognised how their learning and work linked to their future employment goals. Women stated that education staff genuinely cared about their wellbeing and helped them cope with the effects on their mental health of the pandemic.

**What steps are leaders, managers and staff taking to ensure that the approaches used for building knowledge and skills are appropriate to meet the reasonable needs of prisoners?**

Teaching staff had not received sufficient training to develop effective remote teaching skills. Teachers found teaching through cell doors a challenge. Women on ESOL programmes were particularly affected by the delivery model. As a result, these women did not make sufficiently rapid progress in improving their communication skills.

Teachers visited accommodation blocks and provided useful activity packs to women throughout the pandemic. However, teachers did not effectively reinforce or check the learning that women had undertaken. Teachers made insufficient use of the available technology, such as in-cell telephony, to support women to learn.

Staff acknowledged that support for learners with special educational needs (SEN) was not effective. Leaders recognised the need to coordinate the overall support for learners across the establishment. Staff and peer mentors provided additional, often informal, support to women identified with SEN. One member of staff in the education team had experience of working with SEN learners but no other training had been provided for teachers.

Managers ensured that women continued to develop useful vocational skills in key areas such as cleaning and catering. Instructors ensured that new workers to these areas completed work that closely reflected the curriculum content. They hope that when formal training recommences women can make swift progress towards an accredited qualification.

Learners produced work of an appropriate standard. The work produced in art was of a high standard. However, managers recognised that the amount and quality of

the feedback that women received in their written work needed improving. Too often, feedback did not help women to develop their skills and knowledge further. In their assessments, teachers confirmed the completion of tasks, rather than the skills and knowledge women had demonstrated. As a result, learners did not know what progress they were making, or how to make improvements.

Teachers worked effectively in response to changed working arrangements brought about by the pandemic. For example, the staff and prisoners from the small Bistro serving prison staff moved to the very challenging and busy environment of the industrial kitchen. They provided food for the whole establishment due to a Covid-19 outbreak on the adjoining male prison site. Education staff provided administrative support to the vaccine roll out in the prison.

### **Next steps**

Leaders and managers should ensure that the education offer during lockdown is broadened so that women have increased opportunities to learn new skills and gain new knowledge ahead of the full re-opening of the regime. The offer should be informed by a training needs analysis of the prison population to establish fully their needs in relation to education, skills and work.

Leaders and managers should formally monitor the quality of in-cell learning. They should work with staff to improve their skills in remote teaching and in providing developmental feedback to learners.

Leaders and managers should monitor how well women engage in the activities available to them to assure themselves that women not allocated to education, skills and work activities are occupied and meaningfully engaged during their time in cells.

Leaders and managers should ensure that support for prisoners with special educational needs is appropriate, effectively coordinated and provided in a timely manner.

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