

Scottish Prison Service

Correctional opportunities for prisoners

Key messages / Prepared for the Auditor General for Scotland

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Key messages

Introduction

The Scottish Prison Service (SPS) oversees 16 prison establishments ranging in size from HMP Barlinnie, with over 800 places, to HMP Inverness, with 100 places. The average daily prison population was more than 6,600 in 2003-04.

Re-offending by ex-prisoners is a major problem. Ex-prisoners are responsible for one-in-five of all crimes, and 47% of prisoners return to prison within two years.

High proportions of prisoners are poorly educated, have limited work experience, have drug or alcohol problems, have physical or mental health problems, and lack family support. Correctional opportunities can be effective in improving basic skills and reducing re-offending.

This report looks at the correctional opportunities which SPS provides to reduce the risk of re-offending by improving prisoners' skills, addressing their offending behaviour, tackling addictions and preparing prisoners for release ([Exhibit 1](#)). These opportunities offer the twin benefits of helping to maintain order in prisons and reducing the risk of re-offending.

Main findings

1 SPS objectives and reported performance

SPS has demonstrated a commitment to providing effective correctional services in prisons, and has developed an approach to meet the needs of prisoners. This commitment needs to be reflected in the objectives set by the Scottish Executive Justice Department (SEJD).

The 2003-04 SPS business plan contains key objectives for correctional opportunities (including learning opportunities and programmes to address sex offending and violent behaviour) but there are no targets or standards relating to inputs, outputs or outcomes.

However, ministers have set seven key performance indicators, two of which relate to correctional opportunities (numbers of prisoners completing offending behaviour programmes and approved activities, and the number of prisoner learning hours delivered). SPS has consistently exceeded these targets.

During the 1990s the SPS emphasis was on developing correctional opportunities for long-term prisoners (sentenced to four or more years). In 2002, SPS introduced an 'Inclusion' policy reflecting the needs of short-term prisoners. The Inclusion objectives cover the full range of correctional opportunities provided by SPS (including working with community partners, helping prisoners to integrate into society and a range of training and employment measures) and are based on evidence of what works in reducing re-offending.

From April 2004 performance contracts were introduced in all SPS-run prisons. A set of performance indicators was introduced to measure needs assessments and the provision of correctional opportunities.

The contract to provide education in SPS-managed prisons is due for renewal from April 2005. The new contract is expected to specify greater links between education and vocational skills training (in line with the Inclusion policy), and to include outcome measures to monitor the effectiveness of the education opportunities provided.

The opportunities provided to prisoners

2 SPS provides a wide range of correctional opportunities, but there are significant variations between establishments.

In 2003-04 over 2,100 prisoners completed offending behaviour programmes and approved activities, and around 430,000 prisoner learning hours were delivered across all 16 prisons. However, there were significant variations in the levels of activity in individual establishments ([Exhibits 2-4](#), [pages 3 and 4](#)).

These variations may reflect the focus until now on long-term prisoners, together with constraints in resources at individual establishments. A more consistent approach is being addressed through the 'Core Plus' initiative, introduced in April 2004, to provide a clear statement of all care and rehabilitation services available to different categories of prisoner, based on sentence length.

Prisons are inconsistent in the way they plan and manage the opportunities offered to individual prisoners. Our examination of 150 short-term prisoners' files showed that completion of the forms was variable, and we were unable to assess whether opportunities appropriate for short-term prisoners were being delivered.

Sentence planning systems worked best in prisons with staff dedicated to this purpose.

Exhibit 1

SPS correctional opportunities for prisoners and estimated costs for 2003-04



Link/Throughcare services (£5.2 million)

Scotland's prisons provide a number of services (such as advice on accommodation, employment, benefits) to assist prisoners' reintegration into the community. Each prison has established (or will establish) a 'Links Centre' to coordinate the delivery of these services. A number of these services involve external organisations.



Employment opportunities (£13.7 million)

Scotland's prisons have a number of industrial-type workshops which allow prisoners to work and earn wages, and to develop work habits and values necessary to find sustained employment after release (£11.5 million). Prisons also offer a range of work-based (vocational) training opportunities which allow prisoners to develop new skills and gain qualifications (£2.2 million).



Addiction treatments (£4.4 million)

On admission to Scotland's prisons, a high proportion of offenders are assessed as having addiction problems. SPS offers a range of treatments and programmes to tackle (or at least manage) prisoners' addiction to drugs and/or alcohol. Access to these treatments is based on assessed need, devised and agreed with individual prisoners.



Education (learning) opportunities (£3.6 million)

Education provision within Scotland's prisons largely focuses on 'basic skills' (reading, writing, numeracy, IT awareness) and 'core skills' (communication, problem solving, working with others). These opportunities may lead to SQA qualifications, and may include access to further and higher education where appropriate.



Offending behaviour programmes (£2.2 million)

SPS has a range of structured programmes (accredited by an expert panel) designed to address prisoners' offending behaviour and subsequently reduce re-offending. Due to the length of these programmes (which may last up to a year), access is limited mainly to long-term prisoners (sentences of at least four years).

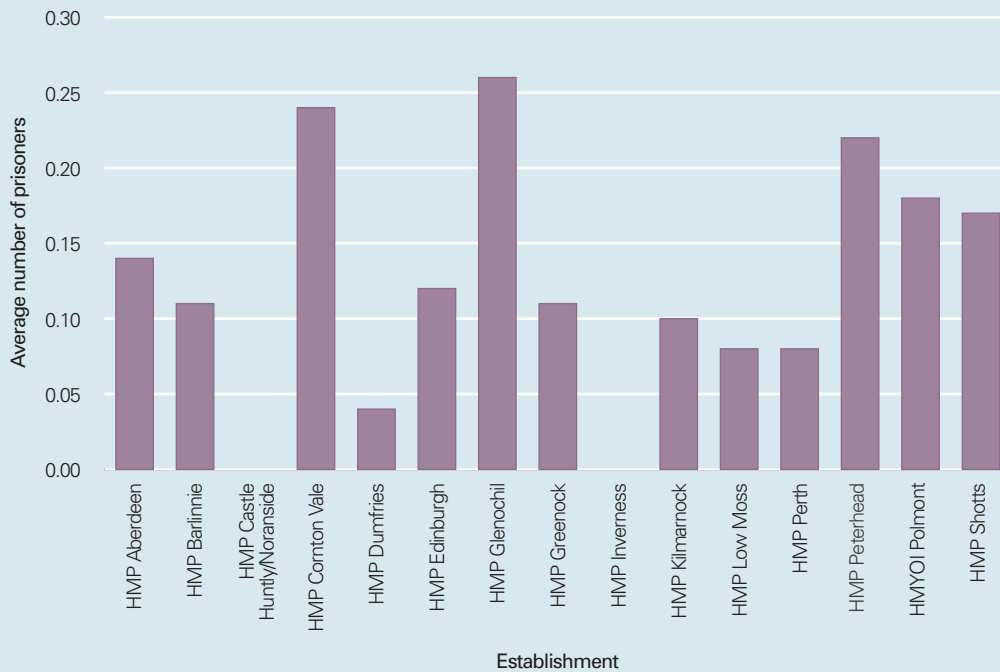


Approved activities (£0.9 million)

Approved activities are a range of structured interventions provided by prisons to help address the identified criminogenic and social needs of prisoners. They offer a wider range of opportunities than the accredited programmes and are suitable for a broader range of prisoners, including those serving short-term sentences and remand prisoners.

Exhibit 2

Variation in prisoners completing offending behaviour programmes per average prison place



Source: Scottish Prison Service

Costs of correctional opportunities

3 SPS estimates that it spent around £30 million on correctional opportunities in 2003-04, some 12% of the full cost of prison operations.

Of the total cost of operating SPS in 2003-04 (£260 million), the Rehabilitation and Care budget was around £50 million. This budget covers centrally-held contracts for external service providers, but the majority is spent by prisons as part of their devolved budgets. The budget covers correctional opportunities (programmes, approved activities, education, employment opportunities, addiction treatments) and a range of other services such as healthcare, catering, social work, physical education and chaplaincy. The budget is not, however, broken down to specific services. SPS estimated the cost of delivering correctional opportunities to be around £30 million in 2003-04.

The cost of correctional work varies between prisons, but the absence of robust local records of costs and activity meant that it was not possible to undertake a complete benchmarking exercise. The absence of information also makes it difficult to identify trends over time.

Effectiveness

4 SPS plans to evaluate correctional opportunities further and to improve working with other organisations to provide evidence that the correctional opportunities it provides are based on well-researched principles

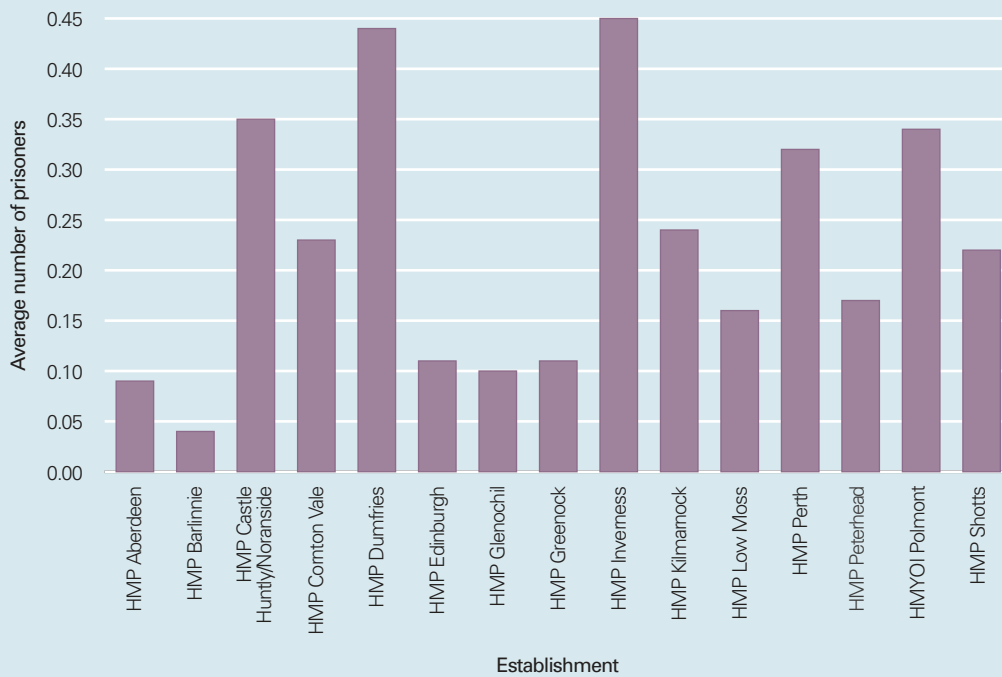
SPS has carried out little systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of its correctional programmes. Its research indicates that prisoners completing offending behaviour programmes showed improvements in certain skills and shifts in attitudes that are

linked to offending behaviour. To date, however, there has been no evaluation of the effectiveness of programmes in reducing re-offending. The SPS evaluation process for the offending behaviour programmes is intended to provide a robust base upon which evaluations for other correctional opportunities can be built, but there are no specific plans or timescales for the development of these evaluations.

There is currently no systematic way of tracking prisoners' progress after release, although SPS has recently introduced several initiatives to improve the way it works with other organisations, including formal partnerships and information sharing.

Exhibit 3

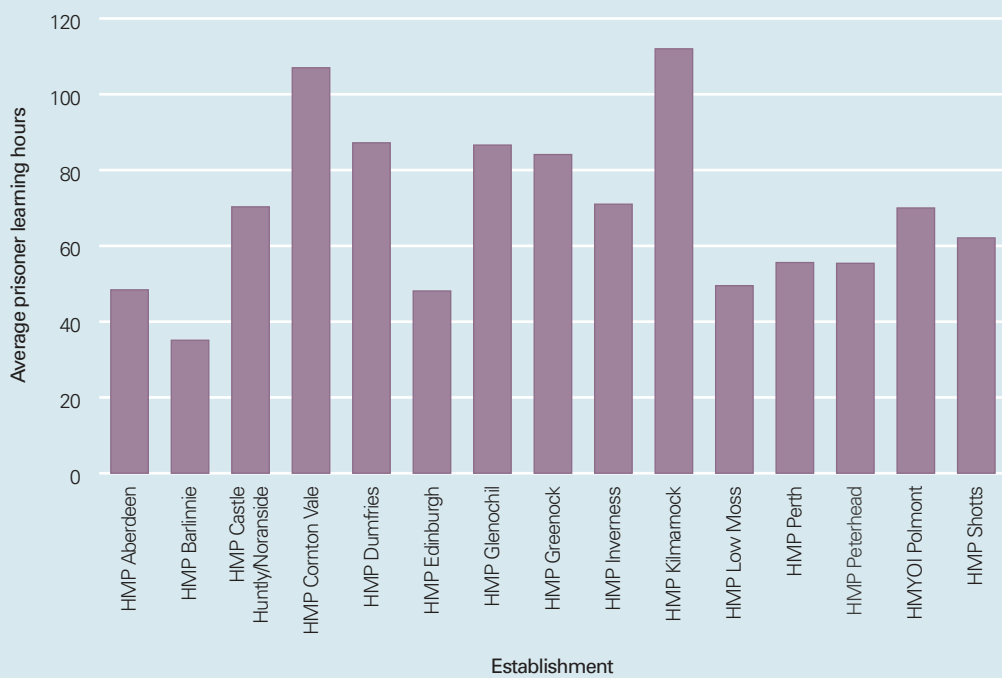
Variation in prisoners completing approved activities per average prison place



Source: Scottish Prison Service

Exhibit 4

Variation in prisoner learning hours per average prison place



Source: Scottish Prison Service

Key recommendations

On objectives and reported performance

Scottish Executive

- To improve the range of objectives and targets for reducing re-offending to provide a clearer link to the correctional opportunities provided by SPS.

SPS should:

- consider developing better budgeting information for services such as correctional opportunities to strengthen the management of financial resources
- use information being developed through recent initiatives to:
 - monitor the timescale for implementing the Inclusion policies
 - further develop performance information in performance contracts to provide a clear view of each prison's contribution to the correctional agenda
 - continue to develop international benchmarking as a means of monitoring progress towards the 'Vision for Correctional Excellence'.

On opportunities provided in prison

SPS should:

- investigate further the variation in correctional opportunities currently available with a view to reviewing resource allocation
- monitor the implementation of Core Plus to ensure benefits are achieved across all relevant prison establishments
- ensure that correctional opportunities are best targeted towards reducing the risk of individual prisoners re-offending
- ensure systems in place for assessing prisoners' needs are applied consistently
- develop appropriate measures for benchmarking performance
- use information being developed under the recently-introduced IT system (PR2) to: monitor the extent to which identified needs are met; provide robust information supporting assessments of aggregated need; and improve information sharing with external organisations.

On effectiveness

SPS should:

- develop a plan with specific objectives and timescales to extend its evaluation process to all prison-based correctional opportunities
- where possible, use reconviction data to assess the effectiveness of its correctional opportunities on subsequent re-offending
- continue to establish links with relevant external organisations to promote the effectiveness of the opportunities provided in custody
- monitor the effectiveness of the revised sentence planning system in achieving the SPS objective to share prisoners' information with external organisations.

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