



Summary of the Inspection on Education and Work Training April - June 2022

This booklet tells you about an inspection of education and work training carried out in 2022 by the Office of the Inspector of Prisons (OIP). It was done in partnership with the Department of Education (DE) Inspectorate.

The booklet contains information on:



Who we are



The inspection findings



**Our recommendations to the Irish Prison Service
and their response**



Our next steps



How to contact us

1. Background

Who is the Office of the Inspector of Prisons (OIP)?

The OIP is an independent prison oversight body. This means we visit prisons to check that they follow Irish law and uphold international human rights standards. We share the findings of our inspections and investigations with people in prison, the Minister for Justice, the Irish Prison Service and the public.

Who is the Department of Education (DE) Inspectorate?

The Department of Education (DE) Inspectorate is part of the Department of Education. Inspectors look at the quality and delivery of education in schools and education centres across Ireland.

What was the aim of this inspection?

From April to June 2022, the OIP and the DE Inspectorate worked together to inspect education and work training across three prisons in Dublin.

The OIP looked at:

- Access to work training
- Work training certification
- Planning of future work training opportunities

The DE Inspectorate looked at:

- Teaching and learning in the prison schools
- Leadership and management in the prison schools

2. Your rights

What do the Prison Rules say about education and work training?

Access to education and work training in prison is important to prepare people for their release. 'Structured activity' is a term used to describe work training, education, and rehabilitation programmes.

Rule 27 of the Prison Rules sets out the requirement for structured activity in the prison. Under Rule 27, people in prison should receive at least 25 hours of structured activity over 5 days each week. Rule 111 says training opportunities should be designed to help people in prison prepare for life after release and improve their chances of employment.

3. OIP findings about work training in prisons

Our inspection found some **positive** things about work training in the three prisons.

Structured activities help

Prisoners and staff said that structured activity helped prisoners to cope with their sentence and to gain new skills. Structured activity, such as workshops and work in the prison, was very important to prisoners and staff.

Good examples of teamwork

We found good examples of teamwork between work training and the prison schools, and also with the wider community. This helps to support and develop prisoners' skills. For example, there was sports training available, and a barista course to learn about coffee-making techniques using specialist equipment.

Positive examples of community involvement

There were examples of community involvement in the prisons where companies were involved in training prisoners and providing them with certification. One prison held an open day with employers who shared opportunities for work available after release.

We also found some **areas of improvement** around work training in the prisons.

Key issues on work training

Access	In two of the three prisons we visited, prisoners did not receive the minimum of 25 hours of structured activity each week, as set out in the Prison Rules. Opportunities for prisoners on protection to take part in activities were particularly limited.
Certification	In all three prisons, there was little opportunity for prisoners to get certificates for their work training activities. Certification is important because it helps prisoners prepare for their release and future employment.
Payment	Prisoners received a small wage when they took part in work, but there was no similar payment for taking part in education.
Planning	There was no long-term plan across all prisons to ensure the activities offered to prisoners would help them gain employment when released from prison.
Prisoners' voice	There was no way for prisoners to suggest the type of work training they would like to have offered in the prison.

4. DE Inspectorate findings about education in prisons

The inspection found some **positive** things about education in the three prisons:

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching in the prison schools was very good. The learning programmes mostly met the needs of students. There was a good selection of educational courses available, and students had a say in choosing classes that suited them and their needs.

School helped well-being

Students said that the school was an important activity. It was good for their well-being and gave them a sense of belonging. Students and teachers shared a strong level of respect for each other.

Learning was enjoyable

Students enjoyed their learning and were successful in the classes visited by the DE inspectors. They really wanted to get to school and were grateful for the work of their teachers. They were lively in class and freely expressed their views on the topics being studied.

The DE Inspectorate also found **some areas of improvement** around education in prisons needed:

Key issues on education

Access	In two of the prisons, there were challenges for students to be able to get to the school. The schools were often closed, started late or finished early. Prisoners on protection had more difficulty getting access to the school.
Literacy	Students who needed help with reading were badly impacted by not being able to access their teachers regularly.
Technology	Better use could be made of technology to support learning in schools, and for students in their cells.
Library access	Access to the library was not the same in all prisons. It was difficult for prisoners to access the library in two of the prisons.

5. Recommendations

After the inspection, we prepared a report and submitted it to the Minister for Justice in December 2022. This report outlined our recommendations for the Irish Prison Service (IPS) on how to improve work training and education in prisons. Below are some of the recommendations we made, and the response from the IPS.

Recommendation	IPS / Prison Response
More access to technology should be provided for students to support them to learn in their cells.	The IPS accepted this recommendation. They will offer in-cell learning in Dublin prisons. The IPS will also develop a policy on technology that can be used in schools.
All prisoners, in particular prisoners on protection and young prisoners, should receive at least 25 hours structured activity over 5 days each week.	This recommendation was partially accepted by two prisons. One prison said a review would be carried out to try and improve access to structured activity. The other prison said additional staffing and funding would be needed to achieve the 25 hours a week of structured activity.
The IPS should review the prisoner gratuity (weekly payment) policy and the amount paid to prisoners. Prisoners who work in the prison should not be paid more than students in the school.	The IPS accepted this recommendation. The Irish Prison Service has agreed to review and update this policy.
The IPS should remove prison names from the certificates earned by people in prison.	The IPS accepted this recommendation. Certificates will no longer include the name of the prison.
The prisons should find more opportunities for prisoners to receive work training certification.	The IPS accepted this recommendation. The IPS is working to ensure that people in prison receive certification in work training areas. Certification will be in line with labour market needs. The aim is to improve employment opportunities when a prisoner is released.

6. Next steps

The Minister for Justice published our report and it is available on www.oip.ie.

- The OIP and DE Inspectorate will continue to work together to look at work training and education across all the prisons in Ireland.
- The OIP will monitor recommendations made to the Irish Prison Service and will publish their progress on its website.
- In June 2023, the Department of Further and Higher Education and the Department of Justice set up a Prison Education Task Force. The goal of this Task Force is to improve access to education in prisons, and to help prisoners receive a qualification that will help them when they are released.

Thank you for taking the time to speak with us and for sharing information with us when we are visiting the prison. We look forward to speaking with you during our next prison inspection.

Contact us

Under Rule 44 of the Prison Rules, you can write to the Office of the Inspector of Prisons about any matter you want to raise, in the strictest of confidence.

This means that, by law, the Irish Prison Service:

- should not read any letters you send to us, and
- must send your unopened letter to us without delay.

This is the address for the Office of the Inspector of Prisons:

Office of the Inspector of Prisons

Pembroke Hall Offices

38-39 Fitzwilliam Square West

Dublin 2

D02 NX53

We will write back to you in a sealed envelope. On the envelope, we will write 'Rule 44', and we ask the Governor to make sure you get the letter delivered to you unopened. The law allows the Governor to open a Rule 44 letter, **but**, you must be with them when they do this. A letter should only be opened to check that it has come from the Office of the Inspector of Prisons.

To learn more about us, you can visit our website: www.oip.ie



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education