

PLA Conference 2022

Ofsted: Looking back at 2021, preparing for 2022

Maria Navarro, HMI FES Specialist Adviser, provided an update on Ofsted's work relating to education in prisons. Her presentation focused on the joint (with HMIP) prison education review and the recent revisions to the inspection handbook.

On the prison education review, Maria said that in 2020 Ofsted had become very concerned about the impact of Covid-19 on prison education and learner outcomes. In 2021, Ofsted and HMIP agreed to jointly carry out a focused programme of work. This was launched with a blog and then involved an analysis of prison monitoring visits. These visits had taken into account amended expectations of prison regimes due to the restrictions placed on prisons by the government, but progress was still very poor and there was concern that expectations were being lowered. People in prison were not being provided with high-quality IAG and there was insufficient support for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A blog on provision for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is due soon and will inform future inspection practice.

There was also a review of reading, which was also very concerning. It concluded that reading education is not given sufficient priority and that at present prison education too often does not support prisoners to improve their reading. Reading is not part of the core education offer, identification of reading needs is inappropriate, and early reading provision relies on voluntary organisations.

Maria also discussed updates to the 'Handbook for the inspection of education, skills and work activities in prisons and young offender institutions' (available [here](#)). Maria highlighted the removal of curriculum transitional clauses – Ofsted will no longer be making allowances for Covid restrictions. There will also be a greater focus on standalone activities – Ofsted will have their own programme and be doing more inspection work without HMIP. They will go where education and training has been found to be poor before. As a result of the review of reading – and its recommendations – Ofsted will also be focusing on the quality of reading education and support for those who are learning to read during its inspections. They will do this whether or not it is commissioned as part of the core education offer.

Maria also discussed the Education Select Committee' recommendations. The recommendations to Ofsted were:

- Prisons to have clear and meaningful KPIs related to education, training and employment which are monitored by Ofsted. Ofsted will do this but will always focus more on the learner than on data.
- Ofsted to be able to take regulatory action against individual prisons, including, where necessary, changes to the prison leadership. Ofsted did not think it was appropriate to have powers to remove governors – they are an inspectorate, not a regulator.
- Ofsted to inspect how prisons engage with civil society. Ofsted did not really see this as part of their role.
- Ofsted to give a grade for the education provider within the prison. Ofsted do not think it is helpful to separate the prison from the education provider, so did not accept this recommendation. But, they will name the provider and include a paragraph in their report on the contribution of the main provider to the quality of education provision, covering intent, implementation and impact. This will not use the language of Ofsted's grade judgements.

In Q&A, Maria was asked about teaching English as a foreign language and confirmed that this is very important, particularly given the make up of the prison population. She was also asked whether the handbook is available to people in prison – she said that it is on Ofsted's website but recognised that may not be accessible within prisons. Attendees discussed whether it should be made more readily available to people in prison, possibly in libraries, and also whether more should be done to publicise results and what changes are made as a result.