



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

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# Better learning, better chances: prison learning and skills provision

Our vision for prison learning and skills focusing on employability on release.

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# Contents

**Foreword**

**Executive Summary**

**The role of the Welsh Government**

**Our vision**

**Monitoring**

**Learning provision of children in custody**

**Our delivery partners: roles and responsibilities**

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# Foreword

People in the justice system are often some of the most disadvantaged in society and I want to ensure that our learning and skills provision in prisons is inclusive and supportive allowing those in the secure estate in Wales to build the confidence they need to find and retain employment or continue with their learning on release.

Reoffending by those released from **custody costs society around £15 billion per year**. The **Wales Reducing Reoffending Plan 2022 to 2025** states prison leavers who get a job are up to nine percentage points less likely to reoffend, helping them gain independence and contribute to the wider society.

By investing in learning and skills provision in prisons we can increase an individual's opportunities of finding sustainable employment on release, aiding safer communities, reducing the number of future victims of crime and reducing the cost burden associated with reoffending.

An emphasis on learning and skills with a view to employability will be the key focus of this policy. However, we also recognise that “out of the gate support” is also critical to ensure that the skills and qualifications achieved in prison successfully leads to employment on release. This is why we will continue to work towards strengthening our employability offer to be more inclusive and responsive to people in prison and once they are released, preparing them for the continuously changing labour market.

The Welsh Government has worked closely with partners including His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) Wales, prison learners and prison leavers, education providers and third sector organisations to co-create this prison learning and skills policy. It sets out our expectations for the delivery of learning and skills support in the adult secure estate in Wales.

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# Executive Summary

Those who find work on release are less likely to re-offend than those who do not.

The learning environment in prisons should help build the necessary skills to find employment in a changing world. It should also enhance social and life skills and improve the well-being and resilience of prisoners during their sentences and once released.

By ensuring the curriculum and vocational courses on offer in prisons reflect the needs in the labour market in Wales we will provide the skills employers require, improving the employability opportunities of individuals being released and supporting them to become assets to their communities.

## The picture from April 2023 to March 2024

- 6 prisons in Wales with a 5,590 place operational capacity
- Over a third of people in prison took up at least one learning opportunity
- 14,243 vocational courses and 2,591 non-vocational courses
- Working with HMPPS on a joint prisoner education target for April 2024
- Working Wales supported 949 prisoners through 1463 interactions
- Achieved approximately 25% employment 6 weeks post release

## Learner feedback

“ See when you’re released you’ve got loads of hurdles in front of you, so it’s all well and good having qualifications, but you need some solid experience behind you, even if it’s in prison. You have to show them, ‘I can do the job and I did it in prison’. Then you’re looking for them to give

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you a second chance. That's all it is. ”

## The role of the Welsh Government

The criminal justice system is currently the responsibility of the UK Government, however, some of the support services required to manage offenders, ex-offenders and promote rehabilitation are devolved in Wales. Learning and skills provision and libraries in Welsh prisons has been devolved to the Welsh Government since 2009.

Welsh Government provides funding to HMPPS to deliver prison learning and skills provision within the context of Welsh priorities. The Welsh Government has a key role in shaping the direction of the learning and skills provision within the secure estate in Wales.

## Our vision

Our overall vision is to deliver a safe and inclusive learning environment in prisons that engages and inspires individuals, helping them to become job ready and gain and retain sustainable employment.

We have co-designed our approach with stakeholders, including people in prison, prison staff, and members of the public. This has enabled us to gain a clearer understanding of the barriers facing learners and the employability and skills provision needed to support them. Together, we have developed the following aims for the sector:

- Flexible and agile: supporting individuals to take up learning
- Relevant and responsive: meeting employer's workforce needs

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- High quality provision and culture of continuous improvement: ensuring prison structures support the delivery of learning and skills provision
- Embedded and inclusive: ensuring learners can access learning and skills provision in prison and through the gates

## Feedback from our learner focus group

“ The vision outlines the needs of prisoners and the benefits of (providing) an educational system. ”

## Aim 1. Flexible and agile: supporting individuals to take up learning

### Learner feedback

Learners told us they often didn't engage in learning or skills provision because they didn't feel it met their specific needs or they did not understand how it would help them on release.

“ Needs to be much more open and responsive to people's needs and aspirations. ”

“ Need proper support for studies, better transfer of studies from prison to prison. ”

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## **Welsh Government response**

Welsh Government will support learners by promoting an individualised approach to learning, which considers their individual starting points, aspirations and helps learners visualise their development pathway. Plans will focus on improving their employment prospects and/or accessing further learning and or skills provision on release.

## **What we will do**

### **Take a learner centred approach**

Take a learner centred approach where learning reflects individual needs and aspirations.

### **Ensure a meaningful personal learning plan (the plan) is in place for all individuals**

The plan will be a “live” document owned by the learner, recording in one place all the learning and development activities. The plan will be digital and transferrable with the learner if they move to another location whilst in custody, and accessible to teachers, tutors and any other partners involved in the learning and skills provision.

### **Support the use of peer mentors**

Peer mentors within prison are an influential and impactful resource. They act as champions of education on the wings, supporting learning within classrooms, working alongside other learners to develop learning plans and assisting in

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undertaking assessments. We will actively support peer mentors to develop the necessary skills by encouraging them to gain coaching and mentoring accredited qualifications which will in turn improve their employability outcomes.

### **Support learners with additional learning needs**

By ensuring all learners in prisons are assessed for any support necessary to assist learning. The information from these assessments will be used to provide the learner with relevant support and resources to enable them to effectively participate and engage in the classroom in prisons. Staff delivering education within prisons should have the requisite skills to manage those with identified needs and should have access to specialist support, information and advice if required.

## **Aim 2. Relevant and responsive: meeting employer's workforce needs**

### **Regional skills partnerships and employer feedback**

Regional skills partnerships (RSPs) and employers in different sectors have told us they are experiencing challenges recruiting into vacancies and are worried about skills shortages now and in the future.

“ Education gives you better qualifications, better jobs, and that. But only if you know what you're looking for and what you've learnt is relevant to the jobs out there. ”

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## **Welsh Government response**

Welsh Government will work with HMPPS to ensure the curriculum and vocational courses on offer in prisons reflects the needs in the labour market in Wales.

## **What we will do**

### **Understand labour market needs**

So that learning will be linked clearly and responsively to the jobs available. Our RSPs will provide information on the changing industry demands and requirements of the Welsh economy. Learning and skills provision will align to meet industry standards, including the delivery of core employment skills to improve learners' employability opportunities and support them to become assets to their communities now and in the future. Additionally, the learning and skills provision will be developed based upon local and regional need.

### **Support the establishment of employability hubs in every prison**

This will bring in different organisations and agencies under one roof with the joint purpose of helping prepare prison leavers for their release. The hubs will help learners to access a variety of services and support employment and career advice, housing advice, substance misuse support, DWP services, third sector organisations. Working with our offender learning employability stakeholder group, Welsh Government and HMPPS will lead on the development of a learning and employability pathway resource for all Welsh offenders outlining the support and services they can access, both in the prison and through the gate, so they can continue their learning and help them secure

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employment in their chosen sector.

### **Work with our partners and employers with the shared objective of maximising the recruitment of prison leavers and highlighting the social benefits of doing so**

We will undertake work to understand employers' concerns and use the information to inform the development of a toolkit for potential employers seeking to diversify their workforce by employing people who are under-represented in the work force and/or face many barriers to employment. As part of the Welsh Government's commitment to developing a culture of rehabilitation within the criminal justice system, we will continue to work closely with HMPPS Wales to encourage the use of release on temporary licence (ROTL) for training and employment opportunities.

### **Promote Welsh Government employability programmes**

To employers who have expressed an interest in employing learners on release, or who recognise the benefits of employing offenders to create an improved workforce pipeline.

## **Aim 3. High quality provision and culture of continuous improvement: ensuring prison structures support the delivery of learning and skills provision**

### **Learner feedback**

Learners have told us they want education and training to be given priority in the prison and be able to access a range of relevant education and skills, in a

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variety of ways, which will then help them towards changing their lives for the better on release.

“ Training is key to rehabilitation ”

“ You got boys, young boys coming in, got personal issues, mental health issues, combat PTSD, and stuff like that. And don't want to go to a classroom environment with everything going on and so we've been asking if we can get these people up to a standard. So what if boys don't want to go to a classroom environment? ”

## Welsh Government response

Welsh Government will work with HMPPS to support learners to access high quality, diverse and innovative lessons, taught by qualified and motivated professionals who are experts in their field and who have access to continuous professional development to ensure the latest technology, practices and theories are embedded within the learner's journey.

## What we will do

### Support a whole organisation approach

To learning and skills provision in prisons, working with HMPPS in Wales to ensure the necessary structures are in place to be at the heart of the prison regime. Heads of learning and skills will take a strategic overview whilst embedded within the prison's senior management team. They will be empowered to take the lead in coordinating the whole prison approach to identifying, supporting, and working with prisoners with their Learning and

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development needs.

### **Collaborate on an "Introduction to Prison Education" programme**

That can be rolled out across the prison network for all those working with prisoners, providing them with the underlying information and skills needed to support prison staff and ensure an effective service. Appropriate professional development opportunities should be provided to ensure that all staff in prisons have a clear understanding of the fundamental role they play to embed learning in every interaction with prisoners.

### **Encourage collaboration and ensure best practice is shared**

The collaborative structure of the prison service in Wales already exists but we intend to establish a best practice network for learning and skills leads and all prison teachers in Wales to learn from their peers and share resources. These networks should engage with colleagues from our further education (FE) and higher education (HE) sectors to share curriculum expertise and explore the potential for secondment and development opportunities.

### **Promote a blended approach to learning**

The lessons learnt through the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted the importance of developing a blended approach to learning and the opportunities that a progressive approach to digitalisation of the prison estate can provide. We will support HMPPS in Wales to enhance the learner experience through increased technological capabilities.

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## Welsh language

Our language is part of what defines us as people and as a nation. We will provide the necessary conditions to facilitate an increased use of the Welsh language within the prison learning and skills provision. We will give prisoners serving their sentences in Wales, as well as staff, the opportunity to develop their Welsh language skills by providing Welsh language courses, as well as exploring informal opportunities to use Welsh, for example, holding Welsh conversation groups, Welsh “Listen and Relax” sessions in the library. We will work with partners, such as the National Centre for Learning Welsh, to increase formal and informal opportunities to learn and practice Welsh in prisons in Wales, and to adapt this provision for women serving sentences in English prisons.

## **Aim 4. Embedded and inclusive: ensuring learners can access education and employability programmes, in prison and through the gates**

### Learner feedback

We have been told that education, employability and skills support should be embedded across the whole of prison life and should continue once learners are released.

“ I’m glad that it was an option here (Working Wales) because I would have struggled to get the position I needed when I was released”. “I’m leaving prison with a job! I can’t thank the Adviser enough, they’ve been amazing. ”

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“ They're not being pushed in the class. They need incentives. Can we increase our payments for education? Because some girls that don't have money being sent in from outside, they have to work so they have money when they get out”. Former learner, Nelson Trust. ”

## Welsh Government response

Welsh Government will work to strengthen its education, employability and skills programmes and make them more responsive to learners in prison and learners being released.

## What we will do

### Help women offenders

For women in Wales who commit crimes and are placed in custody, interventions for learning and skills can be complex and currently secure estates are sited in England. We will develop further our collaborative partnership with UK Government to take forward a learning pathway for women aligning it with the [Women's Justice Blueprint for Wales](#). Focusing on employability, well-being and considering support via a trauma informed lens, supports the transition from custody back to Wales and gives women a better opportunity to develop in relation to employment and training.

### Make our employability programmes more accessible to learners

To learners by increasing awareness of the support available via Working Wales who, alongside DWP work coaches, will provide a connection to employability programmes and other support services.

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## **Make the young persons guarantee more accessible to young people in the secure estate**

To young people in the secure estate. The guarantee brings together a range of programmes and initiatives which have been designed to provide the right support at the right time for the diverse needs of young people across Wales. Through Working Wales, we will ensure everyone under the age of 25 gets the help they need to gain a place in education or training and help to get into work or become self-employed.

## **Tackle essential skills gaps**

Helping learners address their essential skills whilst in prison will lead to increased access to work opportunities or further learning on release. We are working to ensure that every prisoner in Wales undertakes an essential skills assessment which will be used to help learners develop and improve their skill levels. We will work with HMPPS Wales to continue to test and address the essential skills needs of prison learners and ensure results are used to inform learning plans when learners transition into the community or employment.

## **Encourage learner attendance and progression**

By supporting governors to explore innovative ways of recompensing education and training. For example, by introducing additional benefits such as further visits and extra leisure time, for those who demonstrate commitment and progression.

## **Support learner progression**

By working with HMPPS aim to further develop partnerships with further

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education, higher education, work based learning providers to increase enrolments in to mainstream provision. The Welsh Government will review the options around making more provision available including more access modules with the Open University so that learners can experience study at this level before committing to a self-funded degree course.

## **Support digital competencies of learners**

Digital competency is a fundamental prerequisite for securing employment, continuing studies, as well as engaging with and contributing to society. There is a risk that prisoners will fall further behind in a world that demands digital skills in education, training, employment, and personal life. Prison learners must, therefore, be given the opportunity to use and improve their digital skills in prison. So, we will continue to work with HMPPS to develop shared resources and working towards the provision of up-to-date ICT and digital systems in prison to ensure flexible access to learning.

## **Prison libraries**

Welsh Government is focused on enhancing access to libraries in prisons in Wales. The purpose of a prison library is to support prisoner resettlement, rehabilitation, and purposeful activity. A focus on improving literacy and other barriers to effective resettlement assists prisoners in making the transition from custody to community.

Having access to prison libraries becomes a vital part of prisoner environment, as it will support any learning aspect a prisoner may be pursuing as well as being a major factor to their rehabilitation journey. Alongside the learning benefits, a prison library also offers its users a sense of normalcy, giving them the opportunity to make their own choices and self-indulgences. We will work with the relevant Local Authorities and HMPPS to conduct a review of current

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provision and identify opportunities to enhance and develop provision.

## Case Study

ReAct+ funded training at HMP Swansea.

### Learner feedback

“ I am really enjoying this and never thought I'd have a chance to gain practical, accredited skills within a prison setting and really looking forward to progressing on further. ”

### Career Wales advisor said

“ I have been working in HMP Swansea for around 2 years. When the employment hub was launched in HMP Swansea, the prison employment lead and I were keen to engage the prisoners in as many upskilling opportunities as possible. The employment links were growing and from looking at the labour market we could see that construction was a growing sector. It made sense for the men to complete as much training as possible within HMP prior to being released and linking them up with potential employers/job opportunities. The aim would be to reduce the amount of time someone was not in education employment or training (NEET) on release from custody. Working Wales and Welsh Government worked together to bring the offer of ReAct+ funding to HMP Swansea. I engaged a training provider to deliver a training package in HMP Swansea that the men could complete. I also discussed this package with potential employers to ensure it would be worthwhile along with looking at job

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advertises. So far, we have put 3 men through a 5-package construction programme, with another 3 starting next week. The programme has been well received within HMP Swansea.

“ The feedback from the men who have completed the course is extremely positive and all of them have attended every session.

“ We are now looking to continue offering ReAct+ funding within HMP Swansea and are looking to explore alternative training plans. We are exploring forklift counterbalance and reach along with roofing courses which has been launched in other prisons across the UK.

“ Two of the men have got jobs to go to on release. Another has been transferred to HMP Parc so support is being continued and some are no longer in my area, but we are working with DWP to confirm employment status. ”

## Monitoring

The joint memorandum of understanding between Welsh Government and His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service will be supported through robust monitoring arrangements that will assess progress against the four aims, actions and outcomes contained within this policy.

To ensure that this policy is embedded within the delivery of learning and skills provision in prisons, the Welsh Government will work with HMPPS Wales to explore the options around ensuring there are individuals responsible for taking the lead in driving forward the four aims of this policy, namely:

- Flexible and agile
- Relevant and responsive

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- High quality provision with a culture of continuous improvement
- Embedded and inclusive

## Learning provision of children in custody

This policy is intended for the adult prison estate. However, some of the aims in the policy for offender learning will also be applicable to young people in youth custody.

Children and young people within the youth justice system in Wales are often from some of the most disadvantaged backgrounds, and many have complex needs including learning and mental health difficulties, and who are often themselves, victims of crime. Children and young people who are in custody will be supported in many ways throughout their sentence: some aspects of this support will be common across the secure estate; others will be specific to children and young people.

For children in custody, time spent in the secure estate should be viewed as a teachable opportunity in an environment designed to inspire them in that there can be a different way of living. Education, therefore, has a key role to play in the effective rehabilitation of children in the secure estate. The role of education as a key pillar of effective rehabilitation of children and young people complements the **Youth Justice Blueprint** and the **Framework to support positive change for those at risk of offending in Wales 2018 to 2023**. We also want children being educated in youth custody settings to benefit from wider Welsh policies and programmes such as additional learning needs reform and the Curriculum for Wales.

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# Our delivery partners: roles and responsibilities

## Welsh Government

The Welsh Government will provide strategic direction and appropriate funding to HMPPS Wales to support the delivery of learning and skills provision in the prisons in Wales and Parc Young Offender Institute (YOI). It is also responsible for providing oversight for offender learning in prisons and ensuring engagement of stakeholders through the Offender Learning and Employment Employability Stakeholder Group.

## Prisons in England

The Welsh Government will work closely with prisons in England who hold women in custody who will return to Wales once released, to ensure these women are provided with appropriate learning opportunities and employability information to support a successful resettlement in the communities in Wales.

## HMPPS Wales

HMPPS in Wales are responsible for the delivery of learning and skills provision in HMP's Cardiff, Swansea, Usk and Prescoed. They also manage the education and skills contracts for HMP Berwyn and HMP Parc, which are delivered by external providers.

The Probation Service is a statutory criminal justice service that supervises offenders released into the community, while protecting the public.

Working together and sharing best practice amongst the network in Wales is crucial to the continuous improvement of learning provision.

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## DWP

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) works within prisons delivering job coaching support. The Welsh Government will strengthen joint working with DWP and HMPPS to optimise national provision to meet the needs of priority groups. Improving early engagement and joint planning in Wales on design and deployment of interventions to optimise national provision for mutual benefit, and best meet the needs of priority and disadvantaged groups.

## Estyn

Estyn work alongside H.M. Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) to support joint inspections. Estyn is the education and training inspectorate for Wales. Its function is to provide an independent inspection and advice service on quality and standards in education and training provided in Wales. The same standards apply to prison education that exist to Further Education.

## Working Wales

The Working Wales service, delivered by Careers Wales, will provide comprehensive and impartial employability advice to offenders within the secure prison estate and working with probation services in the community. It will simplify access, tailor advice and interventions to meet the needs of individuals and join up available support to help people reduce and overcome barriers to getting into work.

They will be the referral point for prison learners who show commitment to developing their skills to access Welsh Government and other employability support programmes. Advisers will ensure sufficient support is in place in preparation for release from prison to ensure there is sufficient wrap-around

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careers and employability support provided to them through the Employability Hubs.

Employability Hubs are being developed on a multi-agency basis within each prison in Wales, and going forward Working Wales will integrate its delivery of careers and employability service within the secure estate.

## **Educational partners: HE/FE/ACL and work based learning providers**

Learning provision in prisons should be enhanced by engagement with universities and FE colleges and structured work-based learning opportunities. Links exist between institutions and prisons to develop learning and training provision within the prison as well as ensuring there are clear pathways, with appropriate mentoring and support, to continue education on release. This would enhance the offer for both learners inside prisons, and for learners who wish to continue their provision 'through the gate'.

## **Third sector delivery partners**

The Welsh Government values the work undertaken by our active third sector partners in enhancing the education and skills provision across the prison estate in Wales. Working with HMPPS in Wales we will see these relationships further developed to broaden the education provision within the prison estate. All learning undertaken through third sector organisations should be recorded appropriately on learning records and embedded within the education teams.

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