



## Irish Penal Reform Trust Submission to the Prison Education Taskforce

***19 December 2023***

### **Irish Penal Reform Trust**

Established in 1994, the Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT) is Ireland's principal independent non-governmental organisation working for systemic penal reform and change. Our vision is a just, humane Ireland where prison is used as a last resort. We advocate for a progressive criminal justice system that prioritises alternatives to prison, upholds human rights, and champions reintegration. We do this through conducting research, campaigning, and changing attitudes.

**Please note that this submission – in its full form or an abridged version – may be disseminated to other relevant stakeholders following its submission to the Taskforce.**

**Address:** Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT)

MACRO, 1 Green Street

Dublin 7, IRELAND

**Phone:** + 353 1 874 1400

**Website:** [www.iprt.ie](http://www.iprt.ie)

**Email:** [info@iprt.ie](mailto:info@iprt.ie)

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## 1. Introduction

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*“He who opens a school door, closes a prison” – Victor Hugo*

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The Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT) commends the Minister of Further Education and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and the Minister of State with responsibility for Law Reform in the Department of Justice for their initiative in jointly chairing the Prison Education Taskforce (‘the Taskforce’). While the expertise of IPRT primarily lies in the area of penal policy, IPRT views educational disadvantage and inequality as one symptom of wider social exclusion in society, and social exclusion and social injustice are intrinsically linked to penal policy.

IPRT believes that, where imprisonment is necessary, plans for a prisoner’s rehabilitation should commence as soon as they arrive in custody. Encouraging people in prison to pursue education and training can be pivotal to desistance from crime, but it should only be one part of a broader rehabilitative focus, including maintaining family ties, providing mental health and addiction support (if necessary), and support with securing suitable housing on release.

**This is a very broad submission, focusing on a range of areas relating to prison education (and beyond, where relevant). Non-inclusion of a topic is not reflective of the importance or value IPRT places on it, but rather the constraints of time and capacity in drafting this submission.**

**At the outset, IPRT would like to commend the incredible work of Head teachers, teachers, Work Training Officers, voluntary sector providers and all of those who do vital work to provide quality education to people in custody. Any concerns or gaps in educational provision raised in this submission are not intended as critique of any one entity involved in education provision.**

This submission outlines the key points IPRT would like to raise in respect of prison education, offers examples of progressive practice internationally, explores some relevant data and data gaps, and makes some broad policy and practice recommendations.

**IPRT understands that the Taskforce will not be able to address all of the issues explored and recommendations made in this submission. Instead, IPRT is using the formation of the Taskforce and this engagement as a timely opportunity to raise overarching recommendations around the provision of education in prison with a range of stakeholders, including the Taskforce itself.**

While a wide range of relevant recommendations are highlighted throughout this submission, IPRT’s three overarching recommendations are as follows:

**i) Embed a culture of holistic prison education**

Education in prison is considerably wider than traditional classroom activities. It should be embedded in all functions of the prison, and in the culture of the prison. While prison education and training can play an important role in improving the employability of prisoners

and reducing reoffending, at a more fundamental level there is intrinsic value to participation in education, for the opportunities it offers for self-development.

While those involved in the delivery of prison education already recognise the need for this,<sup>1</sup> IPRT believes that through the cooperation and creativity of stakeholders, more can be done to make this a reality in prisons across Ireland.

**ii) Prioritise digital access**

The pandemic has made abundantly clear the need for greater access to digital technology in prisons. The Irish Prison Service (IPS) has previously shown leadership and innovation through the introduction of digital connectivity tools, including video calls and the prisoner television channel. The inclusion of 'Digital Platforms' as a pillar in the *IPS Strategic Plan 2023 – 2027*, launched in late November 2023, is also very welcome. In order to improve employment options on release, digital access and digital education should form a core part of prisoner education. This includes the use of appropriately secure tablets and/or laptops in cells to complement classroom-based learning, the use of devices in workshops, as well as the provision of specific training on the use of digital devices.

**iii) Enhance data collection**

While some data are available on participation in prison education and training, not enough data are collated and published in order to make sound decisions on education policy and provision. Furthermore, data sources are not well linked to build a more comprehensive picture of the benefits and availability of prison education. All stakeholders must work together to address these data shortfalls.

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<sup>1</sup> Irish Prison Service and Education and Training Boards Ireland, *Joint Irish Prison Service/Education and Training Boards Ireland Prison Education Strategy* (IPS 2019) <[www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents\\_pdf/Irish-Prison-Service-Joint-Education-Strategy\\_PRINT-final.pdf](http://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/Irish-Prison-Service-Joint-Education-Strategy_PRINT-final.pdf)> accessed 22 October 2023.

## 2. Context

While there are an extended number of issues that impact the provision of education in prison, in writing this submission IPRT has selected several important issues that heavily impact on the ability of stakeholders to act on the recommendations made in this submission. IPRT believes that it is vital that the issues outlined in this section be given due consideration, in light of their direct or indirect impacts on the provision and experience of prison education.

### 2.1. Overcrowding and increasing numbers of people in custody

As of the end of November 2023, excluding open prisons, 10 of the remaining 12 prisons, were operating either at or over maximum capacity.<sup>2</sup> **The impact of prison overcrowding on the ability to deliver education effectively cannot be underestimated.** This, coupled with a reduction in the *per capita* number of prison officers due to increasing prisoner numbers, poses difficulties with accessing structured education. Shortages of officers mean that prisoners cannot always be escorted safely around the prison or moved from cells to activities (such as education).<sup>3</sup>

Meaningful activities, such as education, work and other programmes are at the heart of creating a positive prison environment. Education is also important from a security perspective, with prisoners who are engaged in meaningful activities being less likely to initiate disturbances than those who are bored and frustrated.<sup>4</sup> However, when prisoner numbers increase:

- i) the necessary resources to ensure all prisoners are engaged in activities outside of their cells are not always made available; and
- ii) prisoners are held in their cells for extended periods due to pressures on staffing relating to other issues, such as prisoner escorts. Such circumstances reduce the prospects of assisting prisoners with their rehabilitation.<sup>5</sup>

**While beyond the immediate scope of the Taskforce, IPRT believes that a reduction in the number of people in custody would have a significant impact on both access to and quality of education. Members of the Taskforce should give due consideration to ways to engage with a range of stakeholders in order to reduce the number of people in custody and thus improve meaningful access to educational activities for people in prison.**

Furthermore, in addition to the *general* impacts that overcrowding has on access to educational activities for the general prison population, it can have particularly detrimental impacts on specific prisoners. For example, one of the mechanisms through which the IPS responds to overcrowding in a

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<sup>2</sup> These nine prisons are: (1) Mountjoy (M), (2) Dóchas Centre, (3) Training Unit, (4) Cloverhill, (5) Midlands, (6) Portlaoise, (7) Cork, (8) Limerick (M) (9) Limerick (F) and (10) Castlereagh. IPS, *Prisoner Population on Thursday 30th November 2023* (IPS 2023) <[www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents\\_pdf/30-November-2023.pdf](http://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/30-November-2023.pdf)> accessed 1 December 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Justice, *Annual Report 2021 Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee* (DoJ 2023) <[www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/260830/e4a9f2f9-b31b-42c7-9552-966496f14bff.pdf](https://assets.gov.ie/260830/e4a9f2f9-b31b-42c7-9552-966496f14bff.pdf)> accessed 11 October 2023.

<sup>4</sup> UNODC, *Handbook on strategies to reduce overcrowding in prisons* (UNODC 2013) <[www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Overcrowding\\_in\\_prisons\\_Ebook.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Overcrowding_in_prisons_Ebook.pdf)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

specific prison is through inter-prison transfers.<sup>6</sup> The movement of prisoners through the prison estate as a response to overcrowding can mean that progress in education is disturbed, or even halted. Among proposals in submissions to the House of Commons Education Committee's Inquiry into Prison Education was a recommendation that an 'education hold' be introduced, so that prisoner learners are not eligible for transfer in certain circumstances.<sup>7</sup> The Education Committee ultimately recommended that when considering moving prisoners, the position of where they are in a course or qualification should be considered, and the ability of a prisoner to continue their qualification where they are moved to should also be a factor.<sup>8</sup>

**IPRT considers that a formal process allowing prisoners to be on an 'education hold' and not eligible for transfer in certain specific circumstances should be explored in Irish prisons.**

## 2.2. Staffing levels

While the delivery of education in prison is primarily the responsibility of the Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) (in partnership with the IPS), there is an important role for prison officers to play in supporting and enabling access to education. Despite the efforts of everyone involved in prison education, current officer shortages have impacts on the delivery of prison education, compromising the ability of prisons to deliver effective rehabilitation.

The IPS has recently stated that "school and work and training closures are directly attributable to prison staff short-falls as a result of the large numbers of officers required to escort persons in custody".<sup>9</sup> Given that the delivery of the majority of prison education and training depends on access to classrooms and workshops, if prisoners cannot get to these locations, then activities cannot go ahead. Even when prisoners can get to classrooms, staff shortages may lead to partial school closures and students accessing only part of the planned curriculum.<sup>10</sup> While access to some education is preferable to none, partial access serves to disrupt the planned lessons and puts more pressure on educators to deliver the curriculum – particularly for those studying curriculum-led courses – over a shorter period of time.

Furthermore, the Office of the Inspector of Prisons (OIP) has raised concerns that, despite the capacity of workshops to hold more students, the fixed ratio of Work Training Officers can limit the number of people attending workshops.<sup>11</sup> Because of these ratios, redeployment of officers leads to low attendance at workshops and long waiting lists,<sup>12</sup> despite there being space in workshops for

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<sup>6</sup> Houses of the Oireachtas, Prison Service (11 July 2023) <[www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2023-07-11/76/](http://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2023-07-11/76/)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>7</sup> Prisoner Learning Alliance, *Written evidence submitted by the Prisoner Learning Alliance* (House of Commons 2021) <<https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/22921/pdf/>> accessed 4 October 2023.

<sup>8</sup> House of Commons, *Not just another brick in the wall: why prisoners need an education to climb the ladder of opportunity* (House of Commons 2022) <<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/22218/documents/164715/default/>> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>9</sup> OIP, *IPS Recommendation Action Plan 9 February 2023* (OIP 2023), 11 <[www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/IPS-Action-Plan-Education-and-Work-Training-Thematic-Inspection-Recommendations.pdf](http://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/IPS-Action-Plan-Education-and-Work-Training-Thematic-Inspection-Recommendations.pdf)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>10</sup> Kildare Street, Prison Service (15 November 2022) <[www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2022-11-15a.1115](http://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2022-11-15a.1115)> accessed 11 October 2023.

<sup>11</sup> OIP, *Thematic Inspection on Education & Work Training: Wheatfield Prison, Mountjoy Men's Prison & Arbour Hill Prison* (OIP 2023) <[www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Inspection-Report-on-Education-and-Work-Training.pdf](http://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Inspection-Report-on-Education-and-Work-Training.pdf)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

additional learners. Not only does a low proportion of officers detailed to education have impacts on movement to education, but it also means that fewer people can be interviewed and timetabled for admission to the school.<sup>13</sup> A core detail of officers is critical to reaching and encouraging potential students from different landings to avail of the full range of learning activities, events, and courses that schools provide.<sup>14</sup>

**IPRT urges the IPS to conduct an in-depth audit to identify the number of officers required to support the effective and consistent delivery of quality education and training in each prison. Based on this audit, ring-fenced funding should be allocated to ensure that the appropriate number of officers are dedicated to support education. This includes Work Training Officers as well as other officers who provide escorts to structured education.**

In early 2023, the Justice Committee in England and Wales undertook an inquiry into the state of the prison operational workforce, exploring issues such as recruitment, retention, and training of staff, as well as how to diversify the workforce and offer greater support for staff.<sup>15</sup> The report of the inquiry has not yet been published. However, evidence submitted to the review highlighted that:

*... there needs to be enough officers to run a full regime, enabling prisoners to access education departments and prison officers need to have enough time to work with individual prisoners and the skills and knowledge to support them to participate in education. This can only be achieved by increasing officer recruitment and retention and improving the training that all officers receive on prison education.<sup>16</sup>*

**IPRT would welcome a similar examination of the IPS operational workforce by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice. This examination should include a specific focus on the impacts of staffing on access to education and training.**

### 2.3. Number of people serving short custodial sentences

Staff involved in prisoner education have an extremely difficult job providing appropriate learning opportunities for people who may be in prison for a few weeks, through to others serving sentences of many years. While staff navigate this expertly, IPRT would welcome greater provision and consistency in education provision for people serving short sentences (i.e., less than 12 months).

In 2022, 74 per cent of people committed under sentence to Irish prisons were for periods of 12 months or less.<sup>17</sup> The IPS has expressed concern about its ability to support the educational

<sup>13</sup> Department of Justice, *Annual Report for 2021 Cloverhill Prison Visiting Committee* (DoJ 2023) <[www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/260823/5abc2af5-cee1-4e16-b0f6-d087c912ab5e.pdf](https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/260823/5abc2af5-cee1-4e16-b0f6-d087c912ab5e.pdf)> accessed 11 October 2023.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Justice Committee (UK), 'The prison operational workforce: Inquiry' (UK Parliament, 2023) <<https://committees.parliament.uk/work/7099/>> accessed 22 March 2023.

<sup>16</sup> Prisoner's Education Trust, *Written evidence submitted by the Prisoners' Education Trust (PRI0044)* (House of Commons 2023) <<https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/116042/pdf/>> accessed 3 October 2023.

<sup>17</sup> IPS, *Annual Report 2022* (IPS 2023) <[www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents\\_pdf/IPS-Annual-Report-2022.pdf](http://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/IPS-Annual-Report-2022.pdf)> <[http://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents\\_pdf/IPS-Annual-Report-21\\_Final.pdf](http://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/IPS-Annual-Report-21_Final.pdf)> accessed 23 October 2023.



development of this cohort of people in custody.<sup>18</sup> While there are no public statistics in Ireland, previous international research indicates prisoners serving short sentences participate in prison educational activities less frequently than prisoners serving longer sentences.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, CSO data indicate that people who have served short sentences are more likely to re-offend, and yet this cohort of prisoners is least likely to have access to sentence management during their time in prison, given restrictions on the availability of Integrated Sentence Management (ISM).<sup>20</sup>

While no such research appears to exist in Ireland, research on the provision of prison learning for those serving short custodial sentences in England and Wales has found that the range of programmes available to prisoners, such as education and health programmes, often compete with each other for attendance.<sup>21</sup> Early and accurate identification of prisoners' literacy and numeracy levels and related support needs was identified in this research as a key factor that underpins successful learning for those on short sentences.<sup>22</sup>

**Research should be undertaken and published by the IPS to map the educational needs and levels of people committed to prison on short-term sentences. One of the core aims of this research should be to inform the enhancement of the educational opportunities available to people serving short prison sentences, including those serving very short sentences (i.e., less than three months).**

**Where prison is the only appropriate response to offending, people serving short custodial sentences should have a dedicated range of options available that are responsive to their literacy and numeracy needs.**

#### 2.4. Prison (Amendment) Rules 2020

IPRT remains concerned that the Prison (Amendment) Rules 2020<sup>23</sup> remain in force. This amendment was introduced during the covid pandemic. It allows the Director General or the Governor of the Prison – based on advice or guidance from the Department of Health, the Health Service Executive, the Director of the Prison Healthcare Service, or a prison doctor – to suspend, restrict or modify the entitlement to physical recreation, exercise, or training. This amendment does not contain a sunset clause.

<sup>18</sup> Houses of the Oireachtas, *Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science: Ireland Prison Education Strategy 2019-2022* (5 July 2023) <[www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint\\_committee\\_on\\_education\\_further\\_and\\_higher\\_education\\_research\\_innovation\\_and\\_science/2022-07-05/2/](http://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_education_further_and_higher_education_research_innovation_and_science/2022-07-05/2/)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>19</sup> Ole-Johan Eikeland et al, *Education in Nordic Prisons Prisoners' Educational Backgrounds, Preferences and Motivation* (Norden 2009) <[www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:702625/FULLTEXT01.pdf](http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:702625/FULLTEXT01.pdf)>; GHK, *Survey on Prison Education and Training in Europe – Final Report* (European Commission 2012) <[www.epea.org/wp-content/uploads/Hawley-Jo-et-al-for-EU-Prison-Education-and-Training-in-Europe-Survey-2012.pdf](http://www.epea.org/wp-content/uploads/Hawley-Jo-et-al-for-EU-Prison-Education-and-Training-in-Europe-Survey-2012.pdf)> both accessed 2 October 2023

<sup>20</sup> ISM is only available to sentenced prisoners serving at least one year. IPS, 'Integrated Sentence Management' (IPS.ie, 2023) <[www.irishprisons.ie/prisoner-services/integrated-sentence-management/](http://www.irishprisons.ie/prisoner-services/integrated-sentence-management/)> accessed 4 October 2023.

<sup>21</sup> Ofsted, *Learning and skills for offenders serving short custodial sentences* (Ofsted 2009) <[https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/338/1/Learning\\_per\\_cent20and\\_per\\_cent20skills\\_per\\_cent20for\\_per\\_cent20offenders\\_per\\_cent20serving\\_per\\_cent20short\\_per\\_cent20custodial\\_per\\_cent20sentences.pdf](https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/338/1/Learning_per_cent20and_per_cent20skills_per_cent20for_per_cent20offenders_per_cent20serving_per_cent20short_per_cent20custodial_per_cent20sentences.pdf)> accessed 11 October 2023.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Prison (Amendment) Rules 2020 (SI No 250/2020)

**IPRT believes that this amendment could have a disproportionate impact on access to education and training, as well as other rehabilitative services in prison. We once again invite the Minister to revoke this Statutory Instrument, or at the very least amend its provisions to limit its scope (e.g., by limiting any modifications or suspensions to coronavirus as opposed to “an infectious disease”).**

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### 3. Education in prison

#### 3.1. Background to the provision of education in prison

It is well known that the prison population is often characterised by low levels of educational attainment. At the same time, the provision of education to persons in prison is well recognised in international human rights standards for the treatment of people in prison, including the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Mandela Rules)<sup>24</sup> and the Revised European Prison Rules.<sup>25</sup> The Council of Europe specifically recommends that: “All prisoners shall have access to education which is envisaged as consisting of classroom subjects, vocational education, creative and cultural activities, physical education, sports, social education and library facilities” and that “all those involved in the administration of the prison system and the management of prisons should facilitate and support education as much as possible”.<sup>26</sup>

Among the most dominant perspectives adopted by prison administrations internationally is that education in prison is a tool for rehabilitation. This approach tends to prioritise education in prison not as a right in and of itself, but as a means to an end (i.e., enabling future employment), with the ultimate goal being rehabilitation.<sup>27</sup> While this is not necessarily the case in Ireland, stakeholders with a role in the delivery of education should consider with caution the primary goals of any education provision in Ireland. As noted previously, while supporting employment is undoubtedly an important aspect of education provision, the broader value of education to an individual is also important and should not be overlooked.

In general, people in prison want to attend school, not only to learn and study, but also to avail of the social environment, mental health activities, creative activities, and music.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, participatory educational initiatives such as the Irish Red Cross and drama have been noted as a huge success in maintaining peace and harmony among prisoners.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> UN General Assembly, *United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules)* A/RES/70/175 (UN 2015), Rule 4.2 <<https://cdn.penalreform.org/wp-content/uploads/1957/06/ENG.pdf>> accessed 12 October 2023.

<sup>25</sup> Council of Europe, ‘Recommendation Rec(2006)2-rev of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the European Prison Rules’ (CoE, 1 July 2020), Rules 28.1-28.7 <[https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016809ee581](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016809ee581)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>26</sup> Council of Europe, *RECOMMENDATION No. R (89) 12 on Education in Prison* (CoE 1989) <<https://rm.coe.int/09000016804c858f>> accessed 12 October 2023.

<sup>27</sup> Cormac Behan, *Education in prison: A literature review* (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning 2021) <<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED615405.pdf>> accessed 23 October 2023.

<sup>28</sup> Department of Justice, *Annual Report for 2021 Cloverhill Prison Visiting Committee* (DoJ 2023) <[www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/260823/5abc2af5-cee1-4e16-b0f6-d087c912ab5e.pdf](https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/260823/5abc2af5-cee1-4e16-b0f6-d087c912ab5e.pdf)> accessed 11 October 2023.

<sup>29</sup> Department of Justice, *Castlerea Prison Visiting Committee Annual Report 2021* (DoJ 2023), 3 <[www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/260821/15339d4b-679b-43be-8714-492851999c22.pdf](https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/260821/15339d4b-679b-43be-8714-492851999c22.pdf)> <<https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/260820/27c6f5d5-f247-451e-a5fb-99d2d062870b.pdf>> accessed 11 October 2023.

### 3.2. Statistics on previous educational attainment of people in the criminal justice system

Prisoners worldwide tend to have lower-than-average attainment and poor experiences with compulsory education.<sup>30</sup> While the Taskforce will likely have considered this information in its work, we would like to briefly draw attention to the previous studies and statistics that show a demonstrated link between educational disadvantage and the penal system.

As part of the Central Statistics Office Frontier Series, data on employment, education, and other outcomes of people in custody on census night 2016 were published for the first time in 2020.<sup>31</sup> **IPRT would welcome the continued publication of these statistics.** These data demonstrated that:

- For 57 per cent of people in custody on census night, their highest level of education up to May 2019 was the Junior Certificate, compared to 10.9 per cent of the general population.<sup>32</sup>
- Furthermore, only 1.2 per cent of those in custody had further education (Level 7+) as their highest level of educational attainment up to May 2019, compared to 29.4 per cent of the general population.<sup>33</sup>
- Almost six in 10 (59.7 per cent) people were not in education or employment up to May 2019 (three years following release) but were in other administrative sources such as records from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.<sup>34</sup>

While they are separate systems, more robust published data for Oberstown indicates a significant level of unmet need among young people in contact with the criminal justice system. Oberstown Campus Statistics for Q1 2019 (the most recent available report) showed that for young people in detention:

- 43 of 75 young people detained during Q1 2019 were not engaged in education prior to their detention (57 per cent).<sup>35</sup>
- Only seven of the young people were identified as being engaged with some sort of education prior to admission, with information not available or identifiable for the final 24 children.<sup>36</sup>
- Of the 75 young people, 17 (23 per cent) had a diagnosed learning disability. 10 of these young people were not engaging in education prior to admission to Oberstown.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Lyn Tett et al., 'Arts in prisons: a Scottish case study' (2012) 44(2) *Studies in the Education of Adults* <<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/28969795.pdf>> accessed 23 October 2023.

<sup>31</sup> Central Statistics Office, 'Offenders 2016: Employment, Education and other Outcomes, 2016-2019' (CSO.ie, 2020) <[www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ftp/p-offo/offenders2016employmenteducationandotheroutcomes2016-2019/introduction/](http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ftp/p-offo/offenders2016employmenteducationandotheroutcomes2016-2019/introduction/)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Oberstown Children Detention Campus, *Key characteristics of young people in detention: A snapshot (Q1, 2019)* (Oberstown 2019) <[www.oberstown.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Oberstown-Final-Characteristics-of-Young-People-Report-2019.pdf](http://www.oberstown.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Oberstown-Final-Characteristics-of-Young-People-Report-2019.pdf)> accessed 3 October 2023.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

While recognising the different approaches and models of care provided by the youth and adult systems, there are practices that could be adapted and introduced in the prison system. This includes the collation and publication of data, as well as educational planning. For example, each young person in Oberstown has their educational needs assessed and a plan for their education is developed within the school and provided to campus staff. Young people are supported to make decisions about their own education and activities, and there is a drive amongst the staff team to develop and enhance both formal and informal learning opportunities on campus.<sup>38</sup>

**A greater level of data on educational backgrounds and educational needs should be published by the IPS. This could include, for example, the highest educational attainment of those in custody and the number of those in custody with a diagnosed learning disability.**

### 3.3. The relationship between education and work training

There is a distinction between the delivery of education and the delivery of work and training in Irish prisons. Education is delivered in a partnership model between the IPS and the ETBI. Work training, on the other hand, is staffed and funded by IPS.<sup>39</sup> Training opportunities in prison are chosen to provide opportunities to acquire skills that will likely help secure employment on release.<sup>40</sup>

While positive examples of collaboration between education centres and the rest of the prison have been highlighted by Prison Visiting Committees, including commitments to maintaining strong links with work training where possible,<sup>41</sup> access to education for prisoners who work in the prison has been raised as an issue.<sup>42</sup> **IPRT believes that the two areas should not be mutually exclusive and encourages the opportunity for prisoners to learn and train while working.** This reflects life in the community, where many students work part-time or study part-time in addition to other activities. A 2021 Spending Review of work and training in the IPS found that scope exists for greater integration of the work and training function delivered by the IPS and the education function delivered by ETBs to provide a programme of education and skills that is flexible to labour market demand.<sup>43</sup>

**IPRT supports the recommendations of the OIP that an audit should be conducted of provision for education, work, training, and other activities and that a system be developed to ensure sufficient**

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<sup>38</sup> HIQA, *Report of Oberstown Children Detention Campus* (HIQA 2022)

<[www.hiqa.ie/system/files?file=inspectionreports/4225\\_Oberstown\\_01\\_per\\_cent20November\\_per\\_cent202021.pdf](https://www.hiqa.ie/system/files?file=inspectionreports/4225_Oberstown_01_per_cent20November_per_cent202021.pdf)> accessed 3 October 2023.

<sup>39</sup> Caroline Finn, *Spending Review 2021: Review of the Programme of Work and Training in the Irish Prison Service* (IPS 2021) <[www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/205493/b0cabab7-17f9-4231-ad48-4827eee4c9f2.pdf](https://assets.gov.ie/205493/b0cabab7-17f9-4231-ad48-4827eee4c9f2.pdf)> accessed 4 October 2023.

<sup>40</sup> Irish Prison Service, 'Work and Vocational Training' (*IrishPrisons.ie*, 2023) <[www.irishprisons.ie/prisoner-services/work-and-vocational-training/](https://www.irishprisons.ie/prisoner-services/work-and-vocational-training/)> accessed 12 October 2023.

<sup>41</sup> Department of Justice, *Arbour Hill Prison Visiting Committee Annual Report 2021* (DoJ 2023), 7 <[www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/260820/27c6f5d5-f247-451e-a5fb-99d2d062870b.pdf](https://assets.gov.ie/260820/27c6f5d5-f247-451e-a5fb-99d2d062870b.pdf)> accessed 11 October 2023.

<sup>42</sup> Department of Justice, *Annual Report for 2021 Cloverhill Prison Visiting Committee* (DoJ 2023) <[www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/260823/5abc2af5-cee1-4e16-b0f6-d087c912ab5e.pdf](https://assets.gov.ie/260823/5abc2af5-cee1-4e16-b0f6-d087c912ab5e.pdf)> accessed 11 October 2023.

<sup>43</sup> Caroline Finn, *Spending Review 2021: Review of the Programme of Work and Training in the Irish Prison Service* (IPS 2021) <[www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/205493/b0cabab7-17f9-4231-ad48-4827eee4c9f2.pdf](https://assets.gov.ie/205493/b0cabab7-17f9-4231-ad48-4827eee4c9f2.pdf)> accessed 4 October 2023.

capacity for each given the size of the population in each prison.<sup>44</sup> It is welcome that the IPS has accepted this recommendation.<sup>45</sup>

Moreover, even within the work training function, there appears to be a hierarchy of activities. A review of work training found that while essential services (i.e., catering, laundry, industrial cleaning and waste management) have been largely prioritised, the non-essential workshops were routinely closed and resources diverted elsewhere. This was reported to be the case both during and before the COVID-19 pandemic. Routine workshop closures were described as contributing to a lack of motivation among Work and Training staff, disengagement of prisoners and an impediment to accreditation.<sup>46</sup>

**IPRT encourages those responsible to explore opportunities for strengthening the relationship between education and work training, this could include, for example, coordination of the delivery of digital and IT skills.**

### 3.4. Incentivising participation in education

There are undoubtedly prisoners who are disengaged and many who have negative prior experience with formal education. However, many prisoners will take opportunities that lead to time out of their cells, especially if the available opportunities are relevant to their interests, abilities, and aspirations.

Education in prison should always be optional, and it should be treated in the same way as other vocational and work activities.<sup>47</sup> However, people in custody are monetarily incentivised to engage in work in the prison, under the IPS policy on prisoner gratuities and private cash.<sup>48</sup> A similar incentive does not exist to participate in education, which acts as a *de facto* disincentive for participation. One method through which increased motivation could be provided is the financial incentivisation of education with people receiving at least the same rate as qualifying work training initiatives. The lack of any financial incentive acts as a particular disincentive for those who are estranged from their families and are thus more likely to be reliant on the approved work gratuity in order to supplement their general daily gratuity. IPRT welcomes that an OIP recommendation to revise the policy and monetarily incentivise education was accepted by the IPS, and that the IPS is seeking additional resources to give effect to this recommendation as part of Budget 2024. IPRT also included this issue in our Budget 2024 asks.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> OIP, *Thematic Inspection on Education & Work Training: Wheatfield Prison, Mountjoy Men's Prison & Arbour Hill Prison* (OIP 2023), 63 <[www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Inspection-Report-on-Education-and-Work-Training.pdf](https://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Inspection-Report-on-Education-and-Work-Training.pdf)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>45</sup> OIP, *IPS Recommendation Action Plan 9 February 2023* (OIP 2023), 11 <[www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/IPS-Action-Plan-Education-and-Work-Training-Thematic-Inspection-Recommendations.pdf](https://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/IPS-Action-Plan-Education-and-Work-Training-Thematic-Inspection-Recommendations.pdf)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>46</sup> Caroline Finn, *Spending Review 2021: Review of the Programme of Work and Training in the Irish Prison Service* (IPS 2021) <[www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/205493/b0cabab7-17f9-4231-ad48-4827eee4c9f2.pdf](https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/205493/b0cabab7-17f9-4231-ad48-4827eee4c9f2.pdf)> accessed 4 October 2023.

<sup>47</sup> Cormac Behan, *Education in prison: A literature review* (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning 2021) <<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED615405.pdf>> accessed 23 October 2023

<sup>48</sup> IPS, *Prisoner gratuities and private cash* (IPS 2012) <[www.irishprisons.ie/images/policy/prisoner\\_gratuities\\_private\\_cash\\_policy.pdf](https://www.irishprisons.ie/images/policy/prisoner_gratuities_private_cash_policy.pdf)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>49</sup> Irish Penal Reform Trust, *Pre-Budget Submission: Budget 2024* (2023) <[www.iprt.ie/site/assets/files/7255/iprt\\_pre-budget\\_submission\\_-\\_budget\\_2024\\_v2.pdf](https://www.iprt.ie/site/assets/files/7255/iprt_pre-budget_submission_-_budget_2024_v2.pdf)> accessed 2 October 2023.

People in custody, like anyone else, benefit from incentives to learn. Many people in the community undertake further study to improve their status, increase their earnings, or change careers. **Further consideration should be given to what incentives, including financial, could encourage people in custody to engage with education.**

### 3.5. Peer education

Subject to proper risk assessments, well-educated prisoners can play an important role in teaching their less skilled peers.<sup>50</sup> Not only is peer education a way to capture potentially untapped audiences who may not otherwise engage with more formal education, it is also an opportunity to develop the skills of people in prison and provide them with certification of the experience of educating others, which they can carry into potential future employment or further education. There is strong evidence that being a peer worker in prison is associated with positive effects on mental health and its determinants, and this is consistent across a number of peer intervention models.<sup>51</sup>

Prison-based peer education programmes have previously been proven to be successful in several areas in Ireland. This includes peer-led health promotion through the 'Community Based Health and First Aid Programme', delivered by Irish Red Cross peers.<sup>52</sup> Participatory educational initiatives such as the Irish Red Cross and drama programmes have been noted as a huge success in maintaining peace and harmony among prisoners.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, the pilot of the Peer-to-Peer Literacy Ambassadors' and Tutors' programme in Portlaoise Prison provides a good model on which to learn from and adapt any future models of peer-led education in prison.<sup>54</sup> Participants in the programme identified a growth in compassion, and others credited the programme with building family relationships and increasing familial pride.<sup>55</sup>

**IPRT recommends that suitable opportunities for peer delivery of education be explored further across the prison estate, building on the successful tenets of existing peer education programmes. People in prison should be consulted to identify where peer education could be facilitated, and the areas where they feel they would most benefit from peer learning.**

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<sup>50</sup> UNODC, *Roadmap for the Development of Prison-based Rehabilitation Programmes* (UNODC 2017) <[www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/17-05452\\_ebook.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/17-05452_ebook.pdf)> accessed 11 October 2023.

<sup>51</sup> Anne-Marie Bagnall et al., 'A systematic review of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of peer education and peer support in prisons' (2015) 15 *BMC Public Health* 290 <<https://bmcpublihealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-015-1584-x>> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>52</sup> Irish Red Cross, 'PRISON PROGRAMME' (*Redcross.ie*, 2023) <[www.redcross.ie/prison-programme-community-based-health-first-aid/](http://www.redcross.ie/prison-programme-community-based-health-first-aid/)> accessed 11 October 2023.

<sup>53</sup> Department of Justice, *Castlerea Prison Visiting Committee Annual Report 2021* (DoJ 2023), 3 <[www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/260821/15339d4b-679b-43be-8714-492851999c22.pdf](http://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/260821/15339d4b-679b-43be-8714-492851999c22.pdf)><<http://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/260820/27c6f5d5-f247-451e-a5fb-99d2d062870b.pdf>> accessed 11 October 2023.

<sup>54</sup> National Adult Literacy Agency, *Here to help* (NALA 2022) <[www.nala.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Case-study-Peer-to-peer-prison-literacy-project-NALA.pdf](http://www.nala.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Case-study-Peer-to-peer-prison-literacy-project-NALA.pdf)> accessed 11 October 2023.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*



### 3.6. Alternate modes of learning

For many people in prison, past experiences with the education system have been negative. For this reason, education in prisons should be innovative and involve the promotion of forms of non-traditional learning with alternative methods of assessment and accreditation. A person-centred approach is required whereby **both** basic and continued learning are catered for, with choice, availability, and accessibility as important features of the curriculum.

It is possible to identify a range of learning opportunities in prisons. These include classroom-based learning; distance learning; cell work, for example 'home work'; other self-motivated learning; vocational training; peer education and support (e.g., Samaritans' Listeners training); classes attached to workshops; gym-based learning; learning through work training in areas such as industrial cleaning or catering. In particular, sport in prison can be used as a 'hook' for engaging in learning. A significant body of research has alluded to sports' potential in developing self-esteem and confidence, cognitive function, and soft skills such as responsibility and leadership.<sup>56</sup>

In addition to this wide scope of opportunities, other 'informal' learning goes on in interactions with officers, other staff, and other prisoners. As we know, the median school-leaving age of people in prison is 14 years old.<sup>57</sup> This means that not only have many people in prison missed out on the development of 'hard skills' and knowledge taught in schools in the community, but also the opportunity to learn soft skills such as how to work in a team, how to manage conflict, and how to process change, among others.

Learning through creativity and the arts is another vital opportunity to reach learners who would otherwise not engage in other learning, as well as providing a tool through which prisoners can express themselves. In addition to supporting the development of arts and creativity skills in schools, the IPS has supported projects such as the 'Visual Artists in Prisons Scheme' and the 'Writers in Prisons Scheme', both through the Arts Council.<sup>58</sup> Any work on developing the curriculum to focus on the employability of prisoners should not come at the cost of such programmes.

**Opportunities to learn should transcend the prison classroom. A holistic approach to prison education that features a wide range of modes of delivery, locations of delivery, and topics should be in place across the prison estate. All activities and programmes should actively consider the opportunity for learning, if any, on roll-out and on evaluation.**

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<sup>56</sup> Sport England, *Review of Evidence on the Outcomes of Sport and Physical Activity a Rapid Evidence Review* (Sport England 2017) <<https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/sport-outcomes-evidence-review-report.pdf>> accessed 12 October 2023.

<sup>57</sup> Houses of the Oireachtas, *Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science: Ireland Prison Education Strategy 2019-2022* (5 July 2023) <[www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint\\_committee\\_on\\_education\\_further\\_and\\_higher\\_education\\_research\\_innovation\\_and\\_science/2022-07-05/2/](http://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_education_further_and_higher_education_research_innovation_and_science/2022-07-05/2/)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>58</sup> The Arts Council, 'Schemes and initiatives' (*ArtsCouncil.ie*, 2023) <[www.artscouncil.ie/Arts-in-Ireland/Arts-participation/Schemes-and-initiatives/](http://www.artscouncil.ie/Arts-in-Ireland/Arts-participation/Schemes-and-initiatives/)> accessed 13 November 2023.



### 3.7. Life skills education

The development of life skills in prison can help to promote reintegration and minimise the risk of future offending.<sup>59</sup> Life skills is a broad concept and can refer to many things, from structured courses to carrying out everyday activities such as preparing meals, cleaning and maintaining a living space. Common life skills courses in prisons internationally relate to money management, building a resumé, self-esteem, and communication skills. A range of life skills courses are available in prison in Ireland.<sup>60</sup>

Life skills are a core component of building competence and confidence among those in custody, but a review of a life skills programme in England indicated that developing the necessary skills to assist prisoners in everyday life, such as recognition, interpretation, reflection, response, and planning is also fundamental to rehabilitation.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, the development of life skills can have wide-reaching impacts, with skills developed in custody ultimately being brought back to families and communities.

There is a mixed picture in regard to the progress made in encouraging and facilitating prisoners to develop their life skills. For example, the Independent Living Skills Unit (ILSU) in Wheatfield Prison was opened in 2016. The unit, designed for those serving longer sentences, offers laundry facilities, communal dining, and residents are responsible for the preparation and cooking of meals at the weekend, with the Unit Officer and a prisoner going to a local supermarket to purchase the ingredients for meals together.<sup>62</sup> While lower security settings exist in the closed prison estate, such as The Grove in Castlerea, it is disappointing that there are no plans to review the operation of the ILSU or to further develop these units.<sup>63</sup> This is despite the fact that “adoption and expansion of an Independent Living Skills Unit model” was among the recommendations in an IPS report on sentence management for life-sentenced prisoners in 2017.<sup>64</sup> While recognising that life skills are taught across the estate regardless of the existence of ILSUs, units such as these provide enhanced opportunities to develop these skills.

**An information-mapping exercise is required to identify the number of prisoners accessing life skills courses and an evaluation undertaken to assess the impact of such courses. In order for prisoners to progress from a closed to an open prison environment, a graduated approach is required, whereby prisoners can avail of support for maintaining or developing skills in the closed prison environment.**

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<sup>59</sup> Ole-Johan Eikeland et al., *Education in Nordic Prisons Prisoners' Educational Backgrounds, Preferences and Motivation* (Norden 2009) <[www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:702625/FULLTEXT01.pdf](http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:702625/FULLTEXT01.pdf)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>60</sup> IPS, 'Prison Education Service' (*Irishprisons.ie*, 2023) <[www.irishprisons.ie/prisoner-services/prison-education-service/](http://www.irishprisons.ie/prisoner-services/prison-education-service/)> accessed 24 October 2023.

<sup>61</sup> Michelle Jolley, 'Rehabilitating prisoners: the place of basic life skills programmes' (2018) 17(1) *Safer Communities* <[www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/SC-02-2017-0009/full/html](http://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/SC-02-2017-0009/full/html)> accessed 23 October 2023.

<sup>62</sup> Kildare Street, 'Prison Service' (15 February 2023) <[www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2023-02-15a.280](http://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2023-02-15a.280)> accessed 24 October 2023.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> IPS, *Examination of the Sentence Management of people serving Life Sentences* (IPS 2017) <[www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents/pdf/Life-Sentenced-Prisoner-Report-Final-April-2017.pdf](http://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents/pdf/Life-Sentenced-Prisoner-Report-Final-April-2017.pdf)> accessed 13 November 2023.

### 3.8. Consistency of education provision

While the educational needs and focus of each prison will naturally vary due to a range of factors, including the demographics of prisoners and the location of the prison, a minimum standard of education provision – which should not become the *de facto* aim – should be available across the prison estate. The IPS Health Needs Assessment commented on the “significant differences” across the prison estate regarding access to activities, including education, due to a range of factors including “physical space availability and limitations, discipline issues within complex prison populations, and the distribution of resources”.<sup>65</sup>

Following its recent Inquiry into Prison Education in England and Wales, the UK Parliament Commons Select Committee on Education recommended that there be a clear signal in each prison that education is an operational priority, with the appointment of a member of Senior Management who is directly responsible for education audits and prisoner outcomes.<sup>66</sup> **IPRT recommends that a similar approach be adopted in Ireland. This could be reflected in both IPS policy, and also in the forthcoming ETBI/IPS Prison Education Strategy.**

## 4. Data

### 4.1. Engagement with education in prison

In 2022, 32.45 per cent of the total prison population attended education classes,<sup>67</sup> compared to the 28 per cent attendance rate reported for 2021.<sup>68</sup> While education attendance is low, it must be acknowledged that this was an increase compared to the preceding years. Following the non-publication of data for several years, IPRT welcomes that prison education and training data were published in the *IPS Annual Report 2021*.<sup>69</sup> It is disappointing, however, that the recently published *IPS Annual Report 2022* did not include statistics on engagement with prison education. The publication of these statistics in the 2021 report was welcomed after a period of many years without the publication of this information.

**Education attendance rates and longer-term engagement rates should be routinely published in IPS annual reports. IPRT also recommends that a specific report on prisoner education be published on at least an annual basis. Ideally, this would be published on a quarterly basis.**

<sup>65</sup> Crowe, Health Needs Assessment for the Irish Prison Service Final Report (DoJ and DoH 2023), 30

<[www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/256918/0a95d124-8d58-498f-994b-356e9e1fb161.pdf](https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/256918/0a95d124-8d58-498f-994b-356e9e1fb161.pdf)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>66</sup> House of Commons, *Not just another brick in the wall: why prisoners need an education to climb the ladder of opportunity* (House of Commons 2022) <<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/22218/documents/164715/default/>> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>67</sup> Information provided directly to IPRT to inform *PIPS 2022* by the Irish Prison Service on 30 March 2023.

<sup>68</sup> Irish Prison Service, *Annual Report 2021* (IPS 2022), 10 <[www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents\\_pdf/IPS-Annual-Report-21\\_Final.pdf](http://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/IPS-Annual-Report-21_Final.pdf)> accessed 23 October 2023.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

As recommended in the last comprehensive literacy study of prisoners in Ireland in 2003, **statistics returned by education units in relation to attendance should detail the numbers of prisoners with literacy difficulties attending classes.**<sup>70</sup>

Until responsibility for budget and delivery of prison education transferred to the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) in England and Wales, offender learning breakdowns were provided separately by the Department of Education.<sup>71</sup> Now that the responsibility is a matter for the MoJ, a comprehensive annual breakdown of prison education statistics is published.<sup>72</sup> This includes information on: the number of prisoners who took part in educational courses; the number of those who were assessed for learning disabilities; and the number of prisoners who started and completed accredited programmes. It also includes detailed breakdowns by ethnic groups, in order to accurately inform policy and practice. The most recent statistical breakdown (for those in custody between April 2022 and March 2023) indicates that a higher proportion of “other” ethnic groups had assessment outcomes in English and Maths in the entry levels, and a higher proportion of females had maths assessment outcomes at entry levels.<sup>73</sup> This demonstrates the importance of disaggregated data. While the IPS/ETBI *Prison Education Strategy 2019-2022* contains an action to support Ethnic Identity Audits,<sup>74</sup> no information on any such audits has been made publicly available. **The collection and publication of data on engagement with prison education should be disaggregated by ethnicity.**

#### 4.2. Engagement with work training in prison

The OIP has flagged concern with the integrity of work training data. While data is available on the number of prisoners attending workshops, they do not clearly identify the total number of prisoners engaged in work training on a daily basis, among other issues.<sup>75</sup> Further, the data on engagement with education or work training that is available does not capture the frequency of engagement in purposeful activity.<sup>76</sup>

**Data on engagement with work training should be developed to include a more longitudinal view of the consistency of engagement with work training, rather than snapshot measures of attendance.**

<sup>70</sup> Mark Morgan and Mary Kett, *The Prison Adult Literacy Survey Results and Implications* (IPS 2003), 36 <[www.drugsandalcohol.ie/27366/1/adult\\_literacy\\_survey.pdf](http://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/27366/1/adult_literacy_survey.pdf)> accessed 3 October 2023.

<sup>71</sup> Department of Education (E&W), ‘Statistical data set: Education and training’ (*Gov.uk*, 2020) <[www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-education-and-training](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-education-and-training)> accessed 24 October 2023.

<sup>72</sup> Ministry of Justice (UK), ‘Prison Education and Accredited Programme Statistics 2022 to 2023’ (*Gov.uk*, 2022) <[www.gov.uk/government/statistics/prison-education-and-accredited-programme-statistics-2022-to-2023](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/prison-education-and-accredited-programme-statistics-2022-to-2023)> <<http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/prison-education-and-accredited-programme-statistics-2021-2022>> accessed 24 October 2023.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Irish Prison Service and Education and Training Boards Ireland, *Joint Irish Prison Service/Education and Training Boards Ireland Prison Education Strategy* (IPS 2019), 6 <[www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents\\_pdf/Irish-Prison-Service-Joint-Education-Strategy\\_PRINT-final.pdf](http://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/Irish-Prison-Service-Joint-Education-Strategy_PRINT-final.pdf)> accessed 22 October 2023.

<sup>75</sup> OIP, *Thematic Inspection on Education & Work Training: Wheatfield Prison, Mountjoy Men’s Prison & Arbour Hill Prison* (OIP 2023), 22 <[www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Inspection-Report-on-Education-and-Work-Training.pdf](http://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Inspection-Report-on-Education-and-Work-Training.pdf)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

### 4.3. Educational outcomes

There is a need for more up-to-date and in-depth analysis, for example, on which kinds of educational programmes are most effective in supporting the realisation of longer-term outcomes. This level of information ensures that programmes are meeting their intended aims, and if not, can be restructured to improve outcomes. This ensures the best use of limited resources and improved outcomes for people in custody and their communities.

Public evidence regarding the overall effectiveness of Irish prison education and training programmes is sparse. There is also a challenge about what constitutes effectiveness. Should prison outcomes be focused on value for money, a reduction in recidivism, or an educational outcome, such as a qualification? In any measure of the success of outcomes, intangible things such as building self-esteem are often overlooked. Education and learning are complex processes that are not always confined to taught classes, and as such, any evaluation should be comprehensive.

**IPRT recommends that an evaluation study of a selected programme(s) take place. This study should compare a range of factors against a control population to assess the longer-term benefits of engaging in education and/or work training.**

## 5. Literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy

The aim of the national *Adult Literacy for Life* strategy is to “ensure everyone [emphasis added] has the necessary literacy, numeracy and digital literacy to fully participate in society and realise their potential”.<sup>77</sup>

Basic literacy and numeracy skills – along with digital literacy – are the bedrock for the furthering of prison education and transitioning to employment and further education on release. However, these skills are also essential to improving people’s experiences in prison and navigating the prison environment. The Prison Rules 2007 state, in particular, the education programme “shall encourage prisoners to participate in educational activities organised in the prison, and give special attention to prisoners with basic educational needs, including literacy and numeracy needs.”<sup>78</sup>

### 5.1. Literacy

There is a considerable body of evidence showing that poor literacy skills restrict life choices (including employment), and thus become a pre-disposing factor in criminal behaviour. While there

<sup>77</sup> Government of Ireland, *Adult Literacy for Life: A 10-year adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy strategy* (Gov.ie, 2021) <[www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/197863/c6f1e81f-3f60-485d-9c55-e33cb85508bc.pdf](https://assets.gov.ie/197863/c6f1e81f-3f60-485d-9c55-e33cb85508bc.pdf)> accessed 13 November 2023.

<sup>78</sup> Rules 110(b), Prison Rules 2007, 252/2007.

may not be a simple direct relationship with educational failure, poor literacy skills may be an important contributory factor in both cases.<sup>79</sup>

We understand that the IPS has been working with Dublin City University (DCU) to conduct an audit of literacy and numeracy across the prisoner population. While this was delayed due to COVID-19, as of late 2022 work was underway to commence the audit, with a view to informing the development of services in this area.<sup>80</sup> This is welcome but long overdue, with the last comprehensive prison literacy study published two decades ago. This study found that half the prison population are at Level 1 or lower (lowest levels of literacy) whereas in the general population, less than one quarter of the sample are at this level.<sup>81</sup> The study specifically recommended that the prison education service give top priority to those prisoners with the weakest literacy skills and basic education skills.<sup>82</sup>

Literacy skills also have significant impacts on the experience of imprisonment. An Ofsted and HMIP report in 2022 found that prisoners in England and Wales with low literacy levels were disadvantaged in prison because they could not read correspondence from family or lawyers, they found it difficult to order from menus or the prison shop, and were often unable to get prison jobs.<sup>83</sup> The report made clear that bolstering literacy is not just the responsibility of education providers; it needed to be an activity that was promoted across the prison, starting with the governor. Importantly, a one-year follow-up report was conducted, which explored progress on the recommendations.<sup>84</sup> There would be merit in a similar approach being adopted in Ireland.

While there are already pockets of excellent practice for developing literacy in prison in Ireland, there is scope to develop this further. It is increasingly important that basic literacy and numeracy are embedded within workshops, and within other areas of the prison.

**Any data collection and analysis needs to be repeated on a regular basis to allow for the build of solid data on prisoners' literacy and numeracy levels. Inaccurate information on the literacy and numeracy levels of the prison population could mean that investment in education may not be being used to its best advantage.**

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<sup>79</sup> Mark Morgan and Mary Kett, *The Prison Adult Literacy Survey Results and Implications* (IPS 2003), 36 <[www.drugsandalcohol.ie/27366/1/adult\\_literacy\\_survey.pdf](http://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/27366/1/adult_literacy_survey.pdf)> accessed 4 October 2023.

<sup>80</sup> Department of Justice, *Review of Policy Options for Prison and Penal Reform 2022–2024* (DoJ 2022), 66 <[www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/233015/1dd9e5a8-796e-4eda-a2d7-4a1b4c160cea.pdf](https://assets.gov.ie/233015/1dd9e5a8-796e-4eda-a2d7-4a1b4c160cea.pdf)> accessed 4 October 2023.

<sup>81</sup> Mark Morgan and Mary Kett, *The Prison Adult Literacy Survey Results and Implications* (IPS 2003), 36 <[www.drugsandalcohol.ie/27366/1/adult\\_literacy\\_survey.pdf](http://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/27366/1/adult_literacy_survey.pdf)> accessed 3 October 2023.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Gov.uk, 'Prison Education: a review of reading education in prisons' (Ofsted and HMIP, 2022) <[www.gov.uk/government/publications/prison-education-a-review-of-reading-education-in-prisons/prison-education-a-review-of-reading-education-in-prisons](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prison-education-a-review-of-reading-education-in-prisons/prison-education-a-review-of-reading-education-in-prisons)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>84</sup> Gov.uk, 'The quality of reading education in prisons: one year on' (Ofsted and HMIP, 2023) <[www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-quality-of-reading-education-in-prisons-one-year-on/the-quality-of-reading-education-in-prisons-one-year-on](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-quality-of-reading-education-in-prisons-one-year-on/the-quality-of-reading-education-in-prisons-one-year-on)> accessed 2 October 2023.

### Emerging progressive practice: Shannon Trust (UK)

Shannon Trust is a charity working in prisons in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, training prisoner mentors who can read to support their peers who can't. Volunteers work in an individual prison, to train mentors (people in prison who can read) and provide support and advice to them. Mentors then work on a one-to-one basis with their 'learners' who are non-readers or have low reading skills.<sup>85</sup> While in its early stages, the relationships between Shannon Trust and prison administrations have been strengthened as a result of recommendations arising from prison inspections. A follow-up inspection of education provision found that one prison now employs a Shannon Trust coordinator to plan pathways from the literacy curriculum to the main curriculum.<sup>86</sup>

## 5.2. Numeracy

There is a consensus across many international studies that literacy and numeracy are, in general, disproportionately poor in the prison population.<sup>87</sup> People with poor numeracy levels may struggle with daily tasks that involve numbers, for example, telling the time, understanding medication, and budgeting. Studies in prison have also found that engagement in numeracy practices is a statistically significant positive predictor of both health and political efficacy.<sup>88</sup>

Data from the UK indicate that, while still comparatively poor compared to the general population, the differences between the prison and general population in numeracy skills are much less significant than in literacy skills.<sup>89</sup> However, there are no publicly available data on this in Ireland.

**Following on from the audit of literacy and numeracy in the prisoner population, data on numeracy rates should be published. This information should be used as the baseline for the development and measurement of numeracy programmes.**

## 5.3. Digital literacy

It has been purported that "prisoners experience profound social isolation and constitute one of the most impoverished groups in the digital age".<sup>90</sup> Shifts in workplace culture, including the shift to remote and hybrid learning and working, could serve to further compound prison leavers' disadvantage in obtaining training and employment opportunities.<sup>91</sup> As such, the inclusion of an

<sup>85</sup> Shannon Trust, 'Our work in prisons' (Shannon Trust, 2023) <[www.shannontrust.org.uk/in-prisons](http://www.shannontrust.org.uk/in-prisons)> accessed 23 October 2023.

<sup>86</sup> Gov.uk, 'The quality of reading education in prisons: one year on' (Ofstead and HMIP, 2023) <[www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-quality-of-reading-education-in-prisons-one-year-on/the-quality-of-reading-education-in-prisons-one-year-on](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-quality-of-reading-education-in-prisons-one-year-on/the-quality-of-reading-education-in-prisons-one-year-on)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>87</sup> Lois Davis et al, *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta-Analysis of Programs That Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults* (RAND 2013), xviii <[www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR266.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR266.html)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>88</sup> Stephen Reader, 'Numeracy imprisoned: skills and practices of incarcerated adults in the United States' (2020) 52 *ZDM Mathematics Education* 593 <<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11858-019-01094-0>> accessed 13 November 2023.

<sup>89</sup> Brain Creese, *An assessment of the English and maths skills levels of prisoners in England* (EPEA 2015) <[www.epea.org/wp-content/uploads/An-assessment-of-the-English-and-maths-skills-levels-of-prisoners-in-England1-1.pdf](http://www.epea.org/wp-content/uploads/An-assessment-of-the-English-and-maths-skills-levels-of-prisoners-in-England1-1.pdf)> accessed 12 October 2023.

<sup>90</sup> Bianca Reisdorf and Yvonne Jewkes, '(B)Locked sites: cases of Internet use in three British prisons' (2016) 19 *Information, Communication & Society* <[www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1153124](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1153124)> accessed 13 October 2023.

<sup>91</sup> Caroline Finn, *Spending Review 2021: Review of the Programme of Work and Training in the Irish Prison Service* (IPS 2021) <[www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/205493/b0cabab7-17f9-4231-ad48-4827eee4c9f2.pdf](http://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/205493/b0cabab7-17f9-4231-ad48-4827eee4c9f2.pdf)> accessed 4 October 2023.

explicit aim to improve digital literacy under the ‘Digital Platforms’ pillar in the new IPS *Strategic Plan 2023 – 2027* is warmly welcomed by IPRT.<sup>92</sup>

Digital learning allows for flexibility in terms of access and learning speed, which can boost prisoners’ involvement and participation.<sup>93</sup> Enhancing digital technology would transform learning in prisons, massively increasing the range of opportunities. The range of assistive technology available, if introduced with adequate tutor resources, could also effectively support people with additional learning needs. One comprehensive research study has shown that people in prison who are exposed to computer-assisted learning learn slightly more in reading and substantially more in math in the same amount of instructional time.<sup>94</sup>

The Council of Europe recommendation on Education in Prison states “Education for prisoners should be like the education provided for similar age-groups in the outside world”,<sup>95</sup> and as such, **prison learners should be provided with the opportunities to develop their digital literacy skills, notwithstanding a certain level of reasonable security concern.**

#### Progressive practice: PrisonCloud (Belgium)

In 2016, Beveren Prison introduced PrisonCloud, a secure, in-cell platform comprised of a fixed computer, a monitor, a keyboard and a headset. It allows prisoners to complete e-learning, watch films and TV, and have control over some aspects of prison life such as food, medical appointments and their prison finances.<sup>96</sup> This is now also available in two further prisons and it is expected that it will be rolled out to all establishments.<sup>97</sup>

## 6. Education for specific cohorts of people in prison

Oftentimes, initiatives targeted at improving access for minority groups have a knock-on impact of improving access for the wider population. While the sections below are included with specific cohorts of prisoners in mind, initiatives designed to better meet the needs of these cohorts would likely have further benefits.

<sup>92</sup> Irish Prison Service, *Irish Prison Service Strategy 2023-2027* <[www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents\\_pdf/IPS\\_Service\\_Strategy-2023-2027-final.pdf](http://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/IPS_Service_Strategy-2023-2027-final.pdf)> accessed 1 December 2023

<sup>93</sup> Gilbert Mahlangu and Eugenia Zivanai, ‘Offender eLearning: A systematic literature review on re-entry, recidivism, and life after prison’ (2023) 9(2) *Cogent Social Sciences* <[www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23311886.2023.2246706](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23311886.2023.2246706)> accessed 12 October 2023.

<sup>94</sup> Lois Davis et al, *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta-Analysis of Programs That Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults* (RAND 2013), xviii <[www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR266.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR266.html)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>95</sup> Council of Europe, RECOMMENDATION No. R (89) 12 OF THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS TO MEMBER STATES ON EDUCATION IN PRISON (Coe, 1989) <<https://rm.coe.int/09000016804c858f>> accessed 13 November 2023.

<sup>96</sup> Prisoner Learning Alliance, *The digital divide: Lessons from prisons abroad* (PLA 2020) <<https://prisonerlearningalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-Digital-Divide-Lessons-from-prisons-abroad.pdf>> accessed 23 October 2023.

<sup>97</sup> Prison Insider, ‘Belgium: prisons in 2023’ (*Prison-insider.com*, 2023) <[www.prison-insider.com/en/compare/fr/be?profiles=142694](http://www.prison-insider.com/en/compare/fr/be?profiles=142694)> accessed 15 November 2023.



### 6.1. Migrants and ethnic minorities

Membership of a protected group or other minority group (for instance, having English as a second language) may also have an impact on educational needs. Many individuals from these groups face barriers to learning in the general population, many of which will also apply within the prison population.<sup>98</sup>

IPRT's 2014 report *Travellers in the Irish Prison System: A Qualitative Study* highlights figures from the Census 2011, which shows that almost 18 per cent of Travellers have no formal education, compared to 1.4 per cent of the general population.<sup>99</sup> However, it should not be assumed that membership of a minority group will automatically lead to lower educational attainment, as often the picture is more complex, requiring a more nuanced approach. Traveller Liaison Teachers (TLTs), working with Traveller Justice Initiative, have been appointed in each education centre to ensure traveller culture is recognised within the curriculum.<sup>100</sup> This is a welcome development.

Language barriers and the limits they place on self-expression and determination are central to the experiences and access to rights of those with limited English.<sup>101</sup> Among other supports for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), **English as a second language education should be fully resourced and provided consistently across the prison estate.**

### 6.2. Younger people

As identified by the OIP in its Thematic Inspection of Wheatfield Prison, while the majority of 18- to 24-year-olds participated in education, less than one-fifth of this age cohort was engaged in work training activities in the prison at the time (week of 9 March 2022).<sup>102</sup> However, this does not indicate a disinterest in engaging with work training, as the OIP also reported that over 50 per cent of young adults were on a waiting list to access a work training interview at the time of the inspection.<sup>103</sup>

The role of education for younger people in prison is specifically highlighted in several international human rights standards, with the European Prison Rules specifically noting the importance of work that encompasses vocational training for young prisoners and the Mandela Rules stating that the

<sup>98</sup> David Doyle et al., 'Education in Ireland: accessible without discrimination for all?' (2020) 24(10) *The International Journal of Human Rights* 1701 <[www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13642987.2020.1773437](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13642987.2020.1773437)> accessed 11 October 2023.

<sup>99</sup> Liza Costello, *Travellers in the Irish Prison System: A Qualitative Study* (IPRT 2014) <[www.iprt.ie/site/assets/files/6339/iprt\\_travellers\\_report\\_web.pdf](http://www.iprt.ie/site/assets/files/6339/iprt_travellers_report_web.pdf)> accessed 23 October 2023.

<sup>100</sup> Houses of the Oireachtas, *Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science: Ireland Prison Education Strategy 2019-2022* (5 July 2023) <[www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint\\_committee\\_on\\_education\\_further\\_and\\_higher\\_education\\_research\\_innovation\\_and\\_science/2022-07-05/2/](http://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_education_further_and_higher_education_research_innovation_and_science/2022-07-05/2/)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>101</sup> David Doyle et al., "Sometimes I'm missing the words": *The rights, needs and experiences of foreign national and minority ethnic groups in the Irish penal system* (IPRT 2022) <[https://iprt.ie/site/assets/files/7076/iprt\\_the\\_rights\\_needs\\_and\\_experiences\\_of\\_foreign\\_national\\_and\\_minority\\_ethnic\\_groups.pdf](https://iprt.ie/site/assets/files/7076/iprt_the_rights_needs_and_experiences_of_foreign_national_and_minority_ethnic_groups.pdf)> accessed 23 October 2023.

<sup>102</sup> OIP, *Thematic Inspection on Education & Work Training: Wheatfield Prison, Mountjoy Men's Prison & Arbour Hill Prison* (OIP 2023), 36 <[www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Inspection-Report-on-Education-and-Work-Training.pdf](http://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Inspection-Report-on-Education-and-Work-Training.pdf)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.



education of young prisoners “shall be compulsory [...] and special attention shall be paid to it by the administration”.<sup>104</sup>

### 6.3. Older people

While many prisoners might never transition back into employment, and as such an employment-focused approach to learning does not meet their needs, this is particularly the case for older prisoners.

The proportion of prisoners under sentence aged 50+ has increased in recent years, from 11.5 per cent at the end of 2014, to 14.4 per cent at the end of 2018, rising further to 17.5 per cent by the end of 2022, and again slightly to 17.9 per cent in November 2023.<sup>105</sup> Older prisoners are the fastest growing age cohort in Irish prisons.

While there are no accessible data in Ireland, learnings from the UK suggest that whilst basic literacy and numeracy skills are appropriate for some older prisoners, most are likely to have progressed beyond this level of learning, either during their sentence or before custody. A broader provision of high levels of learning is necessary to allow prisoners from this age group to progress.<sup>106</sup> Older prisoners in the UK have reported that learning improves their mental and physical health, supports their family relationships, and provides activity to help them stay positive through their sentence.<sup>107</sup>

The Men’s Shed project rolled out in the Training Unit in 2023 is a positive example of skills development and communal work for older people in prison that is not necessarily geared towards gaining employment on release.<sup>108</sup> It is hoped this relationship and its affiliation with Men’s Sheds in the wider community will support men with joining their local group for support.<sup>109</sup> **However, the provision across the estate varies greatly and should instead be led by a national strategy for provision of services, including education and training, to older prisoners.** While we stress the importance of recognising that older prisoners are not a homogenous group, a coherent strategy would better meet the needs of many older prisoners.

<sup>104</sup> Council of Europe, ‘Recommendation Rec(2006)2-rev of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the European Prison Rules’ (CoE, 1 July 2020), 26.5 <[https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016809ee581](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016809ee581)>; and UN General Assembly, *United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules)* A/RES/70/175 (UN 2015), Rule 104 <<https://cdn.penalreform.org/wp-content/uploads/1957/06/ENG.pdf>> both accessed 12 October 2023.

<sup>105</sup> See December 2014, December 2018, December 2022, and November 2023. Irish Prison Service, ‘Monthly Information Note – November 2023’ (*Irishprisons.ie*, 2023) <[www.irishprisons.ie/information-centre/statistics-information/monthly-information-note/](http://www.irishprisons.ie/information-centre/statistics-information/monthly-information-note/)> accessed 10 December 2023.

<sup>106</sup> Prisoners Education Trust, ‘Never too old to learn’ A response to the Justice Select Committee Inquiry into Older Prisoners (March 2023) <<https://prisonerseducation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Prisoners-Education-Trust-response-to-the-Justice-Select-Committee-Inquiry-into-Older-Prisoners.pdf>> accessed 13 November 2023.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Cate Murray, ‘Prisoners take part in Men’s Shed initiative to help prepare for life outside’ (10 January 2023) *Irish Examiner* <[www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-41045000.html](http://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-41045000.html)> accessed 1 November 2023.

<sup>109</sup> Houses of the Oireachtas, ‘Joint Committee on Disability Matters’ (2 March 2023) <[www.oireachtas.ie/ga/debates/debate/joint\\_committee\\_on\\_disability\\_matters/2023-03-02/2/](http://www.oireachtas.ie/ga/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_disability_matters/2023-03-02/2/)> accessed 24 October 2023.

## 6.4. Women

While relevant to the prison population more generally, issues such as confidence levels, a lack of self-esteem, and challenges with concentrating due to trauma can particularly impact on women's access to, engagement with and participation in education.<sup>110</sup>

As previously outlined (see section 2.3), people serving short sentences are among the most difficult to deliver meaningful education to, and women are disproportionately handed down short sentences compared to men. In 2022, almost 85 per cent of all women committed to prison under sentence were for sentences of less than 12 months, compared with 65 per cent of males.<sup>111</sup>

Although there are some data on post-release employment outcomes in Ireland, a gender breakdown is not available. However, previous research in the UK found that employment outcomes for women following short prison sentences are three times worse than for men, with fewer than one in ten women having a job lined up on release.<sup>112</sup>

Furthermore, the last comprehensive study of literacy skills among Irish prisoners, conducted two decades ago, found that more female prisoners scored in the lowest two levels of literacy than male prisoners, which suggests that literacy barriers could be a particular challenge for women.<sup>113</sup>

**Increasing the numbers of lower-security units in the female estate would be beneficial in reducing the disproportionate restrictions on women compared with men and facilitate possibilities around studying, training, and work.**

## 6.5. People with disabilities

The European Prison Rules stipulate that prison education should be available for prisoners in a way "which meet their individual needs."<sup>114</sup>

In research on disability in the Irish prison system published by IPRT in 2019, most prisoners who participated in the research were not able to participate in employment or education programmes offered within the prison due to their inaccessibility, and there appeared to be little understanding of how such programmes should be adapted to enable prisoners with disabilities to participate, and even less resources to implement the needed changes.<sup>115</sup> Access to education programmes varied across the different prison environments visited as part of the research. While the education systems within the prison were often doing their best to meet the individual needs of specific prisoners,

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<sup>110</sup> Prisoners' Education Trust, *Written evidence: Women in Prison* (House of Commons 2021) <<https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/36753/pdf/>> accessed 11 October 2023.

<sup>111</sup> Aodhán Ó Riordáin TD, 'Prison numbers released to me from a PQ...' (X, 18 August 2023) <<https://twitter.com/AodhanORiordain/status/1692422907811483664>>

<sup>112</sup> Prison Reform Trust, *Working it out: Employment for women offenders* (PRT, 2015) <<https://prisonreformtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Employmentbriefing.pdf>> 13 November 2023.

<sup>113</sup> Mark Morgan and Mary Kett, *The Prison Adult Literacy Survey Results and Implications* (IPS 2003), 36 <[www.drugsandalcohol.ie/27366/1/adult\\_literacy\\_survey.pdf](http://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/27366/1/adult_literacy_survey.pdf)> accessed 3 October 2023.

<sup>114</sup> Council of Europe, 'Recommendation Rec(2006)2-rev of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the European Prison Rules' (CoE, 1 July 2020), Rules 28.1-28.7 <[https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016809ee581](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016809ee581)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>115</sup> Eilíonóir Flynn et al, *Making Rights Real for People with Disabilities in Prison* (IPRT 2019) <[www.iprt.ie/site/assets/files/6565/people\\_with\\_disabilities\\_in\\_detention\\_-\\_single-pages.pdf](http://www.iprt.ie/site/assets/files/6565/people_with_disabilities_in_detention_-_single-pages.pdf)> accessed 15 November 2023.

prisoners with disabilities reported that in general their needs were not met and the education opportunities offered in the prisons were often inaccessible to them.<sup>116</sup> While there were some excellent programmes in place, they often were not suitable for prisoners with the greatest needs.

For those held on medical landings – many of whom have psychosocial disabilities – Prison Visiting Committees have recommended that measures be taken to allow improved access to education classes for these prisoners, despite the difficulties involved in arranging such access.<sup>117</sup>

**IPRT supports the recommendation of the Health Needs Assessment (HNA) that, in recognition of the challenges of the committal screening process, a screening tool for intellectual disabilities be considered for use by health and education staff.<sup>118</sup> Relatedly, IPRT supports the recommendation of the HNA that a formal policy to enable prison staff to best support prisoners who are living with a physical or sensory disability be developed.<sup>119</sup> Any such policy should include information on supported access to education and training.**

## 6.6. People on restricted regimes

The CPT, following its most recent visit to Ireland in 2019, noted that prisoners on protection should not be “de facto punished” by virtue of their situation and should be provided with “appropriate conditions and treatment; access to activities, educational courses and sport should be feasible.”<sup>120</sup>

As of October 2023, 15.4 per cent of the prison population was on some form of restricted regime,<sup>121</sup> which limits their access to purposeful activity.<sup>122</sup> Difficulties have previously been reported for people on restricted regimes of availing of library and education services, as well as attending school, workshops or the gym.<sup>123</sup> The OIP has previously reported that prisoners on protection had poor access to work training in the prison, and that the main reported activity available for protection prisoners was the yard.<sup>124</sup> Furthermore, the OIP has raised concerns about limited access to opportunities for those in medical units, which echoes concerns raised by the Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee.<sup>125</sup>

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Department of Justice, *Annual Report for 2021 Cloverhill Prison Visiting Committee* (DoJ 2023) <[www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/260823/5abc2af5-cee1-4e16-b0f6-d087c912ab5e.pdf](https://assets.gov.ie/260823/5abc2af5-cee1-4e16-b0f6-d087c912ab5e.pdf)> accessed 11 October 2023.

<sup>118</sup> Crowe, *Health Needs Assessment for the Irish Prison Service Final Report* (DoJ and DoH 2023), 51 <[www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/256918/0a95d124-8d58-498f-994b-356e9e1fb161.pdf](https://assets.gov.ie/256918/0a95d124-8d58-498f-994b-356e9e1fb161.pdf)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> CPT, *Report to the Government of Ireland on the visit to Ireland carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 23 September to 4 October 2019* (2020), 28, <<https://rm.coe.int/1680a078cf>> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>121</sup> IPS, *Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners October 2023* (IPS 2023) <[www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents/pdf/October-2023-Restriction.pdf](http://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents/pdf/October-2023-Restriction.pdf)> accessed 1 December 2023.

<sup>122</sup> OIP, *Thematic Inspection on Education & Work Training: Wheatfield Prison, Mountjoy Men’s Prison & Arbour Hill Prison* (OIP 2023) <[www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Inspection-Report-on-Education-and-Work-Training.pdf](http://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Inspection-Report-on-Education-and-Work-Training.pdf)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>123</sup> Department of Justice, *Annual Report 2021 Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee* (DoJ 2023) <[www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/260830/e4a9f2f9-b31b-42c7-9552-966496f14bff.pdf](https://assets.gov.ie/260830/e4a9f2f9-b31b-42c7-9552-966496f14bff.pdf)> accessed 11 October 2023.

<sup>124</sup> OIP, *Thematic Inspection on Education & Work Training: Wheatfield Prison, Mountjoy Men’s Prison & Arbour Hill Prison* (OIP 2023) <[www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Inspection-Report-on-Education-and-Work-Training.pdf](http://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Inspection-Report-on-Education-and-Work-Training.pdf)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid; and Department of Justice, *Annual Report 2021 Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee* (DoJ 2023) <[www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/260830/e4a9f2f9-b31b-42c7-9552-966496f14bff.pdf](https://assets.gov.ie/260830/e4a9f2f9-b31b-42c7-9552-966496f14bff.pdf)> both accessed 11 October 2023.

Not only does this impact on those who are in restricted regimes, but in prisons with a high proportion of people on restricted regimes, the staffing demands required in order to segregate different categories of prisoners have negative impacts on those who are not restricted.<sup>126</sup> **Unless systemic issues with adequate staffing and the use of restricted regimes are addressed, ambitious visions for prison education will not be achieved. In order to meet the provisions of the Revised European Prison Rules, the IPS must ensure that the regime provided for all prisoners offers a balanced programme of activities.**<sup>127</sup>

## 7. Motivation and purpose

### 7.1. Motivation for engaging in education

Irish research has identified numerous motivations for the participation of prisoners in education, including: to alleviate boredom; to promote a sense of self-development; for a sense of personal achievement; to improve employment prospects on release; to make families feel proud; to make constructive use of time spent in prison; to help their case when back in court; and to pursue old interests or develop new ones.<sup>128</sup> Other Irish research has identified that prison-based learners initial motivations to engage with education were: to pursue a second chance education and up-skill to prepare for employment on release; to escape the monotony and boredom of the prison regime; to pass the time; and for personal transformation.<sup>129</sup>

While it might not appear ideal, motivation based on a need for distraction or boredom may be one of the first influential educational motivations these prisoners have ever experienced, and so this inherent feature of the prison environment may be transformed into a positive opportunity to commence learning. As a common experience to all cohorts in the prison population, the desire to alleviate boredom – this common human need for stimulation, for interaction, for interest - can be capitalised on to encourage engagement in a variety of forms of education.

### 7.2. Education for purpose

There needs to be a recognition in prison education and training policies that employability is not a priority for all, or even a possibility for some prisoners. Concerningly, there are growing numbers of

<sup>126</sup> Department of Justice, *Annual Report 2021 Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee* (DoJ 2023)

<[www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/260830/e4a9f2f9-b31b-42c7-9552-966496f14bff.pdf](https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/260830/e4a9f2f9-b31b-42c7-9552-966496f14bff.pdf)> accessed 11 October 2023.

<sup>127</sup> Council of Europe, 'Recommendation Rec(2006)2-rev of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the European Prison Rules' (CoE, 1 July 2020), 25.1 <[https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016809ee581](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016809ee581)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>128</sup> Anne Costelloe, *Third level education in Irish prisons: who participates and why?* (Open University 2003)

<<https://oro.open.ac.uk/63999/1/27532740.pdf>> accessed 3 October 2023.

<sup>129</sup> Cormac Behan, 'Learning to Escape: Prison Education, Rehabilitation and the Potential for Transformation' (2014) 1(1) *Journal of Prison Education and Reentry* 20 <<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1148803.pdf>> accessed 23 October 2023.

people who are not realistically expected to be released within their working lifetime, with growing numbers of elderly prisoners and people serving longer sentences.<sup>130</sup>

**Education options that enrich lives, build engagement, and develop social and cultural capital are essential. While focus on employment is welcome and necessary, there is a need for much more nuanced and detailed thinking about the role of prison education.** Education has to be about more than short-term ‘employability’; some people will never seek employment on release (e.g., those who are elderly, those who are full-time caregivers etc), but could nonetheless benefit strongly from access to education.

Additionally, while educational and training programmes can be geared towards enhancing employability prospects, some people will need considerable support beyond education and training before becoming ‘job-ready’. This could include, for example, the fundamental need to find accommodation, to other practical considerations such as acquiring a bank account, work clothes, and a phone. It is essential that such practical supports be offered in tandem with employment-focused education in training, in order for it to be meaningful.

## 8. Capital development

### 8.1. Prison/school infrastructure

Prison schools vary largely across the prison estate. Many Irish prisons were built over 100 years ago, and as such, have limited space and amenities. In response to recommendations made by the OIP, the IPS has noted that Victorian-era prisons with older facilities play a role (alongside staff shortfalls) in the ability of the prison to provide opportunities for all.<sup>131</sup> Concerns have been raised about education centres / schools in a number of prisons, including issues with the size of the available space<sup>132</sup> and the operation of education centres in prefab buildings that are no longer fit for purpose.<sup>133</sup> **While acknowledging that many prison schools are spacious and modern spaces of learning, there are some that are in need of renovating, including through capital projects to expand their size and modernise the available facilities.**

While capital development and modernisation should be pursued where possible, creativity with the delivery of education can open opportunities. For example, employing prisoners in the delivery of

<sup>130</sup> As of August 2023, 643 people under sentence were aged 50+. This represented 18 per cent of all people under sentence at that time. This compares to approximately 10 per cent a decade ago. IPS, Monthly Information Note – August 2023 (IPS 2023) <[www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents\\_pdf/AUGUST-2023.pdf](http://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/AUGUST-2023.pdf)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>131</sup> OIP, *IPS Recommendation Action Plan 9 February 2023* (OIP 2023), 11 <[www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/IPS-Action-Plan-Education-and-Work-Training-Thematic-Inspection-Recommendations.pdf](http://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/IPS-Action-Plan-Education-and-Work-Training-Thematic-Inspection-Recommendations.pdf)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>132</sup> For example, see Department of Justice, *Annual Report for 2021 Cloverhill Prison Visiting Committee* (DoJ 2023) <[www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/260823/5abc2af5-cee1-4e16-b0f6-d087c912ab5e.pdf](https://assets.gov.ie/260823/5abc2af5-cee1-4e16-b0f6-d087c912ab5e.pdf)> and Department of Justice, *Visiting Committee Annual Report 2021 Wheatfield Prison* (DoJ 2023) <[www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/260837/1c4bf2d2-6189-4475-b5bc-e49c219ddfc0.pdf](https://assets.gov.ie/260837/1c4bf2d2-6189-4475-b5bc-e49c219ddfc0.pdf)> both accessed 11 October 2023.

<sup>133</sup> Department of Justice, *Visiting Committee Annual Report 2021 Shelton Abbey* (DoJ 2023) <[www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/260836/a17e76db-d04d-47e4-abc9-d97a6e1de86a.pdf](https://assets.gov.ie/260836/a17e76db-d04d-47e4-abc9-d97a6e1de86a.pdf)> accessed 11 October 2023.

services in more physical spaces of the prison is an excellent practical educational experience that gives prisoners business, customer service, and enterprise skills that could be used post-release.

## 8.2. Digital infrastructure

The pandemic has highlighted the ‘digital divide’ between prisoners and the rest of the community. The focus on digital in the IPS strategic plan, however, needs to be distilled into the successor of the *Joint IPS/ETBI Prison Education Strategy 2019 – 2022*. **However, this level of meaningful focus on developing and integrating the use of digital services throughout the IPS will require significant investment in digital assets, and potential capital development.**

Understandably, IPRT recognises that there could be some hesitancy in allowing prisoners access to the internet outside of very restricted and/or supervised environments. However, this can leave many prisoners unprepared for the real world, lacking the digital skills they need for employment and life skills, and reducing their likelihood of reoffending. The digital divide between prisoners and the community continues to increase. The COVID-19 pandemic brought into stark relief the need for prisoners to be able to work individually and in their cells. The OIP has similarly recommended the development of the use of IT in classrooms and provision of technology for learning in cells.<sup>134</sup> However, caution is advised here; computers in cells should not be used as an opportunity to keep prisoners in cells for longer periods and/or reduce out-of-cell learning. Digital technology should be carefully used to supplement other means of learning, not to replace them.

**Furthermore, as mentioned in section 3.3, there is scope to coordinate delivery of IT skills between the work training function and Education Centres, with a view to maximising the impact of these offerings for people in custody.**<sup>135</sup>

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## 9. Important actors in the delivery of prison education

While lines of responsibility and accountability for each element of prison education should be clear, the delivery of prison education – given the breadth required for it to meet the variety of needs of prison learners – should be shared meaningfully among a range of stakeholders.

### 9.1. The role of prison officers

Human relationships are central to learning. Prisoners spend a considerable portion of their time with or around prison officers, and as such, the collective support, or not, of officers has the

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<sup>134</sup> OIP, *Thematic Inspection on Education & Work Training: Wheatfield Prison, Mountjoy Men’s Prison & Arbour Hill Prison* (OIP 2023) <[www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Inspection-Report-on-Education-and-Work-Training.pdf](http://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Inspection-Report-on-Education-and-Work-Training.pdf)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>135</sup> Caroline Finn, *Spending Review 2021: Review of the Programme of Work and Training in the Irish Prison Service* (IPS 2021) <[www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/205493/b0cabab7-17f9-4231-ad48-4827eee4c9f2.pdf](https://assets.gov.ie/205493/b0cabab7-17f9-4231-ad48-4827eee4c9f2.pdf)> accessed 4 October 2023.

potential to wield significant influence on the progress and development of prisoners' education.<sup>136</sup> Research has shown that prisoners engaging in education value support and encouragement from officers on the wings.<sup>137</sup>

While the role of prison officers in the provision of education has been underexplored to date in Ireland, UK research has found that officers feel they have some role to play in improving education for prisoners (and would like opportunities to do more), but they do not think that they are given enough time or training to fulfil their existing job description properly.<sup>138</sup> While little information is available on the topic in Ireland, the OIP has reported that for many staff working in prisoner services, the redeployment of officers has been experienced as demotivating and a source of deep frustration.<sup>139</sup>

**In considering any potential developments in prison education, including those proposed in this submission or otherwise, consideration should be given to the impacts on and opportunities for prison officers. Where appropriate, prison officer views should be sought.**

## 9.2. The role of community-based organisations

In general, voluntary or community-based organisations excel in flexibility and creativity, which can be harnessed appropriately in the prison environment. Voluntary organisations that excel in topics that strengthen the development of a person – such as mindfulness, conflict resolution, family learning, and niche skills – are often best-placed to deliver these in a prison setting.

Even when an excellent standard and range of education might exist, timetabling challenges may also remain that limit prisoners' engagement in courses offered by community-based organisations. Making sure that prisoners do not have to give up education and work training (especially paid opportunities) in order to engage in activities that support their learning and development is vital to incentivising participation in a wide range of programmes.

## 9.3. The role of higher education institutions (HEIs)

Prison-university partnerships are well-established, with many different models in operation. Partnerships can be a good introduction, or reintroduction, to higher education. Establishing links between prisons and universities can also pave the way for prisoners potentially continuing to higher education, either post-release or via distance learning. Succeeding in employment requires more than just a qualification – many of the skills learned by participating in a prison-university partnership

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<sup>136</sup> The Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, *Wings of Learning: the role of the prison officer in supporting prisoner education* (CCJS 2005) <[www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/sites/crimeandjustice.org.uk/files/wings-of-learning.pdf](http://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/sites/crimeandjustice.org.uk/files/wings-of-learning.pdf)> accessed 3 October 2023.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> OIP, *Thematic Inspection on Education & Work Training: Wheatfield Prison, Mountjoy Men's Prison & Arbour Hill Prison* (OIP 2023), 19 <[www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Inspection-Report-on-Education-and-Work-Training.pdf](http://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Inspection-Report-on-Education-and-Work-Training.pdf)> accessed 2 October 2023.



increase a prisoner's employability, for instance, working in a group, punctuality, communication, presentation and critical reading skills.<sup>140</sup>

There are several positive partnerships in operation in Ireland, including the Mountjoy and Maynooth University (MJMU) partnership; this included the Narrative 4 Story Exchange Project, developed in partnership with Gaisce, The President's Award, that worked towards building empathy and understanding among learners in the community and in prison.<sup>141</sup> This was followed by the establishment of the Unlocking Potential Project (UPP), with a goal of removing barriers by developing a toolkit which would facilitate all HEIs to implement an innovative fair admissions policy.<sup>142</sup> Another positive example of a meaningful partnership is the Inside-Out module, in which University College Cork (UCC) BA Criminology students go inside Cork Prison's Education Unit where they learn alongside people in prison.<sup>143</sup> **More examples of models like this from more universities and from more prisons would be strongly welcomed by IPRT.**

The Kickstart Scholarship is another practical development in strengthening the relationship between prison and tertiary education. The Scholarship was established by the Probation Service, and supported by the Irish Prison Service, to support persons with a criminal justice history who are experiencing socio-economic disadvantage to access higher education.<sup>144</sup>

#### Progressive practice: The Fair Change Pledge (UK)

In October 2019, UK-based charity Unlock launched its 'Fair Chance Pledge'. Through the initiative, higher education institutes pledge their commitment to offering a fair chance to students with a criminal record.<sup>145</sup> Unlock's work in this area also included the development of a fair admissions toolkit to inform and support the work of the institutions in this area.<sup>146</sup> In addition, UCAS (the UK equivalent of the Irish CAO), commissioned the production of resources in collaboration with Unlock. This is a central resource for all higher education institutes and includes a good practice guide, scenarios, and a flowchart to support the good practice guide.<sup>147</sup>

## 9.4. The role of employers

It's crucial that employers are aware of the role they can play in the rehabilitation process and are involved as early on in the process as possible. By engaging with employers in order to contribute to

<sup>140</sup> Prisoners' Education Trust, *Prison-University Partnerships: A Toolkit* (PET 2019) <<https://prisonerseducation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Prison-University-Partnerships-A-Toolkit.pdf>> accessed 15 November 2023.

<sup>141</sup> Maynooth University, *Evaluating the Story Exchange Project* (MU 2020) <[www.maynoothuniversity.ie/sites/default/files/assets/document/Story\\_Exchange\\_Report.pdf](http://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/sites/default/files/assets/document/Story_Exchange_Report.pdf)> accessed 15 November 2023.

<sup>142</sup> Unlocking Potential, 'About the project' (*Unlockpotential.ie*, 2023) <[www.unlockpotential.ie/](http://www.unlockpotential.ie/)> accessed 15 November 2023.

<sup>143</sup> UCC, 'New exhibition by prisoners and students to be shown on Spike Island' (*UCC.ie*, 8 June 2023) <[www.ucc.ie/en/news/2023/new-exhibition-by-prisoners-and-students-to-be-shown-on-spike-island.html](http://www.ucc.ie/en/news/2023/new-exhibition-by-prisoners-and-students-to-be-shown-on-spike-island.html)> accessed 13 November 2023.

<sup>144</sup> Maynooth University, 'KickStart Scholarship' (Maynoothuniversity.ie, 2023) <[www.maynoothuniversity.ie/access-office/kickstart-scholarship#About](http://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/access-office/kickstart-scholarship#About)> 15 November 2023.

<sup>145</sup> Unlock, 'Fair Chance Pledge' (*Unlock.org.uk*, 2013) <<https://unlock.org.uk/project/unlocking-students-with-criminal-records/fair-chance-pledge/>> accessed 15 November 2023.

<sup>146</sup> Unlock, *Developing a fair approach to applicants with criminal records A toolkit for higher education providers* (Unlock 2019) <<https://recruit.unlock.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/FairAdmissionsToolkit.pdf>> accessed 15 November 2023.

<sup>147</sup> UCAS, 'Criminal Convictions Good Practice for HE Providers' (*UCAS.com*, 2023) <[www.ucas.com/criminal-convictions-good-practice-he-providers](http://www.ucas.com/criminal-convictions-good-practice-he-providers)> accessed 15 November 2023.



the design and delivery of education and work training, it increases their understanding of what happens in prison.<sup>148</sup>

While existing services such as IASIO GATE Service aims to enhance employability on release, including through providing CV advice and acting as an advocate on prisoners' behalf with prospective employers, they are limited in their reach.

#### Progressive practice: The New Futures Network (UK)

Set up in 2018, the New Futures Network is a specialist part of HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) which attracts and supports employers to work with prisons in England and Wales. It assists prisons with creating the systems and infrastructure that will result in more prison leavers securing employment.<sup>149</sup> One of the aims of the network is to promote prisoners as a workforce. There have been no published figures of people who have secured employment through the network yet.

### 9.5. The role of prisoners' families in supporting learning

Maintaining strong family relationships is widely accepted as a contributory factor to promoting desistance.<sup>150</sup> Consideration should also be given to the role of prisoners' families in providing support for educational activity through family learning.<sup>151</sup> Family learning often involves learners in practical activities that engage adults in learning, provides opportunities for parents to support their children, and helps parents to understand their role in their children's learning. Not only does this benefit people in prison, but it can also be a vital factor in enabling the partners and children of prisoners to contribute to a more positive future for themselves.<sup>152</sup>

The UK-based charity Pact runs a Building Stronger Families programme that supports relationships between prisoners and their partners while in prison, building up and strengthening them as a couple, reducing risk, improving outcomes for children, and reducing the risk of reoffending.<sup>153</sup> One of the strands of the programme builds numeracy skills through money management modules.<sup>154</sup> Other programmes, such as Storybook Dads and Storybook Mums, offer a well-established family learning programme running in more than 100 UK prisons. The Storybook initiative has been run in several prisons in Ireland and was acknowledged as a complementary programme in the previous

<sup>148</sup> Caroline Finn, *Spending Review 2021: Review of the Programme of Work and Training in the Irish Prison Service* (IPS 2021) <<https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/205493/b0cabab7-17f9-4231-ad48-4827eee4c9f2.pdf>> accessed 4 October 2023.

<sup>149</sup> New Futures Network, 'Homepage' (NewFuturesNetwork.gov.uk, 2023) <<https://newfuturesnetwork.gov.uk/>> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>150</sup> Ian Bruton-Smith et al., 'The Effects of Prisoner Attachment to Family on Re-entry Outcomes: A Longitudinal Assessment' (2017) 57(2) *The British Journal of Criminology* 463 <<https://academic.oup.com/bjc/article/57/2/463/2623932>> accessed 11 October 2023.

<sup>151</sup> Learning and Work Institute, *Family Learning in Prisons: A Resource for Prisons and Learning Providers* (L&W 2017) <<https://learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Family-Learning-in-Prisons-A-resource-for-Prisons-and-Learning-Providers.pdf>> accessed 4 October 2023.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Pact, 'Building Stronger Families' (*Prisonadvice.org.uk*, 2023) <[www.prisonadvice.org.uk/building-stronger-families](http://www.prisonadvice.org.uk/building-stronger-families)> accessed 16 November 2023.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

ETBI/IPS Prison Education Strategy.<sup>155</sup> Support should continue for this initiative and other similar initiatives that integrate key elements of education, family connection, and reintegration planning.

#### Progressive Practice: The Dillon's Cross Project (Ireland)

One progressive example in this area is currently operating in Ireland. The Dillon's Cross Project is run by the Education Unit in Cork Prison, which provides educational opportunities for female relatives of prisoners.<sup>156</sup> Education and continuous support can provide stability for the families of prisoners. Education increases self-confidence and feelings of self-worth while also offering structure, routine, and purpose. Importantly, it can also lead to further or higher education or employment, which provides stability and inspires the children of these families to do the same. Prisoners returning to these families have positive role models, and with this mindset, they will likely continue with their own recovery. Counteracting social disadvantage and negative experiences with education has proved important for many who have entered the prison system.<sup>157</sup>

### 9.6. Work and education in the community

While in prison, people should be able to engage in structured education and training in the community, subject to assessment. Early release programmes, including Temporary Release (TR), should be used as a key part of any apprenticeship and employment strategy. Ideally, in advance of release, people would be able to access TR daily to attend placements in the community in order to be able to become familiar with and start working at any placement before they are released from prison. In the UK, armed with evidence that release on temporary licence (ROTL) is an effective rehabilitation tool, the MoJ 2018 *Education and Employment Strategy* expanded the use of workplace ROTL to get prisoners who have been risk assessed into real workplaces, to build trust and prove themselves with an employer.<sup>158</sup>

However, while people in prison are an untapped resource that should be considered and utilised by employers, it is also important that prisoners are fairly compensated for any labour provided to private companies who profit from their work.

While limited employer attitudinal data is available in Ireland, the data that does exist indicates over 60 per cent of employers surveyed would hire someone with a conviction if they were supported to do so, and almost 70 per cent would be encouraged to do so if they knew the applicant had

<sup>155</sup> Irish Prison Service and Education and Training Boards Ireland, *Joint Irish Prison Service/Education and Training Boards Ireland Prison Education Strategy* (IPS 2019), 7 <[www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents\\_pdf/Irish-Prison-Service-Joint-Education-Strategy\\_PRINT-final.pdf](http://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/Irish-Prison-Service-Joint-Education-Strategy_PRINT-final.pdf)> accessed 22 October 2023.

<sup>156</sup> Cork Education and Training Board. 'Education Service Cork Prison' (CETB.ie, 2023) <[www.corketb.ie/about-cork-etb/further-education-training-f-e-t/education-service-cork-prison/](http://www.corketb.ie/about-cork-etb/further-education-training-f-e-t/education-service-cork-prison/)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>157</sup> Department of Justice and Department of Health, *High Level Task Force to consider the mental health and addiction challenges of those who come into contact with the criminal justice sector: Final Report* (DoJ and DoH 2022), 204 <[www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/236035/0de04b4d-817a-41cf-9779-771ab57703ac.pdf](https://assets.gov.ie/236035/0de04b4d-817a-41cf-9779-771ab57703ac.pdf)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>158</sup> MoJ, *Education and Employment Strategy* (MoJ 2023), 3-4 <<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5b05783aed915d7c91f94be8/education-and-employment-strategy-2018.pdf>> accessed 15 November 2023.

completed an education programme during their sentence.<sup>159</sup> Polling commissioned by the MoJ in the UK found that over 90 per cent of businesses who did employ ex-offenders said they are reliable, good at their job, punctual and trustworthy.<sup>160</sup>

Furthermore, the MoJ *Education and Employment Strategy* set out the Prisoner Apprenticeship Pathway as a vocational route to gaining qualifications and work experience.<sup>161</sup> The formal 12-month apprenticeship on release give the prisoner the chance to have a long period of resettlement in the community with a guaranteed job and a guaranteed income. **A similar apprenticeship model, which spans through custody through to release, should be considered in Ireland.**

**Progressive Practice:** Sue Ryder, Prison Volunteers Programme (UK)

Since 2006, Sue Ryder a charity in the UK, has been offering currently serving offenders volunteering placements in their charity shops and central offices. Those who volunteer are reaching the end of their custodial sentence and are being released on temporary licence to help them with resettlement. This programme prepares prisoners for paid work on release from prison while also providing the opportunity for them to give something back to the community. Over 80 per cent of programme participants reported that they learned new skills that they believed would improve their long-term job prospects.<sup>162</sup>

## 10. Reintegration

### 10.1. Reoffending

Reoffending rates are not the only measure through which the effectiveness of prison education should be measured. However, the detailed analytical studies that do exist on the effectiveness of prison education largely focus on this metric. There is a wealth of evidence that demonstrates the benefits of prison education, particularly in relation to its impact on reoffending and employment post-release.<sup>163</sup> A meta-analysis of 18 (primarily USA-based) reoffending studies found that participating in prison education reduces the likelihood of recidivism by approximately one-third and that those who have engaged in prison education are 24 per cent more likely to find employment

<sup>159</sup> SOLAS, 'Over 60 per cent of employers would hire an ex-offender if supported to do so' (SOLAS.ie, 2 September 2019) <[www.solas.ie/news-media/over-60-per-cent-of-employers-would-hire-an-ex-offender-if-supported-to-do-so/](http://www.solas.ie/news-media/over-60-per-cent-of-employers-would-hire-an-ex-offender-if-supported-to-do-so/)> accessed 15 November 2023.

<sup>160</sup> MoJ, 'Giving an ex-offender a second chance can be a win-win for business, says Deputy Prime Minister' (Gov.uk, 21 October 2021) <[www.gov.uk/government/news/giving-an-ex-offender-a-second-chance-can-be-a-win-win-for-business-says-deputy-prime-minister](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/giving-an-ex-offender-a-second-chance-can-be-a-win-win-for-business-says-deputy-prime-minister)> accessed 15 November 2023.

<sup>161</sup> MoJ, *Education and Employment Strategy* (MoJ 2023) <<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5b05783aed915d7c91f94be8/education-and-employment-strategy-2018.pdf>> accessed 15 November 2023.

<sup>162</sup> Sue Ryder, 'Why PVP?' (SueRyder.org, 2023) <[www.sueryder.org/support-us/volunteer/prison-volunteer-programme/why-pvp](http://www.sueryder.org/support-us/volunteer/prison-volunteer-programme/why-pvp)> accessed 13 November 2023.

<sup>163</sup> Mark Ellison et al., 'A Rapid Evidence Assessment of the effectiveness of prison education in reducing recidivism and increasing employment' (2017) 64(2) Probation Journal 108 <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0264550517699290>> accessed 3 October 2023.

than those who have not.<sup>164</sup> A comprehensive international study of the effectiveness of prison education by RAND Corporation found that prison education improves chances of not returning to prison, and reduces risk of reoffending by 13 per cent compared to those who had not engaged in structured prison education.<sup>165</sup>

Research about prison learners carried out on behalf of the MoJ in the UK showed that they were significantly more likely to be in employment than non-learners one year from release. It also found that people who had participated in education in prison were significantly less likely to reoffend within 12 months of release.<sup>166</sup>

Other research has found that not only employment post-release, but *opportunity* to engage in employment is important in encouraging desistance, which is a challenge for people returning to communities with higher levels of structural disadvantage.<sup>167</sup>

In Ireland, over six in ten (61 per cent) of those who were released from prison during 2017 were convicted of reoffending within three years of release.<sup>168</sup> However, we have no data on how those who have engaged with education or work training fared in comparison to those who did not.

An evidence review commissioned by the Department of Justice in Ireland also found that low levels of educational attainment and poor literacy are associated with an elevated risk of reimprisonment. Higher levels of education and a history of regular employment were protective factors against reoffending.<sup>169</sup>

There are no publicly available data in Ireland on whether prison leavers progress to any training or education following release. Additionally, despite the CSO publishing data on education and employment before and after imprisonment,<sup>170</sup> as well as data on prison reoffending rates,<sup>171</sup> there is no analysis that links the two datasets. Greater levels of data on the relationships between education and reoffending could support stronger investment in prison education. The 2021 Spending Review of work and training in Irish prisons noted that the inclusion of a work and training indicator in prison reoffending data published by the CSO would allow for exploration of the potential impact of engagement in work and training on recidivism and recommended that the IPS explore options to

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Lois Davis et al, *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta-Analysis of Programs That Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults* (RAND 2013) <[www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR266.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR266.html)> accessed 2 October 2023. RAND Corporation is a non-profit institution that conducts public policy research and analysis.

<sup>166</sup> HM Prison and Probation Service, *Evaluation of prisoner learning: Initial impacts and delivery* (HMPPS 2018) <[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/708156/evaluation-of-prisoner-learning-initial-impacts-report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/708156/evaluation-of-prisoner-learning-initial-impacts-report.pdf)> accessed 3 October 2023.

<sup>167</sup> Richard Stansfield, 'Juvenile Desistance and Community Disadvantage: The Role of Appropriate Accommodations and Engagements' (2016) 33(4) *Justice Quarterly* <[www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07418825.2014.958189](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07418825.2014.958189)> accessed 3 October 2023.

<sup>168</sup> Central Statistics Office, 'Prison Re-offending Statistics 2020' (CSO.ie, 11 July 2023) <[www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-pros/prisonre-offendingstatistics2020/keyfindings/](http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-pros/prisonre-offendingstatistics2020/keyfindings/)> accessed 13 November 2023.

<sup>169</sup> Ian O'Donnell, *An Evidence Review of Recidivism and Policy Responses* (Department of Justice 2020) <[www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/74991/b2d18629-257a-4dd4-b72c-38cefa3ed809.pdf](http://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/74991/b2d18629-257a-4dd4-b72c-38cefa3ed809.pdf)> accessed 3 October 2023.

<sup>170</sup> Central Statistics Office, 'Offenders 2016: Employment, Education and other Outcomes, 2016-2019' (CSO.ie, 2020) <[www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/fp/p-offo/offenders2016employmenteducationandotheroutcomes2016-2019/introduction/](http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/fp/p-offo/offenders2016employmenteducationandotheroutcomes2016-2019/introduction/)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>171</sup> Central Statistics Office, 'Prison Re-offending Statistics 2020' (CSO.ie, 11 July 2023) <[www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-pros/prisonre-offendingstatistics2020/keyfindings/](http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-pros/prisonre-offendingstatistics2020/keyfindings/)> accessed 13 November 2023.

leverage existing administrative data through the National Data Infrastructure led by the CSO.<sup>172</sup> **IPRT wholly supports this recommendation.**

Finally, any future research or data analysis on the topic should look beyond the term ‘education’ and consider *types* of education and *methods* of delivery in order to consider how and why education impacts on reoffending.

#### Progressive Practice: The Justice Data Lab (UK)

The Justice Data Lab, part of the MoJ, carries out analysis of programmes and interventions to evaluate any impact on reoffending rates. The one-year reoffending rate for 9,041 learners who received a grant through the Prisoners’ Education Trust for distance learning courses was almost a quarter lower than a matched control group of similar prison leavers (18 per cent compared with 23 per cent).<sup>173</sup> The ‘treatment group’ also had higher employment rates in the one-year period after releases than a matched control group.<sup>174</sup>

### 10.2. Barriers to education and employment on release

An absence of support upon release, including stable accommodation, acts as a barrier for former prisoners to successfully reintegrate into society and access education and employment.

The current spent convictions legislation represents a significant barrier to supporting many young people with convictions to access education, employment, travel and insurance. The current legislation does not allow people who have committed more than one offence (with the exception of motoring and public order offences) to not disclose their old convictions, no matter how long ago in the past the offences were committed. While IPRT welcomed the introduction of the legislation in 2016, we believe this legislation does not go far enough. In order to give more people a greater opportunity to access meaningful employment, the Rehabilitative Periods Bill 2018, introduced by Senator Lynn Ruane, should be progressed through the Houses without further delay. Additionally, IPRT reiterates its position<sup>175</sup> – and the position of IHREC<sup>176</sup> – that the ground of criminal conviction should be added to Ireland’s equality legislation in order to protect people with convictions from discrimination in all areas of their lives.

A US meta-analysis of 57 studies that evaluated recidivism and 21 studies that evaluated employment following participation in education programmes in prison found that prisoners participating in educational programmes were 28 per cent less likely to reoffend than prisoners who

<sup>172</sup> Caroline Finn, *Spending Review 2021: Review of the Programme of Work and Training in the Irish Prison Service* (IPS 2021) <[www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/205493/b0cabab7-17f9-4231-ad48-4827eee4c9f2.pdf](https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/205493/b0cabab7-17f9-4231-ad48-4827eee4c9f2.pdf)> accessed 4 October 2023.

<sup>173</sup> Ministry of Justice, *Justice Data Lab Experimental Statistics: Employment and reoffending behaviour after support from Prisoners’ Education Trust (PET)* - 4th Analysis (MoJ 2021) <[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/600939c0d3bf7f2aa8d97051/Prisoners\\_Education\\_Trust\\_PET\\_4th\\_analysis\\_report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/600939c0d3bf7f2aa8d97051/Prisoners_Education_Trust_PET_4th_analysis_report.pdf)> accessed 14 November 2023.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> IPRT, *IPRT Submission to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth on the Review of the Equality Acts* (IPRT 2021) <[www.iprt.ie/site/assets/files/7029/iprt\\_submission\\_to\\_the\\_review\\_of\\_the\\_equality\\_acts\\_final.pdf](https://www.iprt.ie/site/assets/files/7029/iprt_submission_to_the_review_of_the_equality_acts_final.pdf)> accessed 24 October 2023.

<sup>176</sup> IHREC, *Submission on the Review of the Equality Acts* (IHREC 2023) <[www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2023/07/Submission-on-the-Review-of-the-Equality-Acts.pdf](https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2023/07/Submission-on-the-Review-of-the-Equality-Acts.pdf)> accessed 24 October 2023.

did not participate.<sup>177</sup> However, the reduction in the rate of recidivism did not always lead to gainful employment after release, with only a marginal increase in employment when analysing all studies, and a null relationship when the analysis is restricted to the studies with the highest quality research designs.<sup>178</sup> In short, in this study, those who did not participate in education in prison were as likely to obtain post-release employment as those who did.<sup>179</sup> This could indicate that the impact of a prison sentence can outweigh a prisoner's educational achievements while incarcerated. Because of these, it is imperative that action to minimise the impact a prison sentence, or indeed any other justice sanction, be limited insofar as possible.

IPRT, through funding from IHREC, has commissioned academics from Maynooth University to complete a piece of research on employer attitudes towards hiring people with convictions and the barriers faced by people with convictions to securing employment.<sup>180</sup> This is due for publication in early 2024 and it is hoped that the research will result in a range of pragmatic recommendations for supporting people with convictions and employers.

The *Working to Change: Social Enterprise and Employment Strategy 2021-2023* is due to come to an end this year and work is underway on a successor strategy, due to be published in 2024.<sup>181</sup> It is welcome that consultation has taken place with individuals with lived experience as well as organisational stakeholders.

**IPRT supports the development of a successor to *Working to Change* and recommends that it incorporates any learning opportunities or educational supports identified as part of the consultations, particularly by people with lived experience of the system. The strategy should be designed in partnership by a range of stakeholders to improve employment opportunities and outcomes for people with convictions.**

## 11. Other considerations

### 11.1. Prison Rules and the role of education

The revision of the *Prison Rules 2007* is a key opportunity to consider the role of education in the prison environment and to enshrine this as a right in legislation (albeit secondary legislation).

IPRT is clear that all forms of education in prison should be facilitated as a right.<sup>182</sup> Given concerns regarding the impact of operational decisions (such as staff deployment or being held on protection)

<sup>177</sup> Robert Bozick et al., 'Does providing inmates with education improve postrelease outcomes? A meta-analysis of correctional education programs in the United States' (2018) 14 *Journal of Experimental Criminology* 389 <<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11292-018-9334-6>> 13 October 2023.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> IPRT, 'Researchers announced for "Working with Conviction" project' (*IPRT.ie*, 27 February 2023) <[www.iprt.ie/latest-news/researchers-announced-for-working-with-conviction-project/](http://www.iprt.ie/latest-news/researchers-announced-for-working-with-conviction-project/)> accessed 24 October 2023.

<sup>181</sup> Kildare Street, 'Employment Schemes' (28 November 2023 <[www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2023-11-28a.1117](http://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2023-11-28a.1117)> accessed 1 December 2023.

<sup>182</sup> IPRT, *Progress in the Penal System: A framework for penal reform* (IPRT 2019) <https://pips.iprt.ie/site/assets/files/Progress-in-the-Penal-System-2019.pdf>> accessed 4 October 2023.



on prisoners' access to education (see sections 2.1 and 2.2), it is crucial that the right of each prisoner to educational services of the same standard and quality as those available in the community be strengthened and made explicit within the Irish Prison Rules.

**As such, IPRT has previously posited that Rules 110 and 111 should be amended by removing phrases such as “in so far as is practicable”.<sup>183</sup> While beyond the immediate purview of the Taskforce to make these changes, it is vital that this basic commitment to educational attainment is encouraged and implemented across the prison estate, including through the Prison Rules. While cognisant of the different model and setting, by comparison, Rule 2 of the Oberstown Framework, states that young people shall have access to appropriate education, training and leisure activities suited to their needs and abilities and designed to prepare them, for independent living.<sup>184</sup>**

### 11.2. Breaking the cycle

In media coverage surrounding the first meeting of the Taskforce, Minister Harris noted that the Taskforce wants to “*break the cycle where often your mother or your dad are in prison, you are more likely to end up in prison*”.<sup>185</sup> **With this in mind, the Taskforce should consider as part of its remit a programme of sustained engagement with the Department of Education and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY).** Work with the Department of Education should centre around incorporating lessons and resources about the impact of imprisonment on families and children at both a primary and secondary school level, the development of training for all teachers on the potential impact of imprisonment on children, and how to respond sensitively to these needs.<sup>186</sup> This need for engagement is particularly important in light of the recent inclusion of children and families of prisoners in the DCEDIY’s *Young Ireland – National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023 – 2028*.<sup>187</sup>

### 11.3. Prison education and training in national strategy

Finally, given the number of people committed to prison on a yearly basis (7,043 committals of 5,801 persons in 2022),<sup>188</sup> the important role of prison education as part of the wider further education system should not be overlooked. **Prison education and training should be aligned, where possible,**

<sup>183</sup> Rules 110-111, Prison Rules 2007, 252/2007.

<sup>184</sup> Oberstown Children Detention Campus, *Children’s Rights Policy Framework* (Oberstown 2020) <[www.oberstown.com/wp-content/uploads/pda/2021/05/Childrens-Rights-Policy-Framework-Final-Version-24-August-2020.pdf?t=609406ea37da1](http://www.oberstown.com/wp-content/uploads/pda/2021/05/Childrens-Rights-Policy-Framework-Final-Version-24-August-2020.pdf?t=609406ea37da1)> accessed 3 October 2023.

<sup>185</sup> Harry McGee, ‘First meeting of Prison Education Task Force held in Mountjoy Prison attended by Minister for Justice Simon Harris and Minister of State’ *The Irish Times* (31 May 2023) <[www.irishtimes.com/crime-law/2023/05/31/seven-out-of-ten-prisoners-leave-school-by-age-of-14-taskforce-told/](http://www.irishtimes.com/crime-law/2023/05/31/seven-out-of-ten-prisoners-leave-school-by-age-of-14-taskforce-told/)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>186</sup> IPRT, *Piecing it Together: Supporting children and families with a family member in prison in Ireland* (IPRT 2021) <[www.iprt.ie/site/assets/files/6958/piecing\\_it\\_together\\_supporting\\_children\\_and\\_families.pdf](http://www.iprt.ie/site/assets/files/6958/piecing_it_together_supporting_children_and_families.pdf)> accessed 2 October 2023.

<sup>187</sup> DCEDIY, *Young Ireland – National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023 – 2028* (DCEDIY 2023), 97-98 <[www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/277172/ef862f1a-4e15-465a-9fed-fd43303b60c4.pdf#page=105](https://assets.gov.ie/277172/ef862f1a-4e15-465a-9fed-fd43303b60c4.pdf#page=105)> accessed 27 November 2023.

<sup>188</sup> IPS, *Annual Report 2022* (IPS 2023), 45 <[www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents\\_pdf/IPS-Annual-Report-2022.pdfhttp://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents\\_pdf/IPS-Annual-Report-21\\_Final.pdf](http://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/IPS-Annual-Report-2022.pdfhttp://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/IPS-Annual-Report-21_Final.pdf)> accessed 23 October 2023.

to national strategies, such as the National Skills Strategy<sup>189</sup> and the National Further Education and Training Strategy.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, *Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025* (DFHERIS 2021) <<https://assets.gov.ie/24412/0f5f058feec641bbb92d34a0a8e3daff.pdf>> accessed 10 November 2023.

<sup>190</sup> Government of Ireland et al., *Future FET: Transforming Learning The National Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy* (SOLAS 2020) <[www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/64d0718c9e/solas\\_fet\\_strategy\\_web.pdf](http://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/64d0718c9e/solas_fet_strategy_web.pdf)> accessed 10 November 2023.



## 12. Conclusion

The links between educational disadvantage and the penal system are well-explored. However, equally, the links between prison education and positive outcomes are also well-documented. While the IPS and the ETBI have an immensely challenging role in the provision of education in prison, their work to date in providing men and women in custody with welcoming opportunities for development has been commendable. However, strengthening provision for particular cohorts of prisoners, harnessing data to make better-informed decisions about education, investment in infrastructure, and the use of programmes to enhance out-of-cell time would all continue to the trajectory of positive transformation of education in prisons and beyond.

At its core, given the goal of deprivation of liberty, imprisonment is about exclusion – from family, friends, communities, and society more widely. Education, on the other hand, is about inclusion.<sup>191</sup> As such, challenges exist in meeting both requirements. Despite the challenges of engaging with education in a prison environment, the creativity and determination of both students and teachers can make room for teaching even in these tough conditions.

In order to maximise the benefits and role of education in prison, penal policy must be rehabilitative at its core. The potential of prison education can only be realised within prisons that meet, at a minimum, the basic human rights standards that we should all expect of the Irish prison system, as well as achieving a reasonable measure of decency and humanity in approach to those who live and learn there.

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## 13. Relevant IPRT resources

- Submission of the Irish Penal Reform Trust to the Joint Committee on Education and Skills on 'Education Inequality and Disadvantage' (2018)
- PIPS 2022: Education (2023, p.59)
- PIPS 2021: Education (2022, p.76)
- PIPS 2019: Education (2019, p.74)
- PIPS 2018: Education (2018, p.75)
- PIPS 2017: Education (2017, p.54)

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<sup>191</sup> Cormac Behan, *Education in prison: A literature review* (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning 2021) <<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED615405.pdf>> accessed 23 October 2023