

Desk Research

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Provide an outline of the prison system in your country

The prison system in Scotland is managed by the Scottish Prison Service (SPS). At present there are 7620 prisoners contained¹ within fifteen establishments.

Of the fifteen prisons:

- Thirteen are public sector prisons
- One prison is reserved for young offenders: HMP YOI Polmont
- Females are held in four prisons but only one is reserved for female offenders: HMP YOI Cornton Vale.
- Two prisons are privately run – Addiewell and Kilmarnock

New College Lanarkshire provides educational services within seven of the thirteen prisons – HMP Barlinnie, HMP YOI Cornton Vale, HMP Dumfries, HMP Glenochil, HMP Greenock, HMP Low Moss and HMP Shotts. Fife College provide education services in the remaining eight Scottish prisons, including Polmont.

The ratio of prisoners with low literacy levels and few or no qualifications is significantly higher than the general population. Furthermore, many prisoners report high truancy levels during initial education and up to a third of prisoners have to cope with learning difficulties that make targeted support very difficult to manage.²

Trends within the prison service

The average annual cost per prison place is £34,102³ per annum. By contrast, the average cost of a community payback order is £2400 per annum⁴. Community payback orders (CPOs) are designed to ensure that offenders make reparation to society, most regularly in the form of unpaid work. Unpaid work can be imposed between 20-300 hours. There has been a trend towards the use of community penalties within Scotland and a related shift away from short-term prison sentences of less than three months in line with recent reforms including PASS – The Presumption Against Short Sentences.⁵

The prison system supports a range of prisoners: those on remand, those convicted of short and long-term sentences and young offenders. In 2013/14, 13% of those sentenced by courts were given a custodial sentence and the imprisonment rate within Scotland is currently 143 per 100000, which

¹ The total population of people in custody in Scotland stood at 7620 as of 27 November 2015. Statistics taken from www.sps.gov.uk/Corporate/Information/SPSPopulation.aspx

² Ministry of Justice, 2012

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⁴ <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0039/00391828.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/03/3800/10>

represents a significant increase in the last decade⁶. There is a statutory presumption against prison sentences of less than three months – unless a court considers that no other method of dealing with the person is appropriate.⁷ However, despite this, the number of those on remand continues to rise – by a total of 3.4% since 2000⁸. Recidivism is also a major cause for concern across the UK as a whole with over 45% of adults being reconvicted within a year of being released. The cost of this reoffending is estimated to cost the tax payer between £9.5 and £13 million per year.⁹

The female prison population has doubled in the past ten years in Scotland and Scotland currently has the highest number of female prisoners in Europe. As such, the Scottish Government and SPS have recently begun the process of upgrading Cornton Vale – instructing the completion of a smaller and higher-quality prison on the same site for serious and long-term prisoners. In addition to this, they are creating five community custody units to strengthen the focus on community integration and intensive family support.

Several social and domestic causal factors have been identified for the increasing female prison statistics – namely a history of abuse, mental health issues and addiction problems. In 2007, HMIP reported that 80% of female offenders held within Cornton Vale suffered from diagnosed mental health problems. Reportedly, 60% of female prisoners claimed they were under the influence of drugs at the time of their offence. Furthermore, only 30% of women held on remand went on to receive a custodial sentence.

Scotland is seeing an upward trend in the sentencing of foreign nationals.

In recent years there has also been a move towards a more rehabilitative approach. This started in 2012 with the building of Low Moss prison which focuses on intensive family contact and support. Reducing the number of young offenders has also been a key priority of the Scottish government. In the dedicated Young Offenders institution – Polmont – first-time prisoner numbers have declined by 34% since 2007 and the numbers reoffending have decreased by half. The focus in this area has been on improved conditions, education and health.

Arrangements for prison education in Scotland

Education Strategy

The SPS Learning, Skills and Employability strategy (2016) centres around the mantra *Unlocking Potential and Transforming Lives*. The strategy asserts that every prisoner in their care should have “the opportunity to engage in creative and flexible learning that unlocks [their] potential and inspires change and builds individual strength”. It seeks to achieve this through an education provision which develops key skills and literacies through a mix of classroom teaching, vocational training and a wide range of participatory creative and cultural activities, in a blend of formal, non-formal and informal learning activities.

In response to the Learning and Skills review of 2014, the SPS have outlined further change. The key priorities include:

- An improvement of SPS governance and local management structures, including the introduction of learning and skills panels within each establishment. There will be an

⁶ Based on National Records of Scotland figures – taken from www.prisonstudies.org/country/united-kingdom-scotland

⁷ The Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ Prisoners’ Education Trust – Nina Champion – *The Future of Prison Education Contracts: Delivering Better Outcomes*

increased focus on coordination and integration which will see the SPS adopt a 'whole-prison approach' to engagement and learning activities. These changes will better facilitate the introduction of the 'New Generation Contract' in August 2017, which will aim to respond to the 'learner's voice' and align to the wide-ranging needs of individual learners.

- The further improvement of education provision and access to learning opportunities. Increasing the engagement of all through innovation and enabling access to information through modern technologies will provide two of the cornerstones of delivering a more forward-thinking approach to provision. Despite economic constraints, the SPS are seeking to develop a more tailored approach to educational provision predicated on the specific needs of the learner.
- The connection between educational attainment and employment continues to inform policy and provision given that UK-based research demonstrates that ex-offenders who have gained employment on or shortly after release are between 30-50% less likely to reoffend¹⁰. Purposeful activity and work parties, therefore, will undergo a process of greater harmonisation across establishments and integration with the wider 'learning world' of the prison.
- There is also a commitment to revolutionise evaluation and reflection processes. There will be a move towards a more qualitative, socio-ecological methodology. Alongside the collection and analysis of quantitative data – such as prisoner learning hours, core class provision, literacy screenings, individual learning plans, accreditation – there will also be a distinct move towards a holistic analysis of the impact of an engagement in learning on behaviours, development and a sense of wellbeing.

Practicalities of provision

Each prison has a learning centre which is managed and administered by a further education college: New College Lanarkshire and Fife College independently manage portions of the provision. Engagement in the learning centre is firmly opt-in throughout the prison systems. Potential learners are offered an 'education induction' on entry to the prison during the work board panel. Full-time education is an option for full-time employment. Those prisoners who choose a work party are entitled to access six sessions of education per week.

'On the ground', however, there can be some challenges for learners to access that provision. Delivery for hard-to-reach or reluctant learners is still under-resourced with limited block learning opportunities in residential areas. Access to learning opportunities – formal, non-formal and informal – are limited at evening and weekends with many of the women being restricted to their cells or residential unit. Learners are often required for other prison activities such as the Health Centre or Agent's visits during their time in the learning centre and Programmes commitments can restrict access to education.

Academic, vocational, creative, peer-led and informal learning opportunities are available in Scottish prisons. However, much of the focus in provision in learning centres remains on formalised classroom-based delivery and accreditation via formal qualification, with a primary focus on the development of key skills, such as literacy, numeracy and team working.¹¹ This priority is underscored by Michael Gove, UK Justice Secretary, recent proposition for the possibility of 'earned release' – an early release date as a result of qualifications gained. It is clear then that policy is, to a large extent, driven by a reduction in "idleness and futility" and a push for formal qualifications which can help to lead to employment and subsequently a reduction in recidivism.¹²

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¹² BBC. 'Prison education must be 'overhauled', Michael Gove says'. 17 July 2015

Education provision in the learning centres varies somewhat across the provider. In terms of accreditation, Fife College tend to focus more on the facilitation of key skills, working with learners to produce large quantities of low-mid level core skill qualifications from the SQA (Scottish Qualifications Authority) and non-formal educational opportunities validated by ASDAN. In terms of formal learning and accreditation, New College Lanarkshire deliver formal SQA qualifications, which **research shows**¹³ tend to garner more respect with future employers and further/higher education establishments. Formal qualifications are offered in a wide range of subjects; the core subjects of literacy, numeracy and IT are well represented and opportunities exist to gain qualifications in Art & Digital Art, Music, Cookery, Media Studies, History, Modern Studies, ESOL, Scottish Studies, Business and Peer Tutoring. Learners can also opt-in to these classes without undertaking formal qualification. To complement their SQA-delivery, New College Lanarkshire places an emphasis on non-formal and informal learning, much of which would benefit from clearer validation. Project-working constitutes a great deal of the activity in learning centres, which can take a range of forms from multi-disciplinary projects through drama workshops to the award-winning prisoners' publication STIR.¹⁴

A suite of Open University and Open Learning courses are also available for learners with higher levels of attainment.

In New College Lanarkshire, class sizes can vary between one to fifteen learners. Classes are managed by one offender learning lecturer. All are qualified lecturers with specific skill sets.

Learners who attend education within prison settings come from different backgrounds, with differing skills, aspirations and prior experiences of learning. More often than not, this leads to the challenge of mixed-ability classes. Peer-mentoring and limited class sizes

Lecturers are provided with initial screening assessments which outline the learner's level, interests and identifies the presence of a difficulties/disability (LDD). Future SPS policy will seek to extend 'care pathways' to provide appropriate interventions for those requiring additional support for learning and will anticipate more creative approaches to delivery from their education providers to support the learners effectively.

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Recent study and policy recommendations in Scotland

National Strategy for the validation of informal learning

Scottish employers and formal education providers still tend to prioritise formal qualifications over experiential learning gained from non-formal and informal learning experiences. However, within the Scottish context, a fair amount of research¹⁵ and policy work has focused on the retrospective validation of non-formal and informal learning in an attempt to “make learning visible”. The national approach to the validation of non-formal and informal learning within Scotland is referred to as the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

RPL is defined as: *“the process for recognising learning that has its source in experience and/or previous formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts”*¹⁶. This model of ‘validation’ aims to provide guidance/frameworks for measuring **prior** formal, non-formal and informal learning. Through the process of RPL, “Learners reflect on their experience in order to discover and then express what these experiences have taught them. RPL is a process through which learning gained from experience can be recognised and used. It also includes learning gained through non-formal learning and training programmes in the workplace, in the community and in the voluntary sector. People can gain a range of knowledge and skills through:

- family life (home-making, caring, domestic organisation)
- work (paid or unpaid)
- community, voluntary or leisure activities
- key experiences and events in life.¹⁷

Tools have been developed by the SCQF Partnership and the HE sector to map a learners’ existing **skills and knowledge** against a formalised national qualifications framework – the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). This mapped informal or experiential learning can be benchmarked formatively against the framework or it can be summatively assessed by the SQA (Scottish Qualifications Authority) or other training providers resulting in the accreditation of prior (experiential) learning and the awarding of SCQF credit points. However, these points are more traditionally aligned to the completion of formal learning and, as such, are subject to the same quality assurance methods as formally assessed learning. This validation process consists of four stages: **identification, documentation, assessment and certification**.

The SCQF handbook¹⁸ outlines three ‘key principles’ of RPL:

- Recognition is given for learning, not for experience alone
- The learning that is recognised should be transferable
- SCQF Credit Points awarded as a result of RPL are valued the same as those gained through credit rated learning.

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) also works alongside government bodies including the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and SCQF to offer skills diagnostic tools targeted at wide-ranging individuals. These tools are designed to support individuals to identify the transferable skills and competences gained from experiences outwith formal education and qualifications which can be benchmarked formatively against the SCQF framework. The agency also helps learners to target interests and motivations to support their career development and provides competency-based statements which can be used in the pursuit of further and higher education as well as employment.

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¹⁶ European Commission; Cedefop; ICF International (2014). *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014: country report UK-Scotland*.

http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2014/87080_UK_SC.pdf.

¹⁷ Recognition of Prior Learning Toolkit, Margaret Cameron and Julie Cavanagh, SCQF

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The national curriculum in Scotland is known as the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). It aims to help learners develop the **attributes, knowledge and skills** required for life, learning and work. Education Scotland has outlined four key capacities we should be striving for from any learning experience – namely the creation of successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

As a result of CfE, the focus within formal education in Scotland has shifted towards a more adaptable and inter-disciplinary provision. While education (in the latter stages) in formal settings is still tethered to the acquisition of formal qualifications, the current provision is much less focused on formalised delivery. CfE now measures and validates learning until the age of 15 based on 'experiences and outcomes'. This term is designed to foreground "the importance of the quality and nature of the learning **experience** in developing attributes and capabilities and in achieving active engagement, motivation and depth of learning. An **outcome** represents what is to be achieved". Furthermore, there is a shift towards a more informal and experiential approach. The CfE places a much greater focus on personalisation and choice and the provision of opportunities for personal achievement which education policy recognises can build motivation, resilience and confidence¹⁹.

There are also training providers in the UK which offer formal and non-formal curricula "that explicitly grow skills for learning, skills for employment and skills for life"²⁰. The focus with ASDAN qualifications is very much on the development of personal and social attributes which will improve life chances. ASDAN affiliated practitioners deliver curricula, resources and qualifications within thousands of registered centres.

The national body for quality and improvement in Scottish education, Education Scotland, has also increasingly focused on the complementary benefits informal outdoor learning can have on a broadly formal curriculum, particularly for young people and learners with complex needs²¹. There is a general recognition that this form of informal learning helps to develop health and wellbeing, creativity as well as key skills.

Existing research outlining the value of non-formal and informal learning

A range of pre-existing research exists surrounding the value of informal learning²². However, much of this research pertains to specific 'communities of practice'²³.

The culture sector in Scotland has undertaken to foreground the value of informal learning in increasing participation and engagement. Museums and Galleries Scotland have undertaken or commissioned a range of research papers designed to ascertain the value of informal learning, for example the joint ACE and NIACE publication, *Family Learning and Museums, Libraries, Archives and the Cultural Sector*²⁴. This work has culminated in the introduction of a range of funded projects and manifestos including *Culture Baby*, the *Kids in Museums* manifesto designed to tie in with the government policy of The Big Society. Such research recognises the absolute value of lifelong learning and key skills development for supporting key social policy goals: early intervention, social mobility and employability.

Schools in Scotland work in partnership with the global STEM initiative which delivers informal educational opportunities in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, taking place outside the classroom environment. This learning is intended to be experiential and hands-on, resulting in

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²⁰ <http://www.asdan.org.uk/about>

²¹ http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/OutdoorLearningSupport_tcm4-675958.pdf

²² <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/184313.pdf>

²³ Lave and Wenger

²⁴ http://shop.niace.org.uk/media/catalog/product/m/l/mla_fl_final_active.pdf

richer more engaging learning opportunities and increased enthusiasm, motivation, effective team working and communication.²⁵

Human resource managers and employers are also increasingly recognising the benefits of a “Learning workforce”, which sees employees engaging in the process of lifelong learning in a mix of formal education, non-formal training and informal development opportunities. This shift is apparent in virtually every area of employment.

The professionalisation of teachers, for example, relies on a blend of formal education supported by workplace participation which provides valuable opportunities for learning through non-formal and informal learning. Government reform builds largely on the research of the University of Aberdeen, the Scottish Government and the Hunter Foundation – Scottish Teachers for a New Era (STNE)²⁶. This initiative created a new B.Ed. degree program which was influenced by research into new ways of teaching and the benefit of creating new learning platforms which allowed for informal and continuous learning.

Does VINFL form part of training for teachers?

As yet, the validation of non-formal and informal learning does not play any formal part in teacher training. Though the benefits of informal learning and quite widely documented and well as the processes of self-reflection and the benefits of validation for learners, there has been no attempt to combine validation processes with informal learning.

²⁵ http://www.parliament.uk/pagefiles/53788/postpn_382-informal-science-education.pdf

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Pre-existing research into the need for and potential benefits of VINFL, particularly in prisons?

On a UK-wide level, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) has undertaken significant research²⁷ into the benefits of lifelong learning consisting of a combination of formal, non-formal and informal learning.

The Open Book project at Goldsmiths University is run by former prisoners and provides intensive support to other ex-offenders to engage in informal learning as a pathway into more formal learning.

Nina Champion of the Prisoners' Education Trust cites informal learning opportunities for adults as one of the key rehabilitative outcomes for its ability to enable personal and social development. Hughes develops this statement further, explaining that opportunities for informal self-directed learning, as part of a blended learning model, also promotes personal autonomy, agency and empowerment.

An IFLL paper outlines that lifelong learning “reduces damaging populism, and pushes up standard debate and decision-making.”²⁸

Government policy foregrounds the role the arts sector can play in providing opportunities for informal learning and all its associated social and communicative benefits. The Arts is also an area which policy-makers believe can inspire further motivation to engage in a wider range of educational opportunities.

At times, this is in contrast with the public's perception that prisoners should be deprived of life-enhancing experiences during their sentence: “Despite the benefits that are clearly apparent from prisoners taking part in these activities, it would seem that there is another view to be had and that is that some people think that prisoners should simply not be allowed to take part in ‘fun’ activities”.²⁹

Prisoner Learning Alliance Research into Justice Policy in England and Wales posits that “Another perverse outcome of focusing on accreditation is the incentive to accredit for the sake of it, despite some learning benefiting from being delivered in an informal and non-accredited way. “ This, they believe, may undermine the potential of informal learning to inspire and its function as an avenue into further learning. Approximately 12% of offender learning funding is retained for Personal and Social development, a key element of which is informal learning. They continue, “[g]iven the small proportion of Skills Funding Agency money for Personal Social Development, non accredited learning, as well as the push for accreditations, this can lead to the perverse result that engagement and motivational activities can be side-lined.”³⁰

The Scottish Prison Service prioritise the arts as one of the key elements of informal learning. National initiatives are in place – Scottish Prison Arts Network and Artlink – designed to encourage participation in arts activity. Scottish Justice research, *Inspiring Change* suggests that at least four of the nine key offender outcomes are addressed by arts intervention: “sustained or improved physical and mental wellbeing, improved literacy skills, employability prospects increased, improvements in

²⁷ Niace (2009) Lifelong Learning and Crime: An analysis of the cost-effectiveness of in-prison educational and vocational interventions. IFLL public value paper 2. Leicester: Niace.

<http://www.niace.org.uk/lifelonglearninginquiry/docs/Public-valuepaper-2.pdf>

Niace (2009) Learning Through Life. Leicester: Niace.

Niace (2012) The Work Programme. What is the role of skills? Leicester: Niace.

<http://shop.niace.org.uk/media/catalog/product/w/o/workprogrammeweb.pdf>

²⁸ Schuller, T. Crime and Lifelong Learning. IFLL Thematic Paper 5.

²⁹ Artlink Central (2007): *The Arts and Prisoners – Creative Rehabilitation*, p.13

³⁰ Prisoner Learning Alliance – Smart Rehabilitation Report

the attitudes or behaviour which lead to offending and greater acceptance of responsibility in managing their own behaviour and understanding of the impact of their offending on victims and on their own families”³¹

Qualitative research demonstrates the potential for informal learning to motivate engagement in further learning:

“It opens doors for you as well because a lot of people in here didn’t like school, or they didn’t go, or they didn’t feel any good...because they had dyslexia and it wasn’t recognised. They come in here, they’re thinking about education but they don’t want to do it, because they feel daft, they feel like people will take the mick because they canny get it right or something. They come down and do a bit of the arts, and it seems to open doors for them; it gives them a chance to look at things and watch what’s happening in other classes...and they start to get more curious. Before they know it they’ve went from the window to the door, and then they’re in a class. Without that process in the arts, they wouldn’t have done that in the first place. They wouldn’t have had the opportunity to push themselves in.”
Prisoner, HMP Perth

Creative Scotland argue that embedding the arts in core educational provision in this way creates an “active learning environment in which practical exploration, experimentation and collaborative working is encouraged. For participants in a prison context this can often be a radical shift in their relationship to ‘learning’ as negative past experiences of formal education have left them with a feeling of ‘failure’, with no belief in their wider ability”.³²

There has been limited research into the role and benefits of validation within informal learning. The Arts Alliance believes that “[t]here is a fundamental disconnect between the work being done by arts organisations and measures of success within the criminal justice system. While government targets are built around an end – offending – arts organisations tend to focus on means – personal, social and emotional skills. What is often lacking is a clear theory of change and evidence that links one to the other”³³

Include comment on the lack of research into validation of non-formal and informal learning

³¹ Universities of Glasgow / Strathclyde / Edinburgh (2011): Inspiring Change: Final Project Report of the Evaluation Team, p.5

³² Creative Scotland (2015): Guide for Artists Working in Prisons,” p.4

³³ Arts Alliance (2012): Re-imagining Futures: Exploring Arts Interventions and the Process of Desistance. p. 51

Give examples of good practice in informal learning activities/projects in prisons and community justice settings

In recent research within Scotland, 13 prisons reported 110 arts projects currently taking place. Of those:

- 24 are run by independent arts agencies and 9 are run by museums, libraries and universities.
- 30 are run by SPS or private prisons, of which 4 are led by the chaplaincy
- 46 are run by contracted education providers

Of the 110 arts programmes delivered, 42 programmes were deemed to be 'one off' provision, such as a talk from a visiting specialist, or a single craft workshop.

Examples of past work informal learning activities included:

Create & Curate: Art & Creative Writing Residency at Cornton Vale

A project which integrated art and literature into the culture and fabric of the building at HMP YO1 Cornton Vale. The project sought to promote inclusion and engage participants in the creation of an exhibition.

After a series of visual art, creative writing and curatorial workshops, female artists and participants produced their own artworks and creative writing. The women then curated an exhibition within the prison which included their own work alongside original artworks from Stirling University's art collection, which were loaned for exhibition within HMP YO1 Cornton Vale for a six month period. The exhibition then travelled to Stirling University to be enjoyed by both the local and academic community.

The project noted that participants displayed:

- Improved literacy and communication skills
- Problem-solving skills through working collaboratively as a team to organise the exhibition/ launch event.
- New skills in creative writing and editing
- New-found curatorial skills in the context of putting together a real exhibition
- A marked increase in the women's self-esteem and confidence to try new things and continue to engage with further learning opportunities.

Writing for Respect at Low Moss

Learning centre staff worked in partnership with the Police's Violence Reduction Unit to deliver a project blending creative writing, literacy, music, art and history and responding to domestic abuse.

A significant number of men in HMP Low Moss are imprisoned due to conflict in personal relationships. Many have restraining orders and interim interdicts against them. The project sought to raise this issue and provoke students to reflect on these behaviours and the impact of domestic abuse. This project involved the study of literature and art exploring what it is to be a man in Scotland in the 21st century. Students were invited and supported to respond to the theme through a range of creative writing, art, film and music, creating pieces that illustrated what masculinity means to them.

To increase awareness, the film has now been screened at events in Scotland and outputs shared widely at Humanity, an event organised by the VRU, Intimate Partner Violence Conference organised

by South Ayrshire Council and Violence Against Women Partnership Day organised by East Ayrshire Council.

Through the involvement of the Violence Reduction Unit, the project has enabled one of our students to embark on a mentoring programme with the VRU.

The project noted that participants displayed:

- Improved literacy skills
- Wider appreciation of literature
- Acquisition of new ICT skills in production of the film
- Appreciation and understanding of the dynamics involved in relationships
- Better understanding of the oppression of women throughout history
- An insight into the role of women in abusive relationships
- Awareness of the role of Scotland's Violence reduction Unit