



Prison Education Statistics April 2019 to March 2020

Main points

67,663 prisoners participated in courses

For non-functional skills courses, 29,723 prisoners participated in courses below level 2, 24,772 participated in Level 2 courses, 1,226 in Level 3 courses and 8 in Level 4 or higher. 30,168 prisoners participated in functional skills courses

In total, 78% (53,111) of prisoners participating in courses achieved at least a partial grade / level

There were a small number of courses at level 4 or above (all courses above A-Levels) where 100% of participants achieved at least a partial grade or level. The lowest rate of achievement was for Functional skills courses in English, Maths and ICT at 54%.

There were 55,099 Prisoners that completed an initial assessment

Of the Prisoners, 53,101 took at least one Maths assessment and 53,247 took at least one English assessment.

Prisoners took 57,284 Maths and 57,416 English initial assessments

More than half of initial assessment results were at entry level 1 – 3 (below GCSE), with 61% of Maths and 57% of English.

26% of prisoners participating in courses had a learning difficulty / disability confirmed through an LDD assessment

This is slightly lower than the 29% of those at initial assessment

30,168 prisoners participated in functional skills courses and 16,329 (54%) achieved at least a partial grade / level

17,680 prisoners participated in English functional skills courses and 51% (9,038) at least partially achieved a grade / level. 16,991 prisoners participated in Maths functional courses and 50% (8,431) achieved a grade / level.

This publication covers initial assessment, participation and achievement for prisoner education, based on data from CURIOUS, reporting for the 2019/20 financial year.

The technical guide for the Prison Education Statistics March 2019 to April 2020 can be found here:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/prison-education-statistics-2019-2020>

**This is a new publication, and would welcome any feedback to
commentary.champions@justice.gsi.gov.uk**

For other feedback related to the content of this publication, please let us know at
PPAS_Statistics@justice.gov.uk

Statistician's Comment

Figures presented in this statistical release show prison education statistics for the 12 months ending 31 March 2020. Most of the time period covered by this publication was unaffected by the Covid-19 pandemic and the effect on figures presented in this publication will be minimal if at all.

Prisoners that are interested in education take initial assessments before participating in courses. 55,099 prisoners completed an initial assessment in either English or Maths with the majority completing both. More than half of initial assessment results were at entry level 1 to 3, which are the levels below GCSE. The characteristics of prisoners taking an initial assessment were similar to that of the prison population overall; 94% were male, 71% were aged 25-49, with an almost identical distribution of recorded ethnicity. 29% had a learning difficulty / disability (LDD) confirmed through an LDD assessment.

After taking initial assessments prisoners can participate in education courses. In the 12 months ending 31 March 2020, 67,663 prisoners participated in courses with 78% achieving at least a partial grade/level. 26% of prisoners participating in courses had an LDD confirmed through an LDD assessment, this is slightly lower than at initial assessment.

Functional Skills are the fundamental English, Maths and ICT skills that people need for their working and personal lives. 30,168 prisoners participated in functional skills courses and 54% achieved at least a partial grade/level.

Introduction

Prison education is an important part of any prison's regime. Improving prisoner literacy and numeracy, providing vocational training, and other opportunities for personal development can give prisoners the knowledge and skills they need to get jobs on release and turn away from crime. Prison education is proven to have a positive impact; prisoners who engage with prison education are less likely to reoffend.¹

In 2016, responsibility for the budget which was used to commission most prison education in England moved from the Department of Education to the Ministry of Justice and in 2019 new education contracts were established. This reformed system moved decision-making on prison education closer to prison governors, who would be free to commission the education needed via two complementary frameworks - the Prison Education Framework (PEF) and Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS). PEF provision includes a core curriculum of English, Maths, IT and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), whereas DPS provision is more niche and flexible, designed to allow governors to commission bespoke shorter-term provision, including careers guidance and sector-specific training such as roofing or rail construction based on identified job market needs. Governors may use these complementary systems to make informed decisions on the education provided in their individual prison.

This report contains data from Year 1 of the new PEF contracts, April 2019 to March 2020 inclusive. It includes data on initial assessment of prisoners' English and maths levels on arrival, numbers participating in education, and data on the level of achievement in English, maths, and vocational training courses. These data are not a full picture of prison education – delivery outside of the primary PEF contracts, including all DPS provision, is not captured in this report. Private prisons which sit outside of PEF and the youth estate which has different education processes are also out of scope for this report. Prison education is a devolved matter in Wales and therefore Welsh prisons are also out of scope for this report.

More information on the major caveats of this publication can be found in the technical guidance published alongside this report or in the footnotes of the relevant data tables.

In addition to this bulletin and the tables based on data from the CURIOUS system for March 2019 to April 2020 we are publishing tables for the previous year's data. These tables provide statistics for prisoner education from March 2018 to April 2019, the last year data were collected through the Offender Learning & Skills Service (OLASS) system. These OLASS statistics are not covered by this bulletin.

¹ Prisoner Outcomes data from 2017

1. Initial Assessment for Maths and English

55,099 prisoners completed an initial assessment

Of these prisoners, 53,101 took at least one Maths assessment and 53,247 took at least one English assessment.

Prisoners took 57,284 Maths and 57,416 English initial assessments

Most initial assessment results were at entry level 1 – 3, with 61% of Maths and 57% of English.

Overall, 29% of prisoners who took an initial assessment had a learning difficulty/disability (LDD) confirmed through an LDD assessment.

This varied across ethnic groups and was highest for White at 33% and lowest for Other ethnic group at 17%.

In the year ending 31 March 2020, 55,099 prisoners completed an initial assessment² which was registered on the CURIOUS system. Initial assessments are taken before prisoners engage in learning and are separate to courses discussed in chapter 2. Tables 1-4 accompanying this publication contain information on these initial assessments.

A similar number of prisoners took Maths initial assessments (53,101) and English initial assessments (53,247) in the year ending March 2020, with the vast majority (51,249) taking both.

In total there were 57,284 Maths and 57,416 English initial assessments in the year ending 31 March 2020. There are more initial assessments than prisoners taking them as it is possible for a Prisoner to take more than one initial assessment in each subject. Initial assessments provide an indication of someone's levels of English and maths (see table below).

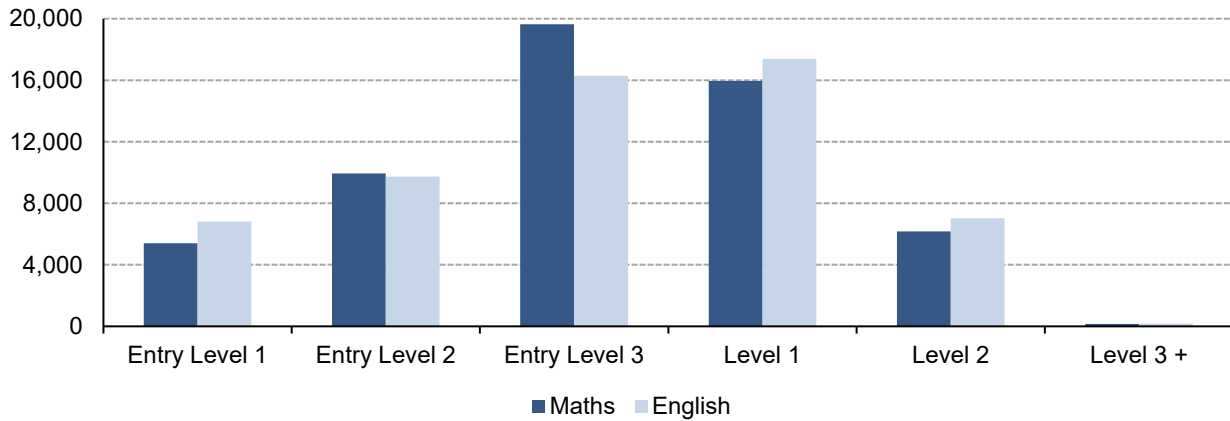
Initial assessment level / Course level	Example ³
Entry level 1,2 and 3	Entry level functional skills Entry level English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)
Level 1	GCSE - grades 3, 2, 1 or grades D, E, F, G Level 1 functional skills Level 1 ESOL
Level 2	GCSE - grades 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4 or grades A*, A, B, C Level 2 functional skills Level 2 ESOL
Level 3	A level Level 3 ESOL Level 3 NVQ
Level 4 +	All higher-level courses

² Prisoners may undertake each assessment more than once over an academic year. Prisoners are counted once for each distinct level of outcome they are assessed at and once in the totals.

³ Further information on course levels can be found: <https://www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/list-of-qualification-levels>

- 61% of maths and 57% of English initial assessment results were at the entry levels 1-3.
- 28% of maths and 30% of English initial assessment results were at level 1.
- 11% of maths and 13% of English initial assessment results were at Level 2 or above.

Figure 1: The number of English and Maths initial assessments prisoners took by level



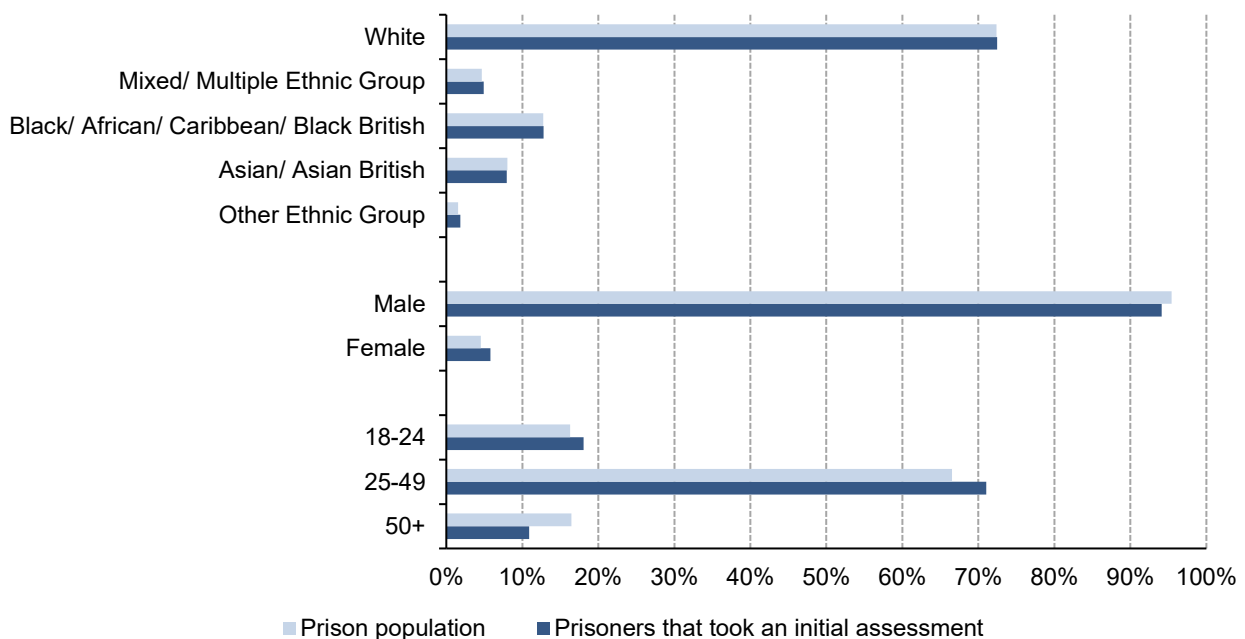
Characteristics of prisoners taking initial assessments

71% of prisoners that took at least one initial assessment were aged 25 – 49, 18% were 18-24 and 11% were aged 50 and over. Compared to the prison population, a slightly higher proportion of younger prisoners took at least one initial assessment.

Female offenders accounted for 6% of prisoners taking at least one initial assessment, compared to 5% of the prison population.

72% of prisoners that sat at least one initial assessment with a recorded ethnicity declared it as White, with the 2nd largest group declaring Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British at 13%. Those from an Asian/ Asian British group comprised 8% of initial assessments, Mixed/ Multiple Ethnic Group comprised 5% while 2% were from Other ethnic groups.

Figure 2: The distribution of prisoners that took an initial assessment compared to the wider prison population by prisoner demographics



29% of prisoners that took an initial assessment had a learning difficulty / disability (LDD) confirmed through an LDD assessment. The remaining 71% were either confirmed not to have an LDD or were not assessed⁴.

These proportions varied by ethnic group, with the highest rate of confirmed LDD among the white ethnic group:

- 33% from White ethnic group
- 25% from a Mixed / multiple ethnic group
- 20% from Black African / Caribbean / Black British ethnic groups
- 18% from Asian / Asian British ethnic groups
- 17% from Other ethnic groups
- 30% where ethnicity was Unknown / not provided⁵

⁴ Learning difficulty / disability assessments are not required for all prisoners; we do not know how many of the prisoners that were not assessed have an LDD.

⁵ There were 656 Prisoner records where the ethnicity was not known and could not be found through linking with other data sources

2. Participation & achievement

67,663 prisoners participated in courses.

59,891 prisoners participated in a course below level 2, 26,006 prisoners participated in a course of level 2 or higher. Prisoners can take multiple courses.

In total, 78% (53,111) of prisoners participating in courses achieved at least a partial grade / level⁶

There were a small number of courses at level 4 or above (all courses above A-Levels) where 100% of participants achieved at least a partial grade or level. The lowest rate of achievement was for Functional courses in English and Maths at 54%.

26% of prisoners participating in courses had a learning difficulty / disability confirmed through an LDD assessment, this is slightly lower than the 29% of those at initial assessment

All other characteristics of prisoners participating in courses were very similar to those taking initial assessments.

30,168 prisoners participated in functional courses and 16,329 (54%) achieved at least a partial grade / level

17,680 prisoners participated in English functional courses and 51% (9,038) at least partially achieved a grade / level. 16,991 prisoners participated in Maths functional courses and 50% (8,431) achieved a grade / level.

Tables 5 and 6 accompanying this publication contain information on all courses taken, these are different to initial assessments.

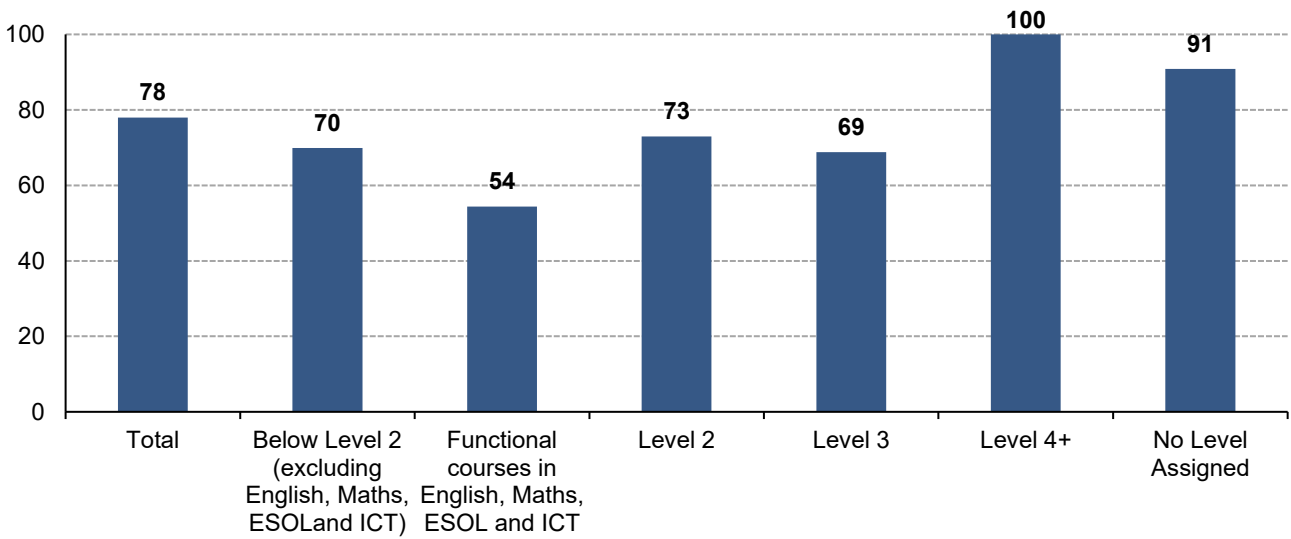
The total number of Prisoners participating in courses was 67,663. The majority were aged 25-49 (70%), with the next largest group being 18-24 (18%) and the remainder being over 50 (12%). These proportions are very similar to those for initial assessment figures and have the same comparison to the wider population; a higher proportion of young offenders were participating in learning. Gender and ethnicity figures for participation are also very similar to initial assessment figures.

A slightly lower proportion participating in these courses were assessed as having a learning difficulty / disability -- 26% compared to the 29% in the English and maths initial assessments.

78% (53,111) of prisoners achieved a full or partial grade / level in at least one of the courses they participated in. The rate of achievement for Functional courses in English, Maths and ICT was the lowest at 54%. All other rates of achievement were 69% or above.

⁶ A prisoner achieves a partial grade / level when they have completed all the course activities but are waiting to sit an exam.

Figure 3: Rate of Achievement for prisoners by course level⁷



■ Rate of Achievement: The proportion of prisoner participating in courses that achieve or partially achieve a grade or level in at least one course.

Functional skills courses

Table 7 accompanying this publication shows participation and achievement in all functional courses. Functional skills courses are offered as part of the core curriculum. Functional Skills are the fundamental English, Maths and ICT skills that people need for their working and personal lives. People can study for the qualifications in practical ways and apply core skills to real-life situations. A functional skills level 2 is equivalent to a GCSE.

There were 30,168 prisoners participating in at least one functional course, with 16,329 (54%) achieving at least a partial grade/level in one or more of their courses. Prisoners participating in English and Maths functional courses had similar rates of achievement, 51% and 50% respectively. A higher proportion of participants (60%) achieved at least a partial grade / level in ESOL, though 98% of these courses were at an entry level. The achievement rate for participants on ICT functional courses was 38%.

⁷ Prisoners can take more than one course at each level, shown here is the proportion of prisoners who have achieved / partially achieved in at least one of them.

Further information

General information about the official statistics system of the UK is available from:
statisticsauthority.gov.uk/about-the-authority/uk-statistical-system

Accompanying files

The following products are published as part of this release:

- A statistical bulletin, containing commentary on key trends over time in prison performance measures and probation.
- A technical guide, providing further information on how the data are collected and processed.
- A set of tables for each chapter, covering key topic areas in this bulletin.
- A set of tables for the OLASS 2018/19 data.

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