



## Prison Education Statistics and Accredited Programmes in custody April 2022 to March 2023

### Main points

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**59,480 prisoners completed an initial Maths or English assessment**

Of these prisoners, 56,548 took at least one Maths assessment and 57,002 took at least one English assessment.

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**Prisoners took 58,321 Maths and 58,907 English initial assessments**

Most initial assessment results were at entry level 1 – 3, with 68% of Maths and 65% of English.

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**Overall, 28% 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 prisoners from white groups at 30% and lowest for those from the other ethnic group at 17%.

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**63,744 prisoners participated in courses.**

This was a 28% increase on the 49,855 prisoners participating in courses last year.

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**28,832 prisoners participated in functional skills courses from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. Over the same time period 19,329 prisoners achieved at least a partial grade.**

From 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, the number of prison learners participating in a functional skills course increased by 71%, from 16,866 to 28,832. Prisoners achieving a full or partial grade increased by 80% from 10,755 to 19,329.

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**The number of starts for Accredited Programmes in custody increased**

From 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, there were 4,820 Accredited Programme starts, a 110% increase when compared with the previous 12-month period.

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**The number of completions for Accredited Programmes in custody increased**

From 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, 4,135 accredited programmes were completed by offenders, representing an increase of 124% compared with the previous 12-month period.

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*This publication covers initial assessment, participation and achievement for prisoner education, based on data from CURIOUS and the HMPPS Performance Hub, reporting for the 2022/23 financial year.*

The technical guide for the Prison Education Statistics and Accredited Programmes in Custody March 2022 to April 2023 can be found here:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6514522f45e741000dffebd8/Prison\\_Education\\_and\\_Accredited\\_Programmes\\_Statistics\\_2022-23TechnicalGuide.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6514522f45e741000dffebd8/Prison_Education_and_Accredited_Programmes_Statistics_2022-23TechnicalGuide.pdf)

For other feedback related to the content of this publication, please let us know at [statistics.enquiries@justice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:statistics.enquiries@justice.gsi.gov.uk)

## Statistician's Comment

Overall, participation in prisoner education and accredited programmes has increased in the past year as the system recovers from the Covid-19 pandemic. The volume of prisoners participating in courses has increased in the 12 months to 31 March 2023 compared to last year (63,744 this year, 49,855 last year). Most learners take an entry level course whilst in prison compared to the higher levels of courses. Nine percent of those who took an English initial assessment took a level two or three course. Seven percent of those who took a Maths initial assessment took a level two or three course.

Twenty-eight percent of the cohort taking initial assessments in the 12 months to 31 March 2023 had a learning difficulty compared to 36% last year. There was a very large rise in those taking functional skills courses this year (28,832 compared to 16,866 last year).

The number of prisoners starting and completing accredited programmes increased for a second year running with 4,820 starts and 4,135 course completions. The uptake and completion of accredited programmes appears to be increasing to pre-Covid levels. Programmes to address general offending remain the largest proportion of courses taken.

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## Introduction

This publication covers both prisoner education and accredited programme participation. 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.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, programme accreditation is a system for ensuring that behavioural intervention and other similar types of programmes offered to offenders, which aim to reduce reoffending, have a proper theoretical basis and are designed in accordance with the 'What Works' literature. HMPPS commissions a range of accredited programmes complexity, and mode of delivery. Programmes have been developed to target the risks and needs for different types of offending behaviour.

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 publication includes data on prisoners' initial 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.

Statistics on accredited programmes previously published in the HMPPS Annual Digest are included in this publication. Further demographic breakdowns for accredited programmes data will continue to be released as part of the HMPPS Offender Equalities 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Prisoner Outcomes data from 2017

# 1. Initial Assessment for Maths and English

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## **59,480 prisoners completed an initial Maths or English assessment**

Of these prisoners, 56,548 took at least one Maths assessment and 57,002 took at least one English assessment.

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## **Prisoners took a total of 58,321 Maths and 58,907 English initial assessments at all levels**

Most initial assessment results were at entry level 1 – 3, with 68% of Maths and 65% of English.

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## **Overall, 28% 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 prisoners from white groups at 30% and lowest for those from the “other” ethnic group at 17%.

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In the year ending 31 March 2023, 59,480 prisoners completed an initial assessment<sup>2</sup> which was registered on the Curious system<sup>3</sup>. Initial assessments are taken before prisoners engage in learning and are separate to courses discussed in chapter 2. Tables 1.1-1.4 accompanying this publication contain information on these initial assessments.

In the year ending March 2023, 56,548 prisoners took Maths initial assessments<sup>4</sup>, a 5% increase compared to 53,743 last year. In the same year, 57,002 prisoners took English initial assessments a 6% increase compared to 53,787 last year.

In total there were 58,321 Maths and 58,907 English initial assessments in the year ending 31 March 2023. 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).

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> For more information on the curious system, please refer to the technical guide

<sup>4</sup> Prisoners can take multiple initial assessments at different levels.

Initial assessment level / Course level	Example <sup>5</sup>
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

### Characteristics of prisoners taking initial assessments

68% of maths and 65% of English initial assessment outcomes were at the entry levels 1-3. This was common across most demographic groups with the following exceptions:

- 76% of female prisoners for maths
- 73% of “other” ethnic group prisoners for maths
- 71% of “other” ethnic group prisoners for English
- 57% of Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British ethnic group prisoners for English

25% of maths and 27% of English initial assessment outcomes were at level 1 and 7% of maths and 9% of English initial assessment outcomes were at Level 2 or above.

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<sup>5</sup> Further information on course levels can be found: <https://www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/list-of-qualification-levels>

**Figure 1: The number of English and Maths initial assessments prisoners took by level in England, 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 (Source: Table 1.1)**

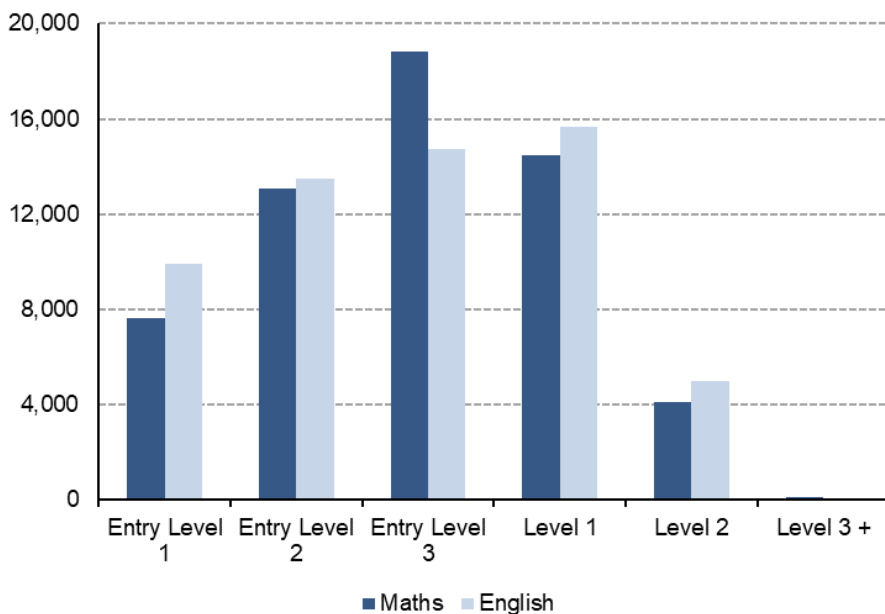


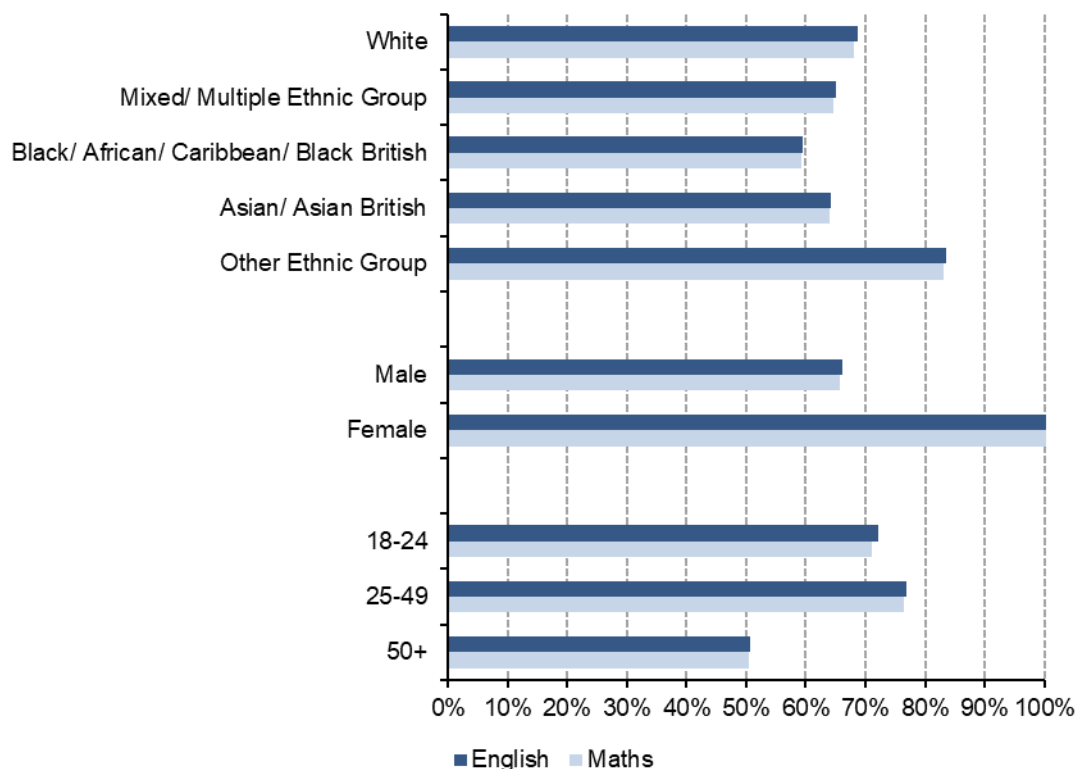
Figure 2 shows the number of prisoners with a characteristic who have completed an initial assessment over the 12 months to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 relative to the prison population at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 expressed as a proportion<sup>6</sup>. On average 71% of the prison population completed an initial assessment from 1 April to 31 March. 101%<sup>7</sup> of Female prisoners completed an initial assessment compared to 70% of Male prisoners. Only 50% of prisoners aged 50+ completed an initial assessment, which is lower than the other age bands 18 – 24 (72%) and 25 – 49 (77%). For Ethnicity 59% of the black, African, Caribbean and black British ethnic group prison population had completed an initial assessment, the lowest of all ethnic groups. The “other” ethnic group had the highest proportion with 83% of prisoners in this population completing an initial assessment.

<sup>6</sup> Given this method of calculation, it is possible for the proportion to show higher than 100%. That is, the flow of prisoners through the estate over the 12 months to 31 March who had also taken an assessment is higher than the stock of prisoners at 31 March.

<sup>7</sup> This result indicates that the flow of women in prison over the 12 months to 31 March 2023 who also took an initial assessment is higher than the stock of women in prison at 31 March 2023.



**Figure 2: The proportion of the prison population that completed an initial assessment by prisoner characteristics in England, 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 (Source: Tables 1.2, 1.3 and OMSQ statistics)**



28% of prisoners who took an initial assessment had a learning difficulty / disability (LDD) confirmed through an LDD assessment. The remaining 72% were either confirmed not to have an LDD or were not assessed.<sup>8</sup>

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

- 30% of white ethnic group prisoners
- 26% of a mixed or multiple ethnic group prisoners
- 23% of black African, Caribbean, or black British ethnic group prisoners
- 21% of Asian or Asian British ethnic group prisoners
- 17% of “other” ethnic group prisoners
- 12% of prisoners where ethnicity was unknown or not provided<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> There were 519 Prisoner records where the ethnicity was not known and could not be found through linking with other data sources

## 2. Participation and achievement

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### **63,744 prisoners participated in courses**

This was a 28% increase on the 49,855 prisoners participating in courses last year.

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### **40% of prisoners participating in courses had a learning difficulty / disability confirmed through an LDD assessment**

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

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### **28,832 prisoners participated in functional skills courses from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. Over the same time period 19,329 prisoners achieved at least a partial grade.**

From 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, the number of prison learners participating in a functional skills course increased by 71%, from 16,866 to 28,832. Prisoners achieving a full or partial grade increased by 80% from 10,755 to 19,329.

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In the tables that accompany this bulletin Table 2.1 contains statistics for prisoner participation in courses and Table 2.2 contains statistics for course achievement, these are different to initial assessments.

The total number of prisoners participating in courses was 63,744. This was a 28% increase on the 49,855 prisoners participating in courses last year. On average 78% of prisoner learners were participating in a course Level 1 or higher (22% participated in entry level courses).

54,401 prisoners achieved a full or partial grade in the year ending March 2023, an increase of 32% compared with 41,344 in the previous year. On average 78% of prisoner learners achieved a full or partial grade or level in a course at Level 1 or higher.

### **Functional skills courses**

Table 2.3 accompanying this publication shows participation and achievement in all functional skills 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 28,832 prisoners participating in at least one functional course, and 19,329 prisoners who achieved a full or partial grade in one or more functional skills courses. Entry level English (5,832) and entry level maths (4,672) had the highest level of participation by prisoner learners compared to other levels and subjects.

### 3. Accredited programmes for offenders in custody

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#### **The number of starts for accredited programmes in custody increased**

From 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, there were 4,820 accredited programme starts, a 110% increase when compared with the previous 12-month period.

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#### **The number of completions<sup>10</sup> for accredited programmes in custody increased**

From 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, 4,136 accredited programmes were completed by offenders, representing an increase of 124% compared with the previous 12-month period.

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Accreditation is a system for ensuring that intervention programmes offered to offenders, which aim to reduce reoffending, have a proper theoretical basis and are designed in accordance with the 'What Works' literature.

HMPPS commissions a range of accredited programmes<sup>11</sup> that vary in length, complexity, and mode of delivery. Programmes have been developed to target the offender risks and needs for different types of offending. To achieve accreditation, programmes must be assessed to make sure they are targeting the right people, focusing on the right things, and being delivered in a way that is most likely to reduce reoffending. All HMPPS-commissioned accredited programmes are subject to quality assurance processes to ensure programme integrity is maintained and developed.

#### **Accredited programme<sup>12</sup> delivery volumes have experienced a long-term downward trend since 2010 (Figures 3.1 and 3.2, Tables 3.1 to 3.3)**

Since 2010, volumes of starts and completions have fallen. This is mainly due to changes in accredited programme delivery in custody. New programmes have been introduced: Building Better Relationships (BBR), Healthy Sex Programme (HSP), Resolve, Horizon. Kaizen was introduced in 2017. Kaizen and Horizon have replaced all the delivery of Core and Extended Sex Offender Treatment Programmes in custody. This transition to newer programmes accounted for some of the decrease in sex offender treatment programmes<sup>13</sup>.

The longer-term decrease in accredited programme starts and completions has also been driven by the change of programme ownership – and responsibility for running substance misuse accredited programmes - from HMPPS to NHS. As of 1 April 2011, local NHS partnerships assumed these responsibilities. The large decreases seen reflect the fact that more offenders are completing programmes run by the NHS, rather than HMPPS.

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<sup>10</sup> Total volumes over the financial year for starts and completions will not necessarily match. This is because an offender who completed in the current financial year might have started the programme in previous years.

<sup>11</sup> A complete list of accredited programmes for offenders in custody can be found at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1140979/HMPPS\\_Accredited\\_Programmes.docx](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1140979/HMPPS_Accredited_Programmes.docx)

<sup>12</sup> In this publication, programmes are grouped into one of six categories: Domestic Violence, Extremism, General Offending, Sexual Offending, Substance Misuse or Violence. For monitoring purposes, Offender Behaviour Programmes (OBPs) in custody include domestic violence, violence and general offending completions but exclude sexual offender treatment and substance misuse programmes, which are reported separately.

<sup>13</sup> In 2022, the Resolve programme was rolled down with resource being diverted into other accredited programmes options.

There has also been a reinvestment from shorter, moderate intensity programmes in favour of longer, higher intensity programmes along with the introduction of some one-to-one programmes. The number of commissioned completions has therefore decreased despite maintaining investment.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted accredited programme delivery. Delivery was mostly paused in March 2020 and, where delivery was able to resume under safe systems of work and infection control, it was limited to one-to-one or small group provision. The majority of delivery began to recover towards pre-pandemic positions during 2022/23.

Despite these long-term trends and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, levels of starts and completions have recovered during the 2022/23 financial year. In the year to March 2023, the number of starts and completions increased by 110% and 124% respectively, compared with the same period in 2022.

### **Starts<sup>14</sup> for accredited programmes<sup>15</sup> delivered in custody (Figure 3.1, Table 3.1)**

Starts in HMPPS-commissioned accredited programmes delivered in custody rose by 110% (4,820 starts), when compared with the 12-months to March 31<sup>st</sup> 2022 (2,297 starts).

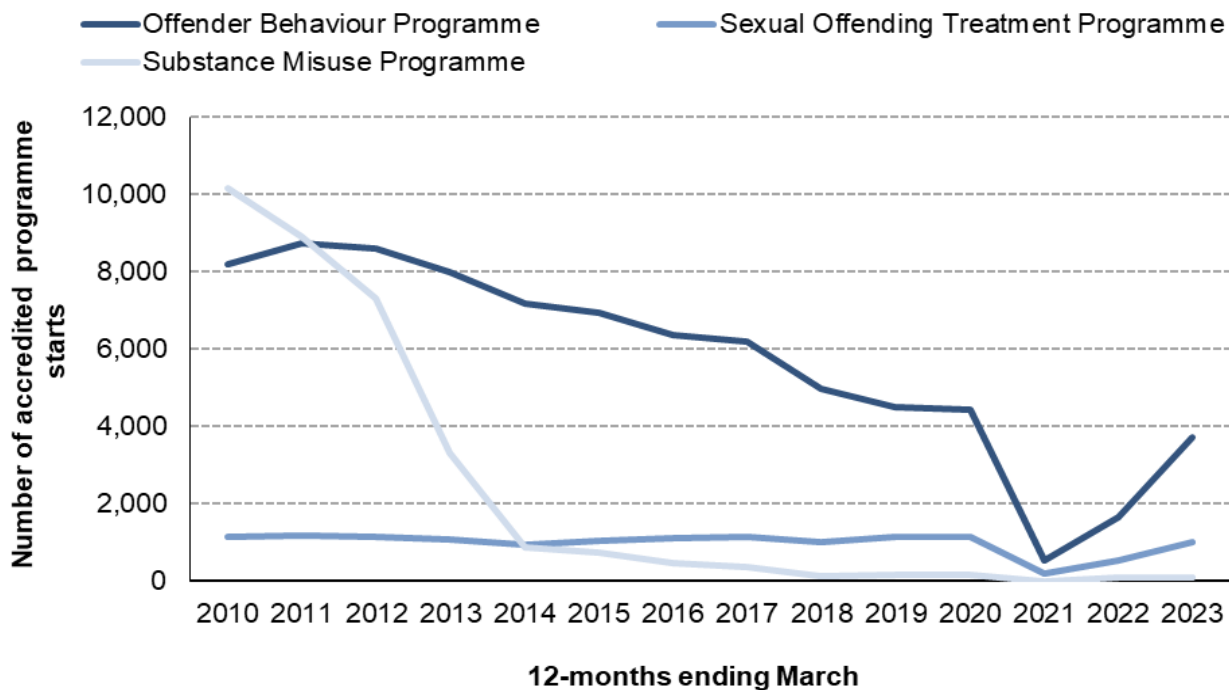
Programmes to address general offending were by far the most common with 62% of starts from this category. This was followed by programmes to address sexual offending and programmes addressing violence, accounting for 21% and 10% respectively, of the total volume of starts. Domestic violence and substance misuse programmes accounted for a much lower proportion of starts in 2022, at 6% and 2% respectively. Extremism programme starts made up less than 1% of the total volume of starts.

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<sup>14</sup> Under exceptional circumstances, offenders in custody can start more than one accredited programme in any financial year. The figures presented in this chapter refer to the number of starts and might not equal the number of offenders who started any given programme during the same financial year.

<sup>15</sup> Programmes relating to domestic violence and sexual offending are available for male prisoners only. Certain programmes relating to general offending (KAINOS and New Me Strengths) and violence (Kaizen Violence, Identity Matters and Becoming New Me) are available for male prisoners only.

**Figure 3.1: Number of starts for accredited programmes in custody, 12-months ending March 2010 to 12-months ending March 2023 (Source: Table 3.1)**

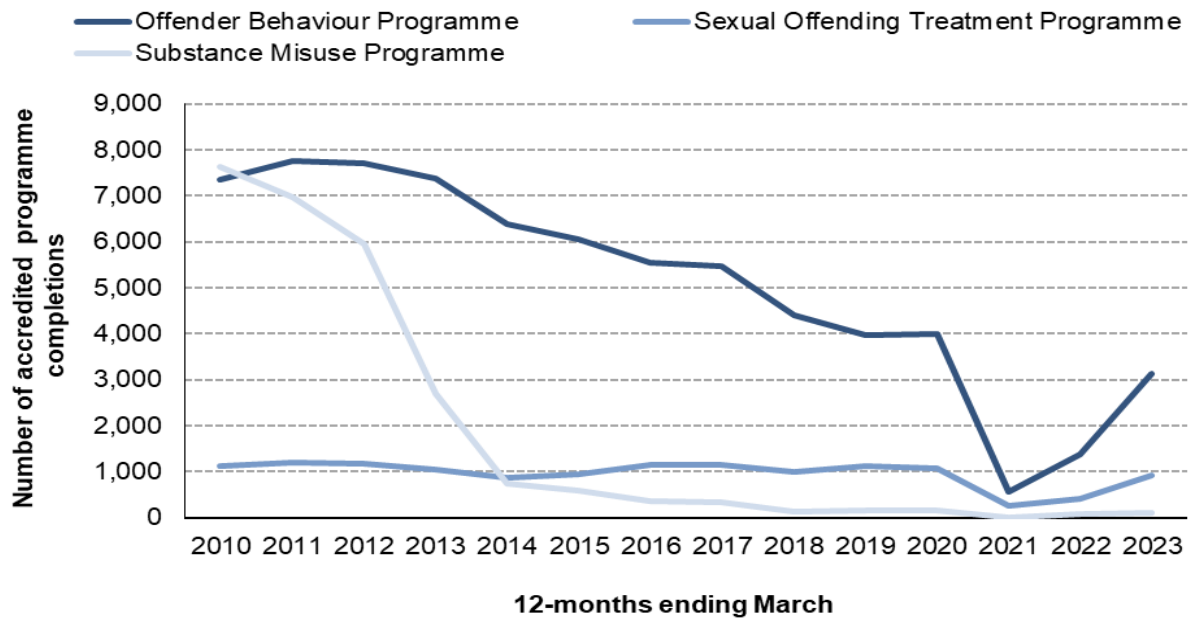


**Completions for accredited programmes delivered in custody (Figure 3.2, Tables 3.2 and 3.3)**

During the latest year, volumes of accredited programme completions have continued to recover. There were 4,136 completions in the year ending March 2023, up from 1,848 during the same period in 2022 thus representing an increase of 124%. This follows a period of relative stability with only a 5% decrease in the number of programme completions between the year ending March 2018 and the year ending March 2020.

Programmes to address general offending were the most common type of completion with 61% of completions in this category. The next most common type of programme completed were sexual offending programmes and violence programmes at 22% and 10% respectively.

**Figure 3.2: Number of completions for accredited programmes in custody, 12-months ending March 2010 to 12-months ending March 2023 (Source: Table 3.2)**



## Further information

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

## Contact

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