

Table 1*Legislation and Standards Relevant to Adult Prison Education in England*

Legislation / Standard	Relevant sections	Relevance
UK Legislation		
The Prison Act 1952 (UK)	Section 47	Makes provision for the creation of prison rules.
The Prison Rules 1999 (England and Wales) (First version 1964)	Section 1	Provides context for prison education: “The purpose of training and treatment of convicted prisoners shall be to encourage and assist them to lead a good and useful life”.
	Section 32: Education	“Every prisoner able to profit from educational facilities at a prison be encouraged to do so”. Subsequent subclauses detail that educational classes should be arranged at every prison with reasonable resources provided and special attention paid to prisoners with special educational needs.
Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 (UK)	Sections 86 and 90	Stipulates provision of facilities for education and training suitable to the requirements of persons subject to adult detention. Requires encouraging engagement with education whilst in detention.
Equality Act 2010 (UK)		Applies as within community settings, legislating for fair and equal access to education and protection against discrimination for individuals with a protected disability characteristic.
International Standards		
The European Prison Rules 2006 (Council of Europe)	Rules 1, 2 & 4	Form part of the guiding principles which underpin how subsequent rules are interpreted and how prisons should be governed. Describes right to maintain human rights, stipulating protection of these whilst in prison (although they may be restricted), that human rights must be respected, and infringement is not justifiable by a lack of resources.
	Rule 5	Guiding principle focusing on normalisation: “Life in prison shall approximate as closely as possible the positive aspects of life in the community” indicating a right to education comparative to community settings.
	Rule 6	Guiding principle describing the key aim of prison being reintegration into society, thus setting the context for prison education.
	Rule 25.1	Prison Regime: states a balanced program of activities should be offered to prisoners, thus inferring fair access to education and skills training.
	Rule 26.16	Requirements relating to work: stipulates that prisoners should have sufficient time for education.

The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) 2015	Rule section 28	Education: Specifically describes prisons requirement to provide comprehensive educational programs to all prisoners, focusing on literacy, numeracy, and vocational training which meet individual needs whilst considering aspirations. Stipulation is made for special attention to prisoners with SEN. Education is cited as being as important as work within prison, with rules that participation in education should not financially disadvantage prisoners. Prisons must have well-stocked libraries, ideally in collaboration with community services and education should be aligned with national systems to facilitate continued learning post-release. Educational programs should aim to improve prisoners' overall education and prepare individuals for a responsible, crime-free life.
	Rule 106	Education for sentenced prisoners: In conjunction with rule 26, emphasises the essential role of education in the regimes for sentenced prisoners and duties of governing authorities to encourage educational endeavours and provide appropriate educational programmes.
	Rule 4	Highlights the relevance of education. Describes a primary goal of imprisonment sentence to reduce reoffending, achieved by focusing on reintegration of offenders into society through education and vocational training, tailored individual need to ensure prisoners can lead law-abiding and self-sufficient lives upon release.
	Rules 91 & 92	Treatment of Prisoners: Describes the purpose of prison sentence as being to establish a will to live a law-abiding, self-supporting life, with treatment to encourage self-respect and sense of responsibility, including by means of education.
	Rule 102	Relating to work: Sufficient time be factored for education.
	Rule 104	Education: Provision shall be made for further education of all prisoners capable of profiting. States that education of illiterate prisoners be compulsory and special attention shall be paid to it by the prison administration. Cites that prison education be integrated with community equiveillance to support continuing education post-release.

Note. Detail provided for further exploration of the legislative rules and guidance.

Table 2

Studies cited in government documents evidencing the impact of prison education on reduced reoffending

Reference	Demographic	Details
Social Exclusions Unit (2002)	Ex-Prisoners with low levels of attainment	UK study, identified that prisoners that had not taken part in prison education or training were three times more likely to reoffend than those that had.
Ministry of Justice & DfE (2017)	UK Prisoners released in 2010	Prisoners who took part in any form of learning activity had significantly lower reoffending rates than peers who had not; one-year reoffending rate of 34% compared to 43% for those who had not participated in any prison learning. Propensity-score matching analysis of 10,000 prisoners identified that achievement rates in learning had little impact, with the significant factor being participation in learning.
Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute et al. (2018)	Prisoners participating in prison education under OLASS 3 UK government contract	Participation resulted in re-offending rates of 32.6% compared to 40.2% for non-learners.

Table 3

Studies and data cited in government documents linking increased employability to reduced reoffending

Reference	Details
Social Exclusion Unit (2002)	Reported 76% unemployment rate prior to entering prison compared with 5% of the general population.
Barron (2008), cited in Ministry of Justice (2012)	Identified a direct relationship between unemployment and property crime in Canada.
Kapuscinski, Braithwaite & Chapman (1998), cited in Ministry of Justice (2012)	Demonstrated an albeit complex relationship between rising unemployment and rising crime in Australia.

Ministry of Justice
(2012)

Survey outcomes of 1435 newly sentenced prisoners surveyed in 2005/06:

68% unemployment rate in the four weeks prior to entering custody.
68% agreed having a job would stop them reoffending.
40% reported needing help with work related skills.
41% reported needing help with education.

Concluded having been employed in the year before custody resulted in lower likelihood of reconviction one year post release at 40% compared to 65%.

Table 4

Detail of qualification levels and equivalence (NAO, 2008)

Reference	Qualification / Approximate Age Equivalence
Level 4+	Higher Education (HE) Degree level and above.
Level 3	A'level (generally taken at age 18).
Level 2	GCSE (generally taken at age 16).
Level 1	Age 11 (expected on leaving primary school).
Entry 3	Age 9.
Entry 2	Age 7.
Entry 1	Age 5.
Pre-Entry	Pre-primary school.

Table 5

Reported rates of prisoners with no qualifications, English, or maths below level 1

Reference	Reported % of Prisoners with no qualifications (general population)	Reported % of Prisoners below L1 English / (general population)	Reported % of Prisoners below L1 maths (general population)
Metcalf, Anderson & Rolfe (2001)	43% (17%)	Reading: 27% Writing: 35%	39%
HM Inspectorate of Prisons and Probation (2001)	Males: 52% Females: 72%	Reading: 31% Spelling: 49%	37%
House of Commons Education Select Committee (2005)	52% (15%)	48% (23%)	65% (23%)

Ministry of Justice (2018)	47% (15%)		
Ministry of Justice (2021)	42%	51%	61%
Ministry of Justice (2024a)	-	71%	73%

Note. Where reported, figures relating to the general population are detailed in parentheses.