

Planning your education and training



Prisoners' Education Trust, who wrote the original article on planning your education in England and Wales, has once again kindly updated it.

Learning in prison

A wide range of learning options exists, though unfortunately not all opportunities are available in every prison. It is best to ask your education department what is available in your establishment. You can also study at a range of levels up to university degree and even postgraduate level. The higher level the course the more expensive it is, but the impact on your life could also be greater. If you are a prisoner in Northern Ireland, it may be worth speaking to the Head of Learning (HOL) at your establishment to find what forms of further education are available and how they can be funded.

Where to start?

The best place to start is with the courses provided by the prison education department. If you have not already reached level 2 in literacy and numeracy, it makes sense to take these classes. Most prisons will also provide IT courses and employability skills training. Find out what other courses are offered – each prison has its own curriculum.

England

Vocational Skills Training

Many prisons offer vocational qualifications in catering, laundry, cleaning, horticulture and waste management, linked to prison jobs. There are often gym-related qualifications available and workshops teaching painting, decorating and construction. There may also be opportunities to do Rail Track qualifications, hairdressing, cooking, beauty, business studies, radio production or health and safety. Find out which vocational skills and qualifications are available in your prison. Ask the education department for details.

Courses at FE colleges

Anyone aged 19 and over, including Cat D prisoners or ex-prisoners, should be eligible for free access to their first level 3 qualification if they have not already achieved this, and are aiming to undertake them at a Further Education College. For more information visit: www.gov.uk/guidance/free-courses-for-jobs

Cat D prisoners in England can contact the education department, any resettlement agencies or staff available in their prison to find out more about Further Education College courses available locally. It may also be worth asking about the 16–19 Bursary Fund www.gov.uk/1619-bursary-fund and about Discretionary Learner Support. Discretionary Learner Support is available in colleges and sixth form colleges to help

with learning costs if you are aged 19 or over: www.gov.uk/learner-support To be eligible to apply, you must be aged 19 or over and have been accepted onto and be studying a programme of learning funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

Anyone aged 19 and over wanting to study at level 3 or above, whether in prison or in an FE college after release, is likely to need to take out an Advanced Learner Loan. For more information, please see www.gov.uk/advanced-learner-loan or call 0300 100 0619 Monday to Friday, 8am to 8pm; Saturday and Sunday, 9am to 4pm.

Each college or learning provider has its own application process. Your tutor, student support or welfare officer should be able to provide further information. Additional information may be available from the National Careers Service.



*Discussing the importance of mentors with a staff member.
HMP Maidstone*

Distance Learning

If you have already reached level 2 before coming to prison, or you've completed level 2 qualifications inside prison, and want to carry on at higher levels, consider whether distance learning is the right next step.

Course materials and project work are sent in by post to you. The Prison Service has a set of rules about applying for distance learning, set out in a Prison Service Instruction. A copy of this PSI should be in your prison library.

One of the biggest advantages of distance learning is that there are courses available in hundreds of subjects – so you can learn about subjects you're most interested in. Courses people in prison have recently followed include: creative writing, horticulture, bookkeeping, business start-up, GCSEs, A-levels and health and safety. The prison education department and the library should have information about some of the courses available.

Prisoners in England and Wales can apply to Prisoners' Education Trust (PET) for funding for distance learning courses. Please speak to the education department for more information. Prison staff can access and download up-to-date course information through the PET website: www.prisonerseducation.org.uk/get-support/prison-staff

PET produces a Course Prospectus to help guide prisoners and prison staff on what courses they offer and can be studied in prison. To ask for a copy, please speak to the prison education or library staff. Prisoners can also contact PET to seek personalised advice and guidance about alternative courses by calling a Freephone Advice Line on 0800 048 7520. The line is open on Tuesdays, 10am to 12pm, 2pm to 4pm and on Thursdays, 10am to 12pm, 2pm to 6pm.

Funding for Open University Introductory Access Modules

Access Modules are an excellent way of trying higher level study through distance learning before considering full degree level study. Prisoners' Education Trust can fund Access Module courses for prisoners under the Steps for Success programme for students ordinarily resident in England and Wales.

The eligibility criteria for the Access Modules are as follows: you must be within 8 years of your earliest release date and must detail which qualification you are working towards. In addition, you need to confirm your residency for the past 3 years prior to your sentence (time spent in prison does not count towards residency); you must also detail your potential and motivation, as well as your eligibility to commit to ongoing study via a student loan.

Cat D Prisoners

At present, Cat D prisoners in England eligible for movement outside the prison may apply for university courses and unless they can self-fund, they will need to apply for a student loan to cover tuition costs. Students intending to study at degree level need to be aware that universities charge up to £9,250 a year for tuition. Student loans are available to cover these fees, for both full-time and part-time students, and all universities will also have a scholarships or bursaries programme to help specific students. Students must also cover their own maintenance costs, although for low-income students, maintenance loans are still available.

To qualify for a student loan, applicants must have an earliest release date which is within 6 years of the first day of the first academic year of the current course.

To qualify for a postgraduate loan, applicants must have an earliest release date which is within 4 years of the first day of the first academic year of the current course. Applicants should first seek advice from the university to confirm the availability of resources and support whilst studying in prison. For more information visit:

www.gov.uk/student-finance

0300 100 0607 Monday to Friday, 8am to 8pm; Saturday, 9am to 4pm
Postgraduate: 0300 100 0031 Monday to Friday, 8am to 8pm; Saturday and Sunday, 9am to 4pm

Student Finance England
PO Box 210, Darlington DL1 9HJ

The arrangements for prison leavers will be the same as for other students, with greater availability of student loans and some fee waiver and scholarship arrangements.

For information on bursaries visit:

www.gov.uk/extra-money-pay-university

Scotland

What are Individual Training Accounts (ITAs)?

In line with the Scottish Government's Labour Market Strategy, Individual Training Accounts were launched in October 2017. This targeted funding aims to support employability by focusing funds on those actively seeking employment and those who are currently in low paid work and looking to progress.

Up to £200 towards a training course

ITAs are available to help people develop the skills they need for work, giving learners who meet the eligibility criteria up to £200 towards a single training course or training episode per year. And because it's not a loan, the money doesn't need to be paid back.

Aligning to the needs of learners and the economy

To ensure ITAs meet the needs of learners and the overall aims of the scheme, training providers must demonstrate the quality and outcomes of their courses. ITA courses are selected and monitored according to the positive outcomes they can offer to the learner and their career prospects.

ITAs aim to improve work-related skills and qualifications. They align to the training definitions set out by the Scottish Government. All ITA courses must be in one of the curriculum areas aligned to the Scottish Government's Labour Market Strategy which includes: Adult Literacy and Numeracy Tuition, Agriculture, Business, Construction, Early Years and Childcare, Fitness, Health and Beauty, Health and Safety, Hospitality, STEM, Language, Security, Social Care and Transport. By increasing the employability of those seeking employment and those who are in low paid work looking to progress, ITAs also allow employers access to a trained and motivated workforce.

Prisoners in Scotland who are engaged in some form of education may open an ITA. Any prisoner wishing to apply for an ITA should approach their local Learning Centre for advice and assistance with the form. Funds of up to £200 may be available to support a distance learning programme from an approved provider. Please note that applications for ITAs will only be accepted at certain times of the year and once the target of 10,000 applications is reached, access will close until the next window of opportunity is announced by Skills Development Scotland. Rules and regulations pertaining to the ITAs are available at the Skills Development Scotland website:

www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/what-we-do/employability-skills/sds-individual-training-accounts

Degree Level Study

The Scottish Prison Service will only consider applications for degree level study through their Higher Education Access Scheme (HEAS). The HEAS sets out clear criteria and requirements for prisoners to access higher education study including applying to the Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) to confirm eligibility for financial support.

Postgraduate programmes will be considered on an individual basis through application to the Higher Education Access Board and will be subject to availability of resources. Priority will be afforded to undergraduate courses.

Wales

Funding for Introductory Access Modules and Short Courses

Prisoners ordinarily resident in Wales can apply to PET for funding for the Access Modules.

The eligibility criteria for the Access Modules in England also applies to prisoners ordinarily resident in Wales. They are as follows: you must be within 8 years of your earliest release date and must detail which qualification you are working towards. In addition, you need to confirm your residency for the past 3 years prior to your sentence (time spent in prison does not count towards residency); you must also detail your

potential, motivation and eligibility to commit to ongoing study via a student loan. If you wish to study with the OU or are a Cat D prisoner wishing to embark on undergraduate studies on day release, please speak to your education department or careers advisor.

For more information on student finance in Wales, visit:

www.studentfinancewales.co.uk or **www.cyllidmyfyrwycymru.co.uk**

0300 200 4050, Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm

Postgraduate: 0300 100 0494, Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm

Student Finance Wales

PO Box 211, Llandudno Junction LL30 9FU

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland each of the three establishments has a dedicated Learning & Skills Centre which is resourced to provide a range of programmes. Students have the opportunity to attain recognised skills and qualifications in a range of both educational and vocational subjects. The curriculum is tailored to the population needs of each establishment and an Individual Learning Plan, focused on progression, is developed for each student based on their individual needs.

Distance Learning (Higher Education)

Any student in custody interested in Distance Learning (Higher Education) should seek advice from their establishment Head of Learning and/or Activities Governor.

If you wish to learn about courses available from the Open University you can do so by speaking to the Head of Learning and/or Activities Governor at your establishment or by writing to the OU directly.

The Open University

110 Victoria Street, Belfast BT1 3GN

02890 245025, Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 4.30pm

northernireland@open.ac.uk

A note for the older person leaving prison

The University of the Third Age (U3A) is a UK-wide organisation for the retired and semi-retired. It is not an academic university so no qualifications are needed and the activities are organised by the members themselves. Their website (**www.u3a.org.uk**) will direct you to your region and give you all the contact details you need. It would certainly be an excellent way for an older prison leaver to make new friends and integrate back into society. Membership costs less than £15 on average per year and is open to everyone who is no longer in full-time work.

A personal reflection on pursuing higher education

You may already have an undergraduate degree but want to make the best use of your time inside by working towards a postgraduate diploma or degree. You will have to find out what the rules are regarding Open University study in your prison, for it is different, for instance, between Scotland and England. You need to remember that you will need the support of your probation officer, whether inside or whilst on licence.

Start by getting a print-out of the OU postgraduate prospectus from your library or whoever runs the careers service at your prison (Shaw Trust, etc.). They will need to go online (www.open.ac.uk/request/prospectus) and request a prospectus (ask them to click on 'via post' otherwise you will have to pay per page for the print-out). You can get up to three prospectuses free from the OU so ask for 'Postgraduate Courses', 'Open Qualifications' plus a subject-specific one to make sure you have all the information you need.

For funding you may be eligible for a student loan (the prospectus explains how to apply for a loan), or you may have to sit down with this Directory and see which funders you could write to. If you are able to contribute something it will help, for you are very unlikely to get all you need from one funder. The most obvious charity for those who have done at least 30 credits with the OU already is OUSET: (www.oustudents.com/support-and-advice/ouset). As they are purely online, again you will need support from your personal officer, the library or whoever provides careers advice in your prison.

You will need to prepare for the course by reading around the subject and collecting together general textbooks, paper, pens, highlighters, etc. and also finding out early what the set books are will help.

Once you start the course you will need to work harder than the average student to keep up.

Write regularly to your tutor who will be able to send you extra e-tutorial and screen-cast print-outs that the OU won't have included. Join the Open University Students' Association (OUSA) www.oustudents.com/ **subject group**: OUSA sell past papers to undergraduates, but not postgraduates but the subject group may be able to send you the questions used in their revision weekend. You could try writing to them at OUSA, P.O. Box 397, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes. MK7 6BE.

Get into a routine by doing a set amount of work every day. If you share a cell then you may need to negotiate a quiet time to study, and ear-plugs from the canteen really help.

You will find the Open University are very flexible in terms of how you present your work so don't rely on getting computer time in the library, otherwise a lockdown will disrupt everything. Neat handwritten essays

are fine and you may be even offered the opportunity to hand-write your dissertation.

You may be in the situation where you will be leaving prison fairly soon and so are not able to start a course whilst inside, or you may be just completing your degree and want to take your studies further when you leave prison. You can use your remaining time to prepare for postgraduate work. If you are considering applying to a conventional university then do that through your probation officer to ensure you have any disclosure done properly.

There is no doubt that doing any qualification in prison shows potential employers that you have real drive and determination. It will be a struggle at times to get materials, time, peace and quiet to study but all of that struggle will make you stand out as a good person to employ.

Bruce
Former postgraduate student

