

## Education Service

### The Prison Education Service

The Prison Education Service consists of a partnership between the Irish Prison Service and a range of educational agencies from the community. Vocational Education Committees and Public Library Services make the largest contribution to, and are the mainstay of, the Prison Education Service. The Co-ordinator of Education with the IPS has an overall responsibility for the education of prisoners. Policy is drawn largely from the Council of Europe Recommendation and Report, *Education in Prison (1990)*, *The Management of Offenders (1994)* and the *Strategy Statement for the Prison Education Service for 2003-2006*.

The Department of Education and Science provided an allocation of 215 whole-time teacher equivalents to the prisons through the VECs in the academic year 2003/04. This included provision for the summer months and also enabled special teaching arrangements where the prisoners are segregated (e.g. Portlaoise, Mountjoy, Wheatfield, Limerick, Cork). In addition, four full-time librarians, employed by Dublin Public Libraries, work in prisons in the Dublin area.

Other agencies also contribute significantly to prison education, for example:

- The Open University, which caters for about 80 prisoners each year on degree-level distance education courses;
- The Arts Council, which provides writers' workshops and artists' workshops;
- Other third-level colleges, such as the National College of Art and Design, which is involved in Portlaoise, Midlands and Training Unit prisons.

### The Curriculum

Objectives, methods and course content are largely those of adult education. Set courses and examination work are but a part of prison education because of a high level of turnover in the population of most prisons, and because of prisoner's special needs and interests. The emergence of FETAC accreditation has opened up new possibilities which are now widely used in prison education. A high degree of curriculum and teaching material development is essential in prison education. This is facilitated through extensive in-service support, covering internal and external courses for teachers and via a range of structures, including the Prison Education Council and "development workers" in areas such as the Arts and Physical Education.

Full details of what is taught in prisons may be found in the Directory of Prison Education (see below). In broad terms, courses may be classified as follows:

- Basic Education, including Literacy and Numeracy
- General subjects, e.g. English, History, Geography, Mathematics, Languages, Computers
- Physical Education, Home Economics and Health Education

- The Arts, e.g. Visual arts, Music, Drama, Creative Writing, Photography
- Practical subjects, e.g. Woodwork, Metalwork, Horticulture
- Courses that address particular problems or needs that prisoners have, e.g. Pre-Release courses, Addiction Awareness, Parenting, Group Skills, Anger Management.

### Participation in Education in Prison

Participation in education varies with factors such as facilities, turnover of population and segregation. At the end of 2003, 54% of all prisoners were involved at some level. Over half of these, (i.e. 27% of the total prison population), were intensively involved, i.e. for more than 10 hours per week of classes, so that education was almost certainly their main activity in prison. Such an overall level of involvement in education whilst in prison is very high by international standards. The pattern of participation for each particular prison may be seen in Table A (\*note to Frances - "Table A" refers to "edu-participation- 17 nov 2003 - 060404").

Participation in education is counted as involvement in at least one structured class in the sample week. However, most of those taking part in education do so on a daily basis, as may be gauged by the measure of "intensive participation." As may also be seen from Table A, the figures for overall participation would have been considerably higher (62% ) if Cloverhill Prison was excluded from calculations, as an Education Unit for that sizeable prison had not yet been completed at the end of 2003. A very extensive library, which includes a wide range of material in the various languages and cultures of that prison's population, is, however, available in Cloverhill.

Participation in education in 2003 would also have been reduced somewhat as a consequence of the closure of Shanganagh Castle, an open place of detention for 16 to 21 year-olds, in December 2002. For more than a decade, Shanganagh Castle had the highest participation in education of any place of custody in the country. Nearly all of the young men who went there took part, virtually on a full-time basis, in the highly-developed education programme at that location. The closure also created difficulties for the teachers who worked there and for their employer, Co. Dublin VEC. Some Shanganagh Castle teachers have been seconded to CDVEC to work in other Dublin prisons, some were made redundant, and discussions are ongoing in relation to others.

### Library Services

The quality of library services available in prison is very uneven. In some prisons, a high-quality and dynamic professional service in good facilities is available, while in others there is scarcely a service to speak of. Generally, the critical factor now is whether, and to what extent, professional input and guidance is available from public library services. In 2000, a structural plan was agreed between the IPS and the City and County Librarians with prisons in their areas. This sought to build, in the rest of the country, on models that are already deemed to work well, e.g. the involvement of full-time qualified librarians in the larger Dublin prisons, and of a part-time library assistant from Co. Cavan Library Service in Loughan House, a relatively small location. Financial constraints at IPS have inhibited the roll-out of this plan to date, but there are proposals to commence on this work, on a phased basis, from 2004.

## Publications

In 2003, two key documents for prison education were completed by working groups. A Strategy Statement for the Prison Education Service for 2003 to 2006 was finalised. In tandem with this, a detailed description of the curriculum that has developed within prison education, entitled *Prison Education in Ireland: a Review of the Curriculum*, was written. Both of these are now printed and available from the Co-ordinator of Education's office (see address below).

Further information on prison education may be found in a range of other recent publications:

- *The Directory of Prison Education, 2004*
- *The Prison Adult Literacy Survey: Results and Implications*, a report on comprehensive research by Mark Morgan and Mary Kett (Irish Prison Service, 2003) and *Guidelines for Quality Literacy Work in Prisons* (Prison Education Service, 2002)
- *Physical Education in the Irish Prison System: The Challenges Ahead, a report of the Physical Education Development Group (2000)*
- *Another Place: A First Anthology of Creative Writing from Irish Prisons*, edited by Jane Meally and Bernadette Butler (2001)
- Four articles on aspects of Irish prison education published in 2001 and 2002 in the North American quarterly *Journal of Correctional Education*

*Copies of these publications may be obtained from the Co-ordinator of Education, Prison Education Service, Block 5, Belfield Office Park, Beaver Row, Dublin 4, or by e-mail from [mlsymes@irishprisons.ie](mailto:mlsymes@irishprisons.ie).*