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Press release

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Prison Service needs more detailed analysis of 'correctional opportunities'

The Scottish Prison Service (SPS) should assess more closely whether its skills courses and behavioural programmes for prisoners are successful in reducing re-offending rates, according to the Audit Scotland report, *Correctional Opportunities for Prisoners*.

Deputy Auditor General, Caroline Gardner, said: "The provision of education, vocational training and behaviour management programmes has increased, but more information is needed about their effectiveness and value."

Re-offending is a major problem for the Scottish criminal justice system. Nearly half of all prisoners released in 1999 were back in prison within two years. Studies have shown that improving prisoners' skills through education and training, and offering structured programmes that tackle behavioural issues like drug taking and anger management, can help reduce re-offending rates. But there is currently little data in Scotland to indicate the effect of the correctional opportunities on offer.

The Audit Scotland report found that prisoners' access to skills courses and behavioural programmes is variable. Access often depends on available resources at each prison and the duration of a prisoner's jail term. New facilities are being developed at several prisons, but the rising prison population means the pressure on correctional opportunity has increased.

Report findings show that:

- Scotland's prisons deal with more than 30,000 prisoners every year. The average prison population rose from 5,400 in 2002/03 to 6,620 in 2003/04
- SPS spent £30 million on correctional opportunities in 2003/04, some 12% of the full cost of operating Scotland's prisons.
- SPS performance results show 2,100 prisoners completed offending behaviour programmes and approved activities, and around 430,000 hours of education were received by prisoners across all 16 Scottish prisons in 2003-04.

Although SPS recognises the importance of rehabilitating prisoners, it has no statutory duty to do so and the Scottish Executive has not set any objectives for SPS in this area. SPS has undertaken only limited evaluation of the success of its offending behaviour programmes and has yet to evaluate their impact on reducing re-offending. SPS is still developing performance measures for other correctional opportunities such as education and training that will focus on results.

The circumstances in individual prisons can make it difficult to match prisoners with opportunities most likely to reduce their risk of re-offending. For example:

- On admission to prison, an estimated 85% of offenders have drug or alcohol addictions. Of prisoners who had used drugs in prison, less than half had received help to tackle their addiction.
- Half of the prisoners at Polmont Young Offenders Institution are locked in their cells at any one time, although new facilities will increase vocational training opportunities.
- At HMP Perth lack of facilities means that prisoners with sentences of less than six months cannot access employment opportunities. Again, new facilities will increase places.
- HMP Peterhead prisoners wait up to a year for a place on a catering course.
- At HMP Barlinnie all employment opportunities are oversubscribed and a timetable is in operation so prisoners work only half a day each. There is also a three month wait for a construction skills course.
- HMP Kilmarnock, the only prison in Scotland operating under private contract, is required to offer every prisoner 35 hours of 'constructive' activity every week, including work, education and physical exercise.

Audit Scotland provides services to the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission

Caroline Gardner added, "The Scottish Prison Service recognises it must measure the effectiveness of its correctional programmes. Monitoring results is essential for evaluating how well public money is being spent. We need to know what difference these training, education and life skills programmes are making to the way people live their lives after leaving prison, and in particular how they affect re-offending rates. The SPS has plans for improving the way it measures the effectiveness of its programmes and we look forward to seeing these put into action."

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Notes to editors

1. The Auditor General is responsible for securing the audit of the Scottish Executive and most other public bodies in Scotland, except local authorities. He investigates whether spending bodies achieve the best possible value for money and adhere to the highest standards of financial management. The Auditor General is independent and is not subject to the control of the Scottish Executive or the Scottish Parliament.
2. Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000, under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act, 2000. It provides services to the Accounts Commission and the Auditor General for Scotland.