



HMIPS
HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland
INSPECTING AND MONITORING

News Release
Full Inspection of HMP Castle Huntly

HMP Castle Huntly provides an important and distinctive function as the only open prison in Scotland. The prison operates with a clear ethos and purpose, preparing low risk prisoners for release. With a significant number of freedoms that do not exist in the rest of Scotland's prisons; prisoners held in HMP Castle Huntly have greater access to the community, can have periods of home release, are able to walk around the estate with few limitations, and are more responsible for their own day-to-day lives.

It has the added benefit of geography situated between two urban conurbations, Perth and Dundee, and therefore can play an important role in the Scottish prison estate by affording the opportunity to have employment in the communities.

Inspectors found the prison to have good staff/prisoner relationships, strong leadership and robust relationships with the community.

A human rights-based approach means that where an individual is assessed to demonstrate a low risk to the community, they should have various freedoms and opportunities restored. States also have a duty to prepare prisoners for release and assist them in their reintegration to the community. The existence of an open prison fulfils this human rights obligation and additionally allows prisoners held in closed conditions to have something to strive for in their rehabilitative journey.

With this in mind, HMP Castle Huntly should be a flagship establishment of the Scottish Prison Service.

In many ways, our inspection found HMP Castle Huntly to be fulfilling this promise, but unfortunately, the establishment is significantly underutilised, with a population under half of its design capacity. With numbers so low, the establishment is unable to offer and support as many community placements as possible and opportunities, since prisoners are needed for the effective running of the prison. This negatively impacts the rehabilitative effect the establishment. Some ameliorating solutions need to be explored; for example, the provision of self-care as opposed to the traditional model of a kitchen and laundry, use of digital platforms, access to personal vehicles and mobile phones etc.

HMIPS are conducting a thematic review into progression (the way in which prisoners can demonstrate they are less of a risk, and therefore be eligible for transfer to open conditions). While not prejudging the findings of this review, the Inspectorate must highlight the disappointing underuse of HMP Castle Huntly. The SPS therefore has a stark choice. It can either continue running an underutilised and therefore expensive prison or unblock the barriers to progression to ensure more effective use is made of the benefits of the facility. A more radical alternative would be to consider closure and affording other prisons the opportunity to run a more open regime, in tandem with a closed regime for those prisoners due to be liberated. That might provide open conditions across a wider area of Scotland, but it would be hard to replicate the inspiring and restorative tranquillity of HMP Castle Huntly.

We identified 20 elements of good practice including a lovely inter-faith centre and memorial garden, and excellent facilities to support outdoor focussed family visits and more relaxed indoor visits.

Embargoed until 00:01 on Thursday 22 December 2022

We also made 38 recommendations for improvement, which included the need to:

- create more accessible cells to accommodate the potential for an increase in prisoners with mobility issues
- provide more modern single cell accommodation for all prisoners, including in-cell shower and toilet facilities, in-cell technology and telephony to enhance its role as Scotland's only Open Estate and key progression objective
- re-open the Independent Living Unit
- provide protection prisoners with better opportunities for external placements and clear explanations when their own suggestions cannot be implemented.
- review psychology provision to ensure national waiting times are not exceeded
- ensure individualised care plans for those with long-term conditions

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland, Wendy Sinclair-Gieben was appointed in July 2018.
2. On publication the report can be found at www.prisonssinspectoratescotland.gov.uk
3. For further information please contact Kerry Love, Business Manager, at Kerry.Love@gov.scot or on 07939 980452.

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