

Cuts to prison education provision (JUPG, December 2025)

Summary

- The MoJ has cut prison education funding for each prison, with reports ranging from 5% to 50%.
- Hundreds of prison educators have been made redundant.
- The UK government's ambitions to reduce reoffending and improve rehabilitation are at risk because of these cuts, while the Gauke Review outcomes are also in jeopardy.
- The prison education curriculum has narrowed, while functional English and maths, as well as reading, hospitality, catering and IT vocational courses, have been cut.
- Purposeful activity has been reduced.
- Prisons are likely to be less safe as a result.
- Reoffending and rehabilitation will be directly impacted.
- The MoJ has not confirmed the scale or impact of the cuts.

Impact of funding cuts

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) has imposed wide-ranging reductions to the funding of prison education. Prison governors have had to reduce the commissioning of education from the providers. UCU believes all prisons have been impacted.

The funding cuts have resulted in a measurable drop-off in prison education, which has led to hundreds of job losses in both functional and vocational skills, including functional English, maths, reading, hospitality and digital skills.

The Gauke Review, published last year and accepted by the UK government, outlined a roadmap for reforming prisons in England, with a strong emphasis on reducing reoffending and improving rehabilitation. The prison education cuts and redundancies directly undermine rehabilitation efforts and raise serious concerns about public safety and prison reform.

The funding cuts are contested by the MoJ. There has been no confirmation from the MoJ regarding either the scale of the cuts to each prison education budget, the type of courses cut in each prison or the number of prison educators made redundant. However, the cuts have been reported in various sources:

- [The Guardian: Prisons in England and Wales to cut spending on education courses by up to 50%](#)
- [Inside Time: Teachers made redundant as prison education slashed by 20 per cent](#)
- [New Daily Prime: Prison education budgets slashed despite Labour's pledge to improve access to learning](#)
- [HM Inspectorate of Prisons: What do cuts to prison education provision mean?](#)
- [FE Week: Prison education cuts will punish those most failed by the system](#)

The range of cuts is estimated to be between 5% and 50%. This has not been official confirmed by the MoJ. UCU's view is that, based on aggregating feedback from reps, the press, commentators and providers, the scale of the redundancies is likely to be over 300 prison educators. The final number of courses cut is still to be confirmed. Quality and accreditation are also impacted.

Redundancies and organisational challenges

The redundancy processes in each prison started before the new Prison Education Service (PES) contract began on 1 October. The funding cuts are linked to the Annual Delivery Plan, which is agreed each year between the prison governor and education provider.

Further job losses are likely to follow TUPE transfers linked to PES. UCU is supporting affected members throughout this process. Widespread redundancies have directly impacted on the ability to provide purposeful activity in prisons.

Prison Education Service (PES) overview

The PES contract, valued at £1.5 billion, runs until at least 2029 and aims to deliver consistent, high-quality education to support rehabilitation and employability. However, the current funding model has led to a narrowing curriculum, reduced creative courses and inadequate provision, with 75% of HMIP reports rating services as inadequate or requiring improvement. Cuts have resulted in course closures, reduced purposeful activity and increased strain on staff.

PES, however, has not been fully implemented. Following the England wide multimillion-pound public procurement exercise and commissioning process, the PES contract for the West Midlands had to be delayed and retendered at further public expense. At the end of this process the likelihood is that the same budget cuts and redundancy processes will be applied under the new PES contract.

PES is supposed to prioritise measurable outcomes linked to qualifications or employability benchmarks, improve prisoner numeracy and literacy, and incentivise prisoners to improve qualifications and skills linked to a job on the outside. Governors are also to be supported to achieve these outcomes. According to the MoJ, PES core education focuses on independence and opportunity for prisoners linked to English and maths and meeting prisoner needs.

Impact of redundancies

Approximately 300 prison education staff have so far been made redundant, with significant losses in English, maths, vocational and digital education. As a result, UCU members report course closures, increased workloads, poor consultation processes and heightened stress. Some prison education budgets have been cut by up to 50%, with MoJ clawbacks and no inflationary adjustments exacerbating the situation.

Unlocking Futures campaign

UCU continues to advocate for:

- a comprehensive and independent review of prison education delivered by PES;
- an urgent investigation to be undertaken by HMIP into the provision of prison education linked to the funding cuts and the redundancies, to report to the Justice Committee by April 2026;
- the transfer of prison education from the MoJ to the Department for Education; and

- a national contract for prison educators ensuring parity with further education teachers and professional respect.

For more information, please visit the [UCU prison educators: unlocking futures website](#).

Paul Bridge, UCU head of Further Education: PBridge@ucu.org.uk