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More than 1000 prisoners in Scotland aren't engaged in work or purposeful activity, new figures have revealed.

It means 17 per cent of inmates aren't taking meaningful steps towards rehabilitation.

According to the Scottish Prison Service, there are currently 6266 inmates north of the border.

Of those, 3696 are enrolled in work programmes with a further 2338 carrying out what guidelines deem "purposeful activity".

Such programmes have been shown in the past to have a significant positive impact on reoffending and prospects of rehabilitation.

Once the 215 signed off sick are stripped out, that leaves 1118 doing nothing, despite the SNP government saying it wanted to improve activity in jails.

Analysis has also revealed a reduction in those putting their time in prison to good use.

In the space of two years, the number of hours taken up by work or activity has fallen by 300,000, with inmates now doing an average of an hour less per week.

And some prisons have far more inmates than they do spaces for work and activity.

At HMP Edinburgh there are 541 work and activity spaces for 888 offenders, while at the newly renovated Low Moss, 755 inmates have to make do with 343 slots.

The Scottish Conservatives – who obtained the data through Freedom of Information – have repeatedly called for prisoners to be given work or education in jail, both to boost the chances of rehabilitation and pay something back to society.

Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary Liam Kerr said:

“Every prisoner should be compelled to either work or take part in some kind of meaningful activity while they’re in jail.

“Evidence shows that this will boost their chances of successfully reintegrating upon release no end, and forces them to pay back something to society in the process.

“But these figures show more than 1000 criminals are not doing this and, in some parts of the country, there simply aren’t enough spaces for them.

“This will do nothing to reduce reoffending for those who are simply sitting inside twiddling their thumbs, watching TV or playing computer games at the taxpayer’s expense.

“Prison is there to keep the public safe and to act as a deterrent to anyone considering criminal behaviour.

“But in addition to that its role in rehabilitation is critical, and we have to make sure every single inmate is involved in that vital process.”

To see the full FoI responses from the Scottish Prison Service, visit:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/HQ17078-Data.pdf>

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