

# [Blow for rehabilitation as fewer inmates involved in purposeful activity](#)

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- Blow for rehabilitation as fewer inmates involved in purposeful activity

18 Aug 2017



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.”

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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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## **[Deprived Scots pupils less likely to get to university than rUK counterparts](#)**

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- Deprived Scots pupils less likely to get to university than rUK counterparts

17 Aug 2017



The number of Scottish pupils from deprived areas winning a place at university is significantly behind the equivalent statistic for England.

Today, youngsters south of the border received exam results, and figures from UCAS have revealed that 16.5 per cent who secured a place at university are from the least wealthy areas.

In comparison, the same number for Scotland is just 11.9 per cent.

And for those from the second poorest backgrounds – deemed to be in the 20-40 per cent bracket – 22 per cent secured university places on results day.

However, the same figure for Scotland was just 17.8 per cent.

It's the latest set of statistics showing the SNP government is doing less than its Westminster counterparts in getting those from most deprived backgrounds into higher education.

It also calls into question the nationalists' policy of universal free tuition, which is now shown to be unsuccessful in closing the attainment gap.

In today's *Scotsman*, former senior SNP minister Kenny MacAskill even acknowledged that Scotland would have to move towards some kind of tuition fees approach, and that the Scottish Government's way has "hit support for the poorest".

**Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary Liz Smith said:**

"These figures show clearly that it's much easier for a pupil from a deprived background in England to get to university than it is in Scotland.

"The SNP has had more than a decade to address this, but it has failed.

"This SNP government now owes generations of disadvantaged youngsters an explanation – why are their contemporaries south of the border significantly more likely to get to university?

"This also blows a hole in the SNP's policy of universal free tuition.

"It blatantly is not working, is harming universities financially and – as Kenny MacAskill has now admitted – is reducing opportunity for those who need it the most.

"We need a radical rethink from the Scottish Government, or more children from the poorest backgrounds will be placed at a stark disadvantage to those just a few hundred miles away."

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**[More than 1000 mental health patients](#)**

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17 Aug 2017



More than 1000 mental health patients have been sent to other health boards for treatment in the past three years, new figures have revealed.

Research by the Scottish Conservatives showed patients being sent between NHS boards north of the border, with some even being asked to travel to England.

In Glasgow, there was an example of a patient being sent 480 miles to Tavistock in Devon, and to parts of London.

The Freedom of Information request showed the conditions suffered by those being transferred elsewhere included eating disorders, bipolar, severe depression and learning disabilities.

In total, 1007 mental health patients were asked to travel “out of area” between 2014/15 and 2016/17, the equivalent of 17 a week.

NHS Highland had the highest number of instances with 295, followed by Fife with 229.

Health boards serving large cities like Glasgow and Edinburgh were less likely to send patients elsewhere, the figures showed.

The Scottish Conservatives said while it was understandable some patients had to travel to receive specialist care, the numbers were too high given that mental health is supposed to be a priority issue for the Scottish Government.

The statistics showed 334 people were moved in 2014/15, followed by 370 a year later, and 303 last year.

## **Scottish Conservative mental health spokesman Annie Wells said:**

“There will always be cases when it’s in the patient’s best interests to be sent elsewhere for treatment.

“But the scale of these figures suggests some health boards in Scotland just aren’t equipped to deal with a range of conditions.

“All sides of the political debate in Scotland agree that mental health should have a parity of esteem with physical health.

“But if that’s to be the case, people need to be able to rely on their own

health board for treatment.

“In cases of exceptionally rare and challenging conditions it can make sense for everyone for a patient to go elsewhere for care.

“However, many of the conditions set out here are not rare, and people would expect at least one of their local hospitals to be able to cope with it.”

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Below is the number of patients sent to other health boards for mental health treatment in the last three years:

NHS Ayrshire and Arran – 73  
NHS Borders – 94  
NHS Dumfries and Galloway – n/a  
NHS Fife – 229  
NHS Forth Valley – 52  
NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde – 17  
NHS Grampian – 151  
NHS Highland – 295  
NHS Lanarkshire – n/a  
NHS Lothian – 14  
NHS Orkney – n/a  
NHS Shetland – n/a  
NHS Tayside – 28  
NHS Western Isles – 54  
**Total – 1007**

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## [Give headteachers power to ban mobile phones in schools](#)

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- Give headteachers power to ban mobile phones in schools

16 Aug 2017



Headteachers should have clear guidance allowing them to remove smartphones from school if they deem it necessary, a Scottish Conservative MSP has said today.

It follows academic evidence that restricting access to smartphone use by pupils can boost educational attainment – and reduce educational inequality.

No guidance has been issued to Scottish schools on smartphone technology since 2013, during which time mobile phone usage has increased by more than a third among the population.

Michelle Ballantyne, the party's spokesman for childcare and early years, said today that a ban should exist in primary schools and restrictions on use should be introduced in secondary school where heads deem it necessary.

It comes after a major paper by the London School of Economics declared "schools that restrict mobile phones subsequently experience an improvement in test scores".

It also found that "low-achieving students are more likely to be distracted by the presence of mobile phones" meaning that "banning mobile phones could be a low-cost way for schools to reduce educational inequality".

However, the 2013 guidance issued by the Scottish Government declares that it is "unreasonable and impractical to attempt to impose a ban" on mobile phones in schools.

Now the South Scotland MSP has called for that guidance to change if attainment is to be improved.

**Scottish Conservative early years spokeswoman Michelle Ballantyne said:**

"We are all becoming more and more reliant on smartphones and we know parents see them as valuable to ensure they can keep in contact with their children before and after school.

"But we do need to get the balance right.

"The evidence suggests that excessive smartphone use in schools can reduce educational attainment, particularly among low-achievers.

"At the same time, we know that online bullying is a growing problem in school.

"Many primary school teachers would like to see a ban on smartphones, something I support.

"And in secondary, headteachers who want to restrict the use of smartphones if they think it is necessary should be supported to do so.

"Given the explosion of smartphone use over the last few years, the Scottish Government should be looking again at its four-year old guidance.

"This may be a cost-free way to help boost standards in classrooms all over Scotland, giving teachers the support they need to deliver the high quality education we all want for pupils."

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A study by the London School of Economics concluded in 2015 that schools

which banned mobile phones saw an increase in test scores – with improvements particularly pronounced among low-achievers

<http://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/dp1350.pdf>

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## [Demands for new strategy after scale of drugs deaths revealed](#)

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15 Aug 2017



The Scottish Government must urgently embark on a new drugs strategy after figures revealed deaths had doubled in the past decade.

Statistics released today showed there were 827 drug-related deaths north of the border in 2016, an increase of almost a quarter from the previous year.

The report said Scotland's drugs death rate was now two-and-a-half times that of the rest of the UK.

And while the Scottish Government claimed last month it would "refresh" drugs strategy, shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said that was not enough, and a full parliamentary review was needed.

Methadone, the substance prescribed by the NHS to get addicts off heroin, contributed to 42 per cent of the deaths, a new record.

And legal highs, or new psychoactive substances, were present in 286 of the fatalities recorded last year.

Males accounted for the majority of deaths, with 35 to 44 being the age group most affected.

**Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:**

"These figures are nothing short of appalling.

"Every year hundreds of lives in Scotland are being wasted because of a drugs culture that's been allowed to escalate out of control.

"People will be stunned that the death rate here is more than twice that of the rest of the UK, and that poses some extremely tough questions for the Scottish Government.

“For decades now we’ve had a drugs policy that simply parks people on methadone programmes, offering them zero hope of ever beating addiction completely.

“Not only is that methadone leaving vulnerable individuals in limbo, but it’s killing hundreds of people too.

“We now want a change to get people out of a life of drug and substance addiction.

“Cuts to alcohol and drugs partnerships need to be reversed now, and people need more direct access to physical support.

“A strategy refresh won’t cut it. We need a full parliamentary review of drugs policy in Scotland.

“Holyrood can implement policies that make a real difference to people’s lives, yet those who have been marginalised and forgotten the most are drug users.

“These statistics must serve as an abrupt wake-up call for the SNP.”

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To see the full report, visit:

<https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files//statistics/drug-related-deaths/drd2016/16-drug-rel-deaths.pdf>