

Prisoners not engaged in learning

✘ Liberal Democrat Justice spokesperson Robert Brown MSP has revealed that many prisoners in Scottish jails are not engaged in any type of learning despite there being resources in prison available.

In 10 prisons in Scotland less than 40% of the prison population are taking some form of educational or work course.

In Kilmarnock prison less than 15% of prisoners take classes. The figure is replicated in Barlinnie, Scotland's largest prison, where only 17% of prisoners are listed as taking part in courses while in prison.

Commenting Mr Brown said:

"It is disappointing that prisoners are not taking up the opportunity to learn new skills or learn toward a qualification while behind bars.

"It confirms the long held belief that prisons can be colleges of crime where prisoners often come out worse than they went in.

"Learning a course or skill is a vital component of helping prisoners to stay on the straight and narrow when they are released.

"All the evidence points to the fact the prisoners equipped with skills do better and cause less trouble when they are released

"Boredom in prison can be a hugely demotivating factor and it is vital that prisoners engage with the facilities offered.

"The Scottish Government needs to make diligent efforts to

ensure that far more prisoners engage with the skills on offer.”

This only reflects the comments by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, Andrew McLellan, in the last published report covering the period 2008-09. He repeated the lament of previous reports:-

Many of the most unhappy features of Scotland's prisons have been criticised repeatedly in inspection reports. Another example is the amount of time spent by prisoners locked in cell. Two years ago I wrote Report after Report tells the same grim story. The law requires prisoners to work. The public expects prisoners to work. Yet in nearly every prison many prisoners are not working. When they should be working – indeed, often when they want to work – there is no work for them. When prisoners are not working they are almost invariably locked in their cells. A useful working day for a prisoner could make such a difference. It could teach good habits of punctuality and self-discipline. It could be a training opportunity to develop a skill to help with employment on release. It could transform the self-respect of prisoners who had never done a decent day's work in their lives and never made anything useful or beautiful. It could keep the minds of prisoners focused on things that are valuable rather than on things that are destructive. It is no surprise that the public expects prisoners to work. But the reality is that prisoners – many of them – spend the working day lying in bed. Usually this is not about laziness: usually it is about overcrowding. In an overcrowded prison there is always someone ahead of you in the queue for work.