



Independent Prison Monitoring (IPM) Findings Annual Report

Prison:

HMP EDINBURGH

Year (1 April – 31 March):

2024 – 2025

By HM INSPECTORATE OF PRISONS SCOTLAND



Annual Monitoring Figures

		2023-24	2024-25
	Total number of visits	73	92
	Total number of missed weeks	3	1
	Total number of prisoner requests received	134	199
	Total number of IPM hours	254	380

Executive Summary

This annual report summarises the observations made and engagement with prisoners, staff, and management throughout the year, by Independent Prison Monitors (IPMs) against the nine HMIPS inspection and monitoring standards.

There was an average of 1.8 visits per week, although one week was missed due to unforeseen circumstances. The number of visits, IPM hours, and requests received all increased compared with 2023/24.

The IPM story of HMP Edinburgh for the year would be one of a prison trying in almost impossible circumstances. As noted throughout the report, IPMs have observed good practice and positive actions. However, the prison was hampered by issues out with their control. The establishment does not have the facilities it needs to offer everyone a full and fulfilling regime, which would help reduce prisoners' chances of returning to custody. They do not even have the space needed to hold everyone in decent accommodation. The use of single cells to house two prisoners should be a scandal in 2025. Beyond that, they do not have the deployable staff required to open all areas of the prison each day. Whilst the prison is being supported in terms of recruitment, and have a full complement of staff, the IPM Team were concerned that the current systems for deploying staff, for example not taking into account those on maternity leave, are no longer appropriate. Further, even if all staff were deployed, the IPM Team question if this provides enough officers to fulfil all the duties required to care properly for prisoners.

Despite no longer holding female prisoners, the prison is still being asked, like many other prisons in Scotland, to hold a far too complex prisoner population. Looking after five separate categories of prisoners, whilst also trying to manage issues within those groups, impacts adversely on what is available for all groups. The IPM team recognise the work done by the staff at HMP Edinburgh given these structural challenges.

General Observations

Standard 1: Lawful and Transparent Custody

As per last year's report, for those prisoners who attended the induction programme it was very good. The prisoners and staff involved in the delivery are conscientious and empathetic to the new prisoners' needs and concerns. The officers who lead on this showed a well-developed understanding of the needs of prisoners and how best to deliver the induction. IPMs would like to see a full induction programme rolled out for the prisoners on remand, as this may have a positive effect for prisoners and staff alike.

Issues around translation services have generally improved since the last report. Although IPMs were still informed of a few cases where prisoners who did not speak English were not automatically provided with translation services, staff seemed more aware of these issues and the options to resolve them. The inclusion of country flags on name badges, indicating other languages spoken by officers was a positive development.

The reconfiguration of some of the halls that took place during the year was welcomed by the IPM Team, with a clearer sense of purpose around the function of the first night centre. However, the population pressures continue to hamper the ability of the prison to deliver the service they would aim to. Quite simply, there are too many prisoners and too complex a prisoner population for the physical infrastructure in place at HMP Edinburgh.

The planned work to freshen up the reception area has not taken place, and the IPM Team remain of the view that this area is not optimal and does not support the dedicated staff to do the job they need to do. One particular concern, other than the simply tired appearance and lack of natural light, was the shortage of space which meant the prisoner peer mentors conducted interviews with new prisoners in the corridors of the reception area, rather than in a discrete and private area, undermining the valuable work they do. The IPM Team would hope the prison is able to look at this during the coming year.

Where IPMs have spoken to prisoners about pre-release planning, they have generally felt supported. IPMs noted the well-meaning efforts of staff in this regard, including in reception immediately before prisoners were released. Some aspects could be further developed to equip officers with more information and support, for example around sign posting to support services, which in turn would allow them to better support prisoners leaving custody.

Once again, and outwith the remit of the IPM team, IPMs noted the number of prisoners they encountered who continued to serve sentences of under 12 months, despite the presumption against such sentences.

Standard 2: Decency

As reported last year, IPMs remained concerned that the catering team are fighting an unwinnable battle to provide healthy and nutritious meals to all prisoners within the budget. IPMs were aware of work taken by SPS HQ to review the budgets, but they once again call on the Scottish Government to review the prison budgets and ensure that enough money is set aside to provide quality meals to all prisoners. The issues of cost of living remain and, as in the community, the impact of rising costs and stagnant wages make it harder for prisoners to supplement the food provided by the prison.

IPMs welcomed the regime changes during the year that mean on a weekday the evening meal is served at a more appropriate time. Whilst changes like this may seem small, they can make a big difference to the experiences of those in custody.

Last year IPMs were pleased to report that the prison had improved the general cleanliness, particularly in outside areas. Overall, the prison had managed to maintain some of the progress,

and although it remains an ongoing challenge, during most visits, IPMs were able to report back positively on this matter. However, issues around weekly kit changes continued to be raised by prisoners and officers alike throughout the year, with prisoners stating they were not always able to get hold of clean clothing or changes of sheets and towels. Where IPMs checked stores and spoke to staff these challenges were confirmed. The prison may wish to consider how to ensure that officers are aware how to resolve these issues and are empowered to do so.

The Glenesk exercise yard was moved during the year from an outer to an inner area. If this area is to be used in the longer term, the prison should consider seating or exercise equipment to enrich the environment.

IPMs observed that no toilets had covers and this was explained as a security measure. It is the view of the IPM Team that toilets should have covers as a matter of basic decency, and they call on the SPS to review this situation across the entire estate.

While the IPM Team noted the issues around the physical limitations of the prison above, the biggest concern, as reported last year, remained the continued use of cells designed to hold one person being used to hold two. IPMs make clear their view that this is totally unacceptable, and the Scottish Government must urgently do more to address the issue of overcrowding

Standard 3: Personal Safety

In general, the prison felt safe during IPM visits, and this was a huge accomplishment from the officers and the prison management team, who were dealing with an incredibly challenging situation, most notably the housing of many members of serious and organised crime groups. This is coupled with the fact that HMP Edinburgh is surrounded by housing, making it a target for 'throwovers' and drone activity. No one should be in any doubt as to the challenges the prison faces in this regard. Prisoners and staff raised concerns to IPMs about drugs in the prison at various points during the reporting year. The IPMs applaud the staff on their attempts to control this through security measures and with efforts to reduce demand. Given this, it is notable that, in the main, the prison felt calm and well-run, and levels of violence were lower than in some comparable prisoner populations. This does not minimise the traumatic impact to both staff and prisoners alike of violence when it happens.

IPMs were concerned that issues around staffing levels make this job more challenging for the officers. Staff reported that a lack of regular or experienced staff inhibits them from carrying out their roles properly and creates barriers for them conducting their core duties, around both security and interpersonal relationships. IPMs remained concerned that too often staff were found at their desks at the front rather than patrolling landings and engaging with prisoners, with the possible implications this has on dynamic security. The IPM team believe that the SPS should review staffing levels on all the halls to ensure that there are enough staff deployed at all times to carry out all the functions of a prison officer, including building interpersonal relationships and personal officer work that can have a positive impact on safety for everyone who works or lives in a prison.

Finally, the IPM Team were aware of several deaths that had occurred in HMP Edinburgh during the year. They express their sympathy to all those who have been affected by a death in custody.

Standard 4: Effective, Courteous and Humane Use of Authority

The IPMs were impressed with the SRU staff during their visits to the area and in their discussions with them. The officers were knowledgeable of those in their care and their specific needs. They do an exceptional job in challenging circumstances. The main concern for the IPM team remained that the SRU is always full. This has led to a further area of the prison being allocated to house prisoners on rules who cannot be located in the SRU due to space limitations. The IPM team question whether all those held in prison are in the right place. Despite the work of the SRU staff, and officers on the halls, the needs of many of these prisoners with complex mental health issues cannot be met within prison, and this needs to be addressed by the Scottish Government and others outside the SPS.

Where IPMs attended orderly rooms they reported they were well-conducted and fair. IPMs have not had cause to comment on the orderly room paperwork this year, and hope that action taken by management to improve the quality of reports has made a difference.

IPMs welcomed the work undertaken, and future work planned, to enhance the security of the prison by reducing the number of drones and 'throwovers'. They also found security measures at the front of house with staff and visitor searching were done respectfully. They do question the use of both strip searching and body scanners for prisoners entering and leaving the prison. The IPM Team call on the Scottish Government and the SPS to review this practice. The body scanners show everything a prisoner might have secreted about their person and a strip search is dehumanising and an unnecessary indignity.

Standard 5: Respect, Autonomy and Protection

The issues the IPM team raised in last year's annual report remain the same this year. Some of these issues were also raised in the 2023 HMIPS full inspection report. The team are hopeful they will see further progress in the coming year.

Relationships between staff and prisoners were in the main respectful, although at times, of necessity, transactional. Where officers did engage with prisoners it was good, such as officers sitting with prisoners helping them complete forms or demonstrating real care and concern for individuals. On many occasions, officers have alerted IPMs to prisoners whom they felt needed their support to overcome issues, demonstrating a praiseworthy level of empathy towards the prisoners. This is counteracted by the tendency of staff to base themselves at the desks behind locked grille gates, which remained a concern during IPM visits. Staff will often explain this occurs because they are too busy or due to a lack of experienced or regular staff on the hall. The IPM team were pleased that work is planned around the role of personal officers in the coming year and look forward to reporting on this next year.

IPMs also noted that the practice of shouting down the halls continues. Last year the prison management had committed to act on this, but with the other pressures in the prison they have not been able to prioritise it. Whilst the IPM team acknowledges the challenges the management team are facing, they do believe these standards should be non-negotiable, and if there are structural barriers that inhibit action being taken, such as a lack of deployable staff, or the complex prisoner population, the SPS should assist in managing those issues so the prison can operate to the best of its ability. The IPM team would like to see more done to promote the positive actions of staff when engaging with prisoners, as this could bring more positive benefits in terms of dynamic security and enhanced safety and welcome the commitment the prison has made towards addressing this in the coming year.

There were some improvements to the regime compared with last year. Concerns remain about the amount of time remand prisoners on Glenesk remain in their cells. Again, this is a limitation of the physical space and staffing available in the prison.

The use of Prisoner Information Action Committees (PIACs) remained a concern for the IPMs. It was not evident that they were properly utilised across all the halls. There were some areas of good practice, for example there was meaningful engagement on Ratho Hall, with PIACs being held regularly and minutes being posted. It was harder to find evidence for this on some of the other halls. The prison may wish to consider how they can further develop and embed these meetings, or other forms of prisoner participation and representation, across the prison.

Finally, the issues raised in last year's report regarding complaints remained, although with some improvement towards the end of the year. IPMs were concerned that prisoners' reports about issues with complaints appeared to go unheeded. The IPM team did acknowledge the commitment towards the end of the reporting year to put boxes for complaints on Hermiston Hall, and hope this could be rolled out on all halls. The prison may benefit from further action to ensure that all complaints are recorded and prisoners are provided with responses in a timely manner.

Standard 6: Purposeful Activity

Like the IPM findings last year, the headline is that where activity takes place it is of a good quality, but there is a need for more activity spaces to engage a higher proportion of the prisoners. The lack of physical space will always be an issue, and in line with other comments about the population at Edinburgh, the SPS and the Scottish Government should consider this – the prison could only ever provide opportunities, through purposeful activity, for less than half of those held there. In the view of the IPMs, this is not acceptable and more rehabilitation focused activity is needed. Action also needs to be taken around the staffing available daily to ensure that activities are kept open, and the IPM team call on the SPS to consider the staffing levels available to the prison. The IPM team noted the efforts taken by the prison in this area to date, and the work being undertaken to provide extra capacity in the work sheds. The IPM team are also pleased to report that the amount of purposeful activity delivered to prisoners has increased since the last report, and look forward to seeing this positive trend continue.

Where prisoners did attend activities, they were well-engaged. The atmosphere around the work sheds and education spaces was always positive. During visits IPMs were pleased to see the wide range of activities on offer. IPMs were informed that more prisoners were undertaking Open University courses this year than previously. Prisoners praised education offerings such as art, IT, music and football (Street Soccer). There was also praise for the gym activities, the Recovery Café, the activities at the Hive and the main work sheds. IPMs were impressed with the positive culture created within these areas by committed and dedicated staff. The prison librarian is an example of a member of staff fully engaged in their job and working creatively in the best interests of the prisoners. IPMs reflected this across all activities they monitored. The frustration was that not all prisoners are able to engage, in particular the negligible offering available to those on remand.

The IPM Team were also pleased to report on the positive activity within the visits area. First, the changes to the timetable appeared to have resolved concerns about lack of access reported previously. Secondly, IPMs noted some good activity in both the Visitors Centre, with the family week activity, and in the visit hall. IPMs commend the activity during the family visit with the Highland Games theme, where an officer had given up his own time to play the bagpipes for the prisoners and their families. These efforts by staff are a cause for celebration.

Standard 7: Transitions from Custody into the Community

The IPM team are pleased to note that whilst the issues around GeoAmey transportation of prisoners have not been completely resolved, the improvement in the service has been marked.

Progression continued to be an issue of concern for many prisoners. IPMs are aware of the work committed to nationally to clear the backlog of prisoners waiting to complete offending behaviour courses, but to date are not seeing this having an impact on the ground, frustrating both prisoners and officers alike.

As noted above, the work being done in the Recovery Café for those with drug or alcohol needs was very positive. Prisoner spoke in positive terms about the courses they were involved in. Officers also talked positively about the things they had learned from being involved with such courses, and of the impact of groups like the Sycamore Tree.

The IPM team were also pleased with the work undertaken by the officers on release planning and the housing officer, but noted the wider barriers they faced, for example helping remand prisoners with tenancy issues whilst working with overstretched external partners.

The IPM Team look forward to seeing the outcomes of planned work to provide further support and guidance on the release of short term sentenced and remand prisoners, to support them better as they transition back to their communities.

Standard 8: Organisational Effectiveness

As noted last year, staffing levels remained a concern throughout the year. Too often the prison had to move staff from one area to another to be able to deliver the basic regime, by for example shutting work sheds to allow statutory requirements (i.e. time in fresh air) to take place on the halls. This improved in the latter part of the year with work sheds not having to be cancelled to pull staff back onto residential duties. Having an experienced and consistent set of staff in all areas of the prison would allow for the prison to drive forward the changes they would like to implement. It is the IPM view that the staffing model for a prison such as Edinburgh should be reviewed, including to consider the impact of non-deployable staff, to make sure a full regime can always be delivered.

IPMs were pleased to report regularly on the positive interactions they had with staff, many of whom talk about their jobs with pride and enthusiasm.

Standard 9: Health and Wellbeing

Once again, the biggest single concern expressed by prisoners to the IPM team at Edinburgh regarded healthcare provision. There were some significant improvements made during the year, most notably around bringing waiting lists down. However, towards the final quarter some of these issues re-emerged, and this final report could read identically to last year, with prisoners raising concerns about access to services, the timing of medications, and this year also raising concerns about their encounters with staff. The IPM team is aware of the challenges the NHS trust is facing. A regular meeting has now been instituted between the IPM team and the NHS to ensure concerns are raised in a timely manner. The IPM team are grateful for this action by the NHS and note their positive approach to addressing issues. The appointment of further GPs should also have a positive impact in the coming year.



Key Issues

1. Healthcare
2. Access to purposeful activity
3. Overcrowding and the complex population



Encouraging Observations

As noted throughout the report, the staff of Edinburgh are their greatest asset. In all areas of the prison good practice is observed, be that on halls, in visits, at reception or in activity spaces. Staff talk with pride about their work, and many go above and beyond to support those in their care, be that on the halls or in work sheds. Further, the prison has done well to maintain stability despite the structural challenges outlined in the report. If more can be done nationally to support the prison, especially around the complex prisoner population and overcrowding, the prison has strong foundations to build upon.