

Justice Select Committee

Oral evidence: [The prison operational workforce](#), HC 917

Tuesday 18 April 2023

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 18 April 2023.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Sir Robert Neill (Chair); Tahir Ali; Janet Daby; Maria Eagle; Stuart C McDonald; Edward Timpson.

Questions 286 - 334

Witnesses

I: Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP, Minister of State, Ministry of Justice; and Michelle Jarman-Howe, Chief Operating Officer Prisons, Ministry of Justice.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– Ministry of Justice [[PRI0022](#)]



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP and Michelle Jarman-Howe.

Q286 **Chair:** Welcome to this session of the Justice Committee and our inquiry into the prison operational workforce. I welcome our witnesses. We will come to you shortly, but first we must make our declarations of interest. I am a non-practising barrister and a former consultant to a law firm.

Maria Eagle: I am a non-practising solicitor.

Stuart C McDonald: I am a former solicitor.

Edward Timpson: I am a former Solicitor General with a practising certificate, but I am not currently undertaking any court work. I am the former chair of CAFCASS. My brother is chair of the Prison Reform Trust.

Q287 **Chair:** Welcome, Minister—it is great to see you again as Minister of State at the MOJ, responsible for prisons—and Ms Jarman-Howe, chief operating officer for prisons. Thank you for coming back.

Damian Hinds: Thank you for inviting us.

Q288 **Chair:** I am sorry we were not able to conclude everything we wanted to last time. I am sure we will get through this session without interruptions for Divisions.

May I start with something that Miss Jarman-Howe mentioned on an earlier occasion? We were talking about attrition and what drives people to leave the service. Research from the 2017-18 prison officer retention strategy and framework found that the three top drivers of attrition were leadership, career progression and health and wellbeing, about which we have talked in broad terms in the past. You, Miss Jarman-Howe, fairly made the point that they remain the top drivers. What troubles us is why, five years on, those drivers remain the same.

Michelle Jarman-Howe: Overall, the drivers move around. We give staff who are leaving a range of options to describe the key headings on why they are exiting the service. The top five have remained the top five over that period, but the order has changed. Pay, for example, has moved down the drivers for attrition over that period. But yes, you are absolutely right: our current top three drivers are career progression, health and wellbeing, and leadership.

Q289 **Chair:** You said that they vary month to month but that typically they are the top three.

Michelle Jarman-Howe: Yes, they are the top three.

Q290 **Chair:** In particular, the top three for bands 3 to 5 officers, the key operational grades.

The concern is that, given it was recognised as a problem in 2017-18, what has been done to try to change it? It clearly hasn't succeeded, but



HOUSE OF COMMONS

what has been done to try? What specific programmes have been put in place to try to address the three consistently identified drivers?

Michelle Jarman-Howe: I think that we covered some of this in the last discussion. For each of the top three headers there has been a range of activity.

On career progression, for example, the focus has been on ensuring that staff are aware of how they can develop and progress in the service. A pathways framework was launched at the beginning of the year setting out how staff might progress within the service and the wider Ministry, not just within prisons.

One of our biggest recruitment factors has been for OSGs keen to progress in the service. We produced an OSG conversion scheme, which has been enormously successful in taking people up to prison officers. For staff who are more senior in the grades and want to progress, we have increased the frequency of our promotion assessments so that they have the opportunity to progress within the service.

We have recognised that career progression does not necessarily mean upwards in the ranks. Prison officers might want different experiences, so we have introduced a level transfer arrangement that will launch this summer. Staff who have, for example, spent all their career working with women might want to change sector to the male estate or to YCS. We have made that possible, so there is a range of areas that have been introduced.

Health and wellbeing is another area of concern raised by staff. We have introduced a range of new things. I think we spoke before about new colleague mentors who support new staff. Structured supervision is being piloted at a couple of sites to support staff and make sure that they are familiar and supported when they arrive in the service.

We also have a number of services like occupational health, employee assistance, reflective sessions, self-harm campaigns—the range of OH that you might expect from a big Government Department such as ourselves to support wellbeing for staff.

Again, I think we covered leadership at the last session. Leadership schemes and first-line managers' programmes optimise team-leading programmes, learning to lead, and three ranges of leadership journey programmes. I am happy to cover any of them in more detail.

Q291 **Chair:** That is all very interesting, but it does not seem to be making any difference. Why?

Michelle Jarman-Howe: Some of these areas have only recently been launched.

Q292 **Chair:** Why so long to wait for them to be launched? This was identified five years ago. What have you been doing?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Michelle Jarman-Howe: There has been a pandemic, of course, in the meantime.

Chair: About two years' worth.

Michelle Jarman-Howe: Yes, indeed—

Chair: What about the rest of the time?

Michelle Jarman-Howe: I absolutely understand that. The focus has been on wanting to make sure we understand why staff are going and being able to do something meaningful with that. We got the data in 2017-18. It took us a while to develop some initiatives to counteract some of that activity. There have been a number of initiatives in that time, including graduate schemes, development schemes and making sure that we are doing everything we can.

Introducing key workers has enabled the promotion of relationships between staff and prisoners, which made the environment safer, and there has been a range of activities over the years. We have also tried to make sure that we do not just have that generic headline about why staff leave but know prison by prison why they are leaving. We have focused on sites with the highest attrition levels and have driven some success in that.

I think I would say that it is a perfectly acceptable challenge. We are a big service. We continue to try to demonstrate innovation to meet the challenge.

Q293 **Chair:** Some of us might say that it is more than a perfectly acceptable challenge; it is a major crisis within the system. The attrition of experienced officers has been a matter of real concern. Do you, Minister, get a sense that some of your predecessors have not gripped this with the urgency that it deserves?

Damian Hinds: I think that my predecessors and Michelle and her predecessors have all taken it very seriously. We want to retain talent in this occupation and this sector to do this vital and unique work.

There are a couple of things that I would like to suggest as grounding, if I may. Although I would rather attrition was lower, we should not exaggerate how high it is. Attrition among prison officers—leaving rates—is around 15%. In the economy as a whole, it is somewhere around 14%. The figures are not dramatically out of line. It is true that the proportions for the civil service and public sector tend to be somewhat lower.

We have been through a period, in common with other walks of life; in the coronavirus period, people did not move job as much, for all sorts of fairly obvious reasons that we do not need to go into now. When the coronavirus restrictions came off—the labour market was and remains exceptionally buoyant, with the highest levels of employment for quite



HOUSE OF COMMONS

some time—more people did move. Yes, we want to retain more people, but we should not overstate it.

The second thing I want to mention by way of a little bit of underlay, if you like, is the point about the drivers for change. They have not been static. I do not have the full data table in front of me, month to month and year to year, telling us how they have moved, but they have not been static.

It is true that in most large organisations some issues feature regularly—pay and benefits is one. In every sector I have worked in or with, pay and conditions are one of the things that people cite for why they move on in their career. That is how people develop their careers, in some ways.

Pay remains a top-five issue in the Prison Service, but it is not now a top-three issue. That is partly because of great focus on that area. Last year's pay award, in particular, was a very significant change, and rightly so, in recognition of what prison officers do.

There has been and continues to be a lot of focus on the other areas. Some of them are individual programmes. In the public sector and in Government, we need to be careful not to stamp a programme on everything because it gives us something to talk about. It is about sustained progress in tackling violence in prisons. Our programme on protective equipment, which we might come on to in this hearing, is an important part of that, but so too are the various programmes and ongoing facilities that Michelle spoke about.

Q294 **Chair:** Do I get the sense that your view is that you need not to do anything further by way of new initiatives but just to persist with the same?

Damian Hinds: No, I wouldn't put it quite like that. It is, rightly, not Ministers; it is these people—the professionals—who do that. We are there to hold them to account and to be accountable to Parliament and the public. I defer to my colleagues in HM Prison and Probation Service on these questions.

The overall picture is that we have innovated on quite a number of things. Some of those programmes will bear fruit and should grow. A number of things have been in the pilot phase or limited distribution that I think are very promising and we can grow. We probably won't continue with others, and there is nothing wrong with that. When you are managing any public service or operation you have to be willing to do a number of things and then desist from some, growing the ones that work best.

Q295 **Edward Timpson:** When we met in March we had a conversation about the transition from prison covid regimes to what is termed, albeit differently by different people, a full regime. Since then, a thematic



HOUSE OF COMMONS

review by the chief inspector, Charlie Taylor, has been published on, specifically, weekends in prisons. A number of visits were paid to, I believe, 11 prisons on Saturdays and Sundays. It found that most prisoners were spending at least 21 hours a day locked in their cells, and that in 10 of the 11 prisons prisoners could be expected to be out of their cells for a maximum of just two and a half hours a day, often with no access to showers or fresh air, let alone the purposeful activity that is so crucial to rehabilitation.

What insight can you give us from the Ministry of Justice perspective on why weekends in particular are proving very difficult for full regimes, in particular in respect of staff shortages, which clearly are at the heart of this?

Damian Hinds: Obviously, we take very seriously the points in the chief inspector's reports. It is very important that prisoners have access to purposeful activity and are able to do the essentials of life—and that has to happen seven days a week.

It is true that prison regimes are different at the weekends from weekdays. Staffing is materially lower at weekends because fewer things are going on. Employment is focused on Monday to Friday. Education is focused on Monday to Friday. Weekends are different, but I take very seriously what the chief inspector says in his report.

I might ask Michelle to comment on the new national regime model, which seeks to ensure that minimum facility for all prisoners on all days of the week.

Michelle Jarman-Howe: Staff shortages have definitely impacted on regimes; I don't think there is any way of avoiding that comment. As the Minister said, we have taken a range of steps to make sure that we have a national regime model going forward. That will do a number of different things. It will put a local regime lead in every prison so that we can focus on developing the regime not just at weekends but at weekdays. That activity will not be focused just on the very important workshops and education—all the stuff you would expect us to be focused on—but on trying to think about innovative regime activity, particularly for sites that might not have the workshop capacity that we would necessarily want.

We are trying to make sure we have focus on staff delivering regime activity on wings and using prisoners to support the development of some of those initiatives. We are making sure that we have greater accountability through the lines, so more data available for governors and prison group directors to make sure that the regime ambition is clear. We spoke when last we were here about the range of different regimes offered in different prisons—asking governors to be clear about the level of regime that will be available and holding them to account through our internal publication of internal regime data.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

On the chief inspector's valid observations about weekends, not being able to do the basics—contact with family, and so on—is really important. We are well on with the roll-out of telephony in cells—lots of prisoners have access to telephones in cells—and that roll-out will be completed by March 2024. Likewise, we are improving our arrangements for showers in cells. We have increased focus on digital, with applications being done digitally. Fifteen prisons are rolling out in-cell laptops and digital capability, which will support some of that effort.

When I talk about innovation, I genuinely mean that we are trying to think about every possible way to make things better for prisoners in a way that is consistent.

Q296 **Edward Timpson:** May I ask about the local regime lead? Why is one needed? Who will they report to? Surely a prison governor should lead on the regime and its implementation. We discussed last time the fact that some prisons are able to fulfil a much wider and more available regime with fewer staff, because there is focus from the governor throughout the prison, whereas others with more staff are not. The inspector found that there were a number of missed opportunities to unlock prisoners longer and engage more purposefully during their time out. What will the local regime lead do to change that situation for those prisons that are not doing it?

Michelle Jarman-Howe: Your question is about who they will report to. They will report to the governor and be part of the senior management team of the prison.

You are absolutely right: governors are accountable for their regime. They decide their regime, but governors are accountable for the whole running of the prison, and that is more than regime. It is about having a focus that can think about not just the number of people being unlocked driving the regime every day, although that will be an important part of their job. There is something about having a post focused on maximising the opportunities for delivery in a prison, in a way that goes beyond education, employment and all the activity we would typically rely on.

I genuinely think it is a step forward for us in having that post in the senior management team, accountable for that innovation. They will be an important part of that senior leadership.

Q297 **Edward Timpson:** Is there a timeframe for some of these roles being in position?

Michelle Jarman-Howe: They are being rolled out now. I believe that the ambition is to have them in post by the end of the summer.

Q298 **Chair:** Minister, Miss Jarman-Howe made a fair point about being able to drill down into individual prisons on the drivers for attrition. What more are the Government planning to do to give governors more scope or more levers to pull around those various influences? If it varies from prison to prison, logic states that governors might need more discretion.



What is the policy?

Damian Hinds: Discretion on?

Chair: For example, the ability to vary pay to retain staff.

Damian Hinds: We have some pay variability between prisons according to a tier structure. There are fewer gradations now than there used to be, but we have that facility in a subset of prisons with the most acute staff shortages. We also have things like national detached duty, Payment Plus, and so on. Governors, in conversation with the overall management team of HMPPS, are very much part of the conversation about where those variations are necessary.

Governors rightly have a great deal of scope to determine how their prison is run, including on things such as regime, but always subject to required standards on staffing ratios and various things required for prisoners. They are held to account through the inspectorate, as we have been discussing, but more immediately up the management line and with visibility and performance indicators. It is good to have a good degree of empowerment and flexibility, within bounds, for governors.

Q299 **Chair:** You may remember that when Mr Gove was Secretary of State—it seems a long time ago now—he was very keen on much greater empowerment of governors and greater devolution to prisons. Where do the Government stand? Would you go as far as he was seeking? Some might feel that there has been a bit of a rowing back.

Damian Hinds: I am not conscious of rowing back. We are all as one in seeing the great value of devolution and empowerment of governors, and indeed of various other operations in the public sector, always bearing in mind that these are public sector functions carried out on behalf of the public and accountable to Parliament. People rightly expect standards and transparency to be in place.

Q300 **Chair:** Do you think that the balance is right at the moment?

Damian Hinds: You must always consider these to be contestable questions. I do not have any immediate impetus to say that something is badly awry and needs to be fixed, but we can and should keep it open to review.

Q301 **Chair:** Miss Jarman-Howe, you referred helpfully to the introduction of the new peer-to-peer learning scheme and a number of other such initiatives—mentoring, supervision pilots in a couple of prisons, new leadership training and retention challenges. Have you noticed any differences since you introduced those initiatives?

Michelle Jarman-Howe: Absolutely. Our feedback around structured supervision has been very positive indeed. We are going to evaluate that to consider whether to roll it out more broadly across the estate. We have 150 mentors—funded posts—across the service and have received positive feedback.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

We have done targeted work with the eight prisons with the highest attrition in system. They have benefited from those initiatives and some other targeted work, and we have the data for those, which is very positive—significant improvements in six of the eight sites in attrition.

We are continuing to learn. We do know that some things work in some prisons but do not necessarily work everywhere. We do not have a magic bullet to resolve it across the whole system, which is why local understanding is really important.

Chair: If you are able to update us with the data, that will be very helpful.

Q302 **Janet Daby:** How much does it cost to recruit and train a prison officer, and how long does it take?

Michelle Jarman-Howe: It is £13,000.

Janet Daby: For each prison officer?

Michelle Jarman-Howe: That's right.

Janet Daby: How long does the process take?

Michelle Jarman-Howe: We do not publish our time-to-hire data. I can tell you how long it takes to train a prison officer, if that is helpful. Do you want the whole process?

Q303 **Janet Daby:** Just an idea of the length of the process. Prison officer vacancies are high. How long is the process from recruitment to training?

Michelle Jarman-Howe: We do not publish our time to hire. I can talk you through the processes candidates have to go through. Some of the process is candidate-led. Candidates book themselves on to assessment centres and get themselves on to training. Some of that time to hire is about candidates' preferences. At the point at which they have an offer letter—the point at which they are appointed—they book themselves on to a training course on a date that fits them best. They have a two-week induction, seven weeks of training and then are back in a prison.

We do not publish time-to-hire data in its entirety.

Q304 **Janet Daby:** You mentioned a two-week process and—

Michelle Jarman-Howe: Seven weeks of training.

Janet Daby: So that is nine weeks.

Michelle Jarman-Howe: And an induction period.

Q305 **Janet Daby:** How long is the induction?

Michelle Jarman-Howe: Once they get back to prisons—

Damian Hinds: If it helps, we could give you a graphical chain.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q306 **Chair:** May I pick up on one point? You say you do not publish your time-to-hire data. Is that because you don't have it or because you choose not to publish it?

Michelle Jarman-Howe: We would only publish data that had been verified by our statisticians.

Q307 **Chair:** Do you or do you not have verified data?

Damian Hinds: We absolutely track our performance through recruitment. There are different ways of measuring time to hire, depending on where you count the starting point and the end point. That might sound like an odd thing to say, but there genuinely are different ways of doing it. We do not have quality-assured, publishable statistics, but it is something that we monitor and we try to make sure that we reduce it, subject to certain minima. Vetting is an important part of the recruitment process.

We also want to make sure that candidates take due time to think about it as they go through, as well as the various processes we need to go through.

Q308 **Chair:** Would it be a good idea to have verifiable, quality-assured time-to-hire data?

Damian Hinds: Candidly, Sir Robert, the most important thing is that the management team tracks management information. That is absolutely right. They are then rightly held to account, and I am held to account by you and others for making sure we have the staff complement in place that we need.

Q309 **Janet Daby:** We have heard different accounts on the input of governors in getting officers to work in their prisons. We can see some inconsistency. The governor of HMP Pentonville said that he oversees recruitment, whereas the governor of HMP Exeter does not. Why is that? How much say do governors have in recruitment to their prisons?

Damian Hinds: We are a big workforce. We are a big volume recruiter. We run a centralised recruiting process. That enables us to consider very large volumes of applications and ensure that we use efficient, effective, best practice, modern recruiting methods to provide the right number of suitably qualified people with the right behaviours and attitudes that we are looking for. There is also a role for individual prisons. We encourage prisons to be in touch with individual candidates on that journey.

We are running a pilot replicating large parts of the centralised process being done at an individual prison, but in general we run a centralised process, for all the benefits that brings, one of which is that it removes a great deal of the admin and management burden from individual prisons, enabling them to get on with the operation, which is what they are best at.

Q310 **Janet Daby:** Are you saying that governors should not be involved in the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

recruitment process? You say that it is run centrally, but we have information stating that some governors are involved in overseeing the process and others are not.

Damian Hinds: We are very keen for governors and individual governors and their teams to be a part of the process, in parallel with a centralised recruitment process.

There is a perfectly legitimate argument to be had, and lots of organisations—in the public sector, in the private sector, and in different parts of both—have it about the pros and cons of centralised versus decentralised recruitment. You can absolutely argue it both ways. HMPPS has concluded that a centralised process with an assessment-centre approach is the most effective way for this organisation to run its recruitment.

Michelle Jarman-Howe: I do not know what evidence the two governors gave. We do not do non-national recruitment for Pentonville versus Exeter. The recruitment process for prison officers is the same across the country, with the exception of the pilot the Minister mentioned in Berwyn. The governor of Pentonville may have been referring to the further activity that the prison does locally, which all prisons are able to do in generating interest for potential candidates—local recruitment fairs, going into universities. Most governors will do some activity around supporting candidates as they go through the process—prison open days, for example, for candidates to come to the prison and meet the governor or senior leaders and talk about the prison environment. The recruitment of prison officers is done nationally.

Q311 **Janet Daby:** The president of the Prison Officers Association, Mark Fairhurst, told the Committee that the recruitment process for bands 3 to 5 officers is not fit for purpose. He spoke of there not being face-to-face interviews. Do you share his concerns? What are you doing to improve that?

Damian Hinds: I very much respect the POA president's perspective and we always welcome hearing from the POA and all our recognised trade unions, who have a unique perspective.

To some extent, the response to these questions is along similar lines to the previous questions. Ours is not a non-human process. It is centralised. That is not the same as it being computerised. There are computerised elements, but there is a human-run, assessment-centre approach, which includes current and former operational staff among the assessors.

We think that overall, weighing up the pros and cons of the different ways of doing it, this is an effective way of doing it. But—the clue is in the fact that we are running a pilot to look at a different way—we should be open to doing it a different way. That is why we are running a pilot at HMP Berwyn. We will ensure we get the learning from it that we can.



Michelle Jarman-Howe: I have had clarification of why the governors gave two different answers. The governor of Pentonville was talking about recruitment on promotion, from band 3 to band 4. If all governors across the country are promoting their managers, that is known by them; the governor of Exeter was talking about prison officer recruitment. That is the explanation for the two different answers.

Q312 **Janet Daby:** The information that we have is that you are seeking to recruit 5,000 more prison officers. What progress have you made? Are you meeting your target?

Damian Hinds: Michelle can come in with some more detail, but the broad picture is that it is a difficult labour market. You will know from your constituency, as all colleagues will know from their constituencies, that it can be difficult to hire staff. Uniformed services, including prison officers, is a particularly competitive market. The police service has been recruiting a lot of people over time.

Against that backdrop, we have seen encouraging progress. We still have some way to go, but on our most recent application numbers—there is a time lag between applications, job offers and people coming into post—there is good reason to be encouraged. Last year's pay offer was a significant part of that. You can see in the data the time when that pay award was awarded and even before it had come into effect. You can see the effect of that. We have been actively recruiting directly, and we have been running a number of programmes to maximise those opportunities.

Michelle Jarman-Howe: As the Minister said, we are seeing some positive signs in increased applications. At the end of 2022, we were up to 105,000 applications, as against 72,000 in 2021. We have not yet published our first quarter data for this year but we are very optimistic that there will be a positive set of figures with a net overall gain in prison officers.

We absolutely recognise, as I think I did in the last Committee, that recruitment in 2022 was very challenging for us, against an increasing staffing target figure, so we do need to increase the number of prison officers. The indications from the end of last year going into this year are that the pay award made a difference. We are going to look to publish a net gain figure at the end of the first quarter of this year.

Q313 **Janet Daby:** During the pandemic much of the recruitment was digital for many employers and institutions. Is the recruitment process still digital?

Michelle Jarman-Howe: There is a range of processes that candidates have to go through. If you are referring to the assessment centre itself—the core bit of the assessment centre—then, yes, that is held online. As the Minister said, it is with a person; it isn't an algorithm or questionnaire. There are live people at the end of the line. That means that we have more accessibility for staff who live all over the country or



for potential candidates who live all over the country. We are able to do those interviews in greater volume, and it does mean that we can do them at evenings and weekends, which is more difficult face to face.

We continue to keep that process under review, but, yes, the assessment centre is online.

Q314 Maria Eagle: I want to talk a little about diversity. I think, Minister, that you stated in your written evidence that you recognise the importance of a diverse and inclusive workforce, in accordance with Lammy review recommendation No. 28 in 2017. You are committed to a target of 14% of all staff.

In our staff survey, which admittedly is self-selecting—it is only the people who chose to respond—93% identified as white, so on that survey you are halfway there. How are you doing? What is the trend?

Damian Hinds: The 7%, which I infer from the 93%, would not be a truly representative sample. As you rightly identify, in any self-selecting survey that is the risk that one runs.

Q315 Maria Eagle: What is the figure, then?

Damian Hinds: I'm just coming to that. Ten per cent. of prison staff are from an ethnic minority background.

The figure on joiners is better. We were talking about turnover. Our workforce turnover is not that high, so things do take time. Our percentage of joiners is now above the 14%, at 15%, which is encouraging. There is still a long way to go. There is also a way to go with senior leadership. The 10% varies a lot by place: in London, it is over 40%; in the north-east, it is much lower.

Q316 Maria Eagle: There are going to be regional variations, but the overall picture is important. That shows some progress, and that is good. Is there any concern about the attrition rate? Is there higher attrition among ethnic minority joiners than among people who identify as white?

Damian Hinds: I don't want to give you an answer that I cannot be absolutely, categorically sure about. In our HR materials, training materials and so on, we have particular emphasis on retention, so we are alive to it and must continue to be. I am not sure in exactly what format we might have statistics, but I shall endeavour to do what I can.

Maria Eagle: Let us have what you have. That would be illuminating and helpful.

Damian Hinds: We will do our best.

Q317 Maria Eagle: You have referred to the 2017 Lammy review recommendation on moving a cadre of BAME staff into leadership positions over the next five years. How is that going? What progress has been made?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Damian Hinds: We have further to go. The proportion of staff—we just talked about 10%, but it is 9.9%, so one decimal place, and among the senior leadership it is 9.5%. With both those numbers there is further to go.

Q318 **Maria Eagle:** You will recall the chief inspector's report on the experiences of black male prisoners and black prison staff, which did not paint a particularly happy picture. You said that a comprehensive action plan will be formed to provide robust short, medium and long-term responses to the findings. What are the elements in that plan, which you must by now have devised?

Damian Hinds: Yes, indeed, we have. I share in what you say: it was very uncomfortable reading about the experiences of black officers, on their own accounts, as it were, but also importing what they experienced in the differential treatment of prisoners. I take that report very seriously indeed. We are called the Ministry of Justice, and fairness and equality before the law and through the system must be absolutely at the heart of what we do.

We are doing a number of things. We already had in place a broad project called the race action programme. We have built on that as a result of the thematic report. One specific is around the discrimination incident reporting process, which we will do a root-and-branch review of to ensure that people can have trust in it. That was one of the issues that came up.

We will have representation targets, and this is slightly borne out by what we were saying about local differences, at different levels, redoubling efforts to support career progression as people work through the ranks.

Those were a couple of things. There was more. The race action programme was an existing programme from the previous two to three years. We used this as a way to build on that.

Q319 **Maria Eagle:** When will we see the comprehensive action plan with robust short, medium and longer-term responses to the findings?

Damian Hinds: The action plan is coming about now. It will be in the transcript of this meeting that you are rightly holding us to account on what we are doing, and we will continue to deliver on that.

Maria Eagle: I am not quite sure when it will be published. None the less, no doubt you will let us have it when it is.

Michelle Jarman-Howe: It is worth noting that in his evidence the chief inspector said he had seen the response and that it was very positive and he was impressed with it.

Maria Eagle: It would be nice if we could see it.

Chair: Rather than having it second hand it would be nice to have it



directly. I look forward to having it.

Q320 **Stuart C McDonald:** We touched on the issue of pay but I want to go back to it. Is not the perception that the pay is pretty rotten fundamental to some of the challenges with staff turnover?

Damian Hinds: Pay—broad compensation—is an important part of what attracts and keeps people as a prison officer or in an operational support grade, as with other walks of life. It is partly about pay. It is also about pension, of course. It is also about other things. It is important that we do not look just at one but at the cost of the others. Prison officers and others working in our service should be paid fairly for what they do, which is a unique and irreplaceable job.

Prison officers are paid more than they used to be. I know we have mentioned it a few times already, but last year's pay award was an important change to prison officer compensation. It takes the starting salary for a band 3 entry level prison officer on a 39-hour contract to £30,700. There were significant increments in last year's pay settlement.

Q321 **Stuart C McDonald:** All of this is to be seen against a massive cost of living crisis.

Damian Hinds: But of course we keep all these things under review.

Q322 **Stuart C McDonald:** The numbers in the Committee's survey were pretty stark. Of the folk who responded, close to 6,000 disagreed that salary accurately reflected the role and responsibilities of the job, while only 318 thought salary did reflect it. On whether the salary was in line with similar public sector jobs in other departments, only about 328 thought so; over 5,000 thought not. Do you do any research into where people leaving the Prison Service go? Do they take up jobs in, for example, Border Force or the police? Do you have those numbers?

Damian Hinds: I do not know whether we have them in a statistical form to give you today. By the way, in my last Government job I was responsible for Border Force and we used to have the same discussions. There is a great deal of overlap in the three uniformed services: Border Force, the police and the Prison Service. They are not the same—they also stretch outwards—but there is a lot of overlap in the pools of people who might be interested in one of those roles. There are some parts of the country—for example, Kent and Heathrow—where there is a big Border Force requirement and we have a significant requirement. As you would expect, that happens. When people leave, they go to other things, including in the private sector.

We are very keen, through what we call One HMPPS, on seeing prisons and probation as one service, as they should be, to make sure that prison officers and others working in prisons see the options and know about the opportunities elsewhere in the wider organisation. As Michelle mentioned, we are bringing in this lateral moves function to make sure that people can move around the country. People may want promotion for all sorts of



HOUSE OF COMMONS

reasons; they may want to move and it is important that we help to facilitate that.

Q323 Stuart C McDonald: Ms Jarman-Howe, I do not know whether you have anything to add about what we know about where prison officers go and whether they are able to get jobs at significantly higher pay in similar or compatible roles in different departments.

Michelle Jarman-Howe: Of course, we know the pay of other similarly based roles. As the Minister says, we can see if we have specific data. Often, it is based on local intelligence around staff saying they are going to move to immigration, for example.

The Minister makes an important point about pay more generally and the positive impact that it had at the end of last year. For example, we have always struggled in Kent, where there is a very strong Border Force recruitment process. We are making sure we are able to take further steps at some of those sites in considering an increase of market supplements available to establishments that have significant recruitment efforts. While pay is set through a kind of pay review body mechanism agreed by Ministers, we have the ability, in agreement with Ministers and the Treasury, to flex that to make sure we are able to match the market where other big public sector recruitment is taking place.

Q324 Maria Eagle: Lord Bellamy said recently in a debate in the House of Lords on the retirement age: "The Government do not currently consider that the job of a prison officer...is sufficiently comparable with that of a firefighter or policeman to justify a downward reduction in the qualifying age for full pension." Police officers can retire at 60, as can firefighters. In what respect is the job of a prison officer less challenging than that of a firefighter or police officer to the extent that they have to wait until they are 68 to retire on a full pension?

Damian Hinds: I do not think the job is less challenging. The job of a prison officer is unique and is different from the job of a police officer or firefighter, but I would not say it is less challenging; it is just different. You said, "retirement age". We do not have a retirement age in this country any longer; we have a state pension age. The prison officer pension is linked to the state pension age. There are no plans to review that.

We have talked about varying the pension arrangements for prison officers, but we have not found consensus in the population and representatives. It is a very good pension scheme. You mentioned the police and fire as comparators. It is true that they have a different pension age, but they also pay much higher employee contribution rates into their pension—it is 12% to 14%. Prison officers pay 4.68%, so it is a very material difference. The employer makes a high contribution, 27%, to the Prison Service pension.



One has to look at all these features. In the design of any pension system there is always an actuarial calculation that, as you know very well, is based on the length of time you are in the scheme, the age at which the scheme pays out, the rate of payouts, when it pays out, and what the employer and employee contribution is. You can vary any one of those numbers, but you cannot vary one of them without varying one of the others in counterbalance.

Q325 Maria Eagle: But it is eight extra years. I acknowledge what you have just said about some of the differences, but do you think that at age 68 people are generally fit enough to be on wings doing what can be a very active, tough job in our prisons?

Damian Hinds: I would not generalise about people's fitness and capability, which varies according to the individual. We have a fitness test; that is the key thing, not the date on their birth certificate. It is about their fitness. For some people, that will happen later; for some it will happen sooner.

It is also very important to note that there are other job roles available within the Prison Service and the wider prison and probation service, or even wider in the criminal justice system. We are getting better. Michelle will doubtless remind me of the programme—I forget the name of it—to make sure that all those pathways are visible. It is the careers pathway framework. That is very important, but within prisons there are different roles as well. I want to retain as much of this talent as possible in the service of HMPPS.

Q326 Edward Timpson: On equipment, specifically the synthetic pepper spray, the evidence we have taken in this Committee and the survey we undertook showed a high demand among prison staff for PAVA. Do the Government plan to roll it out fully across the prison estate? If so, how soon, and will that include the women's estate and the youth custody estate?

Damian Hinds: We are rolling out PAVA across the men's estate, and already 82 prisons have gone live with PAVA and a further 14 are working towards it.

I do not think one should see the PAVA roll-out on its own. It is very important, but it is one part of the overall approach to bear down on violence to make prisons as safe as they can be. Maybe we can talk a little bit about training and so on that goes on around it.

On your question about the women's estate and the youth estate, currently we do not have plans for the roll-out of PAVA. We want to see the male adult estate programme through to completion and have the opportunity to consider it fully in the light of all the evidence before making any further decisions.

Q327 Edward Timpson: When do you expect the full roll-out to be completed in the male estate, and how long would you want to see it in action



before you made a decision about extending it further?

Michelle Jarman-Howe: We are looking to complete evaluation of the male estate this summer before we make the decision in the YC estate and women's estate. It will be in the summer—June or July.

Q328 **Edward Timpson:** Minister, can I pick you up on your extremely valid point about seeing PAVA within the context of other work and other protective equipment that may be available, as well as training, to prison officers? Do you think that more protective equipment as part of that cadre of support to prison officers has the potential to prevent the number of assaults on staff in our prisons?

Damian Hinds: Every assault in prison is wrong. We need to minimise the number of assaults both on other prisoners and staff. There is reason for some encouragement, in that in the covid period the number of assaults went down quite significantly, as you might expect with less circulation and interaction between prisoners in particular. Since then, the restrictions have come off and lockdowns and so on have ended and the level of violence, sadly, has come back, but thus far, as we sit here today, not to the level it was pre-covid. I think that is some reason for tentative, cautious encouragement.

There have been a number of important programmes, of which PAVA is one, but in particular I mention body-worn video cameras. That is a really important technology. Not only have we been increasing the number of those but the technology itself has improved. I am sure the Chair does not want me to go into fine detail about the operation, but the newer generation of video cameras has better capability for capturing incidents.

There are training and awareness programmes that go with it around things like general mental health, being aware of conditions that some people may be in and the de-escalation of incidents. There is a particular training programme called SPEAR about which Michelle might want to say a word.

Michelle Jarman-Howe: As the Minister says, there is a range of activity—for example, physical constraints and restraints, such as PAVA, which we have talked about—and SPEAR was rolled out alongside PAVA. It was clear to us that it was a big step for us to introduce PAVA in the prison system. It was something we debated for a significant time, but we also wanted to make sure we coupled that with SPEAR training, which is spontaneous protection enabling accelerated response training.

Edward Timpson: We all knew that. *[Laughter.]*

Michelle Jarman-Howe: Indeed; we will all be right on that! It is effectively about trying to read the environment and react without needing to resort to PAVA. It also about ensuring, as the Minister says, that we have appropriate de-escalation skills through the introduction of key work and making sure we have positive relationships between staff and prisoners. We have mental health training both for POELTs and



HOUSE OF COMMONS

specific parts of the estate, including the women's estate, where we know that is more of a challenge.

We have also introduced a case-management approach through CSIP—which is challenge, support, intervene and plan—for individuals who might be subject to violence and are more likely to conduct violence in prisons. All those physical activities around PAVA are important, but it is only one in a range of activities.

Q329 Edward Timpson: Are there any plans to replace waist belts, like the ones the police use, with tactical vests, based on concerns expressed to us about the excessive weight of the equipment around the waist and injury?

Michelle Jarman-Howe: We continue to keep our uniform policy under review, but it is not an immediate intention.

Q330 Edward Timpson: Quite a few of the responses to our survey included concerns about lack of access to computers, radios and printers—some of the basic equipment prison officers need to go about their work and to record it effectively. Are you aware of this, and would you commit to ensuring that prison staff have the IT equipment they need to perform their roles effectively?

Damian Hinds: The short answer, Mr Timpson, is that we need to make sure they have the equipment they need. As you know, there are particular challenges in prisons about connectivity, access and so on, but it is incredibly important that we use the technology that is available for all sorts of things. I was at a demonstration just yesterday of some of the new software being rolled out. It makes quite a big difference. Your challenge is a good one. We need to make sure that basic access to the hardware is there to go with it.

Q331 Stuart C McDonald: On the question of training, going back to the survey results, it is not as stark as it is in relation to pay, but by a margin of about two to one respondents said they did not get the regular training relevant to their role. Again, by a margin of two to one people were saying that the training was poor or very poor compared with good or excellent. What steps have been taken to try to address that and improve initial training, given how important that is going to be so long as there is a problem with turnover?

Michelle Jarman-Howe: Are you talking about initial training or all training?

Damian Hinds: Did the question specify it?

Stuart C McDonald: That question did not, but perhaps you want to start with initial training, because that will be the most important thing with people having to take on greater responsibility than they would have in decades gone by.



Michelle Jarman-Howe: If we are talking about initial training, we took steps in the past couple of years to undertake apprenticeship support for training. Maybe we want to come back to that shortly. We have reviewed our basic training package a number of times over the years, and will continue to do that. Indeed, I believe there are steps imminently to have a look and review that again.

We try to get a number of things right on basic training. The comparison we always use is learning to drive a car. We can take staff so far on a training course, but there is an element when they come into establishments. It is a week's induction for training; that was the figure I was after earlier. When they land back in the prisons it is important that we continue support for them in their first year, which is why things like new colleague mentors are really important—how you develop relationships with prisoners, how you learn to engage, understanding how your prison works and how to lock up a wing at pace when it is noisy and pressured.

There is only so much we can teach individuals at a training school, so it is not just about the actual formal training we give in those initial seven weeks, although they are critically important; it is also about the support we offer in the first year, making sure we are able to top up training in things like CNR, safety and CSIP to ensure that prison staff can run a safe environment. There are also additional modules that we have to deliver in the first year for individuals joining the female estate, for example, where we might want to do something more bespoke.

It is important to acknowledge—I appreciate the point about the pandemic and the fact that it was only two years—that we also have governors working through a backlog of training at the moment. Governors are trying to make sure that they make the most of the time available to staff to be able to report to support that activity.

Q332 **Stuart C McDonald:** I want to reflect the fact that prison officers will have to take on more responsibility probably much earlier in their careers because of the loss of more experienced staff. Obviously, they will not have had as much time undertaking operations and so probably will rely more on support and training as they go along.

Michelle Jarman-Howe: Of course. Training is important. I reflected earlier on the training being introduced to support those staff who are taking on leadership roles, and there is a range of schemes available for that.

It is a varied picture across the estate, as you can imagine, particularly at those sites where we have to increase staffing because of greater capacity, but we still have a significant number of experienced staff left in the service. About 33% of staff are relatively new to the service, in their first two years, and it is 67% for three to 10 years. We have more staff with 10 years' service than we have staff with less than two. While that is



HOUSE OF COMMONS

a varied picture across the system, as you can imagine, I want to give some context around the inexperience of staff.

Q333 **Stuart C McDonald:** We have also had calls during the inquiry for more trauma-informed training. What is the approach to that?

Michelle Jarman-Howe: TRiM training has been developed with the national safety team over the past couple of years. This is about trying to ensure that staff are familiar with the kind of trauma inherent in prisons, particularly the women's estate, that might lead to self-harming behaviour. A number of governors have undertaken a range of local initiatives to be able to support staff in that approach, but the national team is also able to support that and has been working particularly with the women's estate as part of the self-harm taskforce in the women's estate to try to develop a psychologically informed approach for women.

Q334 **Stuart C McDonald:** Is there specific training for those working in the women's estate and the youth estate?

Michelle Jarman-Howe: Yes.

Chair: Thank you very much. That has been very helpful. We are grateful for your time and your evidence today.