



HOUSE OF LORDS

Justice and Home Affairs Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Prison culture: governance, leadership and staffing

Tuesday 26 November 2024

10.35 am

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Lord Foster of Bath (The Chair); Lord Bach; Baroness Buscombe; Lord Dubs; Lord Filkin; Lord Henley; Baroness Hughes of Stretford; Baroness Meacher; Baroness Prashar; Lord Sandhurst; Lord Tope.

Evidence Session No. 2

Heard in Public

Questions 24 - 40

Witnesses

[I](#): Genevieve Glaister, Author, *The Prison Officer*; Natasha Porter OBE, CEO, Unlocked Graduates; Pia Sinha, CEO, Prison Reform Trust.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

1. This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.

Examination of witnesses

Genevieve Glaister, Natasha Porter and Pia Sinha.

Q24 **The Chair:** Welcome to the second oral evidence session of our inquiry into the culture of prisons, looking at governance, staffing and leadership. We are pleased to see our three witnesses here today. Before we get under way with the questioning, I would be enormously grateful if you could briefly introduce yourselves and the organisations you represent.

Natasha Porter: I am the founder and chief executive officer at Unlocked Graduates.

Genevieve Glaister: I am a consultant for the third sector working in prisons, and I am author of *The Prison Officer*.

Pia Sinha: I am chief executive officer of the Prison Reform Trust.

Q25 **The Chair:** Thank you all very much. Before we look at the specific issues of culture in prisons, governance, staffing, leadership and so on, there has been a huge amount of media coverage about prisons recently, everything from overcrowding to early release prisoners being quickly returned, to real concern about the gang culture in our prisons and the recent ITV programme pointing out that a very large number of prison officers—over 500—have been sacked in recent years because of very serious offences, such as bringing phones and drugs into prisons. I would be grateful if you would comment on whether what we are hearing is a fair characterisation of the situation in our prisons at the moment.

Natasha Porter: When we look at the data, inspection reports and all the publicly available data from the Ministry of Justice, they do suggest that a number of things are at a particularly bad point. It looks like prisons are in a very bad state. In our experience, many of the things we see in the press are recognisable; it is an extremely challenging part of our public sector at the moment.

There are also wonderful, exciting and positive things happening in prisons, which are much less well-spoken about in public. So it is not a complete picture, and it misses out some of the excellent practice and innovation that is happening, but I think the data is pretty clear: that we are in a very challenging time in our prisons.

The Chair: Have we been here before?

Natasha Porter: In some ways. We started placing prison officers in prisons in 2017. Lots of it is recognisable and lots of it does not feel new. It is just that it is being picked up by the media more than previously—for example, overcrowding. When you look at the data, some things are at an all-time worst level. Much of this is familiar, but it does feel as if certain points have tipped into crisis that we were not seeing when we started eight years ago.

Genevieve Glaister: I would echo Natasha. The prison population has doubled in my lifetime, which is 30 years. It is not a new emergency. We have seen this coming for

a long time. One of the reasons I wrote *The Prison Officer* was because I was so frustrated by the way that prisons were depicted by the media and on our screens. Naturally, the media zoom into the salacious, the exciting, the dismal and the despairing because it creates better news stories, but there is a real gap or space in the media that is promoting the really exciting, innovative side of prisons at the moment. Although the media is the only thing that holds space in that area, there is a lot of scope for experts such as governors to be better trained in communications skills and to be able to comment on things happening in the media. At the moment it is an echo chamber. While the Government and the governors of prisons will not comment on anything that is going on, the media take up all that space.

The Chair: There is a silver lining, and there are examples of really good practice that could be shared relatively easily and could help bring to an end some of the concerns being expressed.

Genevieve Glaister: To a degree, apart from the overcrowding issue.

The Chair: We look forward to hearing your suggestions later but obviously note the point you make about the way journalism operates.

Pia Sinha: From a Prison Reform Trust perspective, we have an advice and information line where we speak directly to people in prison, so a lot of our evidence is based on what we hear from them. It is fair to say that the feedback we get from people in prison is that it is absolutely dismal. The rise in mental health calls that we get is at a record high. They are very challenging and difficult calls that give us a temperature check of where the prisons are, and this is directly from people in prison.

I also run the next generation leadership programme, which has 19 deputy governors in it. They talk about their working life in prison and it sounds absolutely unbearable at times. We can say a bit more about that. Our view is based on people who work and live in prison, but inspection reports also confirm the view that it is really dismal in prisons. We have had five urgent notifications this year alone, so I think it is right. What is being presented in the media is often salacious; it is the more gratuitous end of things, but that does not belie the reality. I think it is being presented because it reflects some of the state of prisons. It has changed, though. These negative media reports, however counterintuitively, are for the first time raising public awareness of what is going on in prisons. That is no bad thing, because it allows for some honest debate about what is happening.

The Chair: Thank you. That is enormously helpful.

Q26 **Lord Bach:** Good morning, everybody. The answer to my question will be a general answer at this stage, I hope, because there may be more detailed questions later. Asking you in turn, starting with Pia, what is the role of a prison officer, and what are the qualities of a good prison officer? It is not an easy question, but would you like to have a go?

Pia Sinha: From my perspective, the question about the role of the prison officer is very much determined by our shared understanding of what the role of prisons needs to be, and getting clarity about what that role or purpose of prison needs to be will determine what the role of the officer becomes. Within the prison setting, prison officers can do very routine work such as unlocking and locking up prisoners, giving them a regime. It is a very straightforward task in theory. Equally, you have a very challenging prison population that requires a level of expertise, maturity, wisdom and experience, which means that the approach has to become a lot more nuanced. It is not just about letting people in and out and offering them a regime. It is about interacting; it is about the relationship. In many ways, the short answer is that it needs to be all those things.

As prisons change into becoming much more warehoused where all that can be provided is an unlocking and locking-up function, prison officers who graduate towards the role, job and occupation because they have higher ambition feel very quickly dissatisfied with the role. Others find that they are not up to the job because it is incredibly challenging and difficult. So, in summary, the role is determined by us having a real clarity of purpose about what the role of prisons needs to be.

Genevieve Glaister: It is an incredibly varied role. We were taught in training that in any one day a prison officer can be a nurse, a first-aid responder, a mental health responder, a teacher and a police officer. You are there to keep staff and prisoners safe. You can use such a different range of skills in one day. I would echo what Pia said about needing to be led with a really strong purpose.

I know that Susie Richardson, who recently stepped down as governor of the prison in Jersey, had a bit more autonomy over what she was able to do there and created a really strategic purpose. The purpose of that prison was to release better neighbours. Every member of staff was governed by that. Something as straightforward and clear as that can help to support staff to make decisions at certain times.

Natasha Porter: I could probably spend an hour and a half answering this question, but I will try to keep it brief. We have spent the past eight years asking exactly that and we have placed about 900 officers in 38 prisons round the country. This looks slightly different working with children, women and men, category C, category B and category A. Those are all the settings that we work in.

Coming to this work relatively fresh in 2016, what has been fascinating is how undefined that question is. You would think that as a profession, as the prison officer role should be, it would have defined professional characteristics and that would set your training, assessment and career journey. In the absence of those, it is kind of up to prison officers what they decide to make of that.

What we see is similar to what Gen was saying. If we look at who is in our prisons, it is not a cross-section of society. By and large, it is people who have not been reached by services throughout their lives. We know that many grew up in the care system, many were not successful at school, many have mental health and other

medical conditions. We have all these professionals who have not reached prisoners. At the end of the journey, when they have not been reached by social workers, teachers and doctors—all these people throughout their lives—we lock them up in prison and put a workforce with them who we expect to solve all those problems.

At Unlocked we talk about needing the brain surgeons of the public service. The best social workers who can manage to reach the hardest to reach children may be good enough to be prison officers, or the best teachers who manage to work with children who you might think might end up being excluded and on that journey. Actually, we need people with a skill set who can engage, inspire, motivate and lead some of the most difficult to reach people in our society.

We have tried to codify that. There is a list of adjectives you can put around this. We talk about a sense of possibility and the ability to see solutions when everyone else sees difficulties. We talk about leadership and relationship-building skills. Many words can describe this, but it is similar to what makes an amazing teacher, social worker or doctor; it is someone who is very good at operating successfully in a very complex environment with some very challenging people.

The Chair: Thank you. I noted in answers a reference to the need for clarity about the role of prisons, the lack of defined characteristics of prison officers and so on. I would love at this point to ask you to give us your thoughts on those, but, given the shortage of time, I would be enormously grateful if you would be happy to write to us on the issues that we pick up as we go on to enable us to progress through the wide range of questions that we have.

Q27 Lord Sandhurst: I will start by directing this question to Pia, because she is the one with the most senior governor experience, and then leave it to the other two to come in if they would like. Is the current approach to centralised recruitment working? As a linked question, should prison officers have greater autonomy over recruitment in their prison?

Pia Sinha: That is another big question. I base this on my own experience of being a governor and some of the feedback I get from colleagues now. It is very challenging for governors to be in a place where they are ultimately responsible for everything that happens in the prison. Often, they are the fall guys and the fall women when things go wrong. The frustration that is being felt by a number of governors is that they have very few levers, especially on things like recruitment, finance and income generation, which should be within their gift. I have heard Charlie Taylor, the chief inspector, say that it would be unthinkable that a head teacher in charge of a school was not responsible for their recruitment. I think the same principle applies.

Governor colleagues I know will say that when a new member of staff appears at their gate it will be the first time they have been in that prison. They will know straightaway, intuitively, that that person will not be the right person for the job. However, they have very little control. These individuals start and inevitably are not suitable, and then governors are wrapped in this very difficult, challenging HR

process to try to exit those individuals. That becomes the bane of their life, because they spend disproportionate amounts of time in their office trying to get in the right workforce.

The answer to your question is that the centralised approach, in my view, is not the appropriate one. However, if we are to say that local recruitment or governors becoming responsible for their own recruitment gets reinstated or considered, those governors must have the resource to do it properly; otherwise, it becomes another responsibility for them without the senior level of staffing that they need to do that work properly. This is an area where we cannot squeeze more from less. If we are saying that we need to get this right, the resource needs to follow the risk. Local recruitment, yes, absolutely, but it needs to have senior HR professionals working under the direct line management of the governor so that they can do that process thoroughly and efficiently.

Natasha Porter: I broadly agree with Pia. Ultimately, this is a question of quality of staff and the incentives that you have in place to deliver that. It also depends partly on the workforce you are trying to attract, so a graduate programme such as ours does not work anywhere near as well locally. We are a national campaign; we have a national presence. That means we design what the prison officer role is perceived to be. We had over 40 applicants per place last year. We are one of the most oversubscribed graduate schemes. We were No. 22 in the *Times* Top 100 list of graduate programmes. That attracts a much broader group, because you are then present, you are seen as a really prestigious scheme and you get many more people coming along.

There are questions of quality as well as diversity. There have definitely been challenges with local hiring in how to do that in a way that makes sure that you end up with a diverse workforce, because we all know that that requires a very particular skill set and focus area.

My background is in education. I used to head up an upper school. I broadly agree that you need to be able to choose your own staff and manage them, but that does not mean there is not also a place for centralised recruitment. I am not sure that governor recruitment is the silver bullet that it is sometimes presented as.

There is a bigger question about quality of recruitment and there is probably more than one solution, but we have seen huge pressure on just getting numbers, bums on seats. "Someone who can fog up a mirror is better than no one at all" is part of the problem. There needs to be a shift of incentives towards quality being placed higher than quantity. That is quite a brave decision to take. It might be braver for central government to do that than a local employer. Going back to incentives, how do we incentivise quality above quantity? In centralised recruitment it is much more challenging. I do not think it is a silver bullet. It is more complex than saying that it should move.

Lord Sandhurst: Gen, do you have a view?

Genevieve Glaister: It is essential that a governor has a say over recruitment for their prison. I worked for a private prison, a Serco jail, and that was the system that we had. I agree with Natasha that it is not a silver bullet, because I can confirm that the quality of staff I was recruited with was—there are no other words for it—quite frightening. Three of them have since served prison sentences. They were an incredibly vulnerable group of people who were recruited into a role where vulnerable people are taken advantage of. They were argumentative and unsettled people. They were not confident in themselves, and they were fully taken advantage of in the prison system, so quality has to be brought to the forefront of this.

Lord Sandhurst: Perhaps Pia can answer this. All this has been very helpful. You refer to the fact that, if a prison governor finds that a member of staff is not sackable but just not satisfactory, they manage to move them out or persuade headquarters that they should be moved. Does that mean they end up like an unwanted parcel in some other prison?

Pia Sinha: Not entirely. It depends on what their performance issues were. If they were directly related to their ability to be a good prison officer, moving them to another prison would not be an option. They might move to a non-operational role, which is seen as a less risky role. The Prison Service is such a vast organisation that, according to employment law, prior to sacking someone you need to find an opportunity for alternative employment. They may well be employed in a non-operational role. It could be within the same prison, but the level of responsibility and risk is reduced by doing that.

The Chair: Natasha, you seem to imply that you supported a hybrid system of some local recruitment and the centralised recruitment procedure. I confess I have some difficulty imagining that. If that is what you are suggesting, it would be helpful if you could write to us, but perhaps you could give a very quick response now.

Natasha Porter: I am not sure there needs to be a one size fits all. There are specialist routes you can also have that are centralised. You might have centralised campaigns. Recruitment is attraction, selection, on-boarding. Parts of that could be nationalised, parts of it could be localised. I am not sure that the lens to look at this through is necessarily who is doing that rather than the incentives in the system about how to get that right. That might lead you to who is doing that, but the starting point is: how do we get really high-quality staff and build systems and structures to deliver that?

The Chair: Clearly, we would love to see more detail on that. I look forward to you writing to us on it.

Q28 **Lord Dubs:** You have already come fairly close to answering my question. Nevertheless, I will state it again, because there are aspects of it that you may want to cover. It is about the retention problem within the Prison Service, which you know is quite a serious one. What do you think are the factors that encourage people to leave?

Natasha Porter: We have done so much work on this question. As to our latest cohort, 88% of those who started the programme completed it. We have a much higher retention rate than those coming through the standard routes. That has come as a result of doing a huge amount of research into why people leave and the most effective ways to stop them leaving.

We worked with an organisation called Oliver Wyman, a consultancy, and did a big project on this last year. A few things came out particularly strongly. Of course, this is in a context where we are recruiting. We are a hugely selective graduate programme. We are recruiting very clearly to a set of competencies and values, so it is more that they are choosing to leave when they do.

As to the key factors, the first is career progression. There is a lack of visibility about what that looks like and how open and fair it feels. Secondly, there is opportunity for learning and development so that you can develop a career in this service. Thirdly, there is really good support.

This slightly links to the last question. The people we are recruiting do not want a job for life. Historically, people have managed to recruit into public services by saying, "Come and work for us. You can have a job for 50 years and a pension pot at the end". You go home and say, "Mum and dad, I've got a job. It's the rest of my life sorted. I never have to job hunt again. Oh, wonderful. Let's have dinner and all celebrate".

That is not what we are seeing. More than 50% of graduates who left university last year said they would stay in their first job for less than two years. Under 10% said they expected to stay for five years or more. They are not looking for a lifelong career; they are looking for a job for now where they can develop skills. That does not mean they do not stay long term, but it does mean that you are starting on the back foot, and you need to make yourself the kind of employer who retains people long term.

What retains them long term? We have seen that great line management is the thing that can fix almost all these problems. As to career progression, a great line manager talks to you about what that looks like. As to support, you have a rough day and your line manager calls you up to ask if you are all right and follows up with you afterwards. As for development and opportunities, your line manager says, "Hey, what courses do you want to go on? How are we developing you? How can I develop you?" We have embedded that. We have a mentor who works alongside our participants for the full two years of the programme. Essentially, they step into where a line manager should be. We see that when there is a great line manager they stay; they stay long term and they see a career for themselves.

The final interesting stat is that about 17%, even if they stay long term, want to stay in that same job. People want to progress through an organisation. If we get that right, we will get a lot of the retention problems fixed. We have recently started a custodial manager programme, which is the line manager programme, to try to train CMs to do the things the evidence says will make a difference.

This is fixable. We now have some pretty good evidence about how to fix it. The implementation will make a real difference, but it all depends on hiring the right person in the first place. That is what we have found at Unlocked Graduates, and our retention is much higher than lots of other organisations and graduate schemes, but, my gosh, we sweat it and work hard for it.

Lord Dubs: Does anyone want to add to that?

Genevieve Glaister: There are some environment things. There was never any soap in any staff bathrooms that I ever saw. There is absolutely no place to go and just sit down on a break. On a break you have to stand in the bike sheds outside. There is no place where you can just go and recover and relax. There certainly was not in my prison. Having areas like that creates a sense that you are looking after your prison officers, and that creates more pride in the job. All of that is vital.

Other than that, retaining poor members of staff has a really bad effect on good members of staff. You feel extremely undermined when you work with poor members of staff, and that can quickly become quite frightening in a prison environment. If managers were better trained to look out for those types of dynamics, to intervene and to support people who are experiencing that, it would make a big difference.

Pia Sinha: I agree with all of that. This is not a problem specifically for the Prison Service and the sector; the ability to recruit and retain staff is a problem being experienced globally. We were recently in Holland visiting the Dutch prison service. It has exactly the same issues. It is not a career for life, but this generation of individuals is much more concerned about the reputation of the organisation they work for, what it stands for and what its values are. They are much more concerned about well-being and morale, and that shift in priorities is having an impact.

The jobs for life group of individuals was perhaps more stoic about the conditions of work. They demanded less. That is not necessarily placing any value judgment on whether one is better than the other, but what is expected of you as an employer has also changed, and that impacts on people's experience of their work environment. If you couple that with the issues that Gen raised about the really poor facilities in prisons, the signal to staff working in prisons is that this is not an employer who cares. That has a massive impact, too.

Q29 **The Chair:** I am enormously grateful. Natasha, on Pia's point about the importance of the reputation of the organisation that somebody wants to work for, in view of recent media coverage is there any evidence that that coverage is harming recruitment at the moment?

Natasha Porter: We find that the opposite is true. This is part of its beauty, we think, and why we built a model where we take experience that has worked from other public sectors. You have a charity that sits external to the organisation saying, "Come and work for us. We care so deeply about this problem that we want to work to try and fix it". Working for Unlocked Graduates is seen as quite different from

joining HMPPS. As soon as you join, it is your prison, your friends, and you feel completely attached to the organisation, but it gives you a separate lens.

The Chair: I understand that, but I do not think that really answers my question. You may not have the information, so that is fair enough. In view of the recent media coverage about prisons—so they do not get a very good reputation—Pia makes the point that that is an important factor in recruitment, retention and so on. I am just asking whether we have any evidence that the current media is—

Natasha Porter: Conversely, when people see an issue in the news—we saw it during Covid, with lots of people wanting to join the health profession who worked before in the Civil Service—they become aware of it for the first time. Pia’s point is absolutely true, in that there becomes a retention issue. We have lots of evidence that the culture of the organisation, high ethical standards, diversity and inclusion commitment are three of the top things they want to see in an employer. We provide that tangentially. I think having an issue in the news is a good thing. It means that the public care. We see an increase in applications because they know it exists beyond Dementors in *Harry Potter*.

The Chair: I note your very good example about the health service during Covid and so on, but we need to know more about all the training procedures.

Q30 **Baroness Buscombe:** I am going to ask more about training currently. Listening to you all, one minute I feel encouraged, the next minute I do not. There is clearly a two-tier approach here. What you provide with the graduate programme, Natasha, sounds absolutely amazing, with 40 applicants for each person who gets through. Compare that with HMPPS, a 10-week induction and seven-week foundation, and you are in the deep end.

I want you all to talk a little more about the training process and the role played by third-party organisations, and I want to ask a few questions to go with this. You have already touched on the importance of ongoing training, being incentivised to remain in the role and so on, which is all part and parcel of feeling valued and continually trained and supported. Is there a probationary period? It sounds to me as if you get stuck with some people who clearly are not suited to this. That is one question.

Another question is: is there an age limit? What I am hearing is that you need to have extremely mature heads on young shoulders. At my great age, I feel that I might have something really good to offer because of all the experience that life brings you and all the issues you have to contend with on a daily basis. Is there an issue of fitness levels? I see all the aspects to do with how to look after people, search and security procedures, use of prison radios and keys—all that stuff. What about when you are physically challenged? We know that there are huge numbers of police who are overweight and incredibly unfit. We have to be up front about that and deal with it. As someone who, years ago, was attacked in a prison cell, I was glad that I was quite fit at the time. This is the old days when we were not protected as barristers. So that is important.

Are you worrying too much about diversity when you are looking for the right people? Quality is critical. EDI and so on is the fashionable thing at the moment, but surely it is the right person for the job that really matters. Those are just some things for you to respond to. Natasha, do you want to begin?

Natasha Porter: I will not answer all of them, because we would literally run out of time—

Baroness Buscombe: Exactly.

Natasha Porter: —and I would be here probably in a week's time, you would have all left and I would still be in the room talking. We can definitely write to you on lots of this.

First and foremost, I am not sure exactly how long the training is at the moment. It keeps shifting. There is definitely a structural problem. Ours is a two-year training programme. It is level 7, master's level, and it is ongoing professional development. We have really defined what makes a great prison officer. We have a model of each of those components that makes a great prison officer, people practise until they get better at each of those, and then we can say, "Okay, you can do all of those".

There is a real issue with a couple of things. First, you do not learn how to be a great prison officer sitting in a classroom. You learn how to be safe on a landing from practising in a safe classroom space. This is a job where you need to practise until you build muscle memory, and then you need to practise in the actual environment until you build muscle memory in the actual environment.

There needs to be an initial training period. Ten weeks is probably sufficient—that is what they do in Sweden—but you then need to be trained in the job. You can be very good when someone is running to you in a classroom saying, "Stop, I'm going to use all my things", but, on a landing when they might actually punch you, you have an extremely different physical response and you might not remember to do that. You need to practise it in situ. You then need someone watching you doing it in situ to say, "Okay, this is the thing you got right. This is what we need to work on. Let's practise. Let's get you back in situ". That is the thing that we are missing at the moment.

That is something James Timpson has said he wants to roll out through the new Enable programme. Giving evidence last week, Amy Rees said that the inspiration for that largely has been the work that we have done at Unlocked Graduates. That is where we come to the benefits that third-sector organisations can bring to Prison Service training. We have expertise at Unlocked. We are teachers, by and large. We are brilliant at training and development. We are nerdy about it. We are obsessive about it. We can bring that as a separate organisation. We can prove what works in a way that you cannot with the bureaucracy and everything else in government. We can then transplant that into the service and say, "Great, this is what works. Why don't you try this?"

When we have a partnership approach with HMPPS and third-sector organisations, that is incredible. I speak to people, and even Scandinavian countries are impressed by the work we have been able to do with HMPPS in partnership. When it goes wrong it is the tendency to put a service-style delivery contract in place rather than a partnership, and that is when you are told what to do and you just deliver it. There is a tendency for government contracting to go that way. We are currently in a situation where we have not signed a contract because that is what it looked like. The third sector can bring heaps, but it has to be with that partnership working.

In terms of age limit, we recruit lots of quite young people. They are not 18, but they are 21 or 22. Most of them have lived away from home; they have been at university. Prisoners tell us that age does not matter; the only thing that matters is someone who cares about them and sets strong boundaries. You can train that stuff in the right person. We hear from prisoners that age is not a problem. It is about the right sort of people. Some people learn that. I know some old people who, frankly, should probably be nowhere near vulnerable people in their day-to-day work, and that is perfectly reasonable, and there are young people who excel. I am not sure that age is the problem.

Probation exists. Of course, it relies on a present line manager. There are real problems with that at the moment. In theory, it should work.

Finally, on diversity, for us you do not select based on diversity, not least because it might be illegal, but you attract based on it. You do not have pictures just of white men and say, "Come and be a prison officer". You show that there are people like you in the Prison Service. We know that diverse workforces are better at problem-solving. What is a bigger problem than how to deliver better prisons? The solution is thinking about how we attract people from underrepresented groups to apply, and if they are good enough they will get through the selection process.

Baroness Buscombe: Gen, you wrote the book because you were so frustrated.

Genevieve Glaister: Yes. I would slightly differ from that in that I think age can be an issue. I was 23 when I went into the Prison Service. I was a quite immature 23 year-old. Looking back on it, I feel quite frightened that I went in at that age. Eighteen is the lower limit—the legal limit. Without a doubt that is too young and those people are likely to be incredibly vulnerable.

Other aspects of diversity are important. The prison population is hugely diverse in so many different aspects. The best prison officer teams have older prison officers, younger prison officers, and prison officers of different races and different personality types. It is vital to have a range in one team. So much of the job is being able to relate to the prisoners you are working with. You can relate to them in so many different ways, whether that is an age, religion or ethnicity thing, and it is more vital than potentially any other service, other than the police perhaps.

On age, I would love to see an Unlocked-style model rolled out to recruit older people who have experience in different professions, particularly people with

managerial experience. I would love to see them bringing that into the Prison Service.

Baroness Buscombe: Those are all good points. Thank you. Pia.

Pia Sinha: I will be very brief. There are two reports that I am very happy to provide to the committee. One is due to be published very soon called *Potential Unlocked*, which is all about the lived experience perspective of what makes a good prison officer. This is from interviews with prisoners themselves. Not to ruin the plot or have a spoiler alert I will not go into the recommendations, but essentially it is talking about professionalising the training process and the vital role that people with lived experience play in helping shape what training might look like for prison officers and very much focusing on a relational model, which Natasha talks about. I will make that available to the committee.

The other report is called *Race to the Top*, which is to your point about diversity in the staffing group, again taken from the perspective of lived experience and what they say about the necessity of having a staffing group reflecting the population in prisons.

Baroness Buscombe: Okay, great, thank you.

Q31 **Lord Filkin:** Given that leadership and the skills of prison officers are so fundamental, how should they be appraised in their performance, not how are they appraised at present?

Pia Sinha: I have a very quick answer. Natasha will have more of a view on it. The fundamental problem, in my view, is that the first line manager who is in charge of the officers has too vast a role. At any given time, they could manage up to 20 or 30 individuals, which becomes impossible to do properly. The custodial manager, who is the first line manager in prisons, has a very big workload.

Lord Filkin: That is a diagnostic response as to what needs to change. The question was: what are the metrics, or what is the system, by which you should judge performance?

Pia Sinha: In an ideal world or what exists right now?

Lord Filkin: In an ideal world. What is your normative prescription?

Pia Sinha: The first thing is that the spans of control are realistic, so that if you have a line manager—

Lord Filkin: I am sorry, but again you are answering what needs to change. If you are Mr Timpson, or whatever his name is, what would be good metrics that would tell you whether a prison was well run or not well run? What should be being used?

Pia Sinha: Retention rates.

Lord Filkin: That simple?

Pia Sinha: I think that is a very clear metric. Your staff survey results and any kind of feedback that you get from prison officers should be used. Actually, it affects everything. It is about what levels of corruption there might be in the prison and what the safety metrics might be.

Lord Filkin: We have good metrics on those two, do we?

Pia Sinha: We do not. If you are saying that the role of the prison officer is pivotal in most ways that prisons are run, judging how safe and well led a prison is with the metrics that are currently used will give you a temperature check on how well engaged the staffing group is.

Lord Filkin: That implies that there are good enough, if not perfect, metrics that allow those judgments to be made. Does that imply, therefore, that the appraisal system is okay at present?

Pia Sinha: There might be a theoretical guide that says, “This is what the appraisal system is”. If you judged it on its own merit, you might say that technically it is an adequate appraisal system. The fact is that it needs to be done. Often, prison officers would report that they have not seen their line manager, they have not had mid-year or end-of-year appraisals, that they mean very little, and that there is very little time spent with them. I believe that in theory you might have a good system, but the practice of it is falling far short.

Lord Filkin: Thank you. Gen.

Genevieve Glaister: Is the question about how a prison officer is appraised or how a prison might be appraised?

Lord Filkin: In a sense, it is about both how the governor should be appraised and how the prison officer should be appraised.

Genevieve Glaister: I am not aware of any metrics that measure this, although I am sure they exist. A prison culture is infectious, and a good prison culture breeds positive results on so many levels—at the prisoner level and at the staff level. An investigation into being able to quantify that and being able to manipulate that to improve prison culture would be time well spent.

Lord Filkin: Thank you. Natasha.

Natasha Porter: I think there is an aggregate. When you are talking about your governors, Pia is absolutely right. You look at how many people are off sick and what retention is. There is a tool called the MQPL—Measuring the Quality of Prison Life—which Cambridge University put together, that measures exactly that: culture. It also links to reoffending post release, which interestingly we do not collect at a prison level. There are some incredibly sophisticated and useful assessment tools. It is quite a resource-intensive tool, so we have rowed back from using it. My sense is that if we take assessments seriously it should absolutely be something that we use and use regularly.

In terms of individual prison performance, my background is in school leadership. An assessment is ultimately assessing whether someone has met a set of criteria at a point that correlates with evidence about what good performance looks like. Again, we come back to the fact that the attributes of a good prison officer are not written down and what are we measuring against. The starting point has to be that. Once you have that, you can codify what this looks like in practice. If someone is able to build strong relationships with prisoners, you might break that down into component parts of how they speak to prisoners and how they act in specific situations.

You can build models of what that looks like. In teaching, Doug Lemov has done this amazingly with video models. You have success criteria linked to those video models. That provides everything you need, from training right the way through performance, and you can sit down with your line manager at the end of the year and say how you are performing against each of those metrics. You might have prisoner feedback in that and 360 degree feedback from peers, but, fundamentally, unless you describe what good looks like, it is very difficult.

The other thing you need is the resource to observe someone's practice; to be able to say, "I've seen you do it, and therefore I can make this judgment". Until we define what good looks like and until we create the space and resource to observe whether we are seeing what good looks like, it is quite difficult to performance manage. We have performance management at the end of the first year. It is largely about attendance and whether you have really screwed up and how much. That hits a baseline if your definition of what makes a good prison officer is that you showed up relatively frequently and you did not screw up too badly. We need to have much higher aspirations, because our prisons and our prisoners deserve much higher aspirations. There is a very well-trodden path in other professions that we can learn from, and we should be doing that and putting that in place.

Lord Filkin: Thank you. It sounds as if there is not the knowledge in place to develop, if not install totally, a better system.

Natasha Porter: And perhaps a public who have not cared very much about prison officers or prisons, and so there are not the incentives in central government. Also, we have to remember that prison staff are civil servants. Unlike the police, soldiers, teachers and social workers—unlike all other professions working in the public sector—these are civil servants. They cannot speak publicly. They cannot talk about their profession in a public space. That deprofessionalises it, and some of the organisations that might support them to do that work are kept out, because if you are civil servants, people are kept out.

We have had this unique opportunity at Unlocked to partner and get in. Whether this is the right model needs to be looked at or whether we should look at public servants who could then professionalise. They could have public discussions about what their professional identity looks like, and they could then work much better

with other organisations to define what excellence looks like and build a system that grows that.

- Q32 **Baroness Hughes of Stretford:** I would just like to clarify something, possibly with Pia, because you have been a governor, and Gen. You seem to imply that there is an appraisal system in place in prisons, but the bandwidth of the managerial roles at various levels means that they cannot do it. We have heard in other sessions that there is no appraisal system to speak of and there is no formally recognised process of appraisal that you would expect in other public sector organisations. Which is it? Is there a system there but it just cannot be implemented? In other words, do the Ministry of Justice and the Prison Service centrally say, “Yes, this is what you should be doing, and everybody should be appraised in this period of time, et cetera?”, or is it left to individual governors to try to do that?

Pia Sinha: My knowledge might be outdated, but when I was a governor we had a system called SPDR, which was the appraisal process. It might have a new name or a different iteration to it. Before Covid there was a need to do your regular SPDRs, a half-yearly check and a yearly appraisal with all your staff. In fact, it was a metric. Completion of SPDRs was measured in each prison and it used to drive behaviour. Over the Covid period, there was a loosening of that approach, for obvious reasons. I do not know whether that process ever got resurrected back to its full form. That system exists, or existed, but as pressures have increased in prison there has been an acceptance that you would not necessarily go through the same process with the same rigour that you would normally, so standards have perhaps dropped, if not been abandoned altogether.

Baroness Hughes of Stretford: Gen, as an officer, did you experience appraisals regularly?

Genevieve Glaister: I had one very brief appraisal when I passed probation, and it was very box tick-y. I have nothing else to add on that. It was not managerial in nature.

Baroness Hughes of Stretford: Thank you very much. Thanks, Chair.

The Chair: That is very revealing. Thank you for asking, Baroness Hughes.

- Q33 **Lord Tope:** I would like to ask particularly about Unlocked Graduates. Do you have a scheme for reviewing the performance of your recruits during their period? Can you tell us a bit about that please and how it differs from what we have been hearing?

Natasha Porter: We do a lot on this. Through our initial training every week, we ask our trainers to make constant reports on the participants against the outcomes that we need to see. Every week we come together and we RAG-rate. We pick up who we are really worried about and who needs a lot of support, what that looks like and what amber looks like. We are constantly assessing performance.

Part of what we are also assessing we learned from the Danish youth custody service. We know that some people will join us and get through our selection

process because they have experienced traumatic events in their past. They want to relive that trauma; they have not processed it. One thing that we try to do is identify what in the prison environment is likely to trigger that and how we make sure we pick that up through training. A lot of our training is working out where are the things that might make you leave.

We do not want to put someone on the landing of a prison who we know will not be successful. That is another broken attachment for the prisoners, that is another person walking out the door and giving up on them, and, frankly, prisons then have to go through a big process of having to recruit again, so we try not to get them on the landing if it is not right for them.

While they are on the programme, every week we have a one to one with our mentor, we have a group supervision model, which is a kind of peer support model, and there is a weekly report of everyone who is on the programme.

We then have a RAG rating, and we have purple status for people who are thinking about leaving. Everyone on the programme thinks about leaving. On the last day of their training, I say to them, "If you don't think about leaving, you might not be trying hard enough. It's going to be the toughest six months of your life. You're going to hate it. It's going to be the worst time in your life. Prepare for this. Buckle down. But when you get through it, my gosh, you will have picked up some skills that are going to help you". We try to normalise thinking about leaving as part of the journey; otherwise, they feel horribly guilty. Of course, it is totally normal. Performance-wise, we have a RAG rating.

We then work very closely with the prison and with the custodial manager. We also have our mentor training and supporting. Our sense is that, if they have got through all our recruitment process, all our training and all those assessments, and they are underperforming on the landing, it is probably something we can support them with fixing. They also have the academic components that we are checking.

We constantly check performance. Why? Too many prisoners are reoffending post release. We know from Alison Liebling's evidence that the right support from a prison officer can change somebody's life. This is too important a job to allow underperformance to continue unchecked. We see our job as making sure that prison officers are supported to perform well.

To Gen's point, this can be an extremely challenging environment. We have separate mental health support that we have put in place. It is a whole bucket of support. But we are constantly appraising performance, and what is really good for mental health and well-being is being really good at your job.

Lord Tope: How many people are going through this scheme at any one time?

Natasha Porter: At the moment, we have about 230 currently on the programme.

Lord Tope: That is a lot. That is pretty intensive for that sort of number. How translatable would that be to the general situation?

Natasha Porter: A good line manager could do lots of this, and there are extraordinary line managers. We see a real difference with participants who have a great line manager, but systemically they are not given training and support in how to be a great line manager. That is changing.

Lord Tope: And they should be.

Natasha Porter: There is a new programme that Enable is piloting. We are also training them. A lot of what our mentors do could absolutely be mainstreamed into the Prison Service. We did not make it up. Instructional coaching is the model that we use. There is a model called the Leverage Leadership model. We have taken models that work in other sectors and applied them to the Prison Service. They work and are used in whole systems. I used it in my whole school. It is a replicable model. We would love more of a partnership approach moving forward with the Ministry of Justice so that, as it rolls out the Enable programme, we can share what really works and hopefully mainstreaming that with all staff.

Q34 **The Chair:** I am acutely conscious that you have described the need for a route map that people can look through, see how people are progressing and so on. Pia, you have talked about a number of criteria that could be used in assessing prison officers, and so on. One of the criteria that you specifically referred to was the importance of retention, and you would use that as a rather serious metric in judging not only the success of the recruitment and training process but the whole quality of a prison, if I understood you correctly.

On the other hand, Natasha has told us very clearly that the vast majority of people who enter the graduate programme she is involved with have no intention of staying for a long time anyway, and that in fact modern young people understand that they will move careers many times during their lives. They have no fear of that. There is no expectation they will stay where they are. So is retention any longer an appropriate metric to be looking at, Pia?

Pia Sinha: It is probably a bit of a glib response to the question, but I think that retention in a prison gives a temperature check of what is happening at that moment in time. That is the connection I would make in terms of how well engaged people are.

The Chair: We will come up with making recommendations, and I do not want us to say that one of the key metrics we should judge prison by is whether there is retention of staff, when you are admitting that it is much more nuanced than that. These things need to be put on the record, you will understand, rather than us just internally understanding what you are saying. I am sure you want to come back, Natasha, but I will move us on, and you will find, I am sure, a clever way of getting it into any subsequent answers, no doubt, to Baroness Meacher's question.

Q35 **Baroness Meacher:** Can we turn to the governors? Could you tell us about the role of a prison governor and how that has changed in recent years? What are the main qualities of a really good prison governor? I would be fascinated to hear from you all

on that.

Pia Sinha: As was Natasha on prison officers, I will try to be pithy in my response on prison governors. The role has changed. There has been a lot of valid research done by the Institute of Criminology in Cambridge on the role of the prison governor and the balance between operational grip and moral leadership and how the governor needs to be able to tread that balance and know when it is grip that is required and when it is moral leadership. Actually, it needs to be both things in equal measure.

Over time, because of the operational crises that prisons are in, the qualities of a prison governor that are at the fore are more about operational grip than they are about moral leadership, because of the issues that they face, and there is risk with that. When there is a moral hardening as the prison leader, that is when issues of well-being, retention, corruption and looking after prisoners become secondary. It is lost. Reasserting the need for that then becomes crucially important.

The measurement system comes back to appraisals and performance, but governors are assessed and judged very much on performance. At the moment, we have a very managerial culture, which somehow does not give you a clear enough idea of where the prison is at. You could be performing well in certain areas, but that does not give you an idea of the culture perhaps of the prison. Those are interesting things. The behaviour that is valued and reinforced is much more managerial, and that comes at a cost. That is important to put on the table.

The other bit of research that has been done on the culture of trust is that public servants, public service leaders, are much more motivated by a culture of trust because they come into the profession with the right values, but if they are judged purely on performance, that disenfranchises them and demotivates them. Perhaps you are experiencing some of that within the prison governor cohort right now.

It also feels slightly difficult in the current environment to express yourself openly among your peers and your leaders, because it is a culture of defensiveness. It is very hard to show that you are vulnerable and that you might be having a difficult time, because the messages that you are getting from the top are that that is not tolerated. There is a fear among governors that if they do the right thing and say the wrong thing, or have a poor report, they will not get top cover. Those kinds of things have a real impact on the morale of governors and how they perform.

Baroness Meacher: That is really helpful. Gen or Natasha, do you want to add to that, or do you feel Pia has covered it adequately?

Genevieve Glaister: Very quickly from a prison officer perspective, prisoners are incredibly perceptive. When you have a group of prisoners or a wing of prisoners who never see the governor, they notice it. When you have a governor who comes to the wings and actively supports and enables those officers to do their jobs, it is a much safer place immediately because the prisoners perceive that solidity.

Baroness Meacher: That is very helpful indeed. Natasha.

Natasha Porter: Much of what I said about retention also applies to the governor. This is a job where, unlike a head teacher who can stand up in public and say, “This is outrageous, but this is great”, a civil servant cannot speak publicly. That is to the detriment of some of the leadership.

We worked with a governor for a long time at HMP Pentonville. We found that there was a culture emerging where young staff were being told, “You’re not resilient. You’re too young”. There was a real culture of saying that young staff were never resilient, and it made young staff feel unwelcome. It was creating some real problems. Ian Blakeman called in what he called the culture carriers to his office. He showed them the statistics about the number of Blitz fighters in the war who were only 16 or 18 years old, and he said that young people can have resilience. I have had those same staff feed that back to me saying, “Do you know, in the Blitz—?” Good governors can engage their staff with the key messages, but, as Pia said, it is not incentivised by the system.

Baroness Meacher: Those are really helpful responses. Thanks very much for all of that.

The Chair: Thank you very much. From all of your experience, are there prison governors who should have been sacked who have not been?

Natasha Porter: It is a tricky question. Where you do not have the right metrics and the right support, it is tricky to say, “You’re not doing a great job”, because there are the metrics that someone is measured by but there is not much development, although, I am sure, Pia will speak about her role as deputy governor.

We see some things on the front line that are problematic. We see some cultures with prison officers and some behaviours that are problematic. Every time we raised that with the governor, without exception, the governor has been horrified and has aggressively stepped in and tried to fix it. So I think that the problem is more that they do not always know that that is happening, and there are definite hierarchy problems. I was in Sweden last week. They all wear the same uniform. They do not have ranks. There is a flatness of culture that we could learn from. By and large, we have not worked with governors who do not have great ethical values and do not step up to do what is right. It is quite hard on the performance question, because we do not define what a great governor does. We have not seen that.

The Chair: With respect, you are the person who told us that you can go into a prison and immediately know whether it is good or bad, just as I know as a teacher that I can go into a school and very quickly know whether it is a good school or a bad school and whether the head teacher was or was not performing, so presumably the same is true of a governor. Now, it appears that there are lots of excuses for why those prison governors are not performing, which comes down to all the bureaucracy around it, the fact that we do not have the metrics, and all those sorts of things. Am I summarising your answer correctly?

Natasha Porter: I do not think I did say that you could walk into a prison and know straightaway whether it is good or bad. That might have been Pia. I might have said that at some stage in the past, but I have not said that today.

So, yes, you could, and there are governors where you would say, “I wouldn’t run my prison like that”. But in a system where you are not clear, when you are not saying that someone needs to be on the landing but needs to be with staff, and where governors do not have accountability, it is hard to hold those governors to account. If you have autonomous governors, yes, you can walk into a prison and say, “This is your fault”. I have been in prisons that have had UNs—urgent notifications. The governors say, “I’ve been begging for this stuff to be fixed by HQ. I don’t have the money or resource to do it”. It is quite hard to hold governors to account when they do not have accountability.

The Chair: As to all of that, I absolutely understand the argument. Previous witnesses and stuff we have already seen from other people make it very clear that it would be very difficult to do it, but presumably we have to find a way of moving towards that.

Natasha Porter: I think we should give them autonomy and then we can hold them to account.

The Chair: Okay, that is good. A yes or no, Pia and Gen? Are there governors who should have been sacked who have not been?

Pia Sinha: Yes.

Genevieve Glaister: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you. Very good.

Q36 **Baroness Hughes of Stretford:** We want to look, briefly if we can, at the management structure below governor. Have you seen that management structure change in recent years? Looking specifically at custodial managers, who one of your reports—I think it was Natasha’s—described as the engine room of prisons, translating strategic direction into operational activity, what support have you observed going into the people at that level as custodial managers, given that they have such a critical role at that point in the structure? How have you seen the structure change, and what support has been given particularly to custodial managers?

Natasha Porter: Historically, with this shift to fair and sustainable—Pia probably saw this up close, so she can give first-hand experience—there was a move from the line management sitting with what is called the band 4 officer, which is the supervising officer, up to custodial manager. That is how we have seen ourselves in a situation with enormous numbers of direct reports. In fact, in one London local prison we are working with CMs who line manage over 40 people.

Baroness Hughes of Stretford: That is a band 4 person.

Natasha Porter: That is band 5, because band 4s are not allowed to line manage. The custodial manager is a band 5.

I have been a CEO and a head teacher. I have done various jobs. I have never tried to line manage over 40 people. There is something about the span of that. The answer to many of these questions will be better line management with those kinds of spans. I know Rory Stewart spent a long time trying to unpick that and was unable to, so I do not know what the answer is. There are these enormous spans of control.

We have seen in recent years, as per the general Prison Service, that that is increasingly a job that is taken up by less-experienced officers. There are various reasons why the pay and responsibility do not even out in a way that makes it worth your while to go for that job, so they are often left vacant and not seen as appealing as they were. You have to complete a workbook to be allowed to apply for that job. There is a whole process to getting those jobs, which makes it very slow, which we find puts off some of our people who just want to progress quickly and have responsibility quickly.

There is patchy training. We hear that training modules are available. The prisons that we work with are not familiar with those. We have designed a custodial manager training programme and are piloting it with a very small group of 24 custodial managers. There are over 1,000 in the system. Spark Inside is also doing some work with custodial managers. There are a few programmes going on. The Enable programme will focus on custodial managers.

The dream situation is to have multiple providers providing multiple different programmes and you can quickly learn what works and what is the best of these. Let us learn from each other and let us improve them. There is no doubt in my mind that, if you fix the training and support available to custodial managers, you will radically shift retention and performance of front-line staff. Of the 88% of our participants who have just completed the two-year programme, about 60% are staying for a third year. They come in saying, "Gosh, I'm not going to stay for two years. I'll finish two years and then I'll get another job". The majority get hooked, and the majority who leave go and work for the Ministry of Justice or HMPPS. People join and say, "I don't want a long-term career". You can retain them for their whole career. They can have a job for life, but they expect to have opportunities, progression and training. We think retention is super-important. It is important for prisoners. There is nothing better in some ways than someone having years of knowledge about your organisation. The custodial manager rank is how we fix a lot of the retention problems in the prison officer role.

Baroness Hughes of Stretford: Okay, thanks. I will just ask Gen for her experience.

Genevieve Glaister: I have nothing to add to that.

Baroness Hughes of Stretford: Okay, fine. Before Pia comes in, Natasha, you talked about the example, at the worst end, of the one to 40 ratio of custodial managers to

people to supervise. Why do the band 4s not supervise people and then the band 5 supervise the band 4s?

Pia Sinha: That used to happen, but the restructuring of HMPPS changed that, with “fair and sustainable”.

Natasha Porter: I do not know whether you managed to speak to Rory Stewart, but he tried quite hard to fix that and do exactly what you are suggesting. When you walk in, you think, “I’ve had a brainwave. Maybe no one else has thought of this”. There were legal reasons when they made the pay deal that meant that line management was on the list of things that band 4s are not allowed to do.

The Chair: To be absolutely clear on that, you say that Rory Stewart tried to fix it. We are well aware of the revolving door of Prisons Ministers, and that is sadly true for Ministers in all departments. But the Civil Service continues, so when Rory Stewart was keen to fix it, presumably supported by the civil servants in his department who would have continued, did it get dropped by Rory Stewart’s successor?

Natasha Porter: I understood that it was in the “too difficult” box.

The Chair: Okay. It may be that Rory Stewart would not have been able to fix it any more than his successor.

Natasha Porter: I think the civil servants probably want to fix it. That is my sense, and I might be wrong, so it is definitely worth testing it.

The Chair: What Baroness Hughes has unveiled seems quite simple, and we will want to do our own digging on the notion that something as simple as that is put in the “too difficult” box. We will make some inquiries of the department on that issue.

Baroness Hughes of Stretford: You mentioned—Pia may want to contribute on this—that one of the obstacles was the definition in the job description arising from the pay deal: that there were certain things they could not do. Was that an issue on which the POA—

Pia Sinha: Yes.

Baroness Hughes of Stretford: Yes, I thought so.

Pia Sinha: That is part of the reason why it stayed resilient to change; it was voted in, it was agreed, and it had gone through a process. To undo that you would need to start the consultation.

Baroness Hughes of Stretford: With the association.

Pia Sinha: You would have to start the whole consultation process again, and that would be a challenge.

Baroness Hughes of Stretford: Thank you.

Baroness Buscombe: I have heard there is a real issue between the different grades in the probation system as well. It is worth us digging much deeper on this, because it is current and it is a real problem.

The Chair: Okay, that we will do.

Q37 **Baroness Prashar:** Before I ask my main question, I want to ask a supplementary in response to what Natasha said earlier: that it would be better if the prison staff were public servants and not civil servants. I would like a view from the three of you on what you really think is the downside and the upside of that.

Pia Sinha: If you asked prison officers or the Prison Service operational staff what they would prefer, I think they would prefer to be public servants rather than civil servants. If you asked HMPPS and the Ministry of Justice, I do not know. This is just me giving my view. The lack of ability to speak your truth and to be seen as the experts in your field without so much political interference would be welcome.

Baroness Prashar: What about you, Gen?

Genevieve Glaister: As I worked for Serco, I was not a civil servant, but similar restrictions were put in place to those that civil servants faced just because it was a private company with a reputation to take care of. But I agree with what Pia said. I think that would be the general feeling.

Baroness Prashar: What do you think would be the upside and downside?

Natasha Porter: I increasingly think that in order to professionalise you need to be able to speak, as a profession, publicly. The public voices that we can hear are the union voices—disgruntled prison officers who have left the service. That can create a very particular lens, and we miss out on that real professional view of what it means to be a great prison officer. Of course there are downsides. There is a huge downside to the Government, because they can say mean things about your ideas and policies. Head teachers can march on Downing Street when the Government are cutting free school meals and take their children with them, and there is a good reason why a Minister would never want to do that. There are career opportunities with being a civil servant: you can move to other bits of the Civil Service. But, by and large, I increasingly feel that compared to my experience in teaching you are deprofessionalised when you are silenced.

Q38 **Baroness Prashar:** That is very helpful. My main question is about your Next Gen Leadership project, Pia. Can you tell me a bit about the project, how you would evaluate it, and any other observations you have to make in the process of doing this particular project?

Pia Sinha: Sure. We currently have 19 deputy governors in the group, who represent nearly 45% of all the different prisons in the country, so it is a good cohort. The structure is that they have four bimonthly workshops with expert speakers talking about specific subject areas. The morning session is the delivery of

those workshops, and in the afternoon we speak about generalising. We talk about a theoretical perspective in the morning and look at how you translate theory into practice in the afternoon. After they have completed their four sessions, they have to go away and, in their prisons, formulate, design and implement a place-based project, which has two conditions. One is that it needs to be co-created with prisoners, so you are involving them in looking at an improvement project. The other, where possible, is to use external partners and essentially bring the outside in.

These deputy governors have done their four sessions and are going to their work-based projects now, which the Prison Reform Trust will evaluate. The purpose was twofold. One was that you create 19 improvement projects in the country that directly benefit prisoners.

Baroness Prashar: What are you evaluating?

Pia Sinha: Our method of evaluating the projects is to do consultations with the prisoners directly affected. It is a tried and tested PRT methodology where we get qualitative data from prisoners, who will, hopefully, talk about the benefits and the outcomes that they have gained from the projects. We will then write about it in our briefing reports. It is important that these briefing reports are made public, because we have a tendency not to share good practice in the Prison Service. This becomes 19 improvement projects that could be used in other prisons and the sharing of that information becomes important.

It also counteracts the constant stream of negative publicity about prisons and the bad news stories. This will be about the good news stories, the good stuff, the innovation. It is encouraging deputy governors to use the prisoner voice in a much more meaningful way, and the way you bring in lived experience leadership into those conversations, encourage them to engage with third-sector partners outside, and the way you bring the outside in. That is the design of the project. It was the first one, it was the pilot, so we will take stock and learn a little from what we have heard, what feedback we have had, and then create the next iteration of that.

Crucial to that is that we want to get an external independent evaluation of it. The project will be evaluated, but we are also doing some pre and post-testing with our prison leaders, because we want to be able to say, "What has been the shift in leadership?" Apart from greater psychological awareness, we want to look at motivation, resilience, perceived autonomy, competence, creativity, value clarity, political astuteness. These are the measures that they have currently been assessed on in three stages: pre-start, at the midpoint, and then towards the end. We want to show what progression in those leadership skills they have gained partly as a consequence of being in the group. One of the main things is the value of network. These 19 deputy governors will be the future leaders and they really value the fact that they have created a network.

Q39 **Baroness Prashar:** You talked about a culture of mistrust in the system, which impacts on coaching and so on. What do you think contributes to that mistrust?

Pia Sinha: In the context of Next Gen Leadership, our participants said that often, when it is an HMPPS-designed programme, these are taken off the shelf, they tend to be very corporate in their aims, and there is a fear of being your authentic self. This is partly an issue of the culture of trust: that when a leadership programme is designed by the organisation, and you have certain views on whether that organisation is able to tolerate your vulnerability and your authentic presentation of leadership, you censor yourself in those sessions. They expressed that they value the fact that it is independent and that it exposes them to thoughts and ideas that are outside the box, in a way.

Baroness Prashar: Is this culture of mistrust something you are trying to tackle through the project?

Pia Sinha: No, it is not an aim of the project, but it is one of the reasons why we see it as the unique selling point of the project: that it is independently designed, funded and delivered. It is a service that HMPPS leaders get free of charge, and the value that they place in getting this quality service that is independently designed and delivered is coming out through our feedback as a really positive step.

Baroness Prashar: What are the stages of this project? Will all this innovation and good practice eventually influence the ministry to do something? Is that your objective? What is your status? How is it regarded from within the service?

Pia Sinha: It has been very well received and very well supported by the senior leadership within HMPPS, and I have to give credit for that. They have welcomed the project, they have not viewed it with suspicion, they have not viewed it in a negative way, and they are in fact encouraging us to see whether we can diversify and provide this leadership programme to probation leaders and HQ leaders. We think there is mileage in that. We just have to work out how we grow the project and how we standardise it—and, of course, fund it.

Baroness Prashar: You would regard this as one positive development.

Pia Sinha: I would, but I am biased.

Q40 The Chair: It was very interesting in your response to Baroness Prashar that one of the criteria you were seeking to instil was the idea of bringing the outside in. We talk a lot about the culture of prisons in terms of the governance and the staff who work there, but of course lots of other people are engaged in what happens inside prisons. Serco comes and picks people up and takes them off to court. We have two different companies that provide the food within our prisons. You have a whole string of third-sector organisations doing everything from various educational activities to literacy, numeracy and so on. We cannot ignore that, and in some of our future sessions we will be looking at this in more detail.

As to the staff to non-staff working relationship and so on, are there any general comments you want to make on the involvement of other bodies in prisons? I will leave you till the end, Natasha, because I particularly want to pick up on your organisation's work in prisons in relation to training. Gen and Pia, do you have any

comments about all those other people who are in prison and how they can be supported and looked after?

Pia Sinha: A prison that has very good practice is HMP Bullingdon. It has a community liaison officer who is at a CM grade, and again I think this is externally funded by the Dawes Trust. It used to be part of the structure within HMPPS, but it petered out through time. The custodial manager, who was a former Unlocked graduate, I think, is doing exactly that: liaising with the community outside all the third sector—voluntary sector—organisations that are primed to provide resettlement services to exiting prisoners, bringing them in and starting early dialogue with the relevant prisoners and creating a relationship prior to release.

The Chair: The impression I have picked up from the various people I have talked to so far, not necessarily witnesses, is that it is a scattergun approach: that it may depend on whether the governor wants to have outside people in, there is no central support mechanism to help it achieve that, and on occasions there is at least inadequate space for people to do this sort of work. I have even heard of one particular case where a charity was providing some valuable support on literacy and numeracy to the prisoners and was suddenly told by the governor that it had to pay rent for the space it was using in the prison. There is a rather concerning picture there about other people who could provide help. Is that borne out?

Pia Sinha: Yes, I would agree with that. Prison does not play well with partners. It becomes a slightly one-sided relationship. The partner, which is an outside agency, can feel very insecure in that relationship because it is all done on one person's terms. This is the bit that needs to be encouraged. It needs to be systematised through roles such as the community liaison officer being reinstated.

The Chair: Would I be right, Pia—just help me—in believing that this is the one area where governors do appear to have the autonomy that you are all arguing they need for everything else? In terms of who else is allowed into the prison, this is already largely up to the prison governor. Is that correct?

Pia Sinha: It is very much within their gift, yes.

The Chair: Thank you. Gen, is there anything you want to add before I turn to Natasha?

Genevieve Glaister: Definitely from the third-sector perspective, especially small charities that I consult with, I have experienced a lot, sitting with the CEO and our whole delivery team and security for two hours because someone has forgotten to tell someone to come and pick us up from security. There is a really insecure attachment thing where charities and third-sector organisations have to beg for the space and time to deliver something for free in a prison. They are absolutely not utilised well, and a huge amount of their time is spent on bidding to get into prisons to run really small programmes. These are not massive contracts. A lot of time and, ultimately, public money that has been donated to these charities is wasted on that process.

The Chair: Any thoughts you have on how we can make it all work to the benefit of everybody would be well received.

Natasha, can I finally turn to you? Your organisation already works with the Prison Service, particularly in relation to training. Are there any lessons that we can learn from your experience of working with HMPPS?

Natasha Porter: We bid for a contract that enables us to do the work that we do, and we have just gone through our third contract cycle. When the recent contract came out, it had moved from one of real partnership where KPIs were set and you were free to solve the problem to reach those KPIs into much more of a service delivery contract of the type we might see some of the big, outsourced companies going for. A lot of the thinking was being done by the centre and we would just be delivering standard training and standard support.

The Chair: What I am picking up from what you are saying is that in the previous contracts there was a real opportunity for you to bring innovative practice. There was the freedom to change and modify how you were going to do something in the light of experience, professional expertise and so on, whereas now, HMPPS has determined precisely what the training should look like and there is now no room for innovation within the new contract.

Natasha Porter: Yes, there is a lot more overreach. It used to be that when we won the award, because we would often be bidding against bigger organisations, we would be able to sit down and say, “We’re an SME. We can’t do six-month payment terms”. There are some things that you just cannot do as an SME. If we are going to be working well with third-sector organisations, the Prison Service—and the Probation Service has done some work on this—needs to be really thinking, “How do we work well with the best SME charities that can hold these contracts successfully?”

Because this contract was a service-delivery type and there was no opportunity to discuss how as an SME we would deliver it, we made the very difficult decision not to sign the contract and currently we are not recruiting a 2025 cohort. We have about four months to secure some sort of future for this work to continue or else we will not have further cohorts either.

That is desperately sad and very fixable, but you need to actively push against a system that naturally tends towards overreach and bureaucratisation in order to support SMEs and innovation. This means the graduate scheme will not be on campus this year. The status of the prison officer will not have this huge boost that we give it. Also, come September, there will not be 140 officers arriving from our training programme to support prisoners, and we know the impact that they have on the landing. We felt that with this service delivery, where you are directly told what to do, we just could not have the impact that we needed to have.

The Chair: In the light of you not signing the contract, what has HMPPS done about that? Has it discussed with you the possibility of rethinking its approach?

Natasha Porter: This has been in the middle of a change of government as well, so it has not felt like everything has been on our side in lots of ways with this. We have spoken to James Timpson, who has been supportive in theory but of course has many other things to be thinking about. We are currently in the process of talking with officials trying to work out if we can find a solution. It requires energy to be put into it. It does not just happen. These types of contracts do not just happen; they need to be prioritised to happen. We are very much hoping that the MoJ decides this is worth fighting for as well as all the other things it is trying to do.

A prison governor said to me recently that his biggest issues are corruption and capability in staff, that Unlocked is his best solution to those issues, and he is really upset that we will not be placing a new cohort with him in September. Prisoners are telling us that these officers bring something different. A recent HMIP report on behaviour in prison has a whole page where custodial managers talk about the contagion of the positivity of Unlocked Graduates. We are improving the prisons that we are in. We think it will be desperately sad if a solution is not found to this.

Lord Filkin: To an outsider—and one respects one does not know the detail of what is going on in HMPPS on this—it seems completely bonkers that a strategic approach is not taken to an organisation such as Unlocked Graduates. Think of the effort that goes into making Teach First and how brilliant that has been. Because of the mix of passion and expertise, this has an enormous change agency potential. Just having put you in a service delivery box is bonkers. Surely, you have had that conversation at DG level or above in the department.

Natasha Porter: I would agree; I am very biased. With a change of government, I really hope that other people feel that way as well. We have delivered something that people told us would be impossible. In fact, when we first opened for recruitment, I wondered if no one might apply, because on paper it seemed bonkers that top graduates from Oxford and Cambridge would apply. The president of the Oxford Union is currently four years into working at Pentonville and she is a manager on her landing. We are attracting those people and they are staying. Those are the kinds of people we need in our Prison Service. I am desperately keen that maybe out of this group we are able to find more support and I really hope that a solution is found.

Lord Filkin: More strength to your arm, because it is a critical change agency.

The Chair: “Witness agrees with Peer that Labour Government are bonkers”. You can see the headline. Clearly, we do not know all the details, and it would not be for this committee to make a judgment on it. We do not know the details, for instance, about other companies that could step in and do this work, and so on. We have to be very guarded in our comments, but, on the face of it, the fact that the contract has not been sorted out in some way or other does seem bonkers. But, as I say, it is not for us to comment.

Lord Filkin: It is on the record.

The Chair: We are genuinely enormously grateful. You have brought huge insight from your various experiences to us. We are very grateful for it. We have learned a great deal. Unfortunately, I am very conscious that there are so many things you began to say but did not have the time to develop, and there are no doubt things that you did not even begin to touch on because we did not go anywhere near them that you would like to share with us. So please do write to us as soon as you possibly can after this, because the sooner we get it, the more it can influence any future questions that we ask of other witnesses, and certainly long before we get to discuss this with the Minister, Lord Timpson, towards the end of our inquiry. On behalf of the entire committee, thank you all very much indeed.