

Justice and Home Affairs Committee

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

Tuesday 18 March 2025

11.15 am

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Members present: Lord Tope (in the Chair); Lord Bach; Baroness Bertin; Baroness Cash; Lord Dubs; Baroness Hughes of Stretford; Baroness Meacher; Baroness Prashar.

In the absence of Lord Foster of Bath, Lord Tope was called to the Chair.

Evidence Session No. 12

Heard in Public

Questions 153 - 160

Witnesses

[I](#): Zak Addae-Kodua, Founder and Director, Xconversation; Kieron Bryan; Juliana Rowan.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

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

Examination of witnesses

Zak Addae-Kodua, Kieron Bryan and Juliana Rowan.

Q153 **The Chair:** The session has now begun. I ask each of our three witnesses to introduce yourselves briefly for the recording. Zak, would you like to go first?

Zak Addae-Kodua: I am the founder of Xconversation. I also work with National Prison Radio on the “Life After Prison” podcast and various other charities and social enterprises.

Juliana Rowan: I am 28. I am a personal trainer and I host the “Life After Prison” podcast alongside Zak.

The Chair: You would prefer us to call you Jules, is that right?

Juliana Rowan: Yes, please do.

The Chair: Okay. We will do that.

Kieron Bryan: I am a public speaker.

The Chair: That was splendidly brief. I have already lost what the first question is supposed to be, but I think I know it. How would you describe what we call the culture in prisons today? What is it like in prisons generally, in your experience?

Zak Addae-Kodua: I have served a total of eight years and nine months in prison, moving through the various estates. I began in the juvenile estate in what was YO1 Warren Hill; it has now changed to a category C prison. I then moved through to the juvenile youth custody estate, and then into the adult estate.

Across three sentences, I experienced various things. Some were positive and some were negative but, on the whole, in my experience, the culture of the prison system has more of a focus on punishment and dehumanisation. Rather than focusing on, “What do I need to do in order to change my life?”, it was more like, “You’re here to be punished and this is your punishment. When you get out of here, your life is not going to have a great trajectory. That’s basically where you are at”. That was my overwhelming experience.

However, during my third prison sentence, something clicked within me that I needed to make a change in my life. That was when I took the onus of my own rehabilitation upon my shoulders. I was able to look within myself and find the reasons why I was offending, committing crimes and getting involved with people who were not the best of company. It was at that point that I was able to utilise what good there is in the prison system in terms of rehabilitation, education,

learning and advancing yourself within the system in order for you to have rehabilitation at the forefront of your everyday life.

The prison regime kind of works against you if you really want to rehabilitate yourself. You have prisons that are working prisons, where you work for £3 per session. That does not really benefit you because you are doing—I will be honest—mundane, basic tasks for that £3 per session. You are earning £12 to £15 a week, say, but it is not benefiting you in the long term, whereas, when I moved to other prisons where you could take the onus on your prison regime, I was able to visit the library and do research on topics. I could do research on business and things that I wanted to do when I got out: how to register a company and where to create a company logo, et cetera.

It is also about focusing on preventive methods and asking, “Where am I going to live when I get out? Can I move away from my old area? What are the processes I need to go through? What are the steps I need to take?” That is very challenging in the prison system when you are constantly being told, “Get behind your door or get to work”. That was my overwhelming experience.

However, there were some governors—I know that we are going to speak about governors later but I just want to mention this quickly—who were really keen to focus on what got you there but, also, what was going to keep you out of there. That approach started at a basic human interaction level—seeing us as human beings—and made a difference in the prison in terms of behaviour, staff cohesion, and prisoner and staff relations, not just with prison officers but with education staff and—

The Chair: I just want to interrupt you. Were the governors like that in a minority?

Zak Addae-Kodua: Yes—a very small minority. I can say it for only three governors, off the top of my head; I have been to, I think, about 15 prisons.

The Chair: Three out of 15?

Zak Addae-Kodua: Yes.

The Chair: Wow. Thank you—sorry, I interrupted.

Zak Addae-Kodua: No, that is fine. That made a whole difference.

Also, what was a great initiative in terms of prisons where there was challenging behaviour, or challenging regimes with the serving prisoners, was that they were given an opportunity to keep an enhanced status. I do not know if you are all familiar with the prison system, in terms of being enhanced or standard or basic, but you were given the opportunity to maintain and keep an enhanced level—to maintain your access to the gym, to work and to education, as well as the benefits of an extra visit a month and an extra five or 10 quid to spend on your canteen sheet. That helped reduce the behaviour that the governor did not want to see because people were given a position of trust. They were told, “We are entrusting

you to keep this and maintain this. Now you have your chance. If you go against that, you can only blame yourself". That helped reduce a lot of the bad behaviour that was experienced in the prison. I will let my colleagues continue before I carry on.

Juliana Rowan: On culture, I spent time in four different female prisons. I very much agree with the fact that, when you are inside prison—as soon as you enter prison—it does not feel like a place of rehabilitation. It feels like a place of punishment. You are completely lost. You do not have your family or your friends. You do not have a clue what is going on. That is the same trajectory throughout each prison. You really do not really know what is going on. You have no control. You have to do things yourself. You have to take control of what you can control in there and decide how you want to use your time in there. For somebody who is not in a great headspace—naturally, you are probably going to be so if you are entering prison—it is really difficult. I had to dig really deep to rehabilitate myself in there. If we are going to talk about culture, I would say that it is not a very nice place to be in; that just says what it says.

When I first entered prison, I spent two weeks in Peterborough, which was a private prison. The conditions there were better than what I went into in the next few prisons, but I had only two weeks there and then I was shipped to Yorkshire. Officers just came to me with a bag. I could not disagree or call home. I am from London, so Yorkshire is quite far, but I could only ring when I got to Yorkshire. By then, I was pretty distressed and upset. I was 20 at the time. Again, it is about whether we want to support people. I like to say that I am quite strong-minded; for somebody who is not in a very good headspace at that time, it can be even more traumatic.

In terms of culture, prison does not feel like a place where you are going to help yourself. You have to dig really deep to find that.

Kieron Bryan: In my experience, as Zak said, prison culture is not geared towards rehabilitation. It is geared more towards punishment. The reason for that, I think, is that the staff who are running the prisons do not believe in rehabilitation. I have such a long time in prison—16 years. Half of that time, I wanted to rehabilitate; half of that time, I was thinking about getting back to what I normally did. I have seen officers start, believing that rehabilitation is possible, but that getting drummed out of them over a few years. It goes from them believing, "This prisoner really does want to change his life", to them seeing, a couple of years later, the prisoner coming back for the same thing.

So I feel like everyone who believed in rehabilitation at the start of the job does not believe in it any more. That forms a culture where you are in a prison and wanting to rehabilitate but none of the people who should help you believes that it is possible. That is the problem with the culture of prisons.

The Chair: How are the prison officers who do believe in rehabilitation treated by the other prison officers?

Kieron Bryan: They are few and far between, but they are seen as naive and optimistic by the other prison officers. That limits the help that they want to give to prisoners and the amount of prisoners they help.

Zak Addae-Kodua: Can I add to that? That is a really good question. When I first entered the system, you could tell the difference between someone who was quite green—new to the job—and someone who had been in the job for quite a few years. However, each officer still had a different approach. I had experienced officers who would speak to you on a human level because they understood; they had been through the system and worked in various prisons so, if a situation arose, they were able to get to the bottom of it. They could understand the difference and how to nip it in the bud or solve it.

That approach really worked well. When those officers were on the wings, the wings ran smoothly. There were hardly any disagreements or turmoil. However, when the officer disappeared and someone else was in charge of the wing, certain issues would arise. People were not being unlocked on time. People were not given enough time to use the phones or the showers.

What I found was that, in the overwhelming majority of relationships between new officers and ones who were quite senior or had been in their roles for a long time, the new officers ended up following the senior officers' way. If they had been doing things one way but someone tried to bring another way, their way would get drummed out of them. If someone is really enthusiastic to speak to people, to understand, to be kind, to be happy and to be chatty, six months later, they are not the same officer as they were when they first entered the job.

A lot of new officers I have met really want to make a change. Some have come through uni. Some have done work in criminology, sociology or psychology in uni. When they enter the job, they are really passionate about making a change. Personally, I have a friend who was working in Wandsworth. There was a prison scheme—I cannot remember its name—where graduates were given the chance to go.

The Chair: Unlocked.

Zak Addae-Kodua: Yes, that is correct. They were very passionate and enthusiastic but, nine months later, they were really disenfranchised and did not believe that they could make a change.

The Chair: It was sort of ground out of them, in effect.

Zak Addae-Kodua: Yes.

The Chair: That is appalling.

Q154 **Lord Bach:** I am going to ask about an aspect of the culture of prison: the condition of prison buildings. You have both told us that you have been in a number of establishments; I do not know how many establishments you have been in.

Kieron Bryan: I have been in a few different establishments.

Lord Bach: How many, roughly?

Kieron Bryan: About six.

Lord Bach: So you have quite wide experience. Does it make a difference what sort of prison you are in, in terms of how old it is and what the conditions in it are like? Can you tell us a bit about that?

Zak Addae-Kodua: It is a very big difference. I will try to keep it as brief as possible because I think I am speaking too much.

Lord Bach: Wandsworth has been mentioned.

Zak Addae-Kodua: Personally, I have not spent time in Wandsworth.

Lord Bach: I understand that.

Zak Addae-Kodua: I spent time in Victorian prisons: HMP Pentonville and HMP Chelmsford. Their Victorian wings are in really bad condition. I was on the G wing in Pentonville, which has five landings. At the time, it was the biggest wing in Europe. What happens is, if you are on the fives, you are entirely forgotten. If your buzzer is on, no one is getting to you for however long it takes. That is one thing; it was the first thing I noticed.

The second thing is that there were cockroaches and mice in the cells, on the landings and in the exercise yards. That was standard and regular. If you speak to anyone who has been to HMP Pentonville, they will let you know it straight: "Yep, cockroaches and rats". In the exercise yards, rats were actually killing pigeons for sport. Those are the conditions we were living in. We were living in cells that were not designed for two people. You are doubled up with two men. That is a very tough place to live, especially if you are on remand, awaiting sentence or trial. It can have really damaging psychological effects on you and on your outlook on life.

One thing I would say about Pentonville is that the staff were seasoned. They knew what they were doing and they created a culture of, "You guys sort out the issues that happen. We keep the wing running smoothly. You want it to run smooth? We don't want any drama. Sort out all the drama". That helped the wing tick over. People were treated well. There was hardly any bullying; the prisoners would sort out bullying.

However, physically, the conditions were not great. The gym was closed at the time because, I believe, a prisoner had managed to escape. We had hardly any exercise. That was really damaging to the regime and to the prisoners' mental well-being, as well as their physical well-being. It was also very dark and dingy. If you could open your window, you were just looking at bars and a wall. That really affects your psychological condition. When you went into the exercise yard, you saw rats and pigeons. There was nothing that you could use to work out. If you were to work out by doing some push-ups, sit-ups or laps, that was quickly stamped out. It was like, "What are you doing?" Those conditions were really bad.

However, I can talk about going to a newer establishment—HMP Thameside, for example. It is, I believe, a privately run prison. It had a really nice football pitch. You had access to the gym twice a day. Your room on the wing had a shower. Even though you were doubled up, that made a slight difference. You were able to see out to the exercise yard and the football pitch, which is a better view than looking at bars and a wall. You had a system where you could check your canteen, check your visits and top up your phone—you had a prison phone in your cell. That makes a difference because you do not need to leave your room in order to contact your people or have a shower and feel clean. That makes a big difference. There are times in Pentonville and other prisons where you are not able to access the shower and there are various lockdowns.

But there are prisons in the middle, such as HMP Highpoint, where they have done refurbishment to the prison cells—so it is an older prison but it has been modernised. It was cleaner and the flooring was nicer—you did not feel like you were standing on cement or cracked slabs. The landing was open plan, so when you could leave your cell you at least felt that you had a bit of space. That makes a difference to your psychology. Obviously, access to the gym and the regimes are different—that matters. The regime matters and goes alongside the physical condition of the prison.

Juliana Rowan: I experienced one private prison: Peterborough. Especially at the landings, you can definitely tell the difference between that and the other three prisons I was in. I was in one with open conditions, which was nice—it was good. Obviously, the female estate does not have as many bad problems as what we are hearing here. But it is still not great. For example, most of my covers—my bedsheets—in Peterborough, a private prison, had cigarette holes in them. The beds are really harsh: with most of the beds, you are basically sleeping on a plank of wood with nothing. When you get to the prison, the blue mats have already dipped. They should be a hard block of blue—when you get it new it is a hard block of blue, which is still not super comfortable—but, over time, people sleep on them and they all dip. So the majority of my time over the two and a half years was on dipped blue mattresses. That has a physical effect on your body: I know people who have had problems, and I have had problems sleeping on my side. That is why I sleep on my back, which I still do a lot of the time, to get to get through that.

Conditions-wise, we had rats in some prisons, but not in the cells. We had them on the grounds, which is not as bad as in the cells. I did not see cockroaches, so that is all good. But the cells generally are not very clean when you move from people to people, but obviously you keep your yourself clean.

Lord Bach: Are you on your own?

Juliana Rowan: Not always. When I entered the prison system, I was 20, so I was classed as a YO and I would have to be with a young offender under 20. There were not many of them, so I was on my own for the first year or so and, as soon as I hit my 21st birthday, I was told to move. It was actually on my 21st birthday: somebody came to my cell, and I thought she was going to say happy birthday to me but she said, "You're sharing tomorrow". I thought, "Wow, this is not okay". That would be with any woman above 20, and the majority were over 30. So we shared cells—I do not really know what else to say on that.

Kieron Bryan: The exterior conditions are obviously not that important to the prisoner, but the interior and what the prisoner sees every day is. I had an experiment with an officer one time in Swaleside on G wing. The cleaning used to take place after association. That means that, when you came out in the morning for first association, if you tried to put your bin in the bin it overflowed. There were 20 other bins there, so you ended up just throwing it on the side. You went into the kitchens and the showers, but they would not be cleaned until after association, when they let the cleaners stay out for longer to clean the wing.

I had a debate with an SO, and I said, "Let the cleaners out early today and it's going to have an audible difference"—because, usually, when the doors opened in the morning, everyone was shouting and swearing, and arguments were happening from the day before, et cetera. So he did it—he cleaned the wing before the prisoners were let out. I had the feeling of coming out of my cell, having nowhere to put my bin and just throwing it. It just put me in a mental state, at the start of the morning, where I would be a bit short with the next person I talked to, and they were a bit short with me—it was audible. But when we did the test and he let everyone out in the morning, the wing was silent: everyone just went about their day, and the bell got pressed less that day. That is how we changed the regime. That was a good experiment to show the importance of the conditions that you come out to, and live in, for your mentality.

Lord Bach: Were you in a Victorian prison—one of those very old prisons?

Kieron Bryan: I was in Bedford—I do not know if it meets the right criteria. I was in one of those prisons with all the cockroaches, rats and all that kind of thing. I was not there for long, but it is just an extreme example of what I am saying about bins and that kind of stuff. If you have cockroaches and rats, it puts you in a mind state and that is counterproductive to your environment.

Q155 **Lord Dubs:** We have already talked a bit about prison governors. How visible and engaged were they in the prisons you were in? Did you notice them or were they invisible? What impact did seeing the prison governor often, or not, have on the prison environment generally?

Kieron Bryan: It makes a big difference if the governor does regular rounds, for example. The difference it makes is that you have access to the governor, and stuff that is obviously not fair gets sorted out on the spot—but, if you are dealing with an SO or a CM, they might try to take the officer's side and that kind of thing. So, if the CM and the SO know that the governor is doing regular rounds, the culture in that prison means that it will be less likely that they do that sort of thing—not sorting stuff out when you are obviously in the right. Where you do not see the governor in the prison, that kind of thing will go on more often.

Juliana Rowan: Having a governor around makes a massive difference. It is like having a CEO or a boss: they set the culture and the standards within the prison, and how the officers behave. If the governor does not have the power to set certain rules, standards or whatever, it makes a difference, but it also does not get to the root cause of what really needs to change for a prison—things like education, conditions and all this stuff that we will hopefully come on to. The governor cannot really control that and, if they could, things would be different. But, yes, having a governor around makes a difference. Other issues need to be sorted out underneath that so that the governor can do more. They can only do so much.

Zak Addae-Kodua: The visibility of the prison governor—the number one and the number two—makes a huge difference, and even the senior management team does. Whether they are governors of security or housing, or whatever their title is, if they are part of the senior management and they are in suits, it makes a very big difference when they make the rounds.

First, it removes the us-and-them culture straightaway because you get to see them as human beings. There is an us-versus-them culture—the officers versus the prisoners. However, those barriers are quickly broken down when the governor makes his regular rounds and you know that, every Tuesday morning, the governor will be on your wing and you can speak to him directly. You can challenge some things directly and you are able to solve problems directly—rather than using the app system that sometimes gets forgotten, or goes through so many chains of paperwork that, by the time it is time to sort it out, you have three or four more things that you need to be done.

I will give a couple of examples. In HMP Chelmsford, there was a security governor—a really nice lady who was very forward-thinking. I remember that there was an incident on the yard where I was falsely accused of fighting and bent up with restraining techniques. While I was on the floor, the governor was there and I looked up to her and said, “I didn’t fight. I’ve done nothing wrong. They just picked me out”. She said, “If you’re telling the truth, I’m going to give you enhanced and

you'll go to the enhanced wing. However, if you're lying, you're going to the block and we're going to slam you"—no problem. She checked the CCTV and found out that what I said was right, and I was given enhanced. What she did then was challenge the officers—they were made to apologise. That kind of thing changed the culture of how officers would deal with incidents that arose.

I will give another example from HMP Highpoint. The governor, Nigel Smith, and the number two at the time I was there, Gary Newnes, would do the rounds. They would see you and know you on a first-name basis, and they would allow you to call them on a first-name basis. They would tell you what their plans were for the prison, what the regime is like, what opportunities were coming forward, how they wanted to help you and support you in changing your lives. That made a difference, because you were able to be seen clearly communicating to the governors in front of your wing staff, so your wing staff knew that you could address any concerns or any ill feelings to them directly. It also kept the other prison officers on their toes, because they knew that the governor was making rounds and that he was very keen on cleanliness and on prisoners being productive and using their time wisely. He would ask, "Why is this person banged up? What can they be doing? Does the wing need painting? Does it need cleaning? Does it need this and that? Let's get them to work. Let's get them out of their cells". That made a huge difference, especially with any disagreements and for getting things done that were needed. For example, if you placed an order for new gym trainers but, for some reason, they were not getting to you on time, the governor was able to sanction things, which then happened in half an hour or an hour. I would ask myself, "Why did I have to wait two weeks?" It shows the power that that the governor has in the prison to make things happen.

If a governor is always doing the rounds—and is visible at equality and diversity and violence reduction boards with the reps, when meetings are happening—it makes a difference in communicating what the senior management team are trying to do with the rest of the prison and the prisoners.

Q156 Lord Dubs: What you have all said leads directly to my follow-up question, which is about leadership skills. What leadership skills are most important for prison governors and senior staff, so that they can create an environment which will help with rehabilitation and possibly also with successful reintegration into society? That is quite a mouthful.

Kieron Bryan: Integrity is the most important. I have been to a few different prisons and I have been dealt with by officers in ways that I did not understand. When I have met the number one governor, it all made sense to me, because they are mirroring his attitude. They know that they can do and say what they want, because it does not matter how wrong they are: he is going to take their side. So when I met him, he made the whole prison make sense to me. Obviously, if you are like this, everyone below you is going to copy your attitude.

I have been to a different prison, where it did not matter whether you are a prisoner or an officer, because the governor is going with whoever is in the right. So

that makes a big difference. It filters through the whole prison and directs the culture of the prison.

Juliana Rowan: I have a question for officers. What do they think they are there for? Do they think they are there for rehabilitation? I want to know the answer to that question.

Zak Addae-Kodua: What is the purpose of an officer's role in a prison?

The Chair: That is for us to answer. I think all of us—not that I can speak for us all—see rehabilitation as probably the most important objective of people being in prison. Being put in prison is a punishment—that is obvious.

Juliana Rowan: So it is punishment and rehabilitation. I do not think that officers actually understand what they are there for and what their purpose is. If rehabilitation is there as a purpose—

Baroness Meacher: The main purpose, yes?

Juliana Rowan: Well, then we need to understand whether it is punishment or rehabilitation or both—whether they are both as important. But I do not think that they are, and I do not think that rehabilitation is set as a task for officers to help prisoners with.

Baroness Meacher: Really? You do not think that they are trained to regard rehabilitation as an absolutely central aspect of their role? You do not think so? Are they trained to regard rehabilitation as an absolutely central function that they need to perform?

Kieron Bryan: I do not think it is in their training.

Juliana Rowan: We do not know. From experience, it does not feel like that is the culture in prison.

Baroness Meacher: Amazing. It is so utterly fundamental, is it not?

Juliana Rowan: Yes, this is why I am bringing it up. I would love to understand what their role is, or what they think they are there for. If we want to make a difference, we really need to understand that first, and then things can move forward. If we are going to talk about how officers act and behave, we have to recognise that, if they understand that they are there for rehabilitation, the behaviours would be very different. They would be there to ask, "Okay, how are we going to rehabilitate this person? What do they need?" Obviously, the prisoner also needs to act accordingly; it is a two-party thing.

As it is now, rehabilitation is hard in there. Why is it so hard if it is what the officers should be doing? The only reason I bring that up in relation to the prison officers is because, if they understood that, they would behave in a different way or they would behave accordingly. I do not think that they really understand it, so

sometimes they do not know how to act or to behave when dealing with prisoners and the culture.

Baroness Meacher: Do you think that prison officers, in general, regard punishment as the central role that they have, and maybe the only role?

Juliana Rowan: Embedded in the role of prison officer, they have to want to be able to help. It would be hard to do the job if they thought, “Right, that’s it: punishment, punishment, punishment”. It would be a pretty sad mindset, right? So officers have to want that from within. That is why I asked the question: it does not seem, from being in there, that officers are there to rehabilitate prisoners.

Baroness Meacher: You really do not feel it is in their psyche at all?

Juliana Rowan: I do not think it is in their job role. It is in their hearts and their minds as times go on. That is why we have really good officers and not-so-good officers. The ones we say are really good are there because they care about us as individuals—but that is not the culture of what prison officers are actually there for.

Baroness Meacher: You do not think that they are trained to see rehabilitation as essential?

Juliana Rowan: Correct.

Kieron Bryan: I have spoken to lots of different prison officers about their training, and none has ever mentioned the word “rehabilitation” to me in relation to their training. When I come across an officer moving in that overzealous direction, I try to explain to him that my experience and my punishment is the sentence. When I was sentenced, that is my punishment. The officer’s job is not to try to make my environment a part of my punishment.

For example, when I ring my family on the outside and learn that my sister is getting married, but I cannot attend the wedding, that is my punishment. The officer was not there to try to make my life harder; I was there to try to be rehabilitated. Explaining that to officers, on numerous occasions, makes me believe that they have never come across the word “rehabilitation” in their training.

Juliana Rowan: That is why I asked my question. We—everyone in this room at least—should all know whether that is the case or not. We are a bit confused and they are a bit confused, and that is why there is dynamic relationship of power.

Zak Addae-Kodua: I will just add to what my colleagues have said. There are various nuances to this and there are various deeper levels we can look at. You have the officer who comes into the job with a spring in their step and who really wants to make a difference, but the system—the environment and the conditions—does not allow for it. You have other staff members who have been there 10, 15 or 20 years who drum that out of them. They say, “Listen, we want to run a smooth ship. We

want the regime to run and then go home". They want to get home at the end of the day. They see their job as: opening and locking the doors; everyone is awake and on time; the roles are correct; everyone has been fed and had their time out; and done. Then they say, "Let's go home". However, you have other officers who take a different approach.

The question you asked is important: what are the key skills that a governor needs? There needs to be a top-down approach. If the governor is about rehabilitation, that is what the prison, the staff and the prisoners will also be about.

I was in a prison where that approach worked. I already mentioned Gary Newnes. He became the governor of HMP Hollesley Bay, an open prison. He was formerly the number two at HMP Highpoint, where he worked closely with Nigel Smith, who created a really good environment there. But in this open prison, the focus was on rehabilitation. The governor wanted to make sure that when you leave the prison, you are best prepared for life outside. There were various incentives. He said, "We want to get you working in the community. We want to fast-track your ability to work in the community—but not just to work anywhere doing a mundane job; we want you to do something that interests you, that will get you motivated, and that you can take to develop skills to go forward".

When addressing any complaints and issues, you were treated fairly. If you were in the wrong, you were dealt with accordingly. If you were in the right, the staff member would be corrected if they were wrong. That created an environment of trust and where suspicions were removed. If you are supposed to go somewhere and you are heading there, the staff can trust that you are going there and that you are doing what you need to do. Otherwise, you know that you will be removed from an environment that is conducive to your sentence and rehabilitation. You are able to access education and resources in the library, and you are able to speak to the resettlement team and your offender manager.

Speaking to your offender manager was crucial in that prison, and it made a difference. I was the rep: the link between the prisoner and the offender management. I was able to focus on who needs to speak to them and who does not. I could relay information; guidance was given so that we could lessen the load on the offender manager and allow them to do their job in the best possible way. That came from a top-down approach.

The Chair: I am going to try to close this topic down, because we have more questions. You have all made powerful points. Speaking for us all, we all agree and accept that the reason someone is in prison is punishment—that is the why—but the purpose for imprisonment is rehabilitation, to put it very simply. We will move on to Baroness Bertin.

Q157 **Baroness Bertin:** Staying on the role of the prison officer, we have spoken quite a bit about what makes a good prison officer and the journey of officers arriving—potentially being really up for it and in a good place—and then being accused of being naive and getting into a bad place. Do you think there is any practical

solutions to stopping that? What are your views on how we stop having that?

Zak Addae-Kodua: The head of the Swedish Prison and Probation Service delivered a keynote speech for the Longford Lectures. The Prison Reform Trust wrote a report about what he said. He mentioned that, in their system, they have almost a one-to-one ratio of staff and prisoners. In our system, I believe—you can correct me if I am wrong—it is one to multiple. It might be one to eight or 10. That makes it difficult for officers to carry out their job. How can you be a personnel officer of 10 or 12 people, when you have to take care of a wing of 50, 60 or 70 people? It is really difficult for them to do their job.

The conditions and the environment for prison officers need to change. They need more support. Prisons need better funding, and the staff need better pay and better incentives. They are trying to do a challenging job under difficult conditions—and that is away from the prisoners; I am just talking about their job in general.

When they interact with prisoners, it is really difficult to have the time to help someone. They have to keep the regime going; they need to unlock and lock the prison, and they need to make sure they are doing their report. The officers need to do X and Y—whatever they need to do—and that is challenging. They need support and better investment, help and training. We spoke about training, but we do not know if rehabilitation is even mentioned in that.

Juliana Rowan: Or trauma.

Zak Addae-Kodua: Or trauma-informed practices. That applies to a lot of the people they are dealing with. It is system-wide.

Juliana Rowan: It is going to take investment and time. If we focus on the surface-level stuff, nothing will really change. It has been like this for ever. Also, this is the first time that I have heard, “Prison is there to rehabilitate you”. That makes me excited and smile inside, because I did not have any hope of that in there. I used to think, “I need to just get out. I need to survive”. I saw most of the women trying to survive in there—no rehabilitation, just trying to survive. It is sad to see. So hearing that about rehabilitation is incredible—and that, first and foremost, needs to be spoken about. That would change the culture with the prison officers, making them want to stay and want their job to be rewarding. As Zak said, it is a hard environment to work in and they have a lot going on.

Zak Addae-Kodua: I will quickly add a short point before Kieron goes ahead. I believe that prison officers should be seen as front-line staff. Similar to the NHS—we were clapping for NHS staff during the lockdown because they were doing a great job—prison staff also need to be seen in the same regard. They deal with people who have complex needs and issues, who may be angry and disenfranchised from society, and who eventually will be out in society. They have a very important job. If they do their job correctly, society runs better. They need better tools, environments and training, and more support to do what they need to do. They also

need what we have here: lived experience. You need people that have been in the system to support the training and to inform others about which practices work.

Juliana Rowan: It links back to society so intrinsically. It is wild that we are not looking at this in more detail and that we are not fixing the root of the problem, because it affects society so much.

Kieron Bryan: I will speak about solutions. It is a horrible job; I would not advise anyone to do it. Seriously, it is a very hard job. Sometimes, when I come up to an officer, they are rude to me immediately. When I ask the officer, “What happened? I’ve never been rude to you in my life? How come you was rude to me?”, they say that they were just dealing with five different prisoners with drug issues and that kind of stuff. The prisoners were not looking at the officer as a human; they were just talking to them in a certain way. So by the time I came up to talk to the officer, they would deal with me as if I had been dealing with them in the same way all day. You can imagine what happens over the years. If I have not seen the officer for a little time, when I meet him again, he is a whole new person—and not in a positive way.

One of the solutions—I know this is unrealistic in terms of the retention of officers—would be for officers to work there for three years and then work somewhere else, or work in a different department where they are not with prisoners, before coming back. There needs to be a break and a gap, because for the officers we mentioned earlier, who are starting with all the right intentions and who want to help to rehabilitate prisoners, three or four years down the line, you would not even recognise that in them. They are the ones who are turning the prison into an environment of just punishment, even though they did not start with that as their intention.

Q158 **Baroness Hughes of Stretford:** You have all presented a bleak picture of prisons being mainly about punishment. I will ask you to think about your experiences in the various sentences you did. Were you offered any opportunity for developing skills, gaining a qualification, having work experience through, for instance, the release on temporary licence scheme? Was anything offered to you, and, if so, did it help on your release?

Zak Addae-Kodua: You are given access to education. However, the education level is the equivalent of a GCSE. When you leave the prison system, and you have a level 1 or level 2 qualification, it does not really help you to try to get employment, because you also have the hindrance—rightly so—of having a criminal record. You have done something wrong, and that is on your record. I have convictions that I will always have to disclose when I go forward for employment. When you add that to a GCSE-equivalent qualification, it hinders you in getting a job because someone else does not have a record and they probably have better qualifications.

Baroness Hughes of Stretford: So those education courses were not related to any particular employment? Were they more general—more like GCSEs?

Zak Addae-Kodua: Yes, they were GCSE level—things such as English, maths, graphic design and IT. They were very basic courses: they took six to 12 weeks to complete, and you probably move through the education department within a year if you are serving a long-term sentence. So these qualifications are not really geared for jobs and things like that.

However, they had certain initiatives, such as a fork-lift driver initiative, where you could use that practical skill on the outside. Roadworks was a very popular course, as was PTS, which is for work on the train tracks. Those courses were highly sought after and rarely run. If you got the opportunity to do those, you knew you could use that skill to get employment when you got out.

Baroness Hughes of Stretford: Were you able to do anything like that?

Zak Addae-Kodua: Personally, no, because there is a waiting list of probably 50 or 60 people before your name goes up. However, when I got to an open prison, you were able to find work on the outside. Again, various systems were in place. Some people were given preferential treatment over others to get employment—that is a whole other story. But it does make a difference because it gives someone a routine and a structure: getting up early, going to work and coming back. When you work in a prison and you leave to work and come back, you are too tired to do anything else. You are too tired to focus on mischief—you know you have work tomorrow morning. You are earning a living, making money and doing something practical. You are not a prisoner anymore.

Baroness Hughes of Stretford: Is this going out into the community? Did you do that?

Zak Addae-Kodua: It is. Yes, I did do it, and it makes a huge difference. I believe that open conditions in prisons should be mandatory within sentences because they allow you to rehabilitate. They allow you to reintegrate within society, see your family and dip in and out of the prison system. When you are out of the prison, you are no longer a prisoner. That has a huge psychological benefit for how you see yourself and how you go back into society.

Baroness Hughes of Stretford: Jules, you were able to gain some qualifications as a personal trainer. Could you tell us briefly about that?

Juliana Rowan: Exactly as Zak said, the level 1s and 2s are quite easy to access. They do not set you up for outside, but you are not really thinking about all that; you are thinking about keeping your mind busy. You are thinking about it a little, if you want to do something when you get out, but you quickly understand that that is the kind of level you are at.

I did my level 1 and 2 gym instructor courses, and I saw two females that were serving long sentences in one of the prisons doing their level 3 personal training, so I knew it was available somewhere, but I did not know how to get it because I could

not do it there. I do not know why. You have to serve a longer time to get these kinds of qualifications. So I was fishing and digging around, and I understood that, in the open conditions, there was a possibility—just a possibility—that you could do the level 3. There was hope. But I wanted to get to open conditions anyway, so I thought, “I’m going to get there and if they’ve got it on I’m going to do whatever I can to do it”.

Baroness Hughes of Stretford: Did that happen?

Juliana Rowan: Yes, I got to open conditions and did that. I served my last year doing my level 3 personal training qualification. But, on the outwork, I agree with Zak: it is really important for people to get employment on the outside. You are still quite limited, and me doing outwork in a gym was a no go. I did not want to work in Sainsbury’s or Timpson; I wanted to be a PT and be in a gym. It does not make sense to me to go to Sainsbury’s. Yes, it would get me out of the prison for a day, but I would rather be in the gym in the prison, studying with an incredible PEI who helped me so much.

Baroness Hughes of Stretford: Why could they not get you a placement?

Juliana Rowan: We did end up getting one, but it was because of the female that was there before me. She was an orderly in the gym, and she had sent out loads of emails to Maidstone gyms, but they just would not have her. One David Lloyd gym did, and she begged them for me to have the same opportunity. It said, “After her, nobody else”. They did not have a link with the prison. The prisons have links with Timpson, Sainsbury’s, et cetera, but they did not have a link with a gym. They do not have links with things that are out of the norm. I would have thought that being a personal trainer is not really out of the norm, but it was.

I did end up getting outworked with David Lloyd. I was probably the last person allowed to do that. I left prison with a level 3 PT, and I am a self-employed personal trainer five years on, so it has changed my life completely. Having these opportunities would change other people’s too.

Zak Addae-Kodua: That is an example of when things work.

Baroness Hughes of Stretford: Kieron, were you able to do anything that helped you?

Kieron Bryan: I did: I completed my degree with the Open University while I was in prison. But I did not have a positive experience with the education system in prison because, to me, it came across as more of a façade or a tick-box exercise. There was entry and entry 3, going up to level 2—and maybe they would do level 3 sometimes. So, as Zak mentioned, when you are doing long sentences you can complete maths, English and all the courses they have available in that prison—up to level 2 and 3 if they do it—within a couple of years. After that, the options offered by the prisons are workshops, which are not necessarily helpful for your rehabilitation and do not

give you skills that are useful on the outside because that job does not even exist on the outside.

You end up in a position where, when you want to rehabilitate yourself and try to get higher education, you are going against the grain. Everyone is working against you, saying, “Just go and do level 1”. This is what everyone that is meant to be helping you is doing. The process to do the higher education—filling out all the forms and that kind of thing to get a university place—is not second nature for someone in prison like me. So you end up in a position where you have to fight to rehabilitate yourself when you are in prison. Everyone says that they are trying to help you and believes that education is the best thing but, when you ask them for help, there is no help.

It is not linked to your progression, whereas, because level 2 English is a part of the prison system, it can be linked to my progression—namely, moving from A cat to a B cat. Where Open University and that kind of thing—higher education—is not linked to the prison directly, they do not want to acknowledge it as a positive.

Baroness Hughes of Stretford: I am getting the picture from all of you that, in so far as the system can do anything, it tends to try to funnel everybody into levels 1 and 2, and there is not much scope for thinking individually about your needs and so on.

Juliana Rowan: There definitely is not. This is why our question comes back to whether prison is there for rehabilitation. Would this not be one of the first things that we try for people? Everybody outside in society needs a job of some form to have a successful life.

Baroness Prashar: Before I ask my question, I have one leading on from this. The majority of prisoners lack reading and writing skills. Is there much facility for literacy teaching?

Kieron Bryan: The prison system is geared towards assuming that the majority of prisoners are not able to read and write, and it is true that the majority do need help within that entry level up to level 2 or 3. But once you go past that—or if you are at a starting position where you do not need that—you are stuck.

Juliana Rowan: But it is mandatory.

Kieron Bryan: You have to do all the courses.

Baroness Prashar: Is reading and writing mandatory?

Kieron Bryan: Level 2 English and maths is mandatory.

Zak Addae-Kodua: You are given a skill test when you first enter a prison to assess where your English and maths are at.

Juliana Rowan: But there are organisations within the prison, such as the Shannon Trust, that really want to help and support people to get to that level of reading and writing.

Q159 **Baroness Prashar:** I will move to a different subject: have any of you had experience of the prison complaints and grievance process, either within the prison or with bodies externally? If so, what has been your experience?

Zak Addae-Kodua: I have seen confidential complaints—COMP1 forms, which are sealed in envelopes and put in a box—destroyed by officers.

Baroness Prashar: Has that happened to you personally?

Zak Addae-Kodua: I have personally seen it with my own eyes.

Baroness Prashar: What were you complaining about?

Zak Addae-Kodua: It was not just my complaints but the wing's. There is a box that they go into, and it is supposed to be secure.

Kieron Bryan: There is a box that all the complaints go into, and the officers are not meant to have access to it—it is meant to be emptied by someone independently. Obviously, they can just get in and throw them away. In my experience of the ombudsman and the independent monitoring board, I saw their power diminish because I was doing such a long time. At first when you complained to them, it was a thing; but by the end of my sentence, it was all just a joke. They had no real powers or ways to help you, because whatever influence they had to help with was gone; it was taken away from them.

Baroness Prashar: When did that happen?

Kieron Bryan: I started my sentence at the end of 2010, and I finished it in 2023. When I started that sentence, if I put in a complaint to the IMB or the ombudsman, it was taken seriously. But by the end of my sentence, it was not taken seriously—it did not even matter.

Baroness Prashar: Why did that happen?

Kieron Bryan: I do not know what happened behind the scenes. When making complaints to the ombudsman and the IMB, the influence they could have on the governors or the officers, to change what they had done wrong, diminished over the time. I don't know what happened behind the scenes.

Zak Addae-Kodua: Over time, the independent monitoring board became less visible. At some point, you did not know who your rep was in the prison. At first, you would see them, but then you would not know.

I believe there was also a process where you could complain to an area manager of the prisons, which was actually good in getting a response. I did that on a couple of

occasions, and they were able to override the ruling of the governor or whoever was dealing with the complaint. That worked well on a couple of occasions. However, you are not 100% sure whether your complaint is even getting there—that's the issue.

Baroness Prashar: What about you, Jules? Did you have an experience with the grievance processes?

Juliana Rowan: Not the grievance processes. The complaints process is ongoing; it is very slow in prison. You do not get very far very quickly. Sometimes it is not worth complaining. You do not really know who to complain to.

I will go back to my experience of when I was in Peterborough. I was in there for two weeks; it was a straight bang-up, so I had not settled in. I had a visit booked for that weekend to see my family for the first time, and then I got shipped to Yorkshire. I cried and begged to speak to somebody, and they said they could not do anything for me; I just had to get on the van and go to Yorkshire. I really, really tried. I pressed my cell bell three times while I was standing there, but they could not get anyone for me. In that position, I did not understand my rights—what I could do and what I could not do—and who to speak to. I was only 20, so I just had to go with it.

That is something that we should be able to speak to somebody about. It is hard to understand who to speak to and who has control. Also, the majority of the time, it is not worth it, because it is such a slow process.

Kieron Bryan: The officers also come back to punish you. When you put in a complaint about an officer, he comes back and punishes you anyway. There is no incentive to complain because it can disappear.

Also, one of the strategies they use with complaints and nickings is this: if it comes to a governor and he knows that you are obviously in the right and he should find in your favour, he says to you, "I know you are right, but I am going to find you guilty. Just appeal it because I do not want to upset the staff members". He tells you himself, "You are completely in the right, but I am still going to find you guilty. You're still going to go through all the punishments that they want you to go through. But, in the end, appeal it and you will win the appeal". By then, you have already lost your job and your enhanced status, and you have already missed your family visits—for example, you have missed your niece's birthday. Then six weeks later, they give you something that says, "Oh yeah, you were right about that complaint you put in".

Baroness Prashar: To sum up, am I right in saying that you did not find these processes either fair or effective, and that there were obstructions in getting them?

Zak Addae-Kodua: Yes, for the overall majority. However, I will just add that, when the governor is transparent and present, and when his model of running the prison is efficient and works, the complaints procedure works, because it goes to him or

his senior management team and is dealt with accordingly. It matters who the governor is and what the whole-system environment is like.

Baroness Prashar: What you are saying is that it works if the governor is a good governor, in the way that you have been describing it?

Juliana Rowan: Yes. If you have good officers on at the time and they want to help, it does work. But for the majority of the time, it is more like how you summarised it.

Kieron Bryan: To be a devil's advocate, when you are in the prisons that run well like that, the complaint system is not utilised as much. When you are in the worst prisons, the complaint system is needed, but it does not work.

Lord Dubs: I will ask you a different question.

The Chair: Lord Dubs, remember you need to go early, so we have to watch the time.

Q160 **Lord Dubs:** You see the kind of discipline we have here.

I want to choose my words carefully. Please do not think I am being patronising, but you are obviously highly motivated individuals. How much did luck play a part in getting you to where you are now?

Zak Addae-Kodua: None. As I said in my opening statement, I had to take responsibility for my rehabilitation. I had to be at the forefront of the decisions that I was making on the things that would affect my life on the outside. It came from me, and I was able to persevere and to be persistent and proactive within the system, and to communicate and connect with the people who could help me change: the governors, education staff and PEIs. They could see that I was determined to change my life.

I was also able to articulate myself in a particular way. I was able to write in a way that would help me to voice a complaint. That helps. There are people who cannot articulate themselves in a way that will mean that they can be heard; they are just seen as angry and upset, and they are ignored.

This happens on an individual basis—that is why there are three individuals here who have been at the forefront of their rehabilitation—but it is not the case for the overwhelming majority. It is not luck; it is an amalgamation—a myriad—of persistence, perseverance, taking the onus and responsibility, and being at the forefront of it.

Baroness Cash: Zak, can I come back to that? I work in behavioural science. Having that innate character is fantastic, but we are trying to learn about the system. Was there a particular person or a particular moment in that last sentence that helped? What would be helpful for us writing this report is to understand what else there was.

Zak Addae-Kodua: I had governors who wanted me never to come back again. There were governors who did not want to see us again. There were certain members of staff who did not want to see me back in prison. I had a really good offender manager, who said, “What can I do to help you?” That approach made the difference.

Also, the way the staff used to treat me was as a human being. That makes a huge difference, because it makes you feel that you are of value. I will again refer to the head of the Swedish Prison and Probation Service. Members of his team see the individual. When they lock up someone, they feel bad because they are locking up a human being. He said that, when we have more staff like that, the system can succeed.

Juliana Rowan: Going to the open prison and having one of the PEIs there to support me felt like luck—but I was already completely determined that I was going to succeed in that environment because I had to. I do not think that anything would have changed my trajectory. I do not know how much luck comes into play. As an individual, you have to find your trajectory and do it—no one can change that.

Kieron Bryan: I would dismiss luck because I felt like I was swimming against the tide during my sentence when I was trying to rehabilitate myself. I found it very difficult to stay on that correct path because of the environment I was in and because of the lack of help I was getting. But, if you are in the right place with the right people at the right moment, I guess that is luck.

Juliana Rowan: Also, I said that we, as individuals, have to change this, but the external factors play a massive part.

Baroness Cash: That was the point I was trying to get at. For each of you, as remarkable individuals, what were the other factors that made you commit?

Juliana Rowan: Being given the opportunity to do my level 3 helped, as did the governor of the prison saying, “Yes, okay, you can do it”. Neil helping me, and being by my side, set me up.

Zak Addae-Kodua: Education staff go above and beyond. I was in a business class in HMP Highpoint. The teacher—a very nice Scottish lady; I cannot remember her name—would say to us, “All right, you are on this business course”. She used to treat it as high-level. She would say, “Pick a company name. I will go back home and check Companies House to see if it is available”. She would come in the next day and say, “It is available”. That gives you added incentive and a boost to focus on a business plan, to do the research you need to do and to read the books. It gives you a target and a goal.

Prison officers who would speak to you as a human being made a huge difference. You need those kinds of staff members.

The Chair: I am so sorry, but we need to stop the session now. Some of us could carry on for the rest of the day—some of us will have to carry on for the rest of the day, but that is another issue. Thank you all so much. It has been inspirational.

I want to encourage you, Jules: the first session we had on this inquiry was with two former Ministers, and they both said the objective should be rehabilitation. You are not alone—we are not alone. They are going to try to help with that.

Zak Addae-Kodua: I also want to thank Alex South for recommending us.