



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

The Rt Hon The Lord Foster of Bath
Chair, Justice and Home Affairs Committee
House of Lords
London
SW1A 2AS

10 October 2025

Dear Lord Foster,

Government Response to the Justice and Home Affairs Committee's Report
Better Prisons: Less Crime

Thank you for your letter following the publication of the Government's response to the Justice and Home Affairs Committee's (JHAC) report, *Better Prisons: Less Crime*.

I was pleased to read that the Committee welcomes the Government's acceptance of the majority of recommendations but note the Committee's concern about His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) being fit for purpose and having the dynamic energy to drive reform forward.

The work of HMPPS changes lives every day and is among the most important and challenging work in Government. The efforts of HMPPS staff in keeping the system running despite immense pressure in recent years are a credit to the organisation. HMPPS has my full confidence and has both the desire and capacity to support innovation and provide the dynamic leadership to drive improvements in delivering public protection and reducing reoffending. As I have indicated in previous correspondence with the Committee, this Government inherited a prison system under enormous strain and we are now working to drive meaningful reform in the system. We have taken decisive action on capacity pressures and are committed to going further on digital tools and technology and improving infrastructure to mitigate pressures on staff. Reform of the system will not be immediate, but this Government is committed to driving this change and HMPPS will be crucial to realising this.

As the capacity crisis we inherited begins to ease due to the actions we are taking in response to the Sentencing Review, we want to ensure prisons have more time to focus on protecting the public by rehabilitating prisoners through purposeful activity such as education, which we know is proven to reduce reoffending.

For its part, HMPPS has taken decisive steps to restructure Headquarters (HQ) functions, decentralise decision-making, and embed continuous improvement through specialist support services. These changes ensure that frontline teams are empowered, supported, and shielded from unnecessary pressures, allowing them to focus on delivering impactful services. We will

continue to drive this vision of delivery so that HMPPS continues to support staff and improves outcomes for prisoners. We welcome the Committee's continued oversight in helping us to deliver this objective.

Following the submission of our response and my appearance at the JHAC hearing on 16th September on Electronic Monitoring, we have announced changes to the leadership of HMPPS. James McEwen has been appointed Chief Executive Officer General of HMPPS and will take up position from 13th October 2025. James, who currently serves as the Chief Operating Officer of the Ministry of Justice, will be leading HMPPS as we continue the work to transform our prison and probation system, reduce reoffending and to enable HMPPS to deliver on its potential as a world-class organisation.

In your letter, you mention a number of other issues, including support for women's leadership groups and female staff, access to education in prisons and the impact on recruitment and retention of Skilled Worker visa arrangements. I have provided some additional information on these issues in this letter, as well as additional information regarding prison officer training, which I committed to providing when I gave evidence 16th September.

Women's Leadership and Support for Female Staff

We recognise the importance of supporting the needs of women within HMPPS and will continue to review and improve our approach in line with changes in legislation and outcomes of reviews, such as the HMPPS Professional Standards Review led by Jennifer Rademaker (Non-Executive Director, MoJ). We will do this by ensuring that:

- The needs of women remain a fundamental consideration in the development of future workforce reform interventions;
- We track and monitor the progression of women and take action where necessary;
- Steps are taken to focus in on and challenge culture issues where they present barriers to a positive workplace experience for women, potentially deterring their recruitment, retention and progression; and
- HMPPS continues to support the work of the well established Championing Women in the Workplace (CWW) network which advocates for the rights and needs of women in the workplace.

The progress of female staff in terms of temporary and permanent promotions and representation at leadership levels is monitored and kept under review. The latest available published data by grade and sex shows positive trends and can be accessed via the following link: [HM Prison & Probation Service Staff Equalities Report: 2023-2024 - GOV.UK.](#)

- Female representation at Operational Manager Band 10-12 (including Senior Civil Servants (SCS)) increased by 3.3 percentage points (pp) from 31 March 2023 to 31 March 2024 making up 41% of staff at that grade. Operational Manager Band 7-9 and Non-Operational Manager Band 6-11 both increased by 1.6pp, making up 41% and 63% of staff at those grades respectively.
- Over 80% of new joiners¹ at Operational Manager grade were female in 2023/24, an increase of 13.7pp on 2022/23. Three quarters of Non-Operational Managers new joiners were female, an increase of 5.2pp.

¹ Joiners are new staff to HMPPS who have joined the service externally not including any internal moves or promotions.

- Since 2021, women have consistently received higher levels of Temporary Cover Allowance (TCA) compared to men at an average ratio of 6.4 per 100 staff (excluding SCS and Operational Support Grades (OSGs)). Men average 6.05 per 100 staff. At 31 March 2023 the percentage of permanent female staff in receipt of TCA was higher compared to men at Bands 3-5 and Non-Operational Below Manager level whereas at Operational and Non-Operational Manager it was the reverse. However, at 31 March 2024 this changed at Operational Manager level where women surpassed men by 0.5%.
- Since 2021, women have consistently received a higher level of promotions compared to men at an average ratio of 5.1 per 100 staff. Men average 4.3 per 100 staff. At 31 March 2023 the percentage of permanent female staff in receipt of promotions was higher compared to men at Bands 3-5, OSG and Non-Operational Manager level whereas at Operational Manager it was the reverse. This trend continued at 31 March 2024, but the gap narrowed between men and women at Operational Manager grade by 0.5%.

Officials are analysing the latest data, and the 2024/25 report will be published in due course. In respect of the perception of prisons having a male-dominated and 'macho' environment as raised with the Committee during the evidence stage, work is ongoing under the HMPPS Professional Standards Review to address culture issues which may deter women from joining the service or hinder their progression.

One particular area of focus is sexual harassment. Refreshed sexual harassment guidance is pending alongside the establishment of an independent channel in early 2026 which, when launched, will enable all cases of sexual harassment to be routed via a single pathway providing greater data insight on prevalence, trend and types of cases so targeted action can be taken. In addition, action and activity has taken place to ensure compliance with the Worker Protection Act 2023 and the mandate that employers must take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment. HMPPS has issued a Health & Safety (H&S) Risk Assessment on the Act which will be conducted by H&S colleagues and subject to existing assurance processes. This is an additional step HMPPS has taken, and it will be complemented by a MoJ compliance checker.

Access to Education in Prisons

We welcome the Committee's focus on the vital role of education in rehabilitation and reducing reoffending. We are aware of recent media coverage and concerns raised regarding the funding of prison education. We would like to take this opportunity to clarify the current position and set out our approach for the future.

Contrary to some recent reports, there have been no cuts to the National Prison Education Budget in the current financial year. However, the cost of delivering high-quality education has risen significantly in recent years, and while the budget has increased, it has not kept pace with rising costs. As a result, we have had to make difficult decisions to ensure that the service remains affordable and sustainable. This has meant being more targeted in the curriculum we commission and working closely with providers and prisons to maximise value for money. We are also investing in digital infrastructure, new assessment tools, and specialist staff to ensure that every pound spent delivers the greatest possible impact for learners.

We are committed to transparency about the challenges ahead. The financial pressures facing the wider public sector mean that reductions in the volume of Core Education delivered will be necessary from October 2025. We anticipate a national reduction in delivery volume of around 20-25%, though this is subject to final analysis and we cannot confirm specific allocations at individual prisons. This delivery reduction applies only to Core Education contracts and does not

affect other education services such as libraries, careers advice, distance learning or vocational training delivered through industries and workshops.

The reductions cited above reflect broader funding adjustments. From October 2025, a revised funding formula will ensure fair allocation based on prison population and regional cost differences. This redistribution means that some prisons will see greater reductions, while others will see increases. These changes have been communicated, and we have been working closely with suppliers and operational leaders to prepare for the next commissioning cycle. It will be essential that governors maximise allocations and drive attendance, ensuring we can deliver the greatest possible impact from this investment.

We recognise that any reduction in the services will be challenging for staff, providers, and learners. Our priority is to protect the quality of provision and focus on the most effective interventions. The new Prison Education Service (PES) contracts set clearer expectations for screening and assessment, and support for learners with additional learning needs. New digital systems will also expand access to secure online education content and improve progress tracking. Core Education is one part of the wider rehabilitative picture, and we continue to support broader opportunities for prisoners to gain vocational skills through prison industries and workshops as well as working to expand job training opportunities both in custody and on release – including through the work of the regional Employment Councils I launched in January 2025.

Any prison education funding for future years is subject to internal budget allocations and will need to be considered alongside other competing priorities.

Impact of Skilled worker Visa Changes on Recruitment and Retention

We recognise the personal impact of recent Immigration rule changes on some colleagues in the Prison Service. We are supporting affected staff where we appropriately can, while keeping prisons safe and properly resourced. Immigration and visa status is very personal to individuals and we are working to assess the impact on each individual who currently holds limited right to work and might have been intending to seek sponsorship for a skilled worker visa. We are closely monitoring workforce movement and our recruitment pipeline. The MoJ must remain compliant with the laws applied in the UK and will continue to ensure recruitment and retention is in line with relevant laws.

We have recruitment campaigns open where there are current or anticipated vacancies, including where we are looking to expand the prison estate, with targeted interventions being developed for sites with greatest need to bolster recruitment efforts.

Prison Officer Training

We are committed to improving prison officer training. Our approach is to make some immediate improvements as well as develop a longer-term plan. In the short term, work is underway to strengthen the Foundation Programme for new prison officers. Over the next three months, nine updated modules will be implemented into the existing Foundation curriculum. These modules have been designed in close consultation with stakeholders, frontline experts, and policy leads, and will address critical areas identified through operational feedback and strategic review. The introduction of these modules will ensure new officers are equipped with the latest skills and knowledge required for modern prison environments. They will promote safer, more effective management of prisoners, improve staff confidence, and support a culture of professionalism and respect.

Overall, we are developing a curriculum that is forward-looking, resilient, and adaptable to the changing requirements of the prison service. Our aim is to ensure that the first twelve months of a prison officer's tenure are a mix of high-quality training and development. This will not only support ongoing staff development but also uphold the highest standards of safety and professionalism across our workforce. By aligning the curriculum with the recommendations from my Independent Review for Foundation Training, HMPPS will be able to take advantage of improvements in training quality and infrastructure, ensuring our officers are equipped with the skills, knowledge, capability, professionalism and confidence needed for both current and future challenges.

Next steps

I am grateful for the Committee's constructive engagement throughout the inquiry. The Government is committed to working collaboratively with the Committee to deliver meaningful reform and improve outcomes across the prison system. I look forward to the debate in the House on the report.

Yours sincerely,

Lord Timpson
Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending