



Ministry
of Justice

The Right Honourable
David Lammy MP
Deputy Prime Minister
Lord Chancellor & Secretary
of State for Justice

Andy Slaughter MP, Chair
Justice Select Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Ref: 131214

26 January 2026

Dear Andy,

VISA ARRANGEMENTS FOR PRISON OFFICERS

I am writing following my appearance before the Justice Select Committee on Tuesday 16th December. I committed to updating the Committee about collaboration with the Home Office to consider the impact of immigration reforms, and the options to ensure the safety and stability of our prisons.

Net migration has already fallen by more than two-thirds under this government. We are clear numbers must fall further as we create a migration system that is controlled and fair. However, public safety is the first duty of any Government, and we must ensure that our prisons can continue to run safely with the right level of experienced staff. For that reason, we have given a specific, time-limited exemption to Skilled Worker visa rules for the prison officer role. The Ministry of Justice does not seek to recruit overseas and, under this exemption, there is no provision for overseas recruitment. The exemption will remain in place up to 31 December 2026, with a lower salary threshold of £33,400 (subject to updates) in place until 31 December 2027. This is vital given the prison capacity crisis the Government inherited, after just 500 places were added to the prison estate in the 14 years to April 2024.

I was also asked at the Committee how many prison officers were on Skilled Worker visas. Based on internal management information that is not subject to the cleansing and quality assurance processes that would be used for publishing official statistics, we estimate that the number of prison officers sponsored by HMPPS prior to the introduction of the exemption to be in the region of 450¹. The Committee also asked about the number of officers who could be lost due to the previous Immigration Rule changes and, while we cannot give an exact figure owing to this depending on the personal circumstances of each member of staff, it is clear that the exemption that has been made will make a meaningful difference to help with the significant pressure the prison system has been under.

¹ This is an estimate only and the data could be subject to change that can result from cleansing.

We continue to take steps to bolster staffing in prisons. Work is ongoing with the Department for Work and Pensions to explore all recruitment avenues, and we have a range of different schemes and interventions in place to increase recruitment for prisons. This includes:

- A 'Prison Officer Alumni' scheme, which encourages former officers to return to the Service, bringing back their previous experience. We are currently running a proactive alumni scheme in the Long-Term High Security Estate, where we have contacted previous members of staff to enquire about them returning.
- Our Advance Into Justice scheme, which helps Armed Forces leavers, veterans, and their spouses into prison officer roles.
- First Deployment, where new recruits apply to a national campaign and will be allocated to a 'home' prison but deployed to a different site for their first 23 months of service, with additional financial incentives, helping us put staff into sites where they are most needed.
- The operational support grade to prison officer fast-track scheme, giving individuals the chance to use their previous experience in another role in a prison and take the next step in their career through a streamlined recruitment process.

In addition to these interventions, we will be launching a further burst of activity as part of the HMPPS brand campaign, 'An extraordinary job. Done by someone like you'. The brand campaign is fundamental to maintaining and growing the talent pipeline for HMPPS, both in the short and long term. In January 2026, we are launching a multi-million pound, three-month national, regional and local campaign, covering all prisons with additional support for Long Term High Security Estate prisons, using a range of paid marketing channels and media partnerships supported by our own 'no cost' social media and PR activity.

I hope this Committee finds this update helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David', followed by a long horizontal flourish.

RT HON DAVID LAMMY MP

**DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
LORD CHANCELLOR AND SECRETARY OF STATE FOR JUSTICE**