

Written evidence from Dr David Peplow, Senior Lecturer, Sheffield Hallam University

I am a researcher based at Sheffield Hallam University. My current research is looking at oral parole hearings conducted by the Parole Board (England and Wales) before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. The initial focus of the research is on the effect of the move to remotely-held hearings, as required by national and regional lockdowns.

In the course of conducting this research I have listened to various oral hearings involving prisoners serving IPP sentences. Many of these prisoners are in a desperate position, and the nature of the prison sentence that they are serving appears to have worsened their situation. This surely cannot be desirable in any criminal justice system. The prospect of release for these IPP prisoners is often so remote, and many are so far over their tariff, that many have lost all hope and therefore engage in behaviours that are, unfortunately, self-sabotaging (e.g. drug misuse, misbehaviour in prison). This creates a vicious cycle, as engaging in these antisocial behaviours means that they are not able to successfully negotiate the parole system. There are even cases in the dataset of prisoners who have developed serious drug habits whilst (and because of?) serving on an IPP sentence. Likewise, some prisoners have developed complex mental health problems over the course of their sentence.

It is clear from the dataset that many prisoners on the IPP sentence feel abandoned and forgotten. Many feel that they will never be free, because they will either remain in prison indefinitely or, if released, they will be on stringent licence conditions for a long period of time. More than anything, these prisoners need to be provided with some real sense of hope that they will be released from custody at some point. Possible options would be to offer more frequent parole hearings for IPP prisoners, changing the sentence that these prisoners are serving to a determinate sentence (this would need to be undertaken on a case-by-case basis), and reviewing the level of offence that would get IPP prisoners automatically recalled to prison should they offend whilst on licence.