

# Have you got what it takes?

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### Important facts

Prisons have a central role in protecting the public, reducing reoffending, helping offenders to reform their lives and delivering sentences of the court.

The Secretary of State for Justice is responsible for providing prison places in England and Wales under the Prisons Act 1952 (amended). The National Offender Management Service (NOMS), an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice, carries out this responsibility on his behalf. NOMS commissions (contracts) and delivers adult custodial services in England and Wales and services for offenders in the community.

There is a range of services provided in prisons such as health care, learning and skills, substance-misuse services and employment services which are commissioned by other organisations, including the Youth Justice Board and UK Borders Agency.

Prisons also play a central role in the work of a range of local, regional and national partnerships such as multi-agency protection panels (MAPPAs), local safeguarding boards, local criminal justice boards and community safety partnerships. Prisons work closely with police forces to gather and share intelligence (information) and investigate crimes. Intelligence received from prisons contributes to national, regional and local priorities including national security, serious and organised crime and integrated offender management (IOM).

### Background

There are currently 119 public sector and 14 'contracted-out' prisons in England and Wales, holding a population of 87,868 (of whom 4,226 are female). (These figures were correct on 30 March 2012.) Prisons are classed depending on the sex, age and type of offenders they hold.

The type of prison offenders are sent to depends on their crime and their sentence. The risk of harm to the public and how likely offenders are to try to escape are also important considerations.

The Justice website includes a ['Prison finder'](#) tool which allows you to search for information about any prison in England and Wales.

### Types of prisons

**Closed prisons** have a secure perimeter to stop prisoners from escaping. Prison staff control prisoners within the prison.

**Open prisons** do not have a secure perimeter and give prisoners more freedom to move around. Prisoners may have their own cell and keys or may live in dormitories. Some prisoners may be able to leave prison for a certain amount of time during the day – for example, to go to work.

**Local prisons** have a secure perimeter and hold people remanded into custody by the courts before they are sentenced, those recently sentenced and who are waiting for classification (from all security categories), or those who are serving short sentences.

**High security prisons** are for prisoners who have been given a category-A or category-B security classification.

### Changing the way offenders are managed

The Government has set out radical plans to change the approach to managing offenders and their rehabilitation. This includes only paying for what works to deliver reduced levels of crime. NOMS works very closely with the Home Office, intelligence agencies and the police to tackle the risks posed by offenders in custody and to give them opportunities to gather information. The Government is testing a range of models where providers from all sectors work together and are paid by the results they deliver. The Government is also committed to making prisons places of productive work. They should provide the discipline and challenge of a full working week. The Ministry of Justice is also committed to working with the Department of Health, to support the development and roll-out of wide-ranging liaison and diversion services for offenders with mental health, substance-misuse and other problems.

## What other partners have important roles?

The Parole Board is an independent organisation that works with its criminal justice partners to protect the public by assessing prisoners in terms of risk to decide whether they can be safely released into the community. Set up in 1968, the Parole Board's role is to make risk assessments about prisoners to decide who may safely be released into the community. For more information see <http://www.paroleboard.gov.uk/>

All prisons have an independent monitoring board (IMB). IMB members are independent, unpaid and work an average of two to three days a month. Their role is to monitor the day-to-day life in their local prison and make sure that proper standards of care and decency are maintained. For more information see <http://www.justice.gov.uk/about/imib>

The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman is appointed by the Secretary of State for Justice and is completely independent of NOMS, HM Prison Service, the Probation Service and the UK Border Agency. The Ombudsman may investigate:

- **complaints from prisoners, people on probation and people held at immigration removal centres; and**
- **deaths of prisoners, residents in premises approved by probation, and those held in immigration removal centres.**

For more information, see <http://www.ppo.gov.uk>

## What is the role of a prison?

Her Majesty's Prison Service (HMPS) is the public sector prisons provider in England and Wales. HMPS also has a number of contracted-out prisons managed and run by private companies that are commissioned by NOMS. They are managed by a contract or service level agreement (SLA) to serve the public by keeping in custody those committed by the courts, as well as reducing reoffending by helping offenders to reform their lives.

They protect the public by holding prisoners securely, reducing the risk of prisoners reoffending and providing safe and well-ordered establishments in which they treat prisoners humanely, decently and lawfully. They do this by working closely with all commissioners, local stakeholders and others in the criminal justice system to achieve common aims based on evidence-based practice and the needs of the community.

You can find more information about HMPS and the 'contracted-out' prisons on the justice website at the following links.

[www.justice.gov.uk/about/hmps](http://www.justice.gov.uk/about/hmps)

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/about/hmps/contracted-out>

You can also find more general information about prisons on the Directgov website at

<http://www.direct.gov.uk>

How is it decided which prisons prisoners should go to?

Prisoners are given a security category, based on:

- **how likely they are to try to escape;**
- **their risk of causing harm to other prisoners and prison staff; and**
- **their risk of causing harm to the public if they did escape.**

## What is a 'private' or 'contracted-out' prison?

The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) commissions custodial services from a wide market of providers. As well as prisons run by HM Prison Service, there are a number of prisons managed by private sector companies (known as 'contracted-out' prisons).

## What are the main services delivered in prisons?

NOMS has set out mandatory minimum core services expected of all prison providers. These set out what service outcomes are expected. You can find the directory of services and service specifications at [www.justice.gov.uk/about/noms/noms-directory-of-services-and-specifications](http://www.justice.gov.uk/about/noms/noms-directory-of-services-and-specifications)