



Ministry  
of Justice

## **Management Information Notice**

# **Applications and Admissions to Prison Mother and Baby Units**

Ministry of Justice

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## Introduction

This ad-hoc release presents management information on the number of applications and admissions to Mother and Baby Units (MBU) in prison establishments in England and Wales between 1 January 2013 and 31 December 2015.

It provides information on:

- **Number of applications received for admission to MBU:** the total number of applications made to Mother and Baby Units, where the count includes every application as a separate instance.
- **Number of applications approved or refused by a board:** all applications for places on MBUs are referred to an Admissions Board, which makes a recommendation to the Governor/Director of a prison with a MBU on whether a child and mother should be admitted to such a unit. Not all applications to MBUs will be approved or refused, many will not proceed for other reasons, for example due to the prisoner being released. Applications may not be assessed in the month in which they are received.
- **Number of women received into MBU:** women who have given birth while serving a custodial sentence and women who have given birth shortly before being sentenced to custody.
- **Number of babies admitted into MBU:** babies born to women in custody and babies born to women shortly before being sentenced to custody. Most babies born to women in custody will be born in an outside hospital. Figures exclude babies who are born in custody but who are taken into care or raised by family members from the point of birth and those who do not survive birth. They exclude those babies whose mothers have either not applied for an MBU place or whose application has been refused.
- As data are presented quarterly, it is possible that some women and babies may have been admitted and/or discharged from prison on more than one occasion during the period. In some cases a mother and baby may have only been admitted for a very short period, e.g., an emergency temporary admission prior to an Admissions Board that subsequently refuses full admission.
- **Number of mothers / babies in MBU at quarter end:** the total number of mother and babies residing in an MBU at the end of each reporting period.

MBU data are collected from prison establishments by means of a monthly return submitted via the National Offender Management Service Performance Hub: a secure web-based data collection and management information reporting system. Although care is taken when processing and analysing the returns, the detail collected is subject to the inaccuracies inherent in any large scale recording system.

As of July 2016, data on MBUs will be included as part of the National Offender Management Service Annual Report: Management Information Addendum. General data and commentary on prison performance metrics up to the end of 2014/15 can be found in the NOMS Management Information Addendum:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/prison-and-probation-performance-statistics-2014-to-2015>

## Background

Prison Rule 12(2) entitles the Secretary of State to permit a female offender to have her baby in prison with her subject to any conditions he sees fit. In line with this, Prison Service Instruction (PSI 49/2014) requires Governors/ Directors to ensure that procedures are in place to ask women on reception or at the earliest opportunity whether they are pregnant or have children under the age of 18 months. The National Offender Management Service in certain circumstances allows mothers to care for their babies in Mother and Baby Units (MBUs) in prison.

A MBU is a designated living accommodation within a women's prison, which enables mothers, where appropriate, to have their children with them. MBUs promote the care of babies and young children by their mother. Mothers are enabled and encouraged to have their children with them in prison during the important period of bonding and arrangements are in place to assess and admit suitable mothers. There are currently six MBUs across the women's prison estate in England and Wales which provide an overall total capacity of 64 places for mothers. However, there are a total of 70 places for babies to allow for twins.

Women who are pregnant or who have children under the age of 18 months can apply for a place on a MBU. All applications for places on MBUs are referred to an Admissions Board, which makes a recommendation to the Governor/Director of a prison with a MBU on whether a child and mother should be admitted to such a unit. The Board must be multi-disciplinary and include an Independent Chair, MBU Manager, Community Offender Manager, and have input from Local Authority Children's Services. The best interests of the child are the primary consideration, alongside the safety and welfare of other mothers and babies on the unit. The Chair must communicate the recommendation within 24 hours of the conclusion of the Board, though it is the responsibility of the Governor/Director of the prison to reach the final decision. An applicant has the right to appeal a decision not to allocate a place on an MBU, with appeals determined by the Head of the Women's Team.

Findings suggest that during the first 18 months of life the pressure of maturation tends to protect babies from low stimulation environments and development progresses normally<sup>1</sup>. However, from the age of 18 months babies may be more sensitive to the stimulation of the environment they reside in. It is for this reason that MBUs have an 18 month age limit and separations should be planned to take place prior to reaching the age of 18 months. A separation plan must be agreed for each mother and child when they arrive on the unit, setting out the care arrangements that will be initiated should the need for separation arise. This plan should be revisited whenever the woman's domestic circumstances change. Separation Boards, also chaired by an Independent Chair, are convened to consider the separation plan and to ensure that decisions about the separation process are carefully considered, appropriate and defensible.

The 18 month age limit has some flexibility in exceptional circumstances, however any final decision to admit a child after the age of 18 months to a MBU or a proposal to

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<sup>1</sup> Jiminez, J.M and Palacios, J (2003) When home is in jail: Child Development in Spanish Penitentiary Units, *Infant and Child Development*, 12, 461-474

separate a child from their mother after they have attained 18 months must be taken by the Head of Women's Team and will be decided on a case by case basis.

More information about the Prison Service Instruction (PSI 49/2014) for MBU management, guidance and applications can be found at:

<https://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/offenders/psipso/psi-2014/psi-49-2014-mother-and-baby-units.pdf>

## Summary

- There were 173 applications to a MBU in 2015 which was down 15% from 2014.
- Of those applications that resulted in a recommendation in 2015, 65% were approved and 35% were refused. This compares to 72% approved and 28% refused in 2014.
- In 2015, 69 women were received into a MBU, a decrease of 9 compared to 2014. 61 babies were admitted into a MBU during 2015, a decrease of 4 compared to the previous year.
- At the end of 2015, there were 37 mothers residing in a MBU in England and Wales and 39 babies. This is a similar level to 2014.
- During 2015, 100 babies resided in a MBU, compared with 96 during 2014. Over the same period, 107 women resided in a MBU during 2015 and 111 during 2014.

**Table 1. Mother & Baby Units (MBU) Management Information, 2013 to 2015<sup>1</sup>**

Measure	Total		
	2013	2014	2015
Number of applications received for admission to MBU	191	204	173
Number of applications approved by a board <sup>2</sup>	73	81	73
Number of applications refused by a board <sup>2</sup>	23	31	40
Number of women received into MBU	72	78	69
Number of babies admitted into MBU <sup>3,4,5,6,7</sup>	60	65	61
Number of mothers in MBU at year end	33	38	37
Number of babies in MBU at year end	31	39	39

*Source: NOMS Performance Hub*

(1) Figures are management information drawn from administrative data systems. They are provisional figures and subject to change following final quality assurance. Although care is taken when processing and analysing the returns, the detail collected is subject to the inaccuracies inherent in any large scale recording system.

(2) Not all applications to MBUs will be approved or refused, many will not proceed for other reasons. Applications may not be assessed in the month in which they are received.

(3) Data include primarily babies born to women in custody and babies born to women shortly before being sentenced to custody. Most babies born to women in custody will be born in an outside hospital.

(4) As data are presented annually, it is possible that some women/babies may have been admitted and/or discharged from prison on more than one occasion during the period.

(5) In some cases a mother and baby may have only been admitted for a very short period (e.g. an emergency temporary admission prior to an Admissions Board that subsequently refuses full admission).

(6) Figures exclude babies who are born in custody but who are taken into care or raised by family members from the point of birth and those who do not survive birth. They exclude those babies whose mothers have either not applied for an MBU place or whose application has been refused.

(7) MBU policy requires that MBUs should be available to accommodate babies up until the age of 18 months, though in exceptional circumstances the child may remain beyond 18 months.

Data by quarter are provided in the accompanying Excel workbook.

## Contact points

Press enquiries should be directed to the Ministry of Justice press office:

Tel: 020 3334 3536

Other enquiries about these statistics should be directed to:

**Kate Shaw**  
Planning and Analysis Group  
NOMS Agency  
Clive House  
70 Petty France  
London  
SW1H 9EX

General enquiries about the statistical work of the Ministry of Justice can be emailed to:  
<mailto:statistics.enquiries@justice.gsi.gov.uk>

General information about the official statistics system of the UK is available from  
<http://statisticsauthority.gov.uk/about-the-authority/uk-statistical-system>

Ministry of Justice publishes data relating to offender management in England and Wales. Equivalent statistics for Scotland and Northern Ireland can be found at:  
[www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Crime-Justice](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Crime-Justice)  
[www.dojni.gov.uk/index/statistics-research/stats-research-publications.htm](http://www.dojni.gov.uk/index/statistics-research/stats-research-publications.htm)

Alternative formats are available on request from [statistics.enquiries@justice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:statistics.enquiries@justice.gsi.gov.uk)