



Ministry
of Justice

HMPPS Digest: A Summary

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Prison Story

The average prison population in the 12 months to 31 March 2019 was 83,013 in England and Wales.

Although this remains close to the operational capacity of 84,865¹ prisoners, crowding rates in prison remain at low levels, and this year was 22.5%. The vast majority of the prison population is male, comprising 95% of the total number of prisoners across England and Wales.

Five per cent of the prison population is female, and provision can be made for women who have a child or children under the age of 18 months, or who are pregnant and due to give birth. This year, specially designed Mother and Baby Units (MBU) accommodated 60 women and 57 babies across six female estates in England and Wales.

HMPPS has a duty to implement the sentences and orders of the courts, to protect the public and to rehabilitate offenders². There are various ways a prisoner can be purposefully rehabilitated; including education, training, work and undertaking targeted accredited programmes.

Prisoners have a daily regime which might include employment and training on temporary licence outside of prison. In financial year 2018/19, 12,100 prisoners on average were employed in custody, delivering 17.1 million hours worked over the year. Average monthly net earnings per prisoner was £1,083 before the Prisoner Earnings Act (PEA) levy was applied.

On March 31st 2019, there were 37,735 staff in post. This was an increase of 2,452 staff on March 31st 2018, when a total of 35,293 were staff in post. Over the two year period from 31st March 2017 to the latest year, 4,894 extra staff were in post (32,841 staff were in post on 31st March 2017)³.

Drug finds in prisons continues to rise, and in the 12 months to March 2019, there were 18,435 incidents; an increase of 41% over the previous 12-month period.

Finds of mobile phones and SIM cards increased in the 12 months to March 2019 compared with the previous year. This year, there were 11,448 mobile phone finds and 5,377 SIM card finds, compared with 10,642 and 4,729 respectively in March 2018.

Find incidents for weapons, alcohol, tobacco and distilling equipment continue to rise. There were 5,909 finds incidents for tobacco; a percentage increase of 127% compared with the previous 12 month period. Alcohol, distilling equipment and weapons find incidents went up by 47% (6,484 incidents), 49% (444 incidents) and 37% (9,785 incidents) respectively in the 12 months to March 2019.

In the most recent year, of the 54,242 number of random mandatory drug tests performed, 17.7% were positive. This has increased in each year since March 2015, due in part to the widening scope of drugs testing and the inclusion of psychoactive substances (such as Spice), which commenced in October 2016.

¹ Useable Operational Capacity of the estate is the sum of all establishments' operational capacity less 2000 places.

² The HMPPS Annual Report and Accounts can be found here: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/720863/HMPPS_ARA_2017-18_web.pdf

³ Figures are for staff in post in Public Sector Prisons and in the Youth Custody Service.

The number of protesting incidents continues to rise year-on-year, and in the 12 months ending March 2019, there were 7,430 incidents in total. Most incidents dealt with were incidents at height, comprising 72% of the total number of incidents. 22% were barricade incidents. Hostage and concerted indiscipline incidents combined made up 6% of the total number of protesting behaviour incidents.

Prisons have a system of privileges which allows prisoners to earn privileges through good behaviour and engagement in the regime and rehabilitation. The Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) scheme must operate on at least three levels: basic, standard and enhanced. In some prisons, an entry level of IEP is given to prisoners on admission; soon after which they are progressed on to standard privileges. In the 12 months to March 2019, 4% were on an entry level IEP, 6% were on a basic level, and almost half (49%) were on standard privileges. Greater incentives are awarded if prisoners behave and perform well and this year, 41% were on an enhanced privilege level.

Escapes from prison are rare. A prisoner escapes from prison if they unlawfully gain their liberty by breaching the secure perimeter of a closed prison for 15 minutes or more, or less than 15 minutes if an offence is committed during the escape. In the 12 months to March 2019 there was 1 escape in total from prison establishments in England and Wales, compared with one escape in the previous year. In each year over the last ten years since March 2009, escape counts have fluctuated between zero and four. Since data were first published in March 2012, no prisoners were still at large in each year up until March 2019.

A prisoner escapes from an escort if they are able to pass beyond the control of escorting staff and leave the escort, the vehicle or the premises (court, hospital etc.). The number of escapes from HMPPS and contractor escorts have in recent years been low in volume, and in the year to March 2019, there were 8 escapes compared with twelve in March 2018. In the last decade since March 2009, escape counts from HMPPS and contractor escort have ranged between eight in March 2016 and 2017 to 19 in March 2009.

Absconds occur in open prison conditions. An abscond is an escape that does not involve overcoming a physical security barrier or restraint. Absconds in recent years number at much lower levels than historical counts since March 1996 (956 absconds), and totalled 120 in the latest financial year.

A temporary release failure while on release on temporary licence (ROTL) occurs when a prisoner fails to adhere to any condition written into the licence that permits their temporary release. The number of prisoners released on temporary licence was 376,343 in the 12 months to December 2018.

Over the same period, there were 543 temporary release failures. Of these, 56 failed to return to the establishment by midnight on the designated return date. In 2019, the majority of prisoners counted as failed to return surrendered after the designated return time but on the right date. These prisoners are officially recorded as late returns, and numbered 47 this year. A very small number of prisoners (9 in total) were still at large for those who were failures to return from temporary release.

Probation Story

The probation system's aim is to deliver the orders of the courts and uphold the principles of sentencing; to deter crime and to protect the public and to punish and rehabilitate offenders⁴. This is delivered through the National Probation Service (NPS) and Community Rehabilitation Centres (CRCs)⁵.

The number of offenders being supervised by the Probation Service on 31st March 2019 was 255,264⁶. The total court order caseload for offenders who were given community sentences⁷ and other sentence⁸ orders was 111,667, while 149,484 were subject to pre and post release supervision by the Probation Service. The average length of community orders and suspended sentence orders was 14.5 and 19.5 months respectively.

The primary aim of Bail Accommodation and Support Services (BASS) is to provide accommodation and support services to offenders in the community; to allow the courts and prison governors to make greater use of bail and early release Home Detention Curfew (HDC), in cases where access to suitable accommodation is not available or for those who need extra support⁹. In financial year 2018/19, there were 4,522 referrals to Bail Accommodation and Support Services (BASS). This is an increase of 2% from the same period in 2018. 86% of referrals were made by prisons, 9% by Courts and 3% by Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs). HDC referrals accounted for 78% of the total number of referrals this year.

Electronic monitoring (EM) is a way of monitoring and recording information on an individual's whereabouts or movements and can be applied to those on a Community Order, those leaving prison, or those on bail. On 31st March 2019, the total number of subjects actively monitored with an EM device and open EM order was 10,772. 50 orders were monitored using a location monitoring tag. This compares with 11,205 subjects at 31st March 2018. Court sentences (which include community or suspended sentence orders and youth orders) comprise the largest proportion of EM orders in 2019, with 45% of the caseload (4,835 orders); followed by post release orders at 29% of the caseload (3,093 orders). Bail orders and immigration orders made up 24% and 2% of the caseload (2,572 orders and 233 orders) respectively.

⁴ The HMPPS Business Plan 2018/19 contains further information on priority areas for managing offenders in the community:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/724911/HMPPS_Business_Plan_2018-19.pdf

⁵ Important changes to the way offenders on probation are managed will come into effect in 2021. The National Probation Service (NPS) will take over responsibility for all offender management.

Further information can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/justice-secretary-outlines-future-vision-for-probation>

⁶ Each person is counted only once for each type of supervision being received at the end of each quarter. Each person is counted only once in each total or sub-total even if they were subject to several types of supervision at the end of each quarter. This means that the totals and sub-totals are less than adding the sum of their parts.

⁷ Community sentences include community orders, pre CJA orders, youth rehabilitation orders and supervision default orders.

⁸ Other sentences include deferred sentence and suspended sentence orders.

⁹ The BASS contract is currently being provided by NACRO. More information about the BASS service provided can be found at: <https://www.nacro.org.uk/housing/nacro-bass/>