



# Prison Service Pay Review Body

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Naomi Long MLA  
Minister of Justice  
Minister's Office Block B  
Castle Buildings, Stormont Estate  
Ballymiscaw, Belfast, BT4 3SG

8 October 2024

Dear Minister,

## **NORTHERN IRELAND PRISON SERVICE 2024-25 PAY ROUND**

1. Thank you for your letter of 28 August, providing the written evidence from the Department of Justice for our 2024-25 pay round.
2. The Prison Service Pay Review Body (PSPRB) was pleased to learn that the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) had reached agreement with the Prison Governors' Association (PGA(NI)) and POA(NI)<sup>1</sup> on the proposals included in your evidence. The main parties coming to an agreement is a positive development and gives the opportunity for the delivery of the pay strategy that NIPS's Director General outlined in oral evidence last year. The parties have said they wish the award to be implemented and paid as quickly as possible. In light of this we are submitting this letter rather than a full report. If we were to adhere to our full planned timetable, we would have submitted our report towards the end of this calendar year. I hope that this approach will also help to bring the timing of the annual pay award process in future years closer to the position that enables pay awards to be made on time on 1 April each year.
3. I note that your activation letter of 27 March 2024 requested that we provide a report with recommendations. Given the subsequent agreement with the trade unions, I trust that you are content with this letter in its place. Despite the shortened process, we have thoroughly reviewed all of the written evidence submitted by the parties. The main omissions from our usual process are the various oral evidence sessions and preparation of a full report containing the overall detailed analysis of the position. We have also considered information as required by our standing terms of reference, including: recruitment and retention; remit group morale; labour market issues, including regional and local data, and their effects on recruitment and retention; the legal obligations placed on the Prison Service, including anti-discrimination legislation; affordability of the proposals and the funds available to the Prison Service; the Government's inflation target; and the competitiveness of the Prison Service with the private sector. We have also been informed by our visits. We set out the evidence below

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<sup>1</sup> The Professional Trade Union for Prison, Correctional and Public and Private Mental Health Service Providers (Northern Ireland).

as background and in fulfilment of the remit we were set in your letter. However, we are endorsing an agreement reached between the parties, rather than making recommendations reached as a result of a full round of evidence gathering and PSPRB consideration.

### **Agreed proposals**

4. We note that the written submissions and the agreed proposals from NIPS and POA(NI) are in line with, and appear to represent an acceleration of, NIPS's pay strategy. Taken together with our consideration of the evidence available to us, the PSPRB is able to endorse the following for uniformed grades:
  - Full alignment of the Custody Prison Officer (CPO) maximum to the pre-2002 Main Grade Officer (MGO) rate of pay;
  - Introducing higher revalorisation for Prisoner Custody Officer (PCO) and Night Custody Officer (NCO) grades to allow NIPS to begin delivery of the 'one officer' strategy;
  - Reducing the CPO pay scale to 5 points by removing the band minimum each year following implementation of the pay award;
  - Taking the same approach this year with the Supplementary Risk Allowance (SRA) as in the past number of years, including 2023-24, in that it should be aligned with the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) Transitional Allowance (NITA);
  - Introducing overtime (and public holiday) payments, which will take a phased approach from this year; and
  - Deferring the range of allowances parties were asked to provide evidence on by PSPRB until the above priorities are delivered.The parties also agreed a new pay scale for Operational Support Grades (OSG), which we endorse.
5. For governor grades, in line with the agreement reached by NIPS and PGA(NI), we endorse:
  - 4.5% pay uplift for all governor grades and the Director of Prisons; and
  - The introduction of SRA for all governor grades including the Director of Prisons at one third of the full rate.
6. All of the above to take effect from 1 April 2024, except for the uplift to the SRA which should be from 1 September 2024, as is usual. Pay tables setting out the effects of the above proposals are included at Annex A, with allowances at Annex B.

### **Pay strategy**

7. Last year, during oral evidence, NIPS's Director General outlined a two-stage pay strategy that the Service would follow:
  - Stage one (over three years):
    - Close the base pay differential between the pre-2002 MGO and CPO scales;
    - Reduce the number of CPO pay points;
    - Look to pay the SRA to pre-2002 staff when the first action above has been achieved (if pre-2002 staff opt in to the CPO scale);
    - Higher pay increases for NCO and PCO grades; and
    - An incremental approach to the introduction of enhanced overtime rates.

- Stage two (after stage one):
  - Reduce the number of officer and support grades (MGO/CPO/PCO/NCO) ideally to one main prison officer grade; and
  - Look to further reduce pay points.

### **POA(NI)**

8. While endorsing NIPS's proposals, you will be aware that, in its submission, the POA(NI) made some additional proposals. These included:
  - That there should be an increase of 6% at the top of the post-2002 MGO and CPO band maximum (rather than 5.63%) to take account of the recent increase in inflation and cost of living.
  - As the top of the post-2002 MGO and CPO scale will have overtaken the pre-2002 MGO scale, the POA(NI) considered that the pre-2002 MGO consolidated salary should be increased to match the maximum of that band.
  - That there should be a pay gap of 10% between the maximum of the post-2002 MGO and CPO scale and the minimum of the Senior Officer scale, which would put the first increment of Band 5 at £45,792.
  - That all OSGs were offered the opportunity to move to PCO/NCO or CPO grades and that, if there was any room in the budget, the award for Band 1 OSG staff should be increased.
  - As in previous years, the POA(NI) asked that pre-2002 MGOs should be paid the SRA payment in full.
  - It also asked that existing pre-2002 MGOs should be offered the opportunity to move to the new post-2002 MGO and CPO pay scale where the fully consolidated salary attracts the SRA payment, without any change to their grade or terms and conditions.
  
9. While we have considered carefully and appreciate the comprehensive written evidence provided by the POA(NI), we judge it appropriate to limit our endorsement only to those proposals that have been agreed by the parties. Not only are there affordability constraints, but to consider additional proposals outside those agreed would mean that we would have to undertake our usual full process. This would include holding oral evidence sessions and issuing a full report. We welcome the parties reaching agreement and do not want to undermine this consensus. Furthermore, embarking on a full round would cause further delay in the remit group receiving their pay award. We would welcome the POA(NI) making their case for these additional proposals as part of next year's pay round. We note that the agreed proposals represent a significant investment in the pay strategy and pay structure.

### **Visits**

10. This year we visited HMP Maghaberry, Prisoner Escorting and Court Custody Service (PECCS) Maghaberry base, and Hydebank Wood College and Women's Prison. We greatly value our visits, which give us a better understanding of the issues faced by the remit group, and appreciate staff taking the time to talk to us during our visits. Key themes we heard this year included:
  - Staff were generally content about the level of the 2023 pay award, although some said a flat cash amount was fairer and would particularly benefit the lower paid. Pre-2002 staff ranged from being unhappy with non-consolidated awards to understanding the rationale behind recommending non-consolidated payments.

- PCOs, OSGs and NCO were, however, less positive about their overall rates of pay.
- Many staff were very unhappy that they did not receive the £1,500 unconsolidated payment made to other civil servants.
- Staff agreed that the pre-2002 MGO and CPO scales should be equalised and were generally supportive of the proposal that there should be one officer grade. Staff noted that the move to one officer grade would need to be handled sensitively as there would be some staff who did not want to change roles.
- Nearly all discussion groups wanted an enhanced overtime rate and this was seen as one of the most important issues for staff. Governor grades also wanted overtime payments.
- Some staff felt that there should be an enhanced rate of pay for working on Bank/Public Holidays, particularly over Christmas and New Year.
- There was a mixed picture on morale, some said it was reasonably good, others said it was low, although there was often good camaraderie between staff working in establishments.

It is good to note that many elements of the agreement reached between the parties broadly align with the views of the staff themselves.

## **Economy**

11. Key economic data we considered included:

- Over the four quarters to Q1 2024, economic growth was 1.1% in Northern Ireland and 0.2% in the UK as a whole.
- The UK inflation rate (Consumer Prices Index) was 2.2% in July and 2.3% in April 2024 (the pay effective date). The Bank of England forecasts CPI inflation to average 2.7% in the fourth quarter of 2024 and to stay at this rate for the first half of 2025, before falling slightly.
- Despite this, employment rates remain lower in Northern Ireland at 71.6% compared to 74.5% for the UK as a whole. Economic inactivity in Northern Ireland has fallen from 29.7% at the start of 2021 to 27.1% in the second quarter of 2024. Economic inactivity for the UK as a whole rose from 21.6% to 22.2% over the same period.
- Median earnings in Northern Ireland were an average of 8.1% below the UK as a whole over 2023-24, up from 7.1% in 2022-23. In the first eight months of 2023, median earnings growth averaged 6.6% in Northern Ireland, compared to 5.9% in the UK as a whole
- Private sector median earnings were 14.6% lower in Northern Ireland than the whole UK in 2022-23, while public sector median earnings were 0.3% higher.

## **Affordability**

12. NIPS stated that the agreed proposals would represent an increase in paybill of £6.6 million (9.14%), comprising:

- £2.03m (2.82%) for progression;
- £3.5m (4.9%) for pay increases and grade restructuring;
- £0.65m (0.9%) for overtime including for four specific public and privilege holidays; and
- £0.4m (0.56%) for allowances.

We are content with the overall accuracy of these figures. However, we do not include the cost of progression in our cost calculations because progression forms part of a fully functioning pay system. This would represent an overall

increased paybill cost of 6.32%, or 3.3% of the total 2024-25 NIPS budget. We further note that your evidence states that the proposed pay bill increase is the absolute maximum of available funding and that any additional recommendations could only be funded by reducing the proposed overtime rates. We also note that the agreed proposals have not yet been approved by the Department of Finance.

### **Pay comparability**

13. We reviewed a range of pay comparison data during our deliberations. Key findings included:

- Median gross earnings for full-time workers in Northern Ireland were £32,885 in 2022-23.
- For Band 3 officer grades, the combined post-2002 MGO and CPO scale maximum was 25% above economy-wide median earnings in 2022-23.
- The Band 2 PECCS PCO (40 hours) pay range maximum was 8% below median earnings in 2022-23.
- The Band 1 OSG pay maximum was 17% below median economy-wide earnings in 2022-23.
- The PECCS PCO 2023-24 pay scale including SRA compares relatively favourably with its comparators. The maximum including SRA exceeds three of the comparator ranges and overlaps at the lower end of the Scottish Operations Officer pay range.
- For the merged Band 3 post-2002 MGO and CPO scale, the maximum including SRA is above that of all the comparators except Residential Officer (Scottish Prison Service) and Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) Police Constable.

We note that the Northern Ireland Executive and Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) has undertaken to pay all of its staff (including NIPS staff) the Living Wage Foundation's Real Living Wage.

14. On pay settlements:

- Brightmine reported that the median increase in basic pay for the 12 months to the end of July 2024 was 5.0% for the UK. The private sector median was 5.0% while the public sector median was 6.1%. These increases were the same as in the 12 months to the end of April 2024.

### **Remit group**

- There were 1,373 staff in post (headcount) or 1,344 (FTE) at 1 April 2024. This represents a 6.2% increase in headcount numbers (+6.2% FTE) from April 2023.
- In 2023-24, overtime payments totalled £3.9 million. This is an increase of 19.7% on 2022-23.
- The prison population was at record levels across the estate, with a 3% increase from 1,855 in April 2023 to in 1,914 April 2024.
- The number of recorded assaults on prison staff decreased slightly between 2022-23 and 2023-24. However, within this total Hydebank Wood and PECCS saw increases.

### **Recruitment and retention**

15. Recruitment and retention have historically not been significant issues for NIPS but there has generally been increasing turnover in recent years. In 2023-24, a

total of 68 staff left the Service (down from 97 the previous year), 35 resigned, 10 retired and 23 left for other reasons. This represents a leaving rate of 5.0%, down from 7.5% in 2022-23. After requesting its introduction for many years, we were pleased to learn that an exit interview process commenced in April 2024, to enable NIPS to identify why operational staff resign from the Service (it was expanded to cover those who retire in July). We look forward to receiving information on the findings of these interviews.

### **Motivation and morale**

16. Staff and the trade unions continue to consider motivation and morale to be low. Sickness absence can put a strain on those staff at work and have a detrimental impact on staff motivation and morale. Absence data for the 12 months to December 2023 showed an average of 25 days lost for prison grade staff, a slight decrease from 2022-23 (27 days), but still at historically high levels.
17. NIPS stated that reducing sickness absence remains a priority for the NICS and that it is implementing the NICS sickness absence and inefficiency sickness absence policies. As requested in our 2023 report, we would like to understand the impact of this approach and the plans for reducing both short- and long-term sickness absence rates, along with any identifiable trends. We note that there is a relatively high proportion of staff leaving on medical retirement and would like to better understand why and if anything is being done to try to reduce this.
18. In March this year, NIPS introduced a dedicated people survey for its staff, conducted across all NIPS business areas and sites. While the findings identify a number of challenges, it is encouraging that the survey was undertaken, and it establishes important baseline data from which the Service can measure progress. We hope that the survey will be conducted regularly to identify trends and gauge reaction to changes.

### **Community union**

19. We also received a written submission from the Community union, which is not formally recognised by NIPS. Community included around 30 proposals in its submission, which can be broadly placed in three categories: those covered by the agreements reached by the parties; those outside of the agreement but within our remit, which we can revisit in the next round; and those outside of our remit. We note that the Community union proposed, and agreed with, many elements that are covered by the proposed agreement.

### **Allowances**

20. We have endorsed the agreed proposal to defer reviewing the range of allowances parties were asked to provide evidence on for this round and have not made any recommendations to increase allowances other than the SRA. However, in our 2023 report, we noted that there were allowances in our remit for Northern Ireland which had not been reviewed for some time. We requested information from NIPS outlining what each allowance is for, who receives it, whether it still serves its purpose, and views, if any, as to changes to the amounts of these allowances. We would like to receive this information ahead of the next round for the following allowances, even if there are no proposals to change their rates: dog grooming allowance; boot allowance; clothing allowance; dirty protest payments; governor on-call allowance; and PECCS drivers' allowance.

### *Dirty protest*

21. In our 2023 report, we reviewed dirty protest payments and concluded that, given the dirty protest working conditions for staff in Northern Ireland are equally unpleasant as those for staff in England and Wales, we recommended increasing the payment to the rates that were paid in England and Wales. However, because we had planned to review these rates as part of our 2024 England and Wales report, we also undertook to review these rates in our 2024 Northern Ireland report. In the 2024 England and Wales report, we recommended that the dirty protest rate for periods of four hours or less per day was increased from £10 to £15 and for periods of over four hours per day from £20 to £30. While we understand the rationale for not increasing any allowances except for the SRA this year, we intend to revisit the Northern Ireland dirty protest payments in the next round.

### **Forward look**

22. We were pleased to learn that NIPS has been represented at a number of community events in the last year. However, we would still like to understand the outcome of any affirmative action initiatives to increase the recruitment, retention, development, and promotion of all staff from under-represented groups in the Service that it has undertaken and/or has planned. As mentioned earlier, we also look forward to the insight from staff exit surveys plus annual updates on staff sickness absence data and findings from the staff survey.
23. As the pay strategy develops, we ask that the parties consider jointly how the single grade structure will be implemented. This should include how to take into account individual preferences; differences in contracted full time hours; and ensuring that the new arrangements do not lead to unintended equality issues.
24. This year, we are endorsing an agreement reached between the parties, rather than making evidence-based recommendations. However, we look forward to further progress on the pay strategy next year and hope that the parties will again be able to agree a joint approach.

Yours sincerely



*Tim Flesher*  
*Chair, Prison Service Pay Review Body*

## Annex A: Current and recommended pay levels

### Governor grades

Current and recommended pay (£ per annum) from 1 April 2024.

#### Band 10 – Director of Prisons

Current pay scale	From 1 April 2024
95,629	99,932
94,526	98,780

#### Band 9 – Governor in Charge (Maghaberry)

Current pay scale	From 1 April 2024
92,222	96,372
91,543	95,662
90,054	94,106
88,559	92,544
87,070	90,988

#### Band 8 – Governor in Charge (other posts)

Current pay scale	From 1 April 2024
86,122	89,997
84,627	88,435
83,134	86,875
81,633	85,306
80,139	83,745

#### Band 7 – Governor Head of Function

Current pay scale	From 1 April 2024
67,461	70,497
66,440	69,430
65,426	68,370
64,406	67,304
63,385	66,237

#### Band 6 – Governor Head of Unit

Current pay scale	From 1 April 2024
60,357	63,073
59,470	62,146
58,588	61,224
57,705	60,302
56,823	59,380



## Officer, support and PECCS grades<sup>2</sup>

Current and recommended pay (£ per annum) from 1 April 2024.

### Band 5 – Senior Officer

Current pay scale	From 1 April 2024
46,969	49,317
45,608	47,888
44,612	46,843
43,616	45,797
42,621	44,752

### Band 4 – PECCS Manager (40 hours)

Current pay scale	From 1 April 2024
39,646	43,900
38,806	43,100
37,966	42,300
37,126	41,500
36,286	40,600

### Band 3 – pre-2002 Main Grade Officer<sup>3</sup>

Current pay scale	From 1 April 2024	Non-consolidated payment from 1 April 2024 <sup>4</sup>
41,072	41,072	411
40,289	40,289	403
39,906	39,906	399
39,524	39,524	395
39,146	39,146	391

<sup>2</sup> All rates shown for officer and support grades are based on a 39-hour working week, unless otherwise in brackets.

<sup>3</sup> We note that all pre-2002 MGOs are currently on the pay scale maximum.

<sup>4</sup> This non-consolidated payment is only paid to those pre-2002 MGOs who choose not to opt in to the post-2002 MGO/CPO pay scale.

### **Band 3 – post-2002 Main Grade Officer and Custody Prison Officer<sup>5</sup>**

*Any Custody Prison Officer who has not completed their Certificate of Competence by the time they have progressed to point three of the pay scale will be held on that point until the Certificate of Competence is successfully attained.*

<b>Current pay scale</b>	<b>From 1 April 2024</b>
39,273	41,483
37,131	39,829
35,632	38,176
34,460	36,523
33,288	34,870
32,116	33,217
30,945	31,564
29,773	Point removed

### **Band 2 – Night Custody Officer (44 hours)**

<b>Current pay scale</b>	<b>From 1 April 2024</b>
31,295	34,410
30,446	Point removed
29,566	32,718
28,688	31,026
27,809	Point removed

### **Band 2 – Prisoner Custody Officer (40 hours)**

<b>Current pay scale</b>	<b>From 1 April 2024</b>
28,450	31,282
27,678	Point removed
26,879	29,744
26,080	28,205
25,281	Point removed

### **Band 2 – Prisoner Custody Officer (35 hours)**

<b>Current pay scale</b>	<b>From 1 April 2024</b>
24,894	27,372
24,218	Point removed
23,519	26,026
22,820	24,679
22,121	Point removed

<sup>5</sup> Post-2002 MGO and CPO are now both on the same pay scale and therefore the separate post-2002 MGO pay scale has been removed. This group will now also include a number of pre-2002 MGOs who have opted in to this pay scale. We note that some terms and conditions may differ between the three groups of staff.

**Band 2 – Prisoner Custody Officer (30 hours)**

<b>Current pay scale</b>	<b>From 1 April 2024</b>
21,338	23,462
20,759	Point removed
20,159	22,308
19,560	21,154
18,961	Point removed

**Band 2 – Prisoner Custody Officer (20 hours)**

<b>Current pay scale</b>	<b>From 1 April 2024</b>
14,225	15,641
13,839	Point removed
13,440	14,872
13,040	14,103
12,641	Point removed

**Band 1 – Operational Support Grade**

<b>Current pay scale</b>	<b>From 1 April 2024</b>
No pay point	27,207
No pay point	26,882
25,292	26,557
24,970	Point removed
24,647	Point removed

## Annex B: Current and recommended allowance rates

Those allowances listed below are those that are changing as part of this agreement. All other allowances remain at 1 April 2023 levels which can be found in our 2023 Northern Ireland report.<sup>6</sup>

### Supplementary Risk Allowance<sup>7</sup>

Grade	Current level a year <sup>8</sup>	Recommended a year from 1 September 2024
Officer, support and PECCS grades <sup>9</sup>	3,924	NITA rate <sup>10</sup>
Governor grades <sup>11</sup>	1,308	Third of NITA rate

### Officer and support grade overtime payments (Bands 1 to 5)<sup>12,13</sup>

Period	Current level	Recommended from 1 April 2024
Weekdays	Plain time	Plain time
Weekends	Plain time	Time and a half

### Officer and support grade Bank/Public Holiday payments (Bands 1 to 5)<sup>14,15</sup>

The four Bank/Public Holiday dates that these new payments will apply to are: Christmas Day, Boxing Day, third day at Christmas<sup>16</sup> and New Year's Day.

Period	Current level	Recommended from 1 April 2024
Rostered staff	Plain time	Plain time plus half premium
Rest day staff	Plain time	Time and a half

<sup>6</sup> GOV.uk, (2023). PSPRB Fourteenth report on Northern Ireland: 2023. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/psprb-fourteenth-report-on-northern-ireland-2023#:~:text=Details,Ireland%20from%201%20April%202023>. [accessed on 7 October 2024].

<sup>7</sup> The SRA was previously only paid to post-2002 officer, support and PECCS grades, as pre-2002 staff already had a previous historical equivalent risk allowance consolidated into base pay. However, following the 2024 agreement, this has been extended to Governor grades at a third of the full rate. This allowance is non-pensionable.

<sup>8</sup> For governor grades and the Director of Prisons, the 1 September 2023 SRA rate is only payable from 1 April 2024.

<sup>9</sup> This includes all officer, support and PECCS grades in Bands 1 to 5, except for Band 3 pre-2002 MGOs who choose not to opt into the post-2002 MGO/CPO scale.

<sup>10</sup> This will be the level of the NITA as at 1 September 2024.

<sup>11</sup> This includes all Band 6 to 9 governor grades, including the Band 10 Director of Prisons.

<sup>12</sup> These payments are non-pensionable.

<sup>13</sup> Additional hours worked by staff on less than full conditioned hours of the grade will attract this payment at plain time rate only. Where a member of staff works beyond full conditioned hours for that week, the rate will be calculated on the same basis as those on full conditioned hours.

<sup>14</sup> These payments are non-pensionable.

<sup>15</sup> Rates are paid irrespective of a member of staff's conditioned hours.

<sup>16</sup> This date moves each year and will be advised by NIPS. In 2024 this falls on 27 December.