

## William Dunlop Parole Board Decision Summary

### Parole Board Decision

The Parole Board does not direct the release of William Dunlop. It does recommend to the Secretary of State for Justice that William Dunlop be transferred to open conditions.

### Offending History

On 16 November 1989 William Dunlop murdered Julie Hogg by strangling her. After her death he mistreated her body before hiding it behind the panel of the bath in her home. The body was not discovered until 5 February 1990. Thereafter William Dunlop twice stood trial for the murder. On each occasion William Dunlop gave evidence denying the offence. On each occasion the jury could not come to a decision. As has long been customary, the prosecution offered no evidence against him following the second disagreement, and William Dunlop was formally acquitted and released.

While serving a sentence of 7 years' imprisonment for offences of violence in 1999, William Dunlop admitted the murder of Julie Hogg to a prison officer. At that time, he could not be tried for the murder again, due to the double jeopardy rule, which prevented a further trial after an accused had been acquitted. However, he was charged with two offences of perjury, to which he pleaded Guilty, and received a sentence of 6 years' imprisonment in April 2000.

The law on double jeopardy changed (in large part as a result of a campaign by Julie Hogg's family), so that the Court of Appeal was later able to direct that he be tried again for murder.

William Dunlop had a relatively minor record of convictions from 1975 to 1988, which included a detention centre order, Borstal training, and prison sentences for offences of dishonesty and assault. Evidence considered by the Parole Board, set out in over 2400 pages of documents, shows that from about 1988 to 1998 William Dunlop was drinking heavily and committing numerous offences of violence, for which he was not prosecuted. He was well-known in the area where he lived, and he cultivated the notoriety that his violent behaviour brought him. As a result, many of the people he injured were frightened of him, and of the consequences of reporting him to the police.

In 1997 William Dunlop received a short sentence of imprisonment for threats to kill the new partner of his former long-term partner.

In 1998 he assaulted a woman with whom he had had a relationship, and her new partner. He received a sentence of 7 years' imprisonment for two offences against s18 of the *Offences Against the Person Act 1861*. It was during that sentence that he made the admissions that led to his convictions for perjury, and ultimately murder. He has been in prison ever since.



In 2006 William Dunlop pleaded Guilty to murdering Julie Hogg. On 6 October 2006, at the Central Criminal Court, the judge sentenced William Dunlop to life imprisonment, with a minimum term of 17 years, less time on remand, to be served before he could be considered for parole. That minimum term expired on 15 September 2021.

### Background

The Secretary of State for Justice has a duty to refer a prisoner who has served, or is approaching the end of, the minimum term of a life sentence to the Parole Board for consideration of release, or for a recommendation that the prisoner be transferred to open conditions. If the Parole Board directs release, the prisoner must be released, subject to the licence conditions directed by the Parole Board. If the Parole Board does not direct release, but does recommend a transfer to open conditions, the recommendation is not binding on the Secretary of State.

In 2019, and again in 2022, panels of the Parole Board considered references by the Secretary of State. The first panel could only consider a recommendation for open conditions, as William Dunlop had not by then come to the end of the minimum custodial term ordered by the sentencing judge as punishment for the offence. The 2019 panel did not recommend a transfer to open conditions. The 2022 panel did not direct release, but did recommend a transfer to open conditions. The Secretary of State did not accept the panel's recommendation. William Dunlop remains in custody, in closed conditions.

On 26 April 2023 the Secretary of State again referred William Dunlop's case to the Parole Board for consideration of a direction for release or a recommendation for transfer to open conditions.

### The tests the Parole Board must apply

The tests for release and for a recommendation for open conditions which the Parole Board must apply have changed since the previous panel heard William Dunlop's case.

As to release, the current test requires the Parole Board to be satisfied that, if the prisoner were no longer confined, there would be no more than a minimal risk that he or she would commit a further offence which could cause serious harm. The Board must not give a direction for release unless the Board is satisfied that it is no longer necessary for the protection of the public that the prisoner should be confined. The relevant statute contains a non-exhaustive list of factors that the Parole Board must consider when applying this test to the facts of a case.

The test for a recommendation for a transfer to open conditions requires the Parole Board to consider:

- i. all information before it, including any written or oral evidence obtained by The Parole Board.
- ii. whether the following criteria are met:
  - the prisoner has made sufficient progress during the sentence in addressing and reducing risk to a level consistent with protecting the public from harm (in circumstances where the prisoner in open conditions may be in the community, unsupervised under licensed temporary release); and
  - the prisoner is assessed as presenting a low risk of abscond.



The Parole Board must recommend a move to open conditions only where it is satisfied that the two criteria (as described at (ii) above) are met.

#### The hearings conducted by the panel

A public hearing was scheduled to take place on 25 June 2024. The hearing was adjourned on the day as Mr Dunlop appealed the grant of a Non-Disclosure Application.

The Parole Board panel that heard William Dunlop's case consisted of a judicial member of the Parole Board (that is, a retired Crown Court judge), two independent members, one of whom has current judicial experience, and a psychologist member.

On 26 and 27 November 2024 the panel conducted a two-day hearing by video link. The purpose of this hearing was to hear and consider evidence about a number of allegations that had been made against William Dunlop which had not resulted in convictions. The Supreme Court has recently<sup>1</sup> ruled on the approach the Parole Board must take to such unproven allegations. The Parole Board does not make findings of guilt: only, where it properly can, findings of fact relevant to risk. The panel considered 22 unproven allegations. It heard evidence from a senior police officer as to the documents which were relevant to the allegations, and from William Dunlop.

In respect of some allegations, it found that there was either no evidence to implicate William Dunlop, or no sufficiently reliable or persuasive evidence against him to enable the panel to take account of the allegations. In respect of others, it considered that, although it could not find the allegations proved, in assessing the risk William Dunlop presents to the public it should give some weight to the allegations. In respect of the remainder, the panel found, on the balance of probabilities, facts which the panel considered relevant to risk. The panel drew up a document entitled Facts Found, so that the witnesses, and William Dunlop, could understand the factual basis from which the panel was approaching the issues of risk.

William Dunlop accepted some of the panel's findings of fact. With others he accepted part, but not all, of the panel's findings. Some of the findings he continued to deny. Where the panel made a finding of fact, and William Dunlop denied it, that was a matter which the panel considered to be relevant to his honesty, in addition to the effect the finding itself had on the panel's assessment of risk.

The Parole Board cannot publicly discuss the Facts Found. The complainants and witnesses in the allegations are entitled to have their privacy protected, whether the panel ultimately placed weight on a particular allegation or not.

On 16 and 17 December 2024 the panel conducted a public hearing. The panel, William Dunlop, and all the witnesses except one, were together in a small room at the prison where William Dunlop is held. The hearing was relayed by video link to the public in a courtroom in London. Members of Julie Hogg's family were also able to hear and see what took place. The panel, and the advocates for the Secretary of State and for William Dunlop, could be seen on screen: the witnesses and William Dunlop himself could not. Regrettably, there were some technical problems with the link to the family.

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<sup>1</sup> *R. (Pearce) v Parole Board and another* [2023] UKSC 13



Before the public hearing, the panel, sitting in private with the legal representatives, heard and saw three members of Julie Hogg's family explain the impact of William Dunlop's offence by reading their Victim Personal Statements via a video-link. The Parole Board pays tribute to the dignity and courage shown by the family, and the way in which they made clear how devastating the murder of Julie Hogg, and the circumstances of it, were and are for them and the community.

William Dunlop's application was for release, and for the panel to consider a recommendation for open conditions if that application did not succeed.

During the hearing, in answer to a question from the panel, William Dunlop agreed with the assessment of all the witnesses that he was not ready for release. His representative formally withdrew the application for release. Although the panel is obliged, by the structure of the Secretary of State's reference, to consider release even though William Dunlop does not pursue his application for it, the panel focused for the rest of the hearing on the question of a recommendation for open conditions.

At the public hearing the panel heard evidence from the probation officer who works with William Dunlop in prison (prison offender manager, POM), the probation officer who up until recently would have been responsible for him in the community (former Community Offender Manager, COM), his current COM (by video link), the psychologist who prepared reports on him for the Parole Board, one of his keyworkers, and William Dunlop himself. All the witnesses supported a recommendation for open conditions.

Some of the evidence the panel heard could not be discussed in a public hearing. A principal concern of the panel was to protect the privacy of the complainants and witnesses in the allegations that had been the subject of the fact-finding hearing. The Parole Board does not publicly discuss the prisons where a prisoner is held, addresses where he may go if released, sensitive medical information, details of any treatments he has received and programmes he has undertaken, or the support available to him in the community. At the public hearing the panel heard some evidence on some of these topics, at least in outline.

There followed a closed hearing, which again took two days (10 January 2025 and 12 February 2025). The same witnesses gave evidence. The panel explored in detail the areas of risk and risk reduction in William Dunlop's case: his extremely serious offending history between 1988 and 1998, about which he said himself in evidence in the public hearing "I was a violent hideous unpleasant person"; his excessive drinking; his ability to lie and mislead, continuing, in the panel's view, to date in his response to some of the Facts Found; the programmes and treatment he had undertaken in custody and the effect they had had on him; when the change in him, which all the witnesses agreed had happened, took place, and why; his risk factors, his protective factors, his triggers, his ability to exercise self-control.

The panel looked closely at William Dunlop's conduct in prison, which showed a marked and consistent change for the better since 2010. Regarding honesty and openness, the panel is aware that a lack of openness does not necessarily equate with an increase in risk of serious harm. William Dunlop has fully admitted his most serious offence, the murder of Julie Hogg.



William Dunlop has worked extensively over the years on the factors that led to his offending. He has shown he is able to address and replace many negative beliefs and attitudes with better ways of thinking. Overall, he has a very much improved understanding of himself and the world around him. The panel is satisfied that he could not have maintained the behaviour he has shown since 2010 unless there had been a very substantial change in his degree of self-knowledge and self-control.

Throughout all the hearings both the Secretary of State and William Dunlop were legally represented. The legal representatives asked questions of the witnesses, including William Dunlop, and made submissions to the panel. The Secretary of State did not make any representations as to whether William Dunlop satisfied the criteria for a recommendation for a transfer to open conditions.

### Conclusion

After considering all the evidence, the panel concluded that William Dunlop did not pass the test for release, and must, for the protection of the public, remain in custody. However, the panel did recommend to the Secretary of State for Justice that William Dunlop be transferred to open conditions. The panel was satisfied that William Dunlop has made sufficient progress during the sentence in addressing and reducing risk to a level consistent with protecting the public from harm (in circumstances where in open conditions he may be in the community, unsupervised under licensed temporary release); and William Dunlop is assessed as presenting a low risk of abscond.

It is now for the Secretary of State for Justice to decide whether to accept the Parole Board's recommendation for open conditions.

