



Prison Service  
Pay Review Body

# Prison Service Pay Review Body

Twenty-Fifth Report on  
England and Wales 2026

*Chair:* Tijs Broeke



Prison Service Pay Review Body

# **Twenty-Fifth Report on England and Wales 2026**

Presented to Parliament  
by the Prime Minister and the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for  
Justice by Command of His Majesty

March 2026



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## **Prison Service Pay Review Body**

### **Standing terms of reference**

The role of the Prison Service Pay Review Body is to provide independent advice on the remuneration of governing governors and operational managers, prison officers and support grades in the England and Wales Prison Service. The Review Body will also provide independent advice on the remuneration of prison governors, prison officers and support grades in the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

In reaching its recommendations the Review Body is to take into account the following:

- The need to recruit, retain and motivate suitably able and qualified staff taking into account the specific needs of the Prison Service in England and Wales and the Northern Ireland Prison Service;
- Regional/local variations in labour markets and their effects on the recruitment and retention of staff;
- Relevant legal obligations on the Prison Service in England and Wales and the Northern Ireland Prison Service, including anti-discrimination legislation regarding age, gender, race, sexual orientation, religion and belief and disability;
- Government policies for improving the public services, including the requirement to meet Prison Service output targets for the delivery of services;
- The funds available to the Prison Service in England and Wales and the Northern Ireland Prison Service as set out in the Government's departmental expenditure limits; and
- The Government's inflation target.

The Review Body shall also take account of the competitiveness of the Prison Service in England and Wales with the private sector, and any differences in terms and conditions of employment between the public and private sectors taking account of the broad employment package including relative job security.

The Review Body may also be asked to consider other specific issues.

The Review Body is also required to take careful account of the economic and other evidence submitted by the Government, staff and professional representatives and others.

Reports and recommendations for the Prison Service in England and Wales should be submitted to the Prime Minister and the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice. Reports and recommendations for the Northern Ireland Prison Service will be submitted to the Minister of Justice, Northern Ireland.

The members of the Prison Service Pay Review Body (PSPRB) are:

Tijs Broeke (*Chair*)

Mary Carter

Luke Corkill

Nigel Cotgrove

Peter Dawson CBE

Roy Grant

Mark Hamilton OBE

Raj Jethwa

Professor Ken Mayhew

The secretariat is provided by the Office for the Pay Review Bodies.

### **The International Labour Organization 336<sup>th</sup> Report of the Committee on Freedom of Association**

The POA<sup>i</sup> took a complaint to the International Labour Organization (ILO) in August 2004, alleging that legislation deprived prison officers of the right to take industrial action and that they did not enjoy adequate compensation guarantees to protect their interests in the absence of the right to strike. In its 336<sup>th</sup> Report of the Committee on Freedom of Association (March 2005) the ILO noted that the POA saw the PSPRB as an inadequate compensatory mechanism because it had no powers to make binding recommendations, only to report and recommend, and there was no duty on the Minister to implement the award promptly or at all.

The Government stated that the establishment of the PSPRB in England and Wales, and Northern Ireland was inextricably linked to the introduction of voluntary agreements in that the Prison Service gave up the right to set pay increases in exchange for the POA's agreement not to organise industrial action. The Government stated that recommendations of the PSPRB are not binding in law, but in practice they would only be departed from in exceptional circumstances and are complied with in practice.

The Committee recommended that the Government continued to ensure that the awards of the PSPRB are binding on the parties and may be departed from only in exceptional circumstances.

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<sup>i</sup> The Professional Trade Union for Prison, Correctional, Public and Private Mental Health Trust Services Providers and Immigration Services.

# Contents

Glossary of terms	xi
His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service in England and Wales and our remit group	xiii
Prison Service Pay Review Body 2026 Report on England and Wales – Executive Summary	xiv
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
Our role	1
Outcome of our last report	2
Our remit this year	2
Our timetable	3
Our evidence base	3
Visits	4
Our 2026 Report	4
<b>Chapter 2: Context and evidence</b>	<b>5</b>
Introduction	5
Context	5
<i>Current policy/operations</i>	5
<i>Prison population</i>	5
<i>His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons annual report</i>	6
<i>Safety in custody</i>	7
Economic context	9
<i>Economic activity</i>	9
<i>Inflation</i>	10
<i>Employment and earnings</i>	10
<i>National Living Wage</i>	12
<i>Household income</i>	12
Financial context	12
<i>Affordability</i>	12
The composition of our remit group	13
<i>Staff numbers</i>	13
<i>Staff characteristics</i>	14
<i>Two-tier pay structure</i>	16
Allowances	16

Recruitment and retention	17
<i>Recruits and conversions to officer</i>	18
<i>Leaving rates</i>	19
<i>Reasons for leaving</i>	20
<i>Resignation rates</i>	21
<i>Leavers by length of service</i>	23
<i>Staff by length of service</i>	25
Locality pay and market supplements	26
Pay comparability	27
<i>ASHE analysis</i>	27
<i>Comparator analysis</i>	31
Motivation and morale	35
<i>Civil Service People Survey</i>	35
<i>POA survey</i>	35
<i>Rademaker Review into HMPPS Professional Standards</i>	36
<i>Sickness absence</i>	37
<b>Chapter 3: The parties' submissions and proposals</b>	<b>39</b>
Introduction	39
His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service	39
His Majesty's Treasury	43
POA	44
Prison Governors' Association	47
Public and Commercial Services Union	50
Criminal Justice Workers Union	52
Evidence from visits	52
<b>Chapter 4: Our recommendations on pay</b>	<b>57</b>
Introduction	57
Pay award	57
<i>Bands 3 to 12 pay award</i>	57
<i>Band 2 pay award</i>	59
<i>Pay structures</i>	60
<i>Closed grades</i>	60
Opting in to Fair and Sustainable	61
Pay progression	61
<i>Support and officer grades</i>	61
<i>Operational managers</i>	62

Locality pay	63
<i>Market supplements</i>	63
Allowances and payments	64
<i>Fair and Sustainable on-call allowances</i>	65
<i>Payment Plus</i>	66
<i>Unsocial working hours</i>	68
<i>Supplementary Risk Allowance</i>	69
<i>Operational Support Grade overtime</i>	69
<i>Operational Response and Resilience Unit on-call allowance</i>	70
<i>Physical Education Instructors</i>	71
<i>Dog trainers</i>	71
<i>Care and Maintenance of Dogs allowance</i>	72
<i>Voluntary duties and specialisms</i>	72
<i>Other allowances and payments</i>	73
Performance management	73
Cost of our recommendations	74
<b>Chapter 5: Forward look</b>	<b>75</b>
Introduction	75
Our timetable	75
<i>Two year pay settlement</i>	75
Our remit and its scope	75
Workforce strategy	76
<i>Staff resourcing plan</i>	76
<i>Sickness absence</i>	77
Equality and diversity	77
Flexible working	77
Allowances	78
<i>Recommendation 14 from our 2024 Report</i>	78
<i>Rolling review of allowances 2027</i>	78
<i>Payment Plus</i>	79
<i>Physical Education Instructor recruitment and retention payment</i>	79
<i>Operation Tornado payments</i>	79
Summary of requests for specific information for our 2027 Report	79
Conclusion	80

## ***Appendices***

<b>A:</b> Transcript of the Minister's activation letter	83
<b>B:</b> Transcript of correspondence between the PSPRB and Minister regarding the activation letter, written evidence delays and round timetable	85
<b>C:</b> Correspondence from the Minister on skilled worker visa change exemptions and the HMPPS market supplement review	89
<b>D:</b> Visits and discussion groups held in 2025	91
<b>E:</b> Current and recommended pay levels	92
<b>F:</b> Legacy Locality Pay Allowance rates	103
<b>G:</b> Allowances and payments	104
<b>H:</b> Rolling review programme for Prison Service staff allowances and payments	106
<b>I:</b> Summary of recommendations from the 2025 England and Wales report	107
<b>J:</b> Summary of PSPRB headline pay award recommendations from 2014 to 2024	108

## Glossary of terms

ACH	Additional Committed Hours
ACHP	Pensionable Additional Committed Hours
ASHE	Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings
AWDL	Average Working Days Lost
CJWU	Criminal Justice Workers Union
Covid-19	Coronavirus
CPI	Consumer Prices Index
CPIH	Consumer Prices Index including owner occupiers' housing costs
CPO	Custody Prison Officer (Northern Ireland)
FTE	Full-time equivalent
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HMIP	His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons
HMP	His Majesty's Prison
HMPPS	His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (or the Prison Service)
HMT	His Majesty's Treasury
HMYOI	His Majesty's Young Offender Institution
IDR	Incomes Data Research
ILO	International Labour Organization
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LPA	Locality Pay Allowance
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
NHS	National Health Service
NHSE	National Health Service England
NIPS	Northern Ireland Prison Service
NLW	National Living Wage
OBR	Office for Budget Responsibility
ONS	Office for National Statistics
OPRB	Office for the Pay Review Bodies
ORRU	Operational Response and Resilience Unit
OSG	Operational Support Grade
PAVA	Pelargonic acid vanillylamide spray (a form of pepper spray)
PCS	Public and Commercial Services Union
PEI	Physical Education Instructor
PGA	Prison Governors' Association
POA	The Professional Trade Union for Prison, Correctional, Public and Private Mental Health Trust Services Providers and Immigration Services
PSPRB	Prison Service Pay Review Body
RHA	Required Hours Addition/Allowance
SANEO	Shaping a New Employee Offer
SPS	Scottish Prison Service
SRA	Supplementary Risk Allowance (Northern Ireland)

TOIL	Time off in lieu
TUPE	Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006
UWH	Unsocial Working Hours allowance
YCS	Youth Custody Service
YOI	Young Offender Institution

## His Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service in England and Wales and our remit group

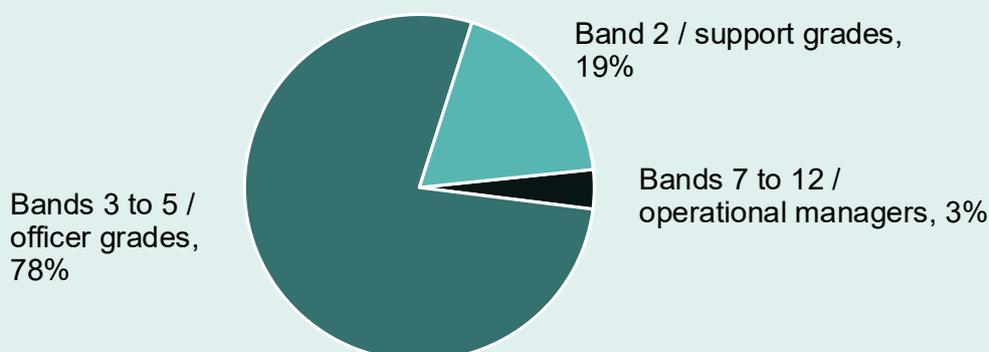
His Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) is responsible for adult and young offender management services for England and Wales within the framework set by the Government. It is an Executive Agency of the Ministry of Justice. The agency currently manages His Majesty’s Prison Service and the Probation Service. In addition, it oversees privately run prisons and services such as the prisoner escort service and electronic tagging. Its role is to commission and provide offender management services in the community and in custody, ensuring best value for money from public resources. It works to protect the public and reduce reoffending by delivering the sentences and orders of the courts and supporting rehabilitation by helping offenders to reform their lives.

At 19 January 2026, the prison population across the public and private sector was 86,936, a 1.0% increase from the previous year.<sup>ii</sup>

HMPPS’s paybill costs relating to the remit group were approximately £1.66 billion for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 (including employer National Insurance and pension costs).

At the end of September 2025 there were 28,905 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff in our remit group, a 4.5% decrease from the previous year. The composition is below.

### Our remit group (FTE staff) in England and Wales, at 30 September 2025<sup>iii</sup>



Grade	FTE staff	% of remit
Bands 7 to 12 / operational managers	983	3%
Bands 3 to 5 / officer grades	22,534	78%
Band 2 / support grades	5,388	19%

<sup>ii</sup> MoJ, (2026). *Prison population: weekly estate figures 2026. Population bulletin: weekly 19 January 2026.* (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prison-population-weekly-estate-figures-2026> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

<sup>iii</sup> OPRB analysis of unpublished HMPPS data.

# Prison Service Pay Review Body 2026 Report on England and Wales

## Executive Summary

This report sets out our recommendations on pay and allowances for operational prison staff. Our recommendations for 2026 are:

**Recommendation 1:** We recommend that from 1 April 2026, the Fair and Sustainable National Band 3 to 12 base pay points and spot rates are increased by 3.5%, as set out in Appendix E. This award to be consolidated and pensionable.

**Recommendation 2:** We recommend that from 1 April 2026 the Fair and Sustainable National Band 2 base pay spot rate be increased by 3.5% as set out in Appendix E. This should be in addition to the National Living Wage increase that Band 2 staff are due to receive on 1 April 2026. This award to be consolidated and pensionable.

**Recommendation 3:** We recommend that from 1 April 2026, those closed grade staff who would not financially benefit from opting in to their equivalent Fair and Sustainable grade receive a non-consolidated, non-pensionable payment of 3.5% of base pay.

**Recommendation 4:** From 1 April 2026, we recommend that the relevant closed grade pay rates are compliant with the National Living Wage.

**Recommendation 5:** We recommend that from 1 April 2026 all closed grade staff who choose to opt in this year be moved to the maximum of their respective Fair and Sustainable grade pay range or scale. The opt in process should be expedited to start as close as possible to the publication date of this report.

**Recommendation 6:** We recommend that all staff (except those subject to formal poor performance procedures) on Fair and Sustainable Bands 3 and 5 who are in post on 31 March 2026 progress by one pay point, effective from 1 April 2026.

**Recommendation 7:** We recommend that all staff (except those subject to formal poor performance procedures) on Fair and Sustainable Bands 8 to 11 who are in post on 31 March 2026 receive a consolidated and pensionable progression increase of 3 $\frac{1}{3}$ %, capped at the 1 April 2026 band maximum.

**Recommendation 8:** We recommend that from 1 April 2026, the fixed cash pay differentials for the Fair and Sustainable Inner and Outer London zones be increased by 3.5% and continue to be applied consistently across all bands, positioning maxima at £5,218 and £3,432 respectively above the 37 hour National maxima. We also recommend adjusting minima and intermediate points so that progression steps are the same percentage as on the National bands. The increases to be consolidated and pensionable.

**Recommendation 9:** We recommend that from 1 April 2026 the hourly rate for Payment Plus be increased by £1 to £23 per hour.

**Recommendation 10:** We recommend that the Unsocial Working Hours payment for Fair and Sustainable Band 2 Operational Support Grades be maintained at 25% of base pay for all contracted hours until our 2027 Report has been published.

**Recommendation 11:** We recommend that the temporary, non-consolidated and non-pensionable payment of £1,500 a year for qualified Physical Education Instructors, working in a recognised Physical Education Instructor role be maintained until our 2027 Report has been published.

**Recommendation 12:** We recommend that from 1 April 2026, the Care and Maintenance of Dogs allowance be increased by 3.5% to £2,945 a year to those with responsibility for a single dog. We further recommend that the rate for multiple dogs is set at 25% above the single dog allowance rate.

## Introduction

- i. The Prison Service plays a crucial role in keeping communities safe, with staff working in a challenging environment with continuing prison population pressures and increasing levels of violence. While the number of prisoners rose since our last report, staff numbers in the remit group fell by 4.5% and there may be further challenges ahead given the changes in the skilled worker visa rules. There is no room for complacency. We believe the recommendations in this report strike a balance between a difficult affordability position and the need to meet required staffing levels both now and in the future. This year we have chosen to focus on the headline award as it benefits staff at all grades, is enduring and consolidated.

## 2026 headline pay award

- ii. Our headline pay recommendation is for an **increase of 3.5%**. The main factors driving this recommendation are:
  - Recruitment appears to have relied heavily on overseas applicants in recent years. Given changes to the skilled worker visa rules, the Prison Service will not be able to rely as heavily on recruiting staff from overseas. Therefore, looking to the future, there needs to be a sustainable pipeline of applicants from the United Kingdom especially given the level of vacancies and the planned expansion of the prison estate;
  - Retention remains fragile with considerable numbers of staff still leaving the Service within their first 24 months of joining;
  - Following gains in recent years, we want to maintain the relative labour market position of all staff in our remit group;
  - The need to balance the above with the constraints of affordability in difficult economic circumstances;
  - Staff morale at all levels continues to be, at best, mixed;

- Unlike the remit groups for most other Pay Review Bodies and those in the labour market more widely, over 80% of our remit group cannot take any form of industrial action;
  - Whilst falling, expenditure on Payment Plus remains at a relatively high level;
  - Although inflation is projected to fall, higher inflation since our last report has meant that staff continue to face cost of living pressures; and
  - His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) continues to use market supplements at some sites and relies on costly detached duty to ensure that certain establishments are able to function.
- iii. As stated in our previous reports, we do not think that there should be a formal link with the National Living Wage (NLW) for Band 2 staff, given their key responsibilities and the critical role they play in the safe and effective running of prisons. We therefore recommend that Band 2 staff receive the same overall headline award of 3.5% as all other staff in our remit, in addition to the NLW increase that will take effect from 1 April 2026.

### **Closed grades**

- iv. At the time of writing, over 99% of our remit group were on the Fair and Sustainable pay structure. For the dwindling group of staff who would not benefit financially from opting in to Fair and Sustainable, we continue with our previous approach and recommend a non-consolidated payment of 3.5% of base pay.

### **Pay progression**

- v. We make recommendations on progression for staff in Fair and Sustainable Bands 3, 5 and 8 to 11 as they do not have contractual pay progression. We agree with HMPPS's objective that staff progress to the maximum within three years as they become fully competent in post. We recommend that all staff (except those subject to formal poor performance procedures) on Fair and Sustainable Bands 3 and 5 who are in post on 31 March 2026 receive a consolidated and pensionable progression increase of one pay point and for Bands 8 to 11 progression of 3½%, capped at the 1 April 2026 band maximum.

### **Locality pay**

- vi. As in previous years, we make no recommendations on the legacy Local Pay Allowance rates. We also conclude that to maintain the differential of National to London rates, the Inner and Outer London cash differentials should be increased by the headline award.

### **Allowances and payments**

- vii. Under our programme of rolling reviews of allowances, for this report we considered Fair and Sustainable on-call allowances. We also considered Payment Plus and continued to receive information in relation to unsocial hours payments and Operational Support Grade (OSG) overtime.
- viii. The evidence that we received on **on-call allowances**, including expenditure data from HMPPS, suggests that these allowances are little used and that, when they are

used, there is no shortage of volunteers. Therefore, we conclude that Fair and Sustainable on-call allowances should not be changed this year.

- ix. Any increase in **Payment Plus** would be expensive and we do not want this to come at the cost of a lower headline award. However, we wanted to ensure that no Band 3 staff working Payment Plus hours would be paid less than their single hourly rate. So, while we await the completion of the HMPPS review into the operation, scope, and uptake of Payment Plus which is due later in 2026, we have decided as an interim measure to recommend an increase of £1 to the hourly rate of Payment Plus, bringing it to £23 per hour. We will undertake our full review of Payment Plus in our 2027 Report, once we have the results of HMPPS's review.
- x. Ahead of this round we received data from HMPPS regarding Band 2 **unsocial hours**. We think this data more than justifies our previous recommendation to increase the Unsocial Working Hours (UWH) payment to 25% of base pay for Band 2 OSGs for two years. Following discussion with the POA, HMPPS agreed to undertake a review of night working in prisons to try to identify the reasons for the high levels of unsocial hours worked and potential ways to address this. As we will review UWH payments for *all* staff in our remit group in our 2027 Report, we do not recommend any changes to these payments this year. However, in case publication of our 2027 Report is delayed, we recommend that the UWH payment for Fair and Sustainable Band 2 OSGs be maintained at 25% of base pay for all contracted hours, until the 2027 Report has been published.

### **Cost of our recommendations**

- xi. We estimate that our recommendations will result in an increase of approximately £59.9 million to the total paybill for our remit group, excluding pay progression and the statutory requirement to pay the NLW. This equates to around 1% of HMPPS's £7.5 billion annual budget for operating expenditure as of 2024-25. This estimate does not include the cost of closed grade staff opting in to Fair and Sustainable, because we cannot know precisely which staff on other pay/allowance arrangements would financially benefit from opting in. As we have set out in previous reports, we do not include the cost of performance awards or pay progression when calculating the cost of the annual pay award.

### **Looking ahead**

- xii. We welcome the continued efforts to administer the pay round in a timely fashion, allowing us to submit our 2026 Report in February this year. We hope that the government will submit its evidence on time for our 2027 Report so that our remit group will receive their pay award in their April 2027 pay.

### **Conclusion**

- xiii. Prison Service staff deliver a vital service 24 hours a day, every day of the year. While we welcome moves to reduce pressures on the prison estate, a fully trained and engaged workforce is equally vital for the medium- and long-term sustainability of the Prison Service and wider criminal justice system. Our recommendations are aimed at helping to deliver that positive future, and we look forward to working with all the parties to continue this important work.

Tijs Broeke (*Chair*)  
Mary Carter  
Luke Corkill  
Nigel Cotgrove  
Peter Dawson CBE  
Roy Grant  
Mark Hamilton OBE  
Raj Jethwa  
Professor Ken Mayhew

26 February 2026

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Our role

- 1.1 The Prison Service Pay Review Body (PSPRB) was established under statute<sup>1</sup> in 2001, with a remit to examine and report on matters relating to the rates of pay and allowances to be applied in the public sector prison services in England and Wales and in Northern Ireland. The staff in our remit group perform an extremely important and sometimes dangerous role.
- 1.2 The PSPRB was created as a compensatory mechanism for most of our remit group's loss of the right to take industrial action of any form. This was outlined in the 336<sup>th</sup> report<sup>2</sup> (2005) of the International Labour Organization (ILO), in which the Government gave a clear and unequivocal commitment only to depart from our recommendations in "exceptional circumstances" and agreed that our recommendations would be complied with in practice.
- 1.3 As we have noted in our previous reports, Ministers of State for Justice have routinely reaffirmed the Government's pledge to the ILO in oral evidence to us. It is this pledge that places a particular responsibility on the PSPRB, which we take very seriously when formulating our recommendations. If the Government rejects any of our recommendations, we expect the remit group to receive a full explanation of the "exceptional circumstances" that led to the rejection.
- 1.4 We have standing terms of reference which outline that we should provide independent advice based on the relevant evidence available to us. We have taken account of these terms of reference in making our recommendations to Government, including:
  - Recruitment and retention factors. For example, whether the Prison Service can recruit and retain the numbers of suitably able staff that it requires;
  - Remit group morale;
  - Labour market context, including regional and local issues, and their effects on recruitment and retention;
  - The legal obligations placed on the Prison Service, including anti-discrimination legislation;
  - Affordability of our proposals and the funds available to the Prison Service;
  - The Government's inflation target;

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<sup>1</sup> The Prison Service (Pay Review Body) Regulations 2001 (SI 2001 No. 1161). (online) Available at: [http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2001/1161/pdfs/ukxi\\_20011161\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2001/1161/pdfs/ukxi_20011161_en.pdf) [accessed on 19 February 2026]. The PSPRB covers England and Wales, and Northern Ireland; the Scottish Prison Service is outside our remit.

<sup>2</sup> The ILO, (2005). *336th Report of the Committee on Freedom of Association*. (online) Available at: [https://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/P/09604/09604\(2005-88-series-B\).pdf](https://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/P/09604/09604(2005-88-series-B).pdf) [accessed on 19 February 2026].

- The competitiveness of the Prison Service with the private sector, taking account of differences in terms and conditions and the broader employment package; and
- The economic and other evidence submitted by the Government, trade unions, staff, professional associations, and others.

## Outcome of our last report

- 1.5 Our 2025 Report was submitted to the Government on 9 April 2025. A Written Ministerial Statement<sup>3</sup> in Parliament on 22 May 2025 confirmed that our recommendations had been accepted in full. Our recommendations were implemented in summer 2025 and backdated to 1 April 2025.
- 1.6 Last year saw us recommend a headline 4% consolidated award for all Fair and Sustainable staff in Bands 2 to 5 and 7 to 12 (for Band 2 this was in addition to the National Living Wage increase). We made a non-consolidated award of 4% for those closed grades who would not find it financially beneficial to opt in to the Fair and Sustainable pay structure. The pay ranges for Bands 8 to 11 were reduced in length by half. We also increased the Operational Response and Resilience Unit (ORRU) on-call and the Care and Maintenance of Dogs allowances, along with the introduction of a temporary annual recruitment and retention payment for Physical Education Instructors (PEIs) and a temporary increase for two years to Band 2 Unsocial Working Hours payments, from 20% to 25% of base pay.

## Our remit this year

- 1.7 As part of the 2025 Spending Review,<sup>4</sup> the Government noted that it was committed to delivering fair and timely pay awards for public sector workforces over the Spending Review period. It also said that pay awards would need to be funded within departmental settlements, with individual departments setting out affordability positions for each pay review body. The Government said there would be no access to the reserve to fund higher than budgeted for public sector pay awards. If required, any additional funding would need to come from within departmental budgets through offsetting savings or productivity gains elsewhere. The Government also stated that it would not allow departments to meet additional funding pressures by transferring funds from Capital Departmental Expenditure Limits to Resource Departmental Expenditure Limits budgets. The Ministry of Justice's departmental expenditure limit would increase by £15.6 billion by 2028-29, equivalent to an annual average real terms growth rate of 3.1% from 2023-24 to 2028-29. His Majesty's Treasury's (HMT) economic evidence<sup>5</sup> to all eight public sector pay review bodies in December 2025 repeated the position that pay awards had to be affordable and within agreed departmental budgets, with no additional funding being available.

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<sup>3</sup> UK Parliament, (2025). *MoJ: Judiciary and Prison Officers Workforce. Statement made on 22 May 2025.* (online) Available at: <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2025-05-22/hcws665> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

<sup>4</sup> HMT, (2025). *Spending Review 2025 document.* (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spending-review-2025-document> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

<sup>5</sup> HMT, (2025). *Economic Evidence to the Pay Review Bodies 2026-27 Pay Round.* (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/economic-evidence-to-the-pay-review-bodies-2026-27-pay-round/economic-evidence-to-the-pay-review-bodies-2026-27-pay-round> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

1.8 We received our activation letter (transcript at Appendix A) on 22 July 2025 from Lord Timpson, Minister of State for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending asking us to commence our 2026-27 pay round. Again, our remit contained no restrictions but emphasised that the pay settlement must be funded from the departmental budget and that no additional funding would be made available. The letter reiterated the Government's objective of providing mission-led public services that are equipped to deliver vital, high-quality services efficiently, whilst ensuring value for money for taxpayers. Our response confirming our timetable for submission of this report is at Appendix B.

### **Our timetable**

1.9 As we have noted in many of our previous reports since 2016, our timetable has routinely run late due to various Government delays. This has resulted in staff receiving their pay awards well after the 1 April implementation date. This is unacceptable and undermines faith in the pay review body process, a position we have made clear repeatedly. Last year, our timetable advanced by several months, although this still resulted in the late publication (on 22 May 2025) of our 2025 Report. This year we proposed to all the parties a timetable that would: get the pay cycle back on track; require evidence from the parties to be submitted by the end of September 2025; see our report submitted in mid-February 2026; and publication being able to be made prior to April 2026. However, His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) submitted its written evidence a month late, meaning the earliest we have been able to submit this report is the end of February 2026. We therefore ask the Government to make a prompt decision on our recommendations, to ensure staff receive their pay award as close to the April 2026 pay date as possible. Next year, we hope not to be delayed once again by the late receipt of the evidence from the Government.

### **Our evidence base**

1.10 All the recognised parties representing staff in our remit group were invited to submit evidence following receipt of the Minister's activation letter, and we received written submissions from them all. We also heard representations in oral evidence from:

- Lord Timpson, the Minister of State for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending, and HMPPS officials led by its Director General Chief Executive Officer, James McEwen;
- The POA, represented by Mark Fairhurst, National Chair, Steve Gillan, General Secretary, Dave Todd, Vice National Chair and Mick Pimblett, Deputy General Secretary;
- The Prison Governors' Association (PGA), led by Tom Wheatley, PGA President, Carl Davies and Mark Icke, PGA Vice Presidents; and
- The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) Union, represented by Nigel Wharrier, PCS HMPPS Branch Vice Chair and Sheila Pevely, PCS Full-Time Officer.

1.11 Each year we base our recommendations on evidence from a range of sources. These include:

- Written and oral evidence from the parties (as above);

- Economic data from a number of sources, including the Office for National Statistics, HMT and the Office for Budget Responsibility;
- Statistical data provided by HMPPS on the composition of our remit group and its pay, which we shared with all the recognised parties, along with publicly available data published on its website;
- Annually updated pay comparability data based on the methodology of a 2019 report commissioned from Incomes Data Research;
- The results of a new, independent pay comparability exercise (to be published following publication of this 2026 Report);
- Information gathered during our 2025 prison visits (see paragraph 1.12 below);
- Information on recruitment and retention from HMPPS; and
- His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) inspection reports and the HMIP 2024-25 annual report.

## **Visits**

- 1.12 This year, we were pleased to undertake in-person visits to nine public sector establishments and one private sector establishment, along with four virtual discussion groups: one with Band 12 staff; one with ORRU staff; and two with PEIs (the full list is at Appendix D). In Chapter 3 we discuss in more detail the evidence from our visits and what staff told us. The key themes we heard this year related to: feedback on the main pay award including the ongoing cost of living challenges; difficulties around recruitment and retention and, despite a better staffing position, an inexperienced staff group; levels of motivation and morale being felt to be poor; an increase in violent incidents; issues around overseas prison officer recruits, including visas; and the significant pressures the Service was facing in many areas, particularly population pressures.
- 1.13 Our annual visit programme remains an important and integral part of our process, enabling us to engage directly with our remit group to gain valuable insights into their experiences of working in prisons, which also allows us to test the evidence provided by the parties. We are grateful to those staff who took the time and volunteered to speak with us and to those staff who made the practical arrangements.

## **Our 2026 Report**

- 1.14 In Chapter 2 we look at the context and environmental evidence, along with staffing data, with Chapter 3 covering the parties’ submissions and proposals, including the evidence from our visits. Our analysis of the evidence and our recommendations for 2026 are in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5 we comment on those areas to which we think the parties should give greatest attention for our 2027 Report, along with additional information and data requests.

## Chapter 2: Context and evidence

### Introduction

- 2.1 This chapter sets out the context for our recommendations together with the evidence that underpins them. It gives a picture of the economic situation and the composition of our remit group, and outlines the situation on recruitment, retention, pay comparability, morale and motivation, which necessarily inform our deliberations.

### Context

#### *Current policy/operations*

- 2.2 The Prison Service and our remit group have continued to face significant challenges, particularly regarding prison population pressures. In its submission, His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) told us that between February 2023 and September 2024, the adult male prison estate operated at over 99% of capacity and it has remained close to this level since. Much of the prison estate is ageing and dilapidated, requiring major repair and replacement. Schemes aiming to manage the situation have been introduced in a number of tranches since then, including changing the automatic release point for some offenders from 50% to 40% of sentence, changes to the recall mechanism, changes to curfew arrangements and removing foreign national offenders more quickly. Longer-term measures were included in the 10 Year Capacity Strategy, published in December 2024. Additionally, the Sentencing Bill was introduced on 2 September 2025 to take forward recommendations from the Independent Sentencing Review.

#### *Prison population*

- 2.3 The prison population across the public and private sectors at 19 January 2026,<sup>6</sup> was 86,936, a similar level as the previous year. The usable operational capacity<sup>7</sup> across the prison estate in England and Wales at 19 January 2026 was 89,617, around 1% higher than 12 months earlier.<sup>8</sup> This figure remains substantially in excess of the prison estate's certified prisoner accommodation of around 79,500, which in turn still requires staff to care for more prisoners than prisons are designed to hold. In the 12 months to March 2025, the crowding rate<sup>9</sup> at establishments across England and Wales was 25.0%, up from 23.6% in the previous 12 month period.<sup>10</sup> The crowding rate for public sector prisons was 23% and for privately managed prisons was 31% in the 12 months to March 2025.

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<sup>6</sup> HMPPS, (2026). *Prison population: weekly estate figures 2026 – Population bulletin: weekly 19 January 2026*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prison-population-weekly-estate-figures-2026> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

<sup>7</sup> Useable Operational Capacity of the estate is the sum of all establishments' operational capacity less 2,000 places.

<sup>8</sup> HMPPS, (2026). *Prison population: weekly estate figures 2026 – Population bulletin: weekly 19 January 2026*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prison-population-weekly-estate-figures-2026> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

<sup>9</sup> Crowding is measured as the number of prisoners who, on the last day of the month, are held in a cell, room or dormitory where the number of occupants exceeds the baseline certified normal accommodation of the cell, room, or dormitory.

<sup>10</sup> HMPPS, (2025). *Official Statistics – HMPPS Annual Digest 2024 to 2025: Prison Crowding*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hmpps-annual-digest-april-2024-to-march-2025/hmpps-annual-digest-2024-to-2025--2#prison-crowding> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

- 2.4 HMPPS's latest prison population projections for England and Wales for 2025 to 2030<sup>11</sup> show that the prison population is projected to increase to between 98,000 and 103,600 by March 2030. That recent upper projection is lower (by 1.5%) than the upper projection for 2024 to 2029 which projected a population of 105,200 by March 2029. HMPPS notes that the projections do not include the impact of policies such as those arising from the Government's Sentencing Bill.
- 2.5 HMPPS data indicate there were 2.39 prisoners per full-time equivalent (FTE) remit group staff member at the end of September 2025, up slightly from 2.27 in September 2024. The data also show that there was an average of 3.06 prisoners per FTE Bands 3 to 5 officer, up slightly from 2.92 in the previous year.<sup>12</sup> By way of comparison, for the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) there were approximately 1.5 prisoners per FTE staff member (all staff across establishments) at April 2025. The ratio is 1.7 for NIPS prison-based officers and support grade staff.<sup>13</sup> The Scottish Prison Service (SPS) has an approximate ratio of 1.7 prisoners per FTE across all roles and an estimated ratio of 2.3 prisoners per uniformed FTE.<sup>14</sup>

*His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons annual report*

- 2.6 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) is an independent body which scrutinises the conditions for, and treatment of, prisoners and other detainees. It aims to help to make sure that detention in England and Wales is humane, safe, respectful and helps to prepare people for release. In 2024-25, HMIP published a total of 83 reports consisting of inspections, independent reviews of progress and thematic reports.
- 2.7 The 2024-25 Annual Report<sup>15</sup> was published in July 2025 and the Chief Inspector noted that there were "overwhelming" amounts of illegal drugs and contraband that were destabilising prisons across England and Wales. This was often backed by criminal gangs targeting prisons to make "huge" profits selling contraband, often using sophisticated drones to get inside prisons. The Chief Inspector said that in many prisons there appeared to be uncontrolled levels of criminality that hard-pressed and often inexperienced staff were unable to contain. Because of this backdrop, the Chief Inspector noted, national rates of violence had increased over the last year, with assaults on staff being 13% higher and those between prisoners increasing by 10%.
- 2.8 The Chief Inspector once again highlighted how staffing shortages and inexperienced staff were causing difficulties both for the successful management of the Prison Service and the rehabilitation of prisoners. There were also concerns at some prisons about inexperienced staff being manipulated or ignored by prisoners. There was limited and insufficient purposeful activity for prisoners with education and such workshop spaces as were available often underused. In the female estate, staff

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<sup>11</sup> MoJ, (2025). *Accredited official statistics – Prison Population Projections: 2025 to 2030*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/prison-population-projections-2025-to-2030/prison-population-projections-2025-to-2030--2> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

<sup>12</sup> OPRB analysis of unpublished HMPPS data.

<sup>13</sup> OPRB analysis of unpublished NIPS data.

<sup>14</sup> Estimated ratios calculated from unpublished SPS data and published SPS figures. SPS, (2025). *SPS Annual Report and Accounts 2024-25 published*. (online) Available at: <https://www.sps.gov.uk/about-us/our-latest-news/sp-s-annual-report-and-accounts-2024-25-published> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

<sup>15</sup> HMIP, (2025). *Annual Report 2024-25*. (online) Available at: [https://hmiprisons.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmipris\\_reports/annual-report-2024-25/](https://hmiprisons.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmipris_reports/annual-report-2024-25/) [accessed on 19 February 2026].

said they had inadequate training to deal with the challenges of looking after the many women who self-harmed. This led to staff spending most of their time attending to those prisoners with the most acute needs, rather than spending time with all prisoners. The three public sector young offender institutions continued to fail in the level of care offered and were plagued with very serious violence levels that were higher than in any adult prison.

2.9 The Annual Report highlighted the four areas on which the Inspectorate focus during prison visits. Overall, the proportion of locations where poor or not good ratings were found were:

- Safety 44%;
- Respect 47%;
- Purposeful activity 75%; and
- Preparation for release 25%.

2.10 The Chief Inspector noted that overcrowding continued to adversely affect prisons across the country. There was such pressure on the system that the Government had had little choice but to introduce the early release scheme, Standard Determinate Sentence 40. In just two days in September and October this resulted in staff having to manage the release of an additional 3,112 prisoners, many at short notice. This created a “huge burden” on an already stretched workforce, particularly in Offender Management Units. However, there were prisons that were performing well and some that had improved since the Inspectorate’s last visit.

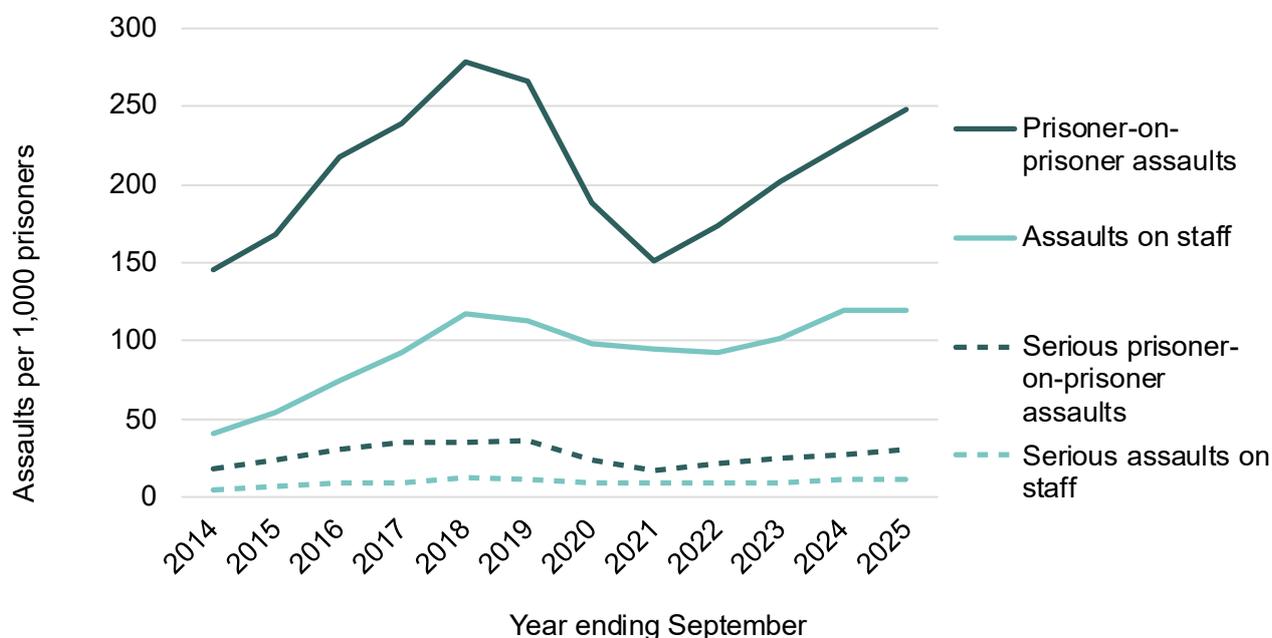
2.11 It was considered that staff-prisoner relationships were often inadequate, with key work not being used sufficiently well or often enough. Around 85% of female and 73% of male prisoners had a key worker, but fewer than two-thirds said their worker was helpful. Rule breaking went unchallenged in some prisons and this was sometimes due to staff inexperience and a lack of confidence and capability. Some of these poor relationships were down to poor regimes, with some officers not visible on landings but locked away in wing offices. Critical to a prison’s success were highly visible governors who knew their prison well, set and maintained standards and held staff to account. However, the Inspectorate noted that the Prison Service continued to tie up too many frustrated governors in an overly bureaucratic management and oversight system that appeared to value “plodding managerialism” over the transformative leadership that is seen in the best prisons. The Chief Inspector concluded by thanking staff who work in prisons for the support and professionalism they show.

### *Safety in custody*

2.12 Prison safety can be impacted by capacity (with a positive correlation between violence and overcrowding), security and healthcare. While the rate of self-inflicted deaths has remained broadly stable since 2018, both the number and rate of self-harm incidents are at their highest ever level. Following previous increases, the number and rate of all assaults rose again in the last year, driven by an increase in the number of prisoner-on-prisoner assaults. In the 12 months to September 2025, there were 31,555 total assault incidents, a 6% increase from the previous 12

months. Rates of assault also increased by 6% to 364 incidents per 1,000 prisoners. There were 10,326 assaults on staff in the 12 months to September 2025, a very slight decrease from the previous 12 months, but still at historically high levels. The rate of assaults on staff decreased by 1% to 119 incidents per 1,000 prisoners when compared to the previous 12 months (see Figure 2.1).<sup>16</sup>

**Figure 2.1: Annual assaults in custody, 12 months to 30 September 2014 to 2025<sup>17</sup>**



2.13 HMPPS initiatives aimed at improving prison safety include: the Challenge, Support and Intervention Plan; training modules covering violence reduction and gangs and harmful group behaviour; a new personal safety package with a professional standard for use of force;<sup>18</sup> rolling out PAVA<sup>19</sup> spray and rigid bar handcuffs to all operational Band 3 to 5 staff; new body worn video cameras in the adult estate; 31 prisons having moved to electric razors only; suicide prevention training; other training and staff support; and Offender Management in Custody and key work.<sup>20</sup>

2.14 The security challenges faced by prison staff are increasingly complex with criminals constantly trying to undermine security and destabilise prisons. Contraband (including drugs, weapons and phones) is a growing problem. There were 12,166 incidents where phones were found in the 12 months to March 2025, a 14% increase on the previous year. There were 26,348 incidents of drug finds in the 12 months to March 2025, a 25% increase on the previous 12 months. Drones are sometimes

<sup>16</sup> HMPPS, (2026). *Safety in custody: quarterly update to September 2025*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/safety-in-custody-quarterly-update-to-september-2025> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

<sup>17</sup> OPRB analysis of HMPPS data. HMPPS, (2026). *Safety in custody: quarterly update to September 2025*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/safety-in-custody-quarterly-update-to-september-2025> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

<sup>18</sup> A professional standard for use of force has been implemented, which equips staff to make use of interpersonal skills, apply judgement in decision making and use physical restraint techniques when necessary.

<sup>19</sup> PAVA spray is a synthetic pepper spray used to incapacitate and control individuals.

<sup>20</sup> HMPPS's key worker scheme is based on prison officers managing around five to six prisoners on a one-to-one basis with weekly support aimed at rehabilitation.

used to smuggle contraband into prisons and there were 1,712 drone incidents around prisons in the 12 months to March 2025, a 43% increase over the previous 12 months. Serious and organised crime poses a particular threat, with HMPPS estimating that around 9% of the prison population have links to serious and organised crime. Added to this, staff have had to deal with an increasing number of incidents, including incidents at height.<sup>21</sup> To help improve security, HMPPS told us that it was investing around £40m in physical security in 34 prisons, has introduced mandatory protective body armour in the riskiest areas of the long-term high-security estate and is trialling the use of tasers.

- 2.15 The POA stated to us its belief that prisons in England and Wales were the most violent places of work in Western Europe and highlighted the high levels of violence and self-harm incidents. The POA also outlined the risks to its members, highlighting the rise in assaults inside prisons (see Figure 2.1) and the growing risk to staff outside of prisons (an issue that should be monitored). The POA noted the increased stress for staff arising from the population pressures as well as the increased levels of violence and risk.
- 2.16 The HMIP Annual Report points to a particularly challenging combination of significantly overcrowded prisons, a lack of meaningful engagement with prisoners due to staff shortages, a lack of training, increased levels of violence and an inexperienced frontline staff cadre. These issues were also highlighted by the Justice Select Committee in its November 2025 ‘Ending the cycle of reoffending – part one: rehabilitation in prisons’ report.<sup>22</sup> The report noted that staffing levels, high turnover, poor recruitment processes, and limited professional development had contributed to a culture that hinders rehabilitation. Other reports that have helped to inform our deliberations include the Independent Review of Prison Capacity August 2025 by Dame Anne Owers<sup>23</sup> and the Institute for Government Report Performance Tracker report of March 2025.<sup>24</sup>

## Economic context

- 2.17 Our recommendations take account of data on key economic indicators including inflation, economic activity and employment.

### *Economic activity*

- 2.18 United Kingdom monthly Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was estimated<sup>25</sup> to have fallen by 0.1% in the three months to November 2025, following a fall of 0.1% in the three months to October 2025 and 0.1% growth in the three months to September

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<sup>21</sup> An incident at height is defined as any incident taking place at height above or below ground level. This category can come in many forms including prisoners on the netting, climbing over bars or on the roof.

<sup>22</sup> UK Parliament, (2025). *Ending the cycle of reoffending – part one: rehabilitation in prisons*. (online) Available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5901/cmselect/cmjust/469/report.html> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

<sup>23</sup> Ministry of Justice, (2025). *Independent Prison Capacity Review: final report*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-prison-capacity-review-final-report> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

<sup>24</sup> Institute for Government, (2025). *Inside England and Wales’s prisons crisis: Summary*. (online) Available at: <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/performance-tracker-local/england-and-wales-prisons/summary> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

<sup>25</sup> ONS, (2026). *GDP monthly estimate, UK: November 2025*. Note that original GDP estimates in this release have been revised, (online) Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/grossdomesticproductgdp/bulletins/gdpmonthlyestimateuk/november2025> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

2025. In November 2025, the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) forecast real GDP growth of 1.4% in 2026. It expected growth to pick up only gradually in the near term as geopolitical uncertainty persisted and domestic business and consumer confidence remained subdued, partly in anticipation of further tax rises. Real GDP growth was then forecast to average 1.5% per annum over 2027 to 2029.

### *Inflation*

2.19 The annual change in the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) was 3.2% in November 2025, up from 2.6 per cent a year earlier but down from 3.6 per cent in October 2025.<sup>26</sup> The CPI including owner occupiers' housing costs (CPIH) was at 3.5% in November 2025. In its November forecast, the OBR expected CPI inflation to fall back over 2026, to 2.4% in the second quarter of the year and to 2.1% by the end of the year. It said that risks around the inflation outlook remained elevated, both due to domestic and international factors. Domestically, there was uncertainty about how far wage growth would moderate in the coming year, as well as the risk that high inflation expectations would keep inflation higher for longer. Internationally, ongoing geopolitical developments could lead to further volatility in energy prices, and changes in global trade policy could significantly affect import prices.

### *Employment and earnings*

2.20 The United Kingdom unemployment rate was estimated at 5.1% in the three months to October 2025, up from 4.4% a year earlier.<sup>27</sup> The level of unemployment was estimated to have increased by 327,000 over the year, to 1.83 million.

2.21 The Labour Force Survey (LFS) showed employment growth over the last year. According to the LFS, the overall level of employment was 34.3 million in the three months to November 2025, up 513,000 over the preceding 12 months and 1.1 million higher than the pre-pandemic peak in the three months to February 2020.<sup>28</sup>

2.22 Economic inactivity fell slightly over the last year, to 20.8% (9.02 million) in the three months to November 2025, compared to 21.6% (9.31 million) a year earlier.<sup>29</sup> This compares with 20.3% (8.45 million) just before the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.23 There were 729,000 job vacancies across the United Kingdom in the three months to November 2025. The number of job vacancies has generally been falling steadily since mid-2022 and is below the pre-pandemic level.<sup>30</sup>

2.24 According to the Average Weekly Earnings series, annual growth in average total pay (including bonuses) was 4.7% for the whole economy in the three months to November 2025 (see Table 2.1). Private sector average earnings growth (including

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<sup>26</sup> ONS, (2025). *Consumer price inflation, UK: November 2025*. (online) Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/bulletins/consumerpriceinflation/november2025> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

<sup>27</sup> ONS, (2025). *Labour market overview, UK: December 2025*. (online) Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/december2025> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

<sup>28</sup> ONS, (2026). *Employment in the UK: January 2026*. (online) Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/employmentintheuk/january2026> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> ONS, (2025). *Vacancies and jobs in the UK: December 2025*. (online) Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/jobsandvacanciesintheuk/december2025> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

bonus payments) was at 3.9% in the three months to November 2025, with regular earnings growth at 3.6%. Total earnings growth was at 7.8% in the public sector, with regular average earnings growth at 7.9% in the three months to November 2025. We note that the public sector annual growth rate is affected by some public sector pay rises being paid earlier in 2025 than in 2024, causing a base effect.<sup>31</sup>

**Table 2.1: Average Weekly Earning annual growth rates, seasonally adjusted, September 2025 to November 2025<sup>32,33</sup>**

Average Weekly Earnings	Whole Economy (%)	Private Sector (%)	Public Sector (%)
Total pay (including bonuses)	4.7	3.9	7.8
Regular pay (excluding bonuses)	4.5	3.6	7.9
Real total pay (including bonuses)	1.0	-	-
Real regular pay (excluding bonuses)	0.9	-	-

- 2.25 The OBR revised its March 2025 forecast for earnings growth and expected pay growth upwards to a range of around 3% to 3.5% in 2026. This means that, having risen by around 5% in 2024, nominal weekly earnings are estimated to grow at close to the same rate in 2025 before falling to around 3.5% in 2026. Nominal weekly earnings growth is then expected to fall back further to an average of around 2.25% a year from 2027.
- 2.26 The pay settlement median for 2025 was 3.0% according to Brightmine data, 1.5 percentage points lower than the 2024 median of 4.5%. Brightmine predicted that the median pay award for 2026 would be 3.3% based on the deals collected in January 2026. The most common award was 3%, offered in around a quarter of deals, with the same proportion between 3% and 4%; highlighting the close bunching of January awards. We note that January and April are the busiest periods for pay awards.<sup>34</sup>
- 2.27 Incomes Data Research’s (IDR) initial analysis of already-decided pay outcomes suggested a median of 3.4% across the whole economy for 2026. This is higher than the median of 3.3% observed in 2025 and predominantly reflects the picture in the private sector as most public sector pay settlements had not been decided. Whilst indications for the median pay award are higher in 2026 than 2025, the mean pay award is expected to be lower. This is due to a smaller expected proportion of

<sup>31</sup> As a result of public sector pay rises being paid earlier in 2025 than in 2024, this group has received two pay rises within a single 12-month period which has over-inflated the annual growth rate in pay. This base effect has now reached its peak and will phase out over the next three months.

<sup>32</sup> ONS, (2026) *Average weekly earnings in Great Britain: January 2026*. (online) Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/averageweeklyearningsingreatbritain/january2026> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

<sup>33</sup> ONS, (2026). *Dataset X09: Real average weekly earnings using consumer price inflation (seasonally adjusted)*. (online) Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/datasets/x09realaverageweeklyearningsusingconsumerpriceinflationseasonallyadjusted> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

<sup>34</sup> OPRB analysis of Brightmine data – January 2026. Available to Brightmine subscribers.

higher-end outcomes worth 5% or more for 2026, with just 5% of pay rises at 5% or more in 2026, down from 16% in 2025.<sup>35</sup>

### *National Living Wage*

2.28 The National Living Wage (NLW) will increase from £12.21 to £12.71 an hour from 1 April 2026, an increase of 4.1%. Therefore, to remain compliant with the NLW, HMPPS will need to increase the pay of some of the lower paid staff in our remit group from 1 April 2026. The following grades in our remit group will see their FTE base pay increase, if our recommendations are not implemented before 1 April 2026:

- Closed grade Operational Support Grade (OSG), Prison Auxiliary and G4S Security Officer (39 hour) from £24,858 to £25,876, a 4.1% increase; and
- National Fair and Sustainable Band 2 OSG 37 hour base pay spot rate from £24,527 to £24,549, a 0.1% increase.

### *Household income*

2.29 In its November 2025 Economic and Fiscal Outlook,<sup>36</sup> the OBR reported that real household disposable income (a measure of living standards) grew by 3.0% in 2024-25 but was projected to increase only by 0.25% per annum over its six-year forecast period, a reduction of 0.35% per annum as compared to the previous year. Weaker medium-term real wage growth and rising taxes will be responsible for this.

### **Financial context**

2.30 In Chapter 1 we noted that as part of the 2025 Spending Review,<sup>37</sup> the Government said that it was committed to delivering fair and timely pay awards for public sector workforces over the Spending Review period. Pay awards would need to be funded within departmental settlements and there was no access to the reserve for public sector pay.

### *Affordability*

2.31 Affordability was the key theme of HMPPS's written and oral evidence to us for this round. HMPPS told us that the last pay award delivered a "substantial" increase of at least 4% to all frontline prison staff, representing "another real terms pay increase". It stated that due to the "continued acceleration" of our timetable, there was not enough time to assess the impact of the award, but it expected to see a positive impact on recruitment and retention.

2.32 HMPPS noted that, as the recommendations in our 2025 Report cost more than it had set out in its affordability proposals, "tough decisions were made on spending and reprioritisation". It asked that this year's recommendations strike a balance

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<sup>35</sup> Available to IDR subscribers. IDR, (2026). *Median pay award up a little to 3.4% in 2026*. (online) Available at: <https://www.incomesdataresearch.co.uk/resources/viewpoint/median-pay-award-up-a-little-to-34-in-2026> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

<sup>36</sup> OBR, (2025). *Economic and fiscal outlook - November 2025*. (online) Available at: <https://obr.uk/efo/economic-and-fiscal-outlook-november-2025/> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

<sup>37</sup> HMT, (2025). *Spending Review 2025 document*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spending-review-2025-document> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

between fair pay and value for money for the taxpayer. It also stated that the cost of future recommendations would need to be balanced against other prison priorities.

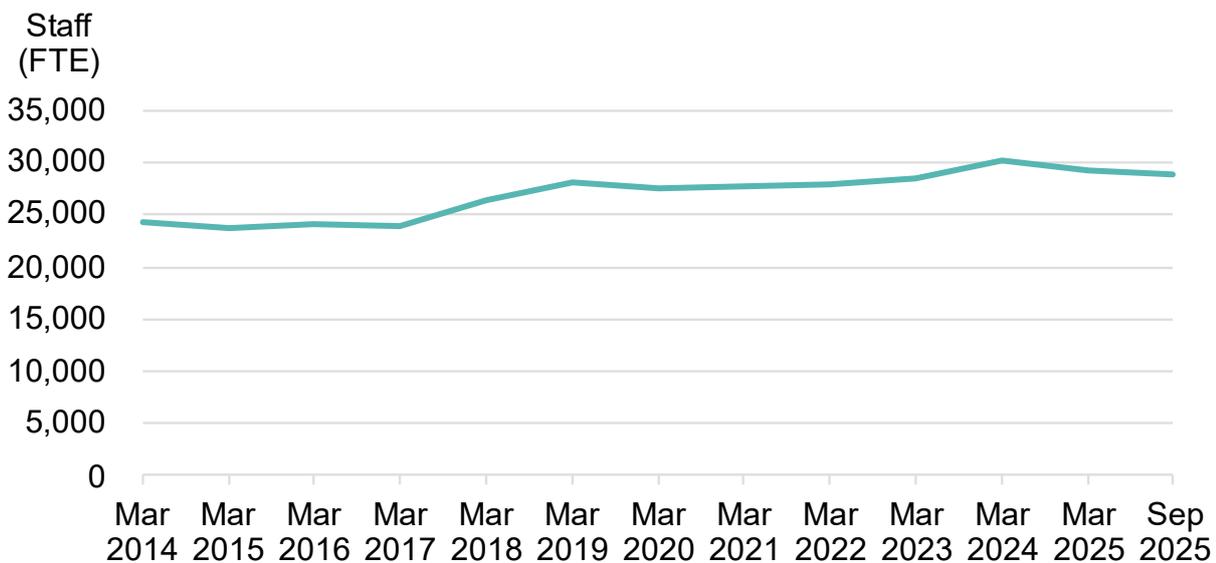
## The composition of our remit group

### Staff numbers

2.33 At 30 September 2025 there were 28,905 FTE staff in the remit group, a 4.5% decrease from September 2024 (see Figure 2.2 and Table 2.2). Between 30 September 2024 and 2025, the number of Band 3 to 5 Prison Officers (including specialists) decreased by 4.4%, meaning that there were more leavers than joiners.<sup>38</sup>

2.34 At 30 September 2025, there were 983 FTE (3%) operational managers; 22,534 (78%) Band 3 to 5 prison officer grades and 5,388 (19%) Band 2 OSGs. Around 95% of remit group staff were based in establishments, 3% in the Youth Custody Service (YCS) with the remaining 2% shared between area services and HMPPS headquarters.<sup>39</sup>

**Figure 2.2: Remit group size, 31 March 2014 to 2025 and 30 September 2025<sup>40</sup>**



<sup>38</sup> On a headcount basis there were 30,428 staff in our remit group at 30 September 2025. OPRB analysis of unpublished HMPPS data.

<sup>39</sup> OPRB analysis of unpublished HMPPS data.

<sup>40</sup> The data includes Band 12 staff from 2022. OPRB analysis of unpublished HMPPS data. HMPPS, (2025). *HM Prison & Probation Service workforce statistics quarterly: September 2025*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hm-prison-probation-service-workforce-quarterly-september-2025> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

**Table 2.2: Remit group staff (FTE) by grade, 31 March 2022 to 2025 and 30 September 2025<sup>41</sup>**

Broad staff group	Mar 2022	Mar 2023	Mar 2024	Mar 2025	Sep 2025	Change Mar 2024 to Sep 2025	Change Mar 2024 to Sep 2025 (%)
Bands 9-12 / Senior Managers	234	243	232	226	212	-20	-9%
Bands 6-8 / Managers	796	817	881	855	771	-110	-12%
Band 5 / Custodial Managers	1,819	1,741	1,757	1,784	1,747	-10	-1%
Band 4 / Supervising Officer	1,761	1,627	1,608	1,622	1,663	55	3%
Bands 3-4 / Prison Officer (incl. specialists)	18,340	18,834	20,225	19,310	19,124	-1,102	-5%
Band 2 / Operational Support	5,055	5,290	5,542	5,424	5,388	-154	-3%
<b>Total (remit group)</b>	<b>28,006</b>	<b>28,551</b>	<b>30,246</b>	<b>29,221</b>	<b>28,905</b>	<b>-1,340</b>	<b>-4%</b>

2.35 Overall, 99.5% of the remit group were in the Fair and Sustainable grades at 30 September 2025 (on an FTE basis), an increase from 98% in September 2024.<sup>42</sup>

#### *Staff characteristics*

2.36 Under our terms of reference, we consider the relevant legal obligations on the Prison Service with regard to equality and diversity, although there remains a lack of data regarding disability, other than for recruitment. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) publishes annual gender pay gap statistics in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017. The gender pay gap shows the difference in the mean and median pay between male and female staff in a workforce. The latest reporting period was at 31 March 2025, apart from the reported bonus gap which was for 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. We note that separate data for our remit group are not published, but we continue to request this information from HMPPS. We note that the requirement to publish employee data will be extended in future to include ethnicity and disability pay gaps.

- For the MoJ overall, the mean gender pay gap was 6.1% at 31 March 2025, 0.4 percentage points higher than at 31 March 2024. The median gender pay gap was 8.0%, an increase from 5.0% in the previous year which was the lowest recorded;

<sup>41</sup> The data includes Band 12 staff from 2022. OPRB analysis of unpublished HMPPS data. HMPPS, (2025). *HM Prison & Probation Service workforce statistics quarterly: September 2025*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hm-prison-probation-service-workforce-quarterly-september-2025> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

<sup>42</sup> OPRB analysis of unpublished HMPPS data.

- The mean gender bonus gap was -1.1% in 2024-25, 4.8 percentage points lower than in 2023-24 (3.7%). The median gender bonus gap was -15.4% for 2024-25, compared to -10.9% in 2023-24 and -19.5% in 2022-23;<sup>43</sup>
- The gender bonus gap is typically subject to greater year-on-year variation in award amounts and frequency. Negative values (-%) indicate that the median or middle-ranked female received a higher bonus payment than the middle-ranked male staff member, although the MoJ have indicated that this is based on awards that are relatively small in value; and
- Across the Civil Service as a whole, the mean gender pay gap was 6.9% at 31 March 2025 and the median was 6.4%.<sup>44</sup>

2.37 At 30 September 2025, 34.3% of the remit group were female, down 0.9 percentage points from 2024. The gender splits by grade groups remained broadly unchanged from 2024, and were as follows:<sup>45</sup>

- 49.9% of Band 2 OSGs were female;
- 30.3% of Band 3 to 5 officers were female;
- 37.4% of Band 7 to 8 operational managers were female; and
- 39.0% of Band 9 to 12 operational managers were female.

2.38 Looking at the age profile of our remit group:<sup>46</sup>

- At 30 September 2025, around 43% of OSGs were aged 50 or over. This age group accounted for around 40% of OSGs in 2011;
- The OSG group also had the largest proportion of staff aged 60 or over, compared to other grade groups, at 19% in September 2025;
- The average age of Band 3 to 5 staff has been decreasing over time, with there being proportionally more younger staff. At 30 September 2025, 22% of Band 3 to 5 officers were aged under 30, whereas the proportion was 11% in 2011; and
- At 30 September 2025, 53% of operational managers were aged 50 or over. The proportion of operational managers aged over 50 has increased since 2011, when 33% were aged 50 or over.

2.39 At 30 September 2025, 19.1% of the remit group were from ethnic minority backgrounds.<sup>47</sup> This is an increase of 4.3 percentage points from September 2024. It should be noted that these figures may be influenced by recent high recruitment

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<sup>43</sup> MoJ, (2025). *Ministry of Justice gender pay gap report: 2025*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ministry-of-justice-gender-pay-gap-report-2025/ministry-of-justice-gender-pay-gap-report-2025> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

<sup>44</sup> Cabinet Office, (2025). *Statistical bulletin - Civil Service Statistics: 2025*. (online) Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/civil-service-statistics-2025/statistical-bulletin-civil-service-statistics-2025#gender-pay-gap> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

<sup>45</sup> OPRB analysis of unpublished HMPPS data.

<sup>46</sup> OPRB analysis of unpublished HMPPS data.

<sup>47</sup> OPRB analysis of unpublished HMPPS data.

levels of overseas staff. The corresponding proportion in the wider England and Wales population of working age people between 16 and 64 years old was 19.3%, as reported in the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) 2021 Census data.<sup>48</sup> As in previous years, the percentage of staff from an ethnic minority background decreases as seniority increases. In September 2025:

- 18.2% of OSGs were from an ethnic minority background, up 2.6 percentage points from 2024;
- 19.9% of Band 3 to 5 officers were from an ethnic minority background, up 4.9 percentage points from 2024; and
- 5.7% of operational managers were from an ethnic minority background, down 0.8 percentage points from 2024.

### *Two-tier pay structure*

2.40 As we have noted in recent reports, the number of staff that occupy the closed grade pay structure has continued to decrease, in part as a consequence of our decision in 2023 not to recommend consolidated pay increases for those who would financially benefit from opting in to the Fair and Sustainable pay structure. Since then, we have only recommended a non-consolidated, non-pensionable payment for those who would not financially benefit from opting in. These closed grades also include a number of TUPE transferred in staff. As at 31 July 2025 there remained 145.7 FTE closed grade staff comprising 115.1 FTE officer and support grades, 3.8 FTE operational manager grades and 26.8 FTE TUPE transfer grades. This represents around 0.5% of our remit group.

### **Allowances**

2.41 HMPPS spends a significant amount of its paybill on allowances for reasons including working unsocial hours, hours in excess of contractual hours or for a variety of different roles. In 2024-25 the cost of allowances represented around 18% of the remit group paybill, a little lower than the previous year. From 2023-24 to 2024-25, total expenditure on all allowances increased by 5.7%, from £298 million to just under £315 million. Around 10% of the paybill is due to unsocial hours allowances. Unsocial hours payments accounted for £169 million of the paybill in 2024-25, compared with £148 million in 2023-24. HMPPS also spends large amounts on other allowances.

2.42 Payment Plus is another significant allowance for the Service, although expenditure on this has decreased in the last two years. It fell from around £48 million in 2023-24 to around £31 million in 2024-25. Adding in bedwatch and constant watch, which are also paid at the Payment Plus rate, gives a total of just over £68 million in 2024-25, down from £79 million in 2023-24. HMPPS data also showed a decrease in expenditure on OSG overtime of 12.8%, a 70.2% increase in the cost of dirty protest payments (the highest total we have seen) and a 7.9% decrease in Operation Tornado payments. The significant increase in the dirty protest expenditure between 2023-24 and 2024-25 is in part due to the increase made to the allowance rate from

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<sup>48</sup> ONS, (2022). *Ethnic group, England and Wales: Census 2021*. (online) Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/bulletins/ethnicgroupenglandandwales/census2021> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

April 2024. While expenditure on Tornado reduced over the same period, it is worth noting that the rate of the allowance was increased with effect from 1 April 2025.

- 2.43 Time off in lieu (TOIL) is a debt HMPPS accrues of time owed to staff who have carried out additional, unpaid hours of work. This needs to be repaid in the future by allowing the relevant staff to take additional time off. Working longer hours for indefinite periods can have a detrimental impact on health, motivation and morale. At 31 March 2025, the total number of TOIL hours owed to officer and support grades was 328,923 hours, a 6.9% decrease from 31 March 2024 (353,424 hours). By September 2025 this had increased to 361,234 hours, once again reflecting continued staffing pressures. We consider that HMPPS should continue aiming to reduce this, allowing staff to take the time off to which they are entitled and to prevent longer term negative outcomes for staff health, motivation and morale.
- 2.44 From 31 March 2024 to 31 March 2025, the total number of staff receiving temporary promotion payments decreased by 4.7% to 1,682 (6.8% of all staff). In previous years we, and the Prison Governors' Association (PGA), have expressed concerns about the upward trend in the use of temporary cover, and the prolonged periods for which temporary cover was used. It is positive that this trend seems to have flattened, but we would like to see this continue to reduce in future years, both in terms of numbers and time.
- 2.45 Detached duty is where prison officers work at a different prison to their home prison for operational reasons. There are additional costs associated with this and, although these costs vary, HMPPS estimates an assumed average cost per person of around £942 per week for a member of staff to be on detached duty. In its written submission this year, the POA expressed concern over the ongoing use of detached duty. HMPPS told us that, while there had been a small increase in the numbers of staff on detached duty, much of this was due to the closure of HMP Dartmoor.
- 2.46 We continue with our rolling programme of reviewing allowances. This aims to ensure that all allowances are subject to a review at least once every five years (see Appendix H). More of the information requested in Recommendation 14 in the 2024 Report has now been provided but not all.

## **Recruitment and retention**

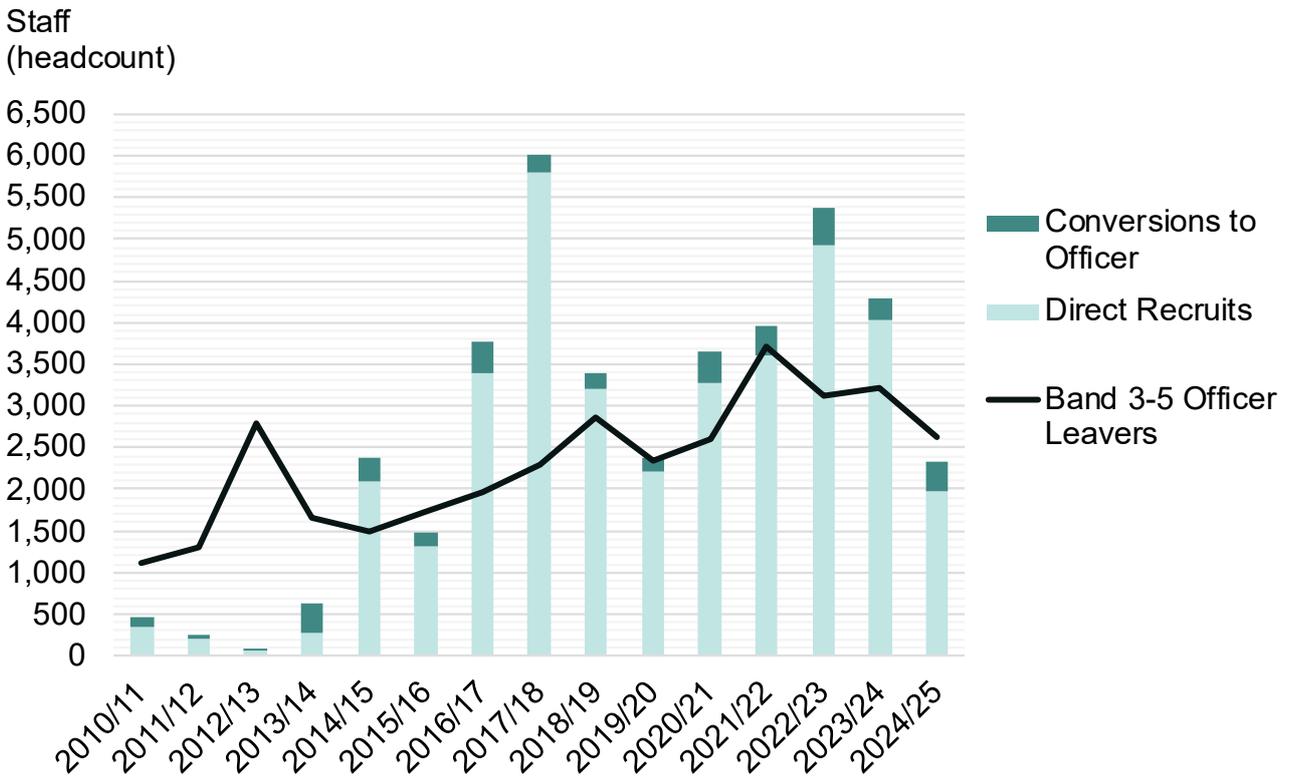
- 2.47 Our terms of reference, when making our recommendations, require us to take account of the Prison Service's ability to recruit, retain and motivate suitably able and qualified staff. In its written submission, HMPPS stated that, given our accelerated timetable for this report, there had not been enough time to assess the impact on staffing of the last pay award, but that it expected to see a positive impact on recruitment and retention. HMPPS said that the national staffing picture had continued to stabilise, although there were specific and persistent recruitment and retention challenges. There was also a relatively inexperienced staffing group, which created its own challenges. At 30 September 2025, over 35% of Band 3 to 5 staff had less than three years' experience. The issue of retention of staff was emphasised at many of the oral evidence sessions. We also received evidence about the specific issue of staff recruited from overseas and the likely effect of a change in working visa regulations. We return to this issue in Chapter 4.

*Recruits and conversions to officer*

2.48 Following the Covid-19 related decline in both officer leavers and joiners, the numbers of both joiners and leavers started to increase. However, the picture is different for the year to 30 September 2025 where both joiner and leaver numbers have been falling:

- There were 2,338 new Band 3 to 5 officers in the year to 30 September 2025 (see Figure 2.3). This represents a 45.6% decrease in new officers as compared to the previous year;
- Of these new officers, 1,971 (84.3%) were new recruits, with the remainder being conversions to officer from existing HMPPS staff;
- The number of Band 3 to 5 leavers was 2,622, an 18.7% decrease from the previous year; and
- Overall, in the year to September 2025, there was a net decrease of 1,015 FTE Band 3 to 5 officers, representing a total decrease of 4.3%.

**Figure 2.3: Staff headcount of direct recruits into Band 3, conversions to Band 3 officers from existing staff, and Band 3 to 5 officer leavers, year to September 2011 to 2025<sup>49</sup>**



<sup>49</sup> OPRB analysis of unpublished HMPPS data.

2.49 HMPPS publishes statistics on recruitment diversity.<sup>50</sup> These statistics are based on self-declared ethnicity:

- Between 1 July 2023 and 30 June 2025, ethnic minority candidates made up 61.5% of all Band 3 prison officer applicants and 51.3% of formal offers accepted (up from 39.6% and 26.8% respectively between 1 July 2022 and 30 June 2024);
- Over the same two year period, ethnic minority candidates made up 43.6% of Band 2 OSG applicants and 31.7% of formal offers accepted (up from 34.9% and 17.8%); and
- These rates are above HMPPS's commitment, in accordance with recommendation 28 of the 2017 Lammy Review,<sup>51</sup> of 15.8% although it should be noted that much of the change is likely to have been driven by an increase in the recruitment of staff from overseas.

2.50 Among prison officer and OSG applicants, there was evidence of a continuing disparity in outcomes when comparing ethnic minority candidates with white candidates, showing that a higher proportion of white applicants progressed through the process compared to ethnic minority applicants. There was also evidence of a continuing disparity in outcomes when comparing female applicants to male applicants for prison officer roles, suggesting that male applicants had a higher success rate. Conversely, there was evidence of an ongoing disparity in outcomes when comparing female applicants to male applicants for OSG roles with the suggestion that female applicants had a higher success rate.

2.51 Candidates with a disability made up 3.3% of all prison officer applicants and 6.1% of OSG applicants between July 2023 and June 2025. There was evidence of relatively poorer outcomes for prison officer roles but not for OSG roles. This is probably influenced by the fitness test for prison officer roles which takes place between the provisional and final offer.<sup>52</sup> We heard that once an officer is appointed the fitness test is no longer repeated except for certain specialist roles.

### *Leaving rates*

2.52 Figure 2.4 shows the leaving rate by grade for the years ending 31 March 2020 to 31 March 2025 and to 30 September 2025. The 12 months to 31 March 2025 and 30 September 2025 saw overall decreases to 12.6% and 11.2%.

- Leaving rates for Band 2 / operational support staff decreased from 14.4% to 13.0%. Leaving rates for Band 3 and 4 prison officers (including specialists) decreased, from 13.4% to 11.7%;

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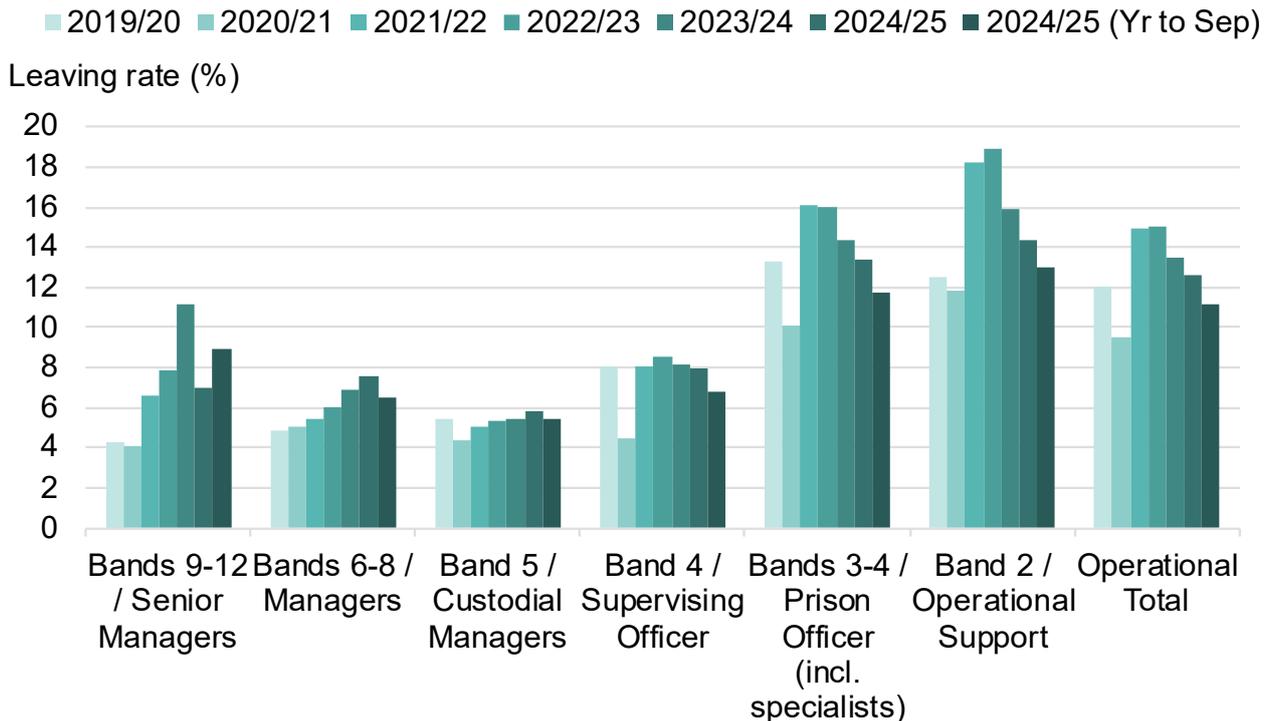
<sup>50</sup> These statistics are classified as experimental and the statistics within the release should be treated as estimates. HMPPS, (2025). *Recruitment Diversity Statistics: June 2025*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hm-prison-and-probation-service-workforce-quarterly-june-2025/recruitment-diversity-statistics-june-2025> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

<sup>51</sup> GOV.uk, (2017). *Lammy review: final report*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/lammy-review-final-report> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

<sup>52</sup> HMPPS, (2025). *Recruitment Diversity Statistics: June 2025*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hm-prison-and-probation-service-workforce-quarterly-june-2025/recruitment-diversity-statistics-june-2025> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

- Leaving rates decreased for Band 4 staff, from 8.0% to 6.8%, and Band 5 leaving rates decreased from 5.9% to 5.4%;
- Leaving rates for Bands 7 and 8 decreased from 7.6% to 6.5%, the first decrease in leaving rates since 2020; and
- Leaving rates for Bands 9 to 12 / senior managers increased from 7.0% to 8.9%.

**Figure 2.4: Annual leaving rate of permanent operational staff by grade, 12 months to 31 March 2020 to 2025 and 12 months to 30 September 2025<sup>53</sup>**



### Reasons for leaving

2.53 There are a number of different categories for how leavers are recorded; these include resignation, retirement, medical retirement, voluntary exit, voluntary/compulsory redundancy, dismissal, transfer to other government department/public sector, and death in service. The main cause for leaving across grades in Prison Service establishments was resignation. In the year to 30 September 2025, resignations accounted for 60% of all leavers from establishments, down from 62% in the year to 30 September 2024. After resignation, dismissal and retirement were the next most common causes for leaving. Exit interviews can provide valuable information relating to leavers. However, the proportion of leavers who complete these has fallen for several years and is now only around 10%. This brings into question how representative the responses are. We continue to encourage the completion of exit interviews and greater participation by leavers to help to improve the data. The main reasons for resignation given at exit interviews were: career progression; health and wellbeing; and leadership. HMPPS told us that

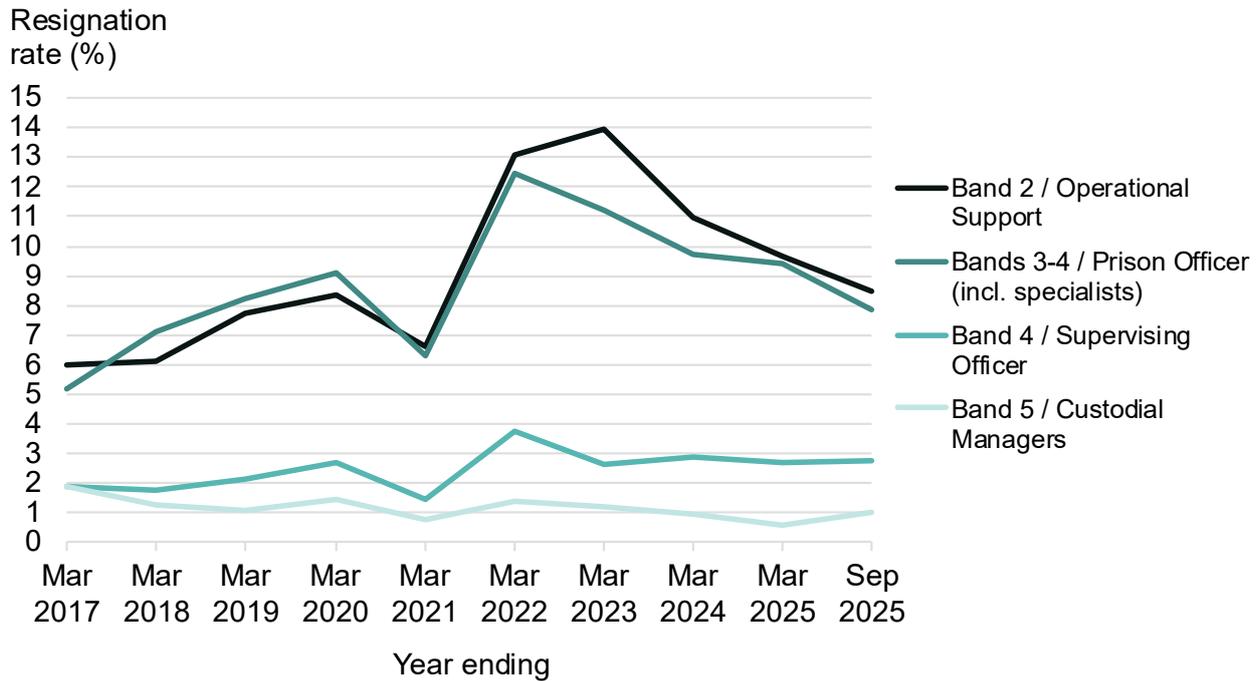
<sup>53</sup> OPRB analysis of HMPPS data. HMPPS, (2025). *HM Prison & Probation Service workforce quarterly: September 2025*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hm-prison-probation-service-workforce-quarterly-september-2025> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

“pay and reward” had not featured in the top five drivers of attrition mentioned at exit interviews since May 2023.

*Resignation rates*

2.54 Resignation rates have generally decreased for Bands 2 to 5 in recent years. Band 2 resignation rates remain above those for other grades but have been gradually decreasing from the historically high levels seen in the financial year 2021-22. However, resignation rates for Bands 2 and 3 still remain above pre-Covid-19 levels (see Figure 2.5).

**Figure 2.5: Annual resignation rate of permanent operational staff by grade, 12 months to 31 March 2017 to 2025 and 12 months to 30 September 2025<sup>54</sup>**

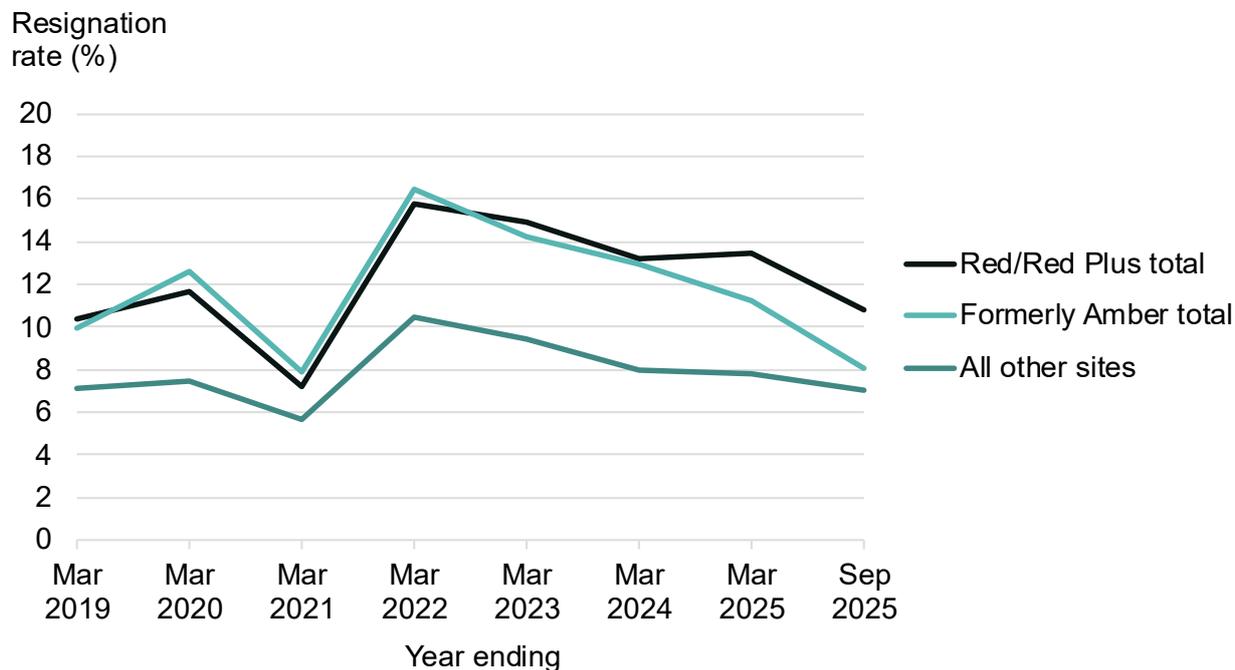


2.55 Figure 2.6 shows Band 3 and 4 resignation rates split by market supplement type. The overall resignation rate for Band 3 and 4 was 7.8% in the year to 30 September 2025. In the year to 30 September 2025, the resignation rate was 2.8% for Band 4 Supervising Officer and 1.0% for Band 5 Custodial Manager.

2.56 We note that some prisons, which have never had a market supplement, have higher leaving rates than red and red plus sites. This indicates that there continues to be variability in leaving rates and that some non-market supplement sites may face similar retention issues compared to those which pay a supplement. We wait with interest to see what impact that HMPPS’s new review mechanism for market supplements will have on leaving rates.

<sup>54</sup> OPRB analysis of HMPPS data. HMPPS, (2025). *HM Prison & Probation Service workforce quarterly: September 2025*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hm-prison-probation-service-workforce-quarterly-september-2025> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

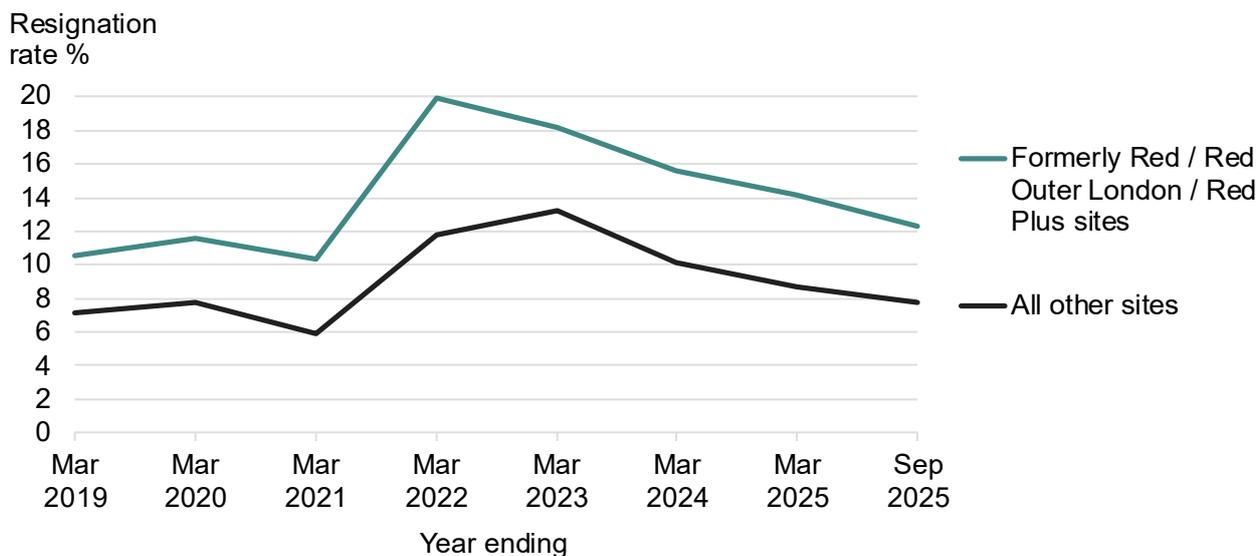
**Figure 2.6: Band 3 and 4 (including specialists) resignation rates split by market supplement type, 12 months to 31 March 2019 to 2025 and 12 months to 30 September 2025<sup>55</sup>**



2.57 Figure 2.7 shows Band 2 resignation rates split by prisons that had a market supplement and those that did not. Data for the year to 30 September 2025 show a continued decrease in resignation rates for both site types. Resignation rates in the year to 30 September 2025 were 12.3% and 7.7% respectively for former red sites and non-market supplement sites. The overall resignation rate for Band 2 was 8.5% in the year to 30 September 2025.

<sup>55</sup> OPRB analysis of unpublished HMPPS data.

**Figure 2.7: Band 2 resignation rates split by market supplement type, 12 months to 31 March 2019 to 2025 and 12 months to 30 September 2025<sup>56</sup>**



### *Leavers by length of service*

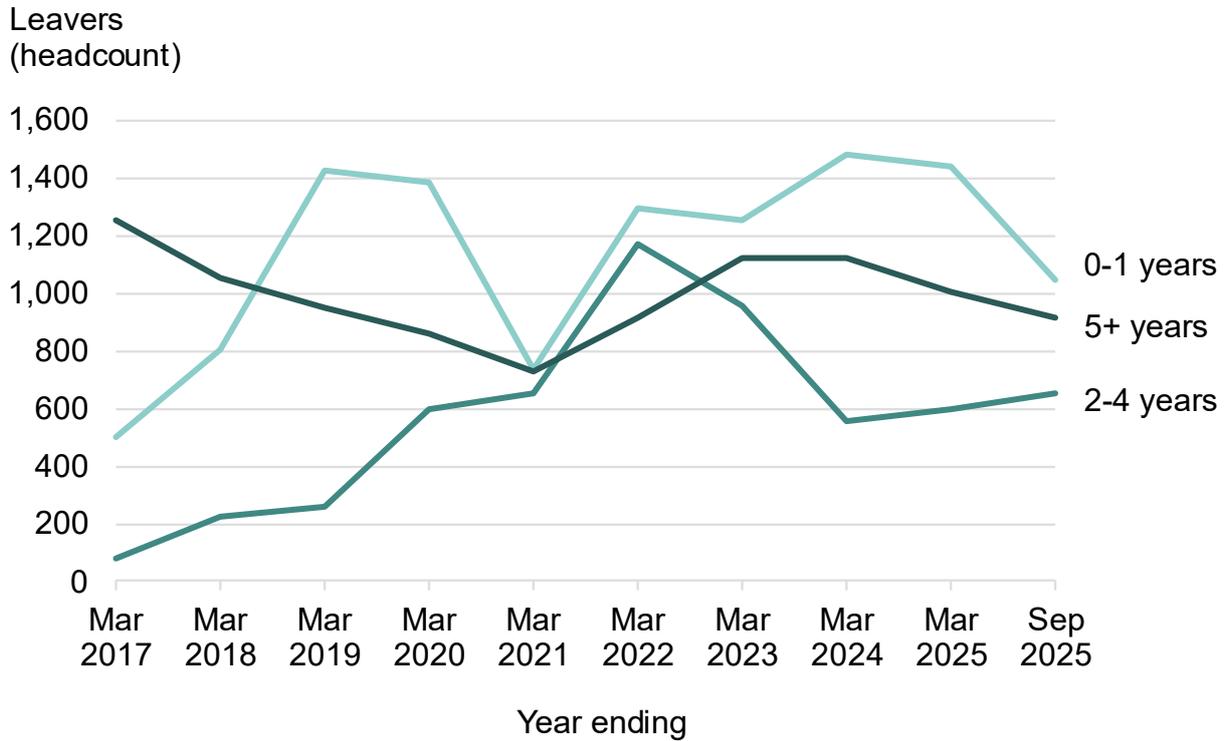
2.58 Figures 2.8 and 2.9 show Bands 3 to 5 and Band 2 leavers in recent years by length of service. In the year to 30 September 2025, the number of Band 3 to 5 leavers with 2 to 4 years of service increased over the previous year but was still lower when compared with the years to 31 March 2022 and 31 March 2023. The number of leavers with five or more years of service has continued to decrease. Leavers with 0-1 years of service accounted for the greatest number of leavers in the year to 30 September 2025, potentially indicating an issue at the recruitment stage. For Band 2 / OSGs, while the overall number of leavers was lower in the year to September 2025, there had been an increase in leavers with 2 to 4 years of service compared with the previous year.

2.59 In our 2020 Report (paragraph 3.35), we noted that HMPPS estimated that each new recruit costs the Service around £13,000,<sup>57</sup> a figure that has not been updated. The 2020 Report also noted that Band 3 to 5 turnover for new recruits with less than 2 years' service cost HMPPS at least £30 million a year. We anticipate that the cost per recruit and staff turnover costs are likely to have increased, possibly significantly, over that period, costs that could more constructively be invested into pay.

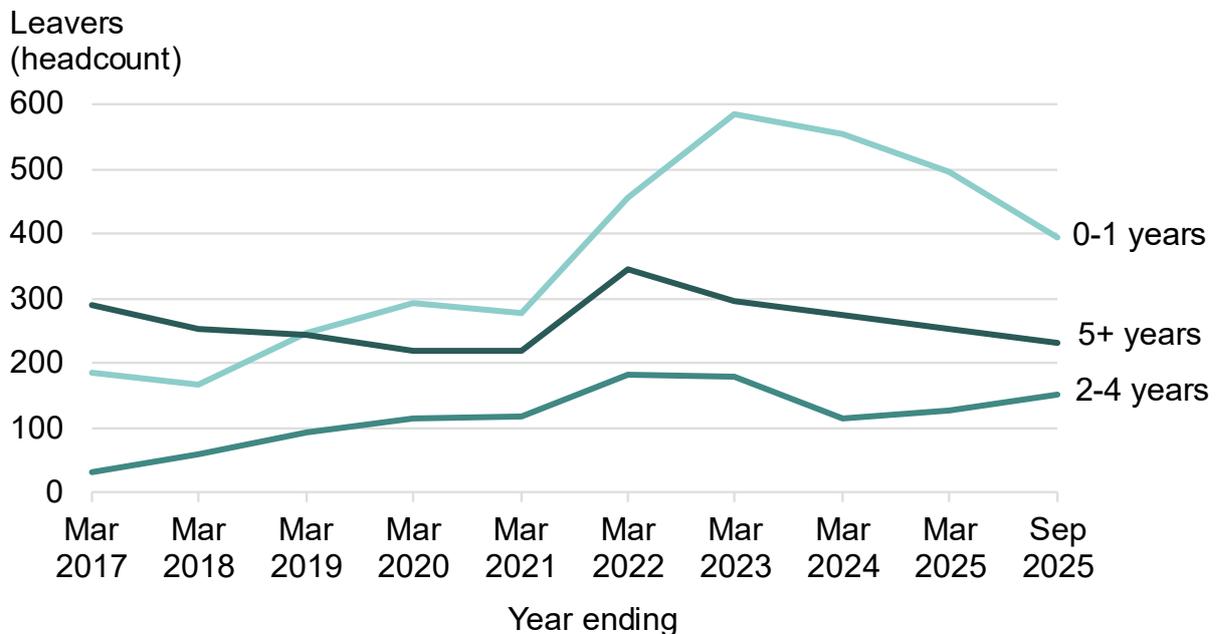
<sup>56</sup> Relevant Band 2 staff were formerly eligible to receive one of three types of market supplement: red, red Outer London and red plus. Following our recommendation from 1 April 2023, all three market supplements for Band 2 staff ceased to be payable as they were consolidated into base pay. OPRB analysis of unpublished HMPPS data.

<sup>57</sup> This figure includes recruitment, training and salary costs.

**Figure 2.8: Band 3 to 5 leavers by length of service, 12 months to 31 March 2017 to 2025 and 12 months to 30 September 2025<sup>58</sup>**



**Figure 2.9: Band 2 leavers by length of service, 12 months to 31 March 2017 to 2025 and 12 months to 30 September 2025<sup>59</sup>**



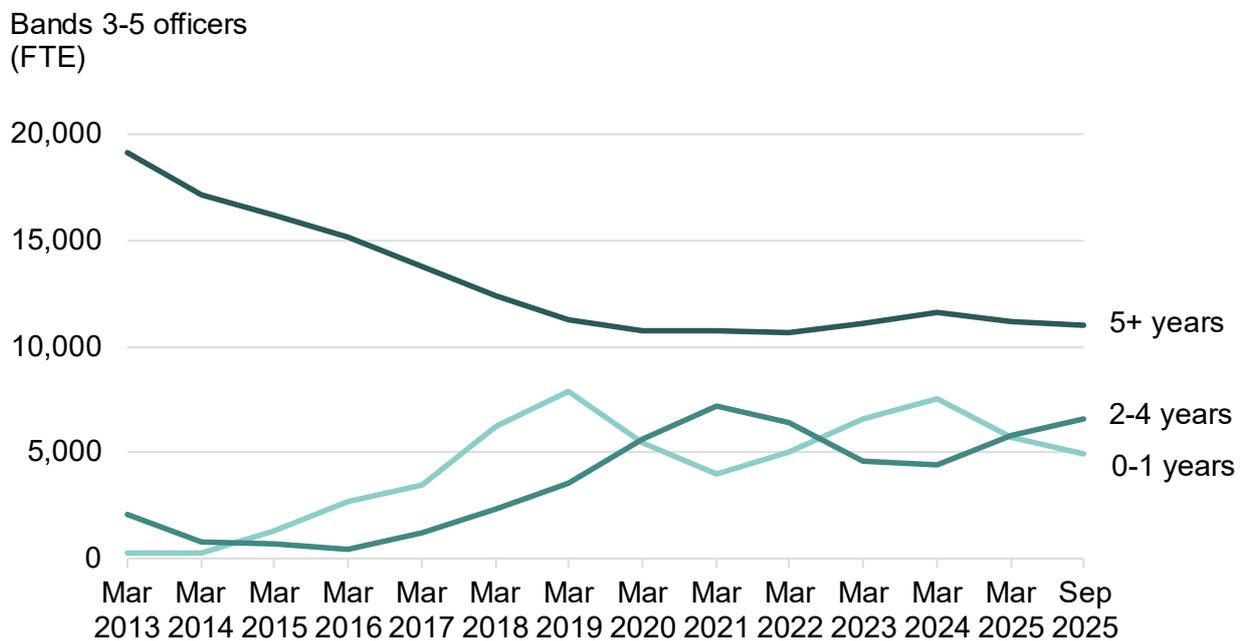
<sup>58</sup> OPRB analysis of HMPPS data. HMPPS, (2025). *HM Prison & Probation Service workforce quarterly: September 2025*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hm-prison-probation-service-workforce-quarterly-september-2025> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

*Staff by length of service*

2.60 The composition of our remit group in terms of time served has changed over time. Figure 2.10 shows that the number of Band 3 to 5 staff with more than five years' service has decreased since 31 March 2013. At 30 September 2025, 48.9% of Band 3 to 5 staff had more than five years' service, compared with 89.1% at 31 March 2013. We note however, that since March 2022 there has been a small increase in the number of Band 3 to 5 officers with more than five years' service. The proportion of staff with 0-1 years of service has generally increased over recent years, but decreased in the last year, standing at 21.9% for Bands 3 to 5 and 30.9% for Band 2 in September 2025 (compared with 18.1% and 28.3% in March 2021).

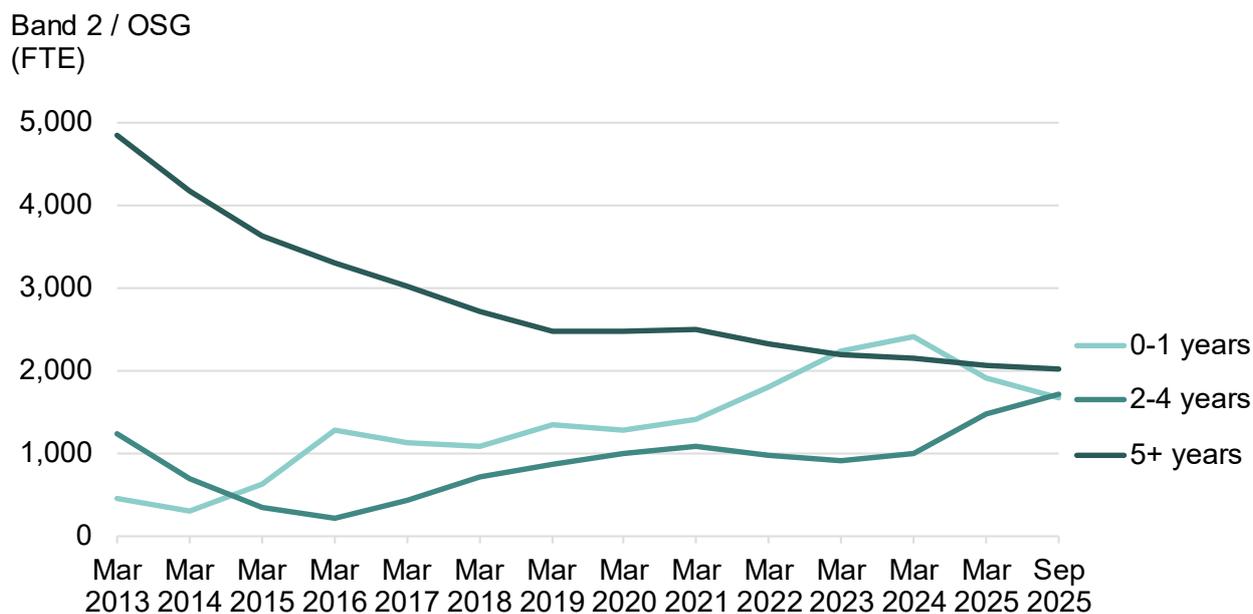
**Figure 2.10: Band 3 to 5 officers in post (FTE) by length of service, at 31 March 2013 to 2025 and at 30 September 2025<sup>60</sup>**



2.61 There is a broadly similar pattern for Band 2 / operational support staff. At 30 September 2025, 37.5% of these staff had more than five years' experience, a decrease from 74.4% as at 31 March 2013. The proportion with less than two years' experience stood at 30.9% as at 30 September 2025, as seen in Figure 2.11.

<sup>60</sup> OPRB analysis of HMPPS data. HMPPS, (2025). *HM Prison & Probation Service workforce quarterly: September 2025*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hm-prison-probation-service-workforce-quarterly-september-2025> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

**Figure 2.11: Band 2 staff in post (FTE) by length of service, at 31 March 2013 to 2025 and at 30 September 2025<sup>61</sup>**



### Locality pay and market supplements

2.62 Two different sets of locality pay arrangements apply to staff in our remit group. Staff in the closed grades at certain establishments continue to qualify for one of six rates of legacy LPAs ranging from £250 to £4,250 a year (see Appendix F). With the introduction of Fair and Sustainable in 2012, LPAs were replaced with three pay zones: a basic National pay range and enhanced ranges for those working in Inner and Outer London establishments and headquarters.

2.63 In February 2017, HMPPS introduced market supplements for 31 sites across England and Wales for an initial period of four years, which was later extended and further sites were added. The amber market supplements were completely removed following the recommendations in our 2022 Report, by being consolidated into base pay, leaving the balance of red (£2,000) and red plus (£3,500) market supplements, paid at 19 sites at the time of writing. As at 30 June 2025 there were 3,124 FTE Band 3 staff eligible to receive a market supplement, around 165 FTE fewer when compared with 30 September 2024. Market supplements do not form part of pensionable pay.

2.64 HMPPS told us that it introduced an evidence-based framework from April 2025 to support the continued use of market supplements. The framework includes an annual review, the first of which was undertaken in autumn 2025. Where the annual review finds sustained recruitment and retention improvements at a prison receiving a market supplement, there would be a gradual and targeted erosion of the payment, without a decrease in staff take-home pay. Market supplements could be introduced at prisons where there were particular issues with recruitment and retention.

<sup>61</sup> OPRB analysis of HMPPS data. HMPPS, (2025). *HM Prison & Probation Service workforce quarterly: September 2025*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hm-prison-probation-service-workforce-quarterly-september-2025> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

## Pay comparability

2.65 Each year, we consider a range of pay comparability data to examine the state of the labour market for Fair and Sustainable grades, with a particular emphasis on Band 3 Prison Officers. Our analysis of the relative position of Prison Service pay in England and Wales is based on comparing gross annual earnings, recorded in the ONS Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) data. We have also included updated comparator analysis based on the approach used by IDR in its 2019 Prison Pay Comparability Study<sup>62</sup> and new, independent research that was commissioned on our behalf (which will be published alongside this report).

### ASHE analysis

2.66 Our ASHE analysis compares Fair and Sustainable pay bands with gross annual earnings across the economy, recorded in the ONS ASHE data. The latest ASHE data relate to the financial year 2024-25.<sup>63</sup>

2.67 Figures 2.12 and 2.13 show where the Fair and Sustainable pay bands fall in the economy-wide distribution of earnings over time, from financial years 2014-15 to 2024-25.

- Pay bands have been split over the two charts below to present a clearer picture. Over this period, Bands 2 and 4 both changed to a spot rate. These spot rates now sit both above their previous respective minima and below their respective maxima, when compared to the relative position within economy-wide earnings. Band 5 has become narrower over time, where the minimum has increased and the maximum has decreased. Band 7 moved to a spot rate, set at the previous maximum, in April 2023;
- Between 2023-24 and 2024-25, the relative position of Band 2 pay has continued to improve, moving by three percentiles in the distribution of economy-wide earnings;
- Band 3 pay has maintained its position over the last three years. The relative position of the Band 4 spot rate and Band 5 minima and maxima have both increased by one percentile between 2023-24 to 2024-25;
- For Band 7 and grades above, the relative positions of the pay scales remained stable when compared to economy-wide earnings. Between 2023-24 and 2024-25 the pay scale length was reduced for Bands 8 to 11, with the difference between the minima and maxima reducing from 20% to 10% by removing the bottom half of the pay scale. This can be seen in the charts as the relative position of the minima points has improved, as well as the spread narrowing; and

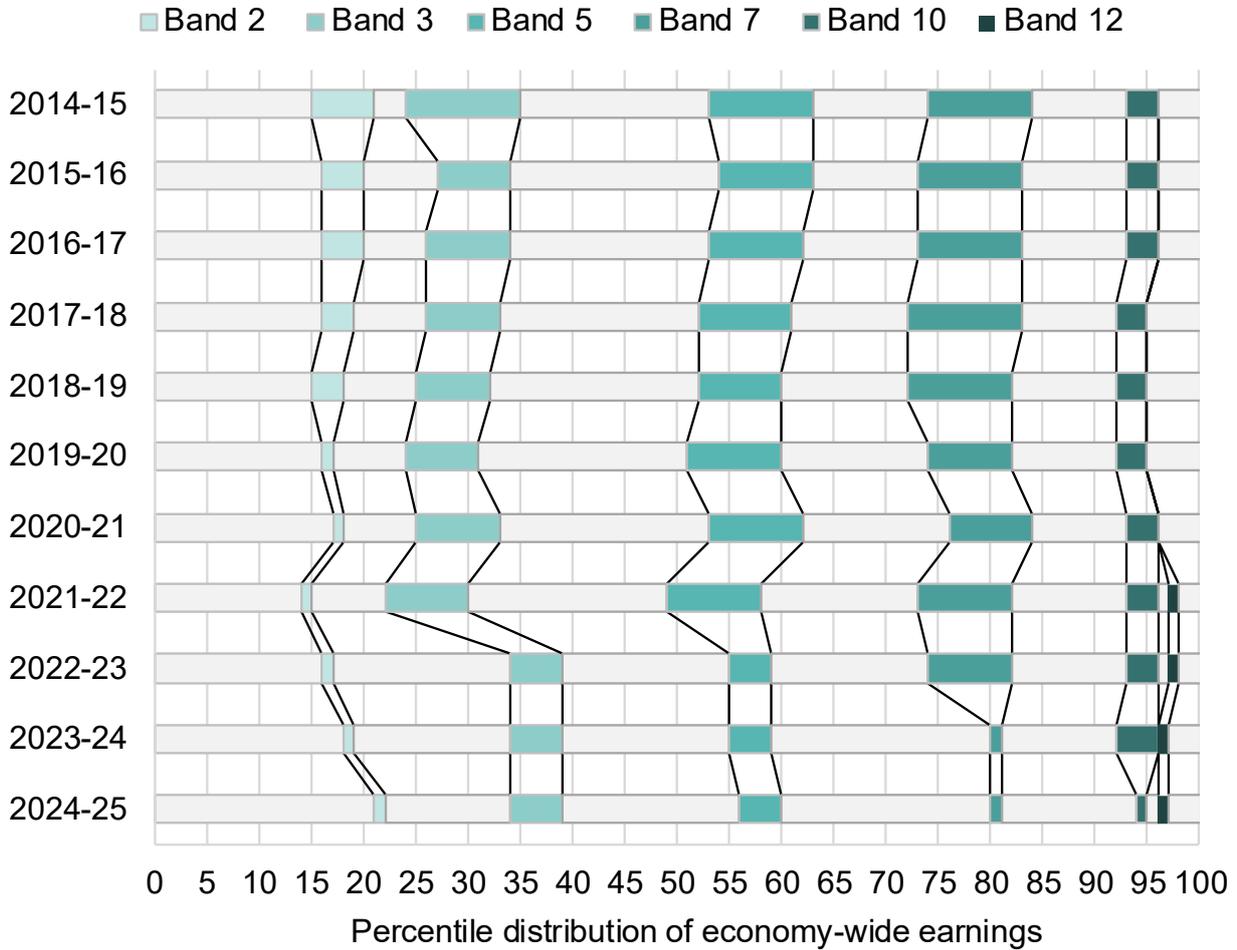
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<sup>62</sup> IDR, (2019). *Prison Pay Comparability Study*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prison-pay-comparability-study>: [accessed on 19 February 2026].

<sup>63</sup> The latest ASHE data is provisional and is subject to change. The ONS introduced improvements to the methodology for processing returns to their survey for 2024 provisional data and 2023 revised data which has resulted in more high earners in each profession being counted in the final data. This has increased the achieved sample size and improved the quality of ASHE estimates, however the ONS advises caution against comparing 2023 and 2024 with 2022 and earlier years.

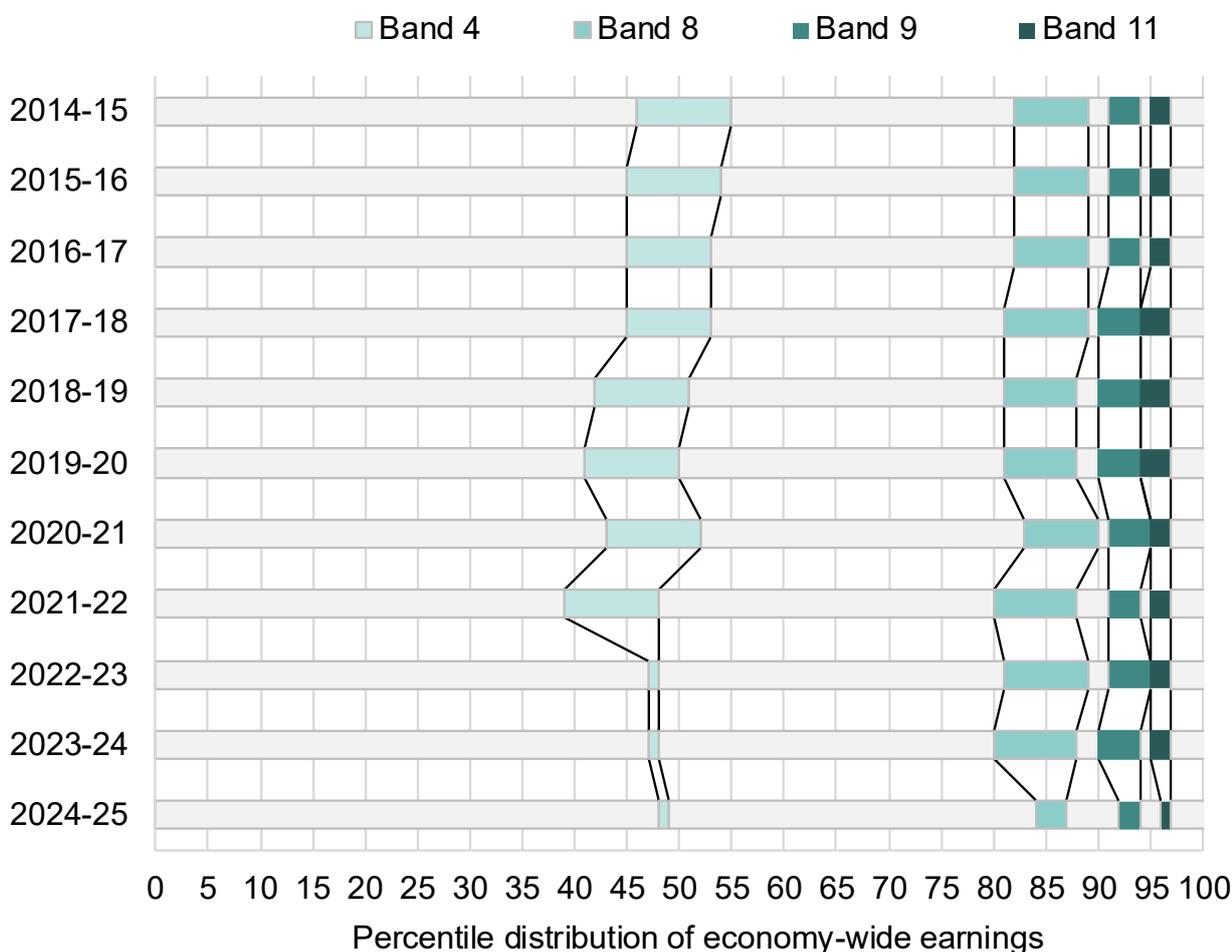
- Band 12 pay has remained relatively stable over the last five years since its introduction, fluctuating between the 97<sup>th</sup> and 98<sup>th</sup> percentile in the distribution of economy-wide earnings.

**Figure 2.12: Position of National Fair and Sustainable Bands 2, 3, 5, 7, 10 and 12 in the percentile distribution of economy-wide earnings, England, and Wales, 2014-15 to 2024-25<sup>64</sup>**



<sup>64</sup> OPRB analysis of unpublished ASHE data. The 2022-23 and 2023-24 data has been revised, and 2024-25 data is provisional.

**Figure 2.13: Position of National Fair and Sustainable Bands 4, 8, 9 and 11 in the percentile distribution of economy-wide earnings, England, and Wales, 2014-15 to 2024-25<sup>65</sup>**



2.68 Figure 2.14 compares the Fair and Sustainable Band 3 pay range (minimum and maximum) to the 25<sup>th</sup>, 50<sup>th</sup> (median) and 75<sup>th</sup> percentiles of gross regional earnings for 2024-25 and includes Scotland and Northern Ireland. Pay for Band 3 is for 37 hours plus 20% unsocial. It shows:

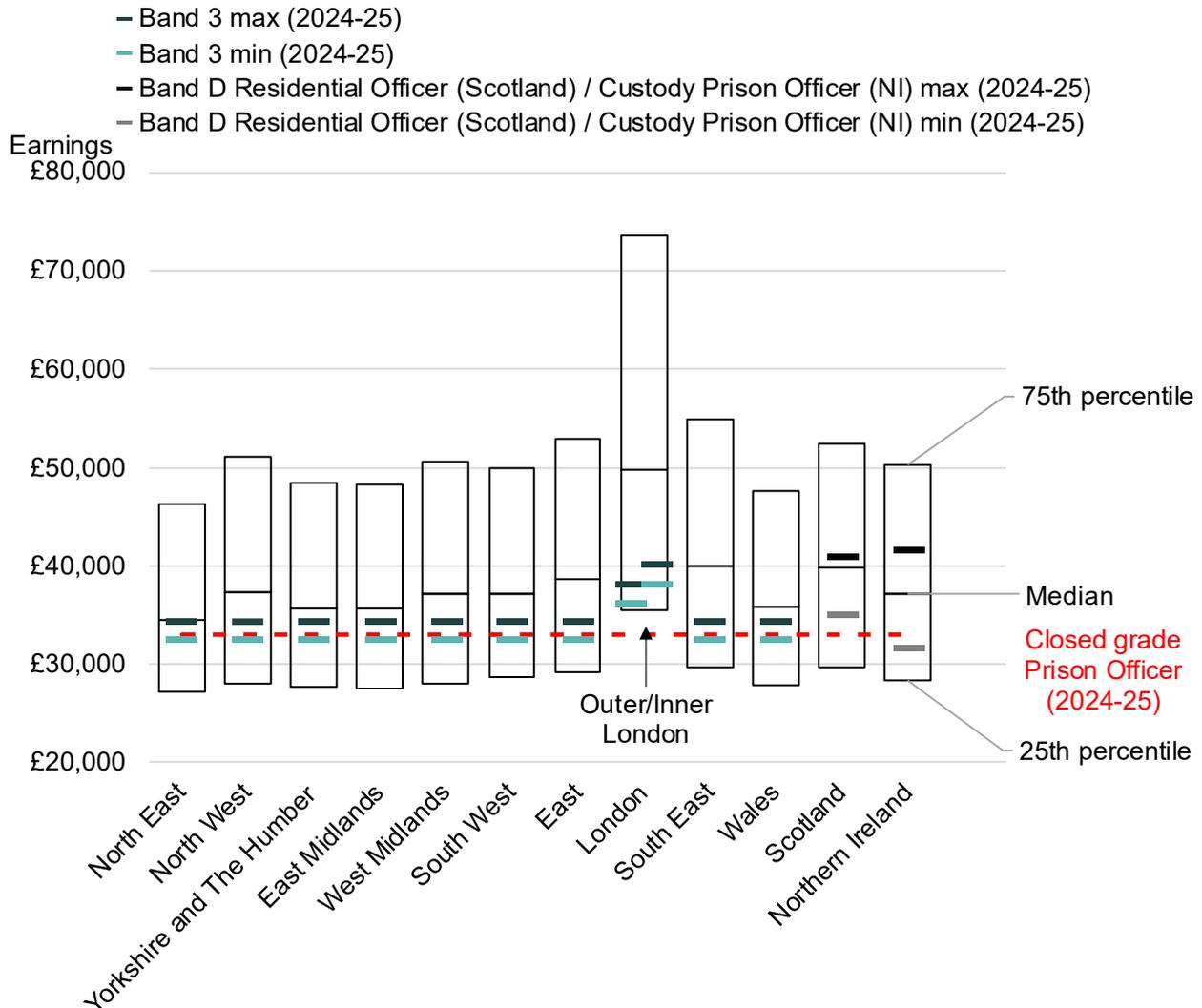
- In the financial year 2024-25, the Band 3 maximum was below median earnings in all regions, as has been the case for several years. The largest differentials are in London, followed by the South East and East;
- When market supplements are factored in for the regions they apply to (£2,000 and £3,500, paid at red and red plus sites respectively), they markedly improve the relative position of prison staff pay. However, the enhanced maxima were still below median earnings for all regions apart from the East Midlands (HMP Stocken);
- Scotland and Northern Ireland have wider pay ranges for their respective grades, the Residential Officer in Scotland and the Custody Prison Officer (CPO) in Northern Ireland. In absolute terms, the difference between the National Band

<sup>65</sup> OPRB analysis of unpublished ASHE data. The 2022-23 and 2023-24 data has been revised, and 2024-25 data is provisional.

3 maximum and minimum was £1,781 in 2024-25. For Scotland the difference was £6,061 and for Northern Ireland, £9,919; and

- In both Scotland and Northern Ireland, the minima of the pay scales were above the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile of earnings and the maxima also exceeded respective median earnings. This is in contrast to the Band 3 pay scale maximum in England and Wales, which did not exceed median earnings in any region. We note that the CPO in Northern Ireland is eligible to receive the Supplementary Risk Allowance (SRA), which was £4,110 from 1 September 2024 to 31 August 2025. When this allowance is included, the position of the Northern Ireland pay scales markedly improved relative to economy-wide earnings.

**Figure 2.14: Comparison of Band 3 pay (37 hours plus 20% unsocial) with regional earnings, 2024-25. The 2024-25 closed grade Prison Officer (39-hour week) max, excluding locality pay, Scottish Band D Residential Officer and Northern Ireland Prison Custody Officer rates are also shown, financial year, 2024-25<sup>66,67</sup>**



**Comparator analysis**

2.69 The 2019 IDR study provided pay comparisons for operational Prison Service staff against other occupations judged by IDR as being suitable comparators. Figures 2.15 and 2.16 set out, for Band 3 and 2 staff outside London, the values for base pay including unsocial hours from 1 April 2025, against the pay of the comparators. The charts seek to demonstrate the range of pay available in comparable roles, compared with the Band 3 Prison Officer and Band 2 OSG pay ranges. The data were retrieved in November 2025 and used the latest available salaries at the time.

<sup>66</sup> OPRB analysis of unpublished ASHE data. ASHE data for 2024-25 is provisional.

<sup>67</sup> Note that y-axis does not start at zero.

2.70 The Band 3 salary including unsocial hours and 2 x Additional Committed Hours (ACH) has also been included. This black bar is most comparable with the private sector prison officer salary figures. We note that as at 31 July 2025:<sup>68</sup>

- 45% of Band 3 staff worked a 37 hour week;
- 29% worked 2 x ACH (or a 39 hour week);
- 9% worked 4 x ACH (or a 41 hour week);
- 15% worked 2 X Pensionable Additional Committed Hours (ACHP); and
- ≤1% worked 1 x ACH or 3 x ACH.

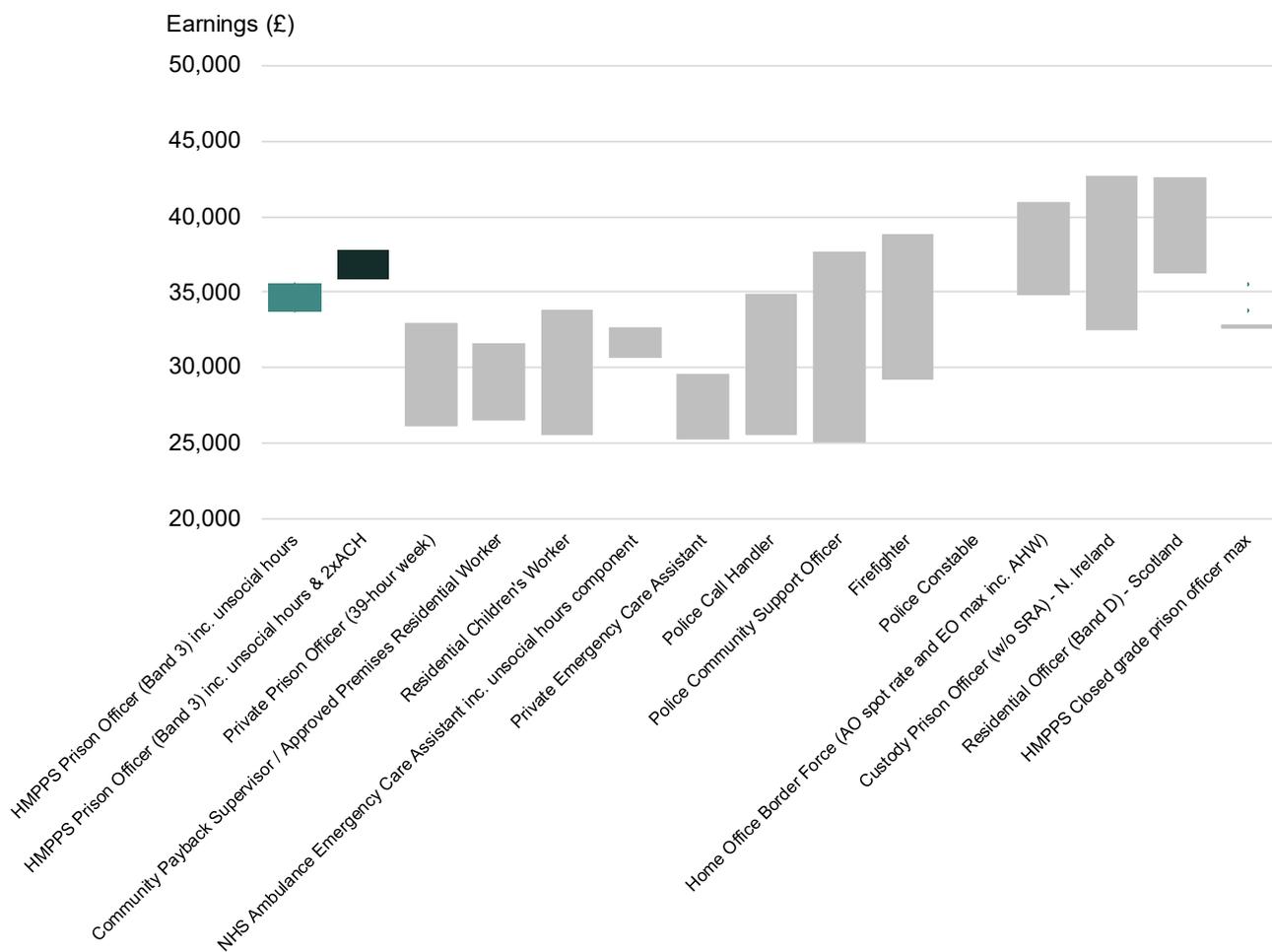
2.71 Figures 2.15 and 2.16 show that:

- The Band 3 pay range including unsocial hours overlaps with six of the thirteen comparators. It is completely above pay for the Community Payback Supervisor / Approved Premises Residential Worker and NHS Ambulance Emergency Care assistant (including unsocial hours). HMPPS closed grades now fall below the Band 3 pay range;
- Band 3 pay remains entirely beneath that of the Residential Officer (Band D) – Scotland;
- Compared to the sample of private prison sector roles, the Band 3 including unsocial hours and 2 x ACH were above the range for the private sector prison roles;
- The Band 3 maximum remains below the maximum for a firefighter and police constable;
- Band 2 pay compares well against the identified comparator roles, exceeding the level of pay for three of the six comparators (excluding closed grade OSG); and
- Band 2 pay overlaps with the relevant NIPS comparator role (Night Custody Officer / Prisoner Custody Officer, excluding SRA), but falls below the level of pay for the SPS Operations Officer (Band C).

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<sup>68</sup> OPRB analysis of unpublished HMPPS data. These figures are presented on an FTE basis, reflecting part-time staff by the proportion of full-time weekly hours worked.

**Figure 2.15: Band 3 National pay and closed grade Prison Officer pay (from 1 April 2025) compared to selected IDR-based comparators<sup>69,70,71</sup>**

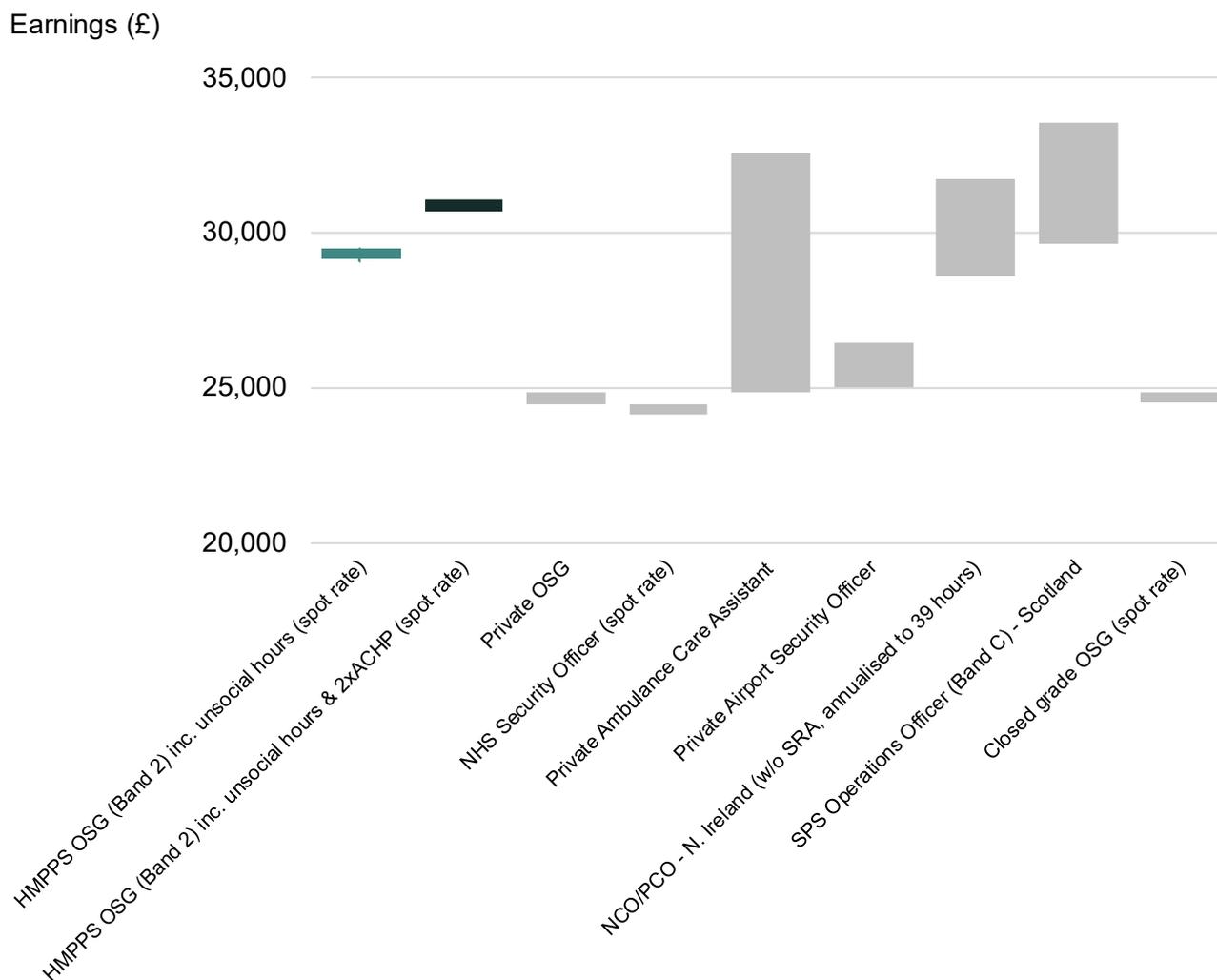


<sup>69</sup> Note y-axis does not start at zero. Adapted from IDR (2019). *Prison Pay Comparability Study*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prison-pay-comparability-study> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

<sup>70</sup> Data from multiple sources. Band 3 and closed grade Prison Officer pay values – unpublished HMPPS payroll data from 1 April 2025. Community Payback Supervisor / Approved Premises Residential Worker – Probation Service (Band 3) (Please note we do not have updated pay scales for Probation service roles) – based on unpublished data from HMPPS. Private Prison Officer (n=3), Residential Children's Worker (n=5), Police Call Handler (n=8), Private Emergency Care Assistant (n=7), Police Community Support Officer (n=9) – OPRB analyses of publicly advertised roles, sourced in November 2025. NHS Ambulance Emergency care assistant – NHS Employers – Pay scales for 2025/26 (online) Available at: <https://www.nhsemployers.org/articles/pay-scales-202526>. Firefighter – Fire Brigades Union, Pay settlement 2025 (online) Available at: <https://www.fbu.org.uk/pay-rates/pay-settlement-2025>. Police constable – Police Federation, Constable pay scale from 1 September 2025 (online) Available at: <https://www.polfed.org/resources/pay-scales/constable-pay-scales/>. Northern Ireland CPO – based on PSPRB 2025 report on Northern Ireland. Scottish Residential Officer – based on unpublished SPS data from 1 April 2025. Home Office Border Force – unpublished Home Office payroll data from 1 July 2024 (Note that we do not have updated pay scales for Home Office Border Force for 2025.) [all links accessed on 19 February 2026].

<sup>71</sup> The salary points for NHS Ambulance Emergency Care Assistant and Border Force both include an estimate of unsocial hours. These estimates were based on IDR's calculations in the 2019 report. Firefighter assumes no overtime. IDR only included pay points 2 to 4 for Police Constable, all pay points have been included here. Community Payback Supervisor was privatised at time of IDR report and is now again part of the Probation Service (Band 3). Private Prison Officer, Residential Children's Worker, Police Call Handler, Private Emergency Care Assistant, Police Community Support Officer pay values may include/attract shift and/or unsocial and/or other allowances and may be based on annual or hourly pay.

**Figure 2.16: Band 2 National pay and closed grade OSG (from 1 April 2025) compared to selected IDR-based comparators<sup>72</sup>**



2.72 As pay comparability is such an important aspect of our terms of reference and the last time that external research was undertaken from scratch was the 2019 IDR study, the Office for the Pay Review Bodies (OPRB) commissioned new, independent research on our behalf in spring 2025. London Economics and Beamans were awarded the contract, following a competitive tender exercise. While OPRB has updated pay information for the comparators used in the IDR research, the comparators or professions themselves had not been reviewed since 2019.

2.73 The research team formulated its methodology and criteria for identifying comparator roles, proposed a set of comparators and then performed its pay comparability analyses. The full research report will be published at the same time as this report. We will use this report to complement our comparator analysis in the future. Key findings for selected pay bands are presented below.

<sup>72</sup> Data from multiple sources. Band 2 and closed grade OSG pay values – unpublished HMPPS payroll data from 1 April 2025. Private OSG Prison Officer (n=3), NHS Security Officer (n=4), Private Ambulance Care Assistant (n=5), Private Airport Security Officer (n=6), – OPRB analyses of publicly advertised roles, sourced in November 2025. Northern Ireland NCO/PCO roles – based on PSPRB 2025 report on Northern Ireland. SPS Operations Officer – based on unpublished SPS data from 1 April 2025.

- For Band 2 staff, when considering basic pay, the salary overlaps with the comparators used (although it tends to be lower than the upper end of the salary range for the selected comparators). When including unsocial hours in the comparison, pay for Band 2 tends to be slightly above the comparator professions;
- Although the pay ranges for Band 3 Prison Officers overlap with that of most comparators, annual salaries were lower than the top of the range observed for corresponding roles in NIPS, the SPS (and identified comparators in the NHS and Border Force). Salaries were higher than pay observed for other identified comparators;
- The annual salary for Band 7 staff is in line with pay observed for comparable roles in the Scottish and Northern Ireland prison services. It is also in line with the upper end of the range for comparator roles in the NHS Agenda for Change, but below the pay range for a Police Inspector. Band 7 pay was above the two private sector roles considered and the other public sector roles considered (including comparator roles at Senior Executive Officer grade in the Civil Service); and
- For Band 10 staff, pay is higher than for governors in the Scottish and Northern Irish prison services, while Police Chief Superintendents and Assistant Chief Fire Officers receive higher salaries.

## **Motivation and morale**

### *Civil Service People Survey*

2.74 We usually consider the results of the annual Civil Service People Survey for HMPPS as part of our evidence. However, as our pay round is running a little earlier than last year, to get the round back to timetable, the results of the 2025 survey were not provided in time for inclusion in this report. Our summary of the results of the 2024 survey can be found in our 2025 Report.

### *POA survey*

2.75 The POA continued with its survey of its members, receiving just over 1,600 responses to its 2025 survey. This survey provided useful insights into the views of frontline staff and results showed that most indicators had slightly worsened compared to the 2024 survey. Some of the key results included:

- Pay – 83% (no change from the previous survey) said they felt that their salary did not reflect the role and responsibilities of their job. Around 88% (no change) felt their salary was too low considering the work they undertook and the risks involved. 38% (-1%) said they were not satisfied with the benefits package they received and 69% (+1%) said their salary was not in line with other similar public sector jobs;
- Training and staffing levels – around 41% (+1%) of respondents felt that they did not get regular training relevant to their role, with 49% (+6%) considering that their job training was not fit for purpose. Over 50% (no change) of reported activities being curtailed were said to be due to staff shortages;

- Retention – around 27% (+1%) said they intended to leave the Prison Service in two to five years, 10% (-1%) in less than a year and 18% (no change) in over 10 years. When asked where they would leave their current role to go, 16% (+1%) said they would retire and 12% (+1%) would want to get promoted to the next band;
- Motivation and morale – 72% (+2%) of respondents felt that morale was not good in the prison that they worked at. The same number also stated that they had been stressed a few times a week or more. 39% (-2%) said they had never been assaulted at their workplace, with 45% (+1%) saying they had been assaulted more than once. 88% (-2%) reported being verbally abused or threatened more than once by a prisoner. Only 32% (-3%) of staff said they felt safe at the prison they worked at;
- Other issues – around 70% of staff said that carrying PAVA spray assisted them in dealing with violent or threatening situations. 74% of staff said they would like to be issued with slash and bite proof utility vests for when on duty;
- Of the 26% (+3%) of staff who had requested a flexible working pattern, 39% (-3%) said they had their proposed shift pattern accepted;
- Around 28% of staff had submitted a grievance since joining the Service, with 79% (-1%) having no confidence in the staff grievance procedure;
- 70% (no change) reported that they did not have meaningful face to face conversations with their line manager every eight weeks about their performance; and
- 97% (+2%) considered the retirement age to be too high.

### *Rademaker Review into HMPPS Professional Standards*

2.76 The Rademaker Report into Professional Standards in HMPPS was published on 6 May 2025.<sup>73</sup> This looked at bullying, harassment, sexual assault and discrimination within HMPPS and a reported a lack of trust in the internal grievance and other processes. Unacceptable workplace behaviour can result in a toxic environment, demotivate staff, increase sickness absence and drive higher levels of turnover. These are all issues that the unions have raised with us over a number of years and have been discussed during our prison visits.

2.77 While finding improvements since the establishment of the Tackling Unacceptable Behaviour Unit in 2020, the report recommended a revised and independent complaints process, centralised tracking of incidents, and other improvements. HMPPS said it accepted all the recommendations and is working with the trade unions on its implementation. HMPPS had started a review of its internal discrimination complaint forms, with a project board set up to oversee the delivery of each of the recommendations, including schedules and delivery targets. In oral evidence HMPPS said the independence of the complaints' procedure would take this work away from managers and relieve pressures on them.

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<sup>73</sup> HMPPS, (2025). *HMPPS Professional Standards Review*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hmppps-professional-standards-review> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

2.78 The POA said it welcomed the Rademaker report, strongly supported it and saw it as refreshing. The POA noted that the author, Jennifer Rademaker, had agreed to stay on to oversee the implementation of the recommendations. The PGA also said it welcomed the positive response to the report from the Government because it offered a real opportunity to shift the culture across HMPPS. However, the PGA said there needed to be sustained commitment and additional resources to ensure its success, noting that roles created in headquarters could see staff taken out of the operational line. The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union welcomed the Report and said it showed that staff had to work in a toxic working environment and culture. The PCS also said there was a lack of visible leadership concerning professional standards with some issues, such as sexual misconduct, not always being fully investigated. The PCS said it would engage closely on the review and try to ensure that HMPPS implemented all the recommendations.

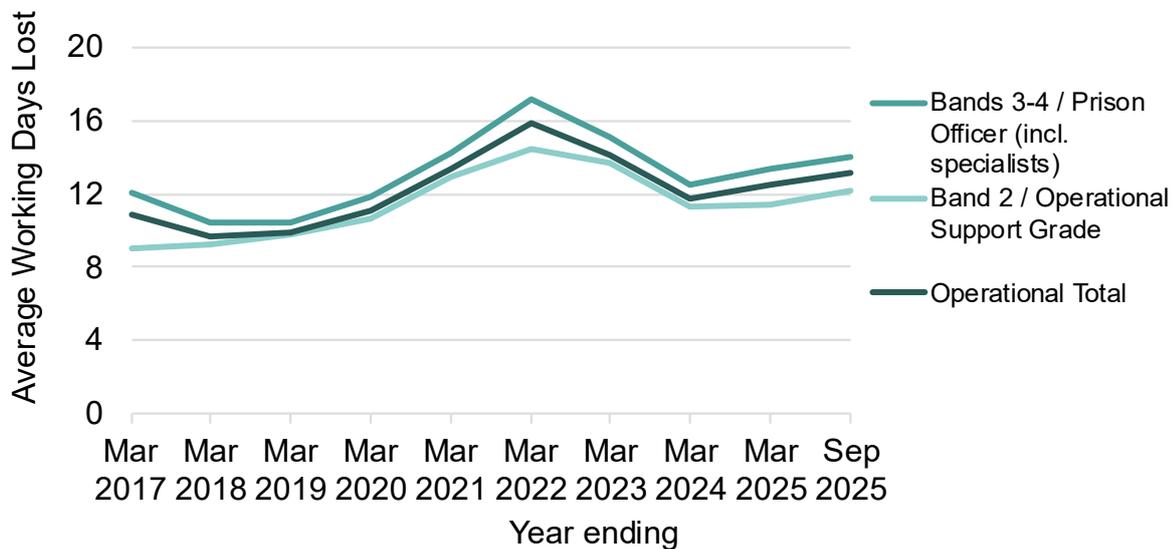
### *Sickness absence*

- 2.79 High levels of sickness absence are often a sign of low morale and motivation. They also significantly affect staffing levels and operational decisions. Overall sickness absence in HMPPS rose in the year to September 2025 and remains higher than in the pre-Covid period.
- 2.80 In the year to 30 September 2025, operational staff in His Majesty's Prison Service, YCS and HMPPS headquarters had 13.2 average working days lost (AWDL) due to sickness absence, up from 11.9 in the 12 months to 30 September 2024.<sup>74</sup> By grade, in the year to 30 September 2025, Band 3 and 4 prison officers (including specialists) had the highest AWDL, at 14.0, followed by Band 4 / Supervising Officer (13.7) and Band 2 / OSG (12.2). Operational manager grades had lower AWDLs compared with Band 4 staff and below. AWDL increased for all grades during the year to 30 September 2025 compared to the year ending 30 September 2024. High levels of overtime, TOIL and temporary promotion might have a direct relationship with the level of absenteeism. Once again, we consider that an analysis of this might be beneficial.

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<sup>74</sup> OPRB analysis of HMPPS data. HMPPS, (2025). *HM Prison and Probation Service workforce quarterly: September 2025*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hm-prison-probation-service-workforce-quarterly-september-2025> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

**Figure 2.17: Average Working Days Lost for Band 3-4 Prison Officers, Band 2 / Operational Support Grades and total operational staff, 12 months to 31 March 2017 to 2025 and 12 months to 30 September 2025<sup>75</sup>**



- 2.81 In the year to 30 September 2025, the most common reason for sickness absence for Band 3 to 5 officers was, again, ‘mental ill health’, accounting for 36.5% of known sickness absence reasons. This was lower than in the year to 31 September 2024 (35.8%). ‘Musculoskeletal system’ was the second-most common reason (20.8%) in the year to 30 September 2025.
- 2.82 For Band 2 / OSG, ‘mental ill health’ was also the most common reason for absence in the year to 30 September 2025, accounting for 27.9% of known sickness absence reasons, up from 25.1% in the year to September 2024. This was followed by ‘musculoskeletal system’ at 23.3%.
- 2.83 Across HMPPS grades in aggregate, ‘mental ill health’ was the most reported known reason for sickness absence in the year to 30 September 2025 (41.2% of known reasons). Over the same period, ‘musculoskeletal system’ accounted for 17.9% of all known reasons.
- 2.84 In Chapter 3 we review the evidence and proposals we received.

<sup>75</sup> OPRB analysis of unpublished HMPPS data.

## **Chapter 3: The parties' submissions and proposals**

### **Introduction**

- 3.1 In this chapter we cover the proposals made to us in written submissions and highlight the main points from our visit programme. We received submissions from all parties: His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS); the POA; the Prison Governors' Association (PGA); and the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) Union. We also received the Government's economic evidence to the pay review bodies from His Majesty's Treasury (HMT). This year we also received a written submission from the Criminal Justice Workers Union (CJWU).
- 3.2 We have collated the main points made by the parties in both their written and oral evidence, relating to: the working environment; issues around recruitment and retention; motivation and morale; and affordability of their pay proposals. All of these are important parts of our terms of reference.

### **His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service**

- 3.3 HMPPS published<sup>76</sup> its written evidence for the 2026-27 pay round on 30 October 2025. As we note in Chapter 1, this was around a month later than had previously been indicated by the Government. The activation letter also asked us to submit our report at the earliest point that allows us to give due consideration to the evidence. HMPPS and Ministry of Justice (MoJ) officials attended oral evidence on 28 November 2025 along with Lord Timpson, the Minister of State for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending.
- 3.4 HMPPS noted that in the previous year prison population pressures had been challenging and the male adult prison estate had been running at around 99% capacity. It noted that the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice published the Government's 10 year capacity strategy in December 2024 which outlined the commitment to increase the prison estate by 14,000 new places by 2031. This also included reforms to the planning system to reduce delays to new builds. In the 2025 Spending Review, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced funding of £4.7 billion from 2026-27 to 2029-30 to support delivery of the 14,000 new prison places. Around 6,500 places would be delivered by building four new prisons, one of which opened in April 2025; a further 6,500 spaces via new houseblocks to be built at existing prisons; refurbishing residential units, facilities and ancillaries across the prison estate; plus 1,000 rapid deployment cells across the prison estate. HMPPS also noted that building alone would not solve population challenges. This is why the Government is taking forward many of the core recommendations from the Independent Sentencing Review which will require legislation and aims to place the prison system on a more sustainable footing. HMPPS also reported that up to £300 million was being invested in prison and probation building maintenance for 2025-26, to support essential repairs.
- 3.5 In its evidence, HMPPS stated that its overall resourcing across the prison workforce continues to stabilise and believes that the Service is almost fully staffed according to its resource model. However, it said there were some challenges with the experience levels of staff. As at 30 June 2025, 37.3% of Band 3 to 5 prison officers

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<sup>76</sup> HMPPS, (2025). *HMPPS evidence to the Prison Service Pay Review Body: 2026*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hmppps-evidence-to-prison-service-pay-review-body-2026> [accessed 19 February 2026].

had less than three years' experience, meaning an important focus was to retain staff and increase experience. HMPPS also accepted that there were some persistent recruitment and retention challenges in certain areas of the country and parts of the prison estate. It reported that the Long-Term and High-Security Estate had staffing difficulties at some of those sites due to security checks, poor rural transport links and recent high-profile assaults covered in the media. The Service's evidence noted that there were high recruitment targets each year to account for natural attrition as well as future prison estate expansion. The national recruitment process was being strengthened by: the Prison Officer Alumni Scheme for former staff returning via a fast-track process; streamlined routes for existing Operational Support Grades (OSGs) to progress to prison officer roles; and the 'Extraordinary Jobs' campaign raising awareness of the prison officer profession. HMPPS said it had deliberately over-recruited at prisons with a strong recruitment performance in 2023 and 2024 to enable the temporary deployment of staff to other establishments, which is a standard operational practice. The Service said it had been actively reducing the number of surplus staff at those sites since then. At the end of June 2025, the Service was 1,046 full-time equivalent Band 3 to 5 officers below the target staffing level. HMPPS also noted that there were particular staffing shortages at managerial grades.

- 3.6 HMPPS said it was making progress developing a workforce delivery project. It was with prison governors to consider how it would change their regimes and what key work needed to be done, with governors deciding the right assessment for their prison. It also advised that the staffing assumptions about non-effective staff, that is staff who are off sick, on maternity/paternity leave or training, had been increased. The assumed level of non-effective staff was being increased from 20% to 24%. This would be provided by a reduction in the number of staff assigned to key work rather than new staff if there was no additional funding. If implemented in full, the new resourcing model suggested that around 450 further additional staff would be needed. HMPPS said it could not provide its detailed medium-term staffing forecasts for the next few years. However, it indicated that expansion in the prison estate could require an additional 1,300 staff.
- 3.7 HMPPS said that the recent increases in pay had, along with other interventions, contributed to an improved resourcing picture, although the most recent pay award for 2025-26 has yet to be reflected in quarterly workforce statistics and exit data. Drawing attention to pay and reward being the eighth main driver of attrition (according to exit interviews), HMPPS said it would be premature to continue to invest heavily in pay without the consequences of the previous award being understood. The written evidence noted that the overall leaving rate for Band 3 to 5 prison officers had reduced to 11.6% for the 12 months ending 30 June 2025, which was a 0.8 percentage point decrease compared to the year ending March 2025. HMPPS also noted that the resignation rate had decreased and stood at 7.7% in the 12 months ending 30 June 2025 which was a 0.6 percentage point decrease since March 2025. The Service stated that the main attrition factors were leadership, learning and development and career progression, with a number of initiatives and programmes to help improvement in these three areas. The Service said it had also implemented the Retention Oversight Process to look at those prisons with the highest levels of attrition to identify the underlying causes of resignations. Exit interviews can be a valuable source of information in this respect.

- 3.8 This year, on our visits, we were informed that HMPPS had recruited around 2,000 to 2,600 staff from overseas, particularly from Ghana and Nigeria, on sponsored visas. However, we were also made aware that the recent change to working visa rules would see the salary needed to sponsor prison officers increasing to £41,700, affecting all those sponsored prison officers earning under that threshold. HMPPS said it had concerns that there would be adverse effects on prisons, particularly those that had recruitment and retention issues. In oral evidence, HMPPS said that a high proportion of new recruits were from overseas and a significant number of visas could expire in the coming year. It said it needed to look at how it grew its national homegrown staffing numbers as it needed around 1,300 additional staff for expansion of the prison estate.
- 3.9 In December 2025, it was reported that the Prison Service had received a temporary exemption from the new immigration rules. In January, the Minister wrote to us (see Appendix C) to outline the exemption that HMPPS had been granted, which also extended to prison custody officer roles in private prisons in the United Kingdom. The Minister said the department was able to sponsor prison officers for skilled worker visas until 31 December 2026. Sponsorship could be granted for up to three years depending on an individual's circumstances and those at risk of losing their right to work could apply for sponsorship. We note that this is a temporary measure to help resolve short term resourcing issues related to non-United Kingdom staff, but this does mean HMPPS will no longer be able to recruit new Band 3 Prison Officers from overseas unless the salary reaches the new minimum threshold.
- 3.10 HMPPS said it has continued to enhance its commitment to staff wellbeing by expanding its portfolio of services, peer support networks and volunteer led initiatives for staff. The written evidence noted that prisons present a challenging workplace. Not only did physical safety affect staff but so did the local culture and day-to-day staff facilities. HMPPS reported that assaults on staff had increased by 7% in the 12 months to March 2025, with the number of incidents reaching a new peak. HMPPS said it had issued staff with body worn video cameras and provided training and support with a strong focus on staff wellbeing. It also said it had introduced PAVA spray and was now rolling out protective body armour in the Long-Term and High Security Estate, which holds the most dangerous and challenging prisoners. The written evidence further noted that HMPPS was working across government to deal with the threat of serious and organised crime, to which it estimated around 9% of the total prison population had connections to.
- 3.11 On affordability, HMPPS said that the recommendations from our last report represented a substantial increase of at least 4% to all frontline prison staff, which was a further real terms pay rise on top of the one awarded the previous year. Due to the accelerated timetable for this 2026 Report, HMPPS said it had less time to assess the ramifications of the 2025-26 pay award but expected positive changes on recruitment and retention. HMPPS said its proposals continued its objective to achieve a difficult balance between affordability and, whilst operating in a context of continued operational challenges, the best possible pay award to support recruitment and retention. HMPPS costed its proposals at around £52.4 million, mainly consisting of £42.0 million for the headline pay award and £5.6 million for pay progression, with a further £4.9 million for its proposed increase to Payment Plus.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> In its published evidence, HMPPS included the total cost of its pay proposals for all staff, which included the non-remit group. The figures here were provided separately by HMPPS and are just for staff in our remit group. The figures include oncosts for employer pension and national insurance contributions.

In oral evidence HMPPS was clear that there were no additional funds for pay above the 2.5% it had proposed, considered that the Prison Service was in a good place in relation to pay and preferred to invest in other areas, such as improving the environment for staff.

### 3.12 The following proposals were made by HMPPS:

- An uplift to the Band 2 spot rate of 3.0% (including any increase to the National Living Wage (NLW) if applicable);
- A headline increase for all staff in Bands 3 to 12 of a fixed percentage value of 2.5%. That being 2.5% to all spot rates in Bands 4, 7 and 12, an increase of 2.5% to all pay points in Bands 3 and 5, plus an increase of 2.5% to the minimum and maximum in Bands 6 and 8 to 11;
- Increase the London cash differentials in line with the 2.5% percentage headline increase;
- A non-consolidated award for closed grade staff who would suffer a financial disadvantage if they opted in to Fair and Sustainable with the value to be determined by the Prison Service Pay Review Body (PSPRB);
- No pay award for those staff on closed grade terms who would benefit financially if they opted in to Fair and Sustainable;
- Eligible staff in Bands 3 and 5, who were not subject to formal poor performance measures, would progress to the next pay point following pay point uplifts, effective 1 April 2026;
- Eligible staff in Bands 8 to 11, who were not subject to formal poor performance measures, would progress by increasing pay by 3.33% (subject to the maxima) in addition to headline increases;
- Maintain market supplements at the current levels of £2,000 a year at red sites and £3,500 a year at red plus sites;
- As part of the rolling review of allowances, no increase to the Fair and Sustainable on-call allowances;
- Increasing Payment Plus from £22 to £25 an hour; and
- No changes or increases to any other allowances or payments, including those linked to Recommendation 14.<sup>78</sup>

### 3.13 HMPPS and the PGA also agreed general principles and areas to review together and provide early sight of these to us. These areas are:

- Enhanced flexibility for recruitment of governor roles – recruitment and retention of governors, particularly in larger, more complex, or high-profile prisons remains

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<sup>78</sup> Recommendation 14 is from the 2024 PSPRB report. It requested a number of data and proposals from the parties including: initiatives to reduce OSG overtime and Payment Plus; the percentage of unsocial hours worked by OSGs; the outcome of discussions between the parties on these issues; and the rationale for why Payment Plus, OSG overtime and OSG unsocial hours payments should or should not be increased.

challenging. Both parties said they would work jointly to explore the scope for the development of tailored contracts for governor appointments to clearly outline applicable incentives, improve transparency and target recruitment more effectively.

- Temporary cover payments – jointly committing to resolving the issue where staff on temporary cover received higher pay than substantive post holders.
- Accreditation utilisation payments (licence to operate) – exploring the introduction of utilisation payments for accredited roles, including: Head of Function; Deputy Governor; Governor; and Gold Commander. This would reinforce the value of frontline leadership and support development of a professional register and licence to operate for accredited post holders.

3.14 HMPPS asked for no changes to be made to market supplements this year, noting again that it had developed its market supplements framework. It said the framework included an evidence-based annual review process, which would provide greater transparency and an effective mechanism for the gradual erosion of supplements, if there was an improvement in recruitment and retention at specific prisons. An erosion of the market supplements was taking place at HMYOI Cookham Wood, due to its re-role into part of HMP Rochester in June 2024. HMPPS said it intends to continue to use market supplements as part of its long-term pay strategy. The Service also asked that there be no consolidation of the current red and red plus market supplements into base pay. That would be a challenge for HMPPS and would, in its view, deliver poor value for money. If a supplement was to be eroded, it would be via a reduction of a proportion of the pay increase in the relevant year and, if necessary, in later years.

3.15 HMPPS said open and honest conversations between line managers and employees were core to the performance management approach in the MoJ. There was the expectation of regular conversations taking place every eight weeks with a quarterly review carried out by managers. The Service said there was work underway to consider elements of the performance management and managing poor performance policies to encourage a high-performance culture. There were already policies in place to deal with performance when there were management concerns.

### **His Majesty's Treasury**

3.16 HMT published<sup>79</sup> its written economic evidence to all eight public sector pay review bodies for the 2026-27 pay round on 15 December 2025. The written evidence noted that the Government had taken steps to strengthen confidence in the process and support timely and fair pay awards, having delivered both the 2025-26 pay awards and the 2026-27 remits two months earlier than previously. On 6 January 2026, HMT held an oral economic evidence session with all eight pay review body chairs and economist members.

3.17 Having accepted the 2025-26 pay award recommendations, HMT's evidence stated that the Government had delivered a real terms increase in pay for the majority of pay review body workforces. However, this resulted in difficult trade-offs as

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<sup>79</sup> His Majesty's Treasury, (2025). *Economic Evidence to the Pay Review Bodies 2026-27 Pay Round*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/economic-evidence-to-the-pay-review-bodies-2026-27-pay-round/economic-evidence-to-the-pay-review-bodies-2026-27-pay-round> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

recommendations were in excess of what it deemed affordable in evidence. As a result, departments had to make challenging decisions on spending and reprioritisation. HMT stated that the public finances remained under significant pressure and that all pay awards must be funded from departmental budgets. Recommendations above what was set as affordable would require careful consideration, noting there were future commitments for further efficiencies and savings from 2028-29. HMT also said that if recommendations above affordable levels are again accepted this would again mean challenging trade-offs, with the potential to adversely affect wider commitments to improve public services.

- 3.18 HMT noted in its written evidence that the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) expected Consumer Price Index inflation to have peaked in Quarter 3 in 2025 and then fall progressively to the Bank of England's target of 2.0% in Quarter 1 of 2027. The OBR forecast is that it will then remain at around that level for the remainder of 2027-28. The OBR forecast of average weekly earnings growth in 2026-27 was 3.2%. There had been a softening demand for labour and HMT's expectation was that wage growth would continue to decline over 2026. HMT suggested that recent public sector wage growth had outpaced that of the private sector. The Treasury noted that Brightmine pay settlement data indicated that over 2025, median pay settlements in the private sector were around 2.9% versus 3.6% in the public sector. The Bank of England Agents' Pay Survey, excluding the public sector, showed 2025 wage settlements averaged 3.9%.
- 3.19 Departmental budgets for 2026-27, 2027-28 and 2028-29 have already been set, with the Treasury again noting trade-offs would be greater were there to be higher than proposed pay awards than could be funded from departmental budgets. Departments would not be given additional funds and would need to carefully consider efficiencies, productivity gains or cuts, and whether recommendations would need to be rejected if they seemed unaffordable.
- 3.20 The evidence concluded by asking pay review bodies to take full account of the latest data and forecasts for wage growth across the wider economy, which, because of a loosening labour market, was expected to decline in 2026-27.

## **POA**

- 3.21 We received the POA's written submissions<sup>80</sup> at the end of September 2025 and held oral evidence with its officials on 13 November 2025. The union noted that the PSPRB was a compensatory mechanism for prison staff who, save for OSGs, do not have rights to take any form of industrial action or to even be able to withdraw from undertaking unpaid duties as industrial leverage on pay or conditions. There was disappointment with the Minister's remit letter and its assertion that pay awards would have to be funded from existing budgets and balanced against other priorities. The union considered that the Government needed to be ambitious and fully fund the Prison Service for the longer term.
- 3.22 The POA said the Service remained in "crisis", with staff shortages, overcrowding and under resourcing leaving hard pressed staff to deal with the turmoil in prisons. The POA said there are no signs that the picture will improve soon. The union again argued that prisons in England and Wales are the most violent workplaces in

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<sup>80</sup> POA UK, (2025). *CIRC 074: POA WRITTEN PAY SUBMISSIONS 2026/27*. (online) Available at: <https://www.poauk.org.uk/news-events/news-room/posts/2025/november/circ-074-poa-written-pay-submissions-202627/> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

Western Europe, with many key indicators heading in the wrong direction which it was concerned about. It noted that the number of incidents of prisoner self-harm had increased and had reached a new high in March 2025. The overall number of assaults in March 2025 data had increased by 9%, with 34% (10,568) of incidents on staff, an increase of 7%. The union also highlighted the risks to staff outside of the prison. These risks can range from threatening behaviour towards them and their families, the attacking of property, to the influence of organised crime and the murder of a former prison officer.

3.23 The written evidence noted that HMPPS claimed that green shoots were appearing in respect of Band 3 to 5 officer numbers, whilst the POA maintained that there had in fact been no real progress. The POA said that the number of officers had flatlined between 2020 and 2025. In oral evidence the union expressed its concerns about the changes to visa rules for overseas prison officers which it said some prisons were relying on to function and which the Service could not simply replace quickly enough. This was in part why it had presented its option 1 proposal (outlined in paragraph 3.25). It noted that the leaving rate in the 12 months to June 2025 had decreased for Band 3 to 5 officers from 12.2% to 11.6% but considered this rate was still too high. It also noted that the HMPPS data indicated that the number of staff with less than three years' service leaving the Service had increased whilst those with 10 or more years of service remained stable. The union stated that there were issues with Band 2 recruitment and retention, something it saw as a consequence of only paying Band 2 OSGs around the NLW. The POA maintains that HMPPS has relied heavily on detached duty since 2013 and, while recognising the operational importance of detached duty, the POA is of the view that it is now an increasingly common response to chronic staffing issues rather than serving its original purpose of being a short-term operational measure. The POA's written evidence also noted a number of roles for example, police officers, Fire Service, Border Force, jobs in railway companies and logistics companies that prison officers leave to work in, together with related salary information.

3.24 The POA again completed a survey of its members this year, with 1,600 responses, covering many areas that can impact on motivation and morale. The survey noted that 72% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that staff morale was good in the prison they worked in. A similar proportion stated that they had felt stressed a few times a week or more at work and 52% said they felt their mental health was not taken seriously at work. Around 40% of staff did not feel safe in their workplaces and 61% reported that they had been assaulted while at work. Around a quarter of respondents had requested flexible working and of those, only 39% said they had had their request accepted. The POA noted that the SANEO project<sup>81</sup> was now a "failed project" but wanted to reengage with any resurrected project that had similar objectives, including flexible working for prison officers.

3.25 The POA made two broad proposals to us this year; its preferred option one, along with option two if we were not able to recommend option one. The proposals were:

#### *Option 1*

- A simplified pay structure for Bands 2 to 5 that would place all staff in those grades on a standardised 37 hour per week spot rate. The Band 3 spot rate with

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<sup>81</sup> The Shaping A New Employee Offer (SANEO) was a programme that is now closed that was tasked with looking at the introduction of flexible working arrangements.

20% Unsocial Working Hours (UWH) set at the skilled worker visa threshold of £41,700 a year;

- The introduction of a Supplementary Risk Allowance (SRA) for operational Bands 2 to 5 to recognise the extreme danger frontline staff endure. The allowance to be set at £4,000 a year for Bands 3 to 5 and £2,000 a year for Band 2; and
- All other allowances and payments to remain at current levels and withdrawal of any previously requested additional new payments or allowances.

### *Option 2*

- A 6.3% headline award for all pay points in Fair and Sustainable Bands 2 to 5, including closed grade equivalents. This includes an element towards pay restoration;
- The introduction of the SRA as described in option one above;
- The UWH payment to be increased from 20% (temporarily 25% for Band 2) to 33% for Bands 2 to 5 to compensate for excessive working hours;
- Payment Plus to increase from £22 to £30 an hour;
- The Operational Response and Resilience Unit (ORRU) allowance to increase by 6.3% from £8,000 to £8,504 a year;
- Fair and Sustainable on-call payments to increase from £9.00 and £25.00 to £14.18 and £39.40 (57.6%), with the hourly rate increasing from £1.04 to £2.21 (113.4%);
- A £500 consolidated payment for Band 2 to 5 staff who undertake additional and voluntary unpaid tasks;<sup>82</sup>
- A £500 retainer payment for those who complete the initial Tornado<sup>83</sup> training course, then paid annually following completion of the Tornado annual refresher course;
- The introduction of a dog trainers' allowance of £1,500 a year for those delivering initial training and an allowance of £1,000 a year for those delivering continuation training;

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<sup>82</sup> POA notes the following, but this is not exhaustive: Negotiator; ACCT Assessor; Control and Restraint Instructor; Control and Restraint Tornado/advanced course; First Aider; Mentor; Local Response Team; Care Team; Mental Health Allies (TRIM trained staff); OSG drivers (including Tornado and Category A/High Security); ECR/Control Room Operators; Separation Centres; Discreet HSE Units; Family Liaison Officers; and proposed Naloxone intervention staff.

<sup>83</sup> Operation Tornado teams consist of staff trained specifically to deal with serious incidents in prisons. Tornado units are used to support other establishments in the event of an operational emergency. These incidents include serious disturbances, hostage incidents, or any incident where the establishment does not have the resources to cope, such as a need to transfer large numbers of prisoners at short notice.

- Band 2 OSG overtime to be increased to time and a half for green hours and double time for red hours;<sup>84</sup> and
- A reduction in the working week to 35 hours.

- 3.26 Despite this being outside our remit, the POA asked for a positive endorsement in this report, for a reduction in the retirement age to 60 in line with the police and fire services. The union also asked that Band 2 OSGs be removed from our remit and subject to collective bargaining because this group has the right to take industrial action. Again, this is not within our remit and would need to be proposed by HMPPS following discussions with the recognised trade unions.
- 3.27 The POA proposed that all market supplements should be consolidated into base pay because it believes the market supplements have “categorically failed” in their aim of improving recruitment and retention at the recipient sites. The POA believes that consolidation of the market supplements would ensure predictability for staff and that would deliver value for money because consolidated pay would better resolve the recruitment and retention difficulties at the current 19 sites. In oral evidence the POA noted that accepting its proposed Option 1 would see all the existing market supplements subsumed into base pay.
- 3.28 The POA also said for the second time that it would be open to discuss multi-year pay awards. It said this would provide the remit group financial stability for the next two years and would enable HMPPS to budget without the uncertainty that the yearly pay award undoubtedly brings.
- 3.29 In its written evidence, the POA costed each of its proposals for Bands 2 to 5 – option one at around £286.8 million and option two at around £280.3 million. Both proposals would see the introduction of an SRA payment which the union costed at around £100 million. Option one would see around £154 million increase in pay with a further £31.5 million in increased UWH costs. Option two would see an increase in pay of around £55 million and around £124 million in increased UWH payments. The union stated that its proposals would enhance recruitment and retention performance and end the reliance on detached duty. Both of these cost the Service significant sums of money each year. It would also place prison pay on a competitive footing with other public sector organisations and incentivise progression across all bands.

### **Prison Governors’ Association**

- 3.30 The PGA submitted its written evidence at the end of September 2025 and attended oral evidence on 13 November 2025. The union said it recognised the significant value of the PSPRB but had concerns that successive governments had not consistently accepted recommendations in full or responded in a timely manner, which undermined the integrity of the process. The PGA said it was working on three areas with HMPPS, with a view to submitting joint proposals for our next report, as outlined in paragraph 3.13.
- 3.31 The union stated that staff across the prison estate continued to face, unsafe, poorly maintained conditions which it considered showed a system under stress. Despite a marginal drop in the prison population from its high in 2024, the system remained

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<sup>84</sup> For OSG overtime, green hours are weekdays and red hours are at all other times – all day weekends and Public/Bank Holidays.

under sustained and severe strain. The union noted cautious optimism around the sentencing review, although any positive day to day effects were likely to be distant. The PGA said that many of the failures of the system were outside the control of operational managers and governors, but they were all too often held up as the “scapegoats” for shortcomings in centrally managed contracts, such as education and healthcare. The physical condition of the estate remained unacceptable, with governors again not having the authority or resources to make well overdue improvements. Prisons were too overcrowded and underfunded.

- 3.32 The union noted that the recruitment and retention of governors, particularly at the large and more complex prisons and high-profile prisons, remained a challenge. The Service was still having to use high levels of temporary cover and for protracted periods. The PGA noted that at 31 March 2025 there were around 275 members of staff who were in the operational manager grades but on temporary cover arrangements within a group that only totalled around 1,100. There needed to be better workforce and succession planning by HMPPS, including making substantive promotions more attractive. It was felt that better pay levels would go some way to help alleviate recruitment and retention pressures in Bands 7 to 12.
- 3.33 The PGA said the survey of its members had found that they were working excessive hours. On average members reported working 48 hours per week, well over their contracted 37 hours. Taking back hours was almost impossible and overtime was not paid. On top of this, the PGA said some governing governor grades were effectively on-call every weekday and 26 weekends a year. As a result, many PGA members said they were feeling exhausted, unwell and some were afraid to take sickness absence when ill. It was noted that around 80% had reported that their families had commented on their excessive working hours and over 70% did not feel rested following a period of annual leave. Many felt that work controlled their lives with HMPPS expecting too much of them. More than half of respondents said they had suffered ill health due to stress at work. Like the POA, the PGA noted that assaults and self-harm had reached record highs. There had been a 30% increase in the number of deaths in custody, with a 6% increase in self-harm, both in the 12 months to June 2025 and a 9% increase in assaults in the 12 months to March 2025. All affected staff morale negatively.
- 3.34 The union noted that as an unprotected department, HMPPS had historically shouldered a disproportionate share of the “burden” when delivering public sector financial savings, as well as “the arbitrary and deeply damaging cuts imposed during the austerity years”. These pressures have not eased and budget cuts, together with increasing productivity, have become recurring themes along with zero growth spending allocations. The PGA said it would make no proposals on productivity improvements because its members had already absorbed the effects of repeated restructuring, staffing reductions and operational disruption, often without corresponding investment.
- 3.35 The PGA made the following proposals:
- The percentage differential between the Band 7 spot rate and the Band 11 maximum be reinstated to the original Fair and Sustainable level (in 2012) as per the 2013 England and Wales PSPRB Report;

- The base pay maxima for Bands 7 to 11 be reset to 2012 levels, with inflation increases then applied. The same should apply to Band 12;
- There should be a gap of at least 10% between each pay band;
- There should be a minimum of at least 10% progression between pay bands;
- The Required Hours Allowance/Addition (RHA) currently incorporated into the Band 12 spot rate should be removed and applied as a separate element to those Band 12 roles that formed part of the original Band 12 agreement;
- RHA should be paid at an enhanced rate to operational managers who are allocated to prisons or have other specific job descriptions, with a reasonable starting point of 25%;
- A headline pay increase of 5% to the minima, maxima and spot rates, with a progression rate of one third of the relevant pay band. Progression should remain linked to performance and those at the top of their respective pay range should receive a corresponding one third, fully consolidated payment;
- The PGA said that there was no evidence to suggest that operational managers were able to work flexibly. Therefore, they should be compensated for this loss of benefit, equivalent to two days average daily commuting costs each week;
- Accreditation or utilisation payments for Head of Function, Deputy Governor, Governor and Prison Group Director appointments. Starting at 10% and then increasing by an additional 5% for each higher grade promoted to, up to a maximum of 25% of base pay for Band 12 Prison Group Directors;
- The Fair and Sustainable Inner and Outer London cash differentials to be redefined to aid staff recruitment in these high cost of living areas of the country. Differentials should also extend to other difficult to recruit areas of the country where there is a high cost of living;
- Funded healthcare for operational managers with a minimum provision of 24 hour General Practitioner access and enhanced occupational and wellbeing support;
- Commitment to the introduction of meaningful workplace salary sacrifice schemes, in line with many other organisations, for example to promote the use of electric vehicles and/or pension-related salary sacrifice arrangements;
- Implementation of a funded performance bonus system; and
- The union said it had, in addition to the proposals above, a standing conference manifesto that included additional remuneration for Band 8 Deputy Governor roles and the principle of 60 years as the retirement age for operational managers without reductions in benefits or increased voluntary contributions.

3.36 The union costed its proposals at around £30.5 million – approximately £6.6 million for resetting the pay ranges; £10.4 million for a 5% pay increase; £3.9 million for the increase to 25% for RHA; around £1.4 million for changes to London pay; and a further £8.2 million for accreditation and utilisation payments. The PGA considered

that this was affordable because of the small numbers of staff in Bands 7 to 12. It also noted the recent substantial investment over several years in pay for prison officer and support grades.

- 3.37 The union said that it remained concerned about the performance bonus system for Bands 7 to 12, which it considered was too localised. It argued that the current system lacks both transparency and the principle of equal recognition for equal performance. In oral evidence the union said the current system appeared to operate differently in different areas of the country, with staff being able to earn a bonus in some areas but not others. Therefore, the PGA wanted a formal system that was written down and auditable.

### **Public and Commercial Services Union**

- 3.38 At the end of September 2025, the PCS submitted its written submission and proposals to us, attending oral evidence on 28 November 2025. The union again said that the Service had been dealing with a capacity “crisis” and that this had overtaken the key functions of rehabilitation and reducing reoffending, with significant future cuts to prison education funding expected. It also noted that an Institute of Government report<sup>85</sup> had highlighted that in March 2024 the numbers of prison officers per 1,000 prisoners was still 8% lower than in 2009-10. Many prisons that were “crumbling” due to a lack of investment, as noted in two reports, one from the Institute for Government and one from the Independent Monitoring Board.<sup>86</sup> The union also noted that HMPPS staff were being “stretched to breaking point” by constantly having to manage increasing numbers of prisoners. This adversely affects rehabilitation. The system was also under stress due to the high levels of remand prisoners.
- 3.39 On recruitment and retention, PCS noted that HMPPS had previously sponsored overseas staff via the skilled worker visa. With recent changes to immigration rules, many of these would need to leave the Prison Service and the country. This was likely to impact negatively on staffing levels. PCS also said that as of 30 June 2025, there had been a decrease of 1,046 FTE (3.5%) operational staff compared to 30 June 2024. The union further noted that the number of Band 3 to 5 officers leaving in the 12 months to 30 June 2025 was 440, 13.5% lower than in the previous 12 month period. The majority of leavers (66.1%) resigned, followed by 21.9% who were dismissed. PCS said recruitment and retention remained a challenge for the Service. Retention of staff was not helped by the lack of flexible working or hybrid options, with requests repeatedly declined by unsupportive management despite the MoJ’s flexible working policy which also covers HMPPS. PCS felt that the current lack of transparency and effective HMPPS-wide organisational monitoring of flexible working was a barrier to inclusivity and retention of employees across all grades.
- 3.40 Morale and motivation were described by PCS as being “at an all-time low” as a result of stagnating pay, excessive workloads and a lack of meaningful investment in facilities and people. The number of deaths in custody had increased by 30% in the 12 months to June 2025 and the rate of self-harm had increased by 6% to a new

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<sup>85</sup> Institute for Government, (2025). *Inside England and Wales’s prisons crisis: Summary*. (online) Available at: <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/performance-tracker-local/england-and-wales-prisons/summary> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

<sup>86</sup> Independent Monitoring Boards, (2024). *Breaking point: the impact of a crumbling prison estate on prisoners*. (online) Available at: <https://imb.org.uk/news/breaking-point-the-impact-of-a-crumbling-prison-estate-on-prisoners/> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

high in the 12 months to March 2025. The union also noted assaults had reached a new high. The statistics did not cover routine threats of violence and verbal abuse which occur daily. These various issues can severely damage the mental health and wellbeing of staff.

3.41 The union commented on several economic measures, such as: inflation; housing and private rental costs; food and drink costs; transport costs; council tax; and childcare provision. PCS stated that the economic climate appeared to be stagnating whilst the cost-of-living pressures remain, having been compounded by what it sees as 15 years of austerity. Hence, the union believes the pay award needs an element of pay restoration.

3.42 PCS made the following proposals to the PSPRB:

- A 10% pay increase, to demonstrate an immediate step towards a significant element of pay restoration following a decade of pay restraint. Base pay increases to be consolidated and pensionable, applied to minima, maxima and spot rates and backdated to 1 April 2025;
- For Band 2 staff the consolidated and pensionable award should be in addition to any legally required increase in the NLW;
- The PCS believes that the NLW should be set at £18 an hour;
- Those closed grades who do not benefit financially from opting in to Fair and Sustainable should receive a payment that matches the headline pay recommendation;
- Those undertaking additional voluntary duties<sup>87</sup> should be financially compensated for the emotional and psychological demands of these, and for the related additional workload. Options put forward by PCS on how staff could be remunerated were a consolidated payment, specific posts with agreed job descriptions or one-off hourly payments;
- Band 4 staff who are fully qualified in their speciality should receive an annual retention bonus. To encourage staff to become Band 4 Specialist Prison Instructors or Vocational Instructors there should be a £1,500 temporary recruitment and retention payment similar to the temporary arrangements for Band 4 Physical Education Instructors (PEIs), given the similar challenges of these roles;
- Progression up the pay scale/range should not be withheld from those staff subject to poor performance procedures;
- Hybrid working should be rolled out in the Prison Service to all those staff who could benefit from this; and

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<sup>87</sup> PCS notes the following, but this is not exhaustive: ACCT Accessors; Reflective Practise Facilitators; First Aiders; Mental Health Allies; Shannon Trust Mentors; Rehabilitative Culture Champions; Care Team; Family Liaison Officers; Peer Mentoring; and TRIM and Mediators.

- Annual leave provision should be increased to at least 30 days on entry to the Service and then increase to 35 days after five years.

- 3.43 The PCS said its position on market supplements had not changed, with market supplements distorting the pay structure, being ineffective and divisive because they are only paid to Band 3 Prison Officers. It said that there should be a review into all market supplements with a view to winding these down and reassessing those establishments with staffing shortfalls. The union said it had not seen HMPPS's evidence-based framework in assessing market supplements and waited with interest for this to be shared.
- 3.44 PCS highlighted the problems it had identified with the existing discretionary bonus payments made locally. The payments were generally low and when they were made, the levels paid to managerial grades were significantly higher in frequency and value than those to non-managerial staff. The union also had concerns about potential discrimination against ethnic minorities and on the basis of age. PCS felt there was a need for a new, open and transparent system that would eliminate bias and asked the PSPRB to support this.
- 3.45 In its written evidence, the PCS again maintained its position that it believed withholding pay progression from a member of staff for a period of poor performance was arbitrary, outdated and not fit for purpose. It also stated that those on formal poor performance procedures were disproportionately staff with protected characteristics. Therefore, pay progression for those in Bands 3 and 5, and Bands 8 to 11 should not be withheld from any staff this year.
- 3.46 The Union also commented that HMPPS was often not prepared to consider pay issues for the non-remit group, such as recruitment and retention payments, if they had not been recommended in the PSPRB report. PCS felt this was unfair and requested that the PSPRB make it clear that recommendations were in respect of the remit group only, and that no significance should be attached to a lack of comment on a non-remit group issue.

### **Criminal Justice Workers Union**

- 3.47 This year, we also received a written submission from the CJWU who indicated that they represented some staff in our remit group. However, we note from HMPPS that the CJWU is not currently recognised for pay and bargaining purposes. As per our terms of reference, we are required to take account of evidence from the Government, staff and professional representatives and others. We have therefore noted the submission by the CJWU for this report.
- 3.48 The CJWU proposed a consolidated headline award for all staff on both pay structures of between 8.9% and 10.0% along with increases to 30% of base pay for UWH for Band 2 OSGs and £30 an hour for Payment Plus. It also proposed increasing all other allowances, with many of these being substantial and a significant increase in and changes to London pay.

### **Evidence from visits**

- 3.49 As discussed in Chapter 1, this year we undertook nine visits to public sector prisons and one visit to a private sector prison. We also held four virtual discussion groups – one with Band 12 staff, one with ORRU staff and two with PEIs. We have grouped the main points and themes from our visits below for ease of reading.

## *Pay*

- Overall, last year's pay award was generally seen as satisfactory, although some staff had expected more and made unfavourable comparisons with other public sector workforces, some of which are able to take industrial action.
- Staff noted that the cost of living remained high and, given previous low awards, they felt that their pay was behind where it should be.
- In quite a few establishments, staff said that they did not think that the pay reflected the responsibility, risk or unique nature of operational roles in prisons.
- There were some calls for pay to be differentiated depending on the type of establishment; for example, should staff in the Long-Term High Security estate be paid more than those working in Category C or D prisons?
- As in previous years, there were discussions over whether the pay gaps between the grades were sufficient to encourage promotion and/or reflected the additional responsibilities. This was especially the case in relation to Band 5.
- Many staff thought that incremental scales should be longer.
- Operational managers felt that there was inconsistent grading at their levels.
- While the Band 7 spot rate represented a decent increase from Band 5, the gap from Band 7 to the bottom of Band 8 was considered too small. One management group thought that there should be increments for Band 7 and then a spot rate at Band 8. Those who were coming in at Band 7 would be very much learning the role for a few years.
- There needed to be a greater pay differential between the Band 12 spot rate and the Band 11 maximum (with unsocial hours) because the gap was getting smaller.

## *Allowances*

- The rate of Payment Plus was generally considered to be too low. Some staff thought it should be a multiplier of base pay (as for OSG overtime) and others thought that it should increase in line with the overall award each year.
- As in previous years, OSGs reported that they were working around, if not over, 40% of their hours unsocially. This was echoed by other grades, who said that they were also working many unsocial hours.
- Given the timing of most of the visits, many staff had not had time to fully understand the differences in their pay packets, but the temporary increase from 20% to 25% in the UWH payment for Band 2 OSGs was broadly welcomed. Band 12 staff said it was particularly positive that this had been recommended and recognised the important work that Band 2 staff undertake.
- Staff called for financial recognition of any additional voluntary duties that they undertook. Staff also wanted better compensation for being on call.

- The ORRU staff were generally content with their level of pay and on-call payment, however it was felt it could be more given the number of weeks a year they had to be on call. There was also a concern that non-operational ORRU staff were paid the same on-call payment as operational ORRU staff although the intensity of the work out of hours by the non-operational cadre was generally lower.
- PEIs told us it was positive to be recognised by the £1,500 payment but questioned what would happen after its temporary two year period expired. Most governors were supportive of the payment, but a small number commented PEI retention was not an issue in their establishment.

### *Recruitment and retention*

- There were concerns over the recruitment process for Band 3 staff. The process was thought to be poor and the quality of new entrants was not as good as it should be.
- While the starting salary looked competitive, it was not attracting people with a sufficient depth of life skills needed for the roles, such as those who had previously been in the military.
- Additionally, new entrants were joining for a couple of years then moving on, rather than intending to start a career.
- Marketing materials needed to make the nature and expectations of the role clearer, so that new recruits were better prepared.
- While the overall number of staff was improving, recent churn left a very inexperienced staffing group, which brought its own challenges.
- Local factors had an influence on retention, particularly alternative employers nearby, which did not necessarily have to pay more but offered better (or safer) working conditions.
- The high proportion of recent recruits who were foreign nationals posed challenges:
  - Forthcoming changes to the wage threshold required to qualify for a working visa means that many may not be able to renew their visas and might have to return to their home country. Some prisons reported that around 30% of their staff fell into this category so the visa changes could create a significant hole in workforce numbers; and
  - Cultural and communication differences could create difficulties. This could put foreign national staff at greater risk of assault.
- PEIs said there were many factors which affect recruitment and retention for their specialism: despite their training, their pay was the same for a non-specialist Band 4; the value that individual prisons placed on the role itself; a lack of progression in the role; and a lack of suitable quality Band 3 Prison Officers to draw from.

### *Motivation and morale*

- While morale varied by location, overall, it was reported as being poor.
- Increasing levels of violence and assaults, together with more drugs and contraband reportedly coming into prisons, raised the threat levels for staff and adversely affected their morale.
- There were different sorts of threats to staff, including psychological as well as physical.
- Political decisions also had an impact on morale and motivation.
- The changing nature of the prison population also presented challenges, for example, high levels of remand prisoners and those presenting with significant mental health issues.
- There was a lack of recognition of what prison officers actually did.
- Operational managers again noted their hours worked were well in excess of their 37 hour contract, which affected their and their families' wellbeing.
- After showing some signs of improvement in recent years, OSG staff reported feeling very undervalued by their colleagues and the Service, and there were some examples given where they had been insulted by colleagues.
- Shift patterns and the inability to take time off in lieu also adversely affected morale.
- Band 12s said the level of accountability for performance, when they ultimately had no control over due to centralised policy decisions, was making the role a challenge.

### *Other issues*

- The visits this year really brought home the differences and challenges faced by staff in different categories and types of prison.
- Lessons needed to be learned from the transition of prisons between different contractors and between the private and public sector.
- The lack of flexible working options and reported managerial reluctance to consider requests positively was highlighted. Some felt that there were different approaches in different establishments, with little obvious sharing of best practice.
- Staff again stated that the pension age of 67/68 was too old for prison officers to be expected to be working until. Most wanted parity with the other emergency services which had pension ages of 60.

3.50 Chapter 4 covers our 2026-27 recommendations and outlines our reasoning along with the evidence that has led to those recommendations.



## **Chapter 4: Our recommendations on pay**

### **Introduction**

- 4.1 This chapter summarises our consideration of the evidence and sets out our recommendations on pay and allowances with effect from 1 April 2026.
- 4.2 In previous chapters, we covered the evidence we reviewed from a range of sources, including: His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS); the trade unions; our remit group, including the evidence gathered during visits; economic indicators, including labour market data; evidence specific to the remit group such as recruitment, retention and morale; equality and diversity; and the competitiveness of Prison Service pay. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Prison Service and our remit group have continued to face significant challenges. While measures have been introduced to alleviate prison population pressures and more will follow as the recommendations of the Independent Sentencing Review are implemented, the burden on the Service remains very high for the foreseeable future, while staff shortages continue and large numbers of operational staff remain inexperienced. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the Service expects to need significantly more staff for a significantly higher prison population in the coming years. Relatively high turnover has associated training and financial costs, as well as placing a burden on more experienced staff.
- 4.3 This year, we set out to produce a balanced set of recommendations, taking full account of our terms of reference. Our priority in recent years has been to ensure that the remit group did not lose its recent improvements in relative market position, and to address the continuing issues of recruitment and retention. Consequently, we have focused on the headline award. We do not consider that it is 'job done' on recruitment and retention, particularly given the reliance of the Service on recruiting staff from overseas and the recent changes to the visa system. In future, HMPPS will need to ensure it is able to recruit sufficient staff from the domestic labour market which may be a significant challenge. We believe that our recommendation on the pay award should help with this. We have also been keen to give all staff a pay award which attempts to reflect developments experienced by other workers in the rest of the economy.
- 4.4 As in recent years, we are again proposing an across-the-board award for those in Fair and Sustainable. We remain well aware of the financial constraints within which HMPPS operates. We recognise that our recommendation on the headline award will cost more than HMPPS said it has budgeted for. However, we consider that our evidence-based recommendations are appropriate and consolidate the progress made in recent years. They recognise the critical role which the Prison Service plays to keep communities safe. We believe our recommendations will help towards improving staff recruitment and retention and alleviate some of the potential issues caused by a relatively inexperienced workforce.

### **Pay award**

#### *Bands 3 to 12 pay award*

- 4.5 For this round, HMPPS proposed an across-the-board increase of 2.5% for Bands 3 to 12. This is a departure from the last two rounds where it proposed an increase of a fixed cash value, derived as a percentage of the National pay range maxima or spot rates, by which we were not persuaded. HMPPS stated that its overall

resourcing across the prison workforce continued to stabilise and it believed that the Service was almost fully staffed according to its resource model. It also noted that 'pay and reward' had not featured in the top five drivers of attrition mentioned at exit interviews since May 2023. HMPPS's submission centred on affordability and stated that another round of high investment in pay would not be affordable or sustainable. It told us that there were no additional funds for an increase in pay above the 2.5% it had proposed.

- 4.6 As noted in Chapter 3, the POA presented two options in its submission. In its preferred option, the POA proposed a simplified pay structure for all Band 3 to 5 operational staff and a 37 hour standard week, with allowances frozen. The proposal would set a Band 3 spot rate with 20% Unsocial Working Hours (UWH) at the skilled worker visa threshold of £41,700 a year. This would represent the equivalent of an increase of 17% on the current Band 3 maximum. The POA's second option was more conventional, proposing a consolidated, across the board increase of 6.3% for all Band 2 to 5 operational staff. The POA also said it would be open to a two year pay deal, at 6.3% each year for all Band 2 to 5 operational staff.
- 4.7 The Prison Governors' Association (PGA) again proposed that the percentage differentials between the Band 7 spot rate and the Band 11 maximum be reinstated to the original Fair and Sustainable levels (in 2012). The base pay maxima for Bands 7 to 11 should then be reset to 2012 levels, with inflation from 2012 onwards then applied. The same should apply to Band 12. This reset of pay ranges alone would give increases of up to 18.9% for some staff. Following those steps, the PGA proposed that a headline pay increase of 5% for 2026-27 be applied to the minima, maxima and spot rates.
- 4.8 The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) Union proposed a headline 10% pay increase for all staff. It said that base pay increases must be consolidated and pensionable and applied to minima, maxima and spot rates and be backdated to 1 April 2025. It considered that competitive pay and terms and conditions would remain an important recruitment and retention aid and that their proposal would make a step towards a significant element of pay restoration following a decade of pay restraint.
- 4.9 In accordance with our terms of reference, we considered a wide range of relevant pay, economic and workforce data when reaching our recommendation on the headline pay award for Bands 3 to 12. While the recruitment and retention picture has been relatively steady, we have increasing concerns over the outlook for both. Recruitment has relied heavily on overseas applicants in recent years and there needs to be a sustainable pipeline of applicants from the United Kingdom, especially as the prison estate continues to expand. We also note that retention remains fragile with considerable numbers still leaving the Service within their first 24 months of joining and morale is, at best, mixed.
- 4.10 We discussed the proposals submitted by the unions in depth when forming our recommendations, including the POA's first option. While we appreciate the thought behind this, we consider that it would not be appropriate to make such a radical change to the pay structure at this time. We also have concerns about the overall cost of such a change, including the increased level of staffing that would be required to cover the reduction in contracted hours. We do, however, consider that it would be beneficial for HMPPS to engage with the POA on this area and try to build

a consensus. If the POA would like us to consider a two year deal for our 2027 Report, we suggest that it first discusses its proposals with both HMPPS and the other recognised unions ahead of the remit letter being issued for our next report.

- 4.11 We have recently focused heavily on Band 3 pay, as it is the main operational recruitment grade into the Service. Our recommendations have sought to improve the pay position of Band 3 within the labour market in which HMPPS operates. More widely, we want, as a minimum, to maintain the relative market position of all staff in our remit group. We are also aware that all staff continue to face pressure from the overall high cost of living, albeit against a background of slowly falling inflation over the last year. We take account of this among other factors including pay settlement data, earnings growth data and broader labour market data when reaching our recommendations. We also recognise that changes to employment legislation will reduce barriers to taking industrial action for other groups of workers, while the majority of our remit group cannot take any form of industrial action.
- 4.12 After assessing all the evidence, we consider an award of 3.5% to be appropriate and justifiable. Therefore, we recommend that the Fair and Sustainable National Band 3, 5, 8, 9, 10 and 11 base pay points and the Band 4, 7 and 12 spot rates be increased by 3.5%.

**Recommendation 1:** We recommend that from 1 April 2026, the Fair and Sustainable National Band 3 to 12 base pay points and spot rates are increased by 3.5%, as set out in Appendix E. This award to be consolidated and pensionable.

#### *Band 2 pay award*

- 4.13 For Band 2 Fair and Sustainable staff, HMPPS proposed a total uplift of 3.0%, which incorporated the 0.1% needed to remain compliant with the National Living Wage (NLW) from 1 April 2026. For its first option, the POA proposed that the Band 2 spot rate be set at 20% above the NLW. In its second option, the POA proposed that Band 2 staff should receive a consolidated 6.3% award in addition to the NLW, stating that there should be a clear distance between Band 2 pay and the NLW. The PCS proposed an increase of 10% to all pay points and that Band 2 pay increases should be in addition to the NLW increase. It also said that the NLW should be set at £18 an hour.
- 4.14 As we have previously set out, we do not think that there should be a formal link with the NLW for Band 2 staff, given their key responsibilities and the critical role they play in the safe and effective running of prisons. We maintain this position. We do not believe it is appropriate that our recommendation for a pay uplift should be offset by any necessary increase to meet the NLW. Therefore, we recommend that Band 2 staff receive the same overall headline award of 3.5% as for all other staff in our remit, in addition to the NLW increase that will take effect from 1 April 2026.
- 4.15 There remains sufficient 'headroom' between the Band 2 spot rate and the Band 3 minimum that this recommendation should not act as a disincentive for promotion between those bands.

**Recommendation 2:** We recommend that from 1 April 2026 the Fair and Sustainable National Band 2 base pay spot rate be increased by 3.5% as set out in Appendix E. This should be in addition to the National Living Wage increase that Band 2 staff are due to receive on 1 April 2026. This award to be consolidated and pensionable.

### *Pay structures*

- 4.16 HMPPS made no proposals for restructuring this year. For operational managers, the PGA proposed that pay scales have a 10% differential between each pay band, from the lower grade maximum to the higher-grade minimum. The PGA also highlighted the issue where, in some circumstances, someone on temporary cover at a higher grade could be on higher pay than someone who was substantive in that grade. We note that this is one of the areas that the PGA is discussing with HMPPS and is looking to submit joint proposals to us for our 2027 Report.
- 4.17 Under its first option, the POA proposed that all Fair and Sustainable Band 2 to 5 pay scales be made spot rates. This would be based on the Band 3 rate being set at the skilled worker visa threshold of £41,700 (37 hour week plus 20% unsocial hours payment). The POA proposed that the Band 2 spot rate was set at 20% above the NLW, giving an 18% gap between Band 2 and Band 3 base pay spot rates. It proposed that the Band 4 spot rate be 10% above Band 3 and the Band 5 base pay spot rate be 15% above the Band 4 spot rate. The POA told us that it considered the Fair and Sustainable pay structure to be complicated and that this proposal would simplify the situation and reward staff more fairly. On our visits, a number of staff told us that they thought that incremental scales should be longer.
- 4.18 We believe that there should be stability in pay structures unless there is a strong justification for changes. Therefore, we make no recommendations for changes to pay structures. Last year, we heard concern expressed over the talent pipeline for more senior operational managers and would be willing to consider evidence-based proposals for change in the future. This year, we also heard concerns about incentives to promote from Band 5 to Band 7, the first operational manager grade. Should the parties bring us evidence, we will consider whether the pay gap between these Bands is set at the appropriate level.

### *Closed grades*

- 4.19 In recent years, we have not recommended a pay uplift for those closed grade staff for whom it would be financially beneficial to opt in to Fair and Sustainable. This was to encourage all remit group staff onto one pay structure. There are now very few staff remaining in the closed grades and, with few exceptions, there is no financial barrier to them opting in to Fair and Sustainable. Some staff who have TUPE transferred into the remit group from the private sector may have marked time arrangements which means they would not benefit financially from opting in. For staff for whom it would not be financially beneficial to opt in, we have recommended non-consolidated payments. We are pleased to note that some 99.5% of remit group staff are now on the Fair and Sustainable pay structure. Under its second option, the POA proposed that all staff remaining on the closed grade equivalents to Bands 2 to 5 should receive a consolidated 6.3% uplift to all pay points. The PCS again proposed that those closed grades who would not benefit financially from opting in to Fair and

Sustainable should receive a payment that matches the headline pay recommendation.

- 4.20 We consider it appropriate to maintain our existing approach. Our recommendation on the headline award in our 2025 Report should have resulted in all closed grade staff in receipt of legacy Locality Pay Allowances (LPAs) being able to benefit financially from opting in to Fair and Sustainable. We note that some staff may have other legacy marked time payments, including TUPE terms which prevent them from benefitting financially from opting in. Therefore, for this small group of staff, we recommend a non-consolidated payment of 3.5% of base pay.

**Recommendation 3:** We recommend that from 1 April 2026, those closed grade staff who would not financially benefit from opting in to their equivalent Fair and Sustainable grade receive a non-consolidated, non-pensionable payment of 3.5% of base pay.

- 4.21 We also note that a small number of closed support grades will see their pay increase from 1 April 2026 due to the increase to the NLW. To ensure that the pay structure remains legally compliant, we recommend that the increase in the NLW is reflected in the pay for relevant closed grades.

**Recommendation 4:** From 1 April 2026, we recommend that the relevant closed grade pay rates are compliant with the National Living Wage.

### **Opting in to Fair and Sustainable**

- 4.22 As in previous years, we recommend that closed grades should continue to opt in to the maximum of their relevant Fair and Sustainable grade. This offers an incentive to opt in and ensures that their experience is rewarded by not placing closed grades on the same pay rates as their less experienced counterparts.

**Recommendation 5:** We recommend that from 1 April 2026 all closed grade staff who choose to opt in this year be moved to the maximum of their respective Fair and Sustainable grade pay range or scale. The opt in process should be expedited to start as close as possible to the publication date of this report.

### **Pay progression**

#### *Support and officer grades*

- 4.23 Staff in Fair and Sustainable Bands 3 and 5 do not have contractual pay progression so we make recommendations on their progression each year. Bands 2 and 4 are spot rates, so we do not make progression recommendations for these. HMPPS proposed one pay point progression for staff in Bands 3 and 5 who are not subject to formal poor performance procedures. This is in line with our usual approach, so we are content to endorse it.
- 4.24 Under its preferred option, the POA proposed that all Bands 2 to 5 be placed on spot rates, so there would be no progression.

4.25 In line with its usual approach, the PCS asked that pay progression was granted for those working through poor performance procedures. It considered that withholding progression for poor performance was unfair and adversely affected staff with protected characteristics more than other staff. It also pointed out that withholding progression cannot be applied to those on pay maxima or spot rates. While we recognise the potential for inconsistencies as highlighted by PCS, given the pay band structures, it remains our view, that poor performance should not be rewarded. Staff working through poor performance procedures still benefit from receiving the headline award applied to the pay point they occupy.

**Recommendation 6:** We recommend that all staff (except those subject to formal poor performance procedures) on Fair and Sustainable Bands 3 and 5 who are in post on 31 March 2026 progress by one pay point, effective from 1 April 2026.

### *Operational managers*

- 4.26 Operational managers made up around 3.4% of the remit group at 30 September 2025, with 99.6% of them on Fair and Sustainable. In our 2024 Report, we recommended that the length of the pay ranges for Bands 8 to 11 be reduced from 20% to 10%. We agreed with the PGA and HMPPS that operational managers become competent in their roles within three years and that progression through the pay ranges from minima to maxima should take three years. Therefore, HMPPS has again proposed progression of 3.33% for Bands 8 to 11, unless they are subject to formal poor performance measures. The PGA also proposed progression through the range of at least a third, linked to performance.
- 4.27 This year, the PGA again proposed accreditation or utilisation payments. These would be linked to staff achieving accreditation in one of four areas. When a manager was promoted to a Head of Function role (Band 7 or 8) they would receive a 10% payment. They would then be eligible to receive a further 5% payment on becoming an accredited Deputy Governor (Bands 8 and 9), 5% for becoming a Governor (Bands 10 and 11) and 5% for becoming a Band 12 Prison Group Director (giving a maximum total of 25%). The union stated that this would remunerate operational managers who are required to obtain additional occupational qualifications and competencies compared with their non-operational counterparts.
- 4.28 In our 2025 Report, we concluded that there was insufficient evidence that these proposed changes would be effective in improving the recruitment or retention of operational managers and that they would introduce complexity to the Fair and Sustainable pay structure, along with being costly. However, we note that accreditation utilisation payments (licence to operate) is one of the three areas on which the PGA and HMPPS have agreed to work together, with a view to submitting joint proposals to us for our 2027 Report. This work aims to explore the introduction of utilisation payments for accredited roles – Head of Function, Deputy Governor, Governor and Gold Command. This would reinforce the value of frontline leadership roles and would aim to develop a professional register and licence to operate. We look forward to receiving the joint proposals from the PGA and HMPPS to consider for our next report.

**Recommendation 7:** We recommend that all staff (except those subject to formal poor performance procedures) on Fair and Sustainable Bands 8 to 11 who are in post on 31 March 2026 receive a consolidated and pensionable progression increase of 3⅓%, capped at the 1 April 2026 band maximum.

### Locality pay

- 4.29 We are required to consider 'regional/local variations in labour markets and their effects on the recruitment and retention of staff'. There are two types of locality payments available to staff on Fair and Sustainable in our remit group: Inner and Outer London cash differentials; and the red and red plus market supplements.
- 4.30 For our last few reports, HMPPS proposed that the Inner and Outer London cash differentials (additions) should not be increased, remaining at their existing amounts. However, for this report HMPPS proposed that the headline award be applied to the London additions. This is more in line with our usual approach.
- 4.31 The PGA proposed that Inner and Outer London payments should be increased and extended to cover other difficult to recruit areas where there is a high cost of living. It noted that London payments in HMPPS appeared lower than other organisations and proposed that the Outer London payment was set at 15% above the National scale, and the Inner London rate set at 20% of the National scale. It also stated that the payments should be consolidated and only apply to the remit group.
- 4.32 We consider that there is little evidence to suggest that we need to change our regular approach, that is that the Inner and Outer London cash differentials should be increased by the headline award. We therefore recommend that the Inner and Outer zones be increased by the 3.5% headline award. This results in the maxima for Inner and Outer London zones respectively being placed at £5,218 and £3,432 above the National maxima. The resulting ranges, spot rates and scales are set out in Appendix E.

**Recommendation 8:** We recommend that from 1 April 2026, the fixed cash pay differentials for the Fair and Sustainable Inner and Outer London zones be increased by 3.5% and continue to be applied consistently across all bands, positioning maxima at £5,218 and £3,432 respectively above the 37 hour National maxima. We also recommend adjusting minima and intermediate points so that progression steps are the same percentage as on the National bands. The increases to be consolidated and pensionable.

### Market supplements

- 4.33 As mentioned in Chapter 3, HMPPS again asked us to not recommend any changes to market supplements, which they see as an enduring feature of the pay structure. We noted in our 2025 Report that HMPPS was introducing a market supplements framework which included an annual review process aimed at providing greater transparency. The first review was undertaken in autumn 2025 and in January 2026, the Minister of State for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending wrote to us with the results of that review.

- 4.34 The Minister informed us that the review considered data on staffing forecasts, retention, and stability, supported by wider data insights and the views of Area Executive Directors, to inform whether supplements should be withdrawn from existing sites or awarded to new sites. It concluded that the red plus market supplement at HMYOI Aylesbury would be downgraded to red, and red supplements would be gradually eroded at HMPs Grendon, Standford Hill and Huntercombe. These changes will take effect from 1 April 2026. The Framework uses a gradual erosion mechanism, with the intention to erode £500 from the value of market supplements each year. This would be aligned with the implementation of the annual pay award to ensure staff experience no reduction in take-home pay as a result of supplements being withdrawn.
- 4.35 While we continue to believe that they should be phased out, we have decided not to make a recommendation on market supplements this year. As for last year, and taking into account affordability constraints, we consider that it is more appropriate to focus on the headline award. Additionally, while we welcome the new, more transparent approach to introducing or withdrawing market supplements, we are concerned that HMPPS takes decisions on these payments without consulting us. We look forward to improved engagement with HMPPS in relation to the review process. We will monitor its implementation, outcomes and consider evidence from the parties on its application.

### **Allowances and payments**

- 4.36 Under our programme of rolling reviews of allowances, we consider Fair and Sustainable on-call allowances for this report. We also consider Payment Plus and give brief thoughts on unsocial hours payments and Operational Support Grade (OSG) overtime.
- 4.37 When considering allowances for this report, we discussed our approach to the five year rolling review. For clarity, we will set out our approach to considering allowances and payments. Those allowances deemed to have a compensatory element are increased by the headline Band 3 pay award each year – currently both rates of the Care and Maintenance of Dogs allowance qualify. This allowance is considered to be compensatory as it is designed to remunerate those who keep dogs at home for the additional work of having them in their own homes, grooming and exercising them. It does not cover veterinary bills, kennelling or food because these are reimbursed by HMPPS. Other payments and allowances are paid for undertaking a specific task or duty. These are considered as part of our published rolling review of allowances.
- 4.38 However, this rolling five year review is flexible. Should one of the parties submit evidence that an existing allowance needs to be reviewed earlier, or there is a need to look at a new issue, then we will consider this outside of the rolling review. An example of this was our out of cycle review of recruitment and retention of Physical Education Instructors (PEIs), the POA having drawn our attention to the difficulty in recruiting and retaining PEIs. Additionally, should we hear of specific issues that are consistently raised on our visits, we may decide to undertake an earlier review of the relevant allowances.
- 4.39 As previously stated, closed grade allowances will not be updated going forward, in line with the decision not to recommend consolidated pay awards to closed grades, given most can benefit financially from opting in to Fair and Sustainable. The

relevant closed grade allowances are the closed grade specialist and on-call allowances, and legacy LPAs.

#### *Fair and Sustainable on-call allowances*

4.40 An on-call allowance can be paid to staff in Fair and Sustainable Bands 2 to 5 if they have a rostered commitment to remain continuously and immediately available outside normal work hours for a period of more than 12 hours for operational reasons; or are specifically required to be on-call when an operational need arises. On-call allowances are not payable during normal working hours, are non-consolidated and non-pensionable. Each prison governor has responsibility for what tasks these allowances are used for.

4.41 The rates of the on-call (home) payments are:

- weekdays and privilege holidays – £9.00 per period of 12 hours or more;
- weekends and public holidays – £25.00 per period of 24 hours or more and proportionately for periods less than 24 hours; and
- hourly rate – £1.04 per hour whilst on-call outside normal work hours.

4.42 In its evidence, HMPPS proposed no change to the on-call rates. It considered that the current rates were in line with wider public sector rates and that the allowances were not commonly used across the estate. It stated that there were no reported problems with getting staff to volunteer, nor did the allowances have any impact on recruitment or retention.

4.43 The POA told us that these allowances first appeared in our 2013 Report and their rates have not been increased since. It said that as these allowances form part of our rolling five-year review, it was a once in 18 year opportunity, covering the period 2013 to 2031. The POA asked that we be mindful of this in settling the uplift. The POA proposed:

- weekdays and privilege holidays – an increase of 57.8% (from £9.00 to £14.18 per period of 12 hours or more);
- weekends and public holidays and rest days – an increase of 57.8% (from £25.00 to £39.40 per period of 24 hours or more or proportionately for periods of less than 24 hours); and
- hourly rate – an increase of 113.4% (from £1.04 to £2.21 while on call outside normal office hours).

4.44 The evidence that we received, including expenditure data from HMPPS, suggests that these allowances are little-used and that, when they are used, there is no shortage of volunteers. Therefore, we endorse HMPPS's proposal that these on-call allowances continue at their current rates. We will review these allowances again in our 2031 Report.

## *Payment Plus*

- 4.45 Payment Plus is a non-consolidated, non-pensionable flat cash payment of £22 an hour. It is paid to officer grades (Bands 3 to 5 and closed grade equivalents) for specific operational duties, and it is the only “overtime” payment available to Bands 3 to 5. It was introduced in July 2008 to replace the separate bedwatch, constant watch and contracted supplementary hours payments. Payment Plus is therefore not intended to be an all-encompassing overtime payment, although feedback on visits suggested that many staff and management see it as such. Staff are only paid Payment Plus on a non-working day or for the hours that fall outside their scheduled shift pattern for a given day. For example, an officer scheduled to work until 17:00 would only be paid Payment Plus for the hours worked beyond this if undertaking one of the qualifying duties.
- 4.46 We were scheduled to review Payment Plus in our 2023 Report, as part of our rolling review of allowances. As we did not receive sufficient evidence from HMPPS on this, and other areas, we made Recommendation 14 in our 2024 Report. HMPPS’s submission for our 2025 Report requested that we recommended no changes to Payment Plus while it was still working on the requirements of Recommendation 14. It asked that no recommendations were made in these areas until the next round, when any proposals would be included in the submission, potentially having been agreed with the unions.
- 4.47 In its submission for this report, HMPPS noted that it was still working on the requirements of Recommendation 14. As an interim measure, it proposed a Payment Plus uplift of £3, to £25 per hour. It noted that the rate had not been increased since 2016, and that its proposal would take the rate to at least the hourly rate for all Band 3 staff and cost around £4.9 million. HMPPS also provided data on expenditure on Payment Plus, which had reduced over the previous year. It said that it would continue to review the operation, scope, and uptake of Payment Plus as part of its ongoing work to respond to Recommendation 14.
- 4.48 HMPPS has told us that it is seeking to reduce its reliance, and expenditure, on Payment Plus. In its submission for this pay round, HMPPS stated that it was undertaking a joint review, with NHS England (NHSE), on escort, bedwatch and constant supervision. This review is due to report in April 2026. It is hoped that this review will make recommendations aimed at reducing the need for the duties covered by the Payment Plus rate. HMPPS also told us that, in principle, the majority of Payment Plus associated with covering bedwatches (for prisons in England) should be funded by NHSE. As noted in previous reports HMPPS had told us that it was considering replacing Payment Plus.
- 4.49 The POA proposed that Payment Plus be increased to £30 an hour. The POA thought that the current rate did not reflect the value, frequency or necessity of the work being delivered. For Band 3 staff, the current rate represents roughly time and two-fifths, time and a third for Band 4 and time and a tenth for Band 5. £30 an hour would represent around double time for Band 3 staff, time and three quarters for Band 4 and time and a half for Band 5. This is based on the maxima for 37 hour Fair and Sustainable base pay for each grade.
- 4.50 The POA stated that the duties delivered on Payment Plus are simply the core duties of all prison officers under their contract of employment. They said that it was not extraordinary, nor paid only for a specific set of tasks and circumstances. The POA

considered that Payment Plus was being used by establishments to cover for staff sent on detached duty, and for other staffing shortfalls. The union noted HMPPS's previous intention to introduce a contracted supplementary hours scheme, but there had been no discussions, and the union did not believe it was the right time to remove Payment Plus, which was working and accepted by staff. The union did not believe that reliance on Payment Plus was being reduced and considered that it had a number of detrimental effects on establishments.

- 4.51 On our visits, we also heard the view that Payment Plus had become an overtime rate in all but name rather than being paid for specific tasks. The rate of Payment Plus was generally considered to be too low. Some staff thought it should be a multiplier of base pay (as for OSG overtime) while others thought that it should increase in line with the overall award each year.
- 4.52 We note that the rate of Payment Plus has not been changed since 2016 and so its real value to staff has been eroded. The rate is also relatively low against other comparators and our proposed headline pay award would mean the current rate would be less than the normal hourly rate for some Band 3 staff. The amount spent by HMPPS on Payment Plus has reduced from £48.3 million in 2023-24, to £30.8 million in 2024-25, continuing the reduction from the peak of £62.6 million in 2022-23.<sup>88</sup>
- 4.53 In light of these legitimate and understandable concerns about the real terms value of Payment Plus, we considered where our priorities should lie this year. Against the backdrop of a tight affordability position, we have chosen to focus on the headline award for all staff. We are aware that our headline pay recommendation is above the budgeted position set out by HMPPS. Any increase in Payment Plus would be expensive and we do not want this to come at the cost of a lower headline award. Based on the expenditure data for 2024-25, each £1 increase in the rate of Payment Plus would add £1.6 million to the paybill, with this figure rising to £3.6 million when including the knock-on impact on bedwatch and constant watch (including associated oncosts), equivalent to 0.21% of the total paybill costs relating to the remit group. As a consequence, we considered recommending no change to the Payment Plus rate. However, we wanted to ensure that no Band 3 staff working Payment Plus hours would be paid less than their normal hourly rate. After much deliberation, we have decided to recommend an increase of £1 to the hourly rate of Payment Plus, bringing it to £23 per hour.
- 4.54 We were scheduled to consider Payment Plus again in our 2028 Report, however, HMPPS is continuing to review the operation, scope, and uptake of Payment Plus as part of its response to Recommendation 14 in our 2024 Report. Therefore, we make our recommendation on an interim basis until we consider, for our 2027 Report, the outcome of the HMPPS review. We will then review again in our 2032 Report, under our five-year rolling review of allowances. We note that some staff, in Bands 4 and 5 who work Payment Plus hours will continue to be paid less than their normal hourly rate. However, we consider that this is reasonable as the duties undertaken under Payment Plus are those of Band 3 staff.

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<sup>88</sup> These figures do not include constant watch and bedwatch payments which are also paid at the £22 an hour Payment Plus rate. With these two allowances included together with Payment Plus, the total amount spent by HMPPS on these associated payments was £68.3 million in 2024-25; compared to £79.0 million in 2023-24 and £90.3 million in 2022-23.

**Recommendation 9:** We recommend that from 1 April 2026 the hourly rate for Payment Plus be increased by £1 to £23 per hour.

### *Unsocial working hours*

- 4.55 Unsocial hours in the Prison Service are classified as weekdays 19:00-07:00, all hours at weekends and Public and Bank Holidays. These hours are known as 'red' hours, with non-unsocial hours known as 'green' hours. Working unsocial hours is remunerated through the UWH payment for Bands 2 to 5 and the Required Hours Addition/Allowance (RHA) for Bands 7 to 11. Band 12 Prison Group Directors do not receive RHA for unsocial hours.
- 4.56 We have previously mentioned that the amount of time worked unsocially had not been reviewed in depth since 2006. There were particular concerns that Band 2 OSGs were working significantly more than 20% of their time on unsocial hours. We made repeated requests for information from HMPPS on this issue but had not received this ahead of our last report. Therefore, based on evidence from the POA and our visits, we made a recommendation to temporarily increase the UWH for Fair and Sustainable Band 2 OSGs from 20% to 25% of base pay for all contracted hours. We said that we would look at this issue again this year if we received further evidence in time.
- 4.57 Ahead of this round, we received data from HMPPS regarding Band 2 unsocial hours working. The data showed that Band 2 staff were, on average, working more than 40% of their time on unsocial hours. HMPPS shared the data with POA and discussed the findings, although HMPPS did not provide further comment or proposals in its submission. Following the discussion with the POA, HMPPS agreed to undertake a review of night working in prisons to try to identify the reasons for the high levels of unsocial hours working and potential ways to address this. HMPPS proposed that we make no further increases to UWH or RHA while it continues working on Recommendation 14.
- 4.58 The POA proposed that the UWH allowance be increased to 33% of base pay for all Band 2 to 5 staff. It said that it had seen the data provided by HMPPS on the proportion of unsocial hours worked by Band 2 staff and attended a meeting with HMPPS to discuss. The union noted that it had consistently provided evidence that Band 2 staff were working over 40% of their hours unsocially and that this was supported by HMPPS's data. It considered that the data from HMPPS will be valuable for future policy decisions and negotiations. The POA also included information on the detrimental effects of night working on staff, calling for health screening and higher pay for night work.
- 4.59 The PGA proposed that an enhanced rate of RHA of 25% should be paid to prison-based operational managers. It also considered that RHA should be paid to Band 12 staff, but only in those roles that were part of the original Band 12 agreement. The PGA thought that we should also consider the amount of time operational managers spend on call versus those in the non-remit group who receive RHA. It told us that the frequency of on call can be high, especially in larger prisons and that there was no compensation for this.

4.60 We considered whether to further increase the temporary 25% unsocial hours payment for Band 2 OSGs in the light of the HMPPS data and the POA's written submission. However, we are mindful of the review into night working that is in progress. Additionally, we have so far seen only limited evidence that Bands 3 to 5 are working more than 20% of their hours unsocially. Consequently, because we will review unsocial working hours for *all* staff in our remit group in our 2027 Report, as part of our five year rolling review process, we do not recommend any changes to these payments this year. However, we want to ensure that the recommendation we made for Band 2 staff last year does not simply expire, if our 2027 Report is not published in time for our recommendations to be implemented in time for April 2027 pay. Therefore, we recommend that the UWH payment for Fair and Sustainable Band 2 OSGs be maintained at 25% of base pay for all contracted hours, until our 2027 Report has been published.

**Recommendation 10:** We recommend that the Unsocial Working Hours payment for Fair and Sustainable Band 2 Operational Support Grades be maintained at 25% of base pay for all contracted hours until our 2027 Report has been published.

#### *Supplementary Risk Allowance*

- 4.61 For the first time, the POA proposed the introduction of a Supplementary Risk Allowance (SRA) for operational Band 2 to 5 staff in England and Wales. The rationale for this being to differentiate operational from non-operational staff given the risks faced from working with prisoners in a prison. The POA pointed to continually increasing levels of violence against staff inside prisons and gave examples of incidents experienced by operational staff outside of prisons and emphasised these during oral evidence. The proposal referenced the SRA that is paid in Northern Ireland and suggested that the risks faced by staff in England and Wales were similar. The proposal was for an annual consolidated payment of £4,000 for Bands 3 to 5 and £2,000 for Band 2 staff, the proposal for Band 2 being lower because staff had less contact with prisoners and therefore faced less risk.
- 4.62 We recognise that operational staff sometimes face real risk outside their establishments as well as inside. However, we do not consider that there was evidence of a general level of threat against operational staff that would justify an allowance of this sort in England and Wales. The situation is very different from that in Northern Ireland. So that the situation can be better understood, we consider that it would be appropriate for HMPPS to monitor incidents against its staff which appear to be related to their profession but that occur when they are not on duty.

#### *Operational Support Grade overtime*

- 4.63 For staff on Fair and Sustainable, overtime for OSGs is 1.33 times the standard hourly base pay rate for weekday time and 1.75 times the standard hourly base pay rate for weekend time.<sup>89</sup> The rates are non-pensionable and, unlike Payment Plus, OSG overtime can be used to cover vacancies, sickness absence, training etc, as long as the establishment has the budget for it. Staff can choose to take time off in lieu instead, but this is calculated only at single time for the hours worked. Both rates have an extra £5 an hour permanently added to the multiplier, following our previous

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<sup>89</sup> Weekday time is all day between Monday and Friday (including Privilege days). Weekend time is between midnight Friday and midnight Sunday, or on a Public or Bank Holiday.

recommendations. This £5 an hour addition has the effect of increasing the multiplier to 1.72 (weekday time) and 2.14 (weekend time) based on 2025 base pay rates.

- 4.64 While we are not scheduled to review OSG overtime until our 2028 Report, we did expect to receive information on this from HMPPS, under Recommendation 14 of our 2024 Report. In its evidence, HMPPS stated that it regarded the OSG overtime rate as competitive and that there was a plentiful supply of volunteers.
- 4.65 In its evidence, the POA proposed that OSG overtime rates be increased to time and a half for green hours and double time for red hours, for Fair and Sustainable and closed grades. The POA considered that this was needed to help to reduce the high leaving rate of Band 2 staff. During oral evidence, the POA told us that some establishments were not paying the appropriate rates for the times worked, having a different interpretation of when red or green hours applied. To be clear, we expect the appropriate rate to be paid at the appropriate time according to the HMPPS pay manual.
- 4.66 We make no recommendation on OSG overtime rates here. We are due to reconsider this in our 2028 Report as scheduled in our rolling review.

#### *Operational Response and Resilience Unit on-call allowance*

- 4.67 The Operational Response and Resilience Unit (ORRU) on-call allowance is aimed at compensating those staff in the National Tactical Response Group and National Dog and Technical Support Group (together forming the ORRU) for having to be on-call (outside normal working hours) for 26 weeks a year. It was introduced from 1 April 2019, replacing a system which required claims to be made, and which was more closely aligned with the closed structure. The ORRU is part of the Service's national resource and is trained to be deployed at the most serious, high-risk, incidents within prisons along with incidents at height. The unit requires a higher level of regular physical fitness testing, and training involves a range of tactical options and equipment, all of which comes at a cost to HMPPS. The ORRU can also be called upon to deal with incidents at the request of other organisations such as Immigration Removal Centres, prisons in the Isle of Man and Channel Islands, courts and the three secure hospitals. When not dealing with incidents in prison, these staff provide a training function.
- 4.68 In our 2025 Report, we recommended that the ORRU on-call allowance be increased from £6,670 to £8,000 a year. We were not intending to review the allowance this year, but to consider it as scheduled in our rolling review of allowances. However, the POA included a proposal in its written evidence as there was an ongoing shortage of ORRU staff. After a substantial increase last year, the POA proposed that the allowance was increased in line with its proposal for the base pay award, of 6.3%. That would increase the allowance from £8,000 to £8,504 a year. The POA also requested that the allowance be made pensionable, as it was a permanent payment.
- 4.69 After considering the POA's proposal and in light of the near 20% increase last year, we do not believe there has been enough time to evaluate its impact on recruitment and retention. Therefore, we will not make a recommendation on the ORRU allowance this year. We will next review the allowance as part of our 2030 Report.

## *Physical Education Instructors*

- 4.70 In our 2025 Report, we recommended a temporary recruitment and retention payment for Band 4 Physical Education Instructors (PEIs). PEIs are trained prison officers who perform an important function in prisons to enhance the wellbeing of prisoners through physical exercise, to provide healthy outlets for the energies of prisoners and to contribute to rehabilitation by providing accreditations that may help to secure jobs on release. Their role is recognised and valued by prisoners and staff alike, and violence is rare in prison gyms as a result. The evidence we considered demonstrated that there was a shortage of PEIs and, while there were some initiatives in place, something more was needed to try to improve the situation in the short term.
- 4.71 In its evidence, the POA welcomed the introduction of a “specialist allowance” for these staff and said that morale had improved as a result. We must emphasise that this is not a payment for any additional skills held by PEIs, because those are covered by being Band 4 Specialist Officers. This is in contrast to the closed system where PEIs were mostly Band 3 equivalents with a specialist allowance. The temporary payment for PEIs introduced in our 2025 Report is aimed at improving the recruitment and retention of this group. The union argued that the benefit would be lost if the allowance was removed after two years, so it should be made permanent, pensionable and be increased in line with the headline award each year. The POA also told us that it had endorsed a new regional approach to PEI recruitment from HMPPS and that it would take time to measure the effect of this, so the allowance should be extended in the meantime.
- 4.72 We committed to review this temporary recruitment and retention payment in our 2027 Report. However, while we are not pre-empting the outcome of that review, we want to make sure that the payment remains in place until our 2027 Report is published. Therefore, we recommend that the temporary, non-consolidated and non-pensionable payment of £1,500 a year for qualified PEIs, working in a recognised PEI role be maintained until our 2027 Report has been published.

**Recommendation 11:** We recommend that the temporary, non-consolidated and non-pensionable payment of £1,500 a year for qualified Physical Education Instructors, working in a recognised Physical Education Instructor role be maintained until our 2027 Report has been published.

## *Dog trainers*

- 4.73 As in recent years, the POA proposed that there should be a Dog Trainers’ Allowance which would be a payment of £1,500 a year for those delivering initial training and £1,000 a year for those delivering continuity training. It said that this allowance would acknowledge the critical contribution of dog trainers, help to stabilise the cadre and help to ensure that HMPPS was better prepared to meet the emerging challenge of synthetic drugs entering prisons.
- 4.74 Last year, we said that POA and HMPPS should work together on this issue and submit any joint proposals to us for our next round. Unfortunately, this has not happened, although we would welcome joint proposals for our next round. As it

stands, we consider that there is insufficient evidence to recommend introducing a new allowance or payment for dog trainers.

#### *Care and Maintenance of Dogs allowance*

- 4.75 Our current approach is to maintain the real value of the Care and Maintenance of Dogs allowance. We have previously stated that it would be our intention to increase it by the headline award each year and we see no reason to depart from that intent this year. We recommend that the single rate of the Care and Maintenance of Dog allowance should be increased by 3.5%, with the multiple dog rate remaining set at 25% above this single dog rate. We will undertake a full review of this allowance, and our approach to it in our 2027 Report.

**Recommendation 12:** We recommend that from 1 April 2026, the Care and Maintenance of Dogs allowance be increased by 3.5% to £2,945 a year to those with responsibility for a single dog. We further recommend that the rate for multiple dogs is set at 25% above the single dog allowance rate.

#### *Voluntary duties and specialisms*

- 4.76 The POA and PCS made proposals for allowances to be paid to those individuals who volunteer to carry out specialist roles over and above their basic job description. The POA said that staff should not undertake additional tasks unless they receive additional pay for doing them. It proposed an annual £500 consolidated payment to operational Band 2 to 5 staff who take on additional tasks. The POA also proposed a new allowances dog trainers (see paragraph 4.73) and an annual retainer for Tornado trained staff (see paragraph 4.78). It has also previously drawn our attention to a shortage of qualified first aiders in prisons, although did not make a separate proposal this year.
- 4.77 The PCS stated that frontline staff, including PCS members, volunteered to undertake additional tasks and training for a variety of roles and should be financially compensated for doing so. It told us that HMPPS had a high reliance on volunteers and the commitment it made last year to review the situation had not progressed. However, in recent meetings, HMPPS had committed to looking at specialist tasks. The PCS proposed that those volunteering to undertake additional tasks and the training for such tasks should receive either a one-off payment or an hourly allowance. It also proposed that Band 4 staff who are fully qualified in their speciality should receive an annual retention bonus and those Instructors and Vocational Instructors should receive a £1,500 temporary recruitment and retention payment.
- 4.78 In its written evidence, the POA again proposed the introduction of a £500 annual retainer for Tornado trained staff, to be paid on completion of the initial Tornado course, then annually on completion of the refresher training. It told us that there was an ongoing shortage of Tornado trained staff despite the increase to Operation Tornado payments we recommended in our 2024 Report. While we note the proposal, we want further evidence to better understand the cause of the shortfall and evaluate the impact of the uplift to the Tornado payments.
- 4.79 We retain our position that we do not believe that a blanket payment for every additional task or specialism is appropriate. However, we will consider the matter of a particular specialism if any of the parties submit compelling evidence to us,

particularly if there are recruitment and retention issues. We would also welcome joint proposals from HMPPS and the trade unions.

#### *Other allowances and payments*

- 4.80 As mentioned in our last report, the PGA has a number of standing items directed by its conference to submit to us each year. These include additional remuneration for Band 8 Deputy Governor roles and the principle of 60 years as the retirement age for operational managers without reductions in benefits or increased voluntary pension contributions. It also again proposed: compensation for the loss of the benefit of being able to work flexibly compared with non-operational colleagues, equivalent to two days average daily commuting costs each week; introducing fully funded healthcare provided to operational managers to include 24-hour access to a GP; enhanced wellbeing and occupational support; and a salary sacrifice scheme for electric vehicles.
- 4.81 The PCS also made a number of points around flexible working, including that staff working in prisons should have the same access to flexible working opportunities as those in headquarters. It also proposed that annual leave entitlement should increase to at least 30 days on entry to the Service and then increase to 35 days after five years.
- 4.82 We note that most of these proposals are outside our remit. Therefore, we have not made recommendations on them and would encourage the unions to take these matters up with HMPPS. We were also told by PCS that it is often unable to progress issues for its non-remit members if there is no Prison Service Pay Review Body recommendation in a particular area. Our recommendations are for our remit group only and we have no views on staff outside our remit group. However, this does highlight the issues with the pay link between our remit group and the read-across group whose pay is affected by our recommendations. This link also adds to affordability constraints. We return to this issue in Chapter 5.
- 4.83 We make no recommendations on other allowances and payments. For our 2027 Report we will consider unsocial working payments for the whole remit group and Care and Maintenance of Dogs allowance. We will also review the temporary recruitment and retention payment for PEIs and Payment Plus.

#### **Performance management**

- 4.84 The PGA told us it still had concerns around the performance bonus system and the localised approach, which it saw as producing inconsistencies and unfairness. It said that the current system lacked transparency and uniformity and undermined morale and the principle of equal recognition for equal performance. The PGA thought that a properly functioning performance bonus system would boost morale and asked that we recommend that HMPPS introduced a funded performance bonus system. We note that the lack of a fit for purpose, fair and valued performance management system adversely affects staff morale at all levels.
- 4.85 The PCS told us that the current reward structure was not being used in an equitable way. There was a significant disparity in payments between management and non-management grades, between ethnic minority and other staff and between age groups. It said HMPPS needed to be more transparent.

4.86 We have heard on visits and from the unions that not all staff feel that they are managed effectively. One potential contributing factor to this is that many Band 5 staff have relatively large spans of control. In oral evidence, HMPPS told us that it was looking to reduce these spans to around 15 staff per Band 5.

### **Cost of our recommendations**

4.87 We estimate that our recommendations will result in an increase of approximately £59.9 million to the total paybill for our remit group, excluding pay progression and the statutory requirement to pay the NLW.<sup>90</sup> This equates to around 1% of HMPPS's £7.5 billion annual budget for operating expenditure as of 2024-25.<sup>91</sup> This estimate does not include the cost of closed grade staff opting in to Fair and Sustainable, as we cannot know precisely which staff on other pay/allowance arrangements would financially benefit from opting in. As we have set out in previous reports, we do not include the cost of performance awards when calculating the cost of the annual pay award.

4.88 In reaching our recommendations, we have consciously focused on a consolidated pay increase for staff, rather than uplifts to allowances. We consider that our headline award is a fair and balanced reflection of the realities of the tight budget situation for HMPPS; the need to recruit and retain more United Kingdom-based staff and the real financial pressures on staff and families. This approach was brought into sharp focus during our deliberations on Payment Plus, where we have made an interim recommendation while waiting for the results of HMPPS's review into that allowance. Each 0.1% increase on the base pay award would cost approximately £1.6 million (including oncosts), compared with each £1 increase on Payment Plus that would cost £3.6 million (including oncosts and the associated impact to constant watch and bedwatch payments which are paid at the same rate).

4.89 While our recommendations have a cost, we believe that they will bring savings for the Service. Better retention would result in fewer new recruits being needed, saving the associated recruitment and training costs. It costs time and money to bring new recruits up to standard, in terms of their initial training and then the on-the-job training needed once they arrive at their establishment. In previous reports, we have noted that each new recruit costs the Service around £13,000, although this estimate was made some years ago and the estimated cost may well be higher now. Improved retention should also increase the depth of experience in the workforce, contributing to a safer environment for both staff and prisoners. It would also assist the Service in its aim of reducing its reliance on Payment Plus, overtime, detached duty, temporary promotion and a large time off in lieu liability. We also consider that this award is important to a workforce whose morale is fragile.

4.90 In Chapter 5, we identify the information and evidence we expect to receive to inform our considerations for our next report.

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<sup>90</sup> Our estimate takes account of our recommended increases to pay scales and allowance rates (including the 3.5% headline award and increase to Payment Plus) for our remit group. Our estimate includes oncosts for employer pension and national insurance contributions. Our estimate does not include the cost of staff opting in to Fair and Sustainable, as we cannot be sure how many staff will be eligible for, and decide to opt in. Our estimate does not include the cost of increasing pay to meet the NLW requirement but includes the additional cost of the headline award when applied on top of the NLW.

<sup>91</sup> HMPPS, (2025). *HMPPS Annual Reports and Accounts 2024 to 25*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hmppps-annual-report-and-accounts-2024-to-2025> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

## **Chapter 5: Forward look**

### **Introduction**

- 5.1 This final chapter is where we highlight areas where we would like the parties to discuss, review and provide evidence, including statistical data, to us. We ask the parties to take note of this chapter and what we ask, to ensure the evidence and information are provided in good time for us to consider for our next report, noting that we should be fully back on track with our normal timetable so that staff receive the benefit of those recommendations from April 2027. We ask that all parties in their written submissions give the rationale for their proposals, including any proposals not to make changes.

### **Our timetable**

- 5.2 This year we are pleased that a prompt issue of the remit letter has enabled us to submit this report by the end of February, although, as we have noted, it was disappointing that the Government's written evidence was a month late. This has slightly delayed the submission of this report. We hope the Government will make its decision on our recommendations quickly. This will allow this report to be published and the recommendations implemented as close to April 2026 as possible.

### *Two year pay settlement*

- 5.3 We note that the POA has expressed interest in a two year pay settlement in its evidence over the last two pay rounds. In order for us to consider such a proposition, this would need to be included in our remit.

### **Our remit and its scope**

- 5.4 The recommendations that we make each year for staff in our remit group also affect a significant proportion of the 14,000 non-operational staff in His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). This is due to the Bailey equal pay case which took place over 20 years ago and was partly responsible for the introduction of the Fair and Sustainable pay structure in 2012. As we have noted in many of our previous reports, this means that recommendations we make for operational staff are, in most cases, also applied to non-operational staff equivalents despite many of their roles and terms and conditions being different from those of our remit group. Furthermore, as we have noted in respect of Operational Support Grades (OSGs), the roles and responsibilities of grades have changed over time. The Service has yet to bring any view or proposals about dealing with the long-term implications of this case. Therefore, we would like the Ministry of Justice to provide an updated view on whether the linkage should be reviewed.
- 5.5 This brings us to a second point, which was raised by the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) Union. In evidence this year, PCS stated that there are many areas they would like to negotiate with HMPPS around pay that solely affect the non-remit group. However, PCS stated that they are often told that HMPPS cannot negotiate because there have been no recommendation(s) from us. We did not get the opportunity to raise this issue with HMPPS during oral evidence. For the avoidance of doubt, we make clear that we would expect HMPPS to negotiate with PCS on issues that do not affect the Prison Service Pay Review Body remit group and solely affect the non-remit group, for whom we do not, and cannot, make recommendations.

- 5.6 The POA again raised in its evidence that it would like to see Band 2 OSGs removed from our remit and returned to collective bargaining, because these staff have the right to take all forms of industrial action, including strike action. It is not within our gift to decide who is and who is not within our remit. That decision would need to be made by the Government following discussions with the relevant trade unions. The POA also asked in oral evidence for our endorsement that the pension age for prison officers should be 60 years. We note that prison officers have a difficult and challenging occupation, but decisions on retirement age and pensions are also outside our remit. Perhaps the POA and the Government could discuss this issue with a view to reaching agreement?

### **Workforce strategy**

- 5.7 In our 2025 Report, we noted that a key area for the Minister was supporting the professionalisation of the prison officer role. We understand that this was to mainly fall under the 'Enable' programme, on which HMPPS provided us with a summary in its written evidence. It told us that the programme aims to transform prisons over the medium term, through a series of workforce and regime changes to improve the way HMPPS trains, develops, leads and supports prison staff. HMPPS said there were four strands: building capacity; supporting our people; strengthening leadership; and improving working environments. We note the written evidence stated that some elements would be in place by October 2025 and there are early adopter prisons. We would therefore like to receive for our next report a statement of what the programme is covering, how long it is intended to last and what its key success measures are. HMPPS has also told us that the adoption of improved technology in prisons is increasing productivity, so we would welcome evidence on these initiatives and how the benefits are being realised and measured.

### *Staff resourcing plan*

- 5.8 We note that HMPPS has a number of staffing and resourcing challenges in the medium term, beyond those brought about by prisoner population pressures. HMPPS has implied that staffing numbers have broadly stabilised, with recruitment and retention improving, apart from a number of sites where challenges remain. However, the unions disagree and consider that the target staffing number figures are not high enough to provide the regimes that are needed to ensure safety and rehabilitation.
- 5.9 Whilst it is positive that improvements have been made, we still have concerns around resourcing. HMPPS remains around 1,500 staff below its target staffing level, and there is an expectation that around an additional 1,300 staff will be needed for prison expansions in the coming years. Moreover, the new HMPPS resourcing plan also suggests the need for a further 450 staff to meet current requirements. There continues to be some reliance on Payment Plus, detached duty and unused time off in lieu. There are also the skilled worker visa issues that have the potential to affect between 2,000 and 2,600 prison officers over the next two or three years. Finally, HMPPS told us last year that it intends to change the non-effective rate for prison officers from 20% to 24%, funded by a 25% reduction in the key worker scheme, and was giving consideration to the ratio of staff being managed by Band 5 Custodial Managers to ensure it sits around 1:15.
- 5.10 For our next report, we would like HMPPS to provide us with its resourcing plan or model, along with what it believes are the key challenges and targets it faces, for the

next three to five years, including how it plans to deal with the issues caused by the changes to skilled worker visas. We would like to know how many staff it expects to need to recruit each year, how the move from 20% to 24% non-effectives and the changes to Band 5 spans of control are progressing. This should include any milestones, along with an analysis of the impact of any initiatives to improve recruitment and retention, such as an evaluation of the 'Extraordinary Jobs' recruitment campaign.

### *Sickness absence*

- 5.11 Sickness absence comes at a cost to HMPPS in the form of having fewer staff available to run regimes. We would like to understand what HMPPS is doing to reduce the level of sickness absence amongst operational staff and what it sees as a manageable level.

### **Equality and diversity**

- 5.12 Our standing terms of reference require us to take into account the legal obligations on HMPPS including tackling discrimination across the full range of protected characteristics. We have previously noted that the data we received around allowances and payments broken down by protected characteristics was of variable quality. This year we were pleased to receive a far more detailed breakdown of allowances and payments by protected characteristics; however, this was received too late for us to consider for this report. Therefore, we would like to receive this data for our 2027 Report in good time for this to be fully considered, preferably at the same time as we receive our usual data pack from HMPPS.
- 5.13 Both the PCS and Prison Governors' Association (PGA) raised issues in relation to the current bonus system. On visits, prison staff told us that the system was not operated fairly. The PGA considered that it was not transparent and favoured non-operational managers. The PCS noted that manager grades received higher value and more frequent awards and it expressed concerns around how the system was working for those with protected characteristics. Whilst the bonus system is on the periphery of our remit, a system that is perceived to be unfair can have an adverse effect on motivation and morale. We would like to hear from HMPPS on what steps it is taking to ensure that the bonus arrangements are operated on a fair and appropriate basis.
- 5.14 We welcome the Rademaker Report into Professional Standards and HMPPS's commitment to implementing the recommendations in full. We realise this is likely to be a journey for the Service. Culture is not something that can be easily changed in a short time frame. We would like to be kept up to date by all the parties on the progress being made.

### **Flexible working**

- 5.15 Flexible working continues to be an issue that staff raise with us on visits with many staff telling us that flexible working requests are often refused. Such refusals can have adverse affects on wellbeing and home lives. HMPPS said it was committed to fostering a modern and inclusive workplace that supported flexible working arrangements that are aligned with operational needs. It said staff are entitled to request flexible working and submit up to two statutory flexible working requests in any 12 month period. However, we continue to hear on visits that staff struggle to get

their flexible working applications accepted and there appeared to be a lack of consistency of approach from prison to prison.

- 5.16 As we have previously noted, there are benefits to offering staff flexible working as it can help to attract talent, retain experienced staff and build a more diverse and inclusive workforce. We would therefore like to hear from HMPPS how it plans to introduce flexible working arrangements for operational staff, including how it will ensure there is a consistent approach across prisons when dealing with requests. If there is a national policy with guidelines, then we would like to see this. We would like to understand how HMPPS plans to monitor this issue centrally and what the timescales for such monitoring would be. We would also like to understand what discussions have taken place with the unions on improving access to flexible working.

## **Allowances**

### *Recommendation 14 from our 2024 Report*

- 5.17 We note that HMPPS is still working on meeting some of the requirements of Recommendation 14 from our 2024 Report and has assured us that these data and information will be ready in time for our 2027 Report. That being the case, we will consider the results of HMPPS's review into Payment Plus in our 2027 Report, ahead of the scheduled review in our 2028 Report. We will also consider OSG overtime as part of our rolling review of allowances in the 2028 Report.

### *Rolling review of allowances 2027*

- 5.18 As part of the rolling review of allowances for our 2027 Report, we are scheduled to consider the Care and Maintenance of Dogs allowances and unsocial hours payments for Bands 2 to 5 and 7 to 11 in the Fair and Sustainable pay structure. We would like to receive the following information from the parties: the intended purposes of the allowances and payments; information on any recruitment and retention difficulties, including any plans for improvement; impact on family life (in the case of unsocial hours) and in particular on those with caring responsibilities; and finally, any external comparator information that may be available.
- 5.19 In addition to the above, and as noted in Chapter 4, we made a temporary increase from 20% to 25% to the Unsocial Working Hours (UWH) payment for Band 2 as part of our 2025 Report, which we will be considering as part of the rolling review of allowances in our 2027 Report along with UWH payments for Bands 3 to 5. Therefore, we would like to receive information in the same format on UWH for Bands 3 to 5 as we received for Band 2 last year and updated information in relation to Band 2. We ask that data collected by HMPPS are in a format that is shareable with the trade unions. Our preference would be for joint proposals from HMPPS and the POA for us to consider for our 2027 Report.
- 5.20 We note that the PGA and staff on visits have also continued to raise the issue of the number of hours operational managers are routinely working, considering these to be excessive. HMPPS has previously said in oral evidence that its preference would be to hire more operational managers rather than increase the Required Hours Addition/Allowance. We note that it is more challenging to get a fully accurate picture of operational managers' working hours as these grades are not detailed to shifts in the same way as Band 2 to 5 staff. Nevertheless, we heard reports of a long hours culture and governing governors and deputy governors being expected to be on call

for work every weekday and 26 weekends a year. We therefore request evidence from HMPPS and the PGA on the hours worked by operational managers and proposals on whether changes need to be made.

### *Payment Plus*

5.21 As noted in Chapter 4, we have recommended that Payment Plus be increased to £23 an hour on an interim basis, preferring to put more into the headline base pay award which benefits all staff. We note that HMPPS and NHS England (NHSE) are undertaking an 'Escort, Bedwatch and Constant Supervision Review', which is due to be completed in April 2026. This aims to improve prisoner access to health services, reduce the demand for medical escorts and bedwatches, and implement sustainable and equitable cross-charging tariffs between HMPPS and NHSE. Our 2026 Report will be submitted before this review concludes and we would like an update on the review for the 2027 Report. We previously asked HMPPS to provide information on initiatives for reducing Payment Plus. We would still like to hear how HMPPS is intending to further reduce Payment Plus and also what Payment Plus annual costs it considers to be acceptable. We would also like to hear the views of the POA on these issues and the outcome of discussions between the parties. We will undertake our full review of Payment Plus again in our 2027 Report, when we have the results of the HMPPS review of the operation, scope, and uptake of Payment Plus as part of its response to Recommendation 14 from our 2024 Report.

### *Physical Education Instructor recruitment and retention payment*

5.22 As part of our 2025 Report, we recommended a recruitment and retention payment of £1,500 for two years payable to current and new Physical Education Instructors (PEIs). We gave the commitment to review the payment in our 2027 Report. We note from oral evidence that HMPPS said it was looking at the training offered and whether this could be streamlined and made more attractive, especially to those who might have family commitments. We would like to receive from HMPPS and the POA in written evidence the following: initiatives to attract new applicants as PEIs; the progress being made on the recruitment of PEIs, along with information on retention; changes to the training programme; shareable and publishable data on the number of PEIs in post versus the target, broken down by establishment and protected characteristics; and information on any individual prisons or areas that are having particular difficulties in recruiting to the PEI role. We will then make a decision on the future of the payment.

### *Operation Tornado payments*

5.23 We recommended increases to Operation Tornado payments in our 2024 Report. This year, the POA again proposed a Tornado retainer payment due to ongoing shortages of Tornado trained staff. Therefore, we would like to receive data on the number of Tornado trained staff broken down by establishment and the target for each prison, along with the numbers currently in the training pipeline.

### **Summary of requests for specific information for our 2027 Report**

- Details on HMPPS's resourcing plan or model, along with what it believes are the key challenges and targets it faces over the next three to five years, including how it plans to deal with the issues caused by the changes to skilled worker visas. We would like to know how many staff it expects to need to recruit each year, and how movement from 20% to 24% non-effectives and the changes to Band 5 spans of control are progressing.

- What HMPPS is doing to reduce the level of sickness absence amongst operational staff and what it sees as a manageable level.
- Data on allowances and payments broken down by protected characteristics.
- How HMPPS is ensuring that the performance bonus arrangements are operated on a fair and appropriate basis.
- Progress updates on implementing the recommendations from the Rademaker Review.
- How HMPPS plans to introduce flexible working arrangements for operational staff and monitor these centrally. Also, what discussions have taken place with the unions on improving access to flexible working.
- A statement of what the Enable programme is covering, how long it is intended to last and what its key success measures are. Also, information on how the adoption of improved technology in prisons is improving productivity.
- The results of HMPPS's review into Payment Plus and the 'Escort, Bedwatch and Constant Supervision Review'.
- Evidence on initiatives to attract new applicants as PEIs; the progress being made on the recruitment of PEIs, along with information on retention; changes to the training programme; shareable and publishable data on the number of PEIs in post versus the target, broken down by establishment and protected characteristics; and information on any individual prisons or areas that are having particular difficulties in recruiting to the PEI role.
- Data on the number of Tornado trained staff broken down by establishment and the target for each prison, along with the numbers currently in the training pipeline.
- For the Care and Maintenance of Dogs allowances and for unsocial hours payments for all staff in our remit: the intended purposes of the allowances and payments; information on any recruitment and retention difficulties if relevant, including any plans for improvement; impact on family life; and any external comparator information that may be available.

## Conclusion

- 5.24 The Prison Service has, once again, been much in the public eye over the last year. This results in part from matters outside its control such as prison population pressures, increased violence and, more recently, the significant potential reduction in Band 3 staff due to recent changes in visa requirements. These issues could hamper the ability of prison staff to perform their duties optimally and to increase productivity. The majority of prison staff at all grades continue to work in often very difficult conditions and not infrequently at real physical risk to themselves.
- 5.25 Looking forward, there are some grounds for optimism. Staff resignation rates have dropped slightly. There are a number of reasons for this, but one factor will be more appropriate pay for staff at all grades. We have, over several years, sought to better match remit group pay levels with jobs which require broadly similar skills and

attitudes. Much of the work undertaken in prisons is complex, skilled, mentally and physically demanding, carried out in often less than ideal conditions and sometimes in dangerous situations. The recommendations in this report seek to build on the progress made over the last few years taking into account the financial constraints on HMPPS, while recognising that a professional, properly remunerated, trained, motivated and committed workforce is essential to ensure the long-term success of the Prison Service.



## **Appendix A: Transcript of the Minister's activation letter<sup>92</sup>**

Dear Tim,

### **THE PRISON SERVICE PAY REVIEW BODY (PSPRB) REMIT 2026/27**

I am grateful to you and the other Prison Service Pay Review Body (PSPRB) members for your continued hard work and dedication to Prison Service Pay for our valued staff and for your commitment to accelerate the timetable.

The government values the vital contribution made by the almost 6 million public sector workers across the UK, who deliver the public services we all rely upon. This includes the excellent work of our Prison Service staff, often in challenging circumstances. The government accepted all recommendations from the PSPRB for the 2025/26 pay round. This represented an increase of at least 4% for all operational prison staff, delivering another real-terms pay rise on top of the one provided last summer. However, since it came in above the figures we set out as affordable within our evidence, the pay award required difficult decisions on spending and reprioritisation of budgets.

As the Spending Review confirmed, all pay must be funded from departmental budgets and there will be no additional funding available for pay settlements. My department's evidence will set out the funds available to MoJ/HMPPS for 2026/27, following the Spending Review last month. It will also set out the recruitment and retention context alongside earnings data. This will need to be balanced against other departmental priorities including improving prison capacity through an increase to prison places and deliver reforms recommended through the Independent Sentencing Review.

I am writing to commence formally the 2026/27 pay round and set out how the government intends to work with the PSPRB over the coming year. I am asking you to provide recommendations in line with your terms of reference, with particular regard for this government's objective of providing mission-led public services that are equipped to efficiently deliver the vital, high quality public services we all rely on, whilst ensuring value for money for taxpayers.

We know that public sector workers delivering our vital public services deserve timely pay awards. We announced 2025/26 pay awards two months earlier than last year, and remain committed to bringing 2026/27 pay announcements forwards further. That is why we are launching this pay round two months earlier than the previous round, and five months before the previous government commenced the 2024/25 round. I would be grateful if you could support an early pay announcement by submitting your report at the earliest point that allows you to give due consideration to the relevant evidence.

I recognise that changing the timeline from recent years will present challenges for you, but I am sure you also share the government's belief in the importance of returning to a timelier annual pay process. To enable you to submit your report earlier, my department will aim to cooperate with all your deadlines and bring the evidence process forward.

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<sup>92</sup> GOV.uk, (2025). *Remit letter for the PSPRB 2026 England and Wales pay round*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/remit-letter-for-the-psprb-2026-england-and-wales-pay-round> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

In closing, I would like to thank you personally for your work over your tenure as Chair of the PSPRB and to wish you well for the future. I look forward to working with your successor and the PSPRB during the upcoming pay round.

Yours sincerely,

**Lord Timpson**  
**Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending**

## **Appendix B: Transcript of correspondence between the PSPRB and Minister regarding the activation letter, written evidence delays and round timetable<sup>93</sup>**

### **PSPRB response to delays in the receipt of the Government's written evidence for the 2025-26 pay round – 31 October 2025**

Dear Lord Timpson,

#### **PRISON SERVICE PAY REVIEW BODY – 2026 REPORT**

Thank you for the written evidence from His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service for our 2026 Report, which was submitted on 30<sup>th</sup> October.

In your remit letter dated 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2025 you rightly stated that “public sector workers delivering our vital public services deserve timely pay” and that Government is committed to bringing 2026-27 pay announcements forward. Indeed, receiving their pay award on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April is very important to our remit group. We hear from them every year, especially on our visits, that delayed payment, even with the appropriate back-pay, can cause unnecessary hardship.

We therefore welcomed that you launched this pay round two months earlier than the last one. In your remit letter you asked if we could support an early pay announcement by submitting our report at “the earliest point that allows you to give due consideration to the relevant evidence”.

As you will be aware we are fully committed to working towards this objective, but it is very disappointing that, yet again, the Government's evidence is late, by a month. This undermines commitment to the remit group, the other parties, and the integrity of the Review Body process. All the other parties have again submitted their evidence on time. It is frustrating that, after committing to getting the process back on to its regular timetable, Government has chosen to submit its written evidence long after the deadline. We believe that the evidence was ready on time, yet we received it with unnecessary delays.

I understand that part of the driver of the delay is the desire to publish the written submissions to all the Pay Review Bodies at the same time. This appears to be a case where communication preferences are taking precedence over the core purpose of the pay review process, which undermines our collective commitment to bringing the 2026-27 pay announcements forward. We, and the other parties, would have expected and respected an embargoed copy of the evidence to allow the process to stay on track.

As you might recall, in his letter of 29<sup>th</sup> July my predecessor noted that for us to submit our 2026 Report at the end of February, allowing the remit group to receive their award much closer to when it is due to be paid, we would need written submissions by 30<sup>th</sup> September. We take our role very seriously and have an established process to follow once we have received the written evidence from all parties. This process ensures that all parties can make their case to us, have the opportunity to comment on evidence submitted by others, and that we have the necessary time to collate and scrutinise the available evidence to

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<sup>93</sup> All three letters in Appendix B can be found using the following link. GOV.uk, (2025). *PSPRB response to the 2025 England and Wales round remit letter and evidence*. (online) Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/response-to-the-2025-england-and-wales-round-remit-letter-and-evidence> [accessed on 19 February 2026].

inform our recommendations. Therefore, delivering our report by the end of February 2026 was dependent on receiving all written evidence by the end of September 2025.

We have done what we can to bring the process forward and make our own deliberations as efficient as possible to deliver timely recommendations. Even so, a delay of one month in receiving the evidence does not simply equate to a delay of one month in submitting our report. The delay in receiving evidence has a compounding effect, impacting scheduling, preparation time, and ultimately the timeliness of our recommendations. Our secretariat is working with your officials, and trade union representatives, to arrange the oral evidence sessions, with shorter notice and less time for all parties to prepare than should ideally be the case.

Once the oral evidence sessions have been completed, I will write again to let you know when we will be able to submit our 2026 Report. We hope that Government will do everything it can to act swiftly in responding to our recommendations, so we can deliver against our joint objective to bring the pay announcements forward.

Yours sincerely

Tijs Broeke

*Chair, Prison Service Pay Review Body*

**Letter from the Minister regarding late receipt of the Government's 2025-26 round written evidence and timetable – 25 November 2025**

Dear Tijs,

**PRISON SERVICE PAY REVIEW BODY – 2026 REPORT**

Thank you for your letter dated 31<sup>st</sup> October 2025, which acknowledged receipt of our written evidence to the PSPRB for 2026/27 and set out the impact of the late receipt of this year's written evidence.

I recognise the importance of the points you have made, and wish to reiterate this Government's commitment to accelerating the Pay Review Body timetable across the public sector. Working together with the PSPRB, we have delivered valuable progress on this in recent years. The 2025/26 round concluded two months earlier than the previous year, meaning staff received the pay award closer to April than has been the case for a number of years. We have commenced the 2026/27 round earlier than in previous years, and are well placed for the round to conclude earlier than last year.

However, I agree that more can be done to further realign the timetable, to ensure staff receive their pay award as close to April as possible each year. I recognise the important work of the PSPRB to support this ambition, and acknowledge that the deadlines set for each stage of the process are important to delivering the overall objective.

My officials have engaged counterparts at HMT and No.10 to explore what more can be done to ensure that the timelines agreed between departments and PRBs are delivered, including the suggestions set out in your letter.

I look forward to meeting you at the oral evidence session later this month.

Yours sincerely,

**Lord Timpson**

**Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending**

**PSPRB response to the Minister's late receipt of evidence letter and confirming timeframe for 2026 Report submission – 3 December 2025**

Dear Lord Timpson,

**PRISON SERVICE PAY REVIEW BODY – 2026 REPORT**

Thank you for your letter of 25<sup>th</sup> November, and for attending your second oral evidence session with PSPRB on 28<sup>th</sup> November. We found the session interesting and useful, and look forward to welcoming you for your third appearance in around a year's time. I also appreciate that your officials have engaged with HM Treasury and No.10 on how to deliver evidence to the timelines agreed between departments and Pay Review Bodies.

Now that we have concluded all of our oral evidence meetings, I can inform you that we will aim to submit our 2026 Report to you in late February – early March. This should gain around six weeks compared to last year, bringing the round close to being back on track and, importantly, allowing the remit group to receive their pay award closer to the due date of 1<sup>st</sup> April than has recently been the case.

Yours sincerely

Tijs Broeke

*Chair, Prison Service Pay Review Body*

## **Appendix C: Correspondence from the Minister on skilled worker visa change exemptions and the HMPPS market supplement review**

Dear Tijs,

### **Skilled Worker Visa change exemption and update on Market Supplements**

I would first like to thank you for your letter of 25 November, in which you confirmed the ambition to provide your report and recommendations in in late February – early March. This continues to demonstrate positive progress in our shared ambition to accelerate the timetable, to ensure that staff receive pay awards as close to April as possible.

Following our discussion at oral evidence, I would like to update you on the time-limited exemption from the Skilled Worker visa threshold changes for prison officers, and the outcome of the first annual review of Market Supplements under the newly introduced Framework.

I am pleased to confirm that the Government has agreed a temporary exemption to the Immigration Rules for the prison officer role (and prison custody officer role in private prisons). This allows the department to sponsor prison officers for Skilled Worker visas until 31 December 2026, with a lower salary threshold for those switching applications, as well as for any extension applications for those already in the Skilled Worker route until 31 December 2027. This means prison officers previously at risk of losing their right to work because of the changes can now apply for sponsorship. Sponsorship can be granted for up to 3 years but will depend on each individual's circumstances. I understand you have received further detail on the exemption from my officials.

As outlined at oral evidence, following the introduction of the Market Supplements Framework, HMPPS have led a review process which has used quantitative and qualitative data to reach decisions on the future of supplements in individual sites. The review considered data on staffing forecasts, retention, and stability, supported by wider data insights and the views of Area Executive Directors, to inform whether supplements should be withdrawn from existing sites or awarded to new sites.

The Framework includes a financial cap based on the cost of paying supplements at 100% of the target staffing figures (TSFs) across the 18 prisons currently in receipt of supplements. In line with this, the first annual review has concluded that the Red Plus Market Supplement at HMP Aylesbury will be downgraded to Red, and Red Supplements will be gradually eroded at HMPs Grendon, Standford Hill and Huntercombe.

These changes will take effect from 1 April 2026. Prisons and staff have received communications to set out next steps, and we have updated our recognised trade unions. The Framework uses a gradual erosion mechanism, with the intention to erode £500 from the value of Market Supplements each year, aligning with the implementation of the annual pay award to ensure staff experience no monthly or annual reduction in take-home pay as a result of supplements being withdrawn.

The targeted use of Market Supplements remains an effective way of supporting HMPPS at individual sites with acute recruitment and retention challenges, with the Framework ensuring that supplements continue to be deployed in an evidence-based way. We will monitor the impact of these changes throughout 2026/27.

I would be grateful if you could consider these updates when forming your recommendations for Prison Service pay for 2026/27. I look forward to receiving your report in the coming months.

Yours sincerely,

**Lord Timpson**

**Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending**

## ***Appendix D: Visits and discussion groups held in 2025***

As part of our in-person visit programme we visited the following establishments, along with holding a number of virtual discussion groups with Band 12 Prison Group Directors, Operational Response and Resilience Unit (ORRU) staff and Physical Education Instructors (PEIs). We usually hold Band 12 virtual discussions each year due to the small number of staff at this grade and their geographical spread across England and Wales. This year, we held virtual discussion groups with ORRU staff to hear their views on the increase to the ORRU on-call allowance as part of our 2025 Report. We also held virtual discussion groups with PEIs to hear their views the introduction of a two year recruitment and retention payment for PEIs and to gather evidence for our review of this payment due as part of our 2027 Report.

HMP & YOI Chelmsford

HMP & YOI Doncaster<sup>94</sup>

HMP & YOI Hatfield

HMP Lowdham Grange

HMP & YOI Portland

HMP & YOI Styal

HMP The Verne

HMP Warren Hill

HMP & YOI Woodhill

HMP Wormwood Scrubs

Operational Response and Resilience Unit – one virtual discussion group

Physical Education Instructors – two virtual discussion groups

Prison Group Directors (Band 12) – one virtual discussion group

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<sup>94</sup> Privately managed by Serco.

## **Appendix E: Current and recommended pay levels**

**Current and recommended pay for Fair and Sustainable grades (£ per annum)<sup>95</sup>**

**Fair and Sustainable ranges – National**

*Bands 7 to 12 – National*

<b>Grade</b>	<b>From 1 April 2025</b>		<b>From 1 April 2026</b>	
	<b>37 hour base pay</b>	<b>37 hour inc 20% RHA</b>	<b>37 hour base pay</b>	<b>37 hour inc 20% RHA</b>
Prison Group Director (Band 12) spot rate	121,644	-	125,902	-
Governor (Band 11) max	97,288	116,746	100,694	120,833
Governor (Band 11) min	88,444	106,133	91,540	109,848
Governor (Band 10) max	86,446	103,735	89,472	107,366
Governor (Band 10) min	78,587	94,304	81,338	97,606
Deputy Governor (Band 9) max	78,129	93,755	80,864	97,037
Deputy Governor (Band 9) min	71,027	85,232	73,513	88,216
Deputy Governor / Head of Function (Band 8) max	61,003	73,204	63,139	75,767
Deputy Governor / Head of Function (Band 8) min	55,457	66,548	57,398	68,878
Head of Function (Band 7) spot rate	52,316	62,779	54,148	64,978

<sup>95</sup> Please see page 101 for explanatory notes on the Fair and Sustainable pay scales, spot rates and ranges.

*Custodial Manager (Band 5) – National*

<b>Pay scale</b>	<b>Pay point</b>	<b>From 1 April 2025</b>	<b>From 1 April 2026</b>
37 hour base pay	3	37,887	39,214
	2	37,009	38,305
	1	36,151	37,417
37 hour inc 20% unsocial	3	45,464	47,057
	2	44,411	45,966
	1	43,381	44,900
39 hour inc 2xACHP & 20% unsocial	3	47,922	49,600
	2	46,811	48,451
	1	45,726	47,327

*Supervising / Specialist Officers (Band 4) – National*

<b>Pay scale</b>	<b>Pay point</b>	<b>From 1 April 2025</b>	<b>From 1 April 2026</b>
37 hour base pay	Spot rate	33,275	34,440
37 hour inc 20% unsocial	Spot rate	39,930	41,328
39 hour inc 2xACHP & 20% unsocial	Spot rate	42,088	43,562

*Prison Officer (Band 3) – National*

<b>Pay scale</b>	<b>Pay point</b>	<b>From 1 April 2025</b>	<b>From 1 April 2026</b>
37 hour base pay	3	29,611	30,648
	2	29,106	30,125
	1	28,122	29,107
37 hour inc 20% unsocial	3	35,533	36,778
	2	34,927	36,150
	1	33,746	34,928
38 hour inc 1xACH & 20% unsocial	3	36,654	37,937
	2	36,029	37,290
	1	34,810	36,030
39 hour inc 2xACH & 20% unsocial	3	37,774	39,097
	2	37,130	38,430
	1	35,875	37,131
39 hour inc 2xACHP & 20% unsocial	3	37,454	38,766
	2	36,815	38,104
	1	35,571	36,816
40 hour inc 3xACH & 20% unsocial	3	38,894	40,257
	2	38,231	39,570
	1	36,939	38,232
41 hour inc 4xACH & 20% unsocial	3	40,015	41,417
	2	39,333	40,710
	1	38,003	39,334

*Operational Support Grade (Band 2) – National<sup>96</sup>*

<b>Pay scale</b>	<b>Pay point</b>	<b>From 1 April 2025</b>	<b>From 1 April 2026 (inc NLW)</b>	<b>From 1 April 2026 (recs)</b>
37 hour base pay	Spot rate	24,527	24,549	25,409
37 hour inc 25% unsocial	Spot rate	30,659	30,686	31,761
39 hour inc 2xACHP & 25% unsocial	Spot rate	32,316	32,345	33,478

<sup>96</sup> The unsocial hours rate for Band 2 OSGs was temporarily increased from 20% to 25% in our 2025 Report.

## Fair and Sustainable ranges – Outer London

Outer London covers – Belmarsh, Downview, Feltham, High Down, Isis and the controllers' offices at Bronzefield and Thameside.

### *Bands 7 to 12 – Outer London*

Grade	From 1 April 2025		From April 2026	
	37 hour base pay	37 hour inc 20% RHA	37 hour base pay	37 hour inc 20% RHA
Prison Group Director (Band 12) spot rate	124,959	-	129,334	-
Governor (Band 11) max	100,603	120,724	104,126	124,951
Governor (Band 11) min	91,458	109,750	94,660	113,592
Governor (Band 10) max	89,761	107,713	92,904	111,485
Governor (Band 10) min	81,601	97,921	84,458	101,350
Deputy Governor (Band 9) max	81,444	97,733	84,296	101,155
Deputy Governor (Band 9) min	74,041	88,849	76,634	91,961
Deputy Governor / Head of Function (Band 8) max	64,318	77,182	66,571	79,885
Deputy Governor / Head of Function (Band 8) min	58,471	70,165	60,518	72,622
Head of Function (Band 7) spot rate	55,631	66,757	57,580	69,096

*Custodial Manager (Band 5) – Outer London*

<b>Pay scale</b>	<b>Pay point</b>	<b>From 1 April 2025</b>	<b>From 1 April 2026</b>
37 hour base pay	3	41,202	42,646
	2	40,248	41,658
	1	39,315	40,693
37 hour inc 20% unsocial	3	49,442	51,175
	2	48,298	49,990
	1	47,178	48,832
39 hour inc 2xACHP & 20% unsocial	3	52,115	53,941
	2	50,909	52,692
	1	49,728	51,471

*Supervising / Specialist Officers (Band 4) – Outer London*

<b>Pay scale</b>	<b>Pay point</b>	<b>From 1 April 2025</b>	<b>From 1 April 2026</b>
37 hour base pay	Spot rate	36,590	37,872
37 hour inc 20% unsocial	Spot rate	43,908	45,446
39 hour inc 2xACHP & 20% unsocial	Spot rate	46,281	47,903

*Prison Officer (Band 3) – Outer London*

<b>Pay scale</b>	<b>Pay point</b>	<b>From 1 April 2025</b>	<b>From 1 April 2026</b>
37 hour base pay	3	32,926	34,080
	2	32,365	33,499
	1	31,271	32,367
37 hour inc 20% unsocial	3	39,511	40,896
	2	38,838	40,199
	1	37,525	38,840
38 hour inc 1xACH & 20% unsocial	3	40,757	42,186
	2	40,063	41,466
	1	38,708	40,065
39 hour inc 2xACH & 20% unsocial	3	42,003	43,475
	2	41,287	42,734
	1	39,892	41,290
39 hour inc 2xACHP & 20% unsocial	3	41,647	43,107
	2	40,937	42,372
	1	39,554	40,940
40 hour inc 3xACH & 20% unsocial	3	43,249	44,765
	2	42,512	44,001
	1	41,075	42,514
41 hour inc 4xACH & 20% unsocial	3	44,495	46,054
	2	43,736	45,269
	1	42,258	43,739

*Operational Support Grade (Band 2) – Outer London<sup>97</sup>*

<b>Pay scale</b>	<b>Pay point</b>	<b>From 1 April 2025</b>	<b>From 1 April 2026 (inc NLW)</b>	<b>From 1 April 2026 (recs)</b>
37 hour base pay	Spot rate	27,842	27,864	28,841
37 hour inc 25% unsocial	Spot rate	34,803	34,830	36,051
39 hour inc 2xACHP & 25% unsocial	Spot rate	36,684	36,713	38,000

<sup>97</sup> The unsocial hours rate for Band 2 OSGs was temporarily increased from 20% to 25% in our 2025 Report.

## Fair and Sustainable ranges – Inner London

Inner London covers – Brixton, Pentonville, Wandsworth, Westminster headquarters and Wormwood Scrubs

### *Bands 7 to 12 – Inner London*

Grade	From 1 April 2025		From 1 April 2026	
	37 hour base pay	37 hour inc 20% RHA	37 hour base pay	37 hour inc 20% RHA
Prison Group Director (Band 12) spot rate	126,685	-	131,120	-
Governor (Band 11) max	102,329	122,795	105,912	127,094
Governor (Band 11) min	93,027	111,632	96,284	115,541
Governor (Band 10) max	91,487	109,784	94,690	113,628
Governor (Band 10) min	83,170	99,804	86,082	103,298
Deputy Governor (Band 9) max	83,170	99,804	86,082	103,298
Deputy Governor (Band 9) min	75,610	90,732	78,257	93,908
Deputy Governor / Head of Function (Band 8) max	66,044	79,253	68,357	82,028
Deputy Governor / Head of Function (Band 8) min	60,040	72,048	62,142	74,570
Head of Function (Band 7) spot rate	57,357	68,828	59,366	71,239

*Custodial Manager (Band 5) – Inner London*

<b>Pay scale</b>	<b>Pay point</b>	<b>From 1 April 2025</b>	<b>From 1 April 2026</b>
37 hour base pay	3	42,928	44,432
	2	41,934	43,403
	1	40,962	42,397
37 hour inc 20% unsocial	3	51,514	53,318
	2	50,321	52,084
	1	49,154	50,876
39 hour inc 2xACHP & 20% unsocial	3	54,298	56,200
	2	53,041	54,899
	1	51,811	53,626

*Supervising / Specialist Officers (Band 4) – Inner London*

<b>Pay scale</b>	<b>Pay point</b>	<b>From 1 April 2025</b>	<b>From 1 April 2026</b>
37 hour base pay	Spot rate	38,316	39,658
37 hour inc 20% unsocial	Spot rate	45,979	47,590
39 hour inc 2xACHP & 20% unsocial	Spot rate	48,465	50,162

*Prison Officer (Band 3) – Inner London*

<b>Pay scale</b>	<b>Pay point</b>	<b>From 1 April 2025</b>	<b>From 1 April 2026</b>
37 hour base pay	3	34,652	35,866
	2	34,062	35,254
	1	32,911	34,063
37 hour inc 20% unsocial	3	41,582	43,039
	2	40,874	42,305
	1	39,493	40,876
38 hour inc 1xACH & 20% unsocial	3	42,894	44,396
	2	42,163	43,639
	1	40,738	42,164
39 hour inc 2xACH & 20% unsocial	3	44,205	45,753
	2	43,452	44,973
	1	41,984	43,453
39 hour inc 2xACHP & 20% unsocial	3	43,830	45,366
	2	43,084	44,592
	1	41,628	43,085
40 hour inc 3xACH & 20% unsocial	3	45,516	47,110
	2	44,741	46,307
	1	43,229	44,742
41 hour inc 4xACH & 20% unsocial	3	46,827	48,468
	2	46,030	47,641
	1	44,474	46,031

*Operational Support Grade (Band 2) – Inner London<sup>98</sup>*

<b>Pay scale</b>	<b>Pay point</b>	<b>From 1 April 2025</b>	<b>From 1 April 2026 (inc NLW)</b>	<b>From 1 April 2026 (recs)</b>
37 hour base pay	Spot rate	29,568	29,590	30,627
37 hour inc 25% unsocial	Spot rate	36,960	36,988	38,284
39 hour inc 2xACHP & 25% unsocial	Spot rate	38,958	38,987	40,354

<sup>98</sup> The unsocial hours rate for Band 2 OSGs was temporarily increased from 20% to 25% in our 2025 Report.

## **Notes pages for Fair and Sustainable pay scales, spot rates and ranges**

### *Bands 2 to 12*

- E1. The 37 hour base pay salaries are the basis from which other rates are calculated.
- E2. Base pay rates are calculated by rounding up to the nearest £.

### *Bands 2 to 5*

- E3. These staff may also qualify for an additional Unsocial Working Hours (UWH) allowance of 20% or 25% which is pensionable.
- E4. The UWH allowance, Additional Committed Hours (ACH) and Pensionable Additional Committed Hours (ACHP) are calculated by rounding to the nearest £.
- E5. ACH and ACHP also attract unsocial hours payments of 20% or 25%, which are pensionable.
- E6. Inner and Outer London scales are calculated by setting the scale maximum at a value equal to the equivalent National pay band maximum plus the Inner London differential - £5,218 from 1 April 2026 (previously £5,041 from 1 April 2025) - or plus the Outer London differential - £3,432 from 1 April 2026 (previously £3,315 from 1 April 2025). Other points are then calculated so that they are the same proportion of the maximum as the equivalent point on the equivalent National scale.
- E7. The base pay rate for National Band 2 will increase on 1 April 2026 to ensure compliance with the National Living Wage. Therefore, the pay values shown as current will not match the equivalent pay values from the 2025 Report. This also impacts on the calculation for Inner and Outer London Band 2 pay rates as per paragraph E6 above.

### *Bands 7 to 12*

- E8. The Band 8 to 11 ranges do not have fixed incremental pay points. Band 7 and 12 are spot rates.
- E9. Pay with Required Hours Addition/Allowance is presented as rounded to the nearest £, is pensionable and calculated as 20% of base pay.
- E10. Inner and Outer London ranges are calculated by setting the range maximum at a value equal to the equivalent National pay band maximum plus the Inner London differential - £5,218 from 1 April 2026 (previously £5,041 from 1 April 2025) - or plus the Outer London differential - £3,432 from 1 April 2026 (previously £3,315 from 1 April 2025). Minima are then calculated so that they are the same proportion of the maximum as is the minimum of the equivalent National range.

## Current pay for non-Fair and Sustainable grades (£ a year)<sup>99</sup>

### Non-Fair and Sustainable operational manager grades

Grade	From 1 April 2026
Senior Manager A	94,896
Senior Manager B	92,110
Senior Manager D (post-2009 scale)	70,003
Required Hours Addition (pensionable) <sup>100</sup>	6,206

### Non- Fair and Sustainable support and officer grades<sup>101,102</sup>

Grade	From 1 April 2026
Senior Officer	35,429
Prison Officer	32,915
Operational Support Grade	25,876
Prison Auxiliary	25,876
G4S Security Officer <sup>103</sup>	25,876

### Non-Fair and Sustainable TUPE transfer grades

There are several grades in our remit that have TUPE transferred on different pay and grading arrangements following HMP The Wolds in 2013 and HMP Birmingham in 2019. We treat these staff as part of the closed grades and they are entitled to the closed grade pay award. Those staff that opt in to Fair and Sustainable will be covered under the Fair and Sustainable rates of pay. In August 2024, HMP Lowdham Grange staff TUPE transferred to HMPPS on existing pay and grading arrangements. Therefore, these staff are now part of our remit and will be treated as closed grades, entitled to the closed grade equivalent pay award until such time as they opt in to Fair and Sustainable.

<sup>99</sup> Senior Manager C, Senior Manager D (pre-2009 scale), Managers E and F, Principal Officer, Prison Officer 2, G4S Prison Custody Officer and Night Patrol have been removed as there are no longer any remit group staff on these pay rates.

<sup>100</sup> This applies to the following grade: Senior Manager D (post-2009).

<sup>101</sup> The pay shown in this table is based on a 39 hour week.

<sup>102</sup> The base pay for the following grades has been uplifted to remain compliant with the 1 April 2026 NLW: OSG; Prison Auxiliary; and G4S Security Officer.

<sup>103</sup> This grade was formerly part of HMP Wolds run by G4S.

## **Appendix F: Legacy Locality Pay Allowance rates**

We recommend no change to legacy Locality Pay Allowances rates for the closed, non-Fair and Sustainable grades so the rates remain as below. These rates are pensionable and are only payable to those staff in post at 31 March 2012.

<b>Rating structure</b>	<b>£ a year</b>	<b>Establishment/sites covered</b>
Rate 1	4,250	Brixton, Pentonville, Wandsworth and Wormwood Scrubs
Rate 2	4,000	Feltham, Huntercombe, The Mount and Westminster headquarters
Rate 3	3,100	Belmarsh, Bronzefield, <sup>104</sup> Coldingley, Downview, High Down, Isis and Send
Rate 4	2,600	Aylesbury, Bedford, Bullingdon, Chelmsford, Grendon/Springhill and Woodhill
Rate 5	1,100	Lewes and Winchester
Rate 6	250	Birmingham, <sup>105</sup> Bristol, Littlehey, Long Lartin and Onley

<sup>104</sup> Payable to eligible staff in the controllers' office at this establishment.

<sup>105</sup> There may be a number of former HMPPS staff that were TUPE transferred to G4S at this establishment who have now TUPE transferred back to HMPPS, that may also be in receipt of this LPA rate.

## **Appendix G: Allowances and payments**

We recommend two changes to allowances: to both rates of the Care and Maintenance of Dogs allowance and Payment Plus. Below are the continuing rates from 1 April 2026.

<b>Allowances and payments</b>	<b>Closed grades from 1 April 2026</b>	<b>Fair and Sustainable grades from 1 April 2026</b>
Care and Maintenance of Dogs Rate 1 – single dog	£2,945 a year	£2,945 a year
Care and Maintenance of Dogs Rate 2 – multiple dogs <sup>106</sup>	£3,682 a year	£3,682 a year
Specialist allowance (pensionable): <sup>107</sup> Patrol and Search Dog Handlers and Physical Education Instructors	£1,200 a year	Not applicable
Operational Response and Resilience Unit on-call allowance	£8,000 a year	£8,000 a year
Operation Tornado payment (officers)	£40.00 an hour	£40.00 an hour
Operation Tornado payment (OSGs)	£30.00 an hour	£30.00 an hour
Payment Plus	£23.00 an hour	£23.00 an hour
Dirty protest allowance: four hours or less per day	£15.00 a day	£15.00 a day
Dirty protest allowance: over four hours per day	£30.00 a day	£30.00 a day
On-call (radio pager): weekdays	£5.67 per period of more than 12 hours	Not applicable
On-call (radio pager): weekends and privilege holidays	£16.13 per 24 hour period or proportionately for periods less than 24 hours	Not applicable
On-call (radio pager): public and bank holidays	£20.41 per 24 hour period or proportionately for periods less than 24 hours	Not applicable

<sup>106</sup> The Care and Maintenance of Dogs allowance multiple dog rate is calculated as an additional 25% of the single dog rate.

<sup>107</sup> There are no longer any staff claiming this allowance as: Caterers, Librarians, Trade Instructors and Works Officers. These have now therefore been removed from the closed grade specialist allowance list.

<b>Allowances and payments</b>	<b>Closed grades from 1 April 2026</b>	<b>Fair and Sustainable grades from 1 April 2026</b>
On-call (home): weekdays	£7.09 per period of more than 12 hours	Not applicable
On-call (home): weekends and privilege holidays	£20.17 per 24 hour period or proportionately for periods less than 24 hours	Not applicable
On-call (home): public and bank holidays	£25.47 per 24 hour period or proportionately for periods less than 24 hours	Not applicable
On-call (home): <sup>108</sup> weekdays and privilege holidays	Not applicable	£9.00 per period of 12 hours or more
On-call (home): weekends and public holidays	Not applicable	£25.00 per period of 24 hours or more or proportionately for periods less than 24 hours
On-call (home): (hourly rate)	Not applicable	(£1.04 per hour whilst on call outside of normal office hours)
Stand by (office): weekdays	£13.43 per period of more than 12 hours	Not applicable
Stand by (office): weekends and privilege holidays	£38.46 per 24 hour period or proportionately for period of less than 24 hours	Not applicable
Stand by (office): public and bank holidays	£48.26 per 24 hour period or proportionately for period of less than 24 hours	Not applicable

<sup>108</sup> For staff on Fair and Sustainable grades the on-call payments are payable as two rates: (a) work days and (b) rest days or weekends and bank or public holidays.

## **Appendix H: Rolling review programme for Prison Service staff allowances and payments**

The table below outlines our rolling review programme and which allowances and payments will be considered in detail in which report and year.

<b>PSPRB Report</b>	<b>Allowances or payments to be considered</b>
Twenty-Sixth (2027)	Payment Plus Unsocial hours payments (Fair and Sustainable) Care and Maintenance of Dogs
Twenty-Seventh (2028)	OSG overtime
Twenty-Ninth (2029)	Operation Tornado payments Dirty protest payments
Thirtieth (2030)	Operational Response and Resilience Unit on-call allowance
Thirty-First (2031)	On-call allowances (Fair and Sustainable)

## **Appendix I: Summary of recommendations from the 2025 England and Wales report**

11. Band 3 to 5 and 7 to 12 pay points and spot rates increased by a consolidated 4% from 1 April 2025.
12. Band 2 spot rate increased by 4% from 1 April 2025 and in addition to the National Living Wage increase that Band 2 staff received from 1 April 2025.
13. Closed grade staff who would not benefit from opting in to Fair and Sustainable received a non-consolidated, non-pensionable payment of 4% of base pay.
14. All closed grade pay rates are National Living Wage compliant.
15. Those closed grade staff who chose to opt in to Fair and Sustainable are moved to the maximum of their respective Fair and Sustainable pay scale, range or spot rate.
16. All staff (except those on formal poor performance procedures) on Bands 3 and 5 who are in post on 31 March 2025 progressed one pay point, effective from 1 April 2025.
17. All staff (except those on formal poor performance procedures) on Bands 8 to 11 who are in post on 31 March 2025 progressed by 3 $\frac{1}{3}$ % capped at the 1 April 2025 band maximum.
18. Band 10 National maximum should be increased to ensure there is 10% between the Band 9 and 10 maxima when the Inner and Outer London differentials are added.
19. From 1 April 2025 the fixed cash pay differentials for Inner and Outer London zones increased by 4% and are applied consistently across all bands, positioning maxima at £5,041 and £3,315 respectively above the 37 hour National maxima. Intermediate points and minima are adjusted so progression steps are the same percentage as on the National bands.
110. The Operational Response and Resilience Unit on-call allowance increased from £6,670 to £8,000 a year.
111. The Unsocial Working Hours payment for Band 2 Operational Support Grades (OSGs) be temporarily increased from 20% to 25% for all contracted hours. This is for a two year period until the next review of unsocial hours in the 2027, subject to evidence expected on scheduled unsocial hours worked by Band 2 OSGs.
112. Introduction of a temporary, two year, non-consolidated and non-pensionable payment of £1,500 a year for qualified Physical Education Instructors (PEIs) working in a recognised PEI role.
113. The Care and Maintenance of Dogs allowance be increased by 4% to £2,845 a year for those with a single dog. The multiple dog rate is set 25% above the single dog allowance rate.

## **Appendix J: Summary of PSPRB headline pay award recommendations from 2014 to 2024**

- J1. **2024** – a consolidated 5% to Bands 2 to 5 and 7 to 12, for Band 2 staff this was in addition to the National Living Wage increase. No pay award for closed grades that can financially benefit from opting in to Fair and Sustainable, with a 5% non-consolidated payment for those that do not. Band 8 to 11 pay ranges reduced in length from 20% to 10%. Increases to Operational Tornado payments, dirty protest payments and the Care and Maintenance of Dogs allowance.
- J2. **2023** – a consolidated 7% to Bands 3 to 5 and a consolidated 5% to Bands 7 to 12. Band 2 spot rate to increase by £2,000. No pay award for closed grades that can financially benefit from opting in to Fair and Sustainable, with a £1,500 non-consolidated payment for those that do not. Band 7 made a spot rate. The Inner and Outer London cash differentials applied to Band 12.
- J3. **2022** – a consolidated 4% to Bands 3 to 5 and Bands 7 to 11, including all closed grade staff. The Band 2 spot rate to increase by £1,500 and Band 12 spot rate by 5% (latter reduced by the Government to 3%), from 1 April 2022. From 1 September 2023 a £3,000 total increase to Band 3, eroding the amber market supplement. A reduction in pay points for Band 3 and 5. Increasing the Unsocial Working Hours allowance for Band 2 to 5 and the Required Hours Addition/Allowance for Band 7 to 11 from 17% to 20%.
- J4. **2021** – Government pay freeze for those earning over £24,000 full-time equivalent a year with a £250 consolidated pay increase for those earning under this figure.
- J5. **2020** – a consolidated 2.5% increase for all Fair and Sustainable and closed grades from 1 April 2020. From 1 September 2020 the Fair and Sustainable National Band 3 base pay points increase by £2,564 giving a total consolidated and pensionable award of £3,000 when the 17% unsocial hours payment is included.
- J6. **2019** – a consolidated 2.2% increase for all Fair and Sustainable and closed grades, except Fair and Sustainable Band 3, which was recommended a 3.0% consolidated pay increase.
- J7. **2018** – a consolidated 2.75% increase for all Fair and Sustainable and closed grades, except Fair and Sustainable Band 3 and 4, which were recommended increases of 5.25% and 3.5% respectively. Rejected by the Government and reduced to a 2.0% consolidated and 0.75% non-consolidated award for all Fair and Sustainable and closed grades.
- J8. **2017** – a consolidated flat cash award of £400 to all uniformed grades (both those on Fair and Sustainable and closed grades) and an increase of 1% to the maxima of the Fair and Sustainable National Bands 7 to 11.
- J9. **2016** – an increase of 1% to the maxima of the Fair and Sustainable National bands and non-consolidated awards of £300 for Prison Officers and support staff, £325 for Senior Officers and £350 for Principal Officers.
- J10. **2015** – an increase of 1.8% to the maxima of the Fair and Sustainable National bands but no recommended pay awards for those on closed grades. The Government then provided non-consolidated retention bonus payments (£300 for

Prison Officers and support staff, £325 for Senior Officers and £350 for Principal Officers) shortly after the publication of our 2015 report.

- J11. **2014** – a 1% consolidated pay increase for all officers and support staff on all pay structures and changes to some Fair and Sustainable National Band 7 to 11 pay structures to provide 2% to staff who opted in.

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