

A Thematic Review of Prisoner Progression in Scottish Prisons

Short Summary

Thank you to the 630 people in custody and 524 prison staff who gave their views and informed this report. The [report](#) published on 14 June 2024 and a copy can be found in all prison libraries.

Introduction: His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland (HMIPS) looked at how arrangements were working for convicted prisoners to progress through their sentence. We worked on this review with The Risk Management Authority, Community Justice Scotland and The Care Inspectorate.

What is the progression system? Convicted prisoners are supported by the Scottish Prison Service (SPS), Prison Based Social Work (PBSW) and others towards release. This is called "The Progression System." It involves making a plan for each person looking at what they need to work on, so they have the best chance of re-entering their community successfully and not committing further crimes. Sometimes this involves completing a programme to work on specific types of offending. This will help to make Scotland a safer place.

When a convicted prisoner qualifies, they can progress to a prison where a more open regime allows them time in the community, so that they can be safely tested in the outside world. The testing happens through things like outside work placements, special escorted leave, and home leave.

What did we look at: We looked at the three main parts that contribute to making the progression system work.

Integrated Case Management (ICM): This is the way individual cases are managed by the SPS and PBSW working together. The system is different for short and long-term sentences and a plan is produced.

Risk Assessment: This looks at how likely it is that people may be harmed and whether the person is likely to offend again. The risk assessment informs the plan.

The Risk Management Team (RMT): This is a multi-agency group that makes the decision about when someone can be transferred to a more open regime or how community access will work. They consider three key areas; time served in a closed prison, level of risk and the person's behaviour in prison. An important task for this group is to confirm that their decisions are the safest for the public.

Why we did this review: Prisoners, staff and Independent Prison Monitors told us that the progression system was not working. Prisoners told us they were not getting the opportunity to move to more open regimes. In our prison inspections we also found that progression was not working well and said this in our reports. We were concerned there were unused spaces in HMP Castle Huntly, the only open prison for adult men in Scotland.

What we were told that was good:

- Some long-term prisoners were positive about their Personal Officer's (PO) attendance at their annual case conference.
- PBSW staff felt that working relationships between different organisations were good. They felt that when they worked well with POs who knew the prisoners, this resulted in good information sharing.
- RMT meetings had improvement recently.
- PBSW, Psychology and ICM Team Officers felt they worked well together.
- The time taken to process life-sentenced prisoner applications for outside work placement has shortened recently.
- In some cases, there was good practice in risk assessment.
- POs in Castle Huntly were more involved in casework.



What we were told that needs improved:

- The system is not working for most people.
- The way that POs support people in prison differs from prison to prison.
- People were frustrated about the time each part of the process took.
- There was a lack of clear and simple information about who can apply to National Top End, Open Prison or Community Integration Units and when this can happen. Prisoners and even staff were confused and sometimes wrong in their understanding of what should happen.
- People were frustrated waiting so long to do a programme. They were told they needed to do this, but it was not being made available and the waiting list changes as people are prioritised. This can mean moving to another prison because programmes are not available everywhere.
- Prisoners and prison officers who do not work directly in the Integrated Management System mostly do not know about key elements like the Core Screen and Community Integration Plan.



Other things we found:

- Young men under 21 progress within HMP YOI Polmont where they can do community work placements and have special leave and home leave. However, they do not have access to independent living areas in the same way that adult men have access to HMP Castle Huntly, and women now have access to the new Community Custody Units. We have suggested that one of the Community Integration Units on the site of HMP Greenock is used for this.
- The Prisoner Supervision System that allocates prison security category levels is outdated, and we have suggested it is reviewed alongside the Progression System.

What we are recommending:

The whole progression system needs reviewed and updated. We made a large number of recommendations about these main themes:

- The SPS should decide its case management model and provide staff with appropriate training and time to do it. They should check that it is working in every prison for every prisoner group. Any review should be informed by people with lived experience.
- Clear information about the system should be made available to prisoners and their families. Prisoners should have a copy of their own personal plan detailing how and when they can progress. They should know how the Community Integration Plan works. Application forms for progression should be clearer.
- SPS and partners should review arrangements for programmes to ensure they do not delay people progressing. They should also explore other ways to show how risk has been reduced and begin work earlier in sentences to identify and address risks/needs.
- The people who chair RMTs should be trained to do this. RMTs should always include the prisoner or a record why they did not attend. The prisoner should be asked to contribute to any Community Access Risk Assessment or Community Risk Management Plan.
- POs or an officer who knows and can support the prisoner should be part of the RMT. The SPS should look at the way ICM Teams work together with the whole team.
- Risk Assessments and Risk Management Plans should be fully looked at as part of RMT. Police Scotland should be invited where appropriate.
- Local Authorities should work with the SPS to ensure PBSW have enough staff. They should be included in RMT Training. PBSW should complete formal risk assessments in line with the guidance, which means within six months of a long-term sentence starting.
- SPS should ensure that the buildings that offer a more open regime are suitable for everyone, including people with mobility issues or other care needs. The accommodation and regimes should encourage prisoners to go there.
- The Community Integration Units should be reviewed quickly to ensure they are being used as part of the more open regime.

What will happen next?

HMIPS have asked the SPS and PBSW for action plans to set out what they will do to respond to the recommendations for improvement that we have made.

We have asked for these plans to be given to us within three months of the report being published.