

PREPARING FOR SESSION TWO

The following information will give you an overview of prisons so that you can get the most out of session two. Take some time to absorb the contents of this preparation sheet.

A snapshot of prison

These statistics are collated by the Prison Reform Trust and are included to give you a snapshot of the reality of prison and the current conditions.

- Following significant cuts since 2010 there are fewer staff looking after more people in prison. The number of frontline operational staff employed in the public prison estate has fallen by nearly a quarter (23%) in the last seven years—5,620 fewer staff looking after more than 800 additional people.
- On 24th November 2017, the prison population in England and Wales was 85,556. The prison population has risen by 82% in the last 30 years.
- Only one in seven people said they spent 10 hours or more out of their cell each day.
- The daily prison food budget within public sector prisons for 2015–16 was £2.02 per person.
- In 2016–17, two-thirds of prisons in England and Wales were overcrowded (79 of the 119 prisons). Nearly 21,000 people were held in overcrowded accommodation—almost a quarter of the prison population. The majority were doubling up in cells designed for one.
- The number of children (under-18s) in custody has fallen by 71% in the last decade. They are also committing fewer crimes—with proven offences down by 74% from their peak in 2006. At the end of September 2017 there were 880 children in custody in England and Wales. 43 children were aged 14 or younger.
- One in 10 boys held in YOIs reported having children themselves.
- 14,963 young adults (aged 18–24) are currently in prison in England and Wales—they account for 17% of the total prison population.
- The number of women in prison has more than doubled since 1993. There are now around 2,400 more women in prison today than there were in 1993. On 24 November 2017 there were 4,048 women in prison in England and Wales. There were 8,583 receptions of women into prison in the year to June 2017, either on remand or to serve a sentence.
- Foreign nationals (non-UK passport holders) currently make up 12% of the prison population in England and Wales.
- With prison sentences getting longer, people are growing old behind bars. People aged 60 and over are the fastest growing age group in the prison estate. There are now more than triple the number there were 15 years ago. People over 50 and over currently make up 16% of the prison population.
- Approximately 200,000 children had a parent in prison at some point in 2009. In the same year more than double the number of children were affected by the imprisonment of a parent than by divorce in the family.

- It is estimated that more than 17,240 children were separated from their mother in 2010 by imprisonment.
- 50% of the total prison population are Christian, 15% are Muslim, 2% Buddhist and 30% report having no religion. 3% are from other religions.
- Prison has a poor record for reducing reoffending—49% of adults are reconvicted within one year of being released. For those serving sentences of less than 12 months this increases to 58%. Over two-thirds (68%) of under 18 year olds are reconvicted within a year of release.
- There is greater disproportionality in the number of black people in prisons in the UK than in the United States of America.³

What is a prison there to do?

There is often confusion in society about the reasons why prisons exist. However, prisons have a very clear mandate and a long history. What follows outlines what the purpose of prison is as laid down in UK law and expressed on the Her Majesty's Prison Service website.

The purpose of a prison sentence

The Criminal Justice Act of 2003, Section 142 makes the purposes of sentencing very clear.

Purposes of sentencing

- (1) Any court dealing with an offender in respect of their offence must have regard to the following purposes of sentencing—
- (a) the punishment of offenders,
 - (b) the reduction of crime (including its reduction by deterrence),
 - (c) the reform and rehabilitation of offenders,
 - (d) the protection of the public, and
 - (e) the making of reparation by offenders to persons affected by their offences.

It is very clear that prison sentences have multiple aims, from a form of punishment right through to rehabilitating the offender and repairing relationships through restorative justice practices and other interventions. Prisons have their work cut out for them as each one of those aims is a complex task in its own right.

Her Majesty's Prison Service website says that "it serves the public by keeping in custody those committed by the courts. Our duty is to look after them with humanity and help them lead law-abiding and useful lives in custody and after release." This statement is printed on the back of every chaplain's ID card. See more at <http://www.justice.gov.uk/about/hmps/>

³ These statistics are taken from *The Bromley Briefings 2015, 2017: The Prison Reform Trust*. Apart from the last statistic which is taken from EHRC (2011) *How fair is Britain? Equality, Human Rights and Good Relations in 2010. The First Triennial Review*, p.172. For more information read *The Bromley Briefings* which is a report published every year and available online as a free download. www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk

The role of the prison chaplaincy team

In order for a prison to be a functioning legal entity, according to the 1952 Prison Act, it needs a governor, a chaplain and a medical officer. The freedom to worship in prison is a statutory requirement laid down in law and the following rights are afforded to prisoners:

- *A chaplain must see each new reception as soon as possible after they are received into prison.*
- *Prisoners must have the opportunity for corporate worship or meditation for one hour per week.*
- *Prisoners located in Segregation Units or Healthcare Units must have the opportunity for corporate worship or meditation for one hour per week and be visited everyday.*
- *Recognised religious feasts, fasts and festivals should be observed.*

There are exceptions to these rules. However, opportunities to worship or meditate should be the norm for the majority of prisoners for most of the time.

Multicultural Britain reflected in our prisons

Since the 1952 Prison Act was written into law, Britain has changed and become a truly multicultural society. The many faiths represented in our society are reflected in our prison population too and it has therefore been important to have representatives from all faiths as part of the chaplaincy team. Prison chaplaincy teams work together as respected colleagues with their faith in common. When asking prison chaplains to explain how the team works together, some of the answers given were:

“We accept we are not the same and respect each other and do not try to convert each other.”

“We work together and show solidarity and protect the 'sacred spaces'.”

“We practice in public our religious beliefs and support of each other.”

“We enable others to practice their religious beliefs.”

Almost everyone in prison will leave at some point

It may surprise you to know that the majority of the prison population changes every year with nearly 80,000 people returning to a community in England and Wales. It is important to be aware of this, understanding that leaving prison is a very common, everyday occurrence.

Sadly, for many people who leave prison, the reality is very difficult and they find themselves staring up at a cliff face; the path to resettlement is one with a steep incline. Climbing expeditions are usually aided by good guides who know the route and conditions, good holds, ropes and equipment as well as fellow climbers. In the same way, those leaving prison can benefit greatly from mentors, key workers, the foot-holds of accommodation, training, employment and positive supportive friendships as well as a broader community of friends. The climb is still challenging, but the chances of success are greatly increased with a supportive group alongside.

Preparing for release

An important aspect of a chaplaincy team's role is to prepare a prisoner for release and resettlement. Leaving prison can be a very big ordeal and all kinds of things can come to the surface as the day of release approaches. Of particular note, many prison chaplains speak of the reservations people leaving prison with faith have about the reception they will receive on the outside.

Chaplains have a duty to help prisoners link up with faith communities who will be able to continue to support their faith in the context of an accepting community. This is why the work of The Welcome Directory is so important; providing prison chaplains with an extensive searchable directory of welcoming and supportive faith communities is a very valuable addition to the work they do.

Connecting with local faith communities

Another important aspect of developing a prisoner's faith whilst in custody is a duty to ensure that prisoners have the opportunity to engage with members of their faith group from the community.

The official guidelines say that "members of outside faith communities should be encouraged and enabled to attend faith and other activities, by agreement with the appropriate chaplain. This is intended to contribute to pro-social modelling and behaviour and assist with normalisation and re-integration of prisoners." It goes on to say that: "Faith communities may be involved in the induction process, pre-release planning and community re-integration where appropriate."⁴

Session two is an attempt to develop that connection. It is wonderful that you have chosen to visit the prison with a few others from your faith community.

Go to the session with an open heart and mind and know that what you are doing is valuable in and of itself. You will meet people from all kinds of different backgrounds with different experiences of faith. Other people's experience of the session will be richer because of what you bring!

Please ensure that you remember to bring your I.D. with you and conform with any other instructions you have been given by the prison chaplaincy team at the prison that is hosting you.

In light of all you have read in this preparation sheet, watch the second film called Connections. The film is available at www.welcomedirectory.org.uk/sessions

⁴ PSI 55/2011, p12