



Ministry  
of Justice

**Victoria Atkins MP**  
Minister of State for Justice and  
Minister for Afghan resettlement

Chair, Independent Monitoring Board  
HMP/YOI Stoke Heath  
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Dear Chair,

**HMP/YOI STOKE HEATH: INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT  
FOR 1 MAY 2020 – 30 APRIL 2021**

Thank you for your Board's report for the year ending 30 April 2021. I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your hard work in capturing these helpful observations, especially as you continue to experience challenges with Board membership and Covid-19 impacted on your ability to gather information during the reporting year. I was saddened to hear there were three deaths in custody; two of which were from Covid-19 and all three occurring in outside hospital. My officials take recommendations from the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman very seriously.

I understand the Board's concern about the budget challenges HMP/YOI Stoke Heath face to delivery of purposeful activity to support prisoners in their rehabilitation. The Board will be aware in numerous correspondence from the previous Secretary of State and my predecessor that changes to the education funding formula back in April 2019 were vital in ensuring there was a sustainable financial platform for the whole prison estate to allow more prisoners to develop skills. The new formula implemented as part of the Prison Education Framework (PEF) introduced a fairer and transparent distribution to all prisons with allocation based on the type of prison and number of prisoners. Due to the scale of the changes required to the funding formula there were a number of prisons, such as HMP/YOI Stoke Heath, with significant revisions compared with what they received under the previous Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) funding. Transition funding has therefore been used over a two-year period ending in April 2021 to ease the move to the PEF education budget. In addition, to empower prisons in commissioning the right education services for their local population needs, Governors are able to move funding between PEF and Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS), as well as allowing funding to be moved between prisons within their regional education Lot where it can be demonstrated that this can be used effectively and would benefit prisoners learning needs.

It also worth clarifying that the education budget HMP/YOI Stoke Heath has received since the introduction of the PEF and DPS has remained static and is underspent, due to low prisoner attendance in financial year one and regime restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic in year two. However, it is acknowledged that the number of vocational courses being delivered at HMP/YOI Stoke Heath has reduced by the equivalent of 102 full-time places, 71 full-time and 62 part-time (31 full-time equivalent) over the course of financial years 2019/20, 2020-21 and 2021-22. Although the Barista has re-opened now and the Barista skills qualification is being provided, there is currently no delivery of vocational

qualifications in engineering, tailoring, horticulture, gardens, waste management and the gym. Covid-19 does continue to present a unique set of challenges in maintaining services in custody, however, HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) has been prioritising work on how to effectively combine keeping prisoners and staff safe whilst delivering full, decent, and purposeful regimes to ensure time in prison is well spent. More prisons have been able to safely reduce control measures meaning that their regimes can begin to improve. I can assure the Board that HMPPS is committed to recover from the challenges of Covid-19 and will ensure that the regimes delivered going forward achieve a balance between safety and sufficient quality and hours of regime with a focus on work and education. HMP/YOI Stoke Heath recognise that there is a clear need to address gaps in vocational training and expand their regime. Although the prison is currently operating at Stage 2 of the National Framework for Prison Regimes and Services, movement to Stage 1 will assist in developing this area with gradual improvements already being made through the increase in Key Work and activity places now becoming available.

It was reassuring to receive your comments that the prison is safe with low incidents of violence and that the installation of the body scanner has reduced the use of illicit substances. I was pleased to read that prison and healthcare staff have been recognised for their hard work through very challenging times whilst continuing to maintain positive relationships with prisoners. I too am grateful for everyone's efforts during the serious Covid-19 outbreak at the prison and throughout the pandemic. I was encouraged to note that equality and diversity work continued during the year with meetings well attended and held regularly as well as religious and cultural events being celebrated in many ways to raise awareness. I was also pleased to read about the installation of in-cell telephony as this provides prisoners with improved opportunities to maintain ties with supportive family and friends and was encouraged that the resettlement team and Forward Trust found accommodation for 97% of all prisoners released during the reporting year.

I note you have raised some local issues of concern in your report which the Governor will continue to keep you aware of as work continues. HMPPS comments in response to other issues raised in your report are set out in the attached annex.

The Justice Secretary and I appreciate the valuable role played by members of Independent Monitoring Boards throughout the estate and we are very grateful for your continued hard work on behalf of HMP/YOI Stoke Heath.

Yours ever,



**VICTORIA ATKINS MP**

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**HMPPS comments on matters raised in the report**

**English and Maths Provision**

Further to last year's response which set out that a core common curriculum of English and maths must be delivered which is tailored to the needs of the learners, but with a focus on progression to at least level 2. In addition to this, it is worth clarifying that when commissioning the curriculum for their prison, Governors do this in conjunction with the prisons within their regional education Lot to ensure there is a coherent approach to the curriculum and that this reflects the offender's journey through the prison estate. The Regional Head of Learning and Skills will be reviewing the curricula for the region and will work to ensure courses in the future are being delivered at the appropriate time.

**Offender Management in Custody Model**

Since the introduction of Offender Management in Custody (OMiC) model, resource has been allocated to training and resettlement prisons to start Offender Assessment System (OASys) for longer term prisoners rather than this taking place within local prisons. The model set out that reception prisons would move prisoners to the training estate within ten working days and, as a start of custody OASys should be completed within ten weeks, the receiving prison would complete this. Although the reconfiguration of the prison estate is still ongoing, training and resettlement prisons should now receive prisoners without a completed OASys when they are allocated directly from reception prisons post sentencing.

However, it is acknowledged that there are occasions where prisoners are transferring from one training and resettlement prison to another without a completed OASys as there remains a national backlog of OASys assessments. This was reducing significantly before the Covid-19 pandemic but has since plateaued and a taskforce is in place to support prisons in tackling the backlog to further reduce the numbers of transfers from training and resettlement prisons without OASys. It is encouraging that the Board has recognised in its report that there has been a reduction in these cases since the last reporting period from 30% to 10% evidencing the progress that was made. HMP/YOI Stoke Heath continues to complete OASys assessments to enable prisoners to undertake meaningful progression during their sentence and where there are issues following the transfer of prisoners these are raised with the Prison Group Director or other colleagues within the prison group.