

# **Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Northumberland**

**For reporting year  
1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023**

**Published July 2024**

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## Introductory sections 1 – 3

### 1. Statutory role of the IMB

The Prison Act 1952 requires every prison to be monitored by an independent Board, appointed by the Secretary of State from members of the community in which the prison is situated.

Under the National Monitoring Framework agreed with ministers, the Board is required to:

- satisfy itself as to the humane and just treatment of those held in custody within its prison and the range and adequacy of the programmes preparing them for release
- inform promptly the Secretary of State, or any official to whom authority has been delegated as it judges appropriate, any concern it has
- report annually to the Secretary of State on how well the prison has met the standards and requirements placed on it and what impact these have on those in its custody.

To enable the Board to carry out these duties effectively, its members have right of access to every prisoner and every part of the prison, and also to the prison's records.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) is an international human rights treaty designed to strengthen protection for people deprived of their liberty. The protocol recognises that such people are particularly vulnerable and aims to prevent their ill-treatment through establishing a system of visits or inspections to all places of detention. OPCAT requires that States designate a National Preventive Mechanism to carry out visits to places of detention, to monitor the treatment of and conditions for detainees and to make recommendations for the prevention of ill-treatment. The Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) is part of the United Kingdom's National Preventive Mechanism.

## **2. Description of the establishment**

2.1 HMP Northumberland (HMPN) is situated in rural Northumberland, some 30 miles north of Newcastle. The estate area is extensive, with some buildings being at least 40 years old. The location and distance from other prisons has an impact on prisoner transfers, including transfers to outside services such as hospitals offering specialist medical care.

2.2 The certified normal accommodation (the number of prisoners a prison can hold without being crowded) threshold is currently 1,348<sup>1</sup> category C prisoners (whose escape risk is considered low but who cannot be trusted in an open prison). The population in December 2023 was 1,339. In December 2023, 1,197 prisoners classified themselves as white/British, 39 white, 19 Gypsy or Irish Traveller, 32 Asian/Asian British, 27 black/black British, 15 mixed, and 3 'other'.

2.3 The prison comprises 15 residential blocks. There are five vulnerable prisoner (VP) blocks, a 40-place drug and alcohol recovery unit and 10 main blocks. In addition, there is a 20-place block where some men are able access release on temporary licence (ROTL), some of whom have category D status (which means they can be moved to an open prison). An additional 60-bed unit was under construction during the year. This is due to be completed in April 2024 and has been designated for prisoners convicted of sexual offences (PCoSOs).

2.4 The prison has been operated by Sodexo since December 2013. The healthcare contract has been delivered by Spectrum since April 2020.

2.5 Services for prisoners nearing release are organised by the Probation Service. Volunteers and staff at the North East Prison After Care Society (NEPACS) continue to support prisoners' families.

2.6 A new Director was appointed in the middle of the reporting year and the Board has been impressed with her plans to make improvements to the prison.

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<sup>1</sup> Figures included in this report are local management information. They reflect the prison's position at the time of reporting, but may be subject to change following further validation and therefore may not always tally with Official Statistics later published by the Ministry of Justice.

### **3. Key points**

#### **3.1 Main findings**

##### **Safety**

Although there has been a slight increase in the number of violent incidents this year, in the Board's view, the prison is generally safe.

##### **Fair and humane treatment**

From its observations, the Board is generally satisfied that prisoners receive fair and humane treatment.

##### **Health and wellbeing**

The Board is pleased by improvements in primary healthcare.

##### **Progression and resettlement**

The new Director is implementing a programme to improve progression and resettlement for prisoners.

#### **3.2 Main areas for development**

##### ***TO THE MINISTER***

How does the Minister plan to urgently address the lack of provision for prisoners with mental health issues?

##### ***TO THE DIRECTOR***

The Board has been impressed with the new Director's ambitious plans from improving education and employment opportunities in the prison and we look forward to seeing how those become embedded over the next year.

#### **3.3 Progress since the last report**

	<b>Main areas for development identified in the 2022 annual report</b>	<b>Progress since the last report</b>
<b>To the Minister</b>	The Board remains concerned about the availability of mental health support for prisoners and the delay in identifying appropriate placements for prisoners with serious mental health conditions.	The lack of mental health support remains a concern and there appears to have been very little improvement in this.
<b>To the Director</b>	The Board would like to see the continuing development of education and employment opportunities for prisoners both during their sentence and identifying opportunities for when they leave.	The new Director has made it one of her priorities to ensure that the majority of prisoners engage in purposeful activity. She has made a good start with this and the Board will continue to monitor the improvements next year.

## Evidence sections 4 – 7

### 4. Safety

#### 4.1 Reception and induction

There were 833 new receptions in 2023. Prisoners in reception are dealt with in a friendly, efficient and appropriate manner. When the Board has been able to observe, the whole approach appears to be businesslike and staff seem to take the time to deal with prisoners' queries. Anyone entering the prison for the first time would be reassured by the generally calm and friendly demeanour of all the staff. Healthcare staff are present to carry out health checks on all new arrivals.

The reception area can feel cramped, given the volume of new arrivals, but has been redecorated. The prison operates an X-ray body scanner and staff are professional and diligent in its use.

The early days in custody (EDiC) unit has recently been moved to a larger house block to create more space for the volume of arrivals, but the Board is not convinced that this has led to improvements in the induction programme and we will monitor this over the coming year.

#### 4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

##### *Deaths in custody*

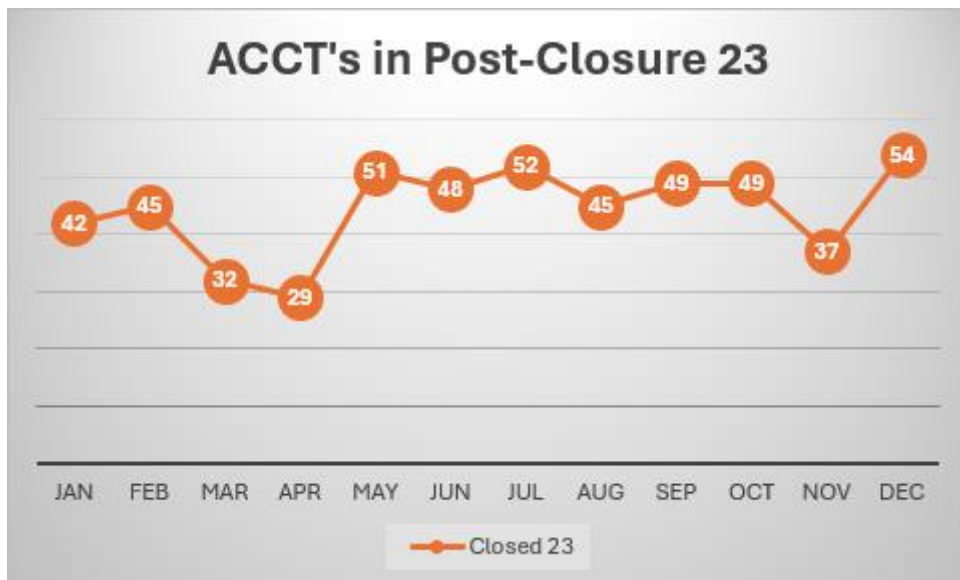
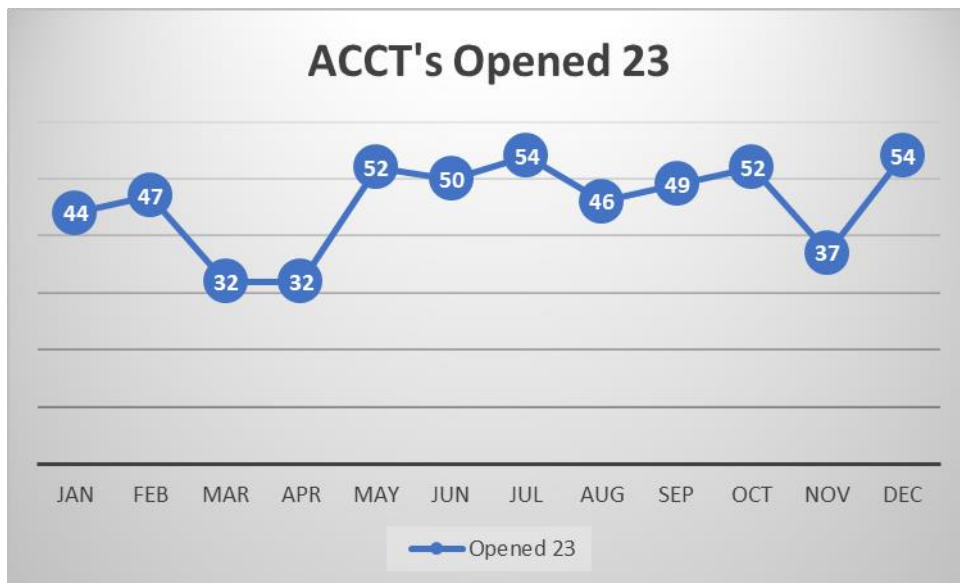
During 2023, there were five deaths in custody.

##### *Self-harm*

Between January and December 2023, there were 463 incidents of self-harm. This is an average of 39 a month and is higher than last year. One of the reasons for self-harm is related to mental health. During 2023, the prison implemented a more consistent approach to rule infringements, which led to lowering incentives. Some prisoners responded to this by self-harming.

*Figures for ACCTs (assessment, care and custody teamwork documents, used to support prisoners at risk of self-harm or suicide):*

Number of ACCTs opened between January and December 2023	549
Reason: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Act of self-harm</li><li>• Staff concern</li><li>• Threat of self-harm</li></ul>	<div>301</div> <div>228</div> <div>19</div>
Number of ACCTs re-opened	134
Number of ACCTs placed in post-closure	533





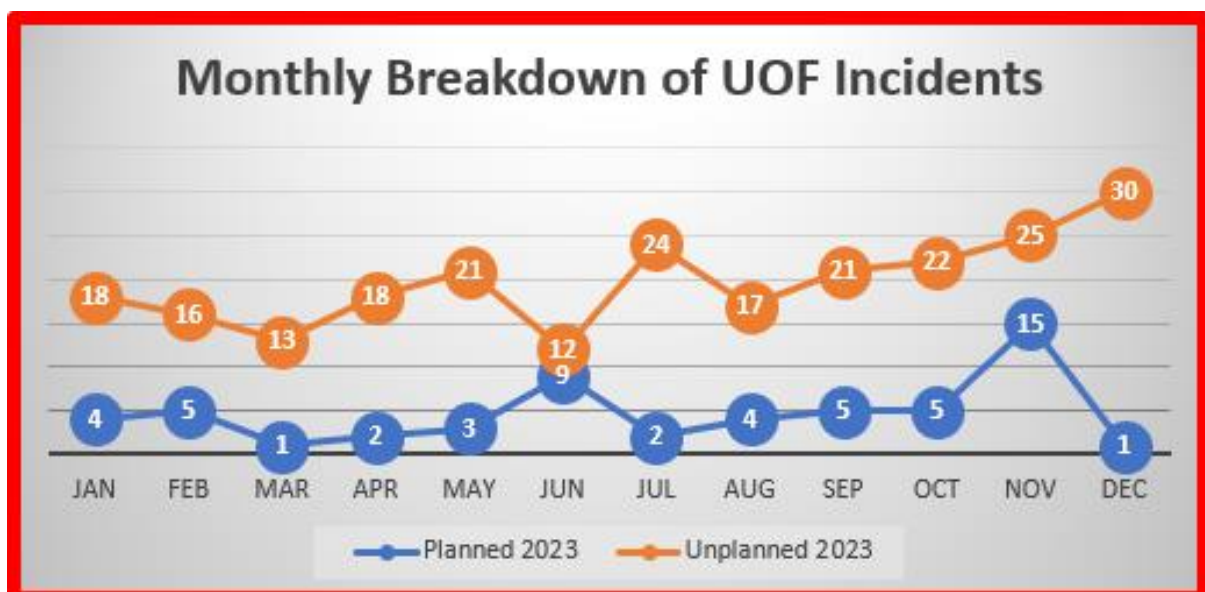
#### 4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

The total number of violent incidents between February and December 2023 was 189, which is a slight increase on last year. This year, there have been more violent incidents, caused by prisoners with complex behavioural and mental health issues.

The prison has taken steps to address the increase in self-harm and violent incidents. It has increased the staffing of the safety team, which has a functional manager with significant safety experience. The safety intervention meeting (SIM) has been overhauled and focuses on complex case management and introduced risk management plans.

#### 4.4 Use of force

Unplanned use of force has varied from 12-25 incidents in most months from January to November, with a high of 30 in December.





#### **4.5 Preventing illicit items**

The prison recognises the considerable impact of drug and alcohol use on its main population, and the contribution to violence, debt and reoffending. The prison has a comprehensive strategy to reduce both drug and alcohol dependency, and instances of drugs, alcohol and other illicit items entering the prison. There is a regular and collaborative multi-disciplinary meeting to manage risks and threats from both a clinical and non-clinical perspective, which ensures illicit item reduction and appropriate treatment for those under the influence of such items remains a priority focus across all areas of the prison.

During the year, the prison has ensured its approach allows for thorough screening of staff, vehicles, visitors and arriving prisoners, introducing dedicated senior supervision of the entry and visits process. Given the Prisons & Probation Ombudsman (PPO) recent attention to the use of X-ray body scanners, reasserting national policy around intelligence or reasonable suspicion-led, rather than routine, scans, the Board has received assurances from the prison and observed that use of the X-ray scanning equipment is in accordance with this policy. Staff are very competent and professional in its use, and the equipment and response to finds appears to be effective in preventing detected items entering free circulation within the prison.

Mail is now routinely scanned, with prisoners receiving photocopies of items. This initially led to an increase in attempts to pass items during prisoner visits and over the prison fence, which the prison successfully identified and intercepted. The prison can further respond to this by placing prisoners on closed visits (where the prisoner and visitor are prevented from having any physical contact) or banning certain visitors. There are, on average, more than 40 finds of illicit items each month.

Staff confiscate any excess fruit to prevent consumption of 'hooch' from fermentation (prison-brewed alcohol). The prison also operates a random and suspicion-led mandatory drug testing programme, which allows the prison to target efforts on particularly impacted house blocks.

The prison also appears to have a robust approach to staff corruption risks and has responded appropriately to issues and incidents.

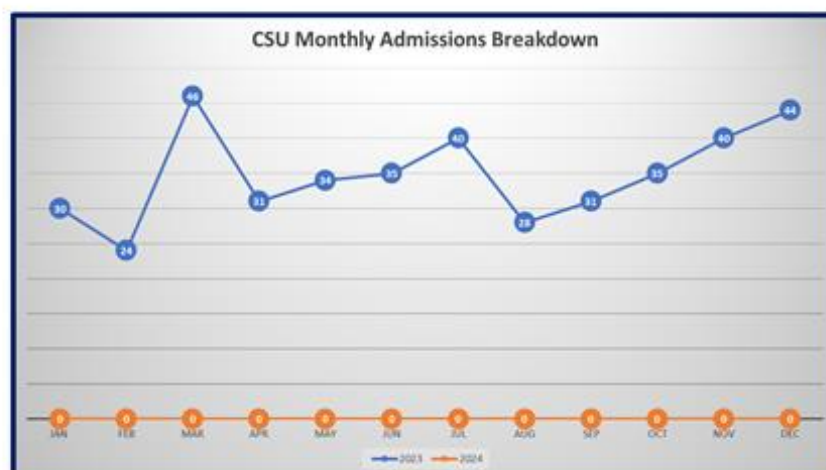
## 5. Fair and humane treatment

### 5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

Since September 2023, investment has been made to make improvements to the kit and equipment in the prison. Blankets have been replaced with duvets for every prisoner. Improvements have been made to cell furniture. There has been a drive to improve cleanliness and wing gyms have been created across all areas.

### 5.2 Segregation

The management of the care and separation unit (CSU) is a useful indicator of the standards of care across the prison estate. There have been staff changes during the year, but we remain impressed with the staff in the CSU, who are knowledgeable and caring. We have also observed that the CSU leadership is particularly attuned to the needs and circumstances of the prisoners, that Rule 45 reviews (which determine whether or not a prisoner needs to remain segregated) and other reviews are fairly and professionally conducted, and that this is often reflected in comments from some prisoners themselves. The CSU was busy, particularly in the second half of the year. This was partly due to the new Director ensuring that disruptive behaviour was dealt with consistently and effectively. The occupancy of the CSU in 2023 was as follows:



Average number of prisoners held in the CU each week	
October	10.25
November	9.5
December	10.75

All health screenings were completed within two hours of CSU arrival, and all CSU review boards were held within the required time limits. The Board is concerned, however, that the CSU is used to house prisoners with severe mental health conditions who should be receiving care in appropriate settings. A number of prisoners have remained in CSU on Rule 45 beyond the maximum 42 days.

The CSU has a programme of continual improvement. The prison has acknowledged that there is a problem with the showers and has made some improvements, but the extractor system is not powerful enough and damp remains an issue. The prison is looking at ways to address this.

### **5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers**

The Board has, again, observed that relationships between staff and prisoners are good or very good. The Board always finds staff to be very friendly, helpful and professional.

The prison has reintroduced its key worker support newsletter to help staff to carry out their key worker role. The number of key worker sessions delivered between April and December in the reporting year were as follows:

<b>Month</b>	<b>Number of sessions delivered</b>
April	3499
May	3141
June	3239
July	3303
August	2623
September	2227
October	3120
November	1943
December	2027

### **5.4 Equality and diversity**

Diversity, equality and inclusion (DE&I) meetings take place quarterly. There are leads for each protected characteristic (which include, among others, race, religion, sex and sexual orientation, which it's unlawful to discriminate against) under the Equality Act.

There were 48 discrimination incident reporting forms (DIRFs) submitted in the reporting year. The Board has reviewed a sample of DIRFs this year. The majority of investigations were satisfactory, but we made a few observations in order to improve the quality of some investigations.

### **5.5 Faith and pastoral support**

The chaplaincy continues to provide good support. Wherever possible, chaplaincy attends Rule 45 and ACCT reviews.

### **5.6 Incentives schemes**

The prison had improved the consistency of its incentive scheme in order to better use it to improve the behaviour of prisoners. At the end of the reporting year, 70 prisoners were on the basic regime, 601 on standard regime and 675 on the enhanced regime.

### **5.7 Complaints**

The total number of internal complaints received by the prison for the reporting year (excluding healthcare and DIRFs) was 4,041.

### **5.8 Property**

There have been a number of complaints about property going missing when a prisoner's cell has been cleared out following their relocation. The Board has raised this issue with the Director, who acknowledged that the clearance process needs

improvement and we will monitor this. We continue to deal with a number of prisoner applications (prisoners' written representations to the IMB) relating to slow receipt of, or missing, property transferred in from other prisons. These make up around half of all property applications. The Board believes that liaison between prisons in respect of property transfer and dealing with subsequent prisoner complaints about lost property or requests for compensation could be improved. For example, there could be better communication with prisoners around timescales and circumstances in which property will not be transferred, such as if it has been inadvertently swapped with another prisoner's property or not properly recorded on receipt.

## **6. Health and wellbeing**

### **6.1 Health general**

The Board welcomes the progress made by Spectrum, which continues to provide healthcare services. During 2023, the implementation of changes, led by the head of healthcare, has brought about significant improvements in service delivery. We congratulate the head and his clinical team for their award-winning commitment, both in the strategic approach to planning the service and to the day-to-day services to prisoners. A Care Quality Commission report in 2022 identified a shortfall in the level of staffing needed to provide services to a community of this size and nature, and the opportunity was taken to restructure and reinvest in several aspects of care.

### **6.2 Physical healthcare**

The appointment of a full-time, permanent GP, with the addition of an advanced nurse practitioner and other team members, has transformed the position in primary care: whereas in February 2023 there were 400 men waiting to be seen, by November this was 48, and at the time of writing, in March 2024, there was no waiting list, one week being the longest time anyone waited, with urgent patients seen the same day. Some of the initial assessment, as in GP practices in the community, is now done by, for example, physiotherapy, where appropriate, which has had a short-term impact on that service, wait time being up to nine weeks. More work is carried out on the wings, and the creation of a substantial pharmacy team, with the addition of a group of dispensing assistants, supports the provision of services hitherto delivered only by nurses.

Waiting times for dental services have also improved, despite the limitations of there being only one dental suite. The longest wait, seven weeks, is for non-urgent treatment, often by a hygienist, and the extra sessions on Saturdays are helping.

We welcome the appointment of a deputy head of healthcare, as carrying sole responsibility for such a widespread service has been shown to be too much for one person. This new post will support the development of other planned services, such as a dedicated service for older, frail patients; expanding the use of the kiosks (self-service computer terminals that prisoners use to manage their daily affairs) to enable dialogue with prisoners, helping to describe their needs so that they can be channelled to an appropriate service.

Hospital appointments have been adversely affected by industrial action, and their re-arrangement, sometimes at short notice, places heavy demands on the use of escorts. We note the work begun recently on the possible use of special purpose licences for lower risk men who need to attend hospital frequently. As a Board, we still have reservations about the lack of provision for patients needing 24-hour care, and note that they can be transferred to HMP Holme House. We also note the early planning of the impact on health services of the advent of additional places at the prison, initiated by the Director, whose involvement in the scrutiny of healthcare is most welcome.

### **6.3 Mental health**

The mental health team has been less successful in recruiting permanent staff, and it was only recently that an appointment was made to the service manager post; this has placed more pressure on other team members during the year, although as a

Board we have noted the efforts they make to attend Rule 45 reviews, where their presence is sometimes vital. We reiterate the concern recorded in our last report about the inappropriateness of having to keep men with serious mental health problems in the CSU, the only safe place for them at Northumberland, and the extreme difficulty of finding an appropriate place for their care. There have been several instances during the year and, most recently, we have all watched with dismay the significant deterioration of one man held in the CSU. We cannot underestimate both the level of his suffering and the impact this has on staff who are not trained in the care of someone so unwell.

Having said that, we welcome the arrival of a psychologist in January 2024, and we are pleased to find that the waiting time to be seen by a member of the team for a non-urgent appointment is still relatively short, at three or four weeks.

#### **6.4 Time out of cell, regime**

The new Director implemented changes to the core day in December 2023 as part of the development of the regime delivery model incentivising meaningful activity. During the week, unlock occurs at 8:15 and prisoners are prepared for movement to activities, which takes place between 8:35 and 8:50. Activities, including work and education, take place between 8:50 and 11:35, then prisoners return to their house blocks for lunch. Prisoners are then locked up until 13:40 and movement to activities takes place at 13:50. Afternoon activities take place between 14:00 and 16:40. There is an hour of association between 17:30 and 18:35 on Monday to Thursday. Prisoners who choose not to engage in activities will spend a majority of their time in their cells.

#### **6.5 Drug and alcohol treatment**

Drug and alcohol services continue to be a shared responsibility, with the drug and alcohol recovery team (DART) running face-to-face services in the residential gateway unit (40 places) and the clinical DART being one of the three teams within healthcare offering services to prisoners on the wing, including prescribing. The DART has also undergone changes: there is now one lead practitioner and two senior practitioners, with staff enabling all parts of the prison to be served more easily, and a non-medical prescriber, who is also mental-health trained. Joint assessments are carried out across all teams.

The Board mentioned in last year's report the promotion of Naloxone to men on release, in case of a relapse in the early days, which could easily be fatal (Naloxone can rapidly reverse an opioid overdose). Up to 70% of the relevant population are taking up this offer which, apparently, compares favourably with elsewhere. Within the prison, agreement has been reached with the POA (prison officers' union) that those staff who wish can carry a mini-strip of Naloxone, after training, which could be valuable during night hours.

Progress in drug withdrawal has also been enhanced by the introduction of the use of Buvidal, which is administered by a weekly (up to monthly) injection, rather than a daily dose of methadone. About 30 prisoners are currently on this regime, which is also helpful in supporting continuing care on release: DART can arrange an appointment in the community to enable a man to continue to receive care and support, indirectly contributing to the reduction of re-offending.

Curiously, the introduction of Buvidal has not led, as anticipated, to a reduction in the number of men on methadone treatment, which has remained steady at about 270. The reasons are difficult to measure, but there are thoughts that progression through the use of Buvidal has attracted hitherto unidentified illicit drug users, who are reluctant to turn up daily to take their methadone.

There is a further development, in the possible use of Espranor, another drug used in the treatment of long-term addiction, which dissolves instantly on the tongue. Unlike Buvidal, the user does not need to be taking a much-reduced dose of methadone. This has been piloted in another northern prison, and there is enthusiasm for it to be trialled at HMP Northumberland. One of its attractions is that, because it dissolves instantly, there is little possibility of transfer.

Against this positive picture there is awareness of new drugs on the scene, which are more powerful, and whose use could endanger prisoners' lives. There is a medicine management pharmacist post, which is proving difficult to fill. There is also no service for men with a dual diagnosis, which could place them at high risk.

The challenges continue for this and other related services, but the Board is pleased to see that regular meetings of providers are now in place. This should enable information to be shared about where the problems lie and how they might be addressed.

## **7. Progression and resettlement**

### **7.1 Education, library**

Education is delivered in two main sectors serving the 'main' population and the vulnerable prisoners' (VP) estate.

Accommodation offers very standard classrooms, with specialist facilities for a number of curriculum areas, such as catering, The Bistro (VP estate) and building and railway workshops on the main estate. Generally, the facilities are adequate if a little outdated. The environments do not reflect modern colleges and places of learning. Similarly, all display is paper-based and very text-heavy. There is no use of digital display on a regular basis.

The delivery of IT on the VP estate is of a very high quality, with a great deal of independent learning supported by tutors and mentors as facilitators. However, the use of technology in other curriculum areas is less well developed and may disadvantage men on release. Other examples of strong delivery and acquisition of work-based skills are evident in The Bistro on the VP campus and building on the main campus. In all these cases, the quality of the relationships with the teachers and tutors has significantly contributed to successful outcomes for the learners.

We have observed very low levels of attendance on main education delivery, with attendance frequently as low as 50 per cent. This, combined with very early closures to sessions, means a lot of lost learning time. Whilst we accept that there have been historic mitigating factors relating to attendance, such as medical appointments and other meetings, it is pleasing to see the new Director has already put in place measures to ameliorate against poor attendance. We intend to monitor the impact of these measure in the next 12 months.

Prisoners generally seem content with the education offer, but some on the VP estate would prefer greater access to opportunities they view as more valuable to their success in gaining employment on release.

With this in mind, the prison has identified that the needs of the VP estate and main estate should be met with different learning experiences. Factors contributing to this include interests, educational attainment, employment requirements and length of sentence. We welcome this identification and look forward to monitoring the improved tailored offer to both estates in the coming year. We also welcome the joint initiative with the education provider, Novus, to purchase and implement the use of a new assessment tool, 'DoIt.' Historically, assessment of educational attainment has been self-declared and not necessarily as accurate as it could have been.

Another area of concern is the capacity of the single qualified special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) to service the needs of the prison population in the North of England. This makes effective identification and assessment of learning difficulties for a growing prison population extremely challenging. Again, we will monitor this over the coming year.

Current prison data suggests that the range of needs is high and varied. A total of 348 learners believe they have a learning difficulty. The majority of these needs focus on mental health, dyslexia and social and emotional difficulties. Some 1.9% believe they have a speech and language disorder, while eight individuals are registered as having a severe learning difficulty. Observation of classes and



materials doesn't obviously identify how these needs are being met and this is an area for monitoring in the coming year.

The proportion of men engaging in Level 3 plus learning is relatively low. At the time of writing, in March 2024, seven men engaged in OU degrees and 38 engaged in distance learning from a population of around 1,400. However, of particular note is the lengths to which the prison goes to make sure funding is accessed by these men and the levels of monitoring that take place to ensure applications are sent on time and resubmitted when not successful at first attempts. Sources of funding range from military-based charities, The Prisoner Education Trust and adult loans.

It is notable that, across the prison, men engaged in higher levels of learning are rightly proud of this. A red band prisoner (those with a greater degree of trust and autonomy in their jobs in the prison) spoke to a Board member at length about the process of passing his OU access course and how he was now studying for a degree in environmental studies. He talked about his balanced day, where he works in the morning as an orderly, goes to the gym in the afternoon and studies in the evening. This is an excellent example of a prisoner making the most of the opportunities available to men at HMP Northumberland.

A range of qualifications are offered at NVQ 2, including Gardening and Horticulture, Industrial Cleaning, Hospitality, ITQ, Laundry and Food Safety and Hygiene. Other qualifications are offered with the Rail Academy with the introduction to Rail NVQ and Personal Track Safety. Numbers per qualification vary from five for the Open University to 100 for Food Safety.

The Board has noticed an increase in the number of foreign national prisoners being held at the prison. This has increased slightly, from 32 at the beginning of the year, to 51 by the end of the year. Almost half of these are Albanian. Whilst we appreciate that not all these prisoners will have a different first language to English, there was a gap in the provision for those men for whom their first language is not English. The introduction of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) on the curriculum is welcome. Current provision suggests that prisoners with English as a first language and those for whom English is not their first language are taught together. This arrangement is not ideal, although it is an improvement in that there is now a dedicated delivery for those who do not have English as first language. We intend to monitor this throughout the coming year.

There are subject mentors across the curriculum. Without exception, these mentors both articulated a desire to be trained further and offer more to learners. In some areas, their work was evident, such as in maths, IT and building, for example.

A weakness of the curriculum delivery on both the main and VP estates is the opportunity to engage in the arts. There is an arts offer expertly delivered on the VP estate, but no opportunities for drama or music on a regular basis. Men across the prison have expressed an interest in these areas. One prisoner suggested: 'It would be great to have a radio station,' whilst another prisoner stated: 'Education gives me a better chance on release.'

The library facilities on both sites are very well used. Shannon Trust mentors support reading activities and a book club is run on the VP site by a Shannon Trust mentor.

## 7.2 Vocational training, work

The new Director is very keen to encourage all prisoners below retirement age to engage in purposeful activity and has changed the regime so that all prisoners under retirement age are expected to work or engage in education. It was previously the case that prisoners over 50 could opt out of purposeful activity. Those who do not engage in work or education remain in their cells during the day. The prison has activity places for 1,144 prisoners. The activities are spread across 19 workshops and education. Steps have been taken to improve attendance. Prisoners who refuse to attend activity are subject to a downgrade in privileges. Sessional pay has recently been launched so that prisoners only get paid for the sessions they attend.

Approximately 20% of the prison population is engaged in wing work, which includes working in the serveries, cleaning, painting, laundry and in residential support.

Off-wing work includes joinery and woodwork, tailoring, tea packing and waste recycling. There is a market garden, where prisoners work in conjunction with the Oswin Project. Produce is grown for the prison farm shop. In November 2023, powder coating was started, with the aim that prisoners can study for the British Coatings Federation Qualifications.

## 7.3 Family contact

During the reporting year, the prison introduced the family pathway project, with a view to supporting prisoners and their families. A Family Pathway booklet is in development. The prison runs family days. The take up from the VP estate is low and the public protection unit has a backlog of applications from prisoners for social visits. A peer-mentoring scheme is being introduced to focus on prisoners who do not have social visits. Mentors advise on how get in touch with family and the chaplaincy can make a request to the Salvation Army for family tracing.

NEPACs has started a new departure lounge project to support prisoners 16 weeks before release to help the prisoner and his family adjust to release and to manage expectations.

The NEPAC visitor centre is clean, well furnished and welcoming. The centre manager is extremely welcoming. Visitors register and can get assistance with any issues they may have.

Visitors order and pay for shared refreshments to be consumed in the visits' hall. There has recently been an improvement in the quality of the food.

There are secure lockers for visitors to place their valuables in and items they are not permitted to take in with them such as coats. There are also rules about suitable clothing (mostly for female visitors). Prisoners are permitted up to three adults and two children and visits last for a maximum of two hours.

*Number of visits in the last quarter of 2023*

	<b>October</b>	<b>November</b>	<b>December</b>
Adults	1152	1274	1434
Children	211	241	324

## 7.4 Rehabilitation and release

During the reporting year, there were 1,050 releases from the prison.

In order to support prisoners in finding employment on their release, there are more focused employment advisory boards led by subject matter experts to increase employment outcomes and provide greater support to prisoners in the six-week post-discharge period. Virtual Campus cabling has been routed to the employment hubs in the main and VP estates to provide greater access to employment opportunities and support. On-site employer events have taken place on a regular basis.

*Percentage of prisoners in employment six weeks after custodial release in the last two quarters of 2023, against a target of 12.54%.*

July	August	September	October	November	December
14.52%	18.46%	13.79%	16.07%	17.54%	19.67%

The prison also offers accredited programmes on both the main and VP estates to support prisoners to help avoid re-offending. In the past year, HMP Northumberland has introduced the adapted programme 'New Me Strengths' (outlined below) to target the high number of prisoners with learning difficulties.

HMP Northumberland currently offers three different programmes:

- The Thinking Skills Programme (TSP): This is offered to individuals with a medium- to high-risk of general reoffending. TSP focuses on supporting participants to develop cognitive skills to manage risk factors, develop protective factors and achieve pro-social goals. It is delivered mainly in the programmes department (and, occasionally, on the VP estate) and each group lasts seven weeks.
- HORIZON: This programme is offered to medium-risk men who have been convicted of a sexual offence. Horizon supports participants to develop optimism and skills to strengthen their pro-social identity and plan for a life free of offending. It is delivered on house block 13 and each group lasts 13 weeks.
- New Me Strengths (NMS): This is offered to medium and above risk individuals who have learning disabilities or challenges, and participants can join this programme with a conviction of any offence(s). NMS supports the development of skills to strengthen pro-social identity and plan for an offence-free life. NMS can be delivered on both the main and VP estates in either the programmes department or in VP education. It is run over 14 weeks.

## The work of the IMB

### Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	17
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	5
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	6
Total number of visits to the establishment	267

### Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	5	2
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	3	5
C	Equality	3	2
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	15	8
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	12	6
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	7	7
F	Food and kitchens	5	2
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	40	25
H1	Property within the establishment	21	11
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	24	12
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	4	4
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary parole), release dates, re-categorisation	19	15
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	20	29
K	Transfers	21	6
L	Miscellaneous	N/A	N/A
	<b>Total number of applications</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>134</b>



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