

Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Buckley Hall

For reporting year
1 August 2023 to 31 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 IMB is part of the United Kingdom's National Preventive Mechanism.

2. Description of the establishment

Buckley Hall is a category C training prison, which has an operational capacity of 469 men on four wings¹:

- A wing contains the Drug and Alcohol Recovery Service (DARS) and an incentivised substance free living wing.
- B wing is general living accommodation.
- C wing houses first night accommodation and the induction unit on one side and the Aspire unit on the other. The Aspire unit supports men for progression and release.
- D wing is currently used for men who have sustained enhanced behaviour and occasionally a vulnerable prisoner who is not suitable for the other wings.
 It also contains the gated cell used for men who are under constant watch.

The prison traditionally accommodated men serving lengthy sentences however this has changed with the increasing pressure nationally on prison space. Buckley Hall now has an increasing number of men serving shorter sentences with some arriving directly from court.

There is a large sports hall marked out for games and weightlifting areas with its own showers and changing facilities. It also has a smaller gym which is used for over 50's and more vulnerable prisoners.

The Multifaith centre provides a full programme of services groups and support for all faiths.

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¹ 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

The prison has had several changes of management staff over the last 12 months, which has brought with it a new set of priorities, with a new Governor taking up post in January 2024.

In March 2024, the prison had a full inspection by HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP). Buckley Hall was given the following outcome scores (where 4 is good, 3 is reasonably good, 2 is not sufficiently good and 1 is poor):

- Safety 3
- Respect 3
- Purposeful activity 2
- Preparation for release 4

The inspectors acknowledged staff had an excellent relationship with prisoners and that key workers provided meaningful support to young adults, care leavers, prisoners serving an indeterminate sentence for the protection of the public (IPP) and those with complex needs.

The Hive, a designated area in Mental Health offered a wide range of therapeutic courses and initiatives.

However, the inspectors felt Buckley Hall was not fulfilling its core function as a training prison and that more needed to be done to encourage men into education and work. In July 2024, 59 men, who are fit and able to work, remain unemployed, while 15% of the men are in education regularly.

Following on from the HMIP visit at the beginning of June, a security audit was carried out. A considerable number of issues were identified and a plan implemented to address the issues.

3.1 Main findings

Safety

Following the security audit carried out during July 2024 which highlighted areas of concern, Security is working to address these.

Fair and humane treatment

The regime is too frequently disrupted, with wings being locked down on rotation. Staff shortages and training are the reason given for this.

The fabric of the building is in a poor condition and too often the heating and showers are not working.

Health and Wellbeing

Improvements in the provision of healthcare have been observed during the year.

Buckley Hall is part of the national steering group to develop the new drug and alcohol framework.

Progression and Resettlement

Improvements have been noted on the progression unit, but it is felt that much more needs to be done if it is to successfully prepare men for release. The focus will be on getting the men who live on the unit involved in the improvements being planned.

The parole awareness course was observed by an IMB member and it was felt that it could have been much better.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

The problems faced by men serving IPPs are still not being addressed. Can the money, which is used to keep them in prison, not be used to provide support, accommodation and employment on release. We have witnessed the upturn in a man's chances of succeeding once he is released by the extensive work which was carried out here prior to his release. He had never been released, served 16 years over his tariff for a relatively minor offence and has virtually grown up in prison. He is doing well some three months after release and is still being supported in an approved premises.

Alongside the early release schemes currently being processed, is consideration being given to early release of men who have served long sentences, completed the courses they were asked to do and have proved themselves to be trustworthy whilst in prison? Many of them having only ever committed a single offence, albeit a very serious one.

The general lack of funding of HMPPS has led to a huge failing in preparing prisoners for release and their continued progress in society, which has far too often seen men returning to custody.

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

The contracts given to outside agencies, such as the maintenance contract given to AMEY, often do not provide the level of service which anyone would find acceptable. They are slow to progress, expensive, often do not cover the required repairs and the quality of the work is not always good. Is it not possible to look more closely at what is being paid for and what is actually being provided?

TO THE GOVERNOR

Last year, it was proposed to introduce a handyman scheme, allowing some of the men to undertake minor repairs around the prison. It is noted that the men are now employed in painting on the wings, but has the scheme been abandoned?

Concerns have been raised about the restrictive timing of the social video calls, which impact on a family's ability to utilise them.

3.3 Response to the last report

Issue raised	Response given	Progress	
CCTV in		A standalone	
Healthcare.		system has	
		now been	
		fitted in	
		healthcare.	
Property		Some	
issues.		improvement.	
Signing off on		Significant	
recategorisation		improvement.	
and release by			
the Minister.			
IPP Release.		The number of	
		IPP prisoners	
		being released	
		from Buckley	
		Hall has	
		definitely	
		increased. The	
		level of	
		support for	
		these	
		prisoners has	
		also improved.	

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

Following concerns raised by healthcare, men are no longer allowed to take vapes off the wing. Vaping is only allowed in cells or on the exercise yard. Restrictions are also placed on staff use of vapes, but it has been observed that these are not always adhered to.

Issues raised from the security audit include concerns about searches, especially of vehicles entering Buckley Hall, critical weaknesses in the processing of intelligence reports, procedures for escorts from Buckley Hall and the controls for tools in the workshops.

4.1 Reception and induction

On arrival, all prisoners are seen by healthcare and chaplaincy before moving to the induction unit on C wing. Safety checks are carried out every four hours for the first 72 hours that prisoners arrive. The Board have checked these files and are satisfied that the process is working. In the HMIP report, it was reported that some of the induction cells were dirty, with damaged furniture and walls that needed painting. It should be noted that the Governor has addressed this issue.

An informal survey conducted by members of the Board found that the majority of new arrivals at Buckley Hall were happy with their reception and induction.

All men are screened on arrival to identify any neurodiverse issues to ensure they receive any additional support needed.

As part of their induction, men attend the sequencing Board, which looks at their educational needs and suitability for work. Around 15% of the men at Buckley Hall attend education on a regular basis. A total of 82 places are available each morning and 74 in the afternoon. New arrivals also attend an induction run by some of the trusted prisoners to tell them what to expect at Buckley Hall.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

There were four incidents at height during June 2024, when the command suite was opened. It was thought that at least one of them was organised to disrupt the regime and facilitate the passing of drugs but this has not been confirmed.

Incidents of self-harm and the number of open Assessment Care in Custody and Teamwork (ACCT) documents (which are used to support prisoners who are at risk of self-harm and suicide) increased at the beginning of the 2024 and have remained at a concerning level. In the first quarter of this year (Jan-Mar 24), 43 ACCTs were opened, and in the second quarter (Apr-Jun 24), 29 ACCTs were opened.

Recorded self-harm incidents totalled 68 in the first quarter of this year (Jan-Mar 24), where 16 incidents were from one prisoner. In the second quarter (Apr-Jun 24), there were 55 incidents, 17 of which were from two prisoners.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation.

As a snapshot, incidents of violence reported during the second quarter of this year (Apr-Jun 24) totalled 22. Ten of these were prisoner on prisoner and 12 prisoner on

staff. It should be noted that the majority of these were not deemed serious incidents (throwing a pillow/biro pen), although at the beginning of the year, two members of staff were quite seriously hurt during an incident on C wing.

4.4 Use of force

In the first quarter of the year (Jan-Mar 24), there were 59 incidents. During the second quarter of the year (Apr-Jun 24), there were 55. At the beginning of the third quarter, in July 24, which marked the end of the reporting period, there were 18 incidents.

A monthly use of force meeting was observed by the IMB, which looked at camera footage of a range of incidents. This is used as a method to review practice and identify training needs. Footage is scrutinised by staff from mental health, security, safer custody and a governor.

An IMB member, who observed footage of one of the incidents, was concerned that this may have been escalated by staff. The prisoner is known to have mental health difficulties and when he asked to be allowed to go back to his cell, this could have been accommodated, but wasn't. The Governor raised these concerns at the meeting.

4.5 Preventing illicit items

The reduction of illicit drug use and reducing prisoners' access to illicit items is pivotal to the prison regime and the long-term aspiration for some prisoners to remain drug free. Currently, 160 men at Buckley Hall have links to organised crime groups (OCGs), which represents 36% of the population. Buckley Hall is working with regional representatives to address these issues.

Incidents of men being found under the influence have increased substantially. Only two such incidents occurred in May, but 53 were recorded in June. The number of incidents then dropped to three in July. This sudden increase was attributed to a large parcel of illicit items found at Buckley Hall. Stricter processes for searching have been put in place to prevent other parcels getting in.

The psychoactive substance currently being found at Buckley Hall is a far stronger strain. Side effects from severe reactions to this drug include seizures, a drop-in heart rate and reduced oxygen levels.

Twenty-five random Mandatory Drug Tests are carried out each month. These have been observed by an IMB member and the security staff were extremely patient. They explained to the men thoroughly what was to happen and escorted them down to the testing suite.

The current security at the prison gate has been described as 'weak' for both staff and visitors. It must be emphasised this is not because of the efforts of staff or training, but because of the physical characteristics of the prison and a continued lack of investment by the prison service in this area compared to other establishments.

Twenty-seven mobile phones were found during June, an increase from 14 in May. Forty-three body scans were carried out during June. Three of them had a positive find and seven were inconclusive. Four full body searches carried out.

New measures, which have been put in place to improve security, including further checks at the gate house before entry to the prison. A new and more rigorous search regime is in place in the visits hall, due to the high level of illicit substances entering the premises. The dog team is seen more often at Buckley Hall, at least four days a week.

Two security led cell searches, observed by an IMB member were carried out professionally and with respect for the belongings of the occupants. One man was escorted down to reception for a body scan, and he was compliant with the process.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

The accommodation at Buckley Hall is tired. The building was originally intended to be used for fifteen years and is now 30 years old. The boilers are unreliable and outdated and even though some of the showers have been refitted over the previous two years they are still causing problems. A hole in the floor of the upstairs showers on A wing caused all the showers to be closed for a sustained period. When the shower in the Segregation unit was installed, the walls were not properly sealed to the floor and it flooded the Cardiovascular suite next door. Both had to be closed for repairs.

The kitchen provides adequate food for the men but because it must be transported up to the wings and then placed in hot trays, there are complaints that the food is not hot when the men get it. Too often, the men are asking for special diets, which are a personal choice rather than a medical need and could be satisfied from the menu. Kitchen staff are always willing to discuss special diets with the men, but are conscious that these requirements do take resources away from the rest of the population.

The equipment in the kitchens has been problematic throughout the year and as of the end of July several appliances are out of use, including two of the four ovens. This is impacting on their ability to provide a varied menu for the men.

5.2 Segregation

The unit has been exceptionally busy over the period since January with a number of extremely difficult men with complex needs being held there. At the beginning of the year there were five men on constant watch in the prison, where there is only one designated constant watch gated cell. When observed by the Board, this was managed well, despite the officers not always having the skills and training to deal with these complicated mental health issues. Two of the five men were transferred to secure hospitals for treatment. It is interesting that one of these men has now been returned to Buckley Hall to finish his sentence. The change in him is remarkable and demonstrates that it is essential that spaces at secure hospitals are available to those prisoners who suffer from severe mental health issues.

It is the Governor's belief the segregation unit is used too readily, and other alternatives are not explored.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

Relations between staff and the prisoners are seen to be good the majority of the time. This is particularly true in the segregation unit, where the level of understanding given to the men often surpasses expectations.

Buckley Hall has a relatively large number of new inexperienced staff. Whilst most of the time they are seen to be professional and understanding and extremely helpful, occasionally the Board have observed some confrontational behaviour from staff, which is not always helpful in calming down a situation. Regrettably the IMB have experienced a negative response from staff on occasions but this is not the norm.

Four specialist key workers have been appointed to provide help and support for young prisoners, care leavers, IPPs and men serving a life sentence.

5.4 Equality and diversity

Buckley Hall run an assortment of forums for the men to meet and discuss their issues regarding equality. For example, Black prisoner forum, equalities forum, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller forum and a veterans' forum. There is also a quarterly meeting, where representatives from each wing meet with staff and Governors to discuss any issues arising on the wings.

The Board has a good working relationship with all men at Buckley Hall, regardless of ethnicity. This is reflected in the applications we receive and the interactions we have daily.**5.5**Faith and pastoral support

The Multifaith centre caters to men of all religions. They have a comprehensive calendar of services and meetings throughout the week.

They also run the Sycamore tree programme at regular intervals throughout the year. This is a course which outlines the principles of restorative justice to groups of up to 20 learners over six weeks. Usually on the third week a victim's relative will come in to speak to the men about their experience. Members of the community are invited to the final session and the men are encouraged to show remorse for their offence. This can be done in the form of letters, poems or artwork.

5.6 Incentives schemes

The incentives scheme is used to incentivise the men to adhere to the prison rules. Currently 58% of the men at Buckley Hall are on the enhanced level, 36% on standard with only 6% on basic. Anyone reduced to basic for poor behaviour has a review meeting each month to discuss their progress and advice is given as to how they can get themselves moved back to standard.

The management team on the Aspire unit are working with the lead in local approved premises to build relationships with the men before they are released. Staff from these units are visiting Buckley Hall as are some community probation officers. The local incentive scheme used on the Aspire Unit, Enhanced Behaviour Monitoring (EBM), encourages men to show their commitment, positive engagement and personal development; with each stage (1-3), men can earn more privileges. The men who have reached stage three get more time out of cell, more access to the gardens and more freedom to move around the prison.

The other wings have been given some cooking appliances, air fryers, slow cookers and grill plates. Fridges have also been installed with stainless steel tops so that the men can prepare their food. On one of the wings all the men contributed to buying cooking equipment themselves. That cooking area is the cleanest in Buckley Hall and anyone using the appliances is expected to clean them.

5.7 Complaints

The progress of complaints is reported at the daily briefing with explanations as to why any of them are late being answered. An issue arose when the complaints boxes on the wings were not being emptied promptly but this has now been resolved by someone from the business hub collecting them.

The IMB have received applications, both verbal and written, about the complaints process and do feel that it could be better explained to the men. As a result of raising these concerns with the Governor, an explanatory leaflet has been circulated which

outlines how the system works. This is an excellent and easy-to-understand piece of work.

Complaints are returned if they are deemed to be a request rather than a complaint, if the issue has already been answered or if they are deemed to be inappropriate. The Governor has set up a complaint's scrutiny panel comprising of men and staff. It is hoped that this will give the men more confidence in the system.

5.8 Property

Historically property has been a big issue at Buckley Hall. Recently the Governor stopped items being sent in by families and friends as a birthday parcel, in response to the ingress of drugs into Buckley Hall. The men may now receive a payment to their account in the month of their birthday, which they can use to purchase items from the catalogue. Speaking to the reception staff, this has made a big difference to the efficiency of security clearance for parcels and a quicker delivery for the men. The exception to this rule is if a man has not yet served 28 days in custody. He can then have a decency parcel sent in. Issues with property during transfer are still problematic.

Many of the in-house property issues result from cell clearances. The cell clearance form is sometimes delayed and therefore men are often not aware that items are missing. This is particularly true when men are sharing a cell, and they are not present when their property is bagged up. The IMB have observed property from cell clearances being left in areas that are open to staff and prisoners who work as orderlies on the wings.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Healthcare general

The healthcare provision has improved during 2024 with staff being more approachable and understanding.

The waiting time to see a doctor is consistently three weeks and appointments with a nurse one to two days. Appointments for dentistry are also offered within three weeks. Nurse led clinics on the wing help to triage men so that they are seen urgently by the general practitioner (GP) if necessary.

6.2 Physical healthcare

Buckley Hall has a large gym with a timetable that includes a variety of activities to suit the needs of most prisoners. There is a separate weights room and an additional over 50's fitness suite.

The IMB recognises that the gym plays an important role for men at Buckley Hall and note that 58% of men use the gym.

As part of the timetable, the staff hold a park run every Saturday morning. This is very popular with average of 30 runners and 10 volunteers helping to organise the event. Membership of the park run can be transferred with the man on release under a different name.

The staff also run a yoga session for men with neurodiversity. These men are referred by the mental health team.

6.3 Mental health

The mental health team have worked with 262 men in groups since January 2024. At the end of July 2024, they have a case load of 38 men being seen regularly by one of the team and 42 men are taking medication to help with their mental health issues.

The Hive is open to men who want to access help from staff and other men and gives out activities to engage them. A group of men have been designing images to attach to T-shirts, pillowcases and cushions, which can then be handed out to family members. One of the men showed the Board a photograph frame which had been intricately carved with a photograph of his son, who passed away recently, in it. He told us that his time in the Hive had helped him cope with his loss. The atmosphere in the Hive is always positive and engaging.

6.4 Social care

The Board is concerned that Buckley Hall does not provide specific support networks for older prisoners, especially since their numbers are increasing and the layout of Buckley Hall can limit their access to certain areas. Although an age forum is held this includes younger as well as older prisoners and their problems are significantly different.

There are four specialist key workers and mentors who provide help and support for young prisoners, care leavers, IPPs and lifers but no one specifically for the older population.

6.5 Time out of cell, regime

The Governor has introduced the new national regime which offers the men one hour out in the open air each day, at least one keywork session a week and has stated that activities sessions must last for at least two and a quarter hours each. He has also reduced the amount of time out of cell the unemployed men get as he feels this will encourage the men to go to work. This has always been an issue as it was felt that those who did not go to work were able to access showers and food before working men got back to the wing. This ruling also applies to those who are signed off as sick.

The time the men have to return from work, collect their food and get a shower before they are locked up is very tight and is constantly raised as an issue.

The evening regime offers additional time out of cell on alternate nights. This allows men to attend gym, library, CV suites, showers, wing and tier two activities. During the summer months there are additional exercise groups.

6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

The DARS team have had 260 new referrals in the current year, and of these 169 are now positively working with the team. It is noted that this figure is consistent throughout the year.

The DARS team are introducing a scheme to provide continuity on release. The men will be able to access meetings with their outside drug worker digitally prior to release.

Staff are being trained to administer naloxone to men found under the influence. At the end of July, 25 staff had already been trained. It is worth noting that naloxone has only been administered once at Buckley Hall and that was by the healthcare staff. Naloxone is also being made available to men on release who are still known to be at risk.

Thirteen of the men have completed the peer mentor scheme and are now trained to support others. This is a voluntary role.

6.7 Soft skills

A sports day was arranged with teams made up of staff and prisoners who competed in various events. The Board have observed that events like this have a significant positive impact on staff/prisoner relationships.

The gym staff also arranged a group session for men under 25 who were not engaging with the gym. This involved small groups of men and staff competing with each other to complete quite complex exercise tasks. All the men joined in and appeared to really enjoy themselves.

7. Progression and resettlement

7.1 Education, library

The Board has observed the maths class and has seen excellent practice, where all men are engaged with their learning.

The art class is always busy and allows men to be creative whilst still adhering to their curriculum. In April, Buckley Hall hosted the "We Roar" exhibition, this included some pieces created by men at Buckley Hall, as well as others from across the prison estate and some from American correctional facilities.

An Upcycling Workshop has been set up in the education block, which provides men with opportunities to learn creative and practical skills. The finished items of furniture are sold or donated to charity. The men can also gain a formal qualification.

16% of the men at Buckley Hall attend education in the mornings and 14% in the afternoons. These figures are consistent throughout the year. There are 82 spaces available in the morning and 74 in the afternoon. Attendance rates are reported at the morning briefing

7.2 Vocational training, work

The current Governor is committed to providing employment and training that is transferrable on release. He is in discussions with KPMG to attract industries into Buckley Hall with the long-term goal of providing every man with employment which could continue on release. It is hoped that attracting industries from outside will reduce the wage bill for the prison, as these firms would pay the men directly. This would allow the saved monies to be used to pay bonuses to other workshops, enticing some of the unemployed back into work.

A survey has been completed by the men to find out their views and opinions on what employment and training they would engage in. This would help Buckley Hall provide suitable employment and training that would meet the needs of the men.

The labour Board is looking at the reasons why men are refusing to attend work and put strategies in place to provide wrap around care and supportive intervention. At the moment, too many men are refusing to go to work and are then punished for this without looking at the underlying reasons.

7.3 Offender management, progression

As of July 2024, there were 45 prisoners serving as IPP prisoners at Buckley Hall and 106 men serving life sentences.

In July 2024, the SDS40 scheme was announced, which allows prisoners to be released when they have served 40% of their sentence, subject to restrictions. Planning is underway for these releases and the Board will monitor the impact of the scheme over the coming reporting year.

The programmes department have two more Thinking Skills Programmes planned before the end of the year. At that point all behavioural courses nationally are to be merged into the Building Choices course, which will be rolled out in the 2025.

7.4 Family contact

Up to ten family visits are arranged throughout the year. 460 children have attended Buckley Hall in the past 12 months. Officer Support Grades (OSGs) are being given training around safeguarding children. Special family events are provided by the DARS team, the mental health team and the progression unit.

Parental contact days allow fathers to play actively with their children. The visits centre has been transformed by the current Family Strategy Lead and is a very welcoming place for all visitors.

Social video calls, which were started during the pandemic, continue at Buckley Hall. These take place on Friday mornings and have only four visits per session. The Board feels that this is very restrictive and not conducive to maintaining family contact especially for men who live outside the area. Children attending school are excluded and partners who must work may not be able to take part.

A coffee morning is organised each month for men who don't get any visitors. It is an opportunity for them to sit and chat and enjoy coffee and cake with staff.

7.5 Resettlement planning

The employment hub provides support to men with opening bank accounts, arranging driving licence applications and ID. It also has links with local employers to help secure employment on release and help with housing.

8. The work of the IMB

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board	10
members	
Number of Board members at the start	5
of the reporting period	
Number of Board members at the end	7
of the reporting period	
Total number of visits to the	384
establishment	

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
Α	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	36	23
В	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	24	25
С	Equality	5	6
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	29	26
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	42	35
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	15	10
F	Food and kitchens	6	25
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	53	47
H1	Property within the establishment	41	43
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	31	32
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	4	2
I	Sentence management, including HDC, ROTL, parole, release dates, re-categorisation	48	41
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	7	8
K	Transfers	10	8
L	Miscellaneous	5	29
	Total number of applications	367	360



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