



# Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Lancaster Farms

**For reporting year  
1 February 2025 to 31 January 2026**

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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

HMP Lancaster Farms is a category C resettlement prison (for those who cannot be trusted in open conditions but are considered unlikely to try to escape) in Lancashire, with accommodation for up to 560<sup>1</sup> adult male prisoners during the reporting year.

The prison benefits from having a large, open central area, with grass and flowerbeds, large communal spaces on each wing and buildings that are generally in a fair state of repair. Most wing accommodation is in single cells; however, the number of double cells with bunk beds has increased in recent years. There are four cells specially adapted for prisoners with reduced mobility.

The prison was opened in 1993 as a youth offender institution but later converted to an adult male prison. While it has an attractive layout, some buildings are beginning to show signs of wear and tear. The prison has four main residential blocks, each divided into two wings. There is also a small unit (for 18 men) dedicated as a complex care unit, with a large proportion of neurodivergent prisoners. New arrivals to the prison are inducted as part of the Coniston 2 unit.

The care and separation unit (CSU) in the Ullswater block holds 12 prisoners. Accommodation is provided in single cells, two of which have closed-circuit television installed. In addition, there are two special cells (where items such as furniture and bedding are removed in the interests of safety).

During 2025-2026, significant construction activity has taken place at the prison. Much relates to the building of four new residential units, due to be opened in early 2027 and housing an extra 240 men. This has also led to necessary infrastructure work, including the relocation and construction of a new MUGA (multi-use games area) sports pitch, new workshops and planned changes to areas such as the kitchen and the CSU.

A few prison services are provided on a contracted-out basis. Healthcare services are run by Practice Plus Group, an independent provider of healthcare services in prisons across the country. Dental services are provided by Time for Teeth. Seetec delivers the commissioned rehabilitative service (CRS), while accommodation support with social inclusion is delivered by both Seetec and The Growth Company. Ingeus provides accommodation support for those returning to Greater Manchester. The prison maintenance contract is undertaken by Amey. Novus delivers education services under the offender learning and skills service contract.

The prison has some community engagement with local schools, football clubs and a growing relationship with some local employers.

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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**

As some aspects of the establishment have remained largely unchanged during the reporting period, parts of this report draw on the previous year's wording, with updates made to reflect the latest data and any significant changes.

#### **3.1 Background to the report**

3.1.1 During the reporting year, the prison has, again, run up to maximum capacity (often at 99%+ capacity). However, 2025-2026 has continued the trend identified in the previous two years; namely, the changing composition of the prisoner cohort. Originally, the prison catered for most prisoners coming from Lancashire and Cumbria, who were held at the prison for a number of years prior to release or progression to an open establishment. However, with continuing pressures on national prison population numbers, the majority of prisoners still come from Greater Manchester and Merseyside. Not only are many transferred to Lancaster Farms soon after sentencing, but they often have very short sentences to serve. With numbers entering/leaving the prison of over 100 prisoners in some months, this impacts on the provision of some services.

3.1.2 In 2025-2026, changes continue to have been made to the regime and to the provision of employment, training and association activities for prisoners. Some of these changes (especially to education/training) have concerned the IMB.

3.1.3 Whilst we continued to be informed that the prison is 'well staffed' by the Governor, we remain concerned by instances when there are multiple officers on 'detached duties' or emergency escorts are required to attend outside hospital, which reduces overall staffing provision for the rest of the prison.

#### **3.2 Main findings**

##### **Safety**

3.2.1 As in our previous report, the Board's monitoring of the prison continues to find that the Governor and prison staff work hard to offer, and succeed in providing, a largely safe environment for prisoners at HMP Lancaster Farms. We have observed effective management of risks at safety intervention meetings and successful collaboration among Governors, the safer custody team, custodial managers and the mental health and chaplaincy teams.

3.2.2 The Board notes the continuing high levels of self-harm among a small handful of prisoners. Many of these men have challenging and complex mental health needs, yet they continue to be accommodated at the establishment rather than being transferred to more specialist secure mental health facilities. This appears to be due to the challenges of the mental health system and is beyond the control of HMP Lancaster Farms, in the Board's view.

3.2.3 During the year, there have, again, been spikes in the levels of violence, prisoner debt and substance misuse. However, over the whole year, figures are not dissimilar to those of 2024-2025.

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

3.2.4 The Board continues to believe that prisoners at HMP Lancaster Farms are largely treated fairly and humanely, with considerable care taken by prison staff to treat prisoners with decency and respect. In-cell telephony has continued to work well at the prison by enabling prisoners to contact friends and family.

3.2.5 As in previous reports, and due to pressure on prison accommodation nationally, the Board notes that a minority of prisoners continue to be accommodated in cramped double cells. Not only are there privacy issues, but there have been instances of prisoner-on-prisoner violence in such cells.

3.2.6 Steps continue to be taken to refurbish some cells, showers and association areas. However, the Board has identified some outstanding issues, such as poor ventilation in cells and the absence of door screens, broken washing machines, and overflows and poor drainage in wet weather.

3.2.7 The Board continues to encounter evidence relating to the handling of complaints from prisoners. While the number of overdue complaints is still relatively low, some responses to complaints related to previous prisons have been very late, despite prompting by business hub staff. We remain concerned about prisoners sometimes not being kept up to date on the progress of their complaints.

3.2.8 As in our previous report, the treatment of prisoners' property remains an issue of concern for the Board, especially when prisoners transfer from other prisons.

### **Health and wellbeing**

3.2.9 Monitoring by the Board during the reporting year suggests that the prison, again, offers variable levels of primary healthcare to prisoners. The number of applications (prisoners' written representations) to the Board regarding healthcare has continued to be high (as in 2024-2025). However, from our observations, new management of healthcare mid-year to have improved issues of communication (both with prisoners and the Board).

3.2.10 The provision of mental healthcare within the prison continues to face many challenges. From the Board's observations, mental health staff continue to provide excellent care and support for prisoners but, given the high incidence of mental health issues amongst prisoners, we still believe there should be further investment in mental health support. Difficulties continue to remain in finding suitable alternative specialist accommodation at other prisons for those with serious mental health difficulties. The Board has been impressed by the support given to prisoners on the complex care unit (Grizedale). However, with room for 18 prisoners, it can only accommodate a minority of those who need extra support.

3.2.11 The Board acknowledges the range of initiatives that continue to be deployed to provide prisoners with access to physical fitness activities in exercise yards and the well-resourced gym. However, on a few occasions, we have noted that access has been limited. The Board remains impressed by the roll-out of the Project 180 workout programme, with its focus also on lifestyle and wellbeing.

### **Progression and resettlement**

3.2.12 Education/training providers continue to run a range of activities, and prisoners are largely positive about these activities. However, in autumn 2025, there was a 41% reduction in the hours devoted to these activities. Activity such as the Railtrack course was an example of programmes that were terminated at the prison. Whilst priority has been given to areas where there are skills shortages in the regional economy (e.g. construction industries), the Board is concerned that areas where men secured

employment previously have been truncated. Whilst we are informed that classrooms are being re-purposed, the Board observes many spaces unoccupied in our visits to the education centre. Meanwhile, we are supportive of work being undertaken to ensure that men take part in education and training.

3.2.13 As part of national initiatives, significant numbers of prisoners were either released earlier than anticipated at sentencing or transferred in greater numbers to category D (open) prisons during 2025-2026. We have been impressed by the hard work of the offender management unit (OMU) staff in managing the high volume of prisoners progressing from Lancaster Farms. However, due to the high turnover, some prisoners are unable to transfer or be released because of the nature of their offences; in such cases, staff appear to make every effort to explain why individuals fall outside the relevant criteria. We remain impressed by the support for social visits. With an increasing number of prisoners living at a distance from families, we are concerned by the time/cost of visits to Lancaster Farms. Social video calls between prisoners and families are available.

### **3.3 Main areas for development**

Some questions have been repeated from the previous report where the underlying issues remain unresolved, to highlight areas where further progress is still needed

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

3.3.1 What concrete actions and timelines are in place to ensure that prisoners with very complex needs receive appropriate and consistent provision across the prison estate?

3.3.2 What immediate steps will the Minister take to reinstate education and training funding to pre-October 2025 levels and ensure a wider offer for prisoners?

3.3.3 What specific action will the Minister take, and within what timeframe, to ensure that prison healthcare improvements are treated as a priority?

#### ***TO THE PRISON SERVICE***

3.3.4 What immediate steps will the Prison Service take to address deficiencies and establish more effective property transfer arrangements between prisons?

3.3.5 Can the Prison Service clarify the status of Lancaster Farms, including whether it is designated as a resettlement prison?

3.3.6 Following the issues raised in 3.3.5, what immediate steps will the Prison Service take to increase education and training funding at Lancaster Farms?

3.3.7 How are arrangements for the purchase of books and clothing by prisoners managed, and what safeguards are in place to ensure proper handling of Rule 39 legal mail?

#### ***TO THE GOVERNOR***

3.3.8 How will the Governor ensure timely and consistent communication with the Lancaster Farms IMB in key situations such as segregation reviews, serious incidents, and instances where Pava is used?

3.3.9 What steps will the Governor take - and by when - to ensure that the Board has effective working arrangements for it to be able to fulfil its duties, including appropriate equipment and clerk support?

3.3.10 How will the Governor ensure that prisoners are kept informed in a timely and consistent manner about the progress of their complaints, and what is the timeframe for implementing improvements?

3.3.11 What steps will the Governor take to ensure that all prison officers wear and switch on their body worn video cameras?

### 3.4 Progress since the previous report

Issue raised	Response given	Action taken
When will the Minister increase the number of specialist prison settings for prisoners with complex and/or enduring mental health conditions?	Whilst no immediate plans, a wider national review is underway.	Ongoing.
When will the Minister review the NHS contract with healthcare providers in order to ensure that there is a high quality of service and higher levels of satisfaction?	NHSE (National Health Service England) Regional Health and Justice Commissioners monitor performance and processes. Local Delivery board central mechanism for oversight.	Ongoing.
What steps will the Minister take to ensure adequate resources for the day-to-day running of prisons and maintenance of a prison now over 30 years old.	Larger-scale improvements subject to bids for capital investment. Smaller-scale improvements via local repairs and Creating Realistic Environments for Decency (CRED).	Ongoing.
How and when will the Prison Service ensure better tracking of prisoners' personal property transferring between prisons?	Live focus for HMPPS. Digitally recorded person escort record in place.	Still a major area of prisoner complaints.
When will the Prison Service increase overall prison staffing across England and Wales to ensure there are no gaps in prison staffing, which leads to regime changes where association time and purposeful activity are curtailed?	HMPPS states that the prison is operating above-target staffing levels. Very few regime curtailments in 2024-2025.	Improved in 2025-2026, but the Board will continue to monitor in 2026-2027.
When will the Prison Service review healthcare contracts to monitor the delivery of services	Commissioning and oversight of healthcare contracts in prisons is	Still some issues in 2025-2026, but the

<p>and ensure that prisoners transferring between prisons are not disadvantaged in their healthcare status?</p>	<p>the responsibility of NHS England and NHS Wales. They monitor service delivery, including arrangements to maintain continuity of care for prisoners transferring between establishments, with HMPPS working in partnership to support this.</p>	<p>Board will continue to monitor in 2026-2027.</p>
<p>When will the Prison Service work with service providers to ensure anomalies in provision of medication are addressed?</p>	<p>Added to site risk register and monitored closely. Provider open to sourcing from alternative suppliers.</p>	<p>Still some issues in 2025-2026, but the Board will continue to monitor in 2026-2027.</p>
<p>When will the Governor increase the amount of purposeful activity (so that 90% of men are in regular education/training/employment)?</p>	<p>PES [prison education service] cuts instigated in October 2025 led to education provision at HMP Lancaster Farms losing a significant proportion of financial resource and reductions to provision. This remaining provision has been tailored to meet the needs of prisoners, including basic education (e.g. English and maths) and those areas with a direct connection to further courses or employment on release. This is continually reviewed.</p> <p>One new feature is Enrichment Fridays, open to prisoners who are normally in education during the week. This offers a variety of activities, from guitar lessons, gym and board games to wellbeing and resettlement courses.</p>	<p>The Board remains very concerned and will continue to monitor in 2026-2027</p>

	<p>Also, some setbacks with external companies working within the prison: either not financially viable or adhering to the ethos of working within the prison environment. Under review, and some companies wish to take over workshop areas (e.g. new recycling workshop), with financial promise to the prison. These are ongoing.</p> <p>The aim is to increase FTE [full-time equivalent] to as close to 500 by April 2026. We strive to offer full-time work places for all prisoners and will continue to do so in this ever-challenging environment.</p>	
<p>When will the Governor increase the effective use of key working at the prison, with demonstrable targets and outcomes?</p>	<p>Key work is consistently above target in terms of delivery. Only one week (Christmas) last year when not met. Committed to work on progress, with quality of delivery. Performance metrics have shown recent improvements. Regular upskilling sessions on lockdown training days and the QA [quality assurance] process for CMs [custodial managers] will continue to improve this delivery. First key work audit (December 2025), with recommendations to further improve</p>	<p>The Board continues to monitor key work. During the reporting year, we received a number of applications (prisoners' written representations) that cited lack of contact with key workers.</p>

	outcomes. Key work is a priority for delivery for the prison.	
When will the Governor increase the use of existing facilities (e.g. classrooms, gym and Railtrack facilities)?	One room re-purposed as a safety suite and enrichment room.	Ongoing, as the prison population will increase by an extra 240 men by 2027.
How will the Governor improve contact with the Lancaster Farms IMB when relevant situations arise? These include segregation reviews, serious incidents and when Pava [an incapacitant spray] is drawn?	All operational Governors are continually reminded to notify the IMB when significant incidents occur. The distribution list for contact numbers and on-call status is being reviewed with a view to ensuring this is as widespread as it needs to be.	Identified, again, in this (2025-2026) annual report.
When will the Governor improve the communication with prisoners on progress with their complaints?	Complaints are monitored daily during the manager's meeting. They are now being answered timely. However, we do have a significant issue with complaints relating to issues at other prisons, particularly in relation to property. This is being chased regularly by the business hub, the head of business assurance and the Deputy Governor when these are overdue. Unfortunately, as these complaints do not relate to HMP Lancaster Farms, we cannot respond. Going forward, we will ensure that interim responses are sent to individuals in these cases.	Problems particularly exist for complaints related to previous prisons from which men have transferred.
What steps will the Governor take to ensure that all prison officers wear and switch on their	The control room announces reminders to staff once an alarm bell is sounded to	

<p>body worn video cameras (BWVC)?</p>	<p>activate BWVC. All use and non-use of the BWVC is monitored during the weekly use of force meeting. 'First offenders' have a reminder given to them; escalated for continual non-users. Regular discussions at weekly safety briefings and features in the C&amp;R [control and restraint] refresher training. Managers are systematically detailed to monitor compliance with collecting the BWVC from the gate area and SMT [senior management team] check on prison rounds.</p>	
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## **Evidence sections 4 – 7**

### **4. Safety**

#### **4.1 Reception and induction**

4.1.1 Reception takes place from vehicles entering the main gates into the central compound. An airport scanner is employed, and all possessions are carefully inspected for hidden contraband (e.g. phones, drugs, cannabis and tablets).

4.1.2 Unfortunately, we receive reports of a high level of property lost in transit when prisoners transfer from another prison, particularly HMP Forest Bank. Many reception prisoners arrive without clothing. Local prisons (e.g. Preston and Forest Bank) previously organised clothing for those transferring to Lancaster Farms with no possessions. However, since 2025, clothing for such prisoners is now offered from donated items.

4.1.3 As a means of reducing incidents of violence and debt for new prisoners, the sum of £15 is advanced to them on their first night if they are without cash, with a further £15 during their second week. This enables them to purchase canteen (a facility where prisoners can buy snacks, toiletries, stationery and other essentials using their allocated funds) and, therefore, avoid debt. Such prisoners repay the prison on a repayment basis.

4.1.4 Reception prisoners usually arrive with their medical records and are assessed by healthcare staff. Coniston 2 is the induction unit for new prisoners. If there are concerns or a prisoner is neurodivergent, they might be referred to the Grizedale (complex care) unit.

4.1.5 In May 2025, reception comprised 77% of prisoners with less than six months to serve and 95% with less than 12 months. The average length of stay is 126 days. The Board found that reception was under some pressure due to the increased churn of arrivals and discharges. As at January 2026, there were on average around 40 receptions and discharges each week.

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

4.2.1 The Board remains seriously concerned about the level of prisoner self-harm, with 418 recorded incidents involving 121 prisoners in 2025-2026. The predominant methods continue to be cutting and the ingestion of non-food or harmful items (such as cleaning products or small batteries). While the overall number of incidents remains high, it is notable that there were no deaths in custody during the reporting year at the establishment. The only death occurred post-release (under the 14-day Prisons and Probation Ombudsman protocol), and this has been subject to review by the Prison and Probation Ombudsman.

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

4.3.1 During the reporting period, 182 violent incidents were recorded, figures not dissimilar to previous years. Analysis of data indicates that the principal drivers continue to be debt, particularly relating to drugs and vapes, bullying, non-compliance with staff directives, acts of retaliation, and gang-related activity. Incidents were predominantly observed during association and unlock periods, with minimal occurrences post-lock-up. A total of 21 staff injuries were reported, primarily minor

muscular strains and bruising, reflecting the enduring operational and safety challenges faced by personnel, in the Board's view.

4.3.2 In response, the prison has implemented a comprehensive strategy to address these underlying factors. Measures include the relaunch of the debt strategy, the introduction of single-vape sales, adjustments to canteen repayment arrangements to prevent recurring debt, and the restriction of canteen removal as a disciplinary sanction to exceptional circumstances. Violence-reduction initiatives for both staff and prisoners have also been introduced, supported by enhanced intelligence-led briefings to enable earlier identification of risks and more timely intervention.

4.3.3 A total of 42 referrals were submitted to the police for offences, including assault on staff and prisoners, drug supply, possession of mobile phones, breach of court orders, arson, racially aggravated behaviour, and threats to kill. Thirteen referrals were not progressed.

4.3.4 All serious incidents are subject to rigorous investigation within the prison, and improvements have been made to ensure that risk information for transferring prisoners is consistently and effectively communicated between establishments.

4.3.5 Instances of self-isolation remain infrequent and are generally linked to debt or safety considerations. Cases are managed in accordance with CSIP (challenge, support and intervention plan) procedures (used to support and manage prisoners who pose an increased risk of violence), with regular multidisciplinary reviews to ensure that decisions are proportionate, time-limited and aligned with best practice.

#### **4.4 Use of force**

4.4.1 During the reporting period, 362 use of force incidents were recorded, comprising 322 unplanned and 40 planned interventions, confirming that the application of force remains predominantly reactive. This represents a reduction from last year's figure of 489 incidents - a 26% decrease - continuing a downward trend. Incident frequency varied throughout the year, with notable peaks in May and November. Thursdays consistently represented the highest-risk period, possibly reflecting canteen-related issues and the pressures associated with debt management.

4.4.2 Body-worn video camera (BWVC) coverage was available for 67.7% of incidents and is subject to weekly scrutiny through a formal review process, with non-compliance addressed decisively. The Board has raised significant concerns regarding incomplete coverage, given that these recordings provide impartial and verifiable evidence essential for operational accountability and the mitigation of potential legal risk. Notably, five serious incidents later in the reporting period required activation of the command suite (the prison's operational control centre, where incidents are monitored and managed in real time), all of which were resolved without escalation to national tactical intervention (a specialist, centrally coordinated response to serious incidents). This underscores the critical role of timely and accurate BWVC evidence in ensuring both staff safety and effective operational governance.

4.4.3 Violence and the application of force within the establishment continue to be closely associated with debt and the illicit prison economy, which, according to reports from the senior management team, remain significant drivers of instability. Governance and oversight arrangements are well embedded and functioning effectively, with strengthened intelligence-sharing, robust scrutiny of use-of-force incidents, and full implementation of PPO recommendations. Preventative strategies, particularly those

targeting debt reduction and violence incentives, are established and demonstrate a proactive and structured approach to risk management.

4.4.5 At the same time, the increasing complexity of the population, including rising levels of neurodivergence and mental health need, continues to place pressure on operational stability, in the Board's view. Sustained focus on early intervention, coordinated partnership working, and responsive risk management remain essential to maintaining safety and ensuring ongoing progress.

## **4.5 Preventing illicit items**

4.5.1 The introduction of illicit items, particularly drugs, remains a significant and evolving risk at HMP Lancaster Farms. Drones are one method of concern, facilitated by the prison's open landscape and proximity to the M6 and surrounding high ground. Recent incidents include a drone crash within the perimeter and a landing within one metre of a residential wing. Drones also present the potential to deliver other illicit items, including weapons, significantly increasing the risk to staff and prisoners.

4.5.2 Delivery methods have evolved. But illicit substances also enter via visits and allegedly through staff.

4.5.3 Spice, a synthetic cannabinoid that mimic the effects of cannabis, remains the most harmful substance, linked to violence, medical emergencies, and instability. Heroin and cannabis are also present.

4.5.4 Intelligence is constantly evolving to identify potential individuals and networks associated with drones and other supply methods across multiple prison estates, informing proactive security measures and risk assessments.

4.5.5 The prison has recently implemented restrictions on unescorted movement, and enhanced night patrols. While appropriate, these measures do not, in the Board's view, fully mitigate risks arising from the prison's geography, evolving supply methods and multiple ingress routes. Higher drug use has been noted in prison data during lockdowns, emphasising the importance of meaningful activity, education, and engagement.

4.5.6 The national introduction of non-tamper-proof vapes (in October 2025), while improving fire safety, presents a potential risk for adaptation to illicit drug use and should remain under review in our view.

## **5. Fair and humane treatment**

### **5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food**

5.1.1 HMP Lancaster Farms houses approximately 560 men in eight residential units (two wings on each of Coniston, Derwent, Windermere and Buttermere), a small unit for men with neurodiverse needs (Grizedale) and a segregation unit (Ullswater). Last year, we reported that the prison had started a refurbishment programme of cells and living areas, starting with Windermere 2. This was completed during this reporting year and now Derwent 1 is close to being completed. The next unit to be refurbished will be Coniston 2 (the induction unit).

5.1.2 Most of the prison population occupies single cells, although there is a proportion of men sharing double cells. There are 73 double cells. Although this is unavoidable with current population pressures, it is unfortunate, as the cells do not offer a satisfactory amount of living space for two men. It can also cause problems with privacy. Whilst some men are happy to share, it can also create tension with some men who don't have the privacy they would prefer. As the prison must risk-assess who can share a cell, it is often men in lower-risk categories and with good behaviour who are forced to share, which they understandably feel is unfair. We have also been made aware of a few instances of violence involving men with mental health issues, which may not have happened if they had not been sharing a cell. The residential units each have a communal central area and a food servery. Some units have access to extra cooking facilities, such as microwaves and toasters, but this is limited due to fire safety regulations. The men can congregate socially outside their cells, and eat meals together, if they wish, which most men choose to do. Men on each wing have access to a small amount of gym equipment, which is used widely, alongside the other recreational equipment (such as pool tables, etc).

5.1.3 Half of Coniston 2 is the designated first night centre. Some work has been done to bring the standard of the accommodation into line with other residential units, such as providing some exercise equipment on the wing, which is welcome. From our observations, staff are also doing a much better job of completing cell inventory checks when men are moved onto other wings, ensuring that new arrivals have the necessary items in their cells – something that was not consistently the case for much of the previous reporting year. We welcome the decision to refurbish Coniston 2 next, as it is more worn than some other wings in the establishment.

5.1.4 Most men choose to wear their own clothing when they arrive at Lancaster Farms. However, we continue to receive applications (prisoners' written representations to the Board) and speak to men whose property does not arrive with them. In some cases, it takes a long time to arrive, or it is lost altogether. In such instances, previous establishments can be very slow to reply to complaints. Where compensation is offered, we are often told by the men that it does not reflect the true value of the items. The prison does not allow extra clothing to be sent/brought in from home for security reasons. Whilst we understand the reasons for this, it can leave some men financially stretched, as they must replace essential items from limited prison earnings.

The prison recognises this and has introduced initiatives to address these problems. The prison shop, Wainwrights, has opened, aiming to offer items that men cannot buy in their usual canteen orders, or goods at much better value. This includes clothing, although there have been some issues with stock levels. It is hoped that this initiative will continue to develop, offering a wider selection of items.

5.1.5 Meals are collected from serveries on the residential units. There have been some changes to the menus over the past year and some of this is still in development. Feedback we receive from the men is mixed, with some being complimentary and others complaining that food is not cooked properly, the portions are too small, or that their dietary requirements are not adhered to. Kitchen staff take feedback on board, and, in our opinion, they are doing their best to provide food of a reasonable standard on a very limited budget. There has also been an innovative approach to breakfasts, with men now being provided with a full-sized box of cereal for the week, which gives them substantially more than they did when they were given daily breakfast packs. They are also served hot breakfasts at the weekends.

## **5.2 Segregation, special accommodation**

5.2.1 The Ullswater wing contains the care and separation unit (CSU), where men are segregated from other residential units. The unit has 12 single cells and is in the process of having three additional cells created in preparation for the expansion of the prison. Board members visit the unit on a weekly basis and usually report that the CSU appears calm and that staff appear to be able to de-escalate most issues efficiently and professionally. Adjoining the unit are four outside penned areas for exercise. The unit also has two special accommodation cells (where items such as furniture, bedding and sanitation are removed in the interests of safety). These have been used on three occasions during the reporting year (for up to four hours each time).

5.2.2 Members of the Board monitor segregation reviews (to decide if a prisoner should remain in segregation) and adjudications (disciplinary hearings when a prisoner is suspected of breaking the rules). In total, 2601 adjudications took place within the reporting year. Overall, our monitoring of reviews and adjudications found that they were well run in terms of adjudicating standards, fact-finding, mitigation and understanding of the drivers of poor behaviour and additional support needs.

5.2.3 On some occasions, disciplinary hearings are heard by an independent adjudicator (IA: a district judge or deputy). This takes place when a prisoner is alleged to have committed a serious breach of prison rules. Disciplinary hearings heard by an IA continue to be held remotely, using a laptop computer. During the reporting year, 37 cases were referred to the IA.

5.2.4 During the year, 281 prisoners spent at least one night located in the CSU. One prisoner spent 41 days on the unit prior to release from custody. Most prisoners return to the main residential units after a short period on the CSU. A small number have been re-located to the Grizedale (complex care unit).

5.2.5 There is in-cell provision for prisoners who are segregated. Distraction packs, consisting of colouring books, pens, books, etc, are part of the provision. A plug-in phone can be provided to enable contact with family and friends. Prisoners are offered time out of their cells to shower and exercise.

5.2.6 The CSU is visited daily by the Duty Governor, the chaplain and a healthcare worker, and each prisoner's contact log will be updated following the visit. Similarly, Board members update the contact log when a prisoner is visited.

5.2.7 Occasionally, a prisoner will commence a dirty protest, where they have chosen to defecate or urinate in a cell without using the facilities provided. In the past year, these have been limited in number, and in duration to less than 24 hours.

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

5.3.1 The prison has a stable complement of staff, with a good retention rate when benchmarked against other establishments. Changes to work patterns were introduced during the reporting year, including the opportunity to work extended four day shifts. Anecdotally, staff welcomed this change as a positive development, with an emphasis placed on improving the work-life balance.

5.3.2 Two staff resigned due to other employment opportunities, one staff member retired and two were promoted at other establishments. There is an issue with delays to the staff vetting procedure, with one recruit waiting eight months to clear the process. Vetting is conducted externally and the prison has no control over it.

5.3.3 Board members consistently observe and report positive staff and prisoner interactions, specifically in two areas of the prison, the CSU (Ullswater) and the CCU (complex care unit) on Grizedale, where prisoners are most vulnerable. De-escalation techniques have also been observed successfully in practice on a number of the residential units. The use of force trainers has also conducted a rolling programme of refresher training during the year for operational staff, with a briefing provided for Board members.

5.3.4 The prison conducted a key worker snapshot survey with prisoners in June 2025, with the following results:

- 95% know who their key worker is and could name them.
- 70.5% say they had received a key work session within the previous two week.
- 82.3% felt their key worker was approachable and supportive of them.
- 71.5% feel their key worker understands their sentence plan requirements.
- 74.5% believe that key work sessions are worthwhile.

Regular updates on key worker interactions, e.g. the number of sessions, are circulated through the daily briefings. Quality-assurance checks are carried out by a custodial manager, with most men receiving a key worker session every two weeks.

Prisoners located on the CCU receive more therapeutically focused key worker sessions at levels above the standard requirements. The staff team based on the unit appear to have a detailed understanding of the needs of prisoners in their care.

5.3.5 Despite the results of the prison snapshot survey, the Board has recorded instances where residents did not know the name of their key worker. Having the key worker based on the same residential unit as the prisoner they are supporting is seen as the ideal. Frequent short-term prison transfers, due to population pressures in the prison system, contribute to the 'churn' of men through the establishment, which limits opportunities to engage purposefully.

### **5.4 Equality and diversity**

5.4.1 A total 59 discrimination incident reporting forms (DIRFs) were received in 2025. Of those, eight were withdrawn by the complainant during the investigation and they said they wanted to retract the complaint. A total of 15% related to disability, 7% to sexual orientation, 31% to ethnicity and 47% to religion or belief. There were no complaints related to age or gender. There is a quality assurance process in place. We are informed that 100% are quality assured by the Deputy Governor. There was also a recent meeting with the Manchester Survivors charity, which is due to start external

scrutiny in March 2026. Redacted DIRFs and any recommendations from the quality assurance processes are recorded and shared at various forums.

5.4.2 Last year, we reported that some black and minority ethnic prisoners complained of being treated less favourably in relation to work allocation. This concern has persisted during this reporting year and remains an area regularly reviewed by the equality and diversity manager. The equality report for December 2025 noted that 94% of wing and kitchen workers were white, compared with 86.5% of the overall population. This is an area the Board will monitor more closely in 2026.

5.4.3 The establishment has five prisoner equality representatives, with a further two waiting for checks from security and for the offender management unit (OMU) to assess their suitability. This is slightly lower than reported last year, although the high turnover of prisoners presents ongoing challenges.

5.4.4 In January 2026, 11 residents have a personal emergency evacuation plan (PEEP) in place. This provides assistance for those who cannot get themselves out of the prison unaided in an emergency. The Board has reviewed them, and all follow a standard format. Plans are in place on each wing and the equality and diversity manager also updates them on the shared drive for staff to access.

5.4.5 Quarterly prisoner forums take place during the year, linked to most of the protected characteristics (age, disability, race, religion, Travellers and veterans). The prison is in the initial stages of offering additional support for care leavers: a coffee morning is taking place in February and the prison has approached some groups and charities for additional support. There is no forum for LGBTQ+ men, with only two men registered on DPS (digital prison services, an electronic system used to record prisoner information) identifying as gay or bisexual. However, the prison recognises that this is unlikely to be a true reflection, as some men may feel reluctant to be open about their sexuality in a prison environment. The equality and diversity manager continues to offer one-to-one support to these individuals. The prison has also taken steps to raise the profile of the LGBTQ+ community, including holding a Pride event in June, with plans to repeat this in 2026.

5.4.6 The neurodiversity support manager (NSM) continues to support men with neurodivergent needs across the prison. However, with an estimated 65% of prisoners having some kind of neurodivergent need, the demands for their time are significant. Consequently, she may have to prioritise those men with the most significant needs. The prison has also decided to train 'neurodivergent champions' on each wing to support men where required. There is also regular staff training to support those working with men with conditions such as autism.

5.4.7 From the Board's observations, the Grizedale unit continues to provide valuable support to men who are neurodivergent. While further work is needed to ensure that activities on the unit are sufficiently purposeful, it is evident from our observations that the men appreciate the smaller, less intimidating environment. The staff on the unit work very well with the men, getting to know them more than would be possible on much larger wings. This enables them to offer more support and advice than would otherwise be possible. There is a sensory room and a small games room/kitchen. The staff are creative in finding activities for the men: for example, at weekends, men can gather in the games room for the Grizedale quiz.

## **5.5 Faith and pastoral support**

5.5.1 The chaplaincy team consists of a managing chaplain and three others from different denominations, including Muslim, Church of England, Free Church and Roman Catholic faith groups. This is supplemented by sessional chaplains from the Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Jehovah's Witness and Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints faith groups. A Roman Catholic priest visits once a week for Mass and to hear confessions. Rastafarian and Pagan followers do not have a dedicated faith-based chaplain. The chaplaincy team makes space available for contemplation and meditation for other believers and those without any faith-based belief. The managing chaplain left during the reporting year and the Imam is both acting manager and the Muslim chaplain on an interim basis.

5.5.2 A snapshot count of those prisoners declaring a religious belief or affiliation include Anglican (98), Christian, other groups (30), Roman Catholic (142), Muslim (57), Jewish (3), Pagan/Druid (2), Rastafari (1), Buddhist (4) and No faith or belief (205)

5.5.3 The chaplaincy team appears to provide a vital role in the life of prisoners and staff at Lancaster Farms, in addition to liaising with family members who raise concerns about the welfare of prisoners. This is a busy service, undertaking daily visits to each residential unit, pastoral support from men held in the CSU, attending ACCT (assessment, care in custody and teamwork) reviews, complex case reviews and GOOD (good order or discipline) reviews. Additionally, the chaplaincy sees every prisoner at reception (sometimes over 100 per month) and those approaching discharge. The chaplaincy team make referrals to outside faith groups to support men returning to the community on release if requested.

5.5.4 Communal services take place most days of the week, led by the chaplain for the relevant faith group. Some groups meet across the week, including Bible Study, Time Out, Muslim Study, Alpha Course, mindfulness, RC Faith Inside, Freedom in Christ Course, RC Rosary. The Living with Loss course plays a significant role in supporting those that have experienced the bereavement of family and friends whilst in custody.

5.5.5 Liaison with community groups outside the prison takes place to recruit volunteers to support the work of the chaplaincy team and create links with specific faith groups. Chaplaincy co-ordinates the official prison visitors scheme and befriending organisations such as New Bridge (which supports prisoners through letter writing and visiting when a prisoner transfers). The Prison Fellowship, accessible through the chaplaincy team, also provides letter support, both in prison and on release. Additionally, groups are invited into the prison, e.g. annual choir services.

5.5.6 Chaplaincy has specific responsibilities for family contact and engagement and liaises with the PoPS (Partners of Prisoners) charity and contributes to the wider Family and Significant Others Strategy. This strategy seeks to maintain positive family relationships in order to support reduced reoffending on release. Chaplaincy staff can facilitate complex family visits in the chapel lounge as need arises.

5.5.7 The death of a family member whilst a prisoner is in custody can be a time of heightened anxiety, stress, trauma and loss. Chaplaincy should be contacted and they provide pastoral support, a service or lighting a candle in the chapel and time for reflection. Where a death in custody occurs, a chaplain visits the relevant residential unit and speaks to other prisoners and staff on the unit to offer pastoral support. The chaplain also liaises with family members and can help make funeral arrangements.

5.5.8 A calendar of religious festivals is observed and supported by the chaplaincy team. The chaplaincy also coordinates with other prison services to mark specific events throughout the year. For example, during the month of Ramadan, arrangements are made with the kitchen to provide hot meals prepared earlier in the day and kept in Thermos containers, to be eaten after the daily fast ends when prisoners are locked in their cells for the night.

5.5.9 Chaplaincy also attends faith forums, organised by the diversity and inclusion manager as part of the prison-wide equality action team, and plays an active role in supporting diversity and equality initiatives.

## **5.6 Incentives scheme**

5.6.1 There are three levels of privileges in the prison: basic (lowest), standard (middle) and enhanced (top). In January 2026, 7% of prisoners were on basic, 53% on standard and 40% on enhanced. As might be expected, the basic regime is highly restrictive, with minimal time out of cell. Men on the basic level are also not allowed a TV in their cell, and it is clear that they find this regime challenging. Some of the benefits available to those on the standard or enhanced levels are include:

- An increased number of social visits.
- More time on association out of cell (evenings and weekends).
- More gym time.
- Catalogue purchasing.
- Authorisation to spend more from their private funds.
- Extra PIN credits for making phone calls.

## **5.7 Complaints**

5.7.1 Complaints (using form Comp 1, for ordinary complaints) and appeals (using Comp1A forms) are administered by a dedicated complaints clerk. Each month, the prison received an average of 100 complaints from prisoners. This is slightly lower than monthly averages over the past three years: (150,139 and 120 from 2022-23 to 2024-2025). The proportion of overdue complaints has remained below 10% each month. Many complaints relate to prisons from which prisoners have been transferred; in any given month, around half outstanding complaints concern other prisons. The impact on prisoners, in terms of frustration and uncertainty, is clear from our monitoring work. In such cases, more regular updates and acknowledgments of any delays could be issued to prisoners, in the Board's view. Where property has been lost, prisoners are only able to pursue compensation once responses have been received.

5.7.2 We also note that some applications from prisoners to the Board refer to complaints they have submitted and express dissatisfaction with the responses received. The Board welcomes the fact that a Governor reviews 10% of complaints and their responses each month; however, no evidence was found that any responses were returned to officers for further action.

5.7.3 The prison, including the Board, receives a small number of confidential complaints each year (e.g. the Board received two in 2025-26). Such complaints are often related to sensitive personal information about a prisoner and/or member of staff and require the engagement with a Governor: however, rarely does the Board receive

any feedback from the prison to these sensitive issues.

## **5.7 Property**

5.8.1 Property applications accounted for 15% of all applications submitted to the Board. While this represents a lower proportion than in the previous report, the total number of property applications increased in absolute terms, alongside a rise in overall applications. Recurring themes include the loss of personal property, delays in receiving property following transfer, and a perceived lack of care in efforts to locate missing items. Property-related issues continue to place considerable demands on staff time and resources, both in investigating claims and in providing compensation where appropriate.

5.8.2 The handling and management of prisoner property during transfers between prisons is a national problem that seems to remain unresolved. The loss of personal possessions, especially photos and documents that may be irreplaceable, can cause significant anxiety and distress to prisoners, as well as a financial cost to the Prison Service through compensation claims. Once a prisoner has been transferred, lost property can be incredibly hard to locate and reunite with its owner. It should be emphasised that this is not a criticism of this institution specifically, but of the overall prison service. Property remains a recurring concern and requires systemic solution.

5.8.3 Property problems are exacerbated by varying interpretations of what, and how much property a prisoner is allowed to have in their possession. Consequently, when a prisoner is transferred, there can be insufficient space in the excess baggage area. Such issues increase resentment of prison life and continue to place extra pressure on staff.

5.8.4 We received complaints from some men that they were not allowed some books that had been sent in by friends and family over the Christmas period. When we raised this with the Governor, they acknowledged that this was not in line with national policies, but necessary for the security of the prison to control the influx of illicit substances into the establishment. This is even though it states on the prison website that 'family and Friends of prisoners are permitted to send books directly to their loved ones, or can order books from approved retailers'. The Governor did offer to buy any books requested by prisoners for the prison library, but the Board is not convinced that this will work in practice, and it does not alter our position that the prison should be adhering to the national policy.

5.8.5 We also received separate complaints about the handling of Rule 39 mail at Lancaster Farms, where men are expected to open the mail in front of prison staff. Prisoners are not allowed to keep the mail, and if they would like a copy, they can either give written consent for the staff to take the mail to be photocopied or they can be escorted to reception for the mail to be copied in front of them. The original mail is then placed in an evidence bag and put into their stored property.

5.8.6 In relation to both 5.8.5 and 5.8.6, the issues are ongoing in April-May 2026, and we have raised this with IMB policy staff who in turn have communicated with staff in policy teams in the Ministry of Justice, who have confirmed that the procedures do not fall in line with national policy. Whilst we do appreciate the motivation of the Governor to control the influx of drugs into the prison, it is likely that we will have to escalate this further unless there are changes to these procedures.

## **6. Health and wellbeing**

### **6.1 Healthcare: general**

6.1.1 Practice Plus Group has run and managed all physical and mental healthcare services at the prison since April 2024. Dentistry services are managed by Time for Teeth. In our 2024 report, we raised some serious concerns about the standard of healthcare offered to men at Lancaster Farms. Healthcare applications had doubled as a proportion of our overall applications, from 15% in 2023 to 30% in 2024. This has improved slightly this year, with applications related to healthcare now at 26%.

6.1.2 A new head of healthcare has been in post since autumn 2025. Together with a new mental health manager, this has enabled staff to adopt a more proactive approach, working more closely with prison staff and spending increased time talking to prisoners. Although the Board still receives many applications about healthcare, a comparison across the reporting year shows a notable improvement: in the first half, 32.5% of applications to the IMB related to healthcare, compared with 20% in the second half. The Board will continue to monitor this in 2026, but early signs are positive.

6.1.3 Last year, we noted some of the problems related to the supply of medication, which resulted in some men going without their prescribed medication for unacceptable amounts of time. This does seem to have improved in recent months. Practice Plus Group is trying to store more medications locally and the patient engagement lead works with patients to remind them to order their medication in good time before they run out.

6.1.4 Waiting times in January 2026 include six weeks for a GP appointment, eight weeks to see a psychiatrist, six weeks for a podiatry appointment, seven weeks for an optician, and 18 weeks for a physiotherapist. Although urgent cases can be seen sooner, men in prison are likely to have greater needs, and in the Board's view, this requires significant improvement.

6.1.5 Healthcare staff have highlighted the issue of missed appointments, which exacerbates the problem of waiting times further. One reason appears to be poor communication. Some effort has been made to improve this, including issuing appointment/movement slips, which should remind men to attend their appointment.

6.1.6 The new head of healthcare has made it clear that their goal is for healthcare staff to be more visible on the wings. There are also now some 'healthcare buddies' (typically prisoners trained to provide basic peer support to other prisoners around health and wellbeing issues) on the wings to offer further support to patients.

6.1.7 The healthcare team has introduced a 'new arrival meeting'. This enables the team to come together and review all the patients who have arrived at the prison. This can help ensure that they identify any issues and take any appropriate actions earlier.

6.1.8 The head of healthcare has also focused on strengthening relationships with prison staff by hosting wellbeing events for healthcare staff and including wider prison staff to promote a more positive and collaborative working environment.

### **6.2 Physical healthcare**

6.2.1 The prison does not have 24-hour healthcare provision and is reliant on other establishments to accept prisoners requiring more intensive healthcare. A number of prisoners are taken to the Royal Lancaster Infirmary for appointments. On occasion,

especially for in-patient care, this disrupts the prison regime, as two officers always need to be on duty at the hospital with each prisoner.

### **6.3 Mental healthcare**

6.3.1 Many prisoners experience mental health issues while in custody. Such conditions may be overlooked, and support is not always readily accessible. At Lancaster Farms, periods of increased violence and self-harm, notably in March and April 2025, were often linked to debt and drug use. Another contributing factor appears to be the arrival of younger men serving shorter sentences, some of whom may have led chaotic lifestyles and struggle to adjust to the prison regime. By contrast, older prisoners and those serving longer sentences often appear more resilient and better able to adapt. In addition, concerns about housing and employment on release can increase anxiety levels. The loss of property during transfers—particularly items of personal or sentimental value—can also cause significant distress and contribute to self-harm. However, the prison has begun work to address some of these issues, including initiatives to reduce prisoner debt. New measures introduced in spring 2025, such as additional evening exercise for wings remaining violence-free, aim to reduce violence. Mental health services at Lancaster Farms include primary mental healthcare, psychological therapies, counselling, and trauma support.

6.3.2 During the year, the Board was alerted to a bid to commence a therapeutic community (TC) plus initiative for the Grizedale unit. The outcome will be known in March 2026. In the Board's view, prisoners with significant neurodivergent needs would benefit from extra funding for a senior psychologist and other specialist staff.

### **6.4 Social care**

6.4.1 Social care is provided by Lancashire County Council, in conjunction with the prison, following an initial assessment by a social worker or an occupational therapist, although prisoners can self-refer (via the healthcare unit). Much of the personal assistance is provided by the healthcare unit - or by buddies, who seem to be the preferred option of prisoners. The Re-coop charity is commissioned by the prison to train and supervise peer supporters or buddies. When a more consistent level of care is required out of hours, the prisoner is transferred to another prison with more suitable facilities.

6.4.2 Wheelchairs, walking aids and other specialist equipment required by prisoners who are ill or disabled are provided by the healthcare unit if they arrive without them or if such items are lost during transfer from another prison.

6.4.3 An improved-access cell is available at ground floor level on some residential wings. A personal emergency evacuation plan (PEEP) is prepared and made available for every sick or disabled prisoner for use in an emergency.

### **6.5 Exercise, regime**

6.5.1 Lancaster Farms allows men on the standard and enhanced regimes an acceptable amount of time out of cell. Evening association time is now well established, and there is also substantial association time on offer at weekends.

6.5.2 For men on a basic regime, time out of cell is minimal, albeit within the national guidelines. Whilst we do understand the desire to motivate men to progress from the basic regime, the restrictions placed on them when on this lowest level can be

damaging, as they may already be amongst the most vulnerable of the prison population.

6.5.3 Prisoners have access to outdoor exercise yards. During the week, they are allowed outside in the yard for 45 minutes each morning. Unfortunately, this also clashes with 'domestics' time, so they may need to choose between having a shower before work or getting some fresh air. We have also had some reports from men that the staff do not always open the yards for exercise on time. On weekdays, the core day includes an additional 15 minutes' movement, such as for activities, visits, healthcare or chapel, as part of the men's outdoor exercise entitlement, bringing the total up to the minimum of one hour per day in the open air. However, the Board is not convinced that this is sufficient, since movement to such activities will vary across the prison population. For example, unemployed prisoners or men who are sick, retired or who work on the wing, may not necessarily have the same opportunities to access fresh air. In the summer months, there is an additional 30 minutes of outdoor exercise in the evening, but this is conditional on the whole wing being free of violent incidents that day, so it is not guaranteed. Whilst the extra time outside is welcome, some men have expressed disquiet that they are being punished for the actions of others when they have done nothing wrong themselves.

6.5.4 There is a well-resourced gym that men can access regularly, with frequency of use dependent on their level within the incentives scheme. Additional exercise equipment is available in the communal areas on each wing, as well as in the outdoor exercise yards.

6.5.5 The MUGA (multi-use games area) is under construction. The building work means that the 'Clougha Pike' Park Run has been temporarily suspended, although it is hoped it will start again when the building work is complete. The MUGA pitch will increase capacity in the sports provision.

6.5.6. The Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme is beneficial for many younger prisoners but has been suspended. We understand that there are plans for it to restart in 2026-2027.

## **6.6 Drug and alcohol rehabilitation**

6.6.1 The continued use of illicit drugs and alcohol in the prisons was highlighted in the (National) IMB Annual Report (June 2025) as 'the most common safety concerns. 'Drug use was endemic across the prison estate and the health concerns, debt and violence arising threatened the stability of many prisons.' (p7).

6.6.2 Nationally, an increase in illicit drugs equates with high levels of violence, often prisoner on prisoner. A spike in violence in March and April 2025 at Lancaster Farms was likely due to an abundance of illicit drugs. Figures fluctuate around a 'drug drop', with violence increasing over debt issues. In May 2025, for example, prisoner-on-prisoner violence was driven by drug debts at a time soon after a package containing drugs had been thrown over the perimeter wall.

6.6.3 High levels of drugs and violence continue to be found on the units. We have welcomed the introduction of first-night canteen for new prisoners to counter them falling into debt.

6.6.4 Mandatory drug tests (MDTs) are taken on a random basis at Lancaster Farms, with some 28 men, or 5% of the population, per month being chosen. The results are tested for illegal substances. Results take up to three weeks to arrive from the lab.

6.6.5 Concerned about high MDT positive results, the healthcare lead and Governor have been reviewing changes to rehabilitation provision. A 'drugs summit' was held in December 2025 to assess what is working well and where improvements are needed. This was well attended, with contributions from prison departments and regional representatives. The drug strategy lead is now working with the substance misuse service lead to support delivery of an action plan and a drug strategy. This marks a shift towards a more proactive, rather than reactive, approach across staff.

## **6.7 Soft skills**

6.7.1 The regime continues to support prisoners with their academic pursuits, especially through the Shannon Trust charity. The Board recognises the efforts that are made to increase literacy, numeracy, and soft skills such as teamwork and leadership.

6.7.2 The Board was pleased to have met with a member of the team administering the Building Choices Programme. This course has been introduced at Lancaster Farms within the last reporting year and looks to change offending behaviour. It has five modules: Getting Started, Emotional Management, Manage Problems, People Around Me and Relationships, and Future Me. It aims to build skills men can use on release and is focused on societal interactions and the soft skills of control and communication.

6.7.3 The Building Choices Programme offered at Lancaster Farm covers 'moderate' rated offenders. It is run by two staff members and can be offered to 32 men per year. The course is popular, and the Board hopes it continues to be so. However, we would like to see the programme expanded, potentially to the 'high risk' individuals. Similarly, increased staffing could be a worthwhile investment, allowing more men to engage with the programme. It is a testament to both the programme and the prison that our chief concern is its capacity, recognising the potential it holds for positive impact.

6.7.4 At Lancaster Farms, a new 'four-day week' was introduced in October 2025 as part of a national project. Prisoners continue to be paid on Fridays, while also benefiting from time set aside for purposeful and enjoyable activities. Enrichment opportunities on Fridays enable men to undertake different activities including sports, games, gym sessions, a chess club, crafts, films, and training in yoga and guitar. Staff have supported the initiative by trialling a range of activities, alongside input from the new enrichment officer. A national team reviewed the project in December and, in addition to reporting a positive experience, made suggestions to help further develop the initiative.

## **7. Progression and resettlement**

### **7.1 Education, library**

7.1 1 This was a challenging year for HMP Lancaster Farms. The cuts to the education budget have affected courses and staffing. Some courses have been cut and the number of staff delivering them has also been reduced. There has been a 41% cut of hours over the contract for PES (Prison Education Service) compared to the PEF (Prison Education Framework) and difficult decisions had to be made to reduce costs. Six courses have been withdrawn, including the catering workshop, which had experienced staff and links to outside employment. We are concerned that the prison that the prison only currently has 452 full-time equivalent education and work spaces for a population of 560. Although great efforts have been made by prison staff to find new employers to provide work within the prison, this remains very challenging with limited education spaces and the requirement to work within contract constraints. Although there has been sadness at the alignment of courses and at losing colleagues who have been delivering the courses offered at Lancaster Farms, staff have been pragmatic and sought positive outcomes. High-need learners are getting what they need with, for example, English and Maths. Art continues to run and remains popular. Employability, electrical installation, plastering and decorating, IT and joinery courses, amongst others, have been delivered and remain popular. Attendance operates at about 80% across courses.

7.1 2 Throughout the year, the library has been short staffed and, for large parts of the year, it has only been open on certain days. However, a senior library officer has been appointed to start in February 2026, which will enable the library hours to revert to Monday to Friday. Successful ventures will also be reinstated (e.g. the popular Story Book Dads scheme). The library should be fully staffed by April 2026. Throughout the reporting year, the library has maintained itself as an innovative and well-used resource. Quick reads and audiobooks are still popular and supported by external bodies such as the Shannon Trust. After the uncertainty, it is good that normal business will resume.

7.1 3 Throughout the year, the celebration of the men's achievements has been particularly impressive. For example, when a man receiving reading support reached Shannon Trust Level 5, this was recognised and praised, helping to motivate others. The prison is also performing well above its targets: for instance, it comfortably exceeded the 50% pass target for Level 2 Maths and English, with SL 2 English achieving a 70% pass rate.

### **7.2 Vocational training, work**

7.2 1 Because of the loss of funding, various measures have been taken to ensure the men do not lose out on key courses. There has been a move away from a reliance on catering provision and an increase in the number of vocational learners accessing the passport to employment scheme, which aims to develop and formally measure employability skills. Many courses have continued to run: plastering, farms and gardens, waste and repair shop, as well as CSCS (construction skills certification scheme, which certifies that a worker has the training and safety knowledge required to work on a construction site) and cookery. Attendance has been generally good throughout the year, at 75-80%.

7.2 2 Some courses are no longer running. Previous reports commended Recycling Lives, which provided men not only with employment while in custody but also

opportunities on release; however, the organisation has since withdrawn from all prisons.

7.2.3 From the Board's observations, the commitment and dedication of course facilitators remain at a high level and there is a good deal of mutual respect between staff and the men.

### **7.3 Offender management, progression**

7.3.1 The population of Lancaster Farms has changed a lot over the past 2-3 years. Due to population pressures around the prison estate, men are arriving with very little time left to serve. Most of the population throughout 2025 had less than six months to serve, ultimately meaning that release planning becomes a priority, rather than any effective risk reduction work. The TPRS (temporary presumptive recategorisation scheme) has also seen many low-medium risk offenders transferred to open conditions far earlier than would usually be expected.

7.3.2 The offender management unit (OMU) has continued to work under considerable pressure again, in 2025, especially with the changes in early release schemes. Staff are professional and hardworking, but any successes they might have are constrained by the circumstances they are working under. Frequently, the OMU must dedicate a substantial amount of time to re-calculate sentences.

7.3.3 Due to the churn rate and unsustainable workload, men sometimes do not have satisfactory contact with their POM (prison offender manager). They often arrive at Lancaster Farms at a crucial point in their sentence, such as when they are eligible for HDC (home detention curfew). It could be questioned whether this could have been processed before their transfer to Lancaster Farms.

7.3.4 The Board believes it should be acknowledged that, under current circumstances, it is challenging for Lancaster Farms to fulfil its role effectively as a resettlement prison, given that much of its population reflects that of a local prison.

### **7.4 Family contact**

7.4.1 Lancaster Farms is committed to providing a rehabilitative environment for everyone who lives in the prison and to ensuring that family relationships are a priority. About 45% of men who enter prison lose contact with their families and 22% who were married get divorced or separated. Moreover, maintenance of family contact is very important in helping men find somewhere to live on release and reduces the likelihood of reoffending. For prisoners whose families have difficulty in visiting, due to distance from home, in-cell phones make contact easier, and extra call time is sometimes provided in place of social visits. Social video calls are also available.

7.4.2 Partners of Prisoners and Family Support (POPS), established nationally in 1988, is a charity that provides a visitors' centre offering food and refreshments for families attending the prison. Located just outside the establishment and close to a car park and bus stop, the centre is run by POPS and offers advice, guidance and practical support to families before visits. Family support workers are also present in the visits hall to engage with families and carry out casework with prisoners on the wings.

7.4.3 In the 'meet and greet' process, in preparation for a first visit, a family engagement worker is assigned to new visitors and detailed records are maintained on visitor diversity. Importantly, children are supported through this process at Lancaster Farms, helping them to understand that their fathers, brothers or uncles are in custody

for a period of time and will not be returning home on a daily basis. Family meeting areas, particularly the visitors' hall, are designed to be welcoming and accommodating, and visitors can purchase hot and cold food.

7.4.4 The children's play area at Lancaster Farms received funding in April 2025, and has been redecorated to resemble a farmyard and barn area, with new vinyl flooring, tables and chairs and model animals. This brightly coloured and attractive area has received many positive reviews from visitors and prisoners. The use of social media enables families to keep abreast of all that is happening at the prison. In January 2026, an annual calendar was produced of events being held at Lancaster Farms during the year. There are social visits during the week and at weekends, with monthly themed family days (often on Mondays), based primarily on children's activities (e.g. farm events, cake baking, etc) and at Christmas a carol service in the chapel, which families can attend.

7.4.5 There is a prisoner forum that meets in relation to family strategy and events, where family days and visits are discussed to troubleshoot and share ideas. There is also an event that runs monthly for men who don't get any visitors - Brewing with Hope.

## **7.5 Resettlement planning**

7.5.1 This has been a more challenging year in terms of resettlement planning. The changing population of the prison has meant that there are more men from the Manchester and Liverpool areas, which were not in the original catchment for the prison. Consequently, the resettlement team has traditionally had less contact in Greater Manchester and Merseyside, and it has been more challenging for them to help men plan for their release.

7.5.2 Resettlement planning is still an area in which HMP Lancaster Farms appears to take pride and develops many initiatives. The prison is keen to celebrate examples of success and good practice. This is to be commended, as successful resettlement is a major key to avoiding reoffending and playing a positive role in society. Prisoners are anxious on release if they have no settled accommodation or employment.

7.5.3 There are many successes in preparing men for resettlement (see 7.1/7.2). The work delivered through education and the library supports men to make progress during their sentence and to prepare for release. Recycling Lives was another valued initiative that supported resettlement; however, it was withdrawn in 2025-2026.

7.5.4 Outside the prison's control, the 'departure lounge', which previously coordinated services and advice for men on the day of release, is no longer in operation.

## 8. The work of the IMB

The Board has maintained a regular presence at the prison. During the past two years, Board membership has increased. This has enabled us to establish more thorough thematic monitoring. Overall, we note that the total number of applications received was 46% higher than that of the previous reporting year (and 2024-2025 had a 51% increase). During the year, the Board received much support from prison staff. We wish to thank staff for their support and help in addressing issues raised by Board members.

### Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	13
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	10
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	9
Total number of visits to the establishment	214
Total number of shifts on the 0800 telephone line	0
Total number of segregation reviews monitored	4

### Applications to the IMB (Some cover more than one area)

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	4	18
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives, sanctions	7	12
C	Equality	9	15
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	6	18
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	5	34
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	8	8
F	Food and kitchens	12	15
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	81	97
H1	Property within this establishment	31	36
H2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	11	17
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	7	8
I	Sentence management, including HDC (home detention curfew), ROTL (release on temporary licence), parole, release dates, recategorisation	28	45
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	25	29
K	Transfers	5	19
L	Miscellaneous, including complaints system	29	64
	<b>Total number of applications</b> <i>*The total number of applications refers to individual applications, although some applications cover more than one area.</i>	<b>272*</b>	<b>396*</b>



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