



Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Swinfen Hall

**For reporting year
1 May 2025 to 30 April 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 IMB is part of the United Kingdom's National Preventive Mechanism.

2. Description of the establishment

	30 April 2020	30 April 2021	30 April 2022	30 April 2023	30 April 2024	30 April 2025	30 April 2026
Total young adult population	556	570	583	614	618	616	611
Serving four years or more	98%	<90%	93%	>98%	<90%	<98%	>99%
Serving a life sentence	38	56	78	106	124	131	129

The prison is a category C training prison, with an operational capacity of 624 prisoners referred to as young adults; at this time of this report, the roll count was 611.¹ There are 10 residential units at HMP/YOI Swinfen Hall, including first night/induction centre, segregation unit and a psychologically informed planned environment unit.

- 89% of the population are young adults, aged 25 or under.
- 96% of the current population are assessed as high or very high risk of harm.
- 36% are convicted of sexual offences,
- All young adults live in a fully integrated population.
- 21% are currently serving a life sentence and an additional 39% are serving sentences of over 10 years.

The prison has a complex cohort of young adults with varying needs, and the efforts made by the Governor and senior leadership this year, have resulted in this complexity now being recognised and partially funded (see section 6.4).

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

3.1 Main findings

It is the Board's view that this report reflects the conditions of Swinfen Hall within the reporting period. Statistics, when quoted, are to be viewed in the context of an ever-changing prison, with the stability of the prison potentially influenced by the arrival or departure of one young adult.

There were several positive initiatives put in place by the Governor and senior leadership team during the reporting year.

In particular the Governor has given considerable time and effort with senior HMPPS leaders to secure recognition that Swinfen Hall provides to a cohort of highly challenging and complex young adults who carry a high or very high risk of harm, and so the prison is deserving of support and investment over and above its current status as a category C training prison.

Although the complexity of the prison has not been uplifted, it is noted that an increase in funding and resource contributions were confirmed at the time of the production of this report (May 2026).

This requires the appointment of at least 30 new officers to fill the 20 current Band 3 vacancies, and 10 newly created posts. The additional staff should, once in post (which is anticipated will take at least 12 months due to vetting delays) ease pressures on wing closures and start to address the failure in provision of key work (see section 5.3).

The final three months of the year saw slow progress and in some cases a reverse in the improvements made in several areas of operation.

There are still too many areas of concern and failure, some outside the ability of the Governor and SLT to address; the Governor is aware of, and has plans for the areas in her direct control but delivery is hampered by a lack of available staff.

The Board recorded at the November 2025 Board meeting that although there should be 147 band three staff in post, only 103 (including detached duty staff) were available. Despite the support of detached duty staff, there were at least 20 vacancies unfilled throughout the last six months of the year.

The recently announced budget increase to develop a workforce delivery model recognising Swinfen Hall as one of 15 top priority prisons is welcome. If the increased number of key work sessions does increase the Board would expect outcomes for young adults to improve.

The Board considers Swinfen Hall well led throughout the reporting year, with committed staff making genuine efforts to drive improvements across the prison, which makes the repeated failures in delivery frustrating for staff, Board members and prisoners.

At the end of the reporting year the Board believes Swinfen Hall is a more stable prison than it was a year earlier. Board members have witnessed signs of improving staff-prisoner interactions.

Overall, many of the young adults at Swinfen Hall are deeply frustrated by a lack of opportunity to progress and the Board is certain that HMPPS is missing opportunities to rehabilitate some very complex young men at a pivotal time in their lives.

The daily regime was often unreliable, and young adults came to expect wing closures as a normal part of the regime. Weekend time out of cell was very poor with multiple wing closures, (see appendix 1). Young adults expected to have less than two hours unlocked from their cells on Saturdays and Sundays.

The prison's ageing infrastructure was an obvious challenge: many cells have poor ventilation and no control over heating. Summer heatwaves created unreasonable living conditions for those in their cell for 22 hours a day, as often happened at weekends. Despite some capital investment, living conditions remained inadequate.

The Board noted challenges with:

- Staff absences (sickness, suspension, delays in vetting new staff).
- A lack of sufficient work or education opportunities.
- A failure to start the delivery of a promised plan for life and 10 year plus sentenced young adults to further support their development.
- A failure to ensure decent levels of cleanliness.
- A serious ongoing rat infestation.
- Poor provision and quality of food.
- Dilapidated infrastructure and legionella infections resulting in the closure of some shower units.
- A daily regime that had regular wing closures throughout the reporting period (see appendix 1) and a weekend regime that provides less than two hours out of cell.

These challenges all hampered progress and created an overall poor experience for many young adults.

In summary, despite a positive approach by many staff and leaders, for the reporting year, many opportunities for rehabilitation have been lost, not funded, or delivery has been too slow and outcomes for many young adults remain poor.

The Board raised concerns to senior leadership at HMPPS over specific provision for life sentenced young adults last year and had a response from them detailing plans (see appendix 2). The Board's view is that the response and action plan being created by the prison is taking far too long (it is not finished or approved 12 months after commencement) and is adversely affecting outcomes for these young adults.

The anticipated cut in the education provision is being addressed creatively by the Governor to preserve some work places; however, the anticipated cut will reduce opportunities and is disastrous for prisoner outcomes.

In July 2025 the Governor commissioned a review into the regime and operating procedures at Swinfen Hall with the aim of providing a regime that can be applied safely, meeting HMPPS delivery requirements, and providing consistent operating practice across the prison.

The new regime was introduced in March 2026 and is more practical in its planning.

The improvements on cleanliness and waste disposal management have not been delivered, in part, as the regime needs changes to timings for cleaning periods to be made.

The Board welcome the commitments made in the new regime, if delivered, to provide:

- *“Purposeful activity targets for our population.”*
- *“Sufficient time for officers to build appropriate relationships with young adults.”*
- *“The new regime which meets the requirement to provide all young adults time in the open air of 60 minutes, except those who choose to isolate and those in the CSU where only 30 minutes is offered.”*

Staff prisoner interactions improved as the supervising officer model was introduced, but this was mostly diminished by the settling in of the new regime.

The Board noted several continued concerns during the year:

- Wing closures especially during weekends.
- Work and education place attendance improved and then reduced in April, and is below expectations.
- Staffing absences in education had a detrimental effect.
- There was no increase in work placements.
- Too many wing jobs are “non-jobs” so, reasonably, the number of positions was reduced by residential managers.
- Structural facilities (showers, floors, toilets in CSU) require refurbishment or replacement.
- A general lack of cleanliness, poor food waste management, and rat infestation.

There is a desire at a senior level to make change and improvements at pace but there is a real lack of drive by those charged with delivery to deliver change with any pace.

3.2 Main areas for development

TO THE MINISTER

- Can the Minister detail how he will speed up the vetting of applicants to work in the prison from the current delay of approximately six months? In the reporting year this delay caused classes to be cancelled, wings to be closed, increased pressures in the health care and offender management units (OMUs), and consequently negatively impacted outcomes for young adults unnecessarily.
- During the year, the Board saw good support in place for those transitioning from HMPPS establishments at age 18. The process is competently managed by the induction wing staff, with support from the OMU beforehand. An important contributory factor is that prison offender managers (POMs) and reception staff use digital prison services (DPS) to plan ahead and prepare tailor made support plans for each transition arrival.

However, this frequently isn't the case for those coming from secure children's homes. This creates a gap, which increases risk, stretches staff resources and slows down how quickly these young adults settle in.

In some cases, individuals were sent earlier than originally agreed, which leaves very little time for staff to prepare. There's also no shared system or information available, so staff were unable to see previous behaviour and consequently create individualised detailed plan for their arrival.

Whilst reception prisons have the resources in place for this, including healthcare screening and structured reception processes, training prisons such as Swinfen Hall do not have the same level of support in place, which has impacted negatively on several prisoners.

The Board would like to know if the Minister is aware of these issues and what can be done to improve the situation?

- With reference to the 199 care-experienced prisoners identified at Swinfen Hall, how will the Minister ensure statutory support entitlements are delivered to those who are eligible?
- Young adults are unable to access student finance loans to study for an open university degree unless they are in the final six years of their sentence. How will the Minister ensure that young adults on longer sentences have equal access to education opportunities?

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

- Does the prison service accept that the real term cuts in the education provision, expected to be in excess of 30% in 2026/7, will restrict catastrophically the prison's plans to improve the rehabilitation support for young adults, 97% of whom are assessed as a high or very high risk to the public, and most of whom have been failed in education?
- What is the timeline for replacing or repairing properly the poor condition of parts of the prison estate, and ongoing problems with basic infrastructure such as heating, ventilation, and hot water?
- What is the rationale of leaving prisoners to "tread water" during their early years in custody and only addressing offending behaviour through programmes in the period leading up to their release? In general, young men at Swinfen Hall will only be considered for programmes in the final two years of their sentence, negating the possibility of progressing to category D establishments.

QUESTIONS FOR THE GOVERNOR

- The Board remains concerned that too many young adults are not meaningfully engaged in education or work opportunities. What steps will the

Governor take to address this as a matter of urgency and move to a regime wherein 90% of eligible prisoners are engaged in employment or training?

- The Board continues to receive daily updates on the number of recorded key worker sessions; it is clear that key work has stalled. Recognising the significant benefits a well-functioning key worker scheme would bring, the Board reiterates the priority this needs to be given by the prison. When will the number of key worker sessions meet the mandated minimum?
- The Board remains concerned that young adults do not receive 'in possession' property from reception in a timely manner. What actions will the Governor take to address this problem? Property delays lead to frustration on the residential wings for young adults, staff and IMB members alike.
- Members frequently had to chase department heads and custodial managers for replies to simple email requests for information in a timely manner. Comments from young adults support this fact, which caused unnecessary frustrations for young adults. How can the Governor ensure that requests are answered promptly and reasonably?

3.3 Response to last report

Safety

Concern/issue last year (2025 report)	Assessment	Progress
The use of weapons has increased. The Board is concerned that searches of men as they leave residential areas and workplaces are failing to detect weapons.	Concern increased and includes concern over quality searches as young adults move to and from wing and workshops.	No longer an issue although quality of searching off wing and from education remains of concern to the Board.
A small number of young adults, despite the efforts of staff, continue to isolate.	The self-isolator engagement in wing regimes remains concerning, in terms of positive outcomes.	Minutes of meetings support the view of the Board that there are men isolating who are not always proactively checked on by prison staff.
Concerns over safety of newly arrived young adults.	Young offenders, who have been convicted of serious sexual offences, who are transitioning from the YOI estate to Swinfen Hall are very vulnerable. Many were previously on designated wings for vulnerable young adults. Some arrive at Swinfen Hall not knowing they will be integrated with young	No concerns now held by the Board for those arriving from HMP establishments, but the ability of induction staff to support those arriving from secure children's homes is a concern due to a lack of information being provided in advance.

	adults with non-sexual offending history.	
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Fair and humane treatment

Concern/issue last year (2025 report)	Assessment	Progress
Concern over clothing parcel distribution.	During the reporting year this significantly improved, following intervention by a newly appointed custodial manager, but has since regressed.	Depending on staff availability this issue improves and then relapses, much to the frustration of young adults. There is no change this reporting year.

Progression and resettlement

Concern/issue last year (2025 report)	Assessment	Progress
Young adults fell behind with educational studies.	Attendance levels remain a concern for the Board.	Education attendance has been reduced as a result of the number of wing closures, and by a high level of teachers being absent (including vacancies, sickness and suspensions). There is no improvement this reporting year.

Evidence sections 4 – 7

4. Safety

4.1 Reception and induction

Members noted a businesslike approach by staff working in reception admitting new young adults. They then progressed to the induction wing where staff are committed to ensuring the new arrivals are supported well for their time at Swinfen Hall. The support given to those recognised as vulnerable and those transitioning from the juvenile estate (HMPPS) at age 18 is recognised as good practice.

4.2 Suicide and self-harm, deaths in custody

There were no deaths in custody in the reporting year.

Incidents of self-harm were low level with the overall trend of self-harm incidents reducing as the year progressed. Incidents were monitored competently with suitable support from health care staff, and whilst the Board holds no concerns over the support offered to many of those who self-harmed, members expressed concerns for those with PTSD-induced hallucinations who come into Swinfen Hall on antipsychotics prescriptions, which are removed. The concern that IMB members have identified is that the medicines are discontinued too quickly and without any phasing.

The relevant NICE guidance in this regard states that abrupt withdrawal should be avoided.

"If an inmate enters custody already prescribed an antipsychotic for severe PTSD, prescribers are cautioned against abrupt withdrawal. Doing so can trigger acute behavioural regressions, severe hyperarousal, or a rebound spike in trauma symptoms.

The Board considers that this risk was not always managed well.

The quality of assessment, care in custody and teamwork documents (ACCTs), used to support prisoners who are at risk of self-harm and suicide, monitored was mixed and, on occasion, poor with a lack of support plans.

4.3 Violence and violence reduction, self-isolation

- At the end of the year there were 15 open ACCTS, six in post-closure seven days
- 19 in post-closure six weeks and 12 young adults in the challenge, support and intervention plan (CSIP) process, which is used to manage prisoners who pose an increased risk of violence.

The stability of the prison was undoubtedly improved during the reporting year by a greater willingness to recategorise a small number of disruptive and influential young adults. Between the 1 May 2025 to 30 April 2026, there were 16 individuals recategorised to category B prisons, including one individual from the YOI estate. This is a rise from nine individuals in the previous year.

Self-isolation

The Board has been critical of the prison over the previous six months, highlighting that it was not clear how many self-isolators were being identified and supported, and how many were missed.

The new prison definition states that to be classed as an isolator the prisoner must have removed themselves from all other prisoners completely, it also states that the term 're-integrator' is used when a prisoner is happy to associate with other young adults very selectively, but does not access a full regime.

Based on conversations and checks on individual reports on DPS the Board is not confident that as the year ended the residential management team were aware of all individual self-isolators and re-integrators, and were active in their support and management.

A new policy was introduced in November 2025 (reviewed in February 2026) to support the prisoners self-isolating. The number of recorded self-isolators varied from between 10 to 30 at peak, and this had reduced to single figures by the end of the reporting year.

The policy initially only supported those who satisfied the new definition of an isolator, resulting in the support for many falling way below the minimum expected, in terms of daily access to fresh air and shower access, as mandated in prison guidance.

The Board believes that the recorded reduction in self-isolators was and remains inaccurate, and misses young adults who are isolating.

The policy provides a pathway through re-integration for self-isolators and the Board has observed that not all staff are using this pathway positively to enable young adults to access a fuller regime.

The prison was aware of a few young adults who chose to remain fully isolated, as their fears of violence were too great. Those young adults were taken out of their cell individually to get their medication, offered a shower at least every three days, and had their meals brought to their cells.

4.4 Use of force

Use of force was reviewed weekly by a broad cross section of staff with all body-worn video camera and CCTV footage examined, and the evidence reports of officers involved being reviewed. The Board are confident that incidents were carefully and thoroughly scrutinised.

Where evidence indicated a need to either recognise positive staff behaviour or offer further training, prison management demonstrated a willingness to ensure the training is offered and that progress is reviewed. There were incidents that required further investigation with regard to use of the disciplinary process, the Board is confident these processes have been taken to conclusion (see appendix 3).

4.5 Preventing illicit items

The Board has noted multiple occasions of successful searches and identification of ingress routes, noting that the prison is reliant on support from the regional search team, who tend to be called in post a serious event taking place.

It is clear to the Board that a lack of activity and time in cell is a driver for some young adults' use of cannabis and, to a lesser extent, spice.

Phones finds were a weekly occurrence and the Board considers that the lack of "through the gate security" provision is a notable weakness.

5. Fair and humane treatment

5.1 Accommodation, clothing, food

It is only fair to preface the Board's comments on food, with a recognition of the conditions in which kitchen staff worked for much of the reporting year. The kitchen was badly resourced and it was not uncommon to find the kitchen staffed by short-term, agency workers, sometimes with a single key-holder in charge.

The quality and quantity of food was one of the most regular complaints Board members heard on the wings. The food itself was sometimes quite unappealing as was recorded on several occasions in the daily duty governor's checks. The food quality was often cited as a major contributor to the amount of food waste onsite, which has caused issues with vermin. This was reflected in members own monitoring visit observations on a regular basis.

There was often a clash between the type of food prisoners wanted to eat and the "healthy ingredients" required by guidelines. This added to the levels of unnecessary food waste.

Food trolleys were inconsistently checked before leaving the kitchens, leading to wings receiving inadequate food or the wrong choices. Due to distances involved between some wings and the kitchens, there was sometimes inadequate time to rectify problems, leading to prisoners going without their choice.

The Board has observed that on-wing serveries were often poorly managed by staff, or not managed at all, leading to unfair distribution of food or bullying of vulnerable young adults.

The Board noted that the prison had been in varying degrees of uncleanness over the year, including vermin and waste management issues. The Board expressed concerns about these issues countless times, as have young adults, staff and senior staff members.

Duty governor entries on many daily briefings accurately reflected the poor situation regarding cleanliness and waste disposal, but the Board's view is that the time taken to deliver any improvement was too long.

This comment on a weekly report from the Board reflects the concerns;

"The bins in front of J and I wing were infested with flies, it was warm and as a group of young adults were escorted past they showed me the horrendous infestation when opening the bins, it wasn't clear what was in the bins because I was covered in flies before I could see what was inside."

From observations and conversations held the Board note that:

- A plan in place to address the rat issue is being recognised but staff and Board members hold concerns that not enough is being done or with any pace.

- The ability of staff to manage in a timely manner the separation and removal of food waste is very poor and inhibits the plan to tackle and eliminate the rats.
- Prompt removal of food waste and an inability to keep wing cooking rooms either clean or closed has increased risk unnecessarily.

5.2 Segregation

The care and separation unit (CSU) at Swinfen Hall comprises 15 cells, one of which is a dry cell (for those who may have secreted items on their body).

There were three instances where “special accommodation” was used. Special accommodation is a highly restricted cell in the CSU that has no bed, or facilities, and only provides a toilet, and so is used where a young adult is not able to be safely managed in ordinary accommodation, or where there is a serious and high risk of harm to the young adult or other young adults or staff.

Members reviewed each occasion and felt the use of special accommodation was justified and the use limited to a reasonable time frame.

Overall, the management and care given in the CSU over the last year improved on that of the previous year. The unit is usually busy, frequently with 12 cells occupied, so caring for individuals who require extra support could be challenging. There have been instances in the reporting period when the Board felt that individuals have been held in the CSU for far too long (usually prior to transfer after re-categorisation) and as a result the prisoner’s behaviour consequently deteriorated.

There have also been instances when prisoners with psychosis were held in the CSU for their own safety, including one on constant watch. The care required by such prisoners presents a huge challenge to the CSU staff who are not sufficiently trained in the support process needed.

The regime operated in the CSU is very restrictive. Attending visits is permitted but the opportunity to attend a religious service, for example, is never facilitated. If there is evidence to show that CSU is effective in discouraging bad behaviour or improving outcomes for prisoners, the Board is unaware of it.

5.3 Staff and prisoner relationships, key workers

Staff absence, as well as a lack of experience, impacted negatively on young adults’ outcomes. For example, during the reporting year:

- 13% of officers had less than one year of service
- 23% had more than one year, but less than two years’ service
- 35% had less than two years’ service
- 14% had two + years’ service
- 12% had three + years’ service
- 9% had four years’ service
-

As a young adult prison the national requirement is that every prisoner at Swinfen Hall receives one key work session per week; therefore, regime planning needs to

include around 600 key work sessions at 45 minutes per session, which equates to around 2400 minutes per month.

Daily briefing records regularly recorded that the prison did not complete any sessions, or less than 10.

- The number of completed sessions recorded in September 2025 was 279.
- Number of completed sessions recorded in February 2026 was 136.

The perception of Board members is that too many staff are willing to be negative about young adults and too slow to offer positive comments to young adults. This negativity does nothing to improve prisoner staff relationships and can cause negativity when reviewed as part of the parole review process.

5.4 Equality and diversity

Members were not made aware of any complaints related to equality and diversity throughout the reporting year. This is reflected in the minutes of prison council meetings during the reporting year.

The Board is reassured that the Governor personally reviews all complaints related to discrimination from young adults and also monitors the outcomes.

5.5 Faith and pastoral support

The prison is required to offer prisoners the opportunity for corporate worship or meditation for one hour per week and be offered pastoral care by chaplaincy staff. The chaplaincy team has been particularly badly hit by staff absences; two chaplains have left, without being replaced, other faiths are not represented, and another chaplain is past retirement age, trying to provide cover until the vetting of his appointed replacement finally comes through. Delivery has understandably suffered.

5.6 Incentives schemes

The prison accepts that the current incentives scheme is inadequate and a review is in progress. The incentives scheme is unduly restrictive, time consuming to administer and causes complaints about fairness when it is overridden by managers.

Research has been completed about what motivates young adults to behave well, which is to be used along with the national policy to develop a new incentives policy.

5.7 Complaints

Dip tests carried out by the Board of responses to complaints indicate that most were answered fairly and legibly, with the author of the reply clearly recorded.

Across departments the legibility and quality of the replies varied considerably, with the security, and education and industries departments often being very cursory and dismissive in their replies, which are frequently formulaic, anonymous, hide behind policy, and do little to resolve problems.

Internal complaints were answered in the statutory time frame, and on rare occasions when timelines were not met, they were followed up with promptly.

External complaints to other prisons were rarely replied to within statutory time frames.

5.8 Property

See the question to the Governor, which reflects concerns held over the ability to consistently handle young adults' property in a reasonable and timely manner. The Board has observed on several occasions how the timely distribution of property to young adults is restricted by staff deployments to other roles on a daily needs basis.

6. Health and wellbeing

6.1 Physical healthcare

Board members had little contact with physical healthcare as very few issues have been raised by young adults with the Board. There have been three applications (prisoners' written representations) from young adults related to healthcare concerns throughout the reporting year and members' observations indicate that the physical healthcare provision meets needs of prisoners.

6.2 Mental health

Many of the young adults at Swinfen Hall enter the establishment with identified mental health needs or neurodivergence, whilst some others wait an excessive time for a diagnosis. The prison has dedicated mental health services, including wing-based therapies and outreach services. These are supported by a psychiatrist who visits from another prison within the prison group.

These services were well-received, but there is a small cohort of service users who struggled with the change to therapy-based treatment, particularly if they were reliant on medication in the community (for example, taking antipsychotics for trauma-based hallucinations). The Board has, on occasion, expressed concern that the step withdrawal of medication precipitated a dangerous risk of harm, either to the prisoner themselves or to others.

The Board is not confident that all those in need of mental health support receive it.

6.3 Social care

Due primarily to the age of the prison's population, social care was not identified as a particular issue. The Board and the senior leadership team are conscious of the number of care experienced young adults at Swinfen Hall.

At the end of the reporting year there were 199 care experienced young adults in the prison, who had either self-identified or been identified by members of staff.

There will likely be more, but young adults have to give consent for this to be entered on to their prison records. The senior leadership team recognises that many young adults may think they have "aged out", do not want to talk about their experiences of care, or simply won't understand they are eligible to have this entered on their records and entitled to additional support.

Figures provided by the prison to cover the 12 months this report covers show that identified care experienced prisoners are over-represented in the self-harm figures each month.

The OMU has recorded that when speaking to young adults about over representation, although most don't see a direct connection, some have been able to identify that an increased amount of adverse childhood experiences has impacted their ability to regulate their emotions, act rationally and problem solve.

The Board believes that although many of the care experienced young adults are entitled to a personal advisor, a pathway plan, help with employment, education and training, support in identifying suitable accommodation, help with living costs, grants,

or entitled to advice and assistance from their local authority, most do not receive the full support.

To address this the prison has applied for funding to implement a single point of contact role for care experienced prisoners. If the funding is made available this staff member will help identify care experienced prisoners, ensure they are supported throughout their sentence and help plan for the future. This would ideally include managing a care experienced peer representative for each wing, which the Board would welcome.

6.4 Time out of cell, regime

See section 3.2

The Board has serious concerns that the provision of time out of cell at weekends is severely hampered by a shortage of staff, see appendix 1 re typical wing closures. The Board has noted and discussed with the Governor the concern that the routine weekend closures are now an accepted practice.

7. Progression and resettlement

During the reporting year the Governor sourced some positive initiatives to support the young adults at Swinfen Hall. The Zahid Mubarek Trust is experienced in providing long-term mentoring for prisoners, whilst in prison and when released into the community. The prisoner peer role models are expected to work with the Trust to help other young adults and support them in learning about respect for others.

Other positive initiatives with outside agencies are in place with Aston Villa, and the Barrow Cadbury trust, a charity that is focused on young adults in the criminal justice system. After visiting Swinfen Hall last year they have provided funding to support two key strands of work:

1. Young adults serving life sentences

- Exploration and development of a bespoke offer for young adults serving life sentences.
- Research into what support and interventions could make a meaningful difference, particularly for those arriving early in long sentences.

2. Support for young staff

- Research and engagement with staff under 25.
- Development of bespoke training to support officers working with young adults serving life sentences.

The Board welcomes their focus on making genuine, sustainable improvements.

HMP/YOI Swinfen Hall's purposeful activity targets are as follows:

- a. 20% of prisoners to be in full-time employment.
- b. 40% of prisoners to be in half-time employment.

The Board entry noted in November 2025 set out below was not unusual:

"Education - numbers were appalling. Excluding four young adults sitting having a chat in the reading room, there was a total of 12 young adults in classrooms, with eight classrooms totally empty."

At the end of October 2026 over 40% of prisoners were in half-time employment, which is significantly under the target for full-time employment.

The Board noted the following concerns:

- Many of the jobs were of a very menial nature offering little in terms of development or learning.
- Workshops frequently lacked sufficient work to do.
- Board members regularly witnessed "wing cleaners" enjoying a little extra time out of cell without actually doing much cleaning (or perceiving the need to do so).
- Prisoners stuck in their cells due to wing closures were still considered "employed" and therefore attendance in workshops or education was often consequently very low.

- Whilst there are workshops previously used to deliver training left unused, there is only one vocational course offering prisoners “level 2 qualifications”, and this course is limited to five prisoners per year.

The relatively high rate of non-associates (and of those who, either due to being “wing restricted” or preferring to be outside of the general population) presented a particular problem to purposeful activity. On the dedicated wing for prisoners serving life sentences, for example, it would be unusual to find more than 25% of young adults off wing, in work or employment. For a training prison with quite specific purpose, there were far too many young men leading unproductive days on their own wings and missing key developmental opportunities.

7.1 Education, library

The Board considers that prison leadership did not set high enough expectations for young adults to engage in education, skills and work. For too many young adults, the curriculum lacked ambition and young adults did not gain relevant skills or develop work readiness. Attendance at education, skills and work was too low and punctuality was poor, although following a senior leadership team focus on attendance the numbers attending improved to average over 75% in the last three months of 2025, before falling again at the end of April 2026.

The Board noted concerns in November 2025 that it was not clear what impact the anticipated 40% reduction in the education provision would have at Swinfen Hall. The exact impact is yet to be announced.

Uncertainty arose because:

- The prison group director has the option to allocate a larger provision reduction to other prisons in their area and a lesser reduction for Swinfen Hall as a category C training prison principally for long sentenced young adults.
- Regardless of budgets, the prison struggles to recruit teachers and instructors, there are currently four instructor vacancies and three teacher vacancies.
- Delays in vetting for new appointments impact negatively on recruitment as by the time an offer is finalised, approximately six months may have passed, by which point the applicant could have taken another role.
- Whatever provision reduction finally is in place there will be less staff to teach, and more long sentenced young adults will have little to give them hope for their future.

7.2 Vocational training, work

Detailed in appendix 1 are the attendance records for a typical week during the reporting year.

Within these employment numbers are hidden an excess of on-wing job roles that contribute very little in terms of learning and training opportunities for prisoners. This was recognised during the reporting year with a reduction in wing-based jobs, but it

was still the case that members observed many young adults in worker roles on wings engaged in little beyond chatting, playing games, and passing time.

7.3 Offender management, progression

Provision for life sentenced prisoners

- There were 129 life sentenced young adults in the prison, some held on a dedicated wing.
- The wing holds up to 72 young adults, of whom around 35 were life sentenced, meaning there were around 95 prisoners with life sentences living in other residential units.
- The prison urgently needs to implement a full strategy and regime across the prison that supports these young adults, as promised by HMPPS a year ago.
- In April 2025 the Board produced a letter about the lack of meaningful rehabilitation for long and life sentenced young adults at Swinfen Hall which prompted senior HMPPS engagement. The prison group director formally acknowledged the systemic gap and the specific needs of this cohort, including neurodivergence and care experience.
- Following this escalation, HMPPS committed to a set of concrete actions, including developing a prison-wide strategy to support life sentenced prisoners, reviewing and reshaping the education and skills curriculum, expanding access to distance learning and enrichment, and reviewing staffing and probation resourcing for high-risk young adults.
- However, although the intention was made clear in the response from HMPPS (see appendix 2), the reality is that little has changed since.
- The support and reassurance provided by the foreign national liaison officer was welcome and appreciated by young adults who are foreign national prisoners.
- There was a small but welcome increase in the number of young adults progressing to category D custody over the reporting year, with a total of 26 individuals progressed, an increase from 18 in the previous year.

7.4 Family contact

Prison rules require prisons to actively encourage prisoners to maintain outside contacts and meaningful family ties and the Board is confident this need is being met.

The provision is handicapped by the distances and costs some families face to travel to Swinfen Hall. The ability to accumulate visits and be transferred temporarily to an establishment nearer to home is technically a statutory requirement, but it is not made available by HMPPS and therefore men placed far away from home miss out on valuable family contact.

7.5 Resettlement planning

Swinfen Hall is not a resettlement prison but over the reporting year there have been 60 young adults released in to the community or to immigration removal centres, and all, except two, had accommodation to go to on their first night of release. Members spoke to various young adults in the days prior to release and whilst many were nervous about release and the conditions they would have to meet during probation,

they all were complimentary about the support they had received from their prisoner offender managers prior to release.

8. The work of the IMB

Board statistics

Recommended complement of Board members	14
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	9 (4 on sabbatical)
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	4
Total number of visits to the establishment	154

Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Previous reporting year	Current reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	16	15
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives scheme, sanctions	16	18
C	Equality	1	0
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, time out of cell	22	7
E1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection, restrictions	15	13
E2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	6	2
F	Food and kitchens	7	4
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	15	3
H1	Property within the establishment	42	16
H2	Property during transfer or in another facility	13	15
H3	Canteen, facility list, catalogues	4	1
I	Sentence management, including HDC, ROTL, parole, release dates, re-categorisation	36	18
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	14	19
K	Transfers	8	17
L	Miscellaneous	5	3
	Total number of applications	220	151

Appendix 1

Typical wing closure plan for the week

SUBJECT			
PLANNED SHUTDOWNS FOR WEEK COMMENCING 17 November 2025			
BELOW ARE WINGS THAT ARE IN PATROL STATE AND WILL NOT BE ATTENDING WORK UNLESS THEY ARE AN ESSENTIAL WORKER:			
Day	AM	PM	ED
Monday	C	G	I
Tuesday	A / J	D	-
Wednesday	B / E	-	I
Thursday	D / F	G / J	-
Friday			
Saturday	A C D G I	B E F J	
Sunday	A C D G I	B E F J	

THE BELOW ARE WINGS REDUCED TO TWO STAFF, REGIME WILL BE NORMAL OF THE CLEANING OFFICER WITH CLEANING PARTY AND SECOND WING DUTY TO FACILITATE SHOWERS. MAX 15 PRISONERS AT A TIME.

Day	AM	PM	ED
Monday	F	-	
Tuesday	C	-	
Wednesday	-	-	
Thursday	-	-	
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			

PLANNED SHUTDOWNS FOR WEEK COMMENCING 3 NOVEMBER 2025

BELOW ARE WINGS THAT ARE IN PATROL STATE AND WILL NOT BE ATTENDING WORK UNLESS THEY ARE AN ESSENTIAL WORKER:

Day	AM	PM	ED
Monday	A / C / F	G	I
Tuesday	A / D	B / E	I

Wednesday	Shutdown AM	-	I
Thursday	C	G / J	I
Friday			
Saturday	A C D G I	B E F J	
Sunday	A C D G I	B E F J	

REDUCED STAFFING:

THE BELOW ARE WINGS REDUCED TO TWO STAFF, REGIME WILL BE NORMAL OF THE CLEANING OFFICER WITH CLEANING PARTY AND SECOND WING DUTY TO FACILITATE SHOWERS. MAX 15 PRISONERS AT A TIME.

Day	AM	PM	ED
Monday	B	J	
Tuesday	C	F	
Wednesday	-	-	
Thursday	F	-	
Friday			
Saturday			

Appendix 2

Letter raised by the Board April 2025 expressing deeply held concerns over provision for long term and life sentenced young adults

Matt Grey, Executive Director Rehabilitation

22nd April 2025

Dear Matt

REHABILITATIVE SUPPORT FOR THOSE ON LONG SENTENCES

I am writing to you on behalf of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP/YOI Swinfen Hall. We are concerned that a systemic gap in provision of rehabilitative opportunities for individuals servicing long sentences is having a detrimental impact on Young adults.

As you will know Swinfen Hall is a national resource, is classed as a category C training prison and has a growing population of Young adults, with around 93% of the current cohort being under the age of 25². Over the last five years the number of individuals at Swinfen Hall serving a life sentence has drastically increased from 38 in April 2020 (population of 556) to 132 in April 2025 (population 618). We note that over half of those with a life sentence have been a looked after child and more than 60% have some form of neurodiversity.

We were pleased to see that in April 2025 the operational function of HMPPS agreed to pause briefly the number of individuals serving life sentences that were being sent to Swinfen Hall and that a number of young adults were transferred elsewhere in the estate to reduce some local pressure. However, the Board now firmly believes that HMPPS should provide additional rehabilitative support for long and life sentenced individuals at Swinfen Hall.

We remain very concerned that those currently in, and soon to arrive at, Swinfen Hall, who may face up to a decade here, are not on the whole provided with purposeful and meaningful rehabilitative activities, suitable to their needs. Whilst those in Swinfen Hall are no longer children, it cannot be said that the predominant age profile of those held at Swinfen Hall are not at a critical point in their personal and societal development and that they require suitable programmes and opportunities.

For instance, those who are academically inclined and wish to improve their education but are on a life sentence, face barriers in getting access to Open University courses, as funding is aimed at those in with an earliest release date in the next eight years, with local education courses often being aimed at individuals with lower academic abilities. This is just one example of a missed opportunity to avoid Young adults stagnating during their formative years.

² Figures in this letter are taken from local management information.

Furthermore, the Board regularly observes many Young adults working on menial tasks or unskilled wing work, being isolated behind their cell doors for exceptionally long periods or being excluded from training opportunities in favour of shorter sentenced young adults. One of the key drivers behind this letter was the repeated instances of Board members hearing Young adults express little hope for their future or that they could achieve their ambitions within their sentence.

However, we do wish to note that the local senior leadership team have taken independent steps, within their remit, to support this cohort. We have seen the introduction of a transitional support programme for Young adults, a review of suitable employment opportunities and most notably a wing for life sentenced Young adults. On this wing there are additional and centrally unfunded staff to provide enhanced support, with all staff on this wing having additional training in the needs and expectations of Young adults with life sentences. We have observed this wing as the most stable, and anecdotally, the safest in Swinfen Hall.

Despite these local operational initiatives, the Board believes that further central support is now required at Swinfen Hall to improve the rehabilitation of the Young adults on long and life sentences held there.

Whilst we have included the regional prison group director in copy to this letter and we understand many future steps may involve the operational side of HMPPS, we do believe that as the Executive Director for Rehabilitation this gap in provision, and the resultant impact on individuals, is something worthy of your attention. I would be happy to discuss this further with you, or one of your officials.

Yours Sincerely,

Roger Swindells
IMB Swinfen Hall Chair

Copied to:

Governor HMP Swinfen Hall
Prison Group Director
IMB National Chair
IMB Chief Executive Officer
IMB Policy Team

Response from HMPPS

Private and Confidential

Roger Swindells
Chair of the Independent Monitoring
Board
HMP/YOI Swinfen Hall

Prison Group Director West Midlands
West Midlands Directors Office
24 Gaol Road
STAFFORD
ST16 3AN

Date: 29th May 2025

Response to IMB Concerns on Rehabilitative Support for Long and Life Sentenced Young Adults

Dear Mr Swindells,

Thank you for your letter dated 25th April 2025 and for the continued dedication of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP/YOI Swinfen Hall in advocating for the needs of the young adult population in custody. I am replying after engagement with the Rehabilitation Directorate and have copied Matt Grey to whom you originally addressed the letter. We are committed to work in partnership to do all we can to improve the offer, not just at Swinfen Hall but more widely in the prison estate.

I fully acknowledge the concerns raised regarding the systemic challenges in providing meaningful rehabilitative opportunities for individuals serving long and life sentences at Swinfen Hall. Your observations are both timely and valid, particularly in light of the significant demographic shift and the increasing complexity of the population held at the establishment.

As you rightly note, Swinfen Hall now accommodates a high proportion of young adults many of whom are serving lengthy sentences, present high levels of risk and have complex needs including neurodiversity and care-experienced backgrounds. These factors necessitate a tailored and well-resourced rehabilitative approach.

We collectively would like to commend the local leadership team for their proactive and innovative efforts, including the development of the Long-Term and Lifer Wing, the introduction of bespoke training for staff and the creation of a more stable and supportive environment for life-sentenced young adults. These initiatives reflect a clear commitment to improving outcomes for this cohort.

As a training prison with a young adult population, Swinfen Hall recognises the need to provide appropriate support for its population.

The most recent needs analysis informed Swinfen Hall's Education, Skills and Work curriculum intent and places the focus on developing prisoners' literacy, numeracy and digital skills to allow for further progression onto vocational courses or level 3 qualifications. As a result more functional skills hours have been commissioned, both in class and through outreach, to engage all learners including those who are hard to reach or unable to attend education due to gang related issues. **This strategic intent has been validated** during the most recent Ofsted inspection:

"Leaders had also prioritised a well-defined ambition to improve prisoners' English, mathematics and digital Skills." (Ofsted 2024).

The curriculum contains not only the core skills above but also a wide range of practical vocational* delivery alongside opportunities such as Art and Money Management which support prisoners to develop skills and build cultural capital which benefit them within custody, including those learners with a significant time to release. Prisoners also have access to a range of enrichment activities^(†) that develop their emerging or existing talents and interests as well as allowing them to discover new activities to keep them mentally and physically healthy, including some well received music provision commissioned flexibly. The range of provision at Swinfen Hall has recently been recognised by Ofsted where the inspectorate noted:

"Leaders and managers offered a curriculum adapted to meet the needs of a largely stable prison population with a significant number serving long sentences." (Ofsted 2024).

However, I also recognise that these local efforts, while commendable, are not sufficient in isolation. The current resource constraints, particularly in education, probation staffing and specialist support for neurodivergent and care-experienced individuals, are limiting the ability to deliver a comprehensive rehabilitative regime. The challenges around access to higher-level education, meaningful employment and personal development opportunities are particularly concerning.

In response the Rehabilitation Directorate have committed to working with us and supporting wider HMPPS engagement on the following actions:

1. **Curriculum Review:** The Head of Education, Skills and Work will review and re-state their curriculum offers to better meet the needs of the current population.
2. **Strategic Development:** We will support the development of a prison-wide Lifer Strategy at Swinfen Hall during 2025–26, ensuring it is evidence-based^(**) and aligned with the needs of the population.
3. **Education and Personal Development:** We will advocate for increased investment in distance learning, outreach education and enrichment activities, committing to explore funding opportunities for personal social development such as the Twinning Literacy project. It should be noted that the legislation on funding is a DfE decision and we continue to engage with DfE on a range of matters.
4. **Resource Review:** We will work with relevant stakeholders to review staffing models, particularly the balance of prison and probation POMs and explore funding options to enhance support for high-risk individuals.
5. **Workplace Review:** We will work to review the workplace offer, recognising the long-term benefits of engaging young adults in purposeful activity.
6. **Support for Care-Experienced Individuals:** We will explore opportunities to liaise with Local Authorities and ensure statutory support is accessed by those entitled to it.
7. **Neurodiversity Support:** We will continue to work with partners to expand specialist provision and ensure that central funding reflects the scale of need.

We appreciate the IMB's constructive engagement and your commitment to improving the lives of those in custody. We will also need to consider any impacts of the Independent Sentencing Review over the coming months. I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and your colleagues to discuss these matters further and to ensure that our shared goals for rehabilitation and progression are realised.

Yours Sincerely



Mark Greenhaf

Prison Group Director
West Midlands

The Board's view is that the response and action plan being created by the prison is taking far too long (at the time of writing this report it has not been finished or approved).

The anticipated cut in the education budget is being addressed creatively by the Governor to preserve some work places; however, the anticipated cut will reduce staffing and is disastrous for prisoner outcomes.

Appendix 3: Learning and skills attendance numbers for 28/10/25

End of working day summary (paid activities only)

Activity	Capacity	Allocated	Attended	%	
Learning & skills	192	184	95	49%	49%
Services	411	319	299	72%	72%
Industry / work	222	197	123	55%	55%
Interventions totals	34	33	33	97%	97%
Total	859	733	550	64%	65%

Workplace attendance: first week of December 2025							
		GYM	L & S	SERVICES	INTERVENTIONS	OVERALL	TIER 2
01-Dec		38%	60%	72%	56%	66%	43%
02-Dec	BISTRO EVENT	32%	66%	70%	52%	66%	34%
03-Dec		60%	49%	67%	98%	57%	60%
04-Dec		47%	68%	70%	54%	64%	43%

End of working day summary (paid activities only) 27 April 2026					ALLOCATION/ CAPACITY
Activity	Capacity	Allocated	Attended	%	%
Learning & skills	136	126	81	60%	93%
Services	410	332	282	69%	81%

Industry / work	242	209	163	67%	86%
Interventions totals	45	45	44	98%	100%
Total	833	712	570	68%	85%
Tier 2 summary					
Education	20	10	10	50%	50%
Faith & spirituality	0	0	0	-	-
Gym, sports and fitness	154	103	59	38%	67%
Interventions	15	15	13	87%	100%
Prisoner forum	0	0	0	-	-
Resettlement	0	0	0	-	-
Induction	0	0	0	-	-
Sentence management	0	0	0	-	
Total	189	128	82	50%	68%

Use of force incidents											
May-25	Jun-25	Jul-25	Aug-25	Sep-25	Oct-25	Nov-25	Dec-25	Jan-26	Feb-26	Mar-26	Apr-26
25	51	69	62	97	42	42	66	68	37	66	62
Total: 687 Planned: 547 Unplanned: 140											
Pava Incidents drawn and used 39 occasions 15.4% of all use of force incidents											
Pava drawn and not used 6 occasions 5.5% of all use of force incidents											

No batons were drawn in the year		
Incidents by ethnicity show a slight disproportionate use of force to minorities		
White	302	
Black	164	
Mixed	159	
Asian	64	
Other	24	
Notes		
One individual was directly involved in 89 incidents		
Much use of force is minor and includes use of handcuffs when warranted for certain young adults being moved around the prison.		



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