

BY EMAIL

19 March 2026

Reference: FOI 733 Freedom of Information request

Thank you for your email, which we received on 25 February 2026. Your request has been handled under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

You asked us:

To provide annual totals for the number of drug-related deaths in prisons in England and Wales from 2010 to 2025.

Our response:

We have searched our records and we hold the requested information. A copy of the information that you requested is shown below.

The below table shows the number of drug-related deaths (intent unknown) that the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) has been notified of from 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2025.

Year	Number of drug-related deaths
2009/2010	2
2010/2011	3
2011/2012	1
2012/2013	4
2013/2014	3
2014/2015	8
2015/2016	12
2016/2017	16
2017/2018	29
2018/2019	45
2019/2020	23
2020/2021	22
2021/2022	16
2022/2023	18
2023/2024	25
2024/2025	48
Total	275

The PPO does not determine the cause of death. This is determined by a coroner following an inquest. Cases are separated into administrative categories, which may differ from a coroner's conclusions. Classifications may change during an investigation. However, they are not altered following the conclusion of the inquest.

For the purposes of this request, the PPO's other non-natural (ONN) death definition has been used to compile the data:

Other non-natural: These deaths have not happened organically. They are non-natural but cannot be readily classified as self-inflicted or homicide. They include accidents and cases where the post-mortem has not ascertained a cause of death. This category also includes drug-related deaths where there is not enough evidence to classify them as a self-inflicted death.

I hope that this is helpful.

You have the right to appeal against our response if you think it is incorrect. Details can be found in the 'How to Appeal' section attached at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely,

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of the PPO.

Email: PPOMailFreedomofInformationRequests@ppo.gov.uk

The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) carries out **independent investigations** into complaints and deaths in custody. The detailed role and responsibilities of the PPO are set out in our office's Terms of Reference. The PPO has three main duties:

- to **investigate complaints** made by prisoners, young people in detention (prisons and secure training centres), offenders under probation supervision and individuals detained under immigration powers (detained individuals)
- to **investigate deaths** of prisoners, young people in detention, approved premises' residents and detained individuals due to any cause, including any apparent suicides and natural causes
- to **investigate deaths of recently released prisoners** that occur within 14 days of release from prison (except homicide)

The purpose of these investigations is **to understand what happened, to correct injustices** and **to identify learning** for the organisations whose actions we oversee so that the PPO makes a significant contribution to safer, fairer custody and offender supervision.

We may use or share your data only to the necessary extent when conducting our independent investigations in the exercise of our official authority. We will share your data with third parties (e.g. the prison) in order to make sure the information is accurate; to prevent or detect failings; and to identify lessons learnt. We may sometimes need to share your data with third parties if required by law. We only keep your personal data for as long as it is needed, as set out in our data retention policy. If you need any further information about how your data is used, please contact us.

How to Appeal

Internal Review

If you are not satisfied with this response, you have the right to an internal review. The handling of your request will be looked at by someone who was not responsible for the original case, and they will make a decision as to whether we answered your request correctly.

If you would like to request a review, please write or send an email to the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman's office **within two months of the date of this letter**, at the following address:

Prisons and Probation Ombudsman
Third Floor
10 South Colonnade
Canary Wharf
London
E14 4PU
E-mail: Mail@ppo.gov.uk

Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)

If you remain dissatisfied after an internal review decision, you have the right to apply to the Information Commissioner's Office. The Commissioner is an independent regulator who has the power to direct us to respond to your request differently, if he considers that we have handled it incorrectly.

You can contact the ICO at the following address:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

Internet address: <https://ico.org.uk/>