



Guide to independent reviews of progress for prison staff

April 2025

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Section 1 Rationale and purpose

1.1 IRPs were established in 2018 to provide ministers with an independent assessment of the progress made in addressing concerns resulting from particularly troubling prison inspections. The scope of IRPs has widened over time and now includes a greater focus on continuous improvement at a broad range of establishments.

1.2 The aims of IRPs are to:

- provide an independent, evidence-based assessment of progress against the key concerns identified at the previous inspection
- assess the sufficiency of the leadership and management response to key concerns
- identify emerging difficulties or slippage in progress
- support improvement.

1.3 The purpose of an IRP is distinct from an inspection. The table below shows the key differences.

Features of a full inspection	Features of an IRP
Ten or 15 inspectors/researchers attend over seven days.	Three to five inspectors attend over 2.5 days.
All previous concerns are followed up and all HMI Prisons 'Expectation' areas are assessed.	Selected concerns are followed up.
Focuses on assessing treatment and conditions.	Focuses on improvements in treatment and conditions since the full inspection.
Use of HMI Prisons 'Expectations' to make judgements about outcomes.	Use of 'key questions' to make judgements about progress.
Healthy prison tests are graded.	Healthy prison tests are not graded.
All prisons are inspected at least once every five years.	HMI Prisons makes 15–20 visits per year, usually within a year of the inspection.
Concerns are raised.	New concerns are unlikely to be raised. (Exceptionally, additional concerns are raised if a significant issue relating to the safety or well-being of prisoners which is not being adequately managed is discovered.)
A prisoner survey is conducted.	There is no prisoner survey (except in establishments holding children).

1.4 IRP sites are identified at the discretion of the Chief Inspector of Prisons. Prisons subject to the Urgent Notification process will almost

always receive an IRP. For other prisons, particular consideration will be given to the following factors:

- poor or not sufficiently good scores, especially if they are over successive inspections
- the type of prison and the risks presented, especially the vulnerability of those detained
- confidence in the prison's capacity for change and improvement
- the degree to which a follow up review is likely to encourage sustained improvement.

Section 2 Planning an IRP

- 2.1 IRPs will normally take place eight to 12 months after a full inspection. There are usually three to five inspectors, including any specialists or partners. In most cases, at least one member of the IRP team will have conducted the previous inspection. One of the inspectors is identified as coordinator. The Chief Inspector or Deputy Chief Inspector of Prisons may also attend for part of the visit.

Working with partners

Care Quality Commission (CQC)

- 2.2 HMI Prisons will invite CQC to participate in IRPs if CQC issued notices following the previous inspection. CQC will attend whenever possible, but there may be circumstances when it is more appropriate for it to arrange a separate follow-up visit.

Ofsted

- 2.3 Ofsted intends to participate in IRPs when the overall judgement for education, skills and work at the previous inspection was either 'inadequate' or 'requires improvement'. It does so by conducting a prison monitoring visit at the same time as the IRP, during which Ofsted inspectors follow up 'themes' based on the key concerns. Occasionally, joint working may not be possible and Ofsted may conduct a separate prison monitoring visit.
- 2.4 Ofsted's approach to undertaking monitoring visits and the inspection methodology involved are set out in the 'Further education and skills inspection handbook' at paragraphs 25 to 27, available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-education-and-skills-inspection-handbook>.

Estyn

- 2.5 Estyn will participate in IRPs at Welsh prisons where there are priority and key concerns relating to education, skills and work.

Announcing the visit

- 2.6 The Chief Inspector of Prisons will write to the governor/director of the prison, usually two to three months in advance of the visit, confirming the date of the visit and which concerns will be followed up. The list may include concerns that were rejected or only partly accepted by HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). If Ofsted is conducting a concurrent prison monitoring visit, the list includes the themes it will follow up. HMI Prisons copies this letter to the Chair of the Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) and invites them to meet the team/team leader during the visit.

Before the visit

- 2.7 The governor should appoint a liaison officer who can fulfil the job description outlined in Appendix I. A coordinating inspector will contact the prison in advance to explain the IRP process, answer any questions and make more detailed arrangements relating to logistics and documentation.
- 2.8 In advance of the IRP, HMI Prisons will:
- provide the attendance list and information about who requires keys
 - offer an opportunity for staff association representatives to meet the team leader
 - arrange to meet representatives from the IMB.
- 2.9 HMI Prisons will also ask the governor and liaison officer to:
- complete a pro forma to identify a manager responsible for each concern it is following up
 - provide an updated action plan for the concerns it is following up
 - prepare a 30–45 minute presentation to be delivered at the start of the visit which should:
 - explain what staff have done to address HMI Prisons' concerns
 - reflect on what has gone well and what has been challenging
 - offer a self-assessment of how much progress has been made
 - complete a bespoke data request, which HMI Prisons will supply
 - provide well-organised documentation and data to evidence the work done to respond to the concerns that are being followed up – this may include new policies and procedures, quality assurance data and minutes of meetings
 - provide information on the prisoner population using the instructions in Appendix II
 - provide a copy of any operational support and assurance group (OSAG) reports.
- 2.10 All of these documents should be received by HMI Prisons no later than five working days before the start of the IRP visit.
- 2.11 Ofsted will make contact directly with the learning and skills manager or equivalent.

Section 3 Structure of the visit

3.1 The visit will last 2.5 days. The following schedule is indicative only.

Day 1

- Morning: inspectors will arrive.
- 12.30pm: 30–45-minute presentation by governor/SMT
- Afternoon: inspectors begin collecting evidence
- Afternoon: team leader may hold prisoner groups and/or meet with senior leaders, IMB chair and staff associations. There is unlikely to be formal feedback to the governor on the first day.

Day 2

- Morning: inspectors continue collecting evidence.
- 12.30–2pm: inspection team meeting.
- Afternoon: inspectors continue gathering evidence and prepare short written judgements for each of the concerns being followed up.
- At a prearranged time, the team leader will feed back to the governor.

Day 3

- The Chief or Deputy Chief Inspector may attend.
- Morning: inspectors collect final evidence and give feedback to named managers.
- Morning: Ofsted inspectors confirm final key findings and progress judgements to governor, head of reducing reoffending, learning and skills manager or equivalent and other interested parties.
- Morning: team leader collates key judgements and prepares draft debrief document for discussion at deliberation meeting.
- Afternoon: deliberation meeting to finalise judgements and debrief document.
- Feedback to the governor will follow immediately after the deliberation meeting, usually mid- to late-afternoon.

Gathering evidence

3.2 Sources of evidence for an IRP will be similar to those for an inspection. Inspectors will speak with staff, prisoners and relevant third parties; review documentation and data; and observe what happens within the prison. As during an inspection, they will base judgements on evidence which has been ‘triangulated’: corroborated by several evidence sources. The main difference from an inspection is that there is no prisoner survey. HMI Prisons may occasionally organise group discussions with prisoners.

- 3.3 HMI Prisons may visit any part of the establishment and will ask questions of staff and prisoners, but the focus will be on the concerns being followed up (unless something else is identified which is particularly concerning).

Section 4 Assessing progress

HMI Prisons' judgements against concerns

4.1 There is no overall judgement. HMI Prisons makes judgements on progress for each individual concern that is being followed up. Progress is defined as activities that have the potential, in time, to lead to improved outcomes. HMI Prisons follows up using the following definitions:

- **No meaningful progress**
Leaders had not formulated, resourced or begun to implement a realistic improvement strategy to address this concern.
- **Insufficient progress**
Leaders had begun to implement a realistic improvement strategy (for example, with better and embedded systems and processes), but prisoner outcomes were improving too slowly or had not improved at all.
- **Reasonable progress**
Leaders were implementing a realistic improvement strategy, with evidence of sustainable progress and some early improvement in outcomes for prisoners.
- **Good progress**
Leaders had already implemented a realistic improvement strategy to address this concern and had delivered a clear improvement in outcomes for prisoners.

Ofsted judgements against themes

4.2 Ofsted makes a progress judgement for each of the themes it follows up, using the following definitions:

- **Insufficient progress**
Progress has been either slow or insubstantial or both, and the demonstrable impact on learners has been negligible.
- **Reasonable progress**
Action taken by the provider is already having a beneficial impact on learners and improvements are sustainable and are based on the provider's thorough quality assurance procedures.
- **Significant progress**
Progress has been rapid and is already having considerable beneficial impact on learners.

Calibrating progress

- 4.3 The following 'key questions' framework shows what kinds of activities inspectors look for when making judgements about the extent of progress towards addressing an identified concern. Effective change is likely to happen when leaders and managers take concerns seriously, plan effectively, act, monitor and refine procedures, and measure outcomes.

Leadership

Have leaders and managers taken HMI Prisons' concerns seriously?

- Can staff articulate these concerns?
- Do staff share these concerns?
- Do staff have an in-depth understanding of the problems faced?
- How quickly after the inspection did staff start working to address the concerns?
- Are staff motivated to address the concerns?
- Do staff feel able to effect change?
- Are staff listening to what prisoners say about the concerns?
- Is there a sense of urgency and a clear sense of direction?

Planning

Is there a realistic plan for addressing HMI Prisons' concerns?

- Have managers developed and communicated a credible plan?
- Does the plan take account of the starting point and have key measures of success?
- Does the plan have the potential to improve outcomes in a reasonable timeframe?
- Is the plan prioritised?
- Is the plan resourced?
- Are there clear milestones/timescales and specific goals?
- Have staff, prisoners and relevant third parties been involved?
- Does a named member of staff have overall responsibility for addressing specific concerns?

Action

Is the plan being robustly implemented?

- Is there evidence of ongoing, focused activity to achieve change?
- Are senior managers monitoring implementation of the plan?
- Do stakeholders communicate effectively to support progress?
- Do staff understand what they need to do to deliver improvement?
- Do senior managers take an interest in the implementation of the plan?
- Is data accurate?
- Do leaders and managers monitor and analyse relevant data?

- Are successes celebrated?

Is there evidence of proactive problem solving?

- Are staff encouraged to provide feedback on progress?
- Are prisoners encouraged to provide feedback on progress?
- Do leaders and managers receive support from the operational line?
- Do leaders and managers work collaboratively with partners and politicians/government departments, where relevant, to create solutions?
- Are risks identified and managed?
- Are there clear accountability systems?
- Is enforcement action taken where necessary?
- Is disciplinary action taken where necessary?

Evaluation

Is tangible/discernible improvement taking place?

- Are data on measures of success (outputs) encouraging?
- Can staff identify changes made?
- Are managers encouraging behavioural change?
- Is staff behaviour changing?
- Can prisoners identify changes made?
- Is prisoner behaviour changing?
- Are outcomes demonstrably better than during the inspection?
- How well do outcomes compare with other similar prisons?

Debriefing

- 4.4 The team leader will meet with the governor for a formal debrief at the end of the IRP. A copy of the debrief document will be shared with the governor and various staff in HMPPS.

Section 5 After the IRP

Report writing and publication

- 5.1 The draft report will be shared with the governor for factual accuracy checking approximately two weeks after the IRP. The final report will be sent to the Secretary of State for Justice and published on HMI Prisons' website within 25 working days of the end of the IRP visit.

Follow-up

- 5.2 IRPs will usually be followed by a full unannounced inspection. The judgements on progress made during an IRP will be used to inform decisions about the timing of this event. The UN protocol cannot be invoked following an IRP.

Appendix I The role of the liaison officer

Liaison officer	
Job purpose	To be the focus of communication between inspection team members, and the management and staff of the establishment.
Who should the liaison officer be?	Someone who knows the establishment well and where to go to get information. It helps if this person has the respect of their peers and is flexible and able to adapt to changes. This person will need to be reliable, motivated and available throughout the IRP period.
Preparation tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Liaise with the organising inspector about logistical requirements for the IRP, for example gate passes, keys, car parking arrangements.• Organise a base room large enough for approximately six people, with an external telephone line, extension leads and staff contacts list, and access to tea, coffee and water if possible.• Provide requested information, documentation and data electronically in advance as requested (see 'Before the visit' section).• Collate any additional information in hard copy.• Arrange a venue for the presentation at 12.30pm on day one.
Tasks during the IRP	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make contact with the team three times a day during the IRP visit to meet additional requests or to manage any difficulties the team may be experiencing, at times to be agreed.
Tasks after the IRP	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure the material requested and used by the inspection team is destroyed or returned to the correct departments.• Respond to any further requests from the HMI Prisons team.

Appendix II Instructions for creating the prisoner population report

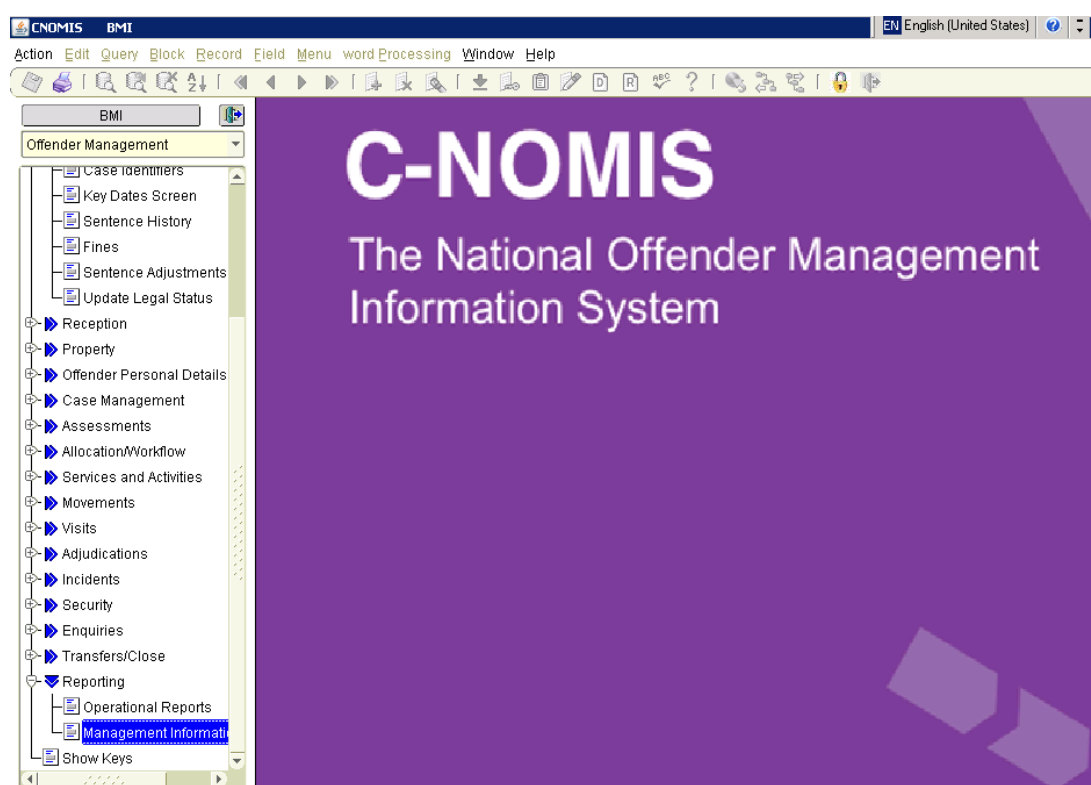
Please refer to your establishment's type in the table below to determine which report is required.

Establishment type	Report name
Adult establishments	Adult HMP Establishments Population Breakdown
Young offender institutions	YOI Population Breakdown
Split establishments – adults and young adults	Population Breakdown for Split Establishments – Adults and Young Adults

Each report has three sections (tabs). For an IRP only the report on the first tab is required, called 'summary'.

Please see below for instructions on how to access and print the reports required.

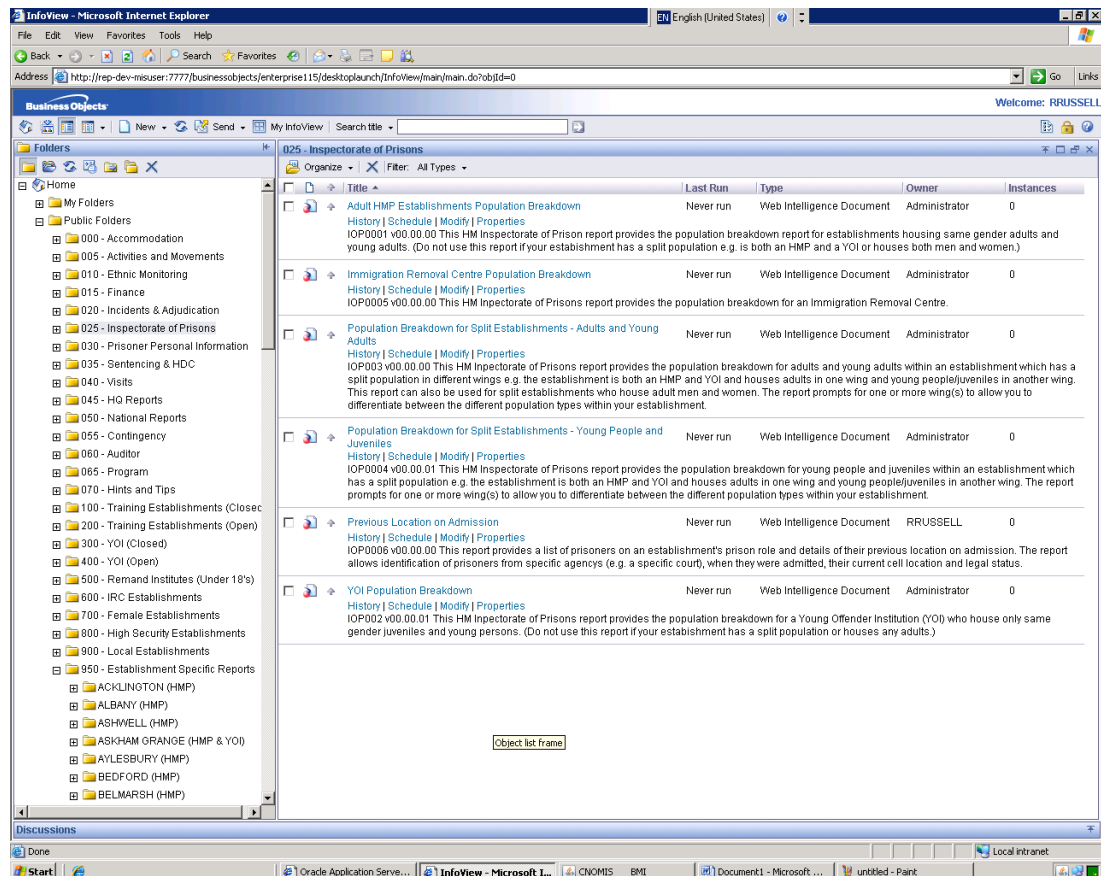
- Log in to the NOMIS application. A shortcut to the Prison-NOMIS application should be available on all PCs within NOMIS-enabled establishments.
- Once in the NOMIS application, select 'Offender Management' (from the drop-down menu underneath the establishment code).
- Locate 'Reporting' in the menu navigation pane and double click on 'Management Information' to launch the reporting sub-system.



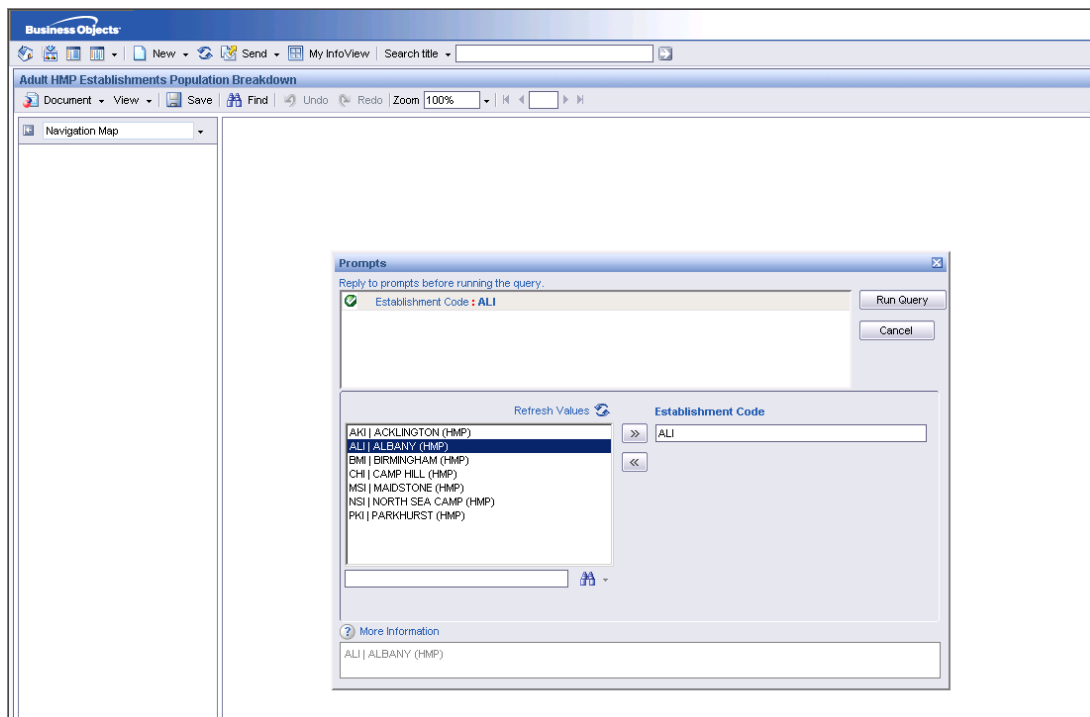
The Management Information reporting sub-system is a web portal. It consists of a folder structure pane on the left-hand side and if you click on a folder, it will reveal the reporting content.

To find the HMI Prisons reports, expand the folder called 'Public Folders', and then locate and click on the '025 – Inspectorate of Prisons' folder.

Click on the appropriate 'population breakdown' report to obtain population profile information.



When you click on a report, the report will open and present a prompts dialog. Select the name of the establishment to be inspected and click on the right arrow to enter the corresponding establishment code. This will act as a parameter value for the report. Once entered, click on the 'Run Query' button and wait for the query to complete.



When the query has finished running, you will see the report populated with data and the three tabs: 'summary', 'core detail' and 'detail'.

For an IRP, HMI Prisons only needs the summary, which provides the counts by the various attributes, such as status, length of stay, age, ethnicity and so on. On the next page is a screenshot from the first page of the report (the data shown is not real but the report structure is accurate).

RESTRICTED

Adult HMP Establishments Population Breakdown - Summary

Data Refreshed Date
20/01/2012

Parameters

Establishment Code: ALI

This report is for Adult HMPs only. Do not use this report for establishments with a split population or HMPYOIs or IRCs.

ALBANY (HMP)

Status	18 - 20 yr olds	21 and over	Other	%
Sentenced	4	519	0	91.6%
Recall	0	0	0	0.0%
Convicted unsentenced	0	5	0	0.9%
Civil prisoners	0	5	0	0.9%
Detainee	0	1	0	0.2%
Other	1	36	0	6.5%
Total	5	566	0	100.0%

Sentence	18 - 20 yr olds	21 and over	Other	%
Unsentenced	3	342	0	60.4%
Less than 6 Months	0	2	0	0.4%
6 Months to less than 1 Year	1	3	0	0.7%
1 Year to less than 2 Years	1	5	0	1.1%
2 Years to less than 3 Years	0	1	0	0.2%
3 Years to less than 4 Years	0	4	0	0.7%
4 Years to less than 10 Years	0	6	0	1.1%
10 Years or more and Less than Life	0	3	0	0.5%
Lifer	0	200	0	35.0%
Total	5	566	0	100.0%

Age	No. of Prisoners	%
Minimum Age: 18	-	-
Under 21	5	0.9%
21 years to 29 years	51	8.9%
30 years to 39 years	113	19.8%
40 years to 49 years	165	28.9%
50 years to 59 years	116	20.3%
60 years to 69 years	74	13.0%
70 plus years	47	8.2%
Maximum Age: 111	-	-
Total	571	100.0%

Nationality	18 - 20 yr olds	21 and over	Other	%
British	2	424	0	74.6%
Foreign nationals	0	38	0	6.7%
Not stated	3	104	0	18.7%
Total	5	566	0	100.0%

RESTRICTED

Save the data as a PDF (go to the 'Document' menu and select 'Save to my computer as... PDF'). A 'file download' dialog box will appear and you can choose to save the file to a location on your computer (click the 'Save' button).

Send the PDF file to the coordinator electronically.