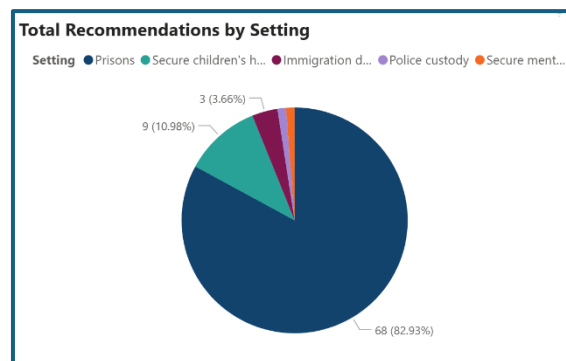


Good Practice: Connection to the Outside World

Maintaining human connection, and a connection to life outside detention, is crucial not only for wellbeing, but also for successful reintegration post-release.

Looking at the Reporting Dashboard's "connection to the outside world" and "visits" tags, records overwhelmingly come out of prisons. This is due to the specific focus that these themes receive during inspections and monitoring visits, and the number of those visits that take place each year.

In analysing the records, some key themes that arise in the examples of good practice are: the use of technology, visits, opportunities for relationship-building, and connection to post-release services, experiences and community.



Examples of good practice in "connection to the outside world" and "visits" by setting.

Connection to the outside world using technology:

Since COVID-19, many establishments across the UK have increasingly embedded technology into everyday practice. Video-calling, in particular, has become a core mechanism for maintaining essential family relationships, especially for people held far from home.

In immigration detention, this has been especially important. At Gatwick IRC, Skype facilities have had a considerable positive impact on detainees. Refurbishment plans for the Tinsley House library also include the installation of several video-call booths.

In-cell phones and facilities for video calls also improve accessibility for detainees. At HMP Full Sutton, video-calling booths had been installed on each wing, significantly increasing access as detainees did not have to wait to be escorted and supervised in a central area of the prison.

At many prisons across the UK, the use of technology is highlighted as a positive means for allowing detainees to keep in contact with family. At HMP Oakwood, video visits were used creatively, facilitating evening calls for bedtime stories, parent/teacher evenings and contact with partners who had just given birth. Hydebanks Wood Women's Prison also allowed video call facilities to enable detainees to attend religious events like funerals, and other important ceremonies involving their children.

Using technology to facilitate communication with and connection to the outside world reduces barriers, provides vital flexibility and supports more consistent contact, particularly in prisons and immigration detention where distance or security restrictions can limit face-to-face time.

Visits:

Despite the rise of digital options, in-person visits remain central to emotional wellbeing and rehabilitation. Several establishments show strong practice in this area.

In police custody, where visits are generally not permitted, Gwent Police showed a good level of care towards children in custody by allowing family members to visit. This is highly unusual and reflects a trauma-informed and child-centred approach to detention.

Across the prison estate, attention has increasingly been paid to accessibility for neurodiverse visitors. At HMP Drake Hall, for example, a private room with soft furnishings was used to help children deal with the visit's environment, offering access to ear defenders, weighted soft toys and sensory activities. Similar provisions were also seen at HMP Peterborough and HMP Hollesley Bay.

Improving the physical environment of visits has also had a strong impact. Catered visit areas, notably HMP Lincoln's "Bertie's" restaurant and HMP Stafford's prisoner-run bistro, create more relaxed, family-like environments and encourage positive behaviour.

Some establishments also hold special visits. At HMP Oakwood, extended private visits (supervised by CCTV) were offered to those on the highest level of the incentive scheme, creating a more relaxed environment for detainees and visitors. At HMP Durham, father-and-child visits were available weekly, enabling men to spend time with their children under five. At HMP Edinburgh, during a "Highland Games" themed visit, an officer gave up his own time to play the bagpipes for the prisoners and their families, creating a fun and family-friendly atmosphere.

In keeping the visits experience positive and inclusive, establishments are able to strengthen family bonds and support a more humane and reassuring environment for both detainees and their loved ones.

Maintaining and building relationships:

Many prisons get creative with the opportunities on offer that help maintain social connection. Football has been used at HMP Dumfries, HMP Edinburgh and HMP Chelmsford to build and maintain relationships between fathers and their children. HMP Doncaster also introduced "Daddy newborn" sessions, where fathers met their newborns and learnt how to carry out caring tasks, weekly toddler sessions, and a "social kitchen" where older children could bake with their dads.

A world first, HMP Barlinnie introduced a "Healthy Dads, Healthy Kids" programme. This was an intensive 8-week initiative which educated fathers and children about eating well and physical activity, simultaneously promoting healthy lifestyles and relationships.

In both the Kibble Safe Centre and the Rossie Secure Accommodation Service, there was an inclusive, passionate and individualised approach to visits and family time. This meant that children's relationships with their families remained strong during their time in the homes.

Detainees who did not receive social visits from family and friends at HMP Long Lartin were still able to build relationships with their peers by attending tea and cake sessions with a friend. This allowed detainees to experience a visit and also engage with family support services.

These examples demonstrate the various ways that meaningful relationships can be supported, even when visits from family members are limited or absent.

Connection to pre- and post-release services, experiences and community:

Connection to the outside world also means preparing individuals for life beyond custody. Effective practice in this area supports continuity, builds confidence and reduces the likeliness of individuals feeling isolated or unsupported upon release.

In the secure children's estate, children at the Atkinson unit benefitted from careers information, advice and guidance. Staff also organised visits to colleges where children planned to study. At Barton Moss Secure Care Centre, staff supported children in taking part in purposeful activities outside the home, which enhanced their practical skills and allowed them to contribute meaningfully to the community.

At HMP Brixton, pre-release appointments were offered, with information about ID, bank accounts and universal credit, housing advice, and healthcare release planning.

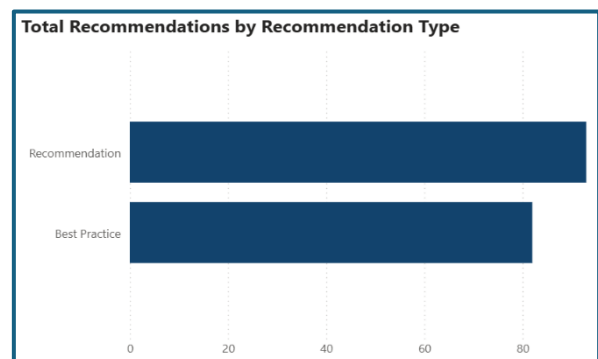
Replicating everyday life inside an establishment can build confidence and independence. HMP Foston Hall allowed women to cook a meal with their family or friends in the family bonding unit, replicating life in the community. HMP Rye Hill allowed for detainees to browse and order items using an electronic catalogue, also reflecting the many purchases made this way in the community.

Patients with unescorted leave at the Rowanbank Clinic were able to engage in community outings, which they said improved their mental health and ensured that moving on from the hospital environment was achievable.

Together, these examples show how connection to community, services and real-world routines supports a smoother transition out of custody and enhances long-term outcomes.

Concluding remarks:

Maintaining connection to the outside world, whether through family relationships, supportive visits, technology or real-life experiences, remains fundamental to wellbeing and reintegration. Establishments that prioritise this create more humane environments and lay the groundwork for better outcomes beyond custody.



Number of recommendations (93) and good practices (82) made relating to connection to the outside world and visits in 2025.