Applying to be a prison officer: frequently asked questions

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Do I have to wear a uniform?

What will my working hours be?

Prison officers can opt to work either a 37, 39 or 41 hour week. You will work on a rolling shift pattern, usually of 39 hours, which includes some nights and some weekends and some public and bank holidays (any public or bank holidays you work will be added to your annual leave allowance – find out more below).

Your salary will be dependent on the number of hours you work. You will have the opportunity to work overtime in certain circumstances.

Work life balance options such as part time hours and job shares are also available, subject to completion of your 10-week full-time POELT course and Induction.

What will I be paid?

Please refer to job advert for details of salary for your selected establishment.

The standard working week for a prison officer is based on 37 hours. Working 39 hour is dependent on completing POELT and opting in to a 39 hour week.

You will also be entitled to a wide range of benefits. You can find out more below.

What benefits am I entitled to as a prison officer?

Pension scheme

Employees are automatically enrolled into a Civil Service Pension Scheme. If you choose to join this scheme, you may contribute an average of 5.45／ of salary depending on your earnings and we will make an average of 18／ employer contribution. http://www.civilservicepensionscheme.org.uk/

Annual Leave

Annual leave starting at 25 days per year rising to 30 days per year after 10 years' service.

Bank, public and privilege holidays

Although prisons operate 24/7 and you will be expected to work on some public and bank holidays, you are still able to enjoy these 9 additional holidays and they will be added to your annual leave entitlement.

Work life balance

The Prison Service is keen to encourage alternative working arrangements. Work life balance provides greater opportunities for staff to work more flexibly wherever managers and establishments can accommodate requests to do so. Requests for flexible working are subject to completion of your 10-week POELT course, which must be completed full time.

Childcare Voucher scheme

If you are a parent and have parental responsibility for a child living with you aged up to 15 (16 if your child has a disability) you could make savings on childcare costs by using our childcare voucher scheme. You will be able to deduct the cost of purchasing childcare vouchers from your earnings before tax and National insurance is deducted.

Season Ticket Loan

You can borrow the cost of your annual season ticket for travel to work interest free and repay this over the following 12 months.

Cycle to Work scheme

You can also participate in the Cycle to Work scheme and save between 30⁄ -40⁄ on the cost of purchasing a bike and accessories by deducting the monthly repayments before tax and National Insurance is deducted.

Exclusive discounts

We offer a range of discounts for many businesses across the UK. These include savings at supermarkets, high street retailers and online stores.

Employee Assistance Programme

All employees have access to our Employee Assistance Programme, providing independent, free and completely confidential telephone advice and support 24/7.

GAYE - Give As You Earn

We provide the opportunity of making charitable donations each month directly through salary, allowing employees to benefit from tax savings.

Prison Service Sports Association (PSSA)

The PSSA is a Membership Association open to all staff working within the prison service including those on contract or in the Education, Healthcare sectors, etc. You can join for a small monthly fee.

Events include sports tournaments, Ski Zone, Spa Day, Clay Pigeon Shooting, Velodrome Trial, Three Peaks, White Water Rafting and much more.

The PSSA is a fantastic organisation enabling you to meet up with colleagues, build friendships and involve your family.

What qualifications do I need?

You don't need any specific qualifications for this role. We're much more interested in your personal qualities and life experience

What happens when I apply?

You will need to complete an online application that includes a maths test, situational judgement tests and confirmation that you meet the eligibility criteria (find out more below).

If you pass the online tests you will be invited to attend a recruitment assessment day (RAD) where you will be assessed further in a number of ways (find out more below).

If you are successful at RAD you will either be:

- put through the vetting process if a position is available immediately
- Put onto a reserve list to wait for a position to become available. As soon as it does you will move into the vetting process.

Once you have passed the vetting process, which can take a few months to complete, you will be booked onto a prison officer entry level training (POELT) course. Providing you pass your POELT course you will begin working in your allocated establishment.

The whole process from application to starting your job as a prison officer can take a minimum of 10 weeks.

What will I be assessed on during my application?

You will be assessed in a number of different ways to ensure you meet the competencies required to become a prison officer. These competencies are:

- Leading and communicating
- Managing a quality service
- Achieving a safe and secure environment
- Showing drive and resilience
- Caring
- Persuading and influencing

What is involved in the online tests?

The online tests assess your ability to deal with situations that you may face as a prison officer.

Maths test

You'll need a decent level of maths to be a prison officer. As well as being able to do prisoner headcounts, you'll have to write reports. As part of your application, you'll take an online maths test.

Situational judgement test

This is an online test that is designed to test how you react in scenarios you may face as a prison officer.

You can find out more in our interactive video at www.prisonandprobationjobs.gov.uk

What happens at the Recruitment Assessment Day (RAD)?

At the recruitment assessment day we will assess your physical fitness and whether you have the qualities and skills we are looking for in a prison officer.

We assess this in a number of ways:

Role plays

We will test how you react in three different role play situations. You will be video-taped and observed by an assessor who will mark you against our criteria.

Written test

We will test you on your literacy and numeracy skills, similar to what you will complete as part of the online test.

Fitness test

The fitness test will assess your ability to meet the physical demands of the job. You will need to complete a bleep test, an agility test and push/pull strength tests.

What do I need to do to prepare for the fitness tests?

You can find a short video and a training plan to help you prepare for the test at nomscareers.com

What training will I get?

You will complete a 10-week prison officer entry level training (POELT) course before you begin your role. During the course new officers will be required to complete the SFJ Level 3 Diploma in the management and care of individuals in the custodial environment.

What is involved in the Prison Officer Entry Level Training course?

Prison officer training is 12 weeks in duration; 10 weeks of that is the POELT course and weeks 1 and 12 are hosted by the home establishment.

Week 1 provides new officers with the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the establishment layout, the role of the establishment and the work they will be expected to carry-out after training.

Week 2 – 11 is formal training which is delivered at one of a number of training sites across England and Wales, this is known as Prison Officer Entry Level Training (POELT).

On successful completion of the formal training new officers will return to their establishment for week 12 where they will have a consolidation week, this gives them the opportunity to apply the learning from formal training.

The course combines a mixture of theory and practice based classroom and dojo activities, each session within the course aims to give new officers a knowledge and understanding of the following:

- Health and safety responsibilities
- Organisational, legal and moral responsibility to those in custody
- Communication and interpersonal skills
- Safer custody in custodial environments
- Offending behaviour and methods for reducing re-offending
- Operating safely
- Operating securely
- Recording and reporting
- Use of force
- Searching individuals
- Escorting
- Pro-social behaviour in working relationships with individuals

New Officers are continually assessed during the course using a range of different practical and written assessment methods. All assessments are designed to test skills and to check knowledge, for example the practical assessments aim to demonstrate competence in:

- Radio procedures and urgent message
- Rub down searching
- Full search
- Cell searching
- Handcuff
- Accommodation Fabric check
- Roll checks
- Locking and unlocking

During the course new officers will be required to complete the SFJ Level 3 Diploma in the management and care of individuals in the custodial environment.

The main objective of this qualification is to provide them with the knowledge, and many of the skills, required to work in custodial environments.

It is a requirement that they complete this qualification during the POELT course in order to take up full duties as a Prison Officer.

In order to gain the qualification they must successfully complete:

- a written final summative assessment paper (knowledge & scenario based questioning)
- 12 knowledge-based work books (Level 3 qualification)
- a range of practical skills assessments (Level 3 qualification)
- use of force - theory and practical (Level 3 qualification)
- demonstrating and maintaining professional standards

They are also required to complete the following:

- work with others to produce a work based project
- a weekly personal development journal
- a range of personal reflection records

Do I have to wear a uniform?

Yes, you will be provided with a uniform.