HM Prison & Probation Service

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

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What is a merit campaign?

Merit campaign: Candidates will be allocated to a vacancy in order of merit, based on their performance at the ARC. This means no candidate will be allocated to a vacancy until all candidates have completed the ARC or by the closing date of campaign applicable assessments, which run for 8 weeks after the campaign closing date. Once you are allocated to a vacancy, you will begin pre-employment checks.

What is a pass campaign?

Pass campaign: You will be allocated to the next available vacancy and will begin pre-employment.

What will my working hours be?

Prison officers can opt to work either a 37, 39 or 41 hour week. Our prisons need 24/7 coverage, so you will work on a rolling shift pattern, usually of 39 hours, which will include some nights, weekends and 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 shift hours for prison officers are based on a 39 hour working week and salary is advertised on that basis. Initially you will be on a 37 hour contract until completion of POELT when you will be able to opt to work between 37 and 41 hours per 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

Prisons operate 24/7 and you will be expected to work on some public and bank holidays. However, any public holidays worked 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.

Find out more about childcare options here: https://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk/

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 abilities, behaviours, strengths and fitness for the job.

What happens when I apply?

Once you have applied, you will be required to pass two online tests: A Scenario-Based Test which covers a range of situations which you could typically face when working in a prison environment; and a Numeracy Test. These tests check that you have the judgement and basic numeracy skills to be a prison officer.

If you pass the online tests, you will be invited to attend an Assessment & Recruitment Centre (ARC). The ARC has six components that you will need to pass to progress with your application.

If you pass your ARC, the next steps depend on whether you applied to a pass or a merit campaign.

- **Pass campaign:** You will be allocated to the next available vacancy and will begin pre-employment.

- **Merit campaign:** Candidates will be allocated to a vacancy in order of merit, based on their performance at the ARC. This means no candidate will be allocated to a vacancy until all candidates have completed the ARC or by the closing date of campaign applicable assessments, which run for 8 weeks after the campaign closing date. Once you are allocated to a vacancy, you will begin pre-employment checks.

During the pre-employment check period, you may be offered a prison tour to show you what working in a prison would be like before starting your role.

The vetting process can take around 3 months. Once you have passed, 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?

The assessment process will test you against a range of skills, behaviours and strengths which have been shown to be important for the prison officer role. You will also need to meet the required fitness standard. You will be assessed in a number of different ways throughout the process.

Stage 1 - Online Tests

All candidates are required to pass two online tests: A Scenario-Based Test which covers a range of situations which you could typically face when working in a prison environment; and a Numeracy Test. These tests check that you have the judgement and basic numeracy skills to be a prison officer.

You can find more information and example questions here:
https://prisonandprobationjobs.gov.uk/prison-officer/tips-for-applying/

Stage 2 - Assessment & Recruitment Centre (ARC)

If you pass Stage 1, you will be invited to attend an Assessment & Recruitment Centre (ARC). You can find out more information about the ARC here:
https://prisonandprobationjobs.gov.uk/prison-officer/tips-for-applying/

The ARC tests whether you have the abilities, behaviours, strengths and fitness for the job. The ARC has six components that you will need to pass to progress with your application:

- **Numeracy Test**
  This short test will confirm you have the basic numerical ability needed to perform your duties as a prison officer. The areas tested are those you will have previously been assessed on during the online Numeracy Test.

- **English Test**
  The test checks your written ability and assesses whether you are able to use written sources of information to make effective decisions. We're looking for you to have clear, legible hand writing and be able to write in sentences that show a reasonable understanding of grammar. You will need to take information from various sources and summarise it in written format.

- **Role Plays**
  You will be assessed on two 10-minute role plays. The role plays require you to take on the role of a prison officer who is interacting with a prisoner in different situations. They are based upon scenarios that you could typically face when working in a prison environment.
  You do not need any prior knowledge of the prison officer role to pass. You will also be assessed on your ability to speak and understand fluent English.

- **Interview**
  The 30-minute interview is strengths-based and will focus on what motivates and energises you. There will be a range of questions and that will assess you against a number of strengths which have been shown to be important in the prison officer role. You will also be assessed on your ability to speak and understand fluent English.

- **Medical Assessment**
  You will be required to take part in a medical assessment, carried out by a trained nurse, to check that you are safely able to take part in the fitness test during the ARC. The

assessment will involve an eye test and basic health screening (including blood pressure check).

- **Fitness Test**
  If you pass your medical you will then be tested on endurance - using a running bleep test between two points, and agility - using a shuttle run. We also test your upper body strength to see if you can hold a 7kg riot shield and grip a piece of equipment.

What is involved in the online tests?

- We use the Scenario-Based Tests to check your ability to judge the effectiveness of actions that could be taken in response to scenarios which you could typically face when at work in a prison environment.
- We use the Numerical Test to check your ability to work with numerical information in situations that you could typically face when at work in a prison environment.
- You can find out more information about the online tests here: https://prisonandprobationjobs.gov.uk/prison-officer/tips-for-applying/

What happens at the Assessment & Recruitment Centre (ARC)?

The Assessment & Recruitment Centre (ARC) tests whether you have the abilities, behaviours, strengths and fitness for the job.

- **Numeracy Test**
  This short test will confirm you have the basic numerical ability needed to perform your duties as a prison officer. The areas tested are those you will have previously been assessed on during the online Numeracy Test.

- **English Test**
  The test checks your written ability and assesses whether you are able to use written sources of information to make effective decisions. We're looking for you to have clear, legible hand writing and be able to write in sentences that show a reasonable understanding of grammar. You will need to take information from various sources and summarise it in written format.

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  If you pass your medical you will then be tested on endurance - using a running bleep test between two points, and agility - using a shuttle run. We also test your upper body strength to see if you can hold a 7kg riot shield and grip a piece of equipment.

If you pass the online tests, you will receive extra information about the ARC and how to prepare.

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

You will be tested on endurance - using a running bleep test between two points, and agility - using a shuttle run. We also test your upper body strength to see if you can hold a 7kg riot shield and grip a piece of equipment.

If you pass the online tests, you will receive extra information about the ARC and how to prepare.

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, you 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. Ten weeks of that is the POELT course. 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 known as Prison Officer Entry Level Training (POELT). POELT is delivered at one of a number of training sites across England and Wales.

Week 12: 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 in their establishment.

What is the formal training like?

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.