



HM Prison &
Probation Service

Prison Officer 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 preemployment.

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 Custody and Detention Apprenticeship Foundation course.

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 your Foundation course 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 Foundation 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 invited to complete the Scenario-Based Test, presenting you with different behavioural and numerical scenarios you might face as a prison officer.

We use this to check you have the basic numeracy skills and behaviours expected of a prison officer.

We will let you know immediately if you pass the first stage of the online tests.

If you are successful, we will invite you to the second stage of the online tests.

For the second stage of the online tests you will be invited to complete a game-based assessment which checks that you have the right natural strengths and preferences to become a prison officer.

You don't need to be a gamer to do well on this test. We're just looking for your natural ability to succeed in the role.

If you are successful, we will invite you to the Assessment & Recruitment Centre (ARC), to complete the final stage of selection. 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 Custody and Detention apprenticeship course.

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 – Scenario-Based Test

All candidates are required to pass a Scenario-Based Test which presents you with different behavioural and numerical scenarios you might face as a prison officer.

You can find more information and example questions here:

<https://prisonandprobationjobs.gov.uk/prison-officer/tips-for-applying/>

Stage 2 – Online Tests – Game-based Assessment

If you are successful in passing the Scenario-Based Test you will be invited to complete a game-based assessment which checks that you have the right natural strengths and preferences to become a prison officer.

You don't need to be a gamer to do well on this test. We're just looking for your natural ability to succeed in the role.

Before you take the real test, we recommend taking the practice assessment which will help to prepare you for the real test.

You will receive information and a code on how to download the practice test and the actual test once you apply.

If you are successful, we will invite you to the Assessment & Recruitment Centre (ARC), to complete the final stage of selection.

Stage 3 - 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:

1. 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 by the numerical elements of the online Scenario-Based test.

2. English Test

The test checks your written ability and assesses whether you are able to use written 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.

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. 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).

6. 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 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?

The Level 3 Custody and Detention Officer Apprenticeship will be replacing the current 10 week Prison Officer Entry level training course (POELT) from May 2020. The Apprenticeship will be a minimum of 12 months of learning and will give you a Level 3 qualification from the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical education (IFATE) as well as a Level 3 diploma qualification in the Management and Care of Individuals in the Custodial Environment which is awarded by Skills for Justice.

The programme will include: 2 weeks induction at your home establishment.
8 weeks foundation training at a Learning & Development (L&D) centre.
Establishment based learning for the remainder of the Apprenticeship.
2 checkpoints will break up the establishment based learning elements, the first will be 2 weeks long with a week at your establishment and a week at an L&D centre. The second checkpoint will take place at an L&D centre.
Once you have been signed off by your line manager and apprenticeship coach you will pass through gateway and will be ready to take your end point assessment. The assessment include a project and a professional discussion.

You will also need to evidence a Level 2 Functional Skills equivalent qualification in Maths and English before you can enter gateway. This could be either a GCSE grade C or above or GCSE Level 4. Don't worry if you can't because training and support will be available to help you. This means not only will you achieve a Level 3 Apprenticeship you will also achieve a Level 2 Functional Skills qualification too.

How will the apprenticeship prepare you to be a prison officer?

The Apprenticeship will develop all of the knowledge, skills and behaviours you need to be a confident Prison Officer. You will complete classroom and online training as well as training on the job so you can practice and enhance your skills with the help and support of your colleagues.

How will you be supported throughout the apprenticeship process?

Apprenticeships aren't just about gaining a new qualification, they will help you to become the best Prison Officer you can be. Don't worry if you aren't very good at Maths or English, tutors will be there to support you through the Functional Skills training. You will also meet regularly with your apprenticeship coach and your line manager throughout the course of your Apprenticeship

You can find out more about the apprenticeship here - <https://prisonandprobationjobs.gov.uk/prison-officer/apprenticeships/>

Do I have to wear a uniform?

Yes, you will be provided with a uniform.