



Independent Monitoring Board

HMYOI Thorn Cross

**Annual Report
May 2010– April 2011**

Section 1

STATUTORY ROLE OF THE IMB

The Prisons Act 1952 and the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 require every prison and IRC to be monitored by an independent Board appointed by the Home Secretary from members of the community in which the prison or centre is situated.

The Board is specifically charged to:

- (1) Satisfy itself as to the humane and just treatment of those held in custody within its prison and the range and adequacy of the programmes preparing them for release.
- (2) Inform promptly the Secretary of State, or any official to whom he has delegated authority as it judges appropriate, any concern it has.
- (3) **Report annually to the Secretary of State on how well the prison has met the standards and requirements placed on it and what impact these have on those in its custody.**

To enable the Board to carry out these duties effectively its members have right of access to every prisoner and every part of the prison and also to the prison's records.

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Section 3

DESCRIPTION OF PRISON

- 3.1.1 HMYOI Thorn Cross was purpose built in 1985 as an open establishment for male juvenile and young offenders. It has a capacity for 322 trainees in 6 units. It was re-rolled in 2008 to become a prison for 18 to 25 year old men. The High Intensity Training unit caters for up to 60 trainees and also has an Independent Living Unit for up to 8 prisoners nearing release. Two 60 bed units cater for 18 to 21 year olds and two units for 21 to 25 year olds. There is a secure closed unit which can house a further 10 trainees with r additional cells where prisoners can be placed for reasons of care and separation.
- 3.1.2 In January 2011 Thorn Cross was twinned with HMP Risley. The prisons have the same Governor and several posts are now shared between the two sites. This number is likely to increase in future.
- 3.1.3 There are a variety of workshops and the education department provides general education, art, computer skills, life skills and a variety of specialised courses. Additional and evening programmes are offered in Thinking Skills, Anger Management, parenting etc. CARATs offer counselling for drug use and there is a comprehensive resettlement programme.
- 3.1.4 The gym and weights room and the playing fields offer sports of all kinds.
- 3.1.5 Training and education is provided by Manchester College and Healthcare by the Bridgewater Community Health Care Trust.

Section 4

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

4.1.1 The Independent Monitoring Board believes that Thorn Cross is well run with dedicated staff at all levels providing a fair and decent service to prisoners in a sometimes challenging environment. There is a positive culture which is demonstrated in the attitudes of both staff and prisoners. The twinning with Risley offers positive opportunities for both prisons but also carries risks of a dilution of the expertise built up at Thorn Cross. It is too early to know what impact it will have on the prison and, in particular, the lives of prisoners but this will be closely monitored by the IMB during 2011-2012. The Chair of Thorn Cross IMB and the Chair of Risley IMB will be looking at how the relationship between the two boards should develop.

4.1.2 The main concerns are as follows in order of priority:

For the attention of the Prison Service

- Some prisoners who arrive at Thorn Cross are found to be unsuitable for open conditions and need to be held in the Care and Separation Unit before being returned to closed conditions. This has been highlighted in every annual report since 2006. The usual reasons for unsuitability are: less than 7 days in a closed site, offences too severe for an open site, or a suspected foreign national. As all these circumstances are apparent from the prisoner record, it is difficult to see why this misallocation of prisoners continues to occur. (ref. section 5.5.6, p.8)
- At the same time, despite the national shortage of prison places and the apparent availability of prisoners suitable for open conditions, the population of Thorn Cross remains below capacity. Improved systems for prisoner allocation to maximise use of facilities and assets is required. (ref. section 6.4.1)
- Appeals against adjudication now go to the Briefing and Casework unit in London and it can take 3 or more weeks to obtain a response by which time any punishment given is likely to have been completed. Although a fast track approach is available and is used, this still does not always give a sufficiently fast response. (ref. section 5.5.4, p.8)

For the attention of the Governor

- There is some confusion in the understanding of ROTL policy across the prison which can result in inconsistent decision-making. (ref. section 7.4.1., p.13)
- SMARG meetings have been very irregular with very few taking place. (ref. section 5.5.9, p.9)

4.1.3 Update on areas of concern from the 2009-2010 annual report.

The Board is pleased to note the following improvements in areas of concern from 2009/2010

- Delays in transport arrangements for prisoners have decreased significantly and prisoners have not generally spent a long time in CSU waiting for transport.
- Police investigations are now being completed more speedily so that prisoners have not generally spent long periods of time in CSU whilst waiting for these. Exceptions still occur when the police force conducting the investigation is geographically distant from the prison. (ref. section 5.5.7, p.9)
- Although the state of the toilets and showers continued to cause concern during the first half of the year, there was a significant improvement in the second half. (ref. section 6.6.1, p.10)
- The frequent closure of workshops due to staff absence has been remedied by the appointment of a peripatetic instructor. During 2010-2011, Manchester College delivered 98% of its contracted hours. However, capacity of the sessions is still a concern, with regular prisoner absences. (ref. section 5.2.3, p.6)
- There has been a sharp decrease in the number of prisoners arriving with only a few weeks of their sentence remaining.
- The number of workout placements increased from 30 in 2009/2010 to 50 in 2010/2011. (ref. section 5.2.6, p.6)
- The re-roll to take in 21-25 year olds is now well bedded in, with staff attitudes now adjusted to young adults.

Section 5

AREAS THAT MUST BE REPORTED ON

5.1 Diversity

- 5.1.1 Thorn Cross is committed to ensuring equality and valuing diversity and holds the Investors in Diversity Award.
- 5.1.2 Race equality is promoted through monthly REAT meetings, which include two prisoner representatives. Equality targets are closely monitored and are usually met. Action is quickly taken to remedy any problems.
- 5.1.3 The kitchens are sensitive to religious and cultural needs and Ramadan is well managed. A variety of interesting and enjoyable activities are built around awareness days for different cultures. These often include art work produced in the classrooms, food prepared in catering and talks from outside groups.
- 5.1.4 Other areas of diversity such as gender and sexuality are also positively promoted.

5.2 Learning and Skills

- 5.2.1 The education programme is operated through the SFA and supplied by Manchester College. Educational targets have nearly all been met or exceeded. There are a variety of workshops including catering, bricklaying, painting and decorating, industrial cleaning, plumbing, car mechanics, farms and gardens and recycling. A new course on kitchen and bathroom fitting was introduced during the year which combines a number of different building skills. Qualifications are awarded by the Construction Awards Alliance at Diploma level 1. A classroom has been built in the Brickwork workshop to allow teaching to level 2. Improvements have been made to the Painting and Decorating area. Prisoners are able to gain their CSCS green card through the workshops. The Railway project, which provides opportunities for employment to suitable people after release is still very popular. Full and part time courses are provided in art and design, business administration, information technology (i-media) and social skills.
- 5.2.2 On induction all prisoners are seen by CIAS (Careers Information Advisory Service). All are asked for two choices in terms of educational and vocational classes and are then interviewed by Working Links / Connexions. The Labour Board then allocates courses according to need and choice where possible. Prisoners with poor literacy and numeracy skills are identified on Induction and are offered one-to-one teaching and study group activity to rectify this. An Individual Learning Plan is created for each prisoner. This is a personal document which accompanies the prisoner and, while the target is to have all prisoners with ILPs, there are issues which result in many being incomplete, and work is required, by both prisoners and staff, to ensure that compliance is increased in this area.
- 5.2.3 Previous difficulties in ensuring that courses are able to run when staff are off sick or on holiday have been largely resolved by the appointment of a peripatetic instructor. Manchester College provided 98% of its contracted hours during 2010/2011. Targets for Skills For Life accreditation have been exceeded with 301 achieved against a target of 300. However, it is still disappointing to find that

workshops and classes are often running with reduced numbers due to short term absences and conflicting priorities for prisoners.

- 5.2.4 Farms and gardens ensure that the appearance of the prison is to a high standard. The annual entry into Southport flower show also engages the art class and many of the workshops in providing a stall of exceptionally high quality.
- 5.2.5 An Employability course is designed to ensure offenders are ready for the work place. This includes giving prisoners practice in interviewing skills and IMB members have been involved in providing panels for mock interviews. The 'Family Links' and 'Life Skills' courses aim to build on previous courses and introduce further parenting skills.
- 5.2.6 Workout opportunities are a valuable experience towards the end of a sentence, and employers are generally very pleased with the contributions the prisoners make. The Board is delighted that workouts have increased from 30 per week in 2009-2010 to 50 per week in 2010-2011.
- 5.2.7 The Library has been well used and has an enthusiastic team of staff who link closely with the local library service and are very willing to help prisoners get the most benefits from this service.
- 5.2.8 The prison is continuing to have significant successes in linking into the community with initiatives with the Halle Orchestra (Halle4brass) and the Gamelan project, which has been funded through the Big Lottery. It is hoped that this funding will be continued and the art classes have produced some excellent work to support the application process.
- 5.2.9 The gym, weights room and sports facilities are popular and a wider variety of sporting activities has been introduced during the reporting period. Significant events such as the World Cup are used as a basis for organising sporting events within the prison.
- 5.2.10 Board members are consistently impressed not only by the level of commitment shown by the tutors and support staff, but also the real sense of learning and achievement experienced by some of the prisoners. The dedication of the staff at Thorn Cross in handling the many issues and attempting to maximise each individual's potential continues to be outstanding.

5.3 Healthcare and Mental Health

- 5.3.1 There is a high standard of health care at Thorn Cross and previous problems of high staff turnover have been resolved so that there is now a stable team working well together. Access to the services of a G.P. and dentist have improved significantly with a G.P. now attending daily and a dentist weekly. A CPN attends for 22.5 hours each week.
- 5.3.2 The IDTS programme continues to be available, but numbers of prisoners on the methadone programme remain very low due to the low incidence of heroin use at Thorn Cross.

5.3.3 In addition to providing medical services, the healthcare centre runs a number of health promotion courses for which there is a good take-up amongst prisoners.

5.4 Safer custody

5.4.1 The Safer Custody Committee draws together issues concerning suicide and self-harm prevention, anti-bullying and violence reduction. The Peer Mentor scheme continues its successful work giving advice and support to new prisoners and those who may be vulnerable. There are 20 trained mentors and there have been 207 since the scheme started in 2007. The mentors themselves gain confidence and self esteem and give talks to people in the prison and outside. These are always very well received. They have given 43 talks since the scheme began.

5.4.2 During 2010 / 2011 28 ACTS were opened. One prisoner arrived with an open ACT.

5.4.3 New procedures have been implemented for unexplained injuries and anti-social behaviour. The Violence Reduction Workshop provides mandatory training for all prisoners receiving adjudications for assaults, fights or anti-social behaviour.

5.5 Care and Separation Unit

5.5.1 Prisoners are confined to the care and separation unit (before or after adjudication) following some misdemeanour or for their own protection – due to risk of self harm or threats from other prisoners. All prisoners on arrival in CSU are seen by health care immediately after admission and then on a daily basis, and daily by a Governor.

5.5.2 An officer contacts an IMB member whenever a prisoner is located to this unit and a Board member meets with each prisoner as soon as possible – usually within 24 hours. Prisoners in CSU are usually calm when seen by the IMB and rarely complain about the adjudication or their treatment in CSU. They have access to a shower, some of their property and an outside yard for exercise or a smoke.

5.5.3 Adjudications are routinely observed by members of the Board and are seen to be conducted fairly with appropriate punishments awarded. The trainees have sufficient time to prepare and are given every opportunity to speak for themselves at the adjudication.

5.5.4 The Board is concerned that appeals against adjudications are now considered by the Briefing and Casework Unit in London and can take up to 3 or more weeks for a response to be received by which time the punishment has been served. Although a fast track appeals approach is possible through faxing etc, most punishments are of short duration so even a short turn round may be ineffective.

5.5.5 Segregation reviews are carried out routinely as required, and members of Healthcare are always present. A member of the IMB attends whenever possible.

5.5.6 Unsuitable prisoners arriving at Thorn Cross continue to give the Board concern and during the last 12 months there have been several prisoners sent to Thorn

Cross who are found on arrival to be unsuitable for open conditions. This may be due to:

- less than 7 days in a closed site
- offences too severe for open site
- foreign national

The Board feels strongly that better checks should be made at the closed prison to avoid these errors which cause inconvenience to all and unnecessary costs.

- 5.5.7 The board has previously expressed concern about the length of time prisoners are held in the CSU awaiting police investigations when they have been involved in a serious incident. This has improved significantly in most cases and time delays now only occur when the investigation is being done by a police force geographically distant from Thorn Cross.
- 5.5.8 The number of prisoners in CSU varies considerably from day to day and over the longer term, ranging from a total of 14 in February 2011 to 38 in July 2010. There has been a concerted effort to hold onto prisoners who in previous years may have been returned to closed conditions. 10 days CC tends to be the maximum punishment given and is less in many cases.
- 5.5.9 SMARG meetings have been irregular and infrequent and the Board would like to see these being re-established.
- 5.5.10 The Board considers the CSU to be a very well-run unit with staff providing a high standard of care.

Section 6

OTHER AREAS OF THE PRISON REGIME ON WHICH THE BOARD HAS ISSUES TO REPORT

6.1 Accommodation

6.1.1 During the previous year the Board had serious concerns about the state of the toilets and showers. Whilst this continued to be a problem in the first part of 2010/2011, there were significant improvements in the later part of the year. This has been partly due to the installation of new pressure pumps and partly to increased vigilance and inspection by prison staff. Vandalism remains an issue but much progress has been made.

6.2 Catering and Kitchens

6.2.1 Food is generally good and most prisoners acknowledge this. The few complaints received by the Board concern quantity not quality. Sufficient food leaves the kitchens so any shortfall in portions happens at the servery. Good supervision at the servery is essential to ensure that adequate portions are available for everyone.

6.2.2 The prison Farms and Gardens provide fresh salad for the kitchens, grown in poly tunnels.

6.2.3 The Board is concerned that the very limited budget for food purchase is very inflexible as much of the purchasing is carried out centrally and there is little or no opportunity for opportunistic purchasing which has been beneficial in the past.

6.3 Chaplaincy

6.3.1 The Thorn Cross Chaplaincy team are all very active and enthusiastic and cater for a wide range of faiths. Their work in providing Family Days and Restorative Justice programmes greatly enhances the life of prisoners.

6.3.2 The Sycamore Tree programme is very successful and the Chaplaincy team is particularly enterprising in obtaining sources of funding to enable these to continue.

6.3.3 Chaplaincy have involvement with REAT, safer custody and Child Protection. The Chaplaincy also provide a Care Team staff and a Care Team Co-ordinator and two members of staff are ACCT assessors.

6.4 Population

6.4.1 The operational capacity of the prison during 2010/2011 was 85% against a target of 95%. The staff at Thorn Cross have developed considerable expertise in working with the 18-25 year old age group and the Board hopes that the twinning with Risley and other changes taking place in prisons in the North-West will ensure that more young offenders and young adults are able to benefit from this. The prison is very active in trying to increase the population at Thorn Cross, and liaises closely with its feeder prisons, but despite the numbers of eligible prisoners in the area, and the

general shortage of prison places, this seems to be an uphill struggle. Some of those who do arrive are then seen to be inappropriate for open conditions.

6.5 Staffing

- 6.5.1 Four of the units moved to a self-rostering system during the year. The Board has found that this has improved the stability of staffing in the units with far less occasions when staff end up working on an unfamiliar unit.

6.6 Substance misuse

- 6.6.1 All trainees are assessed on arrival and if necessary they are referred to CARATS for counselling. Prisoners may self refer at any time. Cannabis remains the most common drug used in Thorn Cross as proved by mandatory drug tests. The drug mentors have proved to be helpful in supporting those with drug problems.
- 6.6.2 The figure for positive MDTs was 7.74% against a target of 8%.
- 6.6.3 Although facilities for providing methadone exist, very few prisoners have needed this service.

6.7 Prisoner representatives

- 6.7.1 Representatives of prisoners from each unit meet regularly with a governor and many issues are discussed and acted on, if it is seen as appropriate, to improve life at Thorn Cross. Domestic issues can be sorted out quickly as the representatives are listened to and explanations offered if issues raised cannot be changed.
- 6.7.2 The Board is pleased that previous problems about frequency and representation have been resolved and meetings now take place monthly with full representation from the units. An IMB member attends these meetings.

6.8 Unit 5

The High Intensity Training Unit programme is tailored to meet the individual's needs giving prisoners a wider range of opportunities to explore. The HIT unit is seen as a positive initiative and has a beneficial effect on the majority of prisoners enabling them to make a successful transition back into the community. However, whilst numbers for the unit have increased, there seem to be more prisoners who are then found to be unsuitable for the Unit 5 regime.

The unit continues to have a pleasing success rate for prisoners completing the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme, with 60 bronze medals awarded over the past 18 months. Thorn Cross is the only prison permitted to give out awards.

6.9 Visits

- 6.9.1 Families and friends are able to book visits easily and are welcomed at the gate with courtesy and efficiency. Mid-week and weekend visits are available, with

longer hours at weekends. On weekend visits, refreshments and a crèche are available through a local voluntary group.

Section 7
THE WORK OF THE INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARD

BOARD STATISTICS	
Recommended Complement of Board Members	12
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	11
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	9
Number of new members joining within the reporting period	0
Number of members leaving within reporting period	2
Number of attendances other than Board meetings	295
Total number of visits to the prison/IRC (including all meetings)	374

7.2 Training

- 7.2.1 The National Training programme is used as the basis for training members of the Board. Members have attended the appropriate courses as their roles change and develop. All the National courses attended have been well received and found to be most useful. Two members of the Board attended the National Conference
- 7.2.2 Members of the Board had a useful and informative visit to HMP Garth and hosted a return visit from members of their Board.
- 7.2.3 Board meetings usually start with a short presentation by a member of the prison staff on their area of activity and the issues which they face. These have proved very informative and useful. Various internal courses arranged at Thorn Cross have also been attended.
- 7.2.4 The Chair attends area Chairs meetings with the Area Manager and the National Council Representative which is useful in terms of sharing information.

7.3 Inductions

- 7.3.1 The prison runs induction courses for new prisoners starting on Mondays and Wednesdays. As part of each programme the new prisoners are seen by a Board member who tells them about the work of the IMB and how they can be contacted. Prisoners in the High Intensity Treatment unit are also seen for induction every two weeks.

7.4 Access to IMB

- 7.4.1 Historically few formal applications are received by the Board at Thorn Cross and most queries are collected “on the hoof” and sorted out immediately. However, there has been an increase in formal written applications in the later part of the reporting period and this may reflect the older age group now arriving in Thorn Cross. Informal “on the hoof” approaches continue to be common. Queries have included access to property, misunderstandings with staff or prison rules and various sanctions for minor reports. There is a steady stream of prisoners who are unhappy with decisions about ROTL. This is not surprising given the significance of this for prisoners and the important role it plays in an open prison. The Board have found that decisions to refuse ROTL are usually taken with good reason and prisoners are given guidance on what they need to do to improve the chances of a successful future application. There is some confusion about ROTL eligibility dates with inconsistent interpretation of the policy and this needs to be remedied. The guidance is currently being re-written in order to clarify this and ensure consistency throughout the prison.
- 7.4.3 Possibly because of the previous rarity of formal applications, the process for getting these to the Board had become confused, with applications going astray. A new system was introduced, along with a new application format, to ensure that applications remain confidential and are received quickly. This system is now working well. The Board appreciates the effective work of its Clerk in devising and maintaining this system.
- 7.4.4 Most trainees are directed to their personal officer or the prison complaints system although enquiries are made and action taken in many cases. Most often, the prisoner only requires an explanation of what he can do or reassurance of how the system works, and is well satisfied with the response.
- 7.4.5 Rota visits take place each week usually by a pair of Board members and findings shared at the monthly meetings and discussed with the Governor. If there are matters of significance, a Governor is contacted immediately and the response received by the Governors is usually excellent.
- 7.4.6 Most of the Board have individual responsibilities for areas of special interest and attend meetings as observers, e.g. Safer Custody, REAT, Prisoner Representatives, Quality Improvement etc. The prison continues to rearrange meetings or cancel them at short notice which is frustrating to members of the Board who attend the prison especially for a meeting.

7.5 Support

- 7.5.1. The Board is grateful for the efficiency, hard work and cheerful support from the Board Secretary and all the support staff at the prison who are always eager to help and provide information and advice where necessary.