



Annual Report
of the
Independent Monitoring Board

at

HMP Thameside

for reporting Year
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Monitoring fairness and respect for people in custody

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1 STATUTORY ROLE OF THE IMB

The Prison Act 1952 requires every prison to be monitored by an independent Board appointed by the Secretary of State 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.

2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

HMP Thameside holds a diverse and fluctuating prisoner population with different needs (young and elderly, remand and convicted [short and long sentences], UK and foreign nationals). Every day it accepts whomever the courts and HMPPS send it, and the average stay is short. Operating within, but very close to, its operating capacity of 1232 men, it has been ‘crowded’ throughout the reporting year (as defined by HMPPS). It meets these challenges well.

Main judgements

Are prisoners treated fairly?

The prison’s systems and practices are properly designed to be fair but the IMB is seriously concerned at the unfair impact of inadequate management of some processes. Areas of ‘low level’ unfairness identified in the 2016/17 Annual Report persist (5.7). Far from improving, the handling of prisoners’ complaints deteriorated markedly at the end of 2017/18 (5.9). The organisation of home detention curfew (11.6) remains unreliable. Delays making repairs when equipment is broken (7.1, 7.2, 7.8), cancellation of activity sessions (7.3), and more use of restricted regime with men spending longer in their cells (7.4), all cause the IMB growing disquiet. A simple task, like delivering necessary post to prisoners, has been taking up to two weeks (5.8). Nevertheless, the IMB can also report that the prison has implemented valuable initiatives, detailed in the evidence sections below (e.g. 4.2.1, 4.4, 5.1, 8.4, 8.7, 10.4, 11.5).

Are prisoners treated humanely?

HMP Thameside remains a humane prison with an unoppressive ethos. The nine protected characteristics are taken seriously and prisoners’ basic rights are recognised (5.1). The Early Days Centre provides appropriate oversight when men first arrive (4.6) but the care with which the ACCT system is implemented deteriorated during 2017/18 (4.3). Adjudications and Reviews are conducted humanely (6.4, 6.7). A smoking ban was introduced in March 2018 following good preparation. Men suffering from the withdrawal of tobacco are helped (8.2). The quality of healthcare is not consistent. There are unexplained delays in treatment or referral (8.4). Some men held in the In-Patient Unit have too little time out of cell (8.3.2).

Are prisoners prepared well for their release?

Prisoners committed to HMP Thameside stay for periods ranging from a few days to several years. The average is 5 weeks (11.1). Many have needs that cannot be met by the prison. Because of their diversity, it is impractical to establish all-inclusive programmes to prepare men for life in society. Disappointingly, the availability of suitable accommodation for released men remains poor (11.4). A typical prisoner leaving the establishment has not been prepared well for a law-abiding lifestyle. On the plus side, substance misusers are helped whilst in prison (8.7); maintenance of family links is supported well (7.7, 11.5); some men improve their numeracy and literacy (9.2), or gain employment-related skills in textiles or reprographics (10.4); job fairs involving employers are organised (10.5). However, such measures impacted a fraction of the ~1500 men who were released in 2017/18 (11.1).

Main Areas for Development

TO THE MINISTER, THE PRISON SERVICE AND THE DIRECTOR

None of the Main Areas for Development identified in the Executive Summary of the IMB’s 2016/17 Annual Report has been successfully addressed. They remain as urgent now as they were a year ago. Further commentary is given on page 5.

TO THE DIRECTOR

The acceptability of low level unfairness needs to be challenged robustly whenever it arises. In the IMB’s judgement, the reasons given to Board members to justify such unfairness are too often unconvincing and some managers appear insufficiently energised to put things right.

Main Areas for Development reported by the IMB in 2016/17

TO THE MINISTER

Urgent action by government departments, charities, local boroughs and the London Mayor to increase the availability of good hostel accommodation for prisoners on their release, because good accommodation is a vital factor in reducing reoffending.

TO THE PRISON SERVICE

Clarity in planning of the prison estate and its development so that HMP Thameside can develop services in line with a long-term strategy, free of planning blight.

TO THE DIRECTOR

A high-quality complaints system that prisoners can trust and that promotes improvement.

Progress during 2017/18

- i. The first of these areas is one of serious concern to IMBs for other London prisons, as their Annual Reports document. Prisoners tell the IMB how the absence of somewhere to go with a bed has contributed to their reoffending and return to prison. It is recognised that resolving the problem cannot be achieved at a stroke. However, there has not, apparently, been any 'urgent action' on this issue (11.4).
- ii. The second area, addressed to the Prison Service, is similarly unresolved (11.7). IMB members know that HMPPS has no option but to accept and accommodate anyone committed to custody by the courts. The prison estate is crowded to the point that ensuring all prisoners have a bed for the night takes precedence over enabling an establishment like HMP Thameside to plan confidently for a consistent population make-up. This means that men held in the prison are not prepared for release as well as they could and should be. It is not fair and contravenes MoJ's stated policy.
- iii. The third area, complaints handling, was immediately accepted and recognised as important by HMP Thameside's Director. Efforts have been made during the past twelve months to raise the prison's performance. At times there were improvements but, during the period from April to June 2018, the prison's response to formal prisoner complaints has been very poor [5.9].

3 DESCRIPTION OF THE PRISON

- 3.1 HMP Thameside opened in 2012 as a Category B local prison, with an operational capacity of 900 men. In April 2015, an extension opened providing an additional capacity of 332, intended for resettlement prisoners (mainly Category C) approaching their release date. Throughout 2017/18 the prison has been occupied close to its operational capacity of 1232, which means it has been consistently very full.
- 3.2 The prison must accept whatever prisoners it is sent either from a court or from another prison. This results in a diverse and fluctuating population of men (11.1). The average length of stay is short. Each quarter the prison receives and discharges over 500 prisoners.
- 3.3 The prison was purpose-built. All cells have integrated toilets and showers, a telephone and in-cell information technology for communication within the prison. Eligible prisoners can opt to pay for access to a limited number of television channels. There is a Care and Separation Unit (CSU) with 20 cells and a Healthcare Centre with 18 cells for in-patients and surgeries for out-patient consultations.
- 3.4 There is a well-equipped gym, a library, an education centre, a multi-faith centre and an activity centre with workshops, classrooms and the potential to accommodate a range of activities suitable for resettlement prisoners.
- 3.5 The prison is managed under contract by Serco Group plc. It has two partner agencies, Catch 22 (focusing on offender management, gangs and rehabilitation) and Turning Point (issues arising from drug and alcohol misuse).
- 3.6 A range of centrally contracted organisations provide other services. Education is contracted to Novus; healthcare is contracted to the Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust (Oxleas); Change Grow Live (CGL) provides social care; career information and advice was provided by Prospects until March 2018, when its contract ended; the community rehabilitation company (CRC) is MTC Novo which subcontracts assisting with accommodation on release to Depaul; the escort contractor is Serco Wincanton.
- 3.7 In September 2017, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons (HMCIP) published the report on an inspection of HMP Thameside in May 2017. He found that 'overall, HMP Thameside is a relatively good prison ... a real achievement in the current climate ... with an unusually high number of good practice points'.

B Evidence sections 4 – 11

4 SAFETY

- 4.1 **Violence.** Levels of violence within the prison remain too high but have declined slightly since 2016/17. During the final quarter of the reporting year the average monthly number of assaults (prisoner on prisoner and prisoner on staff) was 39 (43 in 2016/17), with 8 classed as serious (9 in 2016/17). The prison does not collect similar data about prisoner on prisoner and staff on prisoner bullying but there has been an increase in Applications to the IMB alleging bullying (Section D).
- 4.2 **Violence reduction.** There are two limbs to violence reduction – (i) organisational arrangements to minimise the opportunities for violent behaviour and (ii) behavioural interventions to help those prone to anger and violence to increase their self-control.
- 4.2.1 There are 70+ gangs with members in the prison who need to be kept apart. This is done well, through close understanding of gang affiliations and enmities and good intelligence. In May 2018, a revised regime for the movement of prisoners (to activities, etc.) was introduced. Early indications are that it reduces violent incidents though it appears to have consequences in other areas that need to be addressed (7.8, 8.3.2).
- 4.2.2 Behavioural interventions are less impressive. Given the classification of the prison, longer term violence reduction courses are not run. There is a reliance on in-cell reading packs which require the willingness, often absent, of prisoners to get involved. A new programme, due to start in August 2018, facilitates more staff interaction with violent offenders, but without good supporting courses its effectiveness will be limited.
- 4.3 **Vulnerable prisoners.** The IMB's monitoring this year has reinforced its 2016/17 opinion that "Assessment Care in Custody Teamwork (ACCT) paper-work ... does not encourage officers to monitor vulnerable prisoners thoughtfully because it promotes a box-ticking mind-set". In May 2018, a spot check of all 42 ACCT documents then open found little evidence of mental health needs assessment or therapeutic input from NHS staff to care plans, or of regular meaningful interactions between prisoner and custodial staff as specified by an ACCT. Not all routine observation records were reliable. The prison identified this weak practice early in 2018 but has not succeeded in correcting it.
- 4.4 **Self-harm.** Prisoner self-harm incidents (as reported in the prison's daily meeting) averaged over one a day in June 2018; few were life threatening, and repeat self-harming by the same prisoner is common. The number is static but too high. The safer custody team have introduced several initiatives, such as identifying men who seldom interact with other prisoners, spending considerable time withdrawn in their cells, and providing social opportunities to help take them out of themselves. This is good.
- 4.5 **Deaths in Custody.** There were two deaths in custody during 2017/18. Neither was apparently self-inflicted. Inquests have yet to be held.
- 4.6 **Early days.** The Early Days regime introduced in January 2017 has bedded down. All new arrivals are monitored with particular care by officers on a dedicated wing, with readily available trained prisoner 'insiders' to offer help and reassurance.
- 4.7 **Health and safety.** The prison's design and construction make it generally healthy and safe. The smoking ban introduced in March is positive. Rodent infestation is now better controlled. Significant resources are committed to eliminating corruption and preventing drugs and phones entering the prison. Much is intercepted, but not everything. In June, 31% of mandatory random drug tests were positive (mostly 'spice').
- 4.8 Prisoners sometimes put themselves at risk. The monthly averages during April to June 2018 were 7 incidents at height, 2 cell fires, 16 drugs finds, 6 hooch finds and 7 improvised weapons. Sometimes men tamper with electrical equipment. Substance misuse, especially taking 'spice', regularly damages both health and safety.

5 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS

- 5.1 **Diversity and equality.** The Diversity team in the prison is energetic, proactive and effective. Members of the senior team act as leads and there are prisoner groups or a forum for each protected characteristic. The Diversity and Equalities Action Team meets monthly, chaired by the Deputy Director. It receives reports on life for prisoners with one or more of the characteristics and from prisoner Diversity representatives and Care and Support orderlies.
- 5.2 During the first half of 2018, 56 Discrimination Incident Report Forms were submitted. Ten have been upheld, 27 were not upheld and the rest are still being investigated. The majority allege some form of racism and in one instance the investigation led to the dismissal of a member of staff. IMB members did not witness any of the proven instances of racism.
- 5.3 The chaplaincy has been affected by staff changes. Recruiting replacements is not easy but adequate arrangements were made to ensure that there have not been serious discontinuities in the support provided for prisoners from the range of faiths.
- 5.4 The kitchen provides suitable food for prisoners with particular dietary needs or habits. It supports major religious fasts and festivals well by offering appropriate menu choices.
- 5.5 **Disability and social care.** The prison was designed to accommodate men with physical disabilities. There are cells adapted for wheelchair users. However, a problem of growing importance during 2017/18 was the unreliability of the lifts in the residential houseblocks, tending to restrict living conditions for men with impaired mobility (7.2).
- 5.6 Social care provision is good. The Royal Borough of Greenwich assesses whether a prisoner requires such care. As at June 2018, the number was 12. Prisoner orderlies are trained to provide general support. When hands-on care is needed, it is contracted to specialists (Care, Grow, Live). There is a constant need to train new orderlies as trained men leave the prison on release or transfer, but there is no shortage of volunteers.
- 5.7 **Unfairness.** A theme running through this report is the prevalence of low-level unfairness within HMP Thameside. By this the IMB means treatment that, while not seriously damaging to prisoners in isolation, is an avoidable irritation that over time, and given the constrained circumstances of prisoner life, builds cumulative frustration and resentment that may provoke poor behaviour. Delay in delivering post is an example. There is no valid reason why daily collection of internal mail and its delivery to prisoners should be haphazard and unreliable; but it has been. There can be serious consequences because post may contain time sensitive and important information about a prisoner's custodial status or welfare from a prison department or agency. The IMB has documented occasions when envelopes addressed to prisoners sit in a pigeonhole for over a week, uncollected and undelivered by staff. For other examples see 7.2 and 7.3.
- 5.8 **Complaints.** During April-June 2018, 476 complaints were submitted to the prison by prisoners. The biggest single category, accounting for about one third of the total, concerned their property. During the reporting year the prison tried to improve its handling of complaints. Initially there was progress and 96% were recorded as answered on time in September 2017. However, in May 2018 the figure deteriorated seriously to 19% and in June to 15%. Almost 10% of prisoner Applications to the IMB concerned the way the prison mishandled their complaints.
- 5.9 The IMB knows that there was an administrative staff shortage. However, the deeper cause has been that officers and managers responsible for answering complaints have been failing to do so within the allotted time, or even close to it. Some do not appear to take this obligation seriously. They may not have been 'chased' by an administrator, but chasing should not be required. The consequence was *serious* unfairness to prisoners.

6 SEGREGATION/CARE AND SEPARATION UNIT

- 6.1 **Turnover.** The Care and Separation Unit (CSU) was generally occupied to about two thirds of its maximum capacity during April-June 2018 – a small reduction on the 2016/17 figure. Turnover is high, and few men spend more than seven days at a time in CSU, though there are always several ‘returners’ in the Unit.
- 6.2 **Regime.** The regime in CSU is not a rich one. The cells are adequate. Library books are available and men have weekly access to a computer kiosk if they wish to order canteen *etc.* Prisoners are spoken to every day by the duty director and a chaplain. There are daily opportunities for exercise, though the men do not always take them.
- 6.3 The prison is keen to establish a new unit elsewhere in the establishment to accommodate men with challenging behaviour who repeatedly move back and forth between CSU and the wings. CSU restrictions may be inappropriate, but such men need more support than is generally available on a wing. Planning is advancing and prison managers hope that the facility can be commissioned within the coming year. However, funding arrangements are unconfirmed at year-end. In principle, the IMB sees the proposed development as a desirable one that meets a clear need.
- 6.4 **Adjudications.** The prison performs a large number of adjudications to hear allegations of misdemeanours by the men. During April-June the average was 68 each week, of which an average of 39 were proven. IMB members observe a sample of adjudications and find them to be conducted fairly by senior prison staff. When sanctions are applied, they are proportionate.
- 6.5 Regular readers of this IMB’s annual reports will know that concerns about the efficiency (as distinct from fairness) of adjudications have been expressed every year since 2014. A spot check, in June 2018, of the reasons why fewer than 60% are proven showed that whilst some allegations were dismissed because the prisoner was found not guilty, many adjudications were adjourned because no decision could be reached.
- 6.6 Sometimes the reason for no decision was a good one (*e.g.* the prisoner requested legal advice) but in about 20% of instances the ‘reporting’ officer did not attend to give evidence. The IMB reported in 2016/17 that the prison was taking steps to resolve this problem, but they have not worked. Prison managers recognise the situation but have not so far got a satisfactory grip of it. It is not fair on prisoners to have the uncertainty of an adjourned adjudication hanging over them because of the prison’s inefficiency.
- 6.7 **Reviews.** A proportion of the men held in CSU at any time are there under Rule 45 to maintain good order in the prison, not as a result of an adjudicator’s decision. In these circumstances, continuing detention in CSU must be reviewed at specified intervals to ensure that it is fair and legitimate. IMB members are invited and attend when they receive sufficient notice to do so. The quality of the review, and the care taken by staff to ensure that the prisoner understands the process and accepts the reasons for decisions reached, are routinely high. Often prisoners wish to remain in CSU and a purpose of the review is to devise a realistic plan to reintroduce them to normal location safely.
- 6.8 Properly briefed healthcare staff are not reliably present at Rule 45 reviews, as they should be. However, the IMB is not aware of occasions when this failure has significantly obstructed the review process or materially disadvantaged a prisoner.
- 6.9 **Healthcare.** A member of the healthcare team visits CSU daily and the quality of care for prisoners held there is similar to that on a wing. There continue to be debates between custody and healthcare staff about the appropriate location for some particularly challenging prisoners (*i.e.* CSU or healthcare’s In-Patient Unit). These men usually display difficult mental health issues. Ultimately, the determination rests with the prison (not Oxleas) but IMB members continue to believe that a more collegiate approach to agreeing good decisions promptly is desirable and ought to be possible.

7 ACCOMMODATION (including communication)

- 7.1 **Daily life.** HMP Thameside's design and construction (3.1, 3.3, 3.4) enable it to provide good accommodation. However, some prisoners treat it roughly or destructively, so maintenance and repair are constantly required. Prison staffing and procedures rely on the use of in-cell technology (7.8) and lifts (7.2). Malfunctions are to be expected, but have been frequent during the year and, in some instances, protracted. Contingency arrangements, with knock-on disadvantages, have had to be introduced too often.
- 7.2 Houseblock lifts exemplify the issues. They deliver hot meals and clean kit to the upper wings, and enable access for disabled prisoners. They are frequently out of service, sometimes for weeks, with repair slow. When lifts fail, officers and prisoners ferry food trays or bundles of kit up and down stairs, removing them from their wing duties. Kit changes are postponed. Delivery of prisoners' canteen purchases is delayed. These are examples of low level unfairness. It is often borne with patience (the men have low expectations) but this does not make it acceptable, or excuse poor facilities management.
- 7.3 Serco is active recruiting and training new staff to fill vacancies. During the second half of 2017/18, the IMB observed a deterioration in the numbers of custodial staff reliably on duty that impacted on the regime and the quality of prisoners' daily life. For example, from 1 March to 31 May, 55 gym sessions were cancelled, almost always so that officers could be redeployed to fill gaps elsewhere. Family Visits were cancelled at short notice.
- 7.4 **Restricted regime.** The situation in 7.3 was accompanied by more frequent use of restricted regime, with men locked in their cells due to insufficient officers to unlock them safely for meals and permit normal out of cell time. This was apparent especially at weekends and Bank Holidays due to low staff turnout. It could be prison-wide or on a single wing. The IMB has tried to establish comprehensive data on the frequency and reasons for the imposition of restricted regime; disappointingly, the prison does not record this in a readily accessible way. Losing time out of cell is unfair to the men and injurious to their rehabilitation, which the normal daily regime is designed to promote. Prison managers appear to accept such unfairness too readily, without challenging it.
- 7.5 **Food.** The quality of wing food is good, portions are satisfactory and there is a proper range of choices. The meal offered to new arrivals in Reception has changed from one cooked in the kitchen to a packaged product, heated on demand by microwave. The IMB recognises the need to reduce waste but is disappointed by the low calorific content of these packaged meals. The prison has said that it is researching better alternatives.
- 7.6 **Property.** The insecurity of a man's property, in prison or on transfer, has been widely reported by many IMBs. Problems certainly persist and property complaints to the prison remain high (5.8). The response rate from other prisons where property is 'stuck' is often low. Nevertheless, it is encouraging to note that applications to the IMB about property problems have reduced compared to 2016/17 (Section D).
- 7.7 **Communication.** The in-cell telephones enable easy communication with approved external contacts. The visits hall has good facilities, including for children (11.5), but the visitor centre (where visitors wait to enter the prison) does not use its play space.
- 7.8 In principle, the arrangements for prisoners to manage their own lives (booking visits, activities *etc.*) are good, but they depend on the functioning of the in-cell IT system. Too often an essential component (*e.g.* the monitor) has broken and not been repaired or replaced within a reasonable time (7.1). The revised regime for movements (see 4.2.1) unexpectedly led to difficulties booking family visits. The prison is now aware of this.
- 7.9 Communication between staff and prisoners is not reliably good. Written responses to formal complaints are not always clear or timely (5.8, 5.9). Most wing staff are helpful and reliably courteous, even when provoked, but others become dismissive (5.2). It winds up the men, sometimes to the point of confrontation.

8 HEALTHCARE (including mental health and social care)

- 8.1 NHS England has contracted Oxleas to deliver healthcare to prisoners in HMP Thameside at an equivalent standard to that of NHS services in the community. It is a challenge to do this well. The men present a range of physical and mental health conditions in greater numbers than in the general public. For example, on a typical day, around half of all prisoners must receive medication under direct supervision by healthcare staff.
- 8.2 Oxleas struggles to deliver the expected standard consistently, though there have been improvements during the reporting year (*e.g.* health screening for new arrivals is now close to 100% within the required time). Smoking cessation sessions are well attended though availability of nicotine patches can be problematic. Staffing levels have improved. However, the standard is not always achieved (see 8.4), and sometimes borders on inadequate. Bowel cancer screening, long promised, is still not available.
- 8.3 Oxleas relies on the prison's support in two critical areas – accommodation and security.
- 8.3.1 The prison has provided improved accommodation for healthcare in Reception. It has not so far enhanced the pharmacy, which is too small. Oxleas, Serco and HMCIP all agree that the present space is inadequate. The plan to remedy this has not been agreed by the building's owner. Timely and safe dispensing of medication is put at risk.
- 8.3.2 Serco custody staff ensure prisoners move to Outpatient appointments securely, and that healthcare staff attending prisoners on a wing do so safely. Some men fail to attend booked Outpatient appointments. Serco and Oxleas disagree on the numbers, reasons and remedies for this. Under the revised movement regime (4.2.1), the numbers seem to have increased. In the In-Patient Unit, IMB monitoring shows that security is too often maintained by keeping prisoners locked in their cells because insufficient custody officers are present to permit safe unlocking. Proper healthcare interventions (*e.g.* from a psychiatrist or the occupational therapist) may be prevented or exercise sessions lost.
- 8.3.3 Transfers of patients to hospital require Serco custodial escort. Oxleas has requested a review to increase escort capacity, since current capacity sometimes undesirably leads to prisoner hospital treatment being postponed. This is subject to commercial negotiations.
- 8.4 **Prisoner concerns.** The IMB in 2017/18 received 104 prisoner Applications about healthcare (Section D). Not all were valid, but three themes emerge: (i) medication provided late or not at all; (ii) unexplained delays in treatment, referrals or test results; (iii) prisoners uncertain how to bring concerns directly to Oxleas, having submitted complaints without receiving a response, or finding hatch staff too busy to listen. IMB monitoring has shown that some healthcare staff still fail to communicate well with their patients. The Patient Council, established in 2016/17, continues to meet regularly attended by prisoner representatives from across the prison.
- 8.5 **Mental health.** Many prisoners suffer from mental ill-health and are on medication. Some are psychotic. Typically, 20% of the prison's total population suffer from depression. However, the In-Patient Unit is not a mental health facility. Secure transfers are arranged for the most seriously ill men, usually within two to four weeks of their assessment. The challenge of caring humanely for other men, whose mental health leads to unpredictability, self-harm or violence, exercises healthcare and custody staff alike, but they sometimes disagree about the best regime for a given man (6.9).
- 8.6 **Social care.** See 5.6.
- 8.7 **Substance misuse.** Serco's partner, Turning Point, provides a good quality service to men with substance misuse issues, and meets its contractual targets. Over 90% of prisoners eligible to take the SCAR (Supporting Change and Recovery) programme for substance misuse do so, and over 80% complete it. Turning Point innovates. For example, it makes outreach visits to relevant London boroughs to build relations and facilitate phone assessments between Community Services and prisoners, pre-release.

9 EDUCATION AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

- 9.1 **Induction.** Participation in education induction (where attainment levels are assessed) is one of the requirements of the prison's Early Days regime. Following induction, a prisoner can enroll on appropriate education courses providing spaces are available (which they generally are).
- 9.2 **Courses.** A range of courses is offered by the provider, Novus, which are appropriate for the needs of many prisoners. They can lead to an accredited qualification (at Entry Level, Level 1 or Level 2), in English (including ESOL), Mathematics or ICT. Prisoners can attend courses in personal and social development and there are vocational course opportunities too (10.3, 10.4). Course completion rates are relatively good (at about 70%).
- 9.3 **Classes.** Attendance at education classes varies but averages about 60% of those registered on the course. There may be good reasons for non-attendance (*e.g.* ill health, attendance at court, left the prison) but these do not explain the full shortfall. Novus and the IMB (separately) have investigated the reasons for attendance failure. It is not systemic but frequently simply that a prisoner decides not to go, despite losing pay by so doing. Wing staff, having unlocked the prisoner concerned, do not generally have time to try to persuade him to attend if he is reluctant.
- 9.4 **Distance learning.** The difficulties regarding access to Distance Learning (DL) courses reported by the IMB in its 2016/17 Annual Report were resolved during the year. Prisoners who wish to undertake a DL course are now able to do so, and about 20 are engaged in such learning at any time. Prisoner feedback is positive, particularly for the introduction of a group session offering learners both peer and tutor support. The hiatus in processing new applications for Distance Learning that was caused by withdrawal of funding for Prospects (3.6) has been overcome, with Novus taking over.
- 9.5 Use of the Virtual Campus remains problematic at HMP Thameside, not only for those prisoners who are engaged in Distance Learning, but also for education tutors who run classes. The IMB understands that a slow internet connection is a major cause of the problems, causing delays when material is downloaded, as well as frequent crashes.
- 9.6 **Library.** HMP Thameside's library continues to offer an impressive and wide range of activities – creative writing workshops, book clubs, author visits, film clubs, DVD rentals, as well as literacy support programmes such as Shannon Trust training and Reading Ahead (six book challenge). Prisoners can undertake modern foreign language courses through Rosetta Stone as well as prepare for the DVLA theory test. Enthusiastic and proactive library orderlies have set up individual support sessions for prisoners who wish to use the legal reference books that the library holds. Events in the library are over-subscribed, well attended and enjoyed by prisoners.
- 9.7 There are currently 9 Shannon Trust mentors and more being trained. They help prisoners trying to improve their literacy skills. In common with other men who provide support of some kind to prisoner colleagues (such as Listeners), they are sometimes not unlocked when they feel they need to be. IMB members appreciate that there can be valid security or other reasons for this. However, it is disappointing that staff do not always find ways to explain the situation to Shannon Trust mentors in terms they recognize and can accept.
- 9.8 **Other activities.** There are educational components in much of the vocational training described in Section 10 and in the SCAR programme (8.7). A range of faith-based courses are provided by members of the chaplaincy staff, and a comprehensive victim awareness programme also runs. In-cell education programmes are available and a few men take advantage of them. Generally, however, there are few activities available on the wings themselves and many prisoners say they are deeply bored.

10 WORK, VOCATIONAL TRAINING and EMPLOYMENT

- 10.1 **Work placements.** Prisoners at HMP Thameside are not offered external work placements.
- 10.2 **Work experience and employment.** There is a range of different types of paid work within the prison, from wing cleaners to social carers, from library orderlies to serverly workers, from Listeners to prisoner representatives in meetings with prison managers. There are opportunities in the laundry, or grounds maintenance, or the kitchen, or the bag and tag store, and much more. There is a total of about 500 full time equivalent jobs altogether. Appropriate care is taken to allocate them fairly as well as to ensure that proper security is maintained and that known enmities are managed.
- 10.3 Some of the roles require or provide opportunities for specific training and the achievement of a given vocational standard (*e.g.* in hospitality and catering, health and safety, biohazard cleaning). All of them can be done with commitment and pride or, alternatively, with just the minimum effort to get by. IMB monitoring finds that the quality of direction and supervision by prison staff is a key to engendering commitment. Those areas where staff work alongside prisoners and give them responsibilities, such as the library and grounds maintenance, tend to be the ones where prisoners appear to get the most benefit and, indeed, do the best job. The quality of wing cleaning is patchy.
- 10.4 **Vocational training.** There are only a few directly vocational courses available within the prison. However, they offer important opportunities to small numbers of men (typically no more than 20 at any time) to learn a particular set of skills, for instance in the textiles or reprographics workshops, fitness instruction (in the gym), and barbering (in Short Back and Thameside). An FA Coaching course ran early in 2018. Other training to enhance employability (such as *c.v.* writing) is offered.
- 10.5 **Job fairs.** The prison occasionally organises job fairs in which (mostly local) employers provide information about employment opportunities to those prisoners who attend. They are good occasions but they inevitably touch only a minority of the men (typically they involve up to 20 employers and about 60 prisoners). The prison also works with national employers who occasionally visit to recruit staff directly (Pret a Manger was an example during 2017/18).
- 10.6 **Impact.** The IMB has found it difficult to obtain information about the impact of these activities on the resulting employability of men after they leave HMP Thameside. Some individuals are known to have received job offers following attendance at a Job Fair. The prison has informed the IMB that during the first quarter of 2018, 83 prisoners were placed on release into full-time paid work, and 3 apprentices signed up to work with Serco. The Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) told the IMB that of 281 men released from the prison in May and June 2018, 27% (excluding pensioners *etc.*) had jobs. However, how many of the 27% reported by the CRC were significantly helped into employment by their training or experience in the prison is not recorded.
- 10.7 **Uncertainty.** In its 2016/17 report, the IMB noted that uncertainty about the future role of the prison was affecting its planning to provide appropriate training and other programmes for the men it holds (box on page 5 para ii). A year ago, there was an expectation that HMP Thameside would become a Reception prison. This is not how things have evolved during 2017/18 and the prison's population as at June 2018, and prisoners' needs, are as heterogeneous as ever (11.1, 11.2).

11 RESETTLEMENT PREPARATION

- 11.1 **The challenge.** Throughout 2017/18, HMP Thameside has been almost full to its operating capacity. In the last quarter of the year, just under a third of prisoners were being held on remand. Some men were in the prison for a very short time, others for periods up to and exceeding a year; the average length of stay during the reporting year was 35 days. The convicted men had sentences from weeks to life, with duration spread fairly evenly across the range (*e.g.* the average number serving less than six months was the same, at 101, as the number serving between 10 years and life); many were within 18 months of their release date and five or more leave prison every weekday. Typically, about 8% of the population are young offenders (aged 18-20) and close to 20% are foreign nationals.
- 11.2 These figures illustrate the scale of the resettlement challenge. The circumstances and needs of the men are widely diverse to the point that each one needs a tailored programme. The effective delivery of such programmes is beyond the capacity of the prison, which was not designed to hold a population with the current make-up or turnover.
- 11.3 **Employability.** In the previous section (10.2 to 10.5) some of the opportunities to improve employability prospects are outlined. Obtaining employment is frequently an important step in successful resettlement. But the scale of the challenge, the number of men, and the range of the skills they need to obtain in the short time often available whilst in HMP Thameside, is too great for there to be widespread success (10.6).
- 11.4 **Accommodation.** Ensuring that a released prisoner has somewhere to sleep when he leaves prison is a vital first step in his resettlement. This truth was stressed in the IMB's 2016/17 report (box on page 5, para i). Data provided by Depaul (the agency responsible for assisting prisoners to find accommodation) shows that in May and June 2018 about 45 men each month were released without any form of tenancy arranged. This equates to approximately one in five of the men leaving prison and is unsatisfactory. It is no wonder that many return quite quickly.
- 11.5 **Family links.** One of the areas where HMP Thameside excels is in helping men keep in touch with their families, which facilitates resettlement on release. In-cell telephones are a powerful help (7.7). The prison's Families First team offers a range of activities – such as baby bonding sessions, family and toddler visits, a homework Sunday brunch club – and its outreach work includes links with some of the schools and nurseries that the children of prisoners attend. Family days and 'story book dads' also help the men who take part, to maintain contact with their families.
- 11.6 **Home detention curfew (HDC).** In its 2016/17 report the IMB expressed concern about the administration of HDC. A spot check in May 2018 showed that the prison held fewer than half the number of outstanding HDC applications that it held in 2017. The number of men who were sent the application form *after* the date on which they may become eligible for HDC (that is, 10 weeks or more later than they should have received it) was also down from 30, when checked in 2017, to four. Speed of administration of the process has clearly improved, which is good, but it is not yet fully dependable.
- 11.7 There are good reasons why some prisoners are refused the privilege of HDC when they do not meet established criteria, but it is only fair that any man who might be eligible is given an opportunity to apply in good time (the necessary checks, many of them outside the prison's control, can be time consuming). In the most recent quarter for which the IMB has been given data, about 10% of planned releases were on HDC.

C Work of the Board

- 12.1 There are many more aspects of a prison that might be monitored than any IMB has the capacity or time to cover. During 2017/18, HMP Thameside's IMB has focused afresh on evaluating the quality of the real 'outcomes for prisoners'. The prison's practices and procedures affect such outcomes critically and Board members have evaluated them from the perspective of their impacts on the daily lives of the men.
- 12.2 This monitoring priority has led to the highlighting of 'low level unfairness' throughout this report. This is unfairness that can seem unspectacular in isolation, and does not always break prison rules (though often does), but which nevertheless affects and is borne by the 90 per cent of prisoners who do not cause problems and just want to get through their sentences. These men are generally compliant, too downcast to complain, and they demand relatively little staff time. They form a silent majority, who can become resentful and angry when the unfairness becomes cumulative.
- 12.3 Most IMB visits are made in normal working hours but, during 2017/18, some were also made at week-ends, during public holidays and in the evening. There was one night-time visit. Prison staff are almost invariably helpful and supportive during the monitoring visits, even when they are busy, which is something that IMB members greatly appreciate.
- 12.4 One Board member resigned during the year. Five new members have been appointed. A sixth has been recommended for appointment and is awaiting clearance. At different times during the year four members have taken periods of sabbatical leave. On 30 June 2018, there were three members on such leave.

BOARD STATISTICS	
Recommended Complement of Board Members	18
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	11
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	15
Total number of visits to the Establishment	472
Total number of segregation reviews attended	Not available

D Applications to the IMB

Code	Subject	Current reporting year	Previous reporting year
A	Accommodation including laundry, clothing, ablutions	27	22
B	Discipline including adjudications, IEP, sanctions	5	11
C	Equality	1	6
D	Purposeful activity including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	28	48
E 1	Letters, visits, phones, public protection restrictions	29	28
E 2	Finance including pay, private monies, spends	11	15
F	Food and kitchens	5	5
G	Health including physical, mental, social care	104	102
H 1	Property within this establishment	86	124
H 2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	54	74
H 3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	12	11
I	Sentence management including HDC, ROTL, parole, release dates, re-categorisation	52	91
J	Staff/prisoner concerns including bullying	106	78
K	Transfers	6	5
	Miscellaneous and multiple	72	30
	Total number of IMB applications	608	642