



Useful Information

Introduction

This leaflet is designed to give you an insight into the work of the IMB. Please read it thoroughly before completing and submitting your application form. We would like you to be sure that this is the volunteer role for you.

Background

An Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) is an organisation set up by government. There is one IMB attached to every Prison Service establishment in England and Wales, every Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) in the United Kingdom and a number of Short Term Holding Facilities (STHFs) across the U.K. There are approximately 130 IMBs in total.

What are Independent Monitoring Boards?

Independent Monitoring Boards perform a vital role on behalf of Ministers and the public in providing lay and independent scrutiny of prisons and the immigration detention estate.

Approximately 1,500 unpaid volunteers on IMBs across the country visit such establishments frequently and regularly to ensure that people held in custody and detention are being cared for decently and with humanity.

What do Board Members do?

The duties of Board Members include:

- Providing an independent view on the standards of fairness and humanity with which those placed in custody or detention are treated and, for prisoners, the range and adequacy of the programmes preparing them for release
- Reporting annually to the Secretary of State on how well the prison or removal centre has met the standards and requirements placed on it and what impact these have on those in its custody or detention
- Informing the Secretary of State of any concerns they may have throughout the year as appropriate

Many IMB members are also involved in other activities connected with their IMB work. This can include recruitment and training of new IMB members, press and publicity work for their board or developing an area of special interest, such as prisoners' or detainees' education, health or safety.

To hear current IMB Members talk about the role and their experiences, go to Youtube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuQ4WxirPlg> and view the short film 'Joining the Independent Monitoring Board'.

Further information is also available from the IMB website www.imb.org.uk

Membership of an IMB

Appointments are made on merit from members of the local community.

You do not need any special qualifications or experience, as we will provide all necessary support during an initial 12 month training and mentoring period; however, the role does require some basic computer skills and the ability to send and receive emails.

You need to be over 18 years of age and live within approx 20 miles of the IMB you are applying to, unless another distance is stated within an advertisement.

You should be enthusiastic and open minded, be a good communicator and have the ability to exercise sound, objective judgement.

You could be a student, a person of working age or somebody who has retired. Whether you're looking to develop new skills and gain new experiences, or you want to use the skills you already have and give something back to your community, this role could be for you. We want to hear from people from all walks of life.

Each advert will say how many visits a month you would be expected to make to your establishment. You'll have a chance to find out more about this at your interview.

If you are a former IMB Member applying to re-join the IMB, there must be a 3 year gap before an application can be made to rejoin any previous IMB on which you served; however, you can apply to any other IMB without restrictions.

The Seven Principles of Public life

The Committee on Standards in Public Life believe that 'Seven Principles of Public Life' should apply to all in the public service. IMB members are expected to demonstrate these in the course of their duties. The principles are:

Selflessness - Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

Integrity - Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

Objectivity - Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

Accountability - Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

Openness - Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for doing so.

Honesty - Holders of public office should be truthful.

Leadership - Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

The Appointment Process

All candidates are required to undertake the steps of the recruitment process detailed below before their applications may be considered by the Minister's Office for the final decision. Ministerial appointments to public bodies or statutory offices, including Independent Monitoring Boards, fall within the remit of the Commissioner for Public Appointments (CPA). Therefore, members will be appointed to serve on an IMB for a maximum period of 15 years. There is no minimum time you may serve as an IMB member; however, by applying you should be looking at a longer term commitment to public service as there is a one year probationary period.

Application

We can only accept applications as part of a fair and open recruitment campaign, advertised locally or nationally. You need to return your application form to the IMB Secretariat, ideally by email, and before the closing date. Late or incomplete applications may not be considered by the Secretariat. Please note that it may be 3-4 weeks after the closing date before you are contacted with details of next steps in the campaign.

Paper Sift of Applications

Depending on the volume of applications received, the IMB may decide to undertake a paper sift of the forms received. You will be assessed against the set of competences that are designed to test your suitability for the post. You are encouraged to provide specific examples in relation to the competences so that these may be accurately assessed.

If a paper sift takes place, applicants who pass the paper sift will be invited to come for a familiarisation visit of the establishment, and will be offered an interview, usually on a separate day.

If your application is not successful, you will be contacted by the IMB Secretariat informing you of the result. It is unfortunately not possible to provide feedback on these applications.

Visiting a prison or Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) and meeting current IMB Members

You may be invited to visit the prison or IRC to which you are applying. This will be arranged approximately 3-4 weeks after the closing date of the recruitment campaign and before the interview takes place. The visit does not form part of the selection process. It is intended to enable you to make an informed decision about whether the role is right for you. You will be accompanied by an experienced member of the Board at all times during your visit and you may wish to ask them about the duties, time commitment, conflicts of interests or anything else you need to better understand about the role.

Interview

If you are invited to interview, you will usually be interviewed by two members of the Board to which you are applying and a third, independent member. You will be assessed against a set of competences from your application form designed to test your suitability for the post. You are, therefore, encouraged to provide specific examples, as part of your application, in relation to these competences so that these may be discussed further at interview.

Security clearance

If you are recommended for appointment, you will be required to undertake and receive satisfactory Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) security clearance before taking up your duties. A DBS form will be provided and must be returned to the Clerk of the Board, along with the requisite identification documents, by the date specified.

If you are recommended for appointment to a High Security Establishment (HSE) or the Immigration Detention Estate (IDE), you will additionally be required to complete a Counter Terrorism Check (CTC). This will be facilitated by the relevant security department at the establishment.

Consideration

Once all interviews from the recruitment campaign have been completed, the interview panel will send their paperwork including recommendations to the IMB Secretariat, where they will be assessed. Following this assessment, the recommendations will be submitted to a Senior Official within the Ministry of Justice (for the prison estate) or Home Office (for the immigration estate) for a final decision.

Applications which are incomplete due to missing information or documents, e.g., sufficient proof of identity, may be subject to delays.

If selected, you will receive a letter from the Minister's office, specifying the conditions of your appointment. A welcome pack, containing all the information relevant to your appointment, will follow the letter of appointment.

If it's not possible to place you on a Board, you will be advised of the reason for your non-appointment and of any follow-up options available to you.

Complaints Process

If you have any complaints about any aspect of the way your application has been handled, we would like to hear from you. In the first instance, please write, or e-mail, the IMB Secretariat at the address or e-mail address given below, quoting the appropriate reference.

Head of IMB Secretariat
Ministry of Justice
3rd Floor
10 South Colonnade
Canary Wharf
London, E14 4PU

E-mail address: IMB@justice.gsi.gov.uk

Complaints must be received by the IMB Secretariat within 12 calendar months of the issue you are complaining about or after the recruitment competition has closed, whichever is the later.

Your complaint will normally be acknowledged within 5 working days of receipt and answered as quickly and clearly as possible; at the most within 20 working days of receipt. If this deadline cannot be met, we will inform you why this is the case and when you can expect a reply.

Taking it further

If, after receiving a comprehensive response, you are still concerned, you can write to the address below:

Commissioner for Public Appointments
Room G/8, Ground Floor
1 Horse Guards Road
London, SW1A 2HQ

The Commissioner for Public Appointments regulates and monitors appointments to public bodies to ensure procedures are fair. More information about the role of the Commissioner and his Code of Practice is available from:

<http://publicappointmentscommissioner.independent.gov.uk/>

For full details of the complaints process for public appointments, go to <http://publicappointmentscommissioner.independent.gov.uk/contact-us/>
Alternatively, please contact the Commissioner's office on 020 7271 0831 for a printed copy.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How many people are there on an Independent Monitoring Board?

The size of each IMB varies depending on the size and nature of the establishment it monitors and can vary between approximately 10 and 20 members.

2. What happens if the Independent Monitoring Board I want to join is not conducting a recruitment campaign?

If the Board to which you wish to apply is not recruiting, you will not be able to submit an application form. Recruitment campaigns are advertised locally through volunteer centres and posters in public places, and nationally on the IMB website and the Cabinet Office Public Appointments website. You can however ask to be added to a vacancy alert list – sign up at <http://www.imb.org.uk/join-now/current-vacancies/>.

It may be that more than one IMB in your area is recruiting at the same time. We ask you to apply for only one campaign at a time - this should usually be the IMB closest to you or within approx 20 miles of where you live. Please don't submit further applications until the outcome of the first is known.

3. Is there anything that might prevent me from being able to apply?

Age: IMB members must be 18 years of age and over. There is no upper age limit.

Location: You should normally live within approximately 20 miles of the prison or immigration establishment to which you are applying, unless another distance is specified in an individual advertisement.

Conflict of Interest: You cannot join an IMB if your appointment would lead to a potential conflict of interest, for example if you have a business involvement in supplying a service to the establishment or if you have a close friend or relative in custody. However, decisions are made on an individual basis and, in many instances it is possible to become an IMB member of a nearby Board where such a conflict will not arise.

If you are concerned about a possible conflict of interest, please email full details to imbrecruitment@justice.gsi.gov.uk or telephone the IMB Secretariat on 020 3334 3265 and we will discuss this with you.

4. What should I bring with me if I am offered a visit to my local prison or immigration establishment?

The Chair of your local IMB will be in contact to offer you a visit to the prison or immigration establishment. This will enable you to learn more about the work of the Board and get a feel for what the work is like before you commit yourself to the interview stage.

You will be accompanied by an IMB member on the visit and will need to bring three forms of identification and any other documents specified by the Chair. The Chair will advise you of the documentation required for that establishment, these would usually include a current passport or photo driving licence and a document clearly showing your name and address (eg a recent utilities bill or bank statement).

5. Are IMB Members able to claim expenses?

IMB members are all unpaid volunteers. However, members are able to claim expenses, for example, for the cost of travelling to and from the establishment for visits or Board meetings, or for costs incurred as a result of attending IMB training courses. Members are also able to claim Financial Loss Allowance in some circumstances which may include the cost of childcare incurred in the course of performing their IMB duties.

We regret that we cannot re-imburse expenses incurred in attending familiarisation visits or interviews.

6. Can I still join an IMB if I am in full time employment?

Yes, many of our members are in full time employment. The time requirement each month varies between IMBs and will be indicated within advertisements. However, the average time commitment can be anything from between two to four days a month. Depending on the establishment and other factors, the timing of rota visits may be flexible and can perhaps be scheduled outside of working hours, although some of the input will probably need to be carried out during standard working hours. Further information will be provided by the IMB during the establishment familiarisation visit and at interview. Individual IMBs are encouraged to hold their monthly meetings at times which are convenient to all Members. You may also very occasionally need to attend training days during working hours, although we try to keep these to a minimum.

7. What is an Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) and Short Term Holding Facility (STHF)?

People can be detained at immigration removal centres under Immigration Act powers for a number of reasons. The largest category of detainees is people who have claimed asylum. Other people include those detained awaiting determination of their right to entry to the UK, people who have been refused permission to enter and are awaiting removal, people who have overstayed the expiry of their visas or have not complied with their visa terms, and people lacking the required documentation to live in the UK. The length of stay can range from a few days to several months (in IRCs). Some detainees may be long-stayers because they have lodged an appeal against their removal or have applied for a Judicial Review of their case and are awaiting a court appearance or a decision.

The detainees are allowed as much free association as possible within a relaxed environment. There can be as many as 45 different nationalities within a centre at any one time and two centres also contain families, so a large part of the IMB role in these establishments is ensuring that the services provided meet their diverse needs. There are currently seven IRCs in England and one in Scotland.

Short Term Holding Facility

STHFs hold detainees for a relatively short period of time. They can be linked to Reporting Centres or Ports where detention is typically for hours, or they can hold detainees in places where overnight accommodation is available, where detention can vary between a day and a week. If longer detention is required, they are moved to an IRC. The role of the STHF IMBs is to monitor the welfare of those in detention by observing their treatment and the environment in which they are detained.

Boards in the immigration estate will have unrestricted access to all detainees and to all designated immigration facilities. Members will be free to make unannounced visits and to speak in private to any detainee. The IMB do not get involved in the immigration status of those in detention unless there are reasons to doubt the legality of the continued detention of individuals.

8. Is being an IMB member the same as being a Prison Visitor or befriender?

No. A Prison Visitor visits prisoners who have no other visitors, perhaps because they are far from home or have no close relatives to visit them. Immigration removal centres also have visitors' groups, whose members visit and befriend detainees. This is different from

the role of IMB members who are there to be independent monitors of the whole establishment.