



**Annual Report**  
of the  
**Independent Monitoring Board**  
at  
**HMP Northumberland**

for reporting Year  
1 January to 31 December 2019

Published  
May 2020



*Monitoring fairness and respect for people in custody*

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## Sections 1 - 3

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### 1 STATUTORY ROLE

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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**

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### **Are prisoners treated fairly?**

1. The Board's view is that prisoners at HMP Northumberland are treated fairly, and that many staff exercise scrupulous care in dealing with those who are vulnerable.

### **Are prisoners treated humanely**

2. Throughout the year, our observations are that residents are treated humanely. This applies across the prison, and especially in places where the most challenging and/or vulnerable residents are housed. Staff on several house blocks demonstrate exceptional patience and kindness in dealing with those in their care, and our highest praise is for the teams in the segregation unit, who are constantly tested by the demands of their charges.

### **Are prisoners prepared well for their release?**

3. As we said in our last report, those who adjust well to prison life, can resist the temptations posed by the presence of drugs, and who take every opportunity to improve themselves, reach the end of their sentence better equipped to deal with life outside. Unfortunately, many others do not have this experience, lack family support and have little to look forward to on release: their stay is a continuing struggle.
4. The prison's location has an adverse impact on the ability to mirror life outside through employment and education. In addition, many residents have unrealistic expectations and a learnt dependency, and seem unable to take responsibility for their actions. Preparing these prisoners for release is very difficult. We applaud the efforts made and the links which have been created with outside agencies to inspire prisoners and give them hope. However, many residents reach their day of release without much change in their personal insights or a realistic understanding of how to deal with the situations which contributed to their original sentence.

## **Main areas for development**

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### **TO THE MINISTER AND THE PRISON SERVICE**

5. Does the minister consider it acceptable that prisons like HMP Northumberland, with a large population, 25% of whom are classed as older prisoners, do not have inpatient facilities or 24-hour healthcare cover? Further, that they are not equipped to provide support to residents reaching the end of their life or who need palliative care (see paragraphs 53 and 54)?
6. Could the minister and HMPPS reassure us that the allocation of resources to private sector prisons in relation to the offender management in custody (OMIC) model and changes in the Probation Service is calculated and funded on the same basis as for public sector prisons?

## **TO THE PRISON SERVICE**

7. Given the increase in the number of prisoners serving shorter sentences, what steps is the Prison Service taking to ensure that prisons like HMP Northumberland have the necessary resources to meet the particular educational and rehabilitation needs of this group of prisoners?

## **TO THE DIRECTOR AND THE PRISON SERVICE**

8. Does the Director consider that the standard of accommodation in the segregation unit is still fit for purpose (see paragraph 39)? What steps could be taken to rectify this, given that the contract with Sodexo requires the estate to be returned to HMPPS exactly as it was when they took over?

## **Improvements**

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9. We commend the prison's continuing efforts to clamp down on violence and the use of drugs, by measures such as body-worn cameras (see paragraphs 29 and 30). Support to vulnerable residents who are easily exploited by others is often outstanding. Developments such as the self-isolators policy reinforce the message that every member of staff needs to engage with these individuals.
  10. The Board also commends the achievements in improving the standard of living accommodation, with a noticeable impact across the whole estate (see paragraphs 22–24).
  11. Maintaining standards after the successful introduction of key work has proved challenging, but we conclude that with the occasional dip, standards remain high in terms of coverage and quality. It is worth noting that when the level of quality key work sessions is sustained, there is a marked diminution in levels of disruptive behaviour.
  12. We note that the opening of I wing at HMP Durham provides 11 places for prisoners assessed as needing inpatient psychiatric treatment. However, this is a resource for all north-east prisons and, as the average length of stay is about 50 days, access is inevitably limited.
  13. We welcome the re-rolling of HMP Haverigg in Cumbria, offering more options for vulnerable prisoners who achieve category D. It is a little early to assess the full impact of this but our understanding is that once a transfer has been approved, the waiting time could be as short as two weeks.
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### 3 DESCRIPTION OF THE ESTABLISHMENT

14. The issues around the location and size of HMP Northumberland change little from year to year, with distance from other prisons and hospitals continuing to affect transfers and movements. The age of most buildings (over 40 years) was again reflected in the extensive programme of works carried out each week throughout 2019. During the year, some members visited HMP Durham, where we saw how modern purpose-built accommodation can make a difference to a prisoner's experience. This made us reflect whether some facilities at Northumberland are any longer fit for purpose, and we discuss this elsewhere in this report. Nevertheless, the prison's energetic engagement with the decency and living standards agenda has made a striking difference to the quality of the environment inside and outside the whole estate.
15. The certified normal accommodation of 1,348 category C prisoners also remains unchanged, with an average unlock in December 2019 of 1,333 (over 98%). There was a slight shift in the make-up of the prison, with 83% (as opposed to just under 80%) of the residents classing themselves as white British; of the remaining 17%, about half were Travellers or Gypsies and about 3% were foreign nationals. About 12% of prisoners (160–170) are at one end of the age range: 21–25 and over 55.
16. The most significant factor currently affecting the make-up of the prison population is the number of prisoners serving shorter sentences. In 2013, no prisoners stayed for less than three months. This has increased significantly over the last few years, reaching 18% in 2015, 31% in 2018 and 37% in July 2019. Furthermore, that same snapshot revealed the following about how long prisoners stay at Northumberland:
- under six months: 607 (45% of the population)
  - 1–3 months: 372 (27.5% of the population)
  - under one month: 136 (10%)
- It is not for the Board to comment on sentencing. However, this shift has implications for the prison's ability to deliver education, work and preparation for release. We comment further on this elsewhere in our report.
17. Accommodation continues to be provided in 16 residential house blocks (five vulnerable prisoner wings, a 40-place drug and alcohol recovery unit and 10 in 'mains' location). The 20-place wing reopened in 2018 continues to develop, to the benefit of older mains prisoners.
18. The prison is in its seventh year of operation by Sodexo. Most other providers remained the same during 2019. The education contract was renegotiated, although it remains with Novus. Work has also been ongoing in preparation for a change of healthcare provider in 2020.

19. Services for prisoners nearing release are still organised by Northumbria Community Rehabilitation Company (part of Sodexo), with some welcome expansion in 2019. Volunteers and staff at NEPACS (the North East Prison After Care Society) continue to support prisoners' families. Over 20 national and local agencies, working independently or alongside prison staff, have an invaluable role.
  
20. Building on the changes referred to in our last report – in particular, a full year's experience of key workers – 2019 proved to be a fairly stable year, although not without challenges. There were changes in staff at senior levels, including the appointment of a new Director and deputy. Nevertheless, the overall performance improved steadily quarter by quarter, and by the year-end it had reached level 3.
  
21. A shortage of members (below 50% for much of 2019) reduced the Board's capacity to carry out the level of sustained monitoring needed across this large estate. This report is necessarily selective and, whereas we address some aspects of prison life in detail, for others we can offer only an overview.

#### 4 ACCOMMODATION

22. In our last report, we commended improvements in both the fabric of the prison buildings and the grounds. We are pleased to report that this continues. Of note are the programme of window replacement, refurbishment of showers on several wings, repairs to the roof of the hangar, which houses workshops, and the replacement of boilers. In a typical week, several hundred small repairs were also needed.

23. 2019 saw several additional strands arising from these fundamental improvements, linked to the emphasis on decency.

24. The first step was a radical approach to the condition of individual cells. As a result:

- every cell has the full complement of furniture, in good repair: an extensive outlay was needed to put this in place
- each cell is laid out in accordance with the guidance, and pictures of what this should be are displayed on each wing
- the standard of cleanliness is high, wall decorations are appropriate and properly located, and graffiti is kept to the minimum.

25. This approach has been linked in a creative way to providing purposeful activity for as many residents as possible, which is an ongoing challenge. Among these are:

- a television repair shop for damaged or malfunctioning sets, instead of sending them to an outside firm, at cost; there are two workers, one with expertise in this field, who is teaching another. Together, they can repair up to 10 televisions a day
- a furniture repair shop, where two workers repair damaged furniture and lockers, salvaging broken pieces for re-use
- painting parties on each wing
- a residential/facilities management academy – a working party assisting with improvements such as painting the outside of one house block and the foyer of another.

26. This engagement of residents in maintaining and improving their surroundings builds respect as well as developing skills. One resident with behavioural problems was actually set to work redecorating cells in the segregation unit. Such developments might seem almost trivial, but to us they are evidence that the slightest opportunity is being seized to make a difference to the life of an individual.

27. Another element of this engagement is the employment of residential support workers on each wing. These prisoners carry out pre-cell occupancy checks, temperature checks and regime monitoring, as well as other work directed by wing staff.

28. Our judgement is that self-respect is an essential step in rehabilitation. Living in reasonable quality accommodation contributes to this understanding. Involving residents has meant a major step forward for the prison.

## 5 SAFETY

29. Our last report commented on the range of measures in place to curb violence and unacceptable behaviour among prisoners and control the unholy triangle of drugs, violence and self-harm. We applaud the prison's continuing efforts and, as we said in our overview, vigilance at all times was a key theme of the year.

30. During 2019, we observed an intensification of the measures in place to clamp down on the availability and use of drugs, including:

- a review of the drugs strategy: this has three key strands – restricting the supply of drugs into the prison as well as targeting the criminal networks which aim to supply drugs; reducing the demand for drugs inside prison; and building recovery for prisoners who want to overcome their substance misuse
- the appointment of a drug strategy lead manager to focus the work
- the use of the body scanner: this has facilitated the management of individuals suspected of secreting items such as mobile phones about their person.

31. The dog team and the censors play a major role in stopping drugs getting into the prison. The dogs are a deterrent to visitors, and the impact of their presence, at times, in the visit's hall – where they have demonstrated their ability to detect drugs – should not be under-estimated. However, two dogs and one handler do not have the capacity to cover the estate at all times. Withholding mail can be contentious, as we noted in our last report, but awareness that mail is closely scrutinised sends another strong message to anyone who might be tempted to deliver drugs in this way.

32. The mandatory drug testing scheme is a useful indicator of the success of the measures in place. Whereas in 2018 we noted that the results were within the target of 26.4%, in 2019 this decreased significantly to less than 15%. Other notable statistics are an average of 18 prisoners on closed visits each month, and a gradual decrease in the level of banned visitors, from a high of 71 in April 2019 to 52 in December.

33. The second element, reducing levels of violence, is equally challenging, with the possibility of violence erupting ever present. On this front, too, there has been an emphasis on pre-empting a potentially violent situation and dealing effectively with the consequences should it arise. It is good to report that there have been no reported significant breaches of security during the reporting year, nor of assistance being needed from the national tornado team. Key factors in maintaining safety now include:

- the daily use of body-worn cameras by all front-line staff, which act as a deterrent and a mechanism for ensuring that acts of violence are recorded and acted upon
- the introduction of violence reduction mentors across the estate: they support individual residents and have a key role in reception, where they speak to groups of new arrivals, helping to reinforce the message that use of drugs is not tolerated
- the continuing emphasis on following through misbehaviour: we noted the prison's self-monitoring initiative when, for a period in spring 2019, there was an investigation of all instances where a prisoner was put on report but no

adjudication took place; this reminded staff of the need to pay attention to the paperwork, which ensures that miscreants are brought to account

- the full implementation of challenge, support and intervention plans, to ensure that detailed attention is paid to individuals whose violent behaviour might present more of a challenge to the safety of other residents and staff.

34. The final element, keeping vulnerable residents safe, is possibly the most difficult. This begins when someone arrives at the establishment, and unfortunately may still apply when they leave. We are pleased to note:

- the care given in reception through practical steps such as offering new arrivals canteen and vape packs to avert the risk of debt; we have observed the sensitive approach from staff in observing privacy and in the way they address them; their ability to identify someone who might be vulnerable seems to stem from careful observation of their behaviour and the experience which the team has built
- the continuing emphasis on effective assessment, care in custody and teamwork (ACCT) management, and monitoring whether record-keeping is relevant and up to date. Board members regularly inspect the ACCT books of anyone they encounter who is on an ACCT, especially in segregation, and have sometimes observed Review meetings. The books are normally of a good standard, possibly linked to the close monitoring by Safer Custody staff. Figures for the year reflect this approach, with total numbers at a maximum of 25 men on ACCTs for the first few months, then a flattening curve with lows of 11 and 10 towards December. Training all staff to spot the signs and tune into something being 'not quite right' has been a constant theme in the weekly newsletters
- the introduction of a self-isolators policy, which clarifies how best to manage prisoners who go behind their doors
- the care and support on induction wings, especially the first night surveillance; this can be more important if someone has spent a very short time in HMP Durham, without much time to adjust to a prison environment.

35. During 2019, there were three deaths in custody. Two of these were atypical as they involved prisoners who were seriously ill, one of whom had been transferred to the establishment less than three weeks previously. The other was a 91-year-old resident. Both men died in hospital after becoming acutely ill. Although the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) reports on both deaths concluded that the standard of care provided to these prisoners was equivalent to that available in the community, we have some concerns about how well an establishment which does not have 24-hour healthcare facilities can reasonably be expected to care for anyone nearing the end of their life. The third death is still under review by the PPO.

36. Four inquests took place during the reporting year, and there were also four pre-inquest reviews. Three more are scheduled for 2020. Points raised in PPO reports had already been addressed by the time those reports were finalised. In particular, the Board is confident that providing support to the relatives of anyone who dies in custody is a priority and begins immediately after a death occurs.

## 6 SEGREGATION/CARE AND SEPARATION UNIT

37. Our last report recorded a shift in the use of the segregation unit, and this has continued throughout 2019. It reflects the focus on managing prisoners on the wings as far as possible; keeping the original cell empty makes this clear to residents who might try to manipulate a move to another house block. We have also observed the strategy to remove someone from a situation for a short period, to allow unrest to settle down, and have been present when this was explained to prisoners who protest their innocence in segregation review boards. An examination of the figures for the last six months of the reporting year (see below) demonstrates what, in our view, is an effective use of this resource.

Month	Total occupancy	Rule 53/4	Rule 55	Rule 45 initial authority	Rule 45 72-hour	Rule 45 continuation
July	92	40	4	28	14	6
August	96	37	5	26	20	8
September	66	33	4	15	11	3
October	41	23	3	8	6	1
November	44	28	9	25	16	3
December	66	n/a	n/a	22	17	4

38. However, as we have previously noted, the above figures include prisoners whose length of stay is long, with some remaining on the unit for over a month, a few for around 40 or 50 days, and one for 78 days. Members have been well aware of the reasons for this, which, unfortunately, is usually that the safest place for a prisoner with severe mental health issues is in segregation until a suitable place can be secured for him elsewhere.

39. Our concerns about a stay of more than a week on the unit stem from our previously documented concerns about the inadequacies of the unit itself, where cells are dark and poorly ventilated, and the heating system is inadequate. We often see prisoners in cells on one side of the unit lying on the floor, huddled in blankets next to the radiators to try to keep warm. The available exercise space is outside, cold and bleak, even on a warm day. The term 'Dickensian', used by a new member, is, we consider, a fair description. Despite the considerable dedication and efficiency of staff, the state of the cells, as well as the lack of reasonable office space, together with only a single large room for holding reviews, adjudications and the independent adjudicator, prompts us to ask whether it really is fit for purpose any longer.

40. We would not wish any of this to detract from our judgement that the efforts of staff on the unit are exceptional. We commend their willingness to take account of observations made by members. A key example was the concerns raised about the shared use of electric razors after the decision – appropriate, in our view – to discontinue the use of disposable ones. Electric razors are not without risk, given the relatively high incidence of infectious diseases such as hepatitis among prisoners, but we recognise the need to balance the risks of health and safety. There is a high standard of cleanliness on the unit, and all cells have been repainted and are properly furnished. Even the most challenging and difficult prisoners are treated with patience and compassion.

## 7 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS

41. Throughout 2019, the proportions of different groups with protected characteristics remained broadly the same. In our 2018 report, we described the framework developed by the prison to ensure that any resident with a protected characteristic was treated fairly. We have therefore selected three groups of prisoners, older men, veterans in custody and transgender residents, to comment on in this year's report.

### **Older prisoners**

42. Men over the age of 50 are classed as older prisoners. During 2019, there have been 230–240 residents (18%) in this age group in the prison, which is similar to the number in 2018.

43. Despite the evidence that lifestyles and failure to access services contribute significantly to the ageing factor of prisoners (considered to be adding about ten years) it is easy to forget that people growing older in prison have similar needs to older people elsewhere: they are less mobile; their vision and hearing may gradually be impaired and they are more susceptible to illness. They will probably need regular primary healthcare support and can be heavier users of secondary health care services. An emphasis on prevention, for instance through flu vaccines, and wellbeing, in keeping moving and maintaining a reasonable level of fitness, becomes more important. They may also benefit from more comfortable surroundings and find it more difficult to negotiate steps and access showers. As far as we are aware, all of these issues are regularly addressed.

44. The 2017 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons report commended the work done with older prisoners. The fortnightly Inside Out Club for those in the vulnerable prisoner group, facilitated by Age UK, has 40 places and continues to be full. The sessions take the form of a drop-in session with refreshments, rather like a social club; there are impromptu performances of songs, or even poetry, from individuals, and some organised games such as quizzes or bingo. One wing has its own fitness equipment, and the weekly sessions led by PE staff are popular. This low-key activity, we consider, reflects the kind of community social group which might be found anywhere on the outside.

45. We welcome the extension of this provision for mains residents. Up to 20 live on a wing with minimum supervision and there are 20 places elsewhere for red bands and prisoners on release on temporary licence (ROTL). Each week, they can attend a one-hour gym session followed by relaxation time in the prison Bistro, with a similar mix of one-off or organised activities. Prisoners we have spoken to are enthusiastic about these programmes, which we consider provide a good balance of physical and social activity.

### **Veterans in custody**

46. The number of veterans, mainly army related, at the prison remains constant, at about 40 (3%). The SSAFA caseworker now has a base on one wing and is available once a week, working one-to-one with residents and any staff members on request. We commend this sensitive approach. We are aware that consideration had been given to group activities for these individuals, but the demand so far has not been identified. Not all residents wish to identify themselves as veterans, but increasing awareness among wing staff aims to ensure that publicity is given to the service and support available.

### **Transgender prisoners**

47. Prison is hardly the place for anyone to explore their sexuality, especially a large male category C establishment like HMP Northumberland. Nevertheless, some have no choice. Most wings at the establishment do not have individual showers, and other facilities, such as gyms, are communal. This is a very male establishment, and the scope for privacy is limited, so there are few opportunities for individual expression. Anyone who is different or appears vulnerable is potentially open to exploitation.

48. Despite the small number of transgender residents (about four), the population changes year on year; we were pleased to learn that one former prisoner is now living independently after release, in her chosen gender. In recent years, we have observed how support from other residents can be remarkable, through befriending and small steps such as guarding the showers to enable a transgender resident to take her time. We acknowledge the steps taken by staff at all levels to help these individuals. Balancing the needs of the large majority of men with a small minority who can, at times, appear demanding and unwilling to compromise is no easy task. Ideally, a more tailored approach to individual needs – for instance, in the purchase of clothes and cosmetics – is desirable, but we accept that there are limitations on how far this can be developed.

49. Overall, our judgement in this area is that, within the overall framework, real efforts are being made to address the needs of the relatively small number of men in these groups for whom prison life will always be exceptionally difficult.

## **8 HEALTHCARE (INCLUDING MENTAL HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE)**

50. In several recent reports, we have expressed our concerns over waiting times for routine GP and dental appointments. The lack of a permanent solution seemed to us to reflect the instability in the overall management and provision of the service. We therefore welcomed the appointment of a new manager in April 2019, who spoke to us of her determination to ensure that high-quality services would be delivered in a cohesive way. Our observation at the year-end is that services have stabilised, key staff have been appointed to ensure continuity, and that some outstanding issues, such as staff retention and the provision of minor treatment on the wings, are being addressed.
51. In primary care, waiting times for GP appointments fluctuated, reaching 38 working days for a routine appointment in September 2019 and reducing to 26 by the year-end, with longer waits for mains residents at all times. Non-urgent waiting times for an initial dental assessment rose to 24 weeks, with a further 21 for treatment in June; the prompt response to contract additional sessions reduced these to 18 and 13 weeks respectively. These problems are common to other prisons with the same provider, and a long-term solution for the whole of the North-East is needed. We note that a new provider, Spectrum, is due to take over the healthcare contract from G4S in April 2020.
52. During the reporting year, we became aware of concerns among prisoners that their long-term prescription medication had been either significantly reduced or stopped. The mental health provider also reported an increase in requests for appointments as a direct result of this. This was less an issue of clinical judgement, on which we are not qualified to comment, but rather a need for better communication about what is going to happen, and preparing prisoners for the change might help. We expect to see this problem resolved in 2020.
53. In previous reports, we have commented on the time lost in work or education by prisoners who have to travel across the prison estate or wait for medication and appointments; missed appointments, which could have reduced the time that others have had to wait, have been an additional problem. We welcome the developments during the last year to provide basic treatments on residential units. This, together with the combined efforts of mentors and the healthcare administration team to remind residents of appointments the following day, seems to be having positive results, but it is too early to confirm whether these are significant.
54. However, one of the biggest draw downs on staff and clinical time is the need to send prisoners to hospital. The lack of 24-hour staffing cover and in-patient accommodation is an issue which has been raised with the commissioners. Our visit to HMP Durham and a discussion with healthcare staff there demonstrated the value of avoiding hospital admission as well as facilitating return, should it be unavoidable. Furthermore, supporting older prisoners and anyone with a life-limiting condition, and being able to offer palliative care, would have a positive impact both for residents and staff.

55. We have been told that not all prisons of the size of HMP Northumberland have inpatient provision. However, some do, eg Holme House, a similar size Cat C prison in Stockton on Tees. Moreover, few establishments are located as far from an acute hospital as Northumberland, or have the same level of older prisoners. During 2019, there were 108 hospital stays of overnight or longer, and four residents needed palliative care. Whenever a resident is taken to hospital, an escort of two officers is needed; if the prisoner stays overnight, the number of escorts is increased. During 2019, one resident was in hospital for over three months. This drain on resources is significant and warrants addressing.
56. We welcome the robust monitoring of healthcare services by the prison, through the regular clinical governance meetings, where the challenge of managing a diverse range of providers is clear. Under the new contract, the intention is for one manager, normally the head of healthcare, to manage all the providers, unlike the present split responsibility. This should bring coherence and enable more effective delivery of services.

## 9 EDUCATION AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

57. The reporting year has been dominated by the impact of the introduction of the new Prison Education Framework (PEF) contract in April 2019, negotiated by Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) on behalf of all five prisons in the North-East. The aim was to achieve consistency of assessment of need, and delivery of education. Unfortunately, some misunderstandings with the bidders around the contract negotiations led to delays in implementation and a shortfall in funding, with a detrimental effect on the ability to deliver courses to residents in the first few months. At HMP Northumberland, this meant:
- an initial loss of 70 course places
  - contraction of the teaching workforce (more than 10 staff posts)
  - a reduction in the student support resource.
58. Despite this, prison managers have worked hard, along with the provider, Novus, to mitigate these losses, and by October they had created 90 new education places, with a further 30 full-time-equivalent spaces added by the reopening of the careers centre/virtual campus.
59. Northumberland's development of the dynamic purchasing scheme has been instrumental in expanding the courses offered, and in changing the shape of some educational provision, more tailored to the individual needs of residents and with flexibility not achievable in the more traditional learning setting. These include:
- the charity Junction 42 offering short courses in four areas – choir, art, drumming and creative writing. Students' work formed part of an art exhibition at Newcastle Cathedral, and a performance as part of Black History Month
  - the reopening of the careers centre: three contractors, First Point Training, Changing Lives, and Novus, assist in initial assessments, tailor training to job goals, and help with developing CVs, job applications and interview skills
  - the provision of student support, now undertaken by First Point.
60. With the increased turnover from HMP Durham, there is a need for good assessments and data entry on offender assessment system (OASys) reports prior to and after transfer. Until recently, much of the burden of gathering information about educational needs fell on 'red bands' – prisoners acting as mentors and as education orderlies on the induction wings. Most new arrivals are also tested on their English and mathematics competence. The completed learner data form is used by regimes managers to allocate prisoners to courses matching their needs and aspirations.
61. Despite the upheaval, in the July to September quarter, allocations were 100% but attendance 80% and efficiency 70% – the latter being reduced by staff sickness, holidays and operational constraints.

62. Core functional skills in English and mathematics remain central to the contract, with an emphasis on individual needs, and teaching embedded in workshops as well as formal classes. Pass rates dropped mid-year – attributed to the turbulence in staffing arrangements and the need for students now to pass two mathematics exams at the same time, as one fail generated two re-sits. Work is in hand to correct this anomaly.

63. Other sustained improvements include:

- the library and the gym being well used, with high attendance levels and a good number of qualifications awarded via the gym training offered
- the Shannon Trust having increasing numbers of mentors, and a significant uplift (about 50%) in the number of users and sessions offered during the year.

64. The PEF has had a challenging first year, but we are satisfied that the prison is working hard to provide the best opportunities for residents within the resource envelope.

## 10 WORK, VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

65. It remains a challenge for the prison to provide work opportunities offering interest, stimulation and the opportunity to gain qualifications that will enhance job prospects on release. In addition, the prison layout and the timing of methadone administration on some wings continue to erode punctuality and attendance, and, in one quarter, contributed to missing the target for the number of hours worked, with an associated financial penalty.
66. Regimes managers, however, worked constantly throughout 2019 to generate new forms of employment, and negotiated multiple outside contracts that provided work through the prison's training workshops. Among these were:
- fabricating lobster pots for the local fishing industry
  - supplying steel cell doors for public sector prisons (engineering)
  - tea packing for HMP Bronzefield
  - producing cell curtains, kitchen whites and bedding, along with an initiative to recycle Formula 1 uniforms (tailors)
67. The prison shop traded successfully over the summer months, selling cards, wooden and textile products, honey from the prison hives, and a variety of plants from the horticultural team. The laundry continues to perform work for two other prisons, as well as meeting local needs.
68. Pursuit of the decency agenda has facilitated the creation of new jobs which perform valuable roles within the prison, such as painting (in teams) and a variety of maintenance tasks through the facilities management academy.
69. Managers have continued to explore ROTL opportunities, but it is an arduous process setting up a placement as it has to be done rigorously. The total at any one time is usually five. In addition, several of those set up lapsed because individuals were transferred to a category D establishment or were released, and others were suspended owing to licence infringements. Refining licence conditions and selection criteria could see ROTL expand, as several companies are interested in working with the prison to take this forward. Several external businesses are currently in negotiation to create further work opportunities, and we applaud the managers' efforts over the last year.
70. In December 2019, the average number of prisoners at the establishment who were unemployed was 185, against a target of 140 or less. The increase in the number of short sentences has exacerbated this problem, as finding meaningful work or training for less than 10–12 weeks is a challenge. Despite impressive efforts by the staff involved, this remains a challenge and the levels fluctuate month by month.

71. The other challenge for the prison is to strengthen the link between workshops and workers' educational needs, so that portfolios can present a comprehensive and continuing record of experience and achievement.

72. Given the prison's location, the shortage of work in the North-East and the constant movement of prisoners, we recognise the creative and ceaseless efforts throughout the reporting year to promote successful rehabilitation of those residents who choose to work.

## 11 RESETTLEMENT PREPARATION

73. Resettlement procedures at HMP Northumberland are undergoing progressive change, with the embedding of enhanced 'through-the-gate', and the initiation of the OMIC model in October 2019.
74. Significant changes are taking place across the prison service to structures and staffing, with the aim of strengthening the probation link and presence within the prison. We understand, however, that the appointments of probation officers in private sector prisons are being approved later than in the public sector, with the consequence that caseloads are currently high and face-to-face meetings with prisoners are few. Low to medium risk prisoners currently have little input. It is a matter of concern how the new system functions over the coming months. Risk assessments need to be completed and communicated in a timely manner for the through-the-gate team to work with prisoners on accommodation and licence conditions, and to avoid frustration. Key workers can sometimes play a crucial role in liaising between resettlement team and resident to transmit significant information.
75. There are longstanding good links with a number of charities that assist with resettlement issues, and prisoners nearing the end of their sentence had the opportunity to meet and get useful information at a couple of 'resettlement days', run in the visitor centre, as in previous years.
76. NEPACS has recently appointed a new family liaison worker, and there has been increasing use of the 'departure lounge' by families. With a reduction in the average sentence length, the workload has increased. Toiletries and clothing packs are distributed on release, if requested. A number of late releases have posed difficulties both for NEPACS staff, and especially for leavers, who may struggle to make their probation appointments later in the day.
77. Shelter has two full-time workers at the establishment and one part-time worker, shared with HMP Durham. Much time is spent negotiating accommodation which meets licence conditions with local authorities and housing associations, and good communication with the probation/OMIC team is a prerequisite for timely intervention. They are also involved with debt counselling, and are looking to offer a money management programme to prisoners, subject to negotiation with the education managers. We welcome the progress made since April 2019, when there were 100 prisoners on the waiting list, to none by the year-end. Being able to address accommodation and finance issues mid-sentence, rather than shortly before release, has helped, as well as rechecking five days prior to release. Nevertheless, of 46 prisoners who had approached Shelter at one point saying they would have no fixed address on release, only 20, less than half, had a definite address upon leaving. The level of referrals has increased by 20% over the previous reporting year, which is possibly a reflection of the shorter sentences given to some prisoners.

78. Staff are constantly seeking opportunities to help residents manage the transition into the community upon their release. Some aspects of purposeful activity can be especially relevant. One example of this is a recent twinning project with Newcastle United Football Club Academy; a team visited the prison to promote the work, which is intended to enhance employment prospects through coaching/refereeing courses.
79. The whole area of preparing prisoners for release is fraught with difficulty, given the number who are now serving shorter sentences – a factor which is completely beyond the prison's control. The wider implications need addressing by HMPPS and elsewhere, to ensure that prisons like Northumberland are in a position to meet the needs of the population. Our view is that those working in this area are currently managing to adapt to the changing picture, and are succeeding in finding acceptable solutions for the majority of residents upon release, but we have concerns about whether this is sustainable.

## THE WORK OF THE IMB

80. The level of membership has once again been a challenge for the Board, as for most of 2019 there was only a third of its complement in action. Retaining newly appointed members is also an issue: matching the expectations of those appointed on the basis of an application, a tour and an interview is hard. We hope that the national working party on this question will produce realistic recommendations.

81. We conducted two recruitment campaigns in 2019. Of the six people recommended for appointment, one had to withdraw because of changed circumstances and one took up post. Another was not able to take up duties in January 2020 and the other three, who were interviewed in December/January, were still awaiting appointment letters at the time of writing.

82. We appreciate the cooperation of staff at all levels in responding to requests for information and facilitating visits to the prison.

Recommended complement of Board members	20
Number of Board members at the start of the reporting period	11
Number of Board members at the end of the reporting period	9
Total number of visits to the establishment	342
Total number of segregation reviews attended	50%

I would like to thank all members of the board for their contributions to this document, and their professionalism and diligence throughout the year.

Lesley Craig  
Chair

## APPLICATIONS TO THE IMB

Code	Subject	Current reporting year	Previous reporting year
A	Accommodation, including laundry, clothing, ablutions	5	14
B	Discipline, including adjudications, incentives and earned privileges, sanctions	3	4
C	Equality	2	2
D	Purposeful activity, including education, work, training, library, regime, time out of cell	14	17
E 1	Letters, visits, telephones, public protection restrictions	21	20
E 2	Finance, including pay, private monies, spends	10	7
F	Food and kitchens	10	11
G	Health, including physical, mental, social care	28	38
H 1	Property within this establishment	30	16
H 2	Property during transfer or in another establishment or location	15	24
H 3	Canteen, facility list, catalogue(s)	14	1
I	Sentence management, including home detention curfew, ROTL, parole, release dates, recategorisation	24	38
J	Staff/prisoner concerns, including bullying	44	28
K	Transfers	21	13
L	Miscellaneous	11	9
	<b>Total number of applications</b>	252	242