



INSTITUTE OF PRISON LAW

FOUNDED IN 2006

CERTIFICATE OF COMPETENCY IN PRISON LAW (Course now in update for 2027)

This Distance Learning Course is ideal for anyone with a personal, professional or academic interest in prisons in England and Wales – including prisoners themselves.

The course does not require a legal background, no prior prison law knowledge is required.

The course has been devised, written and updated by expert prison lawyers, full terms and conditions of the course applicable to all students are at prisons.org.uk/terms-conditions and registration on the course by payment of the course fee explicitly confirms acceptance of each and all of those terms and conditions without exception.

Full details of the course and its accreditation history are shown on prisonlaw.org.uk the course is fully updated to January 2026 and updating to January 2027 will take place before the course reopens in January 2027

The course consists of eight self-contained Modules and, once registered on the course, students receive the eight modular full texts and the eight modular examinations. These are all delivered by download or email once registration is confirmed and as research is an important part of the law students need to keep abreast of the latest prison law and policy changes – we make this easy by emailing the HoESW or similar at the prison providing policy updates as they are published by HMPPS/MOJ.

On average, each Module takes 10-15 hours study and ends with a multiple-choice examination which must be submitted for marking online to <https://prisons.org.uk/contact> when completed.

Successful completion of the Course leads to the **Certificate of Competency in Prison Law** and allows the Certificate holder to display the Institute's **Digital Badge** (above) on their stationery, advertising, social media and website.

The course must be completed within 12 months of the registrations date and enrolment confirms acceptance of all course terms and conditions set out at the following address:

[https:// prisons.org.uk/terms-conditions/](https://prisons.org.uk/terms-conditions/)

The Certificate is gained by successful completion of the eight modular examinations, each with a minimum 80% pass mark; if a student obtains less than 80% in a module, they have the choice of resitting it (£29.99 plus VAT) or moving on to the next module – in which case they will be told which questions they answered incorrectly and while they can then continue the course, they will **not** be awarded the Certificate nor will the Digital Badge be issued to them.

FEES:

The Course Fee for a member of the public is £999 + VAT (£1198.80)

The Course Fee for prison staff is £749 + VAT (£898.80)

The Course Fee for someone in prison/on probation is £749 + VAT (£898.80)

Course Fees include enrollment/registration, all modular texts and examinations, and examination marking fees(except exam resit fees)

LAST COURSE UPDATE BY: Simon Creighton, Solicitor. Author: **Parole Board Hearings: Law and Practice** (Legal Action Group); **Prisoners: Law & Practice** (Legal Action Group); **Prisoners and the Law** (Tottel); **Indeterminate Sentences** (POUK).

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INSTITUTE DIRECTOR: Mark Leech FRSA.

THE COURSE 2026

MODULE 1

Unit 1: A short history of imprisonment – from the middle ages to the current day

Unit 2: The Statutory and Regulatory Framework – Acts, Rules, Orders, Instructions....

- The Prison Act 1952.
- The Prison Rules - The Legal Status.
- Prison Service Instructions and Orders and Policy Frameworks
- The Ministry of Justice and the Prison and Probation Service
- Contracted out prisons
- Private escorts
- The contract document

Unit 3: The Prison Estate and Population – What prisons we have, public and private, male, female, young offenders and who is detained in them.

- The Structure of the Prison System
- The adult prison system
- Reception/Local prisons
- Men's prisons
- High security prisons
- Special security units and high security units
- Close supervision centres
- Dangerous and Severe Personality Disorder Units
- PIPE units
- Category B training prisons
- Category C prisons
- Category D/open prisons
- Resettlement prisons
- Vulnerable Prisoners' Units
- Women's prisons
- Mother and Baby Units
- Protected Witness Units
- Prison Staff
- "The role"
- Eligibility Requirements:
- Prison Management
- HMPPS
- HMPPS Key Performance targets:
- Independent Monitoring Boards
- The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO)
- The Probation Service

Unit 4: Funding: How to obtain funding for Prison Law work today – an expert view from a practicing prison lawyer on the how to obtain funding for prison law work – and what mistakes to avoid.

Unit 5: Overview of Prisoners' Rights 2026; Access to law; Right to life; Prevention and investigation of prison deaths; Liberty and Release Date calculations; Recall; Prison Offences and Discipline; Regime, Categorization and Allocation; Incentives and Privileges; Contact with the outside world, Letters, Visits and Phone Calls; Contact with Journalists; Health; Religion; Race and Equality.

Unit 6: Requests & Complaints

- Requests
- Complaints
- Non-Confidential Complaints
- Allocation of the complaint
- Response to the complaint
- Reserved Subjects
- Complaints about members of staff.
- Other Avenues of Complaint.
- Independent Monitoring Board
- The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman
- The Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration.

MODULE 2

Unit 1 – Sentence Planning & OaSys

- Sentence Planning
- OASys: How does it work?
- Risk classification

Targeting needs
Responsivity
Treatment method
Programme integrity
Community-based programmes
An effective risk needs assessment
What is OASys in a Nutshell?
Benefits of OASys
OASys: Scoring.
How does OASys arrive at its scores?
Section 1: Offending information
Section 2: Analysis of offences
Section 3: Accommodation
Section 4: Education, training and employability
Section 5: Financial management and income
Section 6: Relationships
Section 7: Lifestyle and associates
Section 8: Drug misuse
Section 9: Alcohol misuse
Section 10: Emotional wellbeing
Section 11: Thinking and behaviour
Section 12: Attitudes
Section 13: Health and other considerations
Self-assessment
Who has an OASys Assessment – and when?

Unit 2 – Categorisation & Allocation

Allocation
Categorisation
What are the security categories and what do they represent?
Category A
Category B
Category C
Category D
Restricted
Open
Closed
Category A Prisoners
Definition of Category A
Definition of Restricted Status
Criteria Justifying Suitability
Escape Risk Classification
Standard Escape Risk.
High Escape Risk:
Exceptional Escape Risk:
Legal Background
Identification & Reporting in of Potential Category A prisoners.
Reviews of Provisional Category A and Restricted Status Prisoners
Reviews Leading Up to Conviction and Sentence
Escape Risk Classification
First Formal Review
First Formal Review Preparation
Completion of the First Formal Review
Reviews of Confirmed Category A and Restricted Status Prisoners
Oral Hearings
Timings of Annual Reviews
Annual Review Procedures
Preparing the Reports
Disclosure of the Reports
Local Advisory Panel Consideration
Initial Category A Team Consideration
Annual Review Decisions by the Category A Team
Referral of Annual Reviews to the Director of High Security
Decisions from the Director of High Security
Downgrading from Category A or Restricted Status

Unit 3 – Incentives and Privileges

General – policy framework 2026
Basic Theory: Good behaviour v poor behaviour.
Local incentive arrangements
Three levels: basic, standard and enhanced.
Devising local IEP Schemes

- Key earnable privileges
- Privilege levels
- Basic Level
- Standard Level
- Enhanced Level
- Further details of key earnable privileges Access to private cash
- Extra and improved visits
- Higher rates of pay
- In-cell television
- Wearing own clothes
- Time out of cell
- Additional Privileges
- Games Consoles and Games
- Management and operation of local IEP Schemes
- Criteria for good behaviour and performance
- Reviews
- Prisoners' in denial of their offence
- Double jeopardy
- Review Boards
- Retention of privilege level on transfer
- Special groups of prisoners
- Unconvicted prisoners
- Immigration detainees
- Foreign national prisoners
- Prisoners with disabilities/particular needs/older prisoners
- Prisoners in Segregation Units
- Safer Custody
- Prisoners who are at risk of suicide or self-harm
- Violent behaviour
- Monitoring

Unit 4 – Prison Work & Pay

- Prison work
- Prison Pay
- Rates of Pay
- General
- Rate of pay for unemployed prisoners
- Minimum Employed Rate for All Prisoners
- Standard Rates of Pay
- Piecework
- Higher Rates of Pay
- Prisoners who are Released on Temporary Licence and those on 'Working Out' Schemes
- Tax and National Insurance Thresholds
- Other liabilities
- Deductions
- Prisoners who are Short-Term Sick
- Prisoners who are Long-Term Sick, or of Retirement Age
- Pregnant Women and Mothers caring for Babies
- Prisoners attending Outside Hospital
- Transfers
- In-Cell work
- Management of the Prisoners' Pay/Earnings Budget
- National Minimum Wage
- Unemployment pay
- Minimum
- Employed rate
- Minimum employed rate
- Short-term sickness
- Long-term sickness and retirement
- Maternity leave or caring full-time for children
- Outside hospital allowance

MODULE 3.

Unit 1: Child Prisoners & Young Offenders

- Basic Principles:
- Prison Service Steps in its Young Person Policy
- Safeguarding and promoting welfare of children and young people
- Promoting and maintaining good behaviour

Managing challenging behaviour
 Dealing with complaints and investigations
 Healthcare
 Substance misuse
 Staff selection, process and training
 Training
 Effective management and support of staff
 Reception into custody and initial assessment
 Induction and further assessment
 Sentence management
 The personal officer or caseworker
 Involvement of the family, supervising officer and outside agencies
 Communications
 Provision of a full, purposeful and active day
 Learning and skills
 Offending behaviour programmes
 Physical education
 Resettlement
 Providing for unsentenced young people
 The Howard League: Judicial Review. The Children Act 1989
 The Children Act 2004
 Sentences & Places of Detention

Unit 2: Women Prisoners

Introduction – Women prisoners policy framework
 Some Statistical and Research Information about Women Prisoners
 Development of the Gender Specific Standards
 Role of HMPS Women and Young People's Group
 Women's prisons

- Pre-custody
- Reception and First Night Procedures
 - Induction, Resolving Urgent Issues
- Health: Physical Health, Mental Health, Substance Misuse
- Offender Management, Offender Supervision, Personal Officer Schemes, Allocation
- Decisions and Through the Gate Support
- Supporting Women at Risk of Self-harm
- Day-to-Day living:
 - Incentives and Earned Privileges
 - PE
 - Property and Clothing
 - Hygiene
 - Environment
 - Diet
 - Association Activities
 - Religion and Faith
 - Prison Shop
 - Complaints
- Managing Order in Women's Prisons: Promoting Pro-Social Behaviour, Adjudications and Segregation
- The Pathways to Resettlement
 - Accommodation
 - Education, training and employment
 - Health and Detoxification
 - Drugs and alcohol
 - Finance, benefit and debt
 - Children and families
 - Attitudes, thinking and behaviour
 - Supporting women who have been abused, raped or who have experienced domestic violence
 - Supporting women who have been involved in prostitution
 - Young Women Prisoners
- Older Women Prisoners
- Women Foreign Nations and Black and Minority Ethnic Groups
- Women Prisoners with Disabilities
- Indeterminate/ Life Sentence Women Prisoners
- Mother and Baby Units
- Management Issues
- Training of Staff and Volunteers
- Security in Women's Prisons
- *Lifers*
- Categorisation.
- Health Care.
- Pregnancy

Unit 3: Mother and Baby Units

Unit 4: Mental Health and the Prison Service

Unit 5: Remand\Civil\FN prisoners\Immigration Detainees

Unit 6: Equality & Discrimination

MODULE 4.

- 1 Maintaining order. Intelligence, segregation, and force. Application to the private sector.
- 2 Adjudications. Discipline manual, Article 6 requirements. Procedural fairness. Independent adjudicators.

MODULE 5.

- 1 Offending behaviour work, and prison education and courses. SOTP, ETS, Think First, CALM, Alcohol awareness, Domestic violence.
- 2 CCRC - correspondence with.
- 3 Communications; Letters, visits, telephone calls, and computers. Access to the media.
- 3 Racism, discrimination and religious rights.

MODULE 6.

- 1 Release regimes, and release date calculation. Tags, HDC, temporary licence. Intermittent imprisonment – Covid-19.
- 2 Licence. Issues re recall and re-offending whilst at risk.
- 3 The parole system and reconsideration mechanism 2019.
- 4 Risk assessment, denial, licence and recall. Recall procedure and hearings.

MODULE 7

- 1 Life imprisonment.
- 2 The lifer panels. Representations, procedure and evidence.
- 3 Case studies/role play; lifer panel

MODULE 8

- 1 Death in custody. Prevention. Procedures; ACCT (suicide and self harm). Article 2 and investigations. Disclosure and openness.
- 2 Inquests.
- 3 Actions for death, assault, false imprisonment, misfeasance, and negligence.

This the Course syllabus, the Course enrolment form will be placed online when the course reopens in January 2027.