

Unlocked

Leading change
on the inside



TRANSFORMING PRISONS:

OUR 2024 – 2025
IMPACT REPORT

OUR IMPACT AT A GLANCE

125,000+ **88%**

prisoners reached by Unlocked participants and Ambassadors since we were founded in 2016

of our most recent cohort were still operational after two years on the programme

40:1

ratio of applications per place for our award-winning, two-year Leadership Development Programme

£1m+

fundraised income invested in frontline prison innovation and accelerator projects led by Unlocked participants

9 IN 10

participants tell us they had not considered a career in the prison service until they heard about Unlocked

3/4

of Ambassadors to complete the programme continue to work towards our mission of breaking cycles of reoffending



“ When I was in prison, my landing officer was an Unlocked participant, and he had a different approach to every other officer. Giving prison officers that living proof that rehabilitation is possible is always going to give them that hope and drive to do the job in prison and understand that they can help a prisoner.

GODFREY
Unlocked Lived Experience Trainer

CEO FOREWORD



NATASHA PORTER OBE
Founder & CEO

In many ways, Unlocked achievements are always against the odds. I still meet people who think they have misheard me when the words “top graduates” and “prison officers” are used in the same sentence. Media continues to present prison officers as violent, unintelligent or corrupt. The prison service itself has had a year of crisis with massive overcrowding, and many data points suggest parts of the system are on its knees.

This makes us even prouder of the record-breaking outcomes described in this report.

This year we had our most competitive recruitment cycle ever, with more than 40 graduates applying for every place on our leadership development programme. Our brand continued to gain traction, and we were once again featured in the Times Top 100 graduate opportunities ranking: a list we were warned in 2017 we would probably never get into. Increased application numbers coupled with much lower attrition meant we were able to launch our biggest cohort yet: enabling us to reach more prisoners and have deeper impact. Our evidence-based support and training model culminated in record high retention on our programme and in operational roles afterwards. Our new pilot programme which transforms the way middle managers in prison lead cultures of rehabilitation and support is already showing promising results.

This has been a remarkable year in so many ways. But ultimately these milestones are significant because of what they add up to – a prison service focused on helping more prisoners to break free from cycles of reoffending.

“By far the most sophisticated example of innovation we came across was the Unlocked Graduates scheme.”

PRISON REFORM TRUST
Potential Unlocked, 2024

This document is a roadmap of how we got here. It is my hope that it will be useful for sharing best practice as well as celebrating the incredible work prison officers do. But it would be wrong to suggest that we have it all figured out. Many prisons in this country have real challenges, and progress remains incredibly difficult. This sector is, by its nature, a closed world, but often breaking cycles of reoffending comes from breaking down barriers and bringing in new ideas.

Certainly, a big part of our impact has always come from having the freedom to innovate – taking the things we know work from other disciplines and combining them with deep domain expertise to come up with new solutions to entrenched problems. This will always be the bedrock of how we believe you make prison more rehabilitative.

This impact is undoubtedly compounded by the support of a bigger network of partners: colleagues across His Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service and the Ministry of Justice; our funders, who enable us to experiment and try new ideas; corporate partners who offer pro bono support, mentoring and expertise; and a myriad of organisations from across the criminal justice sector who have embraced the opportunity to connect by speaking at our events and hosting work placements. We could not do it without all of you.

As always, the biggest thank you of all is to those of you on the frontline, working tirelessly to prepare those in your care to lead successful lives post-release.

N. Porter

WHY WE EXIST

THE PROBLEM

More than a third of those who leave prison today will be reconvicted within a year. Not only does this reoffending make our communities less safe, but it also represents a huge waste of human talent and potential. It breaks up families, destroys livelihoods and prevents people from meaningfully contributing to society. And it is expensive, **costing the taxpayer over £18bn every year.**

But there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Most of the more than 86,000 prisoners in England and Wales require tailored, expert care and robust security. Many come from some of society's most vulnerable groups and have a disproportionately high risk of drug addiction, mental illness, homelessness, and suicide; **in the year to March 2024 there were nearly 74,000 reported incidents of self-harm.** Two thirds of prisoners have the literacy skills below those expected of an 11-year-old, and more than a quarter were in care as children.



OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

We recruit, train and challenge outstanding individuals to lead prisoner rehabilitation with the aim of creating high-performing leaders who will break the cycles of reoffending in prisons and throughout society.

OUR SOLUTION

We believe that the way to break cycles of reoffending is by inspiring the country's best and brightest to lead change on the frontline. In the same way an outstanding teacher can transform a child's life, **a remarkable prison officer can radically alter the outcomes for a prisoner in their care.** Prison officers are the agents of change within prisons, they set the culture on the landings and have the power to create a safe and secure environment focused on rehabilitation. Evidence shows that a good prison officer is critical to improving prisoner outcomes across a range of key measures, including self-harm, violence, engagement in purposeful activities and reduced reoffending post-release.

Unlocked Graduates exists to make this happen. Every year, we recruit, train and support a diverse group of ambitious graduates to deliver reform on the frontline of some of our most challenging prisons while developing incredible leadership skills in the process. They are encouraged to be radical disruptors, pushing boundaries to come up with new solutions and acting as a catalyst for change across the prison system.

TRANSFORMING PRISONS: OUR 2023 – 2026 STRATEGY

Our 2023-26 strategy reflects on everything we have learnt and identifies the steps required to build the prison system we need. We remain committed to four key areas of work:

- 1 RECRUIT, DEVELOP AND RETAIN MORE HIGH-QUALITY GRADUATES AS PRISON OFFICERS**
- 2 SUPPORT AMBASSADORS TO PROGRESS INTO OPERATIONAL PRISON LEADERSHIP ROLES**
- 3 MAINSTREAM OUR SOLUTIONS SO ALL PRISON OFFICERS BENEFIT FROM OUR RESEARCH AND WORK**
- 4 PROVE WHAT WORKS IN PRISONS TO CATALYSE WHOLE SYSTEM CHANGE**





STRATEGIC GOAL 1

RECRUIT, DEVELOP AND TRAIN MORE HIGH-QUALITY GRADUATES AS PRISON OFFICERS

Exceptional outcomes in prison require exceptional leaders. Finding and inspiring the next generation of prison leaders is at the heart of what we do. We are unapologetically focused on recruiting and retaining the best and most diverse pool of prison officers, ensuring that people in custody receive the support they need to lead fulfilling lives post-release in order to break cycles of reoffending.

OUR IMPACT:

- ▶ Placed and trained nearly **900 prison officers in 38 prisons** across England and Wales since 2016 through our award-winning, two-year Leadership Development Programme.
- ▶ Continued to radically improve the status and prestige of the prison officer role, attracting people who would not otherwise have considered joining the prison service:
 - ▶ **87% of our most recent cohort** had not considered a career as a prison officer before hearing about Unlocked.

- ▶ Featured in the **Times Top 100 best graduate employers every year since 2019**, the only prison service scheme ever to make the list.
- ▶ Generated record demand, with **40 applications for every place on our programme** in 2024 and **more than 1,500 additional expressions of interest** since the recruitment window closed.
- ▶ Succeeded in recruiting another diverse cohort of prison officers:
 - ▶ **16% of participants coming from ethnic minority backgrounds** (compared with 10% of the broader prison officer population).
 - ▶ **Participants joined the Unlocked programme having studied 26 different degree subjects at university.**
- ▶ **100% of participants in our 2024 cohort** rated their initial training at Summer Institute as excellent or good.
- ▶ Shortlisted – **Best Graduate and Early Careers Attraction campaign at the 2025 Recruitment Advertising Awards.**
- ▶ Shortlisted – **Best Single Purpose Attraction Activation at the 2024 ISE Awards.**
- ▶ Shortlisted - **Best Graduate Initiative and Best Art Direction at the 2024 Recruitment Marketing Awards.**

“ Since I first discovered Unlocked Graduates, I’ve been an enormous fan of the scheme. I think it’s a way of getting some brilliant, talented people into our prisons, and when I walk around our jails, I see the impact that [they] are having in so many of the jails in which they work.

CHARLIE TAYLOR
His Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Prisons



STRATEGIC GOAL

2

SUPPORT AMBASSADORS TO PROGRESS INTO OPERATIONAL PRISON LEADERSHIP ROLES

If we are to see real change, it is vital that the prison service attracts and retains the very best talent. Therefore, our Ambassadors must continue to have impact beyond their two years on the programme. For most, this translates into promotion on the landings, becoming policy makers or working towards reducing reoffending in other mission-aligned roles.

OUR IMPACT:

- ▶ The majority of Unlocked Ambassadors stay focused on prison reform after completing the programme:
 - ▶ **90% of Ambassadors from our 2022 cohort** are still operational in the prison service or the Ministry of Justice.

- ▶ 72% who have completed the programme since 2017 continue to work towards the mission of breaking cycles of reoffending in their primary role.
- ▶ **Grown our alumni network** and created more opportunities for Ambassadors to develop their influence as leaders together:
 - ▶ Events to promote knowledge sharing, alongside study visits to show Ambassadors examples of best practice in prisons around the country, demonstrating that change is possible.
 - ▶ 2024 saw the launch of an **Ambassador-led think tank called Prisons Solved** which has brought together Unlocked Ambassadors to address the challenges facing prisons.
- ▶ Unlocked participants and Ambassadors have been **nominated for and won multiple awards this year**, including:
 - ▶ **Erin Dunne, Unlocked Ambassador - won the Changing Lives award HMPPS Wales**, recognising her exceptional work supporting prisoners.
 - ▶ **Gavin Joseph, Unlocked Ambassador - won the High Sheriff of Greater London Hidden Hero award** for the difference he has made and effective relationship building.
 - ▶ **Mahi Joshi, Unlocked Ambassador - second place in the 'Rising Star Award'** at Target Jobs National Graduate Recruitment Awards 2024, for her outstanding contribution to the prison service.

“ After graduating from the Unlocked Graduates scheme, no less than three months had passed and I had been successful in gaining my Custodial Manager role. Without the support from Unlocked, mainly my MPOs and regional team, I don't think I would have been successful.

DAN CLEMSON
Unlocked Ambassador

SPOTLIGHT ON: UNLOCKED CHANGEMAKERS

THE PROBLEM

The participants on our graduate programme are making a real difference in their prisons. However, the evidence shows one consistent barrier that many band 3 officers face in their roles: a lack of high-quality day-to-day management.

An excellent middle manager can radically improve outcomes for an entire wing, driving rehabilitative change, while helping to shape the prison service's future leaders. Despite this, most custodial managers (CMs) receive very limited training.



“ Investing in our CMs has never been more important and the opportunity provided by Unlocked to use their established and tested approach to drive personal growth and set culture within custodial settings is the perfect opportunity to develop our CMs into our future leaders.

GOVERNING GOVERNOR
Unlocked ChangeMakers Partner Prison

OUR SOLUTION

Unlocked ChangeMakers is a bespoke leadership development scheme for CMs which **aims to transform the quality of middle leadership in prisons**. After years of gathering evidence and curriculum design, this 12-month pilot launched in September 2024 supported by the Garfield Weston Foundation.

The programme leverages our world-leading expertise in delivering leadership development training for prison officers alongside learnings from our graduate programme. It combines rigorous, evidence-based theory with practical learning to give CMs the tools required to lead culture change in their prisons.

EARLY IMPACT

23 outstanding CMs from six prisons joined our first ChangeMakers cohort. As part of the programme, all participants are completing a series of evidence-based Challenge Goals focused on shifting culture and leading change. This is already making a real difference to prisoners' lives.



STRATEGIC GOAL 3

MAINSTREAM OUR SOLUTIONS SO ALL PRISON OFFICERS BENEFIT FROM OUR RESEARCH AND WORK

We have spent the past eight years collating evidence about the experiences of prison officers and applying this to our recruitment, training and leadership development. Our approach to training and support has influenced wider prison officer training and development, and organisations from around the world regularly reach out to us to learn from our work.


OUR IMPACT:

- ▶ Prison officers joining through Unlocked are less likely to leave the service in their first two years: **overall retention of Unlocked participants in recent years has been 14 percentage points higher than prison officers joining via the standard route.**
- ▶ **Achieved our highest two-year programme retention ever:** 88% of those who started in 2022 completed and graduated from the programme in 2024.



This year will see the publication of our new book and the launch of the accompanying instructional coaching model. Informed by our evidence-based approach, this will codify the solutions we have developed that we know are making a real difference to prison officer training.

- ▶ Learnings from the Unlocked programme have **inspired HMPPS's new approach to prison officer training and support** on the Enable Programme which is now being rolled out to all operational prison staff.
- ▶ Developed **unique insights on prison officer recruitment, experience and retention** and shared this with colleagues across the prison service in the UK and internationally.
- ▶ Given oral evidence to several parliamentary committees, including the House of Lords Justice and Home Affairs Committee on prison culture, governance and staffing.
- ▶ Published **academically peer-reviewed research** on prison officer retention in the prestigious International Corrections and Prison Association (ICPA) journal.



“ I am a big fan of Unlocked. Wormwood Scrubs has really benefitted from the enthusiasm, drive and professional curiosity that Unlocked Graduates participants bring. I'm proud to see these officers stay with us beyond their two years on the programme, with many becoming Supervising Officers, Custodial Managers and part of my senior management team.

AMY FROST
Governing Governor, HMP Wormwood Scrubs

STRATEGIC GOAL

4

PROVE WHAT WORKS IN PRISONS TO CATALYSE WHOLE SYSTEM CHANGE

We want to drive system reform, and to do this we need to prove that change is possible, particularly in areas where failure is expected. We ultimately want to use excellence and proof of concept on the frontline to lead evidence-based change and build a system which effectively breaks cycles of reoffending.

OUR IMPACT:

- ▶ Worked with leading academics and expert thinkers to celebrate excellence and share evidence-based approaches on the frontline to inspire change:
 - ▶ Invested in excess of £1m of fundraised income in frontline innovation and accelerator projects to date, including the launch of a pilot middle leadership programme in 2024.
 - ▶ Facilitated the exchange of ideas, sharing evidence of what works and solutions for change with leading thinkers, academics and frontline staff.



Analysis from independent experts provides indicative evidence that for every £1 spent on Unlocked Graduates, at least £59 is saved for society over a five-year period.

- ▶ Continued our work to find ways to robustly measure our impact, including the development of a feasibility paper for a future randomised controlled trial in collaboration with independent experts and behavioural scientists.
- ▶ Over 500 research papers have now been written by Unlocked participants, developing the evidence base on topics including prisoner wellbeing, rehabilitative practices and culture change.
- ▶ Presented evidence globally on the solutions that we have developed in the recruitment and development of outstanding prison officers:
 - ▶ Invited to present our findings on the factors that impact prison officer retention at the prestigious Stockholm Criminology Symposium.
 - ▶ Invited to share learnings about our recruitment and support model for new prison officers with colleagues from prison services across Europe at the PRISGRADS Workshop in Vienna.

“ [Unlocked participants] listen to prisoners... they see things from a different viewpoint... The Unlocked people are good at talking to people. They have good communication skills. And those skills have rubbed off on other members of staff.

CUSTODIAL MANAGER
HMIP Improving Behaviour in Prisons, 2024

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