

# Unlocked

Leading change  
on the inside

# OUR STORY & IMPACT

“ The most important person in any prisoner’s life is not the minister of justice, not the commissioner of the prisons, not even the head of prison, but the warder in one’s section.

NELSON MANDELA



UnlockedGrads



unlockedgrads



unlockedgrads



unlocked-graduates

# THE PROBLEM

Whatever your views on criminal justice, whether you see prison as a place to punish and deter future crime or to actively rehabilitate, prisons are failing. Just under half of those that leave prison today will be reconvicted within a year.

# OUR SOLUTION

Unlocked believes that the way you change prisons and break cycles of reoffending is through prison officers. The prison officer is the only professional who can build a relationship with every single prisoner – including the most vulnerable and challenging. They set the culture on the landings and have the power to create a safe and secure environment that is focused on rehabilitation. This access and influence makes it a singularly powerful role.

# WHY PRISON OFFICERS?

The idea for Unlocked Graduates emerged as a recommendation from the Coates Review of Prison Education. The advisers on this report included our founder Natasha Porter who came to believe that, even if it was possible to fix all the problems found in prison classrooms, it could still not make a difference to the most vulnerable and difficult prisoners.

These are the individuals who never make it through the series of locked doors to spend time with a teacher. Often, the only professional who reaches this group of prisoners is the officer, and if they ever do reach a teacher, it is because a prison officer has encouraged them to attend education.

“ The prison officer has access to all prisoners, spends the most time with prisoners and work across disciplines dealing with problems related to healthcare, education, employment and probation.

PRISON GOVERNOR

# MEASURING OUR IMPACT

This report offers a snapshot of our progress against this theory, seeking to set out early impact and tell our story over our first five years.

We are still a relatively young organisation. **Our ultimate goal is to measurably reduce reoffending rates**, however this will be a long-term endeavour. Despite this, we feel strongly that we need to track our performance and share data that will allow our prisons, partners and participants to hold us to account.

We therefore rigorously collect data on recruitment, diversity and inclusion, participant performance on the programme, support, and retention. We also regularly ask our partner prisons about our participants' performance.

In addition to this, we recently conducted an analysis of prison performance data mapped to the time and number of participants working in particular prisons. We hope this will form a basis for long-term tracking of our performance.



**LOUISA** set-up a prisoner-led television channel to improve cross-prison communication in her establishment. This provided an important communication tool during the Covid-19 crisis especially.

# MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE TOUGHEST PRISONS

As a leadership development programme, participants are developing transferable skills that allow them to create and drive improvements from small- to large-scale in a variety of contexts. We encourage our officers to go beyond the day-to-day of the role and think bigger – we want them to spot opportunities to fix some of the problems facing their prisons, with the overarching aim to aid the rehabilitation of the prisoners in their care.

The picture in prisons over the last five years has been complex so it is hard to make any definitive claims about our officers' impact on the system. However, we are committed to seeking ways to analyse our effect on prisoners and prisons.

With this in mind, we reviewed all prison-by-prison data comparing average annual performance scores.

The prisons we work with have historically had lower performance scores than average – because we actively choose to go into some of the most challenging institutions. Our research shows that the average annual performance score of these prisons has increased at a faster rate than all other prisons. **More tellingly, those prisons that have had the most participants for the longest period have seen the biggest increase in these scores.**

# 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 ambition is to track and evaluate the direct and indirect impact our officers and ambassadors have on reducing reoffending. The evidence for such long-term measures will take some time to gather, however we believe there are clear indicators of success that should quickly emerge from each stage of our operations:



**DRÉ** noticed that cells overheating during the summer months – especially during lockdown – led to many of the young men at HMYOI Isis covering their windows – blocking out natural light to reduce the excess heat. He applied for funding to pilot an innovative solution to this issue by using UV film to reduce heat while retaining natural light. The film also retains heat during the winter months. The solution is low cost and if successful can be replicated across the prison estate.

## INSPIRE

### RAISE THE STATUS

- ▶ High demand and competition for places
- ▶ High-calibre, diverse applicants
- ▶ Wider awareness of the prison officer role as suitable for the best graduates

## DEVELOP

### EXCELLENT JOB PERFORMANCE

- ▶ Officers' performance exceeds trainees coming through the standard route
- ▶ Training enables officers to have more impact and take on more responsibilities earlier in their career

## AMPLIFY

### DRIVE SYSTEMIC REFORM

- ▶ Officers and ambassadors' ideas are adopted at systemic level

## GROW

### DRIVE IMPROVEMENTS IN PRISON

- ▶ Officers take action to improve systems and processes in their prison
- ▶ Above-and-beyond performance

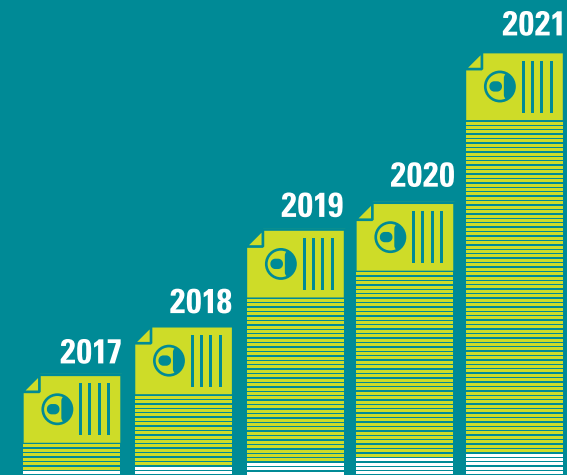
# RECRUITMENT & DIVERSITY

Our recruitment strategy is designed to reach and persuade high-calibre participants, particularly those who would not otherwise consider a job in the prison service, that this is the role for them.

Our focus on graduates is, in part, because they are under-represented in the prison service and we believe that their addition will diversify the problem-solving skills available in the workforce – critical given the magnitude of the challenge. We also focus on this audience because one way to raise the status of the role is to actively target this ambitious group of jobseekers that society views as our ‘best and brightest’. Only 3% of recent finalists said they would positively consider a career in the prison service – however, after reviewing the Unlocked programme and opportunities, 55% found the idea of working as a prison officer more appealing. We are changing graduate perceptions of working in the prison service.

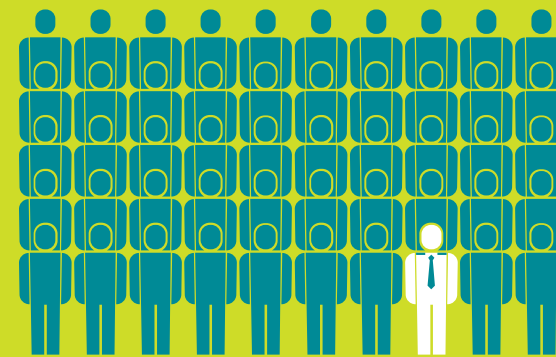
Diversity of all types is central to our approach. A diverse workforce made up of ambitious graduates can drive system change and positively influence prisoner outcomes. It is important that our cohort represents a wide range of demographics, particularly with regard to gender and ethnicity, as well as in terms of subject background, experience and the career stage of our participants. Our programme is highly competitive, with the number of applications to the programme increasing year on year; our approach is effectively attracting top graduates to the programme in high numbers, enabling us to select excellent participants while raising the profile of the prison officer job.

## DEMAND IS HIGH AND GROWING



We have received well over 5,000 applications for our programme – around **15 applications for every place.**

Applications increased by 55% for the 2021 cohort.



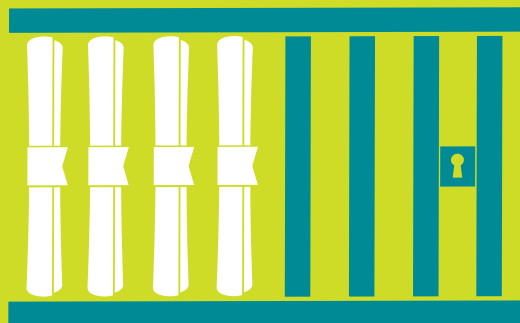
**Most of the Unlocked participants had not considered being a prison officer before discovering Unlocked**

When asked, only 2% of our latest cohort cited ‘always wanting to be a prison officer’ as the main reason for joining Unlocked.

# ATTRACTION

Our award-winning recruitment campaigns have raised the profile of the prison officer role and reached candidates who would never have considered a career in the prison service. In line with other graduate schemes, our programme is two years long and encourages participants to enter a sector without committing to a life-long career.

Shaped to match the priorities of ambitious graduates, four out of five (81%) of our newest recruits cited the Unlocked mission as a reason for applying to the programme. Professional development opportunities such as building leadership skills and the chance to have genuine responsibility from day one were other key motivating factors.



**55% of top university students think that Unlocked Graduates makes a career in the prison service more appealing.**



**We have won nine industry awards for our recruitment campaigns.**

# WE'RE RAISING THE STATUS OF THE PRISON OFFICER JOB



**Our participants attended 89 different universities.** Over half were from the highly selective Russell Group of universities.

In the last four years, over 100 Oxbridge graduates applied to the scheme and we accepted 15 onto the programme.



**We are currently a Times Top 100 Graduate employer,** having entered at number 49 – the highest new entrant that year joining these ranks faster than any past public sector scheme.

# A FAIR SELECTION PROCESS

Our selection process was developed to be rigorous, fair, and successful at attracting and selecting diverse cohorts of candidates with strong potential to be excellent prison officers.

Building on best practice from other graduate recruitment schemes and our consultation with a wide range of stakeholders in the prison service, we developed our core attributes for recruitment: sense of possibility, motivation, resilience, self-awareness, leadership, decision-making, relationship building.

After registering interest, candidates complete a Situational Judgement Test (SJT). Not only does the SJT give candidates a better understanding of the prison officer role, it is also more engaging, meaning our conversion rates from registration to application have improved significantly. Successful applicants are then invited to complete a video interview that assesses their motivation and suitability for the role.

The final stage of our selection process is an assessment centre where candidates are assessed against our attributes in three activities: an interview, a group exercise, and a practice scenario. These activities are designed to give the candidate more insight into the role of a prison officer, and are assessed by members of the recruitment team, serving prison officers, and individuals with lived experience of prison.

Once a candidate receives a conditional offer, they are assigned a dedicated recruitment officer to guide them through the onboarding journey. This focused and personalised relationship is a particular strength of our recruitment strategy.

## THE APPLICATION PROCESS



During the Covid-19 crisis, celebrating big festivals like Eid where people would usually come together for religious services or connect with family was very difficult in prison. **ZEB**A decided to organise a socially distanced Eid celebration at her 18-21 prison. She decorated the wing, worked with the chaplaincy on goodie bags with religious items for Muslim residents, and baklava treats for everyone. The festival went down brilliantly. "A lot of the lads were talking about it. In fact, it was the first time Eid had been celebrated in my prison in a way that the lads felt was special".

# RECRUITING A DIVERSE COHORT

It is vital the prison workforce is representative of the people they work with. This is true of all under-represented groups and protected characteristics but the challenges around ethnic diversity are particularly stark. We know that minority groups are overrepresented in the prison population – over a quarter (27%) of the prison population are from an ethnic minority group compared to 14 percent of the general population.

Effectively encouraging Black, Asian and other minority ethnic candidates to consider the Unlocked programme has always been a priority. Informed by the workforce challenges identified in the Lammy Review. We have made recruiting a diverse cohort a priority from our first year. In fact, the Review mentions our work as example of best practice.

This year we have made even more effort to be transparent about our wish to attract a diverse cohort and actively engaged on the challenging issue of race and racism in prison. We gathered insights and opinions from participants on these issues and weaved this throughout the campaign and hosted two major events centring on race. We have also built in more explicit training and support through the programme so participants coming from ethnic minority groups receive targeted support for some of the challenges they may face in the prison officer role.

Following a pilot in 2019-20, we also rolled out a coaching programme for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic applicants with an external coach. Eligible candidates received recorded videos offering advice, webinars and one-to-one coaching sessions ahead of their assessment centre with us. We have seen a positive impact with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic candidates who received the coaching performing above average at their assessment centre.

## WE'RE DIVERSIFYING THE PRISON WORKFORCE



Our proportion of programme joiners from black and ethnic minority backgrounds is **around one in five.**

That figure for those joining via the standard route is 12%.



**Unlocked participants studied in 50 different subject areas.**

Including mathematics, anthropology and music.



# TRAINING & PERFORMANCE

Unlocked Graduates training is an important part of our strategy to professionalise the prison officer role, and thereby create systemic change in the prison service. Weaving practical and theoretical learning throughout the programme, we support and develop outstanding individuals who excel in their roles, take on additional responsibilities, and influence best practice on and off the landings.

The Unlocked curriculum is informed by Scandinavian models of prison officer training. Our training offer sits across multiple years in recognition of the time it takes to refine expert practice. We also require a high level of prior academic attainment so training can be pitched at a high level. This enables us to accommodate the difficulty of the theories involved in the course as well as build in deep critical analysis and significant independent research.

Our training model is informed by a blended learning methodology which combines independent participant work with training and support from Unlocked and our university partner. The learning approach through the two years uses the 70:20:10 model of professional learning: 70 per cent of an individual's learning comes from engaging in challenging work, 20 per cent comes from relationships with peers and mentors, and 10 per cent comes from formal training. By using participants' professional experiences within a developmental coaching framework, which is then drawn on in lectures, the 70:20:10 elements are integrated and cohesive.

Practice-based learning underpins our pedagogy for the sections of our curriculum which focus on prison officer skills and professionalism. We have also been informed by the work of Professor Alison Lieblich around balancing different components of the prison officer role. We have shared these approaches with other training organisations and the wider prison service, and elements have already been adopted by the mainstream prison officer training scheme as well as other organisations.

## YEAR ONE



## YEAR TWO



**KATRICE** received a High Sheriff's Award as recognition for her work to talk about race and racism in HMYOI Aylesbury. She organised a full programme of activities for Black History Month which was credited with starting real and important conversations about these issues between staff and prisoners. She has now joined the equalities team in the prison where she continues to show leadership and ambition in her role as Equalities Officer.

# SUMMER INSTITUTE & DEVELOPING PRACTITIONER SKILLS

An initial intensive residential course compresses all standard prison officer training into six weeks. Extensive pre-reading as well as longer days and weeks means more hours of learning than in the standard 10-week course.

Practitioner skills are the focus of Summer Institute. As well as the procedures and skills necessary to be an officer, there is a strong emphasis on values, de-escalation, and evidence-based therapeutic techniques – ensuring our participants are day-one-ready to start on the landings.

In line with our philosophy of ongoing learning, practitioner skills are developed throughout the programme. Participants receive 30 half-days of in-prison training which focuses on specialised aspects of the prison officer role. The focus on practitioner skills is central to the programme's impact. Our participants continue to develop over the two years, meaning their skills are always up to date, relevant and in line with best practice. Participants are developed into exceptional prison officers who make a real difference to prisoners' choices, through carefully crafted skills in resilience, problem solving and communication.



During their two years on the programme **nearly half of officers (45%) took on additional responsibilities or were promoted.**

These responsibilities include hostage negotiation, mental health training, offender management and equality officers.

**“ I believe that Unlocked officers are slowly raising the levels of performance and progressive thinking and this is being viewed as a positive by people in and out of the service.**

**PRISON GOVERNOR**

**All the governors we work with want more Unlocked Graduates and would recommend us to other prisons.**

# MENTORING

We recruit experienced, mission aligned prison officers to work as mentors throughout the two-year programme. Seconded from the prison service, they are trained to provide both support and challenge to participants. The role is designed to increase the recognition of those who are outstanding at the craft of being a prison officer, bringing new skills to the uniformed ranks in the prison service and building long-term capability.

# MASTER'S DEGREE

Our officers complete a two-year master's degree that reflects the complexities of the prison officer role and broadens their expertise by focusing on the theory behind the practice; offering an academic angle to address the mission of eliminating cycles of reoffending. All our academic partners and advisors have extensive experience in developing and delivering undergraduate and postgraduate level qualifications in criminology and psychology, with specific focus on the prison officer role and leadership. In particular, the degree is focused on immediate, impactful change.

**10% of our first cohort** are already working as senior leaders in the prison service



**SAIDA** identified that the way medication was dispensed on her wing led to long queues and resulted in men not getting their prescriptions. She changed the way locking and unlocking took place on her wing to fix this problem – her solution has been adopted across the prison.

# OUR OFFICERS ARE MAKING AN IMMEDIATE DIFFERENCE TO PRISONERS & PRISONS

We have grown year on year, expanding to allow for the formation of clusters critical for our mentoring model across London and the South East, the North and West Midlands. We focus on some of the most challenging prisons and institutions where we know the prison officer can make a difference. We challenge officers to go above and beyond from day one. We place our participants in prisons that need us the most with some of the most demanding working environments. They have worked in establishments across the men's estate – including high security and foreign national prisons. We also place in women's prisons and children's prisons.



CHRIS has set up a therapeutic horticulture course for young men in his prison to improve their mental health and well-being.



## WE'RE REACHING PRISONERS

We have placed **over 500 prison officers in 29 establishments.** This is more than 1 in 4 public prisons in England and nearly a quarter (23%) of the prisoner population.

Year of first placement: ● 2017 ● 2018 ● 2019 ● 2020 ● 2021

**70 officers have contributed to papers** that proposed policy ideas on topics including:

- The way self-harm and suicide is monitored in prisons
- How prison officers are managed and held to account
- Phones and technology in prisons
- Homophobia and transphobia in prisons

These ideas have been shared with Ministers, Governors and policy-makers across MoJ and HMPPS who have found these frontline insights invaluable.



When **GEORGIA** publicly challenged a prisoner for transphobic insults she did not think anyone had particularly noticed. But the next day a prisoner completely uninvolved in the incident asked her to help him arrange a visit with his boyfriend - it was the first time he had disclosed to anyone in prison that he was gay.



If you wear glasses you will know how inconvenient it is to forget them. **GEORGIA** noticed that several men on her wing were doing without their reading glasses - a real challenge when this meant they could not read essential paperwork or even do a Sudoku. As many of the men in her prison were on short sentences, by the time they could get an optician appointment their sentence could be over. So she worked with the equalities team and a Governor to fundraise for a grant. They have purchased one thousand basic reading glasses which will be available for the men to use.

# OUR OFFICERS ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE ACROSS THE SYSTEM

## SYSTEM CHANGE: INNOVATION & RESEARCH

Our participants are in a unique position to identify solutions to problems they face on the frontline. The Innovation Acceleration Programme (IAP) is designed to support and amplify the impact participants can have by offering funding for small-scale, evidence-driven innovation projects in their prisons. To receive funding, participants must demonstrate how they work closely with other non-Unlocked prison officers in their prison to develop an idea that will achieve senior buy-in and has the potential to be sustainable long-term.

These projects are an excellent opportunity for the personal development of our officers – developing skills in managing a budget, problem-solving, and developing a business case. Coached in change management techniques by our corporate partner PwC, Unlocked officers are encouraged to design and deliver impactful projects including (but not limited to) new programmes for prisoners, equipment for their prisons, training and work with external organisations, or funding for in-prison events. With time out of cells and purposeful activity limited, the Prison Relief Fund (PRF) was set up to fund immediate relief projects that improve outcomes for prisoners during the Covid-19 pandemic.

While the IAP focuses on longer term projects, the PRF projects are delivered quickly and are easier to implement in prisons. We have supported 14 IAP and 22 PRF projects so far, and their impact case studies have been featured throughout this report.

We believe an evidence-based approach will be an important part of driving rehabilitation in the prison service. Participants undertake a research project based on a problem, question or initiative that they co-identify with the prison governor as an area of interest.

Along with research related to their MSc, in their second year on the programme, Unlocked officers have the chance to write a policy paper. Supported by Unlocked and an expert editor, participants form a group, based on shared interests, and work together to research their chosen policy area and propose solutions to the challenge. We see these papers as a critical way to start driving system-level change from the frontline and demonstrate the importance of the prison officer voice in such debates.

The outcomes of the research projects and policy papers are to uncover genuinely useful insights and solutions for the prison service by applying a research-informed approach, and instil a data-driven and rigorous attitude into the criminal justice sector's future leaders.



A prisoner on **MILLIE'S** wing in Aylesbury was keen to use lockdown to learn a second language. Education services were very limited at the time so, as she is fluent in Spanish, she created a Spanish workbook and provided regular feedback by marking his work. This opportunity proved really popular on the wing so she ended up making copies and sharing her language skills with several prisoners.

**“ This scheme has not only helped me to simply fill vacant posts but also to change the culture within the prison. It has been clear from the outset the level and type of training the graduates have received is far in advance of what is normally afforded to new entrant prison officers.**

**As a consequence the skills they have employed and approach they have taken has set them apart from most of our staff in a very positive way. They clearly lead by example and are always willing to do what is right rather than what is easy.**

**PRISON GOVERNOR**

# WORK PLACEMENTS AND PRISON EXCHANGES

Participants are offered a work placement as part of their second year to give them an opportunity to broaden their outlook, gain new skills, and apply their knowledge to a new environment. This element of the programme also accelerates the exchange of ideas between the frontline of prisons and the wider the criminal justice sector and beyond – contributing to our work to improved wider societal engagement in these challenges. **This year over 50 organisations offered in excess of 120 placements.**

A two-week prison exchange with another participant from their cohort is another option available in the second year on the programme. This allows them to experience a different establishment, share best practice from their own prison, and take back ideas from the contrasting environment.



**SAIMA** worked hard to build a strong relationship with a prisoner on her wing. Eventually he felt comfortable enough to disclose that he was concerned he might be autistic. Saima referred him to healthcare where he received a formal diagnosis which allowed him to appeal his sentence.



During lockdown, prisoners couldn't see their families. It was tough. With the help of Unlocked, **GRACE** got funding to address this in her establishment. She took video recordings of young men who had families so they could talk to their children. They could read a story, poem or prayer, and I'd record it on video and send to their families. "Some people hadn't even seen their firstborn yet, so it was the first time their child had seen them. The reactions I got were amazing. And I had fun doing it, too!"

“ At Google, we're looking for people who can think at scale and bring real world acumen to solving some of the world's knottiest problems. Unlocked is a scheme which provides graduates with the knowledge, skill and experience to do just this.

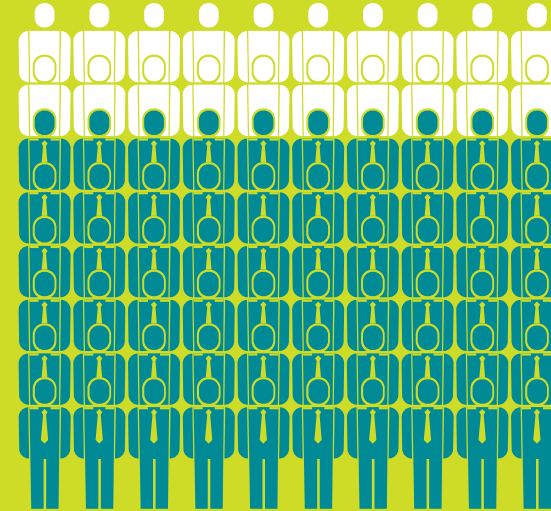
**AMANDA TIMBERG**  
Head of Talent and Outreach Programs, Google

Google

# THE FUTURE: OUR AMBASSADORS

Ambassadors are key to our mission of developing outstanding leaders to break cycles of reoffending in prison and throughout society. Our aim is to create a network of Ambassadors with exceptional leadership skills using their frontline experience to impact systemic changes in prisons, the wider criminal justice system, and beyond.

We set up an Ambassador network, a peer-led programme that provides a platform for ambassadors to engage, organise and identify problems. We play a facilitating role, enabling participant led interactions and action.



Around three quarters of our first cohorts stayed as prison officers for a full two years. Around 70% stayed on the frontline beyond their two years, and the majority stayed in criminal justice, taking on roles in organisations including probation, policing and justice charities.



Becoming a father while in prison can never be an easy experience but **HANNAH** wanted to do more to support the men in her prison. She rewrote the maternity and paternity policy, creating a list of resources and connected with Barnardo's. She is now working with the charity and her Governor hoping to implement sessions where the young men can have a visit with their babies, the mothers and local midwives.



The keyworking system allows prison officers to work more closely with individual prisoners. **OCCY** realised that one of the men she was a keyworker for was going to leave prison homeless. She made sure to connect with probation and sought charities that might be able to help to make sure he had housing sorted before he left prison. She was delighted to hear that he had successfully moved in and was looking for work a few weeks later.