



**The Professional Trades Union for Prison,
Correctional & Secure Psychiatric Workers**

National Chair: Mark Fairhurst
General Secretary: Steve Gillan

Headquarters:
Cronin House
245 Church St.
Edmonton
London N9 9HW
t. 020 8803 0255
f. 020 8803 1761
e. general@poauk.org.uk
w. www.poauk.org.uk

North Regional Office
1 Linden House
Sardinia St.
Leeds
LS10 1BH
t. 01132 428833
f. 01132 429075
e. adminnro@poauk.org.uk

Northern Ireland
Castell House
116 Ballywalter Rd.
Millisle Co Down
BT22 2HS
t. 02891 861928
f. 02891 861839
e. adminni@poauk.org.uk

Scotland
21 Calder Rd.
Edinburgh
Scotland
EH11 3PF
t. 0131 443 8105
f. 0131 444 0657
e. adminscot@poauk.org.uk

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Dear Colleagues

NATIONAL CHAIR UPDATE

Please make yourself aware of the following:

DEATH OF A COLLEAGUE

It is with great sadness that I report to you the death of another colleague due to COVID-19. Custodial Manager Steve Trafford worked at HMP Wymott. He recently wrote an article for Gatelodge to highlight the lack of support from the Prison Service, following a vicious assault by a prisoner when he worked at Lancaster Farms.

I have relayed our deepest sympathies to Steve's family.

POA ACCOMMODATION SCHEME

Center Parcs have very kindly extended the use of their accommodation until Friday 29th May. It is likely that this scheme will then cease after this date in order for hospitality businesses to deep clean and prepare for a reopening in July. The NEC will review this on 26th May to ensure all members are given notice if required. Other hotel chains as identified in circulars 68 and 77/2020 continue to offer accommodation for key workers.

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Members are reminded of the array of mental health support services on offer to them. Please do not suffer in silence if you require help. Full details are contained within POA circulars 59, 68 and 77/2020.

RESTRICTED REGIMES

Until further notice there is no change to the restrictions currently in place. HMPPS via Phil Copple have stated:

Firstly, there will be no immediate change to the current prison regimes in place, but we are actively considering and planning how to move forward safely in the future, taking into account national progress in managing Covid-19 and changes being made in the wider community. It is very important that we keep these measures in place whilst we carefully consider how we safely progress.

The POA and other recognised trade unions within HMPPS will be fully engaged in 'recovery' plans. Your safety and that of your families is non-negotiable. The 'new normal' will look a lot different from previous regimes.

Where certain activities can resume – such as social visits or education – we should expect them to do so with considerable restrictions and adaptations (including reduced capacity) in the interests of safety.

Please ensure you continue to abide by the regime restrictions we have in place.

POA MEMORIAL

It has been agreed that we will fund a memorial to all our fallen colleagues. This will honour all those who have served in previous war campaigns and of course the staff we have lost due to COVID-19. We have offered HMPPS an opportunity to part fund this initiative as a joint venture. This memorial, when completed will be housed on site at the National Memorial Arboretum in Stafford.

TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

There are currently 48 Temporary Accommodation Units in use at HMP North Sea Camp. A further 363 single cell spaces are being made available across 9 sites. There are plans to further increase this capacity at another 18 sites taking the total single cells to 1015. It is vital that local committees are given the facility time to engage and agree with the Risk Assessments and Safe Systems of Work prior to occupation. Please consider utilising your area NEC representative prior to agreeing any RA or SSOW for advice on safe staffing levels including nights profiling.

BONUS SCHEME

There has been much confusion about what duties can be used within the PP Bonus Scheme. As I previously advised, this scheme can be used for Bed Guards and Constant Watches. This has been confirmed at Director level. All staff should note that they can use their PP Bonus scheme hours on Bed Guards and Constant Watch within their own establishment.

SAFETY STATS

We are monitoring the statistics in relation to violence and self-harm during the regime restrictions. Early indicators reveal that self-harm has reduced and

assaults on staff have reduced by a minimum of 27% with assaults prisoner on prisoner reducing by 50%.

LETTER TO SECRETARY OF STATE FOR JUSTICE ROBERT BUCKLAND MP QC

On the 27th April 2020 the Health Secretary, Matt Hancock announced that the families of frontline NHS and Social Care Staff who die from coronavirus will receive a £60,000 payment.

The POA have written to the Secretary of State for Justice Robert Buckland MP QC asking for the same payment for Prison Staff, as we believe that it is only right and just that our members should be seriously considered when the Government consider where this payment should be required.

Currently POA members in Public Sector Prisons, Privately Managed Prisons, Immigration Removal Centres, Secure Hospitals and Escorting Service are looking after patients, prisoners, detainees and those Sectioned under the Mental Health Act, are saving lives and caring for the elderly and the vulnerable.

We await a reply.

NIGHTS STAFFING

Due to regime restrictions many branches have reported adequate staffing levels during the core day that have caused issues surrounding the ability to socially distant whilst at work. Local committees are encouraged to temporarily review staffing profiles to encourage staggered and flexible shift times and an increased compliment of staff during night patrol state. These temporary arrangements may assist in ensuring the workplace is not over subscribed and safe working practices can be maintained.

STAFF WITH HEALTH CONCERNS

Nothing has changed for staff who are currently shielding at home due to receiving a letter from the NHS. We will continue to ensure you are protected and receive full pay. This includes pregnant workers and staff who live with vulnerable adults who cannot work from home. Special leave on full pay will continue to be applicable. Once HMPPS inform us of any updates or reviews we will relay that to the membership.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

The indications are that we now have adequate and suitable PPE available, if any local committees have concerns about PPE, they should raise it with their area NEC representative.

Staff should be mindful that the most recent Risk Assessment for PPE highlights the following:

All sub 2m contacts are to be avoided except those identified and assessed in HMPPS' other COVID-19 SOPs.

Essential means that there is a substantial and immediate risk arising from NOT undertaking the task.

Unavoidable means that the outcome intended for the task cannot be achieved adequately using a different approach which maintains social distancing. This will primarily be for essential and unavoidable searching but may be adapted for other tasks which met these criteria.

Please account for this when conducting any activity that brings you into close proximity to prisoners.

We are also aware of the following statement from Government contained within their UK Government's COVID-19 recovery strategy:

Face-Coverings

As more people return to work, there will be more movement outside people's immediate household. This increased mobility means the Government is now advising that people should aim to wear a face-covering in enclosed spaces where social distancing is not always possible and they come into contact with others that they do not normally meet, for example on public transport or in some shops.

We will continue to engage with HMPPS to ensure your safety at work is prioritised and clarify the position in relation to the appropriate wearing of face coverings within our confined environment.

ANNUAL LEAVE BUY BACK SCHEME

Guidance has now been issued to Prisons on how staff can access this scheme. Staff should submit requests via the detail office manager. You have until the end of June 2020 to sell leave. Staff will be allowed to carry over a maximum of 4 weeks leave (20 days) over a period of 2 years. Please be aware that this 'buy back' cannot be guaranteed:

The NTS allows staff to 'offer to sell back' a maximum of 10 day's leave, in this leave year. The offer does not have to be accepted, although there is an expectation that for those staff in offender facing roles, it will be. Consideration can be made on a case by case basis and any refusal to buy back must be explained and can be subject to appeal (grievance procedure).

VIDEO CALLS INSTEAD OF SOCIAL VISITS

Several pilot sites are trialling video call technology so prisoners may access their families in the absence of social visits. Initial feedback from members has been positive and the POA are happy to support this initiative.

TAKE PART IN COVID-19 RESEARCH

University College London is running a study into the psychological and social effects of Covid-19 in the UK.

The results are being used to understand the effects of the virus and social distancing measures on mental health and loneliness in the UK and to inform government advice and decisions.

The POA membership have been invited to take part. Participation involves answering a 10-minute online survey now and then answering a shorter follow-up survey once a week whilst social isolation measures are in place.

To take part, visit <https://redcap.idhs.ucl.ac.uk/surveys/?s=48Y3T88CYK>

I continue to receive positive feedback from members of the public, prisoners' families, Politicians, and Senior Managers about the exceptional work you continue to carry out on the frontline. There is no doubt that your efforts continue to save lives and prevent the spread of COVID-19 in our workplaces. You should rightly be proud of yourselves. I will continue to highlight your admirable efforts in the media. You are a credit to the POA and the Service.

Look after yourselves and your loved ones.

All the best.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Fairhurst', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

MARK FAIRHURST
National Chair