



**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

POA Circular 068/2020

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Dear Colleagues

NATIONAL CHAIR UPDATE

We will continue to update you as regularly as we can during these ever-changing times. Please ensure all POA members have access to this circular.

DEATH OF COLLEAGUE

I regret to inform you of the death of Prison Officer Rachael Yates who worked at HMP Usk. This was COVID related. Our thoughts and sincerest condolences are with her family, friends and colleagues at this difficult time.

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR POA MEMBERS

We have a range of mental health support services in place for all members. Please do not suffer in silence if you need help. You can access the POA stress line on the freephone number:

0800 107 6585

The portal can be accessed by logging in to the <https://healthassuredeap.co.uk/>

The log in is username **PRISON**

Password **OFFICERS**

We also have a call back service which can be accessed via
info@serveandprotectcu.co.uk

You may also access the MIND Blue Light support services at the following;
Infoline: [0300 123 3393](tel:03001233393) Email:info@mind.org.uk Text: 86463

SPECIAL BONUS

Due to POA pressure the employer has confirmed that our **OSG colleagues will be entitled to the monthly Special Bonus of £150.**

We have raised concerns about the unacceptable disparity in payments to Senior Managers during this time and have asked that in order to qualify this group of staff must be working a stipulated amount of additional hours and must be working on the frontline in a Prison. Our protests have fell on deaf ears, and HMPPS have confirmed that *'It has been agreed that the bonus can be paid to those working from home if they meet the criteria.'* The POA are not aware of 'who' this has been agreed with.

The criteria they quote is as follows:

All of the below criteria must be met to qualify for this bonus:

1. being on duty
2. working additional hours (due to COVID-19 demands)
3. in difficult circumstances (due to COVID-19 demands)

HMPPS have also confirmed the following:

During the period of the Coronavirus pandemic there is an acceptance that Operational Managers will be working additional hours on a regular basis in difficult circumstances. Where this is not the case, or they opt out of doing additional hours the bonus should not be applied.

This is clearly a totally unfair application of special payments. The POA feel there should be pay parity and equal bonus payments across the entire estate for all Prison Workers who are on the frontline during this crisis. We will continue to raise our concerns.

POA ACCOMMODATION SCHEME

POA members can access Center Parcs sites across the country during the COVID-19 outbreak if they need to stay away from their family homes. This scheme is up and running and we are grateful to the Welfare Committee who have contributed funds to support this initiative. The scheme will be reviewed on 1st May so we may assess changes to Government Policy in relation to hotels. We also have offers for key workers from other major hotel chains. Any POA member who wishes to book a hotel can submit a welfare fund application to assist with costs. Please see **POA Circular 64/2020** for further details.

PAY AWARD

The Pay Review Body have indicated that their submissions to Government will be forwarded in early June. POA members can expect an announcement on any pay award at any point from June onwards.

HMIP INSPECTIONS

The inspectorate have commenced a series of one day visits and have assured the POA that they *'have deliberately designed a programme that should provide little or no distraction to a jail from their all-important role of providing safe and decent custody at this time.'* They have visited HMP Cookham Wood, Wetherby and Parc. A full list of Prisons to be visited has not yet been published.

TESTING FOR PRISON STAFF

COVID-19 testing of Prison staff has now commenced and can be accessed at the sites listed. More sites will become available over the coming days. As soon as you inform your management of your absence, they will submit the request for your test. It is important that they have contact details for you so please ensure your contact phone numbers and e mail address are up to date.

You should also note that tests are 'voluntary', and **no member of staff can be pressured into taking a test.**

The following staff are priority for testing:

- 1) **Prison staff who are currently self-isolating as a result of being symptomatic.**
- 2) **Prison staff who are currently self-isolating as part of a symptomatic household.**
- 3) **Approved Premises staff who are currently self-isolating as a result of being symptomatic.**
- 4) **Approved Premises staff who are currently self-isolating as part of a symptomatic household.**

The accessible testing sites are:

Testing location (postcode)	Number of daily booking slots for HMPPS
Greenwich (SE10 0PH)	50
Chessington (KT9 2NE)	25
Wembley (NW10 0TH)	50
Nottingham (NG90 1BS)	75
Edgbaston	50
Gateshead	25
Plymouth	50
Gatwick	50
Haydock	25
Leeds	50
Manchester Airport (MN90 1AF)	50
Stanstead Airport (CM24 1QW)	50

Worcester (WR3 8ZE)	50
Twickenham (SW19 5AE)	50
Midlands Met Hospital (BR6 2RT)	50
Doncaster Airport (DN9 3GN)	50
Southampton (TBC)	50
Preston (PR2 8UR)	50

POPULATION MANAGEMENT

HMPPS have taken the step to transfer prisoners into Training Prisons to create additional single cell space.

Supported by health advice provided by Public Health England (PHE) HMPPS developed a clear population strategy. To support the management of the prison population HMPPS focused on moving additional prisoners into the training estate to use as much capacity as they could in a short window before the outbreak levels grew. This further allowed some stabilisation of the training estate and a greater focus on implementing protective measures for prisoners. HMPPS have issued public health informed guidance on the creation of appropriate protective isolation of the symptomatic, shielding of the most vulnerable and creation of reverse cohorting to prevent seeding and feeding of an outbreak.

To fully apply the public health guidance for protective isolation, shielding and cohorting HMPPS modelled that in a local Prison they would need to deliver approximately a 10% reduction in operational capacity. It is acknowledged that this is site specific though and will vary due to a range of factors including the build environment, the level of crowding, the volume of vulnerable prisoners who require shielding and the pressure from symptomatic cases who require protective isolation.

All new receptions to Prisons **MUST** be housed on a reverse cohort unit and **MUST** self-isolate for 14 days.

PRIVATE SECTOR

Our Full Time Officials have successfully agreed a bonus payment scheme for our private sector sites which is similar to the Public Sector scheme. They continue to engage with private sector providers to ensure pay parity in relation to these schemes and to ensure these schemes are enacted immediately. It is important that Private sector branches keep their FTO updated on the implementation of this scheme and the availability of PPE.

IMMIGRATION REMOVAL CENTRES

The NEC are aware of issues surrounding the lack of social distancing and the refusal to implement the PP Bonus Scheme in some sites. We are tackling these issues with HMPPS Directors. Local committees are encouraged to keep their area NEC representative fully updated so we may continue to assist.

PECS

As the court capacity reduces HMPPS are planning on utilising PECS staff for transferring prisoners to the training estate to free up single space capacity in local Prisons and to enable shielding to take place. PECS staff will also be utilised to transport prisoners on early release to a single secure point near to their homes in the absence of adequate public transport. PECS staff should ensure they keep their FTO fully updated on RA and SSOW so we can ensure adequate protections are in place for escorting staff.

SECURE HOSPITALS

We continue to monitor the availability of PPE in the secure hospitals setting. We are aware of the NHS concerns surrounding PPE and the reduction in supply. In order to give the POA a true reflection of the availability within this setting branch officials are encouraged to liaise with their FTO to give regular updates.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

It is well known that there is a global shortage of PPE. We have secured PPE for Prison staff and there should now be adequate stock for every Prison (including hand sanitiser). Each Prison should have a single point of contact (SPOC) who is responsible for ordering PPE from a regional hub. If this is not the case, then we need to be informed. Please contact your area NEC rep to update them on your PPE availability so we may support you if you need PPE.

The POA have agreed that workshops around the estate that have the capability to contribute to the production of vital PPE should be utilised. These workshops should soon start producing gowns and scrubs for the NHS. All safe working practices including social distancing will be adhered to. We are proud that we can contribute to the National Emergency and welcome HMPPS taking on this joint venture. There is a good possibility that these workshops will get permission to produce our own PPE for Prison Staff.

The workshops are situated at the following sites:

Channings Wood
Featherstone
Garth
Gartree
Hewell
Highdown
Highpoint North & South
Holme House

Liverpool
Long Lartin
Norwich
Ranby
Risley
Stafford
Stoke Heath
Swansea
The Verne
Wakefield
Wandsworth
Wayland
Wealstun
Whatton
Wormwood Scrubs
Wymott

TEMPORARY EMPLOYMENT OF FORMER STAFF

HMPPS has started to invite former staff to re-join on temporary employment contracts. This includes retired staff who can enjoy a relaxation on abatement rules and can work full time hours without detriment to their pension. Cabinet Office have confirmed that this abatement relaxation will **not apply** to employed staff who are already drawing their pension. These staff, however, can access the PP bonus scheme without detriment.

Unfortunately, due to Shared Services being responsible for contacting former staff, we are aware of the families of staff who have deceased during their service receiving letters. This is unacceptable and we have highlighted such circumstances to HMPPS.

We are also aware that some former staff who have been dismissed on disciplinary's or capabilities have been invited back.

More concerningly, some staff in receipt of Ill Health Retirement pensions have been invited back. If you know of any staff in this position please encourage them to refuse to take up this offer as it **will** affect their IHR pension, which could end their entitlement to it if they return.

COVID-19 POLICE REFERRALS FOR COUGHING OR SPITTING

All POA members are reminded of the process to follow should any prisoner threaten them in the following way:

- **Coughing and / or spitting at staff whilst claiming to have Covid-19.** (It is not necessary for the spittle to make contact with staff. The action alone will suffice for the purposes of making a referral to the Police).

- **Threatening to spit or cough at staff whilst the likelihood of being infected with Covid-19 is a realistic prospect.** (This will apply during the time where the Prisons have implemented additional measures to reduce the spread of the virus).
- All other cases for spitting or coughing on a member of staff should be considered for a referral to the police due to the ongoing concern of spread of COVID-19.

If the prisoner commits either of the above acts and

- Has symptoms of Covid-19.
- Is known to have Covid-19.
- Is known to have come in close contact with someone who has Covid-19. ('Close contact' is open to interpretation and therefore a commonsense approach should be adopted when considering whether this applies).
- The proximity of the prisoner to the victim at the time of coughing or spitting and whether the spittle made contact with the victim and where.
- How many coughs or how many times did the prisoner spit at the officer. (One spit/cough alone will suffice for a prosecution, but multiple acts are likely to be an aggravating feature).
- Whether there are witnesses (provide details)/CCTV/BWVC evidence.
- The action taken after this happened i.e. medical attention, change of PPE or clothing, disruption to regime, whether the member of staff has been able to remain on duty.

The use of BWVC will ensure that any threat or action relating to the above is captured and can be used as evidence in criminal proceedings. Incidents of this nature should still be reported to the police even if the act or threat is not captured on BWVC/CCTV. We also urge that victim impact statements and community impact statements are provided to the Police in a timely manner to ensure that the full impact of the offence on the victim and Prison can be considered by the Court when sentencing the defendant. Further information is available via **POA Circular 66/2020**.

STAFF WITH HEALTH CONCERNS

HMPs have confirmed in their latest Q&A that any pregnant staff who cannot work from home and where workplace adjustments are not suitable will receive paid special leave.

Any other members of staff who have concerns about attending their workplace due to health reasons or caring /living with vulnerable family members will have their circumstances considered on a case by case basis. Please get the support of your local POA committee when doing so.

LOCAL POA BRANCH OFFICIALS

Your local branch officials are working tirelessly to deal with your issues and ensure you work safely. They have an abundance of concerns to deal with. Please respect the work they do and ensure you support them. The NEC are available 24/7 to support local POA branches and will continue to be available as long as the membership request it and local Governors are content that NEC reps are not required on site, as is the case at present.

REGIME RESTRICTIONS

COVID -19 outbreaks continue to rise in the Prison Estate amongst prisoners and staff. It is vital that you continue to adhere to regime restrictions. Unless prisoners need to access essential work, they must only be unlocked for showers, phone calls, medication and exercise in the open air. Anything additional is an unnecessary waste of resource and places us all at risk. Local security strategies have also been relaxed which negate the need for CFC's and non-intelligence led searching.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for the outstanding work you are all performing.

In particular I would like to highlight the sterling work of local POA branch officials; we appreciate everything you do for the members and your support of the NEC.

Wherever your workplace is and whatever your Grade or Job title, you should be extremely proud of your efforts. You continue to be a credit to this Union and the service. Continue to support each other, look after yourselves, and keep yourselves and your families as safe as you can be.

With respect and solidarity to you all.

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

MARK FAIRHURST
National Chair