



**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 036/2020

24th March 2020

CORONAVIRUS UPDATE

Contents

Update for Membership

NEC Representation for Midlands Area

Reward Package Details

Reporting Coronavirus Sickness Procedures Information

**Letters to Secretary of State Robert Buckland MP QC and Phil Cople Director
Public Sector Prisons**

Dear Colleagues

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE: CORONAVIRUS

We wish to update you on the current situation in relation to the Coronavirus outbreak and your personal safety. We have been working in unison with both the Government and HMPPS to ensure you are as safe as you possibly can be. Please be aware of the following:

There is an international shortage of Personal Protective Equipment (gowns, goggles, face masks), and HMPPS are planning to 'ration' the supplies they have so all Prisons have some stock. HMPPS have secured 50,000 sets and are delivering them to regional hubs. Supplies should be with you shortly and HMPPS have further stock on order. SMT's have been instructed to ensure PPE is worn when dealing with Prisoners displaying symptoms or having been confirmed as having COVID-19. If you do not have the resource in place to adhere to this, please liaise with your SMT so they may source PPE from their local NHS trust (this has been working well).

There is a nationwide shortage of hand sanitizer. The NHS have been prioritised for its issue. You are encouraged to install portable hand wash basins so staff can wash their hands upon entry to their workplace/station and continue to regularly wash their hands whilst at work.

We have agreed a COVID 19 Operational Guidance, that will cover all aspects of regime restrictions and depleted staffing levels. Local committees should liaise with their SMT'S to formulate an Exceptional Regime Management Plan (facility time has been approved).

Prisons are encouraged to adopt the temperature checks at their gates for visitors to Prisons. We believe this should be extended for staff. The operational guidance allows for visits to be restricted or curtailed. The POA are relaying all your concerns to HMPPS and the Secretary of State. The ultimate decision to stop all visits is out of the control of the POA, but in light of Public Health England and the Governments advice, we are pursuing all options and have relayed your concerns to the Director for Public Sector Prisons and the Secretary of State for Justice, (See enclosed Letters).

The most recent announcement from the Prime Minister would indicate that Prisons now need to adhere to the strict advice of non-association and curtailing visits and transfers. The POA await what we see as an imminent announcement to Governors that reflect the restrictions that now need to be enacted.

The full-time officials of the POA continue to engage with Private Sector providers, Secure Healthcare Services and Escort Services to highlight your concerns and ensure safe working practices are adopted.

Staff from HQ will be redeployed into prisons to assist. The NEC will continue with the business of the POA so you may contact us 24/7 for advice, support and guidance. We stand ready to redeploy to our home establishments should we be required.

A range of measures have been put in place to protect vulnerable staff who have underlying health conditions. A Q&A sheet and a Joint Statement between the POA and HMPPS will be published in due course. If any staff have conditions that have been identified by Public Health England as placing people at an increased risk, they should inform their local POA committee and their line manager, so precautions are put in place. This may include self-isolating, working in an ancillary role away from the frontline or continuing with your current duties at your own request. These conditions include the following:

- 1. Solid organ transplant recipients.**
- 2. People with specific cancers:**
 - **people with cancer who are undergoing active chemotherapy or radical radiotherapy for lung cancer.**
 - **people with cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukemia, lymphoma or myeloma who are at any stage of treatment.**
 - **people having immunotherapy or other continuing antibody treatments for cancer.**
 - **people having other targeted cancer treatments which can affect the immune system, such as protein kinase inhibitors or PARP inhibitors.**
 - **people who have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last 6 months, or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs.**
- 3. People with severe respiratory conditions including all cystic fibrosis, severe asthma and severe COPD.**
- 4. People with rare diseases and inborn errors of metabolism that significantly increase the risk of infections (such as SCID, homozygous sickle cell).**
- 5. People on immunosuppression therapies sufficient to significantly increase risk of infection.**
- 6. Women who are pregnant with significant heart disease, congenital or acquired.**

The Government have also highlighted that staff with diabetes should observe social distancing. If you suffer from diabetes please follow the same procedures as highlighted above.

If you are a pregnant member of staff, you are classed as vulnerable to COVID 19 under Public Health England/Wales Guidance. HMPPS will take all reasonable steps to ensure that you are able to work remotely if you request this through your line manager. It is the POA view that you should stay away from your workplace until further notice.

A reward package has been agreed that increases the salary of staff in our high-risk workplace. All staff who are able to do so may consider opting into these schemes in order to avoid the need for operational emergencies being called. OSG staff should note that if a part-time OSG agrees to sign up to the 12-week overtime contract they will attract the full bonus for completing the full additional hours (it won't be pro-rata). We have agreed this scheme for operational grades band 2-5 and have no control over other aspects of the scheme for other grades of staff. This package is the best that could be achieved and has been authorised by the Treasury.

We have suggested that the abatement rules governing staff who work part time but draw their pension should be relaxed so they may increase their hours without financial detriment if they wish to do so during this period. We await a decision.

Whilst the POA do not agree with staff 'selling' their leave as we wish all staff to have adequate recuperation (especially after this crisis), you should note that this is a totally individual choice if you do so. Excess leave will be allowed to be carried over (full amount allowed yet to be decided).

Staff will receive sick leave excusals if they must self-isolate. A copy of the new reporting system is enclosed. If you are self-isolating you should do so for 14 days and then return to duty if you are able to do so. No member of staff absent from work due to sickness absence or self-isolation can be ordered back on duty.

If local POA Committees need to contact their area NEC representative, please refer to your structures document which includes a list of Prisons NEC reps are responsible for along with their contact details. There are also dedicated NEC reps for the vacant Midlands area (attached).

Governors have been asked to review all suspensions to see whether staff could be returned to work in any capacity, subject to local risk assessment by the Governor.

Governors have also been asked to consider whether investigations, disciplinary hearings and formal attendance review meetings should be postponed in light of COVID 19, particularly where there are operational, or staffing pressure or staff and union representatives are unable to attend. If decisions are taken to postpone, Governors must ensure that staff and trade union representatives are kept informed.

The recruitment processes and POELT training will continue in an attempt to maintain a level of recruitment pipeline to support the difficult staffing situations within the prisons. There are also plans for how to accelerate this process when the country returns to normal.

Mandatory and optional training such as basic and Advanced C&R has been placed on hold and out of date staff will receive dispensation.

We understand that HMPPS will shortly be taking the sensible step of suspending Prison Officer fitness testing in order to redeploy the operational staff currently deployed on fitness testing into prisons. As a consequence, the time period in which staff must pass a fitness test will be extended by at least 6 months to 18 months. Further guidance on this will be issued in due course.

Please make yourself familiar with the contents of this circular. We will continue to update you on a regular basis as the situation changes. During these times social media will be utilised to update you. Please access the POA Facebook and Twitter feeds (NationalChair POA@POAnatchair).

On behalf of the NEC we wish to pass on our thanks to you all at this difficult time for your professionalism and bravery. Your actions have not gone unnoticed by Senior Politicians. We will continue the business of the Union and will work jointly with the Government and HMPPS to ensure you are as safe as you can be and are supported as much as you can be throughout this difficult time.

With respect and solidarity to you all.

Yours Sincerely



STEVE GILLAN
General Secretary

Yours Sincerely



MARK FAIRHURST
National Chair

MIDLANDS – VACANT AREA

The NEC area structures have not changed but it is now necessary to appoint a single point of contact for each POA branch in the Midlands area.

The following NEC representatives will hold responsibility for the identified branches in the vacant Midlands area:

Jackie Marshall- Stoke Heath, Stafford, Swinfen Hall, Whatton, Woodhill.

Ian Carson- Birmingham, Gartree, Ranby, Stocken.

Terry McCarthy-Hewell, Brinsford, Featherstone, Onley.

Sarah Rigby- Foston Hall, Sudbury, Leicester, Nottingham

Scheme	Rate	Absence/Other Comments
Payment Plus Bonus Scheme: £22 per hour PP rate plus bonus	£500 bonus for a minimum of 9 committed weekly hours over a 4-week period	Staff who become sick, or need to care for dependents who do, before completion of committed hours will be paid a proportionate amount of the bonus (calculated to the nearest full completed week)
	£1,750 for a minimum of 9 committed weekly hours over a 12-week period	Staff who become sick, or need to care for dependents who do, before completion of committed hours will be paid a proportionate amount of the bonus (calculated to the nearest full completed week)
Additional Escort/Bedwatch Payment when escorting a prisoner to outside hospital who is a suspected or confirmed COVID19 case	£20 per shift	
OSG overtime Bonus Scheme Normal overtime rate plus bonus	£400 for a minimum of 9 committed weekly hours over a month	Staff who become sick, or need to care for dependents who do, before completion of committed hours will be paid a proportionate amount of the bonus (calculated to the nearest full completed week)
	£1,500 for a minimum of 9 committed weekly hours over a 12-week period	Staff who become sick, or need to care for dependents who do, before completion of committed hours will be paid a proportionate amount of the bonus (calculated to the nearest full completed week)
Special circumstances (COVID-19) Payment – payable to all staff who have prisoner facing roles	£150 per month for staff working in Prisoner Facing roles	Proportionate for staff who are only at work part of the month (e.g. have annual leave for part month)
Annual Leave Buy Back Scheme – for staff who volunteer to sell back annual leave	Payable at 1.2 x daily rate (salary and permanent recurring allowances only)	Up to a maximum of 10 days per person

COVID-19

New sickness absence and special leave categories (version 12/03/2020) How to accurately record COVID-19 sickness absence and leave on SOP (MoJ All Departments e.g. HMPPS, NPS, MoJ, LAA, HMCTS etc.)

We want to make sure that you don't have to worry about your pay or pension if you or your family are impacted by COVID-19.

To make it easy to record which type of leave you might need to take we have created 4 new absence categories.

You and your manager will find these listed under the dropdown menus for 'Sickness' and 'Special Leave With Pay' on SOP.

To help you and your manager identify which category applies to you, please read the option guidance below. **This information will not currently appear on SOP.** More information is on myHub.

The options are:

Dropdown menu option	Dropdown menu option - new absence category	Guidance **This information will not appear on SOP**
Sickness	Respiratory System - Epidemic/Pandemic	<p>You are absent or not working because you are ill with symptoms of COVID-19.</p> <p>The NHS online list of symptoms are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A cough ● A high temperature ● Shortness of breath <p>Please note: Staff will not be required to obtain/produce a medical certificate to confirm they have COVID-19.</p>
Special Leave With Pay	Epidemic/Pandemic - Self Isolation or Quarantine on Official Health Advice	<p>You are not ill but absent or not working on the grounds of specific and official health advice. For example, you are quarantined, in self-isolation, or in family isolation for COVID-19 or suspected COVID-19.</p> <p>Please note: Staff will not be required to obtain/produce a medical certificate to confirm they have COVID-19.</p>
Special Leave With Pay	Epidemic/Pandemic - Caring Responsibility	<p>You are not ill but absent or not working because of caring responsibilities related to COVID-19 or a suspected COVID-19 outbreak.</p>
Special Leave With Pay	Epidemic/Pandemic - Other reasons	<p>You are not ill but absent or not working because of other COVID-19-related issues/ disruption.</p>

Why is it important to select the right category?

The category your line manager selects will help us make sure your pay and pension is accurate as the statutory sick pay rules have been changed for anyone with COVID-19 symptoms. For more information, please read the guidance on your department's intranet or myHub.

MOJ

<https://intranet.justice.gov.uk/guidance/hr/sick-absence/attendance-management/>

HMPPS

<https://intranet.noms.gsi.gov.uk/policies-and-subjects/hr/being-away-from-work/absence-management>

The anonymised data will also be used to provide regular updates to COBR for the purposes of tracking and monitoring the spread of the virus and its impact on the Civil Service.

Where do I get more information/advice on the COVID-19?

All MoJ Intranets have created a dedicated COVID-19 page which can be accessed from the home page within the main banner/page:

For HMPPS (incl NPS) it's within the top banner

<https://intranet.noms.gsi.gov.uk/support/covid-19-coronavirus>



For the main MoJ Intranet's for HMCTS, LAA, MOJ HQ current and changing information is on the home page.

<https://intranet.justice.gov.uk/guidance/security/emergencies/coronavirus-guidance/>

All links carry information for staff and managers, which are updated as the situation changes within the department.



**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 3 PF
t. 0131 443 8105
f. 0131 444 0657
e. adminsct@poauk.org.uk

Our Ref: IR-662 -20 – SG/MF - 3

23rd March 2020

Dear Phil

CORONAVIRUS IN PRISONS

We enclose a copy of a letter we are forwarding to the Secretary of State Robert Buckland MP QC.

Whilst we are agreed that we need to continue to work collaboratively to combat this threat, you must also be left in no doubt that your staff and our members are worried about the implications on their safety and the health of themselves and their loved ones.

They have admirably carried on as normally as they possibly can, but as Government advice changes hour by hour and we head towards a total lock down of the country, we believe the time for HMPPS to respect the safety of frontline staff is now here.

We would urge you to influence the decision to self-isolate our Prisons.

Staff throughout the country are expressing their fears to us. We are ignoring Government advice in every aspect. We do not socially distant, we allow gatherings of people and we do not have enough PPE to protect ourselves.

If the correct and sensible decision is not made soon, we will not be able to override the concerns of staff and encourage them to continue working as normally as they can.

Leaving the operational guidance open to local interpretation on 'what is best' will only encourage some local Governors to carry on regardless despite the fears of their staff.

The time has come for the center to take control and we urge you to respect the views of frontline staff and curtail visits, education, workshops, association, ROTL and transfers.

Our professional staff will devise innovative ways of occupying prisoners and we will maintain the staffing resource to keep our Prisons stable whilst giving us the best chance of halting the spread of COVID -19.

The POA will continue to cooperate fully during these difficult times, but you must understand that we receive feedback from the frontline and we have staff who genuinely fear for the safety and health of themselves and their loved ones if we do not act immediately.

We trust the concerns of our members and your staff will be acted upon.

Yours Sincerely



STEVE GILLAN
General Secretary

Yours Sincerely



MARK FAIRHURST
National Chair

Sent via email to; DirectorGeneralPrisons@justice.gov.uk

Phil Copple
Director General of Prisons



**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 3 PF
t. 0131 443 8105
f. 0131 444 0657
e. adminsco@poauk.org.uk

Our Ref: IR-662 -20 – SG/MF - 2

23rd March 2020

Dear Secretary of State

CORONAVIRUS IN PRISONS

As a responsible Trade Union that is working effectively with HMPPS and Government to combat the threat of Coronavirus in our Prisons, we write to you today to express the concerns of front line staff who now need an Executive decision to be made in order to protect them, their loved ones and the people in our care.

Whilst we acknowledge that altering regimes and severely restricting normal practice in our prisons causes you concern, it would be immoral to our brave frontline staff if we did not act now to protect all those who are vulnerable, cannot work from home and cannot follow Government advice due to their working circumstances. There are, however, many things we can do, and carrying on 'normally' for as long as we can has been adhered to but continuing to do so must now be reconsidered due to the rapid spread of COVID-19 throughout the country.

Government advice to the population is clear. There should be no large or small gatherings in public spaces. Infections spread easily in closed spaces where people gather together and we should avoid gatherings with family and friends.

If you put this advice into a prison context, we are clearly ignoring these instructions to facilitate family visits and allow prisoners exercise and association. Religious services have been curtailed in order to follow Government guidelines, yet we continue to facilitate gatherings of Prisoners and the general public in one contained area.

Furthermore, the POA fully support the request of the UCU, to close all Prison Education Departments and allow teaching staff to work from home in devising learning materials that prisoners can utilise from their cells.

Allowing large groups of prisoners to move within the grounds to activities is placing everybody at an unnecessary risk. All non-essential activities need to cease immediately, including ROTL, Workshops, Education, Association and Social Visits. Exercise should be restricted to minimal numbers and social distancing observed.

The POA have been instrumental in agreeing the COVID-19 Operational Guidance and will continue to fully co-operate to ensure our Prisons remain stable. We are now at a point, that needs important decisions to be made in order to prevent what may be a catastrophic situation for both prisoners and staff. All too often, individual Governors are left to 'interpret' guidance as they see fit and all too often full regimes are continued despite the genuine concerns of staff.

There is a severe shortage of Personal Protective Equipment for staff in our Prisons. Checking the temperature of visitors is too ambiguous and will not halt the spread. In our unique environment it is vital that we follow the advice of experts without delay, as much as we possibly can.

We would therefore urge you to respect the view of frontline staff, who continue to work in a confined environment without adequate protection, professionally and with dedication to the public. An Executive decision is now needed, and an instruction given to self-isolate our Prisons so we may do the best we can for our staff and the people in our care.

Yours Sincerely



STEVE GILLAN
General Secretary

Yours Sincerely



MARK FAIRHURST
National Chair

Sent via email to; secofstate@justice.gov.uk

Rt Honourable Robert Buckland MP QC
Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice
102 Petty France
London
SW1H 9AJ