

Parole



Report by the
Comptroller and Auditor General

Parole

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Comptroller and Auditor General

National Audit Office
4 April 2000

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Executive summary

1 The number of prisoners in England and Wales eligible to apply for early release from prison on parole has been rising in recent years – in 1998-99, nearly 7,000 prisoners were eligible to apply for parole compared with just over 5,000 in 1996-97. It is important that prisoners' applications for parole are considered in a proper and timely manner. Ensuring that this occurs requires close co-operation between the Prison Service, the Parole Board and other agencies involved in the parole process such as the Probation Service and the police.

2 Members of Parliament, prisons' Boards of Visitors and organisations representing prisoners have all criticised delays in processing parole applications. Such delays can result in successful applicants for parole remaining in custody longer than necessary, placing additional strain on available prison accommodation. It is also expensive - each week's delay in releasing a prisoner on parole costs in the region of £450.

3 The Prison Service is concerned about delays in the parole process and has taken a number of initiatives to address the problem and others are underway. Taking this work into account, our report focuses on parole performance and how the organisations involved in parole co-operate to enable paroled prisoners to be released on time; and how prisons' operations can be improved to support the parole process.

Releasing paroled prisoners on time

4 Determinate sentence prisoners are eligible for release on parole when they have completed half their sentence. The parole timetable begins 26 weeks before that halfway point and involves the parole clerk at the prison compiling a dossier of at least 14, and frequently 20 or more, reports and documents on the prisoner. These are required to assist the Parole Board in making a risk assessment to inform a decision on early release. The dossier should be with the Parole Board at least 10 weeks before the prisoner becomes eligible for release on parole (the parole eligibility date). This is to ensure that the Parole Board can reach its decision two weeks before the parole eligibility date, as required by the parole timetable. Two weeks are normally required to ensure that successful applicants for parole are released on time.

5 Until recently, data measuring performance against the parole timetable have been unreliable, and we had to use data for 1998-99 and later for the purpose of our examination. However, by comparing 1998-99 data with earlier performance data generated for specific reviews of parole, we established that performance has improved as a result of work undertaken by the Prison Service and the Parole Board in recent years. In 1998-99, around 50 per cent of completed dossiers were received by the Parole Board by the due date compared with about 40 per cent in 1996-97.

6 For the dossiers that were submitted late to the Parole Board, the delay to the 26-week timetable cannot always be made up. In 1998-99, the target for parole decisions (approvals and refusals) to be notified two weeks before the prisoner's parole eligibility date was met on average in 58 per cent of cases. Of 2,214 successful parole applications, 853 decisions (39 per cent) were not notified by the target of two weeks before the parole eligibility date. This is likely to have resulted in prisoners being released some time after their parole eligibility date. We estimated the cost to the Prison Service of delays in releasing United Kingdom nationals in 1998-99 at some £2 million.

7 In the first six months of 1999-2000, there were further improvements in performance in the submission of dossiers to the Parole Board and the notification of Parole Board decisions to allow release by the prisoner's parole eligibility date. For April to September 1999, an average of 67.5 per cent of all dossiers arrived at the Parole Board on time. From April 2000, while prisons will continue to aim to get all dossiers to the Parole Board by the due date, the Prison Service plans to measure prisons' performance against an indicator of 80 per cent of dossiers arriving by the due date. In the first six months of 1999-2000, the notification of parole decisions by the target date also improved and averaged 82 per cent.

8 Serious delays in processing a prisoner's application for parole can be caused by their transfer to another prison during the parole process. The receiving prison may have to wait for reports on the prisoner to arrive from the sending prison, and the interview between the prisoner and a Parole Board member may have to be delayed - transfers accounted for nearly half of cancelled interviews in the eight months ending June 1999. The Prison Service does not monitor the numbers of these transfers, or whether they are fully justified. Some Prison Governors have tried to address the problem by refusing to accept transfers of prisoners with a parole application in progress unless the relevant parole documents are sent at the same time, or they receive firm assurances that they will quickly follow.

9 Most parole clerks have some difficulty in obtaining parole reports from the police, the courts, and the Probation Service. The problems with police and court reports illustrate the need for criminal justice organisations to share appropriate information, for example on the nature of a prisoner's offences. Otherwise organisations at the end of the chain, like the Prison Service and the Parole Board, have to carry out their responsibilities without important information. The problems with obtaining Probation Service reports illustrate the need for improved collaboration between the Prison Service and the Probation Service on parole reviews, for example to ensure that the probation officer has sufficient, timely information on the prisoner's conduct in prison to complete a parole assessment.

10 Delays in releasing paroled foreign nationals subject to deportation can occur when the Immigration and Nationality Directorate is not ready or able to remove the prisoner to their own country. In 1998-99, only 27 per cent of deportees were paroled on time. Around 8 per cent spent an additional 100 days in custody. We estimate that these delays cost the Prison Service around £0.5 million.

Supporting the parole process

11 In 1998-99, the Parole Board rejected around 60 per cent of applications for parole. In 96 per cent of a sample of rejected applications examined by independent researchers commissioned by the Home Office, the reasons given for the decision included the prisoner's failure to address offending behaviour.

12 Prisoners' sentence plans are intended to help them tackle their offending behaviour and give them experience of work, training and education to help them prepare for release. We found no explicit links in these plans between the programme of action agreed with the prisoner and their possible early release on parole. Parole is an important part of the process of rehabilitating offenders, and we consider that parole needs to be much better integrated into the planning of the prisoner's whole sentence.

13 Many prisoners have a poor knowledge of the procedures and criteria for parole. Prisoners need to be given a clear idea of the criteria against which their applications will be assessed, and the sorts of issues and information which the Parole Board will take into account. To help meet this need, the Prison Service is working with the Prison Reform Trust to produce a booklet on parole for prisoners.

14 Since July 1998, the Prison Service has provided monthly reports to Prison Governors on the performance of their prisons in providing timely dossiers to the Parole Board on determinate sentence prisoners. Initially, there were concerns about the accuracy of the data because of under-use of the Inmate Information System which supports parole, but the Prison Service believes that the reports have been accurate since at least October 1998. However, our survey found that use of the system was still not comprehensive across the Prison Service.

15 The monthly reports have raised awareness in prisons about the need to improve performance in meeting the parole timetable and the causes of delays. We consider that there is a need for more aggregated information on the reasons for and extent of delays to help inform central plans for further improvements in handling parole applications. We found, for example, that no global information was readily available on the extent to which reports from the Probation Service were late, although since our examination changes have been made to provide this information.

16 The parole caseload varies widely between prisons – from nil to 280 applications in 1998. This can lead to inefficiency, particularly in prisons where, for example, a small parole workload effectively requires the parole clerk to relearn the parole process each time they deal with an application. Although we found that management support of parole has been improving, managers need to be more involved in the allocation of parole work and in ensuring that all the various people and organisations that need to contribute to the parole process play their part.

17 We found significant gaps in the training of parole clerks and their managers, which the Prison Service is taking action to address. Only a third of parole clerks had received training in parole procedures, and only 40 per cent of parole managers had received any relevant training. Less than a quarter of those expected to write reports on prisoners applying for parole have received training in writing reports for parole purposes.

Key recommendations

18 Our detailed recommendations are set out at the end of Parts 2 and 3 and in Appendix 1, referenced to the relevant parts of the report. Our key recommendations below reflect the main themes arising from this examination.

- Better monitoring information is needed which measures releases relative to prisoners' parole eligibility dates; allows the cost of releasing prisoners late to be calculated; aggregates the reasons for delays,

including the frequency and extent to which different parole reports are late; and identifies the numbers of, and reasons for, transfers that take place during the parole timetable. The Prison Service needs to support these improvements by reviewing and improving training in parole and by enabling parole clerks to make full and effective use of the computerised Inmate Information System.

- Co-operation across the criminal justice system needs to be improved. The police, the Crown Prosecution Service and the courts should make available all the reports needed to plan the prisoner's time in prison at the start of the sentence. And the Prison Service and the Probation Service need to act jointly to ensure that parole assessments are completed on time.
- The Prison Service and Probation Service are developing a Prison-Probation joint offender assessment system. The effectiveness of the current arrangements under which prison and probation staff provide separate parole assessments needs to be reviewed, taking account of the existing joint work.
- Prisoners' sentence plans should be properly integrated with preparation for prisoners' release, including parole. Prisoners who become eligible to apply for parole should be given a clear assessment of their performance against the targets in their sentence plans.
- There should be stronger accountability for performance within the Prison Service, including for the cost of parolees not being released on their parole eligibility date.

19 As part of our study, we undertook comparative analysis of the processes that apply to determinate sentence prisoners eligible for parole and the different processes that apply to life-sentenced prisoners (lifers), who have no entitlement to parole, but may be released on licence which remains in force for life. Though the processes are different, many of the problems of the two systems are the same, for example late reports. Similar means have been used to tackle the problems, and there were few further reciprocal lessons we could draw from our analysis for the management of parole. However, we concluded that factors partly responsible for recent improvements in performance on parole, such as improved information, reporting and use of targets, could also prove effective in relation to lifer reviews.

Parole

The Prison Service has begun to take action on these lines, and should consider with the Parole Board how the successful elements of the parole process can be further applied to the process for lifer reviews.

Part 1: Introduction

Background

1.1 The vast majority of offenders sentenced to custody will one day need to be reintegrated into society, many within a short space of time. Parole is the early release of prisoners serving determinate sentences of four years or more (see Glossary), where risk of re-offending during the parole period is considered to be sufficiently reduced to enable them to be supervised in the community by the Probation Service, with the aim of helping rehabilitation and lessening the risk of future re-offending. It was first introduced in England and Wales by the Criminal Justice Act 1967, and was part of a package of Government measures designed to “keep out of prison those who need not be there”. The present system of parole is based largely on the provisions of the Criminal Justice Act 1991.

1.2 On 31 March 1999, the total prison population in England and Wales was 64,200. This included 51,400 sentenced prisoners, of whom nearly 20,000 (39 per cent) had determinate sentences of four years or more, thus qualifying to be considered for parole, and 4,100 who were serving life sentences, known as “lifers”.

1.3 Prisoners whose parole applications are approved may be released on parole from the half-way point of their sentence, known as their parole eligibility date. They may apply for parole 26 weeks before their parole eligibility date. If their application is successful, they are released on licence, which sets out conditions for the prisoner’s behaviour while on parole. If the prisoner breaks the conditions or re-offends, they may be recalled to serve the balance of their sentence up to the three-quarters point, when they are automatically released. Around 90 per cent of all parolees complete their licence period without being recalled.

1.4 The caseload of parole applications has increased significantly in recent years. For example, in the two years to 1998-99, cases considered rose by more than 1,000 from 4,899 to 6,078, an increase of 24 per cent. Of the 6,078 determinate sentence prisoners who were considered for parole in 1998-99, 2,383 (39 per cent) were successful, broadly the same level as in previous years.

1.5 Lifers have no entitlement to parole, but may be released on licence which remains in force for life. The licence contains conditions which remain in force for as long as considered necessary in each case. It may be revoked and the lifer

returned to prison to continue serving the life sentence at any time. Of the 1,537 life-sentenced prisoners released for the first time between 1972 and 1994, fewer than one in ten (9 per cent) were reconvicted of a standard list offence within 2 years; this group includes 1 per cent who were convicted of a grave offence such as murder. If the licensee has not given cause for concern after a minimum of four years in the community, the conditions attached to the licence may be cancelled though, as indicated above, the licence itself remains in force.

1.6 Prisoners serving mandatory life sentences – those convicted of murder – are eligible to be considered for release on licence on tariff expiry. The tariff is set by the Home Secretary, and is the minimum period which must be served to satisfy the requirements of retribution and deterrence. Mandatory life-sentenced prisoners are released on the personal authority of the Home Secretary, following a recommendation for release by the Parole Board and consultation with the judiciary. The overriding concern is the safety of the public.

1.7 A second group of lifers have the minimum period they must spend in custody specified by the trial judge in open court. This group comprises prisoners serving discretionary life sentences for serious crimes other than murder, such as manslaughter and rape or “automatic” life sentences passed under the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997, and prisoners detained during Her Majesty’s pleasure for murder, all of whom are entitled to be considered for release at an oral hearing by a panel of the Parole Board once they have served the specified minimum sentence. The panel has the power to direct release if satisfied that it is no longer necessary for the protection of the public for the lifer to be confined.

1.8 In 1998-99, the Parole Board considered 462 mandatory lifers for release and recommended release in 101 cases. The Parole Board also considered for release 291 discretionary lifers and prisoners detained during Her Majesty’s pleasure and directed release in 26 cases.

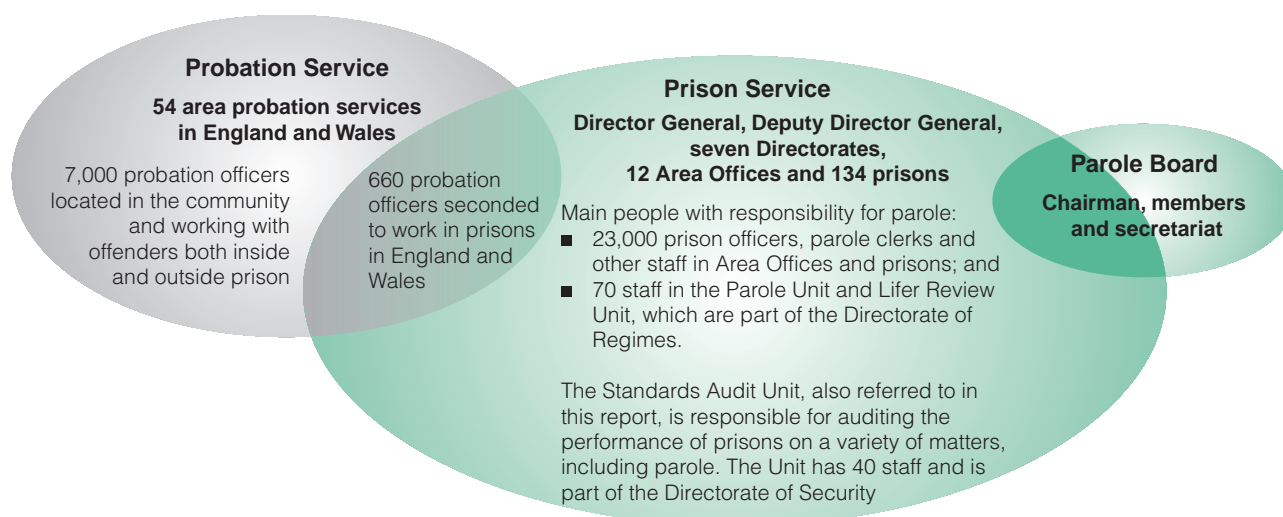
1.9 Lifers have a minimum of two assessments before they are released on life licence. The first is to consider suitability for transfer to open prison conditions, because they are usually required to serve a period in open conditions before release. Where a prisoner is transferred to open conditions, the next review involves a formal assessment of their fitness for release. If the prisoner is not released, additional reviews are normally carried out every two years.

Responsibility for the parole process

1.10 It is important that prisoners' applications for parole and release on licence are considered in a proper and timely manner. Ensuring that this occurs requires close co-operation between, in particular, the Prison Service, the Probation Service and the Parole Board (Figure 1). Figure 20 (pull-out at page 57) briefly explains the activities of each of these organisations, and the procedures and timeframe for consideration of parole applications. Figure 21 (pull-out at page 59) provides the same information for the release on licence of mandatory lifers.

Figure 1

Main organisations involved in parole and release on licence of lifers



Relations with the Home Office:

Probation Service

The Home Secretary sets policy aims and priorities for the Probation Service. The Home Secretary is supported by the Probation Unit of the Home Office Criminal Policy Directorate. The Unit aims to:

- develop and promote the Home Secretary's policy on the supervision of offenders in the community and other aspects of probation practice; and
- assist individual probation services in providing a high standard of service to the courts and the public.

Prison Service

The Prison Service is an executive agency of the Home Office.

Parole Board

The Parole Board is an Executive Non-Departmental Public Body sponsored by the Prison Service.

The Prison Service and the Probation Service

1.11 The activities of the Prison Service and Probation Service are key to the achievement of one of the four principal aims of the Home Office in relation to the Criminal Justice System - "the effective execution of the sentences of the courts so

as to reduce re-offending and protect the public". The objectives of the Prison Service are to protect the public by holding those committed by the courts in a safe, decent and healthy environment; and to reduce crime by providing constructive regimes which address offending behaviour, improve educational and work skills and promote law-abiding behaviour in custody and after release. The Probation Service supervises offenders both in and outside of prison to reduce re-offending and protect the public.

1.12 The two Services are separately organised, but the Prison-Probation Review, which reported in August 1998, concluded that much would be gained from increased co-operation between them. A joint report by the two Services *Joining Forces to Protect the Public* sets out plans for developing the effectiveness of joint work in areas such as risk assessment of offenders and accreditation of offender behavior programmes.

The role of the Prison Service

1.13 The Prison Service is an executive agency of the Home Office. Annual staff costs are around £995 million. It is not known what proportion of staff costs relates to parole, but the main areas of the Prison Service directly involved in parole and the release on licence of lifers are prisons, the Parole Unit and the Lifer Review Unit (Figure 1).

Prisons

1.14 The Prison Service operates in England and Wales through 127 directly managed prisons and seven run under contract by private sector companies. At 31 March 1999, these 134 prisons held 64,200 prisoners.

1.15 The main responsibilities of prisons for parole are: compiling the dossier of at least 14, and frequently 20 or more, reports and documents on the prisoner (Appendix 2) which the Parole Board needs to determine the prisoner's application for parole; issuing the licence which contains the conditions set by the Parole Board governing the behaviour expected of the parolee while on parole; and arranging the parolee's release from prison. In 1998-99, prison staff compiled over 6,000 parole dossiers.

Parole Unit

1.16 The Parole Unit was part of the Prison Service's Directorate of Régimes at the time of our examination (Figure 1). The Unit's main responsibilities for parole are summarised in Figure 2. The Parole Unit has since been renamed The

Sentence Enforcement Unit and has acquired some new responsibilities unrelated to the issues addressed in this report. We therefore refer to the Parole Unit throughout our report, but our recommendations are addressed to its successor, the Sentence Enforcement Unit.

The Parole Unit's responsibilities

Figure 2

The Parole Unit is responsible for:

- policy on early release for determinate sentence prisoners and recall
- monitoring the work of prisons and the Parole Board
- administering the appointment of members to the Parole Board
- keeping under review the computerised Inmate Information System which supports parole
- considering applications for early release on compassionate grounds
- dealing with applications for early release of those prisoners serving four years or more who are subject to deportation or removal from the United Kingdom
- on behalf of the Home Secretary, examining the recommendations of the Parole Board for parole of prisoners sentenced to fifteen years or more
- all post-release work, for example, recalls into custody and variations of licence conditions

Lifer Review Unit

1.17 The Lifer Review Unit is also part of the Directorate of Régimes (Figure 1). It includes a Tariff Section, which supports the Home Secretary in setting and reviewing tariffs for life-sentenced prisoners; and a Lifer Review Section, responsible for compiling lifers' dossiers, arranging their release, supervision, and where necessary recall. In 1998-99, the Lifer Review Unit prepared dossiers for just under 1,000 prisoners.

Role of the Probation Service

1.18 The Probation Service (Figure 1) currently consists of 54 area probation services run locally by independent probation committees. There are proposals to create a unified Probation Service led by a national director, and to reduce the number of probation areas to 42, in line with police authority and Crown Prosecution Service boundaries.

1.19 At the start of each prisoner's sentence, a probation officer – known as the field probation officer – is allocated, who is generally based in the area where the prisoner normally resided before conviction. The field probation officer has a number of responsibilities including helping prison staff to draw up a sentence plan to prepare the prisoner for release, and providing the Parole Board with an assessment of the risk of the prisoner re-offending and a recommendation on

whether they should be released. The field probation officer supervises the prisoner, if released on parole. The officer has a key role in helping the parolee to lead a law-abiding life by continuing work begun during the custodial part of their sentence to help them to reintegrate into the community, and is responsible for initiating recall to prison if parole conditions are breached.

1.20 The Probation Service's responsibilities in relation to prisoners also extend to work alongside prison staff in prisons, aimed at preventing re-offending. There are around 660 probation officers seconded to the Prison Service for this purpose. The seconded probation officer also provides the Parole Board with a report containing a recommendation on whether the prisoner should be released.

The Parole Board

1.21 The Parole Board (Figure 1) is an Executive Non-Departmental Public Body sponsored by the Prison Service, from which it receives a grant-in-aid. In 1999-2000, this amounted to £3 million. The Board is headed by a chairman and has two full-time and 103 part-time members to carry out its primary function of considering prisoners' applications for parole. In making its decisions, the Board is statutorily required to consider primarily the risk to the public of a further offence being committed during the parole period, and to balance this against the benefits to the public and to the offender of early release under supervision, which might help rehabilitation and reduce the risk of re-offending in the future. All Board members are appointed by the Home Secretary. Appendix 3 sets out the criteria for assessing parole applications in more detail.

1.22 The Parole Board's part-time members comprise judges, psychiatrists, criminologists, Chief and Assistant Chief Probation Officers and independent members. The independent members are drawn from a variety of walks of life including barristers, solicitors, teachers, former police officers, and people with experience at senior levels in industry, business and voluntary organisations. Many have experience of other aspects of the criminal justice system, for example as lay magistrates or members of prisons' Boards of Visitors, or have experience of serving on other forms of tribunal. The Board is supported by a secretariat headed by a Chief Executive, with around 40 staff seconded from the Prison Service. In 1998-99, the remuneration of Board members and the secretariat accounted for £2.3 million of the £2.7 million grant-in-aid received from the Prison Service.

1.23 Figure 3 summarises the Parole Board's main responsibilities for determinate sentence prisoners and lifers.

The Parole Board's responsibilities

Figure 3

For determinate sentence prisoners, the Parole Board:

- has delegated authority to make decisions on the early release of prisoners sentenced after 1 October 1992 to four or more but less than 15 years;
- makes recommendations to the Home Secretary for the early release of determinate sentence prisoners serving 15 years or more;
- makes recommendations to the Home Secretary on requests from the Probation Service for the recall of life-sentenced and determinate sentence prisoners;
- considers representations from prisoners recalled to prison and may direct their immediate release; and
- gives advice to the Home Secretary on the risk of releasing those prisoners serving four years or more who have applied for early release on compassionate grounds.

For lifers, the Parole Board:

- considers the suitability of mandatory life-sentenced prisoners for transfer to an open prison, generally three and a half years before tariff expiry, and makes recommendations to the Home Secretary;
- considers the suitability of life-sentenced prisoners for release (which may occur from the expiry of the prisoner's tariff) and makes recommendations to the Home Secretary;
- considers, in oral hearings, the suitability of discretionary life-sentenced prisoners, persons detained during Her Majesty's pleasure and automatic life-sentenced prisoners for release, and may direct their release;
- makes recommendations to the Home Secretary on requests from the Probation Service for the recall of life-sentenced prisoners;
- considers representations from life-sentenced prisoners recalled to prison and may direct their immediate release; and
- gives advice to the Home Secretary on the risk of releasing life-sentenced prisoners who have applied for release on compassionate grounds.

1.24 The Parole Board secretariat is responsible for drawing up the programme of paper and oral panel hearings; allocating cases to each panel; arranging for Board members to interview determinate sentence prisoners who have applied for parole and mandatory life-sentenced prisoners whose case is to be considered by the Board; providing panel secretaries for all oral hearings; working with prisons (in the case of determinate sentence prisoners) and the Lifer Review Unit to ensure that the Board receives prisoners' dossiers in good time; and for the administration of the Board's finances.

Scope of the examination

1.25 Members of Parliament, prisons' Boards of Visitors and organisations representing prisoners have all criticised delays in processing parole applications. Such delays can result in successful applicants for parole remaining in custody longer than necessary. This places additional strain on available prison

accommodation - each week's delay in releasing a prisoner on parole costs in the region of £450. The delays also reduce the time that parolees will spend in the community under the supervision of the Probation Service, since this automatically ends at the three-quarters point in their sentence.

1.26 Following early preliminary work that we carried out on the timeliness with which parole applications are progressed, the Prison Service carried out its own examination. The resulting report, the Shepherd Report (Appendix 4, paragraphs 7 to 10), produced in May 1998, made 16 recommendations for strengthening the management of parole in prisons. The Prison Service's actions in response to these recommendations are set out in Appendix 5. More recently, the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate on behalf of the Prison Service, commissioned Professor Roger Hood of Oxford University, a criminologist and former member of the Parole Board, and Dr Stephen Shute of Birmingham University, to examine parole procedures and decisions (Appendix 4, paragraphs 11 to 13).

1.27 Our examination takes account of the work set in hand to strengthen the management of parole following the Shepherd Report. It also takes account of the findings of Professor Hood and Dr Shute. We focused on determinate sentence prisoners because they account for 85 per cent of the Parole Board's caseload. We nevertheless reviewed the arrangements for lifers to identify any examples of good practice which might assist the administration of parole. For this purpose, we took account of the recent joint thematic review of lifers by Her Majesty's Inspectorates of Prisons and Probation (Appendix 4, paragraph 14).

1.28 Our comparative analysis of parole processes and the different processes that apply to lifers showed that, though the processes are different, many of the problems of the two systems are the same, for example late reports. Similar means have been used to tackle the problems, and there were few further reciprocal lessons we could draw from our analysis for the management of parole. However, we concluded that factors partly responsible for recent improvements in performance on parole, such as improved information, reporting and use of targets, could also prove effective in relation to lifer reviews.

1.29 Our examination of parole focused on process issues and the potential to make better use of resources. The report examines:

- performance on parole and how the organisations involved co-operate to enable parolees to be released on time (Part 2); and
- arrangements in prisons for supporting the parole process (Part 3).

1.30 Our examination does not consider the impact on re-offending of releasing prisoners into the community on parole under the supervision of the Probation Service, compared with completing their sentence in custody. We will be considering this matter in a future report on the Prison Service's programmes to reduce re-offending, which will include examination of programmes undertaken by prisoners released on parole.

Methodology

1.31 Our examination comprised:

- visits to 10 prisons to identify factors which contribute to good and poor performance in meeting the parole timetable;
- a questionnaire survey sent to all parole clerks and their managers in prisons;
- meetings with key members and staff in the Parole Board, and key staff in the Parole and Lifer Review Units of the Prison Service;
- an analysis of the Parole Unit's management information on performance against key milestones in the parole process;
- a review of the findings of the Prison Service's Standards Audit Unit and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons in respect of parole;
- an analysis of progress made in implementing the recommendations of the Shepherd Report;
- collaboration with Professor Hood and Dr Shute, including exchange of findings resulting from our respective examinations;
- discussion with the co-authors of the joint thematic report on lifers; and
- consultation with third parties with an interest in the parole process.

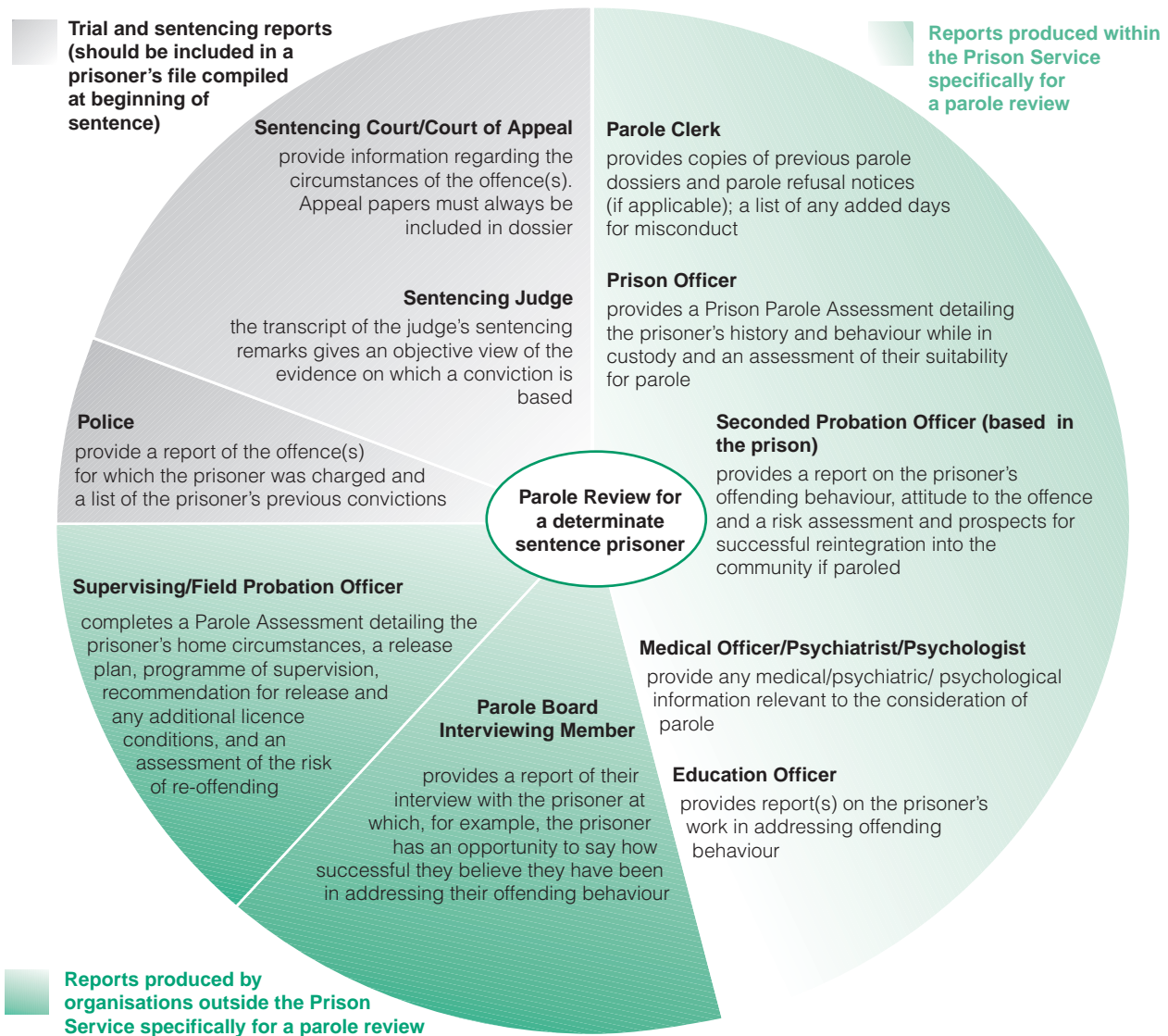
Appendix 4 sets out our methodology in more detail and Appendix 6 summaries the responses to our questionnaire survey of parole clerks and their managers.

Part 2: Releasing paroled prisoners on time

2.1 The efficient and effective operation of parole depends on the Prison Service, the Probation Service, the Parole Board, and other agencies such as the police, working closely together (Figure 4). This part of the report examines

Figure 4

People and organisations providing information for a parole review



Source: National Audit Office

performance on parole and how these organisations co-operate to enable parolees to be released on time. Where appropriate, we draw comparisons with the arrangements for releasing lifers on licence.

Measuring parole performance

Adequacy of parole performance data

2.2 In 1990, the Prison Service introduced its computerised Inmate Information System, which enables prisoner information to be input into a central database via local systems at each prison. The system was upgraded to provide support for the administration of parole from 1996, but many parole clerks found it difficult to operate. Because the accuracy of management reports produced by the system is dependent on parole clerks operating it fully and correctly, attempts to use the reports to monitor parole performance had to be delayed while staff received further training in the operation of the system and data on the system were validated. In July 1998, prison Governors began to receive regular monthly reports on the performance of their prisons against the parole timetable, although the need for data validation continued until the end of the year. Because of doubts about the reliability and completeness of earlier data on parole, we based our analysis for the purpose of this report mainly on data for the year 1998-99.

2.3 The monthly reports to prison Governors show the number and percentage of dossiers that were received on time or late, supported by listings of the individual dossiers and details of the common reasons for delays, emerging trends and anticipated problems. Governors generally provide an explanation to their Area Manager for any individual dossiers that were received late. Information on the level and frequency of the different causes of local delays is not brought together centrally, for example, to help inform plans for further improving the management of parole. We had to rely mainly on other sources of information for the purpose of our assessment of the main causes of delay, such as our visits to 10 prisons and the results of our survey of parole clerks and their managers.

2.4 Determinate sentence prisoners serving four years or more who are granted parole are eligible for release from the half-way point of their sentence, known as their parole eligibility date. The Prison Service does not routinely produce data showing the release of parolees relative to their parole eligibility dates. However, the parole decision should be notified to the prison at least two weeks before this date, so that the prison has sufficient time to make all necessary arrangements for releasing promptly those prisoners who have been granted parole. The Prison Service has information on the extent to which this target is

met. We have therefore used this information, adjusted for the time allowed for prisons to arrange releases, to estimate parole releases relative to prisoners' parole eligibility dates.

Performance

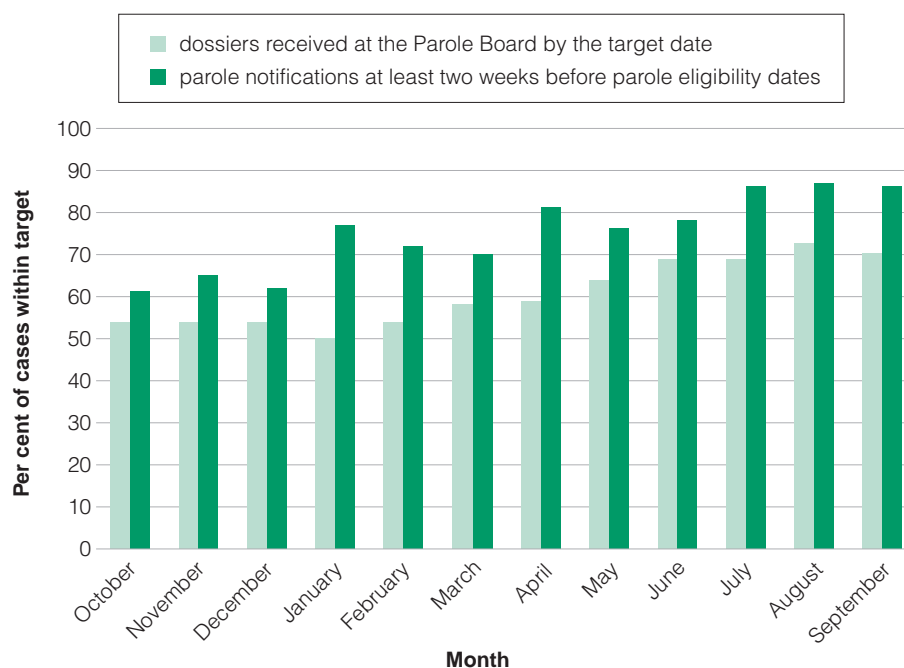
2.5 The parole timetable at Figure 20 (pull-out at page 57) requires the prison to complete the parole dossier and send it to the Parole Board at least 10 weeks before the prisoner's parole eligibility date. If this target is not met, the Parole Board may be unable to meet the target of notifying the prisoner of the result of their application two weeks before their parole eligibility date, as required by the parole timetable. This may in turn lead to a parolee being released from custody after their parole eligibility date. The Carlisle Committee, which conducted a review of parole commissioned by the Government in 1987, considered that it should be "wholly exceptional" for parolees not to be released by their parole eligibility date. However, delays have been a persistent problem for years and the Prison Reform Trust told us that they were the most common subject of complaint from prisoners and their families. Other organisations, such as the National Association of Probation Officers, have also expressed concerns.

2.6 The Shepherd Report (Appendix 4, paragraphs 7 to 10) noted that in 1996-97 around two-thirds of dossiers were not arriving at the Parole Board on time. Our analysis of performance in 1998-99 showed an improvement in that, on average, just under half of all dossiers were received promptly. Figure 5 illustrates further monthly improvements for the period October 1998 to September 1999. In the six months April to September 1999, an average of 67.5 per cent of all dossiers reached the Parole Board on time – a 100 per cent improvement on the 1996-97 position reported in the Shepherd Report. Figure 6 illustrates the extent to which late dossiers were delayed over the 12 months to September 1999, showing that 11 per cent of all dossiers were more than eight weeks late.

Performance in submitting parole dossiers to the Parole Board and the Board's notification of the outcome of parole reviews

Figure 5

Prisons' performance in ensuring that dossiers reach the Parole Board by the target date¹ improved in the 12 months to September 1999 from 54 per cent to 70 per cent. Over the same period, there was a steady but marked improvement in the timely notification of parole reviews from just over 60 per cent of cases to 86 per cent.



Source: Analysis of Prison Service parole data, October 1998 to September 1999

Note: 1. In 1998, the target date was 11 weeks before the applicant's parole eligibility date. From January 1999 it was 10 weeks.

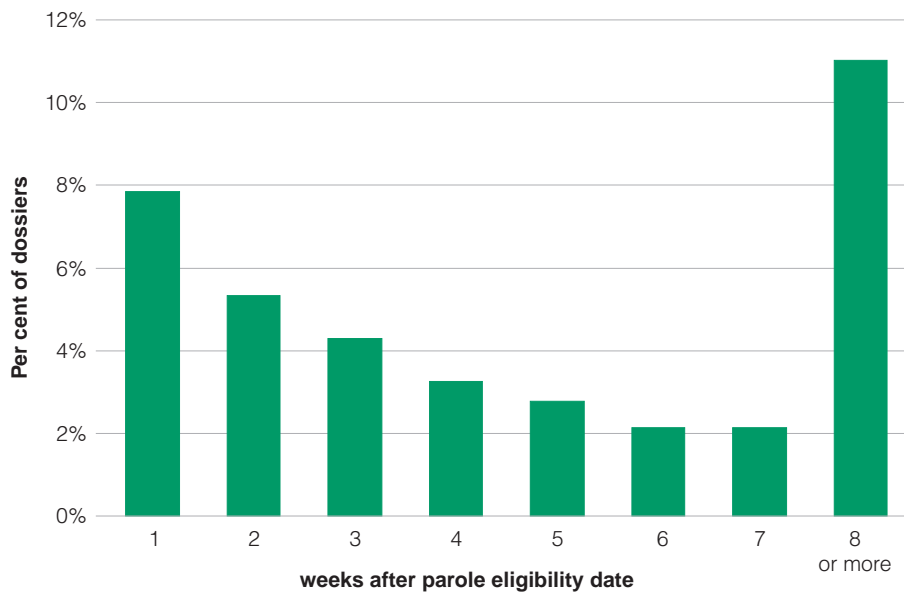
2.7 From April 2000, the Prison Service plans to measure prisons' performance in getting prisoners' dossiers to the Parole Board on time against an indicator of 80 per cent of dossiers arriving by the due date. For individual parole applications, the Prison Service will still expect prisons to aim to get all dossiers to the Parole Board by the due date. On its own, this target could create an incentive for prisons to give lower priority to cases which have already missed the deadline. This underlines the importance of the monthly reports to prison Governors (paragraph 2.3) in holding them accountable for the progress of all parole cases.

2.8 In 1998-99, the Parole Board met the target of notifying the results of its reviews two weeks before the prisoner's parole eligibility date on average in 58 per cent of cases. Figure 5 illustrates the monthly performance against the target for the year October 1998 to September 1999, when performance improved from just over 60 per cent to 86 per cent. In the last six months of this period, the average was 82 per cent.

Extent of the delay to dossiers reaching the Parole Board after the due date

Figure 6

In the 12 months to September 1999, 1,083 dossiers (18 per cent of all parole cases) were received more than four weeks after the target date¹ and 661 (11 per cent) were 8 or more weeks late.



Source: Analysis of Prison Service parole data, October 1998 to September 1999

Note: 1. In 1998, the target date was 11 weeks before the applicant's parole eligibility date. From January 1999 it was 10 weeks.

2.9 The target of notifying decisions two weeks before the prisoner's parole eligibility date is the target for the parole system as a whole. The Parole Board has its own targets for notifying its decisions and these contribute to achieving the overall parole target. Historical data on the Board's achievement of its targets are not readily comparable because of the unreliability of data for periods prior to 1998-99, and because of changes to procedures. Figure 7 therefore shows the Parole Board's performance against the targets for 1998-99 and for the first six months of 1999-2000. Performance was well above the targets in the most recent period.

**Parole Board
performance against
targets for April 1998 to
September 1999**

Figure 7

Target	1998-99 % achieved	April 1999 to September 1999 % achieved
To notify 85 per cent of decisions in delegated ¹ cases within eight weeks of receiving complete dossiers from prisons	91	97
To notify 85 per cent of recommendations on undelegated ² cases within five weeks of receiving complete dossiers from prisons	52	96

Notes: 1. Until 26 December 1998, delegated cases were those in respect of prisoners serving four or more, but less than seven, years; from that date, cases of prisoners serving less than 15 years became delegated.
2. Since 26 December 1998, undelegated cases are those where the prisoner is serving a sentence of 15 years or more. In such cases, the Parole Board makes a recommendation to the Home Secretary.

2.10 Delays in the parole process which result in prisoners being released after their parole eligibility date incur increased costs for the Prison Service. In 1998-99, of 2,214 successful parole applications, 853 decisions (39 per cent) were not notified by the target of two weeks before the parole eligibility date. As the average delay was some five weeks, it is likely that many prisoners were released some time after their parole eligibility date. At an average cost per prisoner/week of £450, the delays may have cost the Prison Service in the region of £2 million (Appendix 4, paragraph 18).

Measuring performance of release of lifers

Adequacy of performance data

2.11 At the time of our examination, the Prison Service had no computerised management information system to help monitor the progress of lifers through their review process. Staff in the Lifer Review Unit monitored cases manually. Lifer clerks in the prisons we visited said that they received no information on lifer cases once the prison had provided the necessary input to the review. They were therefore unable to keep the prisoner or the officers working with the prisoner informed of progress or the reasons for any delay. The Parole Board considered that the absence of a lifer database hampered its work, which would be assisted by a system that tracked lifer cases.

2.12 The Prison Service has since completed an examination of the mandatory lifer review process and in early 2000 plans to trial a more streamlined procedure designed to reduce the overall time taken to complete the reviews. A summary of the outcome of key stages in the procedure will be sent to the prison Governor and the prisoner in every case. The Prison Service has also introduced a lifer case tracking system to which the Parole Board has access.

Performance

2.13 The overall aim of the lifer review system is to ensure that as many life-sentenced prisoners as possible are released on or shortly after the expiry of their tariff, so long as they are considered safe to release. As explained in paragraph 1.9, lifers have a minimum of two reviews, the first to consider their suitability for transfer to open conditions and the second their suitability for release on life licence. Figure 8 shows that only a minority of lifers who were assessed safe to be released were actually released within three months of tariff expiry in 1996-97, 1997-98 and 1998-99 (13 per cent, 4 per cent and 15 per cent respectively). The Parole Board considered that it should however be feasible to accomplish the reviews in time to release suitable lifers at tariff expiry if improvements were effected in the efficiency of preparing and submitting lifer dossiers similar to those which have already been made for determinate sentence prisoners.

Figure 8

Release of life-sentenced prisoners in relation to tariff expiry¹

Only a minority of prisoners are released within three months of tariff expiry.

Release date in relation to tariff expiry	Releases in 1996-97	Releases in 1997-98	Releases in 1998-99
On tariff expiry	2 (2%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)
Within 3 months	10 (11%)	3 (3%)	15 (15%)
Within 6 months	9 (9%)	5 (5%)	12 (11%)
Between 6 and 12 months	16 (17%)	23 (21%)	15 (15%)
Over 12 months ²	58 (61%)	77 (70%)	61 (59%)
Total released in year	95 (100%)	109 (100%)	103 (100%)

Note: 1. It is not possible to differentiate these cases into mandatory lifers and discretionary lifers.

2. These figures include prisoners who have made insufficient progress to be assessed as suitable for either a move to open conditions or release on licence, therefore taking them beyond the expiry of their tariff.

Source: Lifer Review Unit

2.14 In July 1998, the Home Secretary announced that the first Parole Board review – for consideration of a transfer to open conditions – would be brought forward by six months, to start three and a half years before tariff expiry, for those lifers who were in a category C prison for 18 months or more prior to the date of the review. In addition, reviews for all mandatory life-sentenced prisoners who are in open conditions would commence 18 months (instead of two years) after arrival. The aim of these changes is to reduce delays by enabling prisoners assessed as safe to release to be released on the expiry of their tariff or shortly afterwards.

2.15 For mandatory life-sentenced prisoners, the Lifer Review Unit aims to prepare and disclose parole dossiers to prisoners within eight weeks of the first day of the month in which the review is scheduled to begin to meet the overall timetable shown at Figure 21 (pull-out at page 59). In 1998-99, the Unit achieved disclosure within the eight-week target in two-thirds of cases.

2.16 The Lifer Review Unit measures the average time taken to complete a lifer review against targets for each of the three possible outcomes of the review. Figure 9 shows that there were improvements in the times taken for all three possible outcomes in 1998-99.

**Lifer review system
targets and
performance, 1997-98
and 1998-99**

Figure 9

In 1998-99 average times to complete lifer reviews improved and were within target for all three possible outcomes.

Target times (months) compared with actual performance for the following outcomes:	Targets for 1997-98 and 1998-99	1997-98 performance	1998-99 performance
Further review in closed conditions	6.5	7.2	5.4
Transfer to open conditions	8.0	8.5	7.9
Early release on life licence	9.0	8.5	8.1

Source: Lifer Review Unit

2.17 We considered whether there was a case for similar targets based on outcome for parole cases. However, we felt there was less scope for such targets for determinate sentence prisoners, since they are automatically released by the two-thirds point in their sentence and parole applications follow a less complex process than for lifer reviews. There is also benefit in having consistent timetables and targeting for all parole cases. The Parole Board considered that the targets used in the parole process are superior, since they relate both to performance at each stage of the process, for example, submission of dossiers and notification of

decisions, and to the overall performance of the parole system. The Board felt that they had been more effective in improving performance than the lifer targets, which relate only to part of the process and are not related to tariff expiry dates.

Working to improve performance

2.18 Processing an application for parole starts 26 weeks before the prisoner's parole eligibility date (Figure 20 - pull-out at page 57), with the aim of ensuring that those who are granted parole can be released on time. Delays in submitting prisoners' dossiers to the Parole Board cannot always be made up later and affect its ability to meet the target of notifying review results two weeks before prisoners' parole eligibility dates, as required by the parole timetable.

2.19 The parole clerk in the prison where the prisoner is based is responsible for compiling the dossier of reports and documents that the Parole Board needs to consider the prisoner's application for parole. As illustrated in Figure 4, reports are needed from a range of people to provide the Board with information on various aspects of the prisoner's case such as the nature of their offence, any previous convictions, conduct while in custody, work done to address their offending behaviour and assessment of their risk of re-offending. The dossier requires input from prison officers, probation officers (both from the officer based in the prison and from the field probation officer), and medical staff working for the prison (if the prisoner has a known medical or psychiatric condition), from educational staff where relevant, from the police for information on the offence and previous convictions, from the Parole Board member interviewing the applicant, the prisoner and in some cases a prison chaplain.

2.20 Parole clerks and their managers told us that the three main reasons why parole dossiers are not submitted on time are:

- transfers of prisoners to other prisons while their application for parole is being processed;
- late receipt of the reports required to complete the dossier; and
- problems with the handling of applications for parole from foreign nationals who are the subject of a deportation order.

Transfers between prisons

2.21 Prisoners may be transferred between prisons for a variety of reasons, including changes in prisoners' security risk and medical conditions. If a transfer occurs during or shortly before the start of the parole timetable, the process can be considerably disrupted. The Prison Service does not routinely produce information for headquarters' management on the number and reasons for transfers or monitor their justification. Without information on why such transfers occur, the Prison Service cannot be certain that they are justified. A third of parole clerks responding to our survey considered that transfers were the main barrier to effective and timely processing of parole applications. Examples of their comments are provided at Figure 10. The quality of parole reports may also be affected if they have to be written by prison officers or seconded probation officers in the receiving prison who hardly know the prisoner.

Impacts of prisoner transfers during the parole process

Figure 10

"Some kind of national order needs to be made to stop transfers (other than for genuine security reasons) during the parole timetable. Present practice is not fair on report writers, parole clerks and especially inmates who don't get reports written by people who know them."

"We still have the problem of having inmates transferred in without the necessary paperwork. It's too easy to say we shouldn't take them – operationally, it's a nightmare."

"On transfer, some sending prisons do not want to accept responsibility for the inmate's parole once they have left. The holding prison gets the thankless task of explaining delays not of their making."

"At a local prison, the population turnover makes it almost impossible to see a review all the way through. Prisoners are moved too quickly due to overcrowding."

Source: National Audit Office survey of parole clerks and their managers

2.22 Case 1, drawn from the sample of cases we examined, illustrates the potential for transfers to cause delay unless they are effectively managed. At the extreme, in one of the cases we examined, the prisoner's dossier arrived at the Parole Board more than 12 weeks after it was due because of delays to reports following the prisoner's transfer.

Case 1

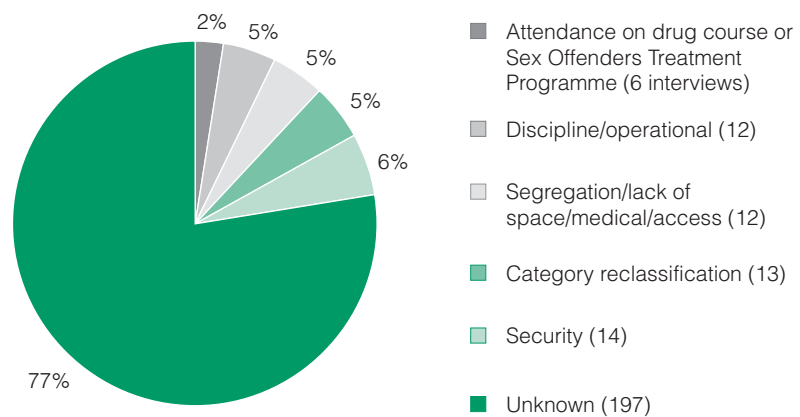
The dossier was received by the Parole Board nearly three weeks after it was due. The parole clerk explained the delay as follows:

The delay was as a result of the often experienced problems associated with transfers. The prisoner was received from prison X with no parole reports completed. His parole process should have started three weeks earlier. Prison X agreed to do the parole reports, but there was slippage on the target dates. The receiving prison cannot do anything to avoid this as its staff do not know the prisoner, so they are not in a position to do the reports. The delay was in this case compounded by the parole assessment report from the prisoner's field probation officer being received more than a month late.

2.23 The Prison Service advises prisons to avoid transferring prisoners before they have had their interview with a member of the Parole Board. Even so, we found that of 515 interviews which were cancelled between October 1998 and June 1999, almost half (254) were due to prisoners having transferred to another prison. In more than three-quarters of these cases (197), no reason for the transfer had been provided (Figure 11). Just 14 (6 per cent) of the transfers were specifically recorded as for security reasons.

Prisoner interviews cancelled due to transfers and reasons for transfer, October 1998 to June 1999

Figure 11



Source: Analysis of Parole Board's records of cancelled interviews

2.24 The Prison Service is aware of the disruption that transfers cause, but because they can be necessary for widely differing reasons, it has been unwilling to instruct prisons to transfer prisoners who have parole applications pending only in certain specified circumstances. In August 1998, the Parole Unit consulted senior Prison Service managers on two options for defining responsibility for the parole dossiers of transferred prisoners. With the first option, as at present, the

responsibility for the parole dossier would transfer with the prisoner, whilst the second option would have involved fixing responsibility for the dossier with whichever prison was holding the prisoner at a certain point in the parole process.

2.25 Views were equally divided between these two options. The issues were therefore discussed further at a series of parole clerk conferences in spring 1999 to reach agreement on the way forward. The Prison Service has since issued a new Parole Standard which requires prisons to put in place their own systems for managing transfers and performance against the Standard will be audited. However, the Parole Board considers that transfers are too important an issue to be left to local initiatives, and that there is a need for consistent rules across the Prison Service.

2.26 We found that three of the prisons we visited had already introduced their own arrangements for tackling the problems caused by prisoners transferring during the parole process (Figure 12).

Figure 12

Initiatives relating to transfers of prisoners during the parole process

Coldingley prison refuses to accept a transferee at any time within three months of the start of their parole timetable, except on security grounds. In these cases, it insists that the sending prison provides the prison officer's prison parole assessment, to ensure that someone who knows the prisoner writes the report.

Where prisoners have to be transferred out of Coldingley prison on security grounds, the prison provides the prison officer's parole assessment report for the receiving prison. The receiving prison is expected to obtain all the other reports. Where a transfer is due to reclassification to a lower risk category, Coldingley delays the transfer until it has completed the prisoner's parole dossier to forward, on transfer, to the receiving prison.

The Verne prison refuses to accept transferees if their parole application is already in progress. Where a prisoner with an ongoing parole application has to transfer out at short notice, the prison seeks to obtain the reports it has already requested and sends them on to the receiving prison. For prisoners transferring to a lower category prison, the Verne delays the transfer at least until the prisoner has had the interview with the Parole Board member.

Sudbury prison operates a policy of refusing to take any prisoner who has started the parole process until the prison has received all outstanding parole reports.

Source: National Audit Office visits to prisons

Late reports

2.27 Twenty or more documents and reports may be required to support a parole application (Appendix 2). Late receipt of any of these reports could delay compilation of the prisoner's dossier and consideration of their application for parole. The Prison Service does not have the management information to show the frequency with which each of these reports is late and the extent of the delays. However, parole clerks considered that reports required from staff based within

the prison were the least difficult to obtain, because it was easier to influence the report writers to produce them on time. Nevertheless, 45 per cent of parole clerks responding to our survey said that they sometimes had difficulty obtaining the reports of prison officers. Thirty-eight per cent of parole clerks said that they also sometimes had difficulty in obtaining the reports from seconded probation officers based in the prison.

2.28 One third of prison officers interviewed during Professor Hood and Dr Shute's research (Appendix 4) said that they were not allocated any time specifically for writing their report on the prisoner. Others told us that they were not allocated enough time to prepare their reports, and had to fit the work in with their other duties and take account of operational constraints such as night shifts and absence on annual leave.

2.29 We found that seconded probation officers were sometimes delayed in putting together their reports because they were waiting for information they needed to complete their assessment of the prisoner, including details of previous offences and performance on offending behaviour programmes. Parole clerks told us that missing reports were more common in respect of prisoners who had transferred from another prison. Clerks also mentioned reports and assessments from the Sex Offenders Treatment Programme as a frequent cause of delay in compiling dossiers. The programme is several months long and its impact on the prisoner is normally assessed a minimum of three months after completing the programme, and this may not coincide with the prisoner's parole timetable.

2.30 In the case of mandatory lifer reviews, reporting officers must complete and submit reports to arrive in the Lifer Review Unit by the first working day of the month in which the review process starts. During our visits to prisons, lifer clerks told us that specialists' reports, particularly those commissioned from psychiatrists and psychologists, can sometimes be up to a month late. The most recent figures show that 64 per cent of reports in mandatory lifer cases are sent to the Unit on time. The Prison Service considers that the streamlined lifer review process currently being trialled (paragraph 2.12) will help to improve performance.

2.31 Our parole surveys confirmed that the greatest difficulties generally arise with reports required from outside the prison, from the police and the courts and the field probation officer.

Reports on the prisoner's offence and previous convictions

2.32 At the start of a prisoner's sentence, the prison should receive copies of any police reports and a list of previous convictions (both usually from the Crown Prosecution Service), reports from the sentencing court and, where relevant, the Court of Appeal. These papers should be placed on the prisoner's file, and prison reception should identify and take action to obtain any outstanding reports.

2.33 Although no routine management information is produced on the extent to which police and court reports are absent from prisoners' files at the start of their parole timetable, it was clear from our examination that they are frequently not available. In response to our survey, 90 per cent of parole clerks said that they sometimes or always had difficulty in obtaining police reports. Professor Hood and Dr Shute's research found that securing missing police reports was the most frequently encountered problem preventing parole clerks from completing parole dossiers on time. Our survey revealed that 51 per cent of parole clerks also had difficulty in obtaining a list of prisoner's previous convictions, and nearly 82 per cent said that they encountered problems in obtaining relevant papers from the sentencing court and, where appropriate, the Court of Appeal. The thematic review of lifers (Appendix 4) found that in the case of life-sentenced prisoners, most of whom need to be prepared for eventual release, there was also a serious problem with the systems for conveying reports on offences to prisons.

2.34 Because most prisons do not track the reports, it is not clear why so many are missing. There are two likely causes: either the documents were removed from the file by staff who needed to read them in connection with the prisoner's sentence plan and not returned, or they were never received by the prison. Where essential reports about a prisoner's offence are missing from the prisoner's case file, prison and seconded probation staff may have had to prepare a sentence plan at the start of the prisoner's sentence without the benefit of important information on the offence. This may seriously inhibit their ability to devise an effective programme to help address the prisoner's offending behaviour. Where the documents were originally available but were later removed and not returned to the file, staff are denied access to information they might need during the prisoner's sentence. In both cases, parole clerks will have to chase reports essential to the consideration of the prisoner's parole application, often long after the start of the prisoner's sentence.

Field probation officer report

2.35 The field probation officer's assessment report provides information which is essential to the Parole Board's assessment of the risk of the prisoner re-offending, and contains a recommendation on whether the prisoner should be released. The officer must ensure that realistic plans are in place to supervise the prisoner if paroled. The report describes these plans, considers whether release should be subject to any additional licence conditions and makes recommendations on these to the Parole Board. The report should be provided to the prison no later than 13 weeks before the prisoner's parole eligibility date.

2.36 Delays providing the field probation officers' reports may lead to additional costs for the Prison Service where the delays result in prisoners granted parole being released after their parole eligibility date. The Prison Service and the Probation Service do not routinely produce information on the extent to which these reports are provided on time, but in response to our survey, 84 per cent of parole clerks said that they sometimes or always had difficulty in obtaining the reports. An example from one of the files we examined is provided at Case 2. As a result of our enquiries, the parole clerk at Usk prison, one of the 10 prisons we visited, reviewed the 44 applications for parole that he had dealt with in the eleven months to April 1999. He found that he had received only six (13 per cent) of the parole assessment reports by their target date. Delays in receiving the remaining reports ranged from one week for just under two-thirds of the reports to up to seven weeks for the rest.

Case 2

The dossier in this case was received by the Parole Board around a week after it was due despite an earlier delay of four weeks for the parole assessment report. The parole clerk's explanation for the delay was as follows:

The small delay to this dossier was because the parole assessment report from the field probation officer was not completed on time. We are unable to send the dossier off without all the reports as the Parole Board would return it as incomplete. When we request the report, the probation officer is given a target date for completion. If we have not received the report by the due date, we contact the officer to find out why. The officer usually gives a date by which they will have completed the report, but they rarely manage it. If after contacting them a few times the report has still not been received, we seek the help of our Probation Department's Senior Probation Officer. The report in this case was eventually received four weeks late.

2.37 To prepare the parole assessment report, the field probation officer needs to visit the prison to interview the prisoner and have available for consideration the results of the prisoner's performance on any programmes, for example on offending behaviour. For life-sentenced prisoners, and for all prisoners convicted

of certain offences, there are clear requirements for the Probation Service to contact the victims of the offences (Figure 13). Depending on the wishes of the victim and the victim's family, the field probation officer may need to maintain ongoing contact with them for their views about the possible release of the prisoner on life licence.

Requirements of the Probation Service to contact victims of crime

Figure 13

In life-sentence cases and other cases involving serious sexual or violent offences, the Probation Service will contact the victim within two months of the sentence being passed to ask if the victim wants to be told about any plans for releasing the prisoner. They will explain to the victim what happens during the sentence and especially how any decision to release the offender will be made.

When release is being considered, the Probation Service makes careful plans and arrangements for supervising offenders. The Probation Service will take the victim's concerns into account when making their plans. The offender may still be released, but conditions may be attached to their release. If the offender behaves in a way which suggests that they may present a risk to public safety, or they break any conditions attached to their release, they may go back to prison.

Source: The Victim's Charter – A Statement of Service Standards for Victims of Crime, 1996

2.38 The field probation officer may also need to consult with other people and organisations before they can finalise their assessment of the prisoner, for example to obtain a place in a hostel approved by the Probation Service where no other suitable accommodation is available; and to ensure that a suitable named clinician is able to treat any parolee with a psychiatric condition after release. Where the prisoner has a history of child abuse, the field probation officer must consult with the relevant local authority Social Services Department. Thus, for field probation officers, each case may involve different levels of input on their part. Nevertheless, all requests for a parole assessment report are referred to them according to the same timetable - 25 weeks before the prisoner's parole eligibility date.

2.39 The Association of Chief Officers of Probation considered that four main factors could delay completion of field probation officers' assessments: the need to wait for the results of the prisoner's performance on programmes to address re-offending if they are not yet available; difficulties in obtaining suitable accommodation for the parolee; the time needed to arrange a psychiatric referral where appropriate; and the availability of funds for any extended travel to visit the prisoner or victims within the required timeframe. Parole clerks suggested that field probation officers most commonly cited other work priorities as the main reason for the delay in providing their assessments.

2.40 Professor Hood and Dr Shute's research questioned 127 field probation officers about producing parole assessments. Half said that they sometimes found it difficult to submit their report to the prison on time, partly because of the

pressures created by other probation work. Nearly one-third felt that the time allowed for the assessments was too short. One-fifth cited the time and expense entailed in travelling to interview prisoners as a factor in delaying some assessments. Discussions with lifer clerks and their managers in the prisons we visited also indicated that work pressures and funds for travelling to prisons outside their home area were sometimes preventing field probation officers from making timely visits to lifers, and therefore delaying reports.

2.41 The Prison Service has discussed the problems in obtaining the field probation officers' reports with the Association of Chief Officers of Probation. As a result, new National Standards for the Probation Service, due to be published in 2000, will confirm that reports should be provided 13 weeks before the parole eligibility date, and the Prison Service has amended the Inmate Information System to enable the standard to be monitored.

Report of the Parole Board member's interview

2.42 All applicants for parole are entitled to an interview with a member of the Parole Board. Board members receive a fee of £80 for each prisoner interview conducted, which takes account of time for preparation, travelling, the interview itself and time to complete the interview report. In 1998-99, interview fees totalled nearly £527,000, around 53 per cent of the fees paid to part-time Board members.

2.43 The main purposes of the interview are to provide the prisoner with an opportunity to explain why they think they should be granted parole and for the Parole Board member to elicit further information to assist the Board in considering the application. The interviewer should send their report of the interview to the parole clerk within two weeks of the interview being carried out. This is to ensure that it can be shown to the prisoner and included in the dossier before this is sent to the Parole Board, 10 weeks before the prisoner's parole eligibility date. Nearly a quarter of parole clerks responding to our survey said that they had difficulties in obtaining the reports in time to meet this deadline.

2.44 Until September 1999, parole clerks were responsible for contacting the Parole Board to request an interview for the prisoner 23 weeks before their parole eligibility date. The Prison Service did not routinely produce management information on the extent to which parole clerks met this target, but a special exercise by the Parole Board to examine requests received in August 1999 showed that more than one in five were late. From September 1999, enhancements to the Inmate Information System enable it automatically to prompt the Parole Board Secretariat at the 23-week stage to arrange an interview, provided that the parole clerk has initiated the review process on the system.

2.45 In the year to August 1999, the proportion of interviews of prisoners by Parole Board members which took place on time ranged from 48 to 76 per cent a month, with an average of 65 per cent. In response to our survey, nearly 30 per cent of parole clerks said that there were difficulties with interviews being arranged on time. The reasons they gave are summarised in Figure 14.

Difficulties in arranging interviews between prisoners and members of the Parole Board

Figure 14

At the prison

- Suitable interview rooms may not be available.
- The prison may be organised to have interviews on certain days of the week only.
- The prison régime may limit the times available for interviews, for example because prisoners have to be back in their cells to take their meals.

Availability of Parole Board members

- There is limited availability of interviewing members in some geographical areas.
- There may be limited availability of interviewing members at a particular time of year.
- Gaps often arise between the departure of one member after the end of their term of appointment and the new member being able to start doing interviews.
- The interviewing member may have to cancel the interview due to illness or an unforeseen commitment.

Source: National Audit Office survey of parole clerks and their managers

2.46 The Parole Board told us that availability of its members in particular parts of the country and at certain times of the year, such as the main holiday season, was the main difficulty in arranging prompt interviews. One of the prisons we visited, the Verne in Portland, Dorset, was waiting for 15 prisoners to be interviewed because of the lack of available interviewing members in the area. The prison was concerned about late interviews delaying the despatch of prisoners' dossiers to the Parole Board, which would reflect badly on the prison's own performance data.

2.47 To help address the lack of available interviewing members in some parts of the country, the advertisements for new independent members of the Parole Board during 1999 specified geographical location of posts, and the applicant's location was used as a criterion when shortlisting for interview. The Prison Service and the Parole Board hope in this way to ensure appropriate coverage in all parts of the country in future. The Prison Service and Parole Board are also reviewing the timing of recruitment and the length of re-appointments, to avoid a seasonal gap between the departure of members whose appointments have ended and new members being ready to conduct interviews.

2.48 Limited availability of suitable interview rooms or time slots for interviews in prisons can also delay the interview. This may result in additional costs to the Prison Service where parolees cannot be released on time as a result of the delay.

2.49 We attended a Parole Board interview to help us understand the process better. Our experience illustrated how the prison régime can inhibit the Parole Board member's wish to have a quiet, uninterrupted meeting with the prisoner to discuss what are inevitably highly personal matters connected with their possible release. At the interview we attended, the discussion was made difficult because of noise from builders working in close proximity to the interview room, and the interview was interrupted before it had finished to advise the Parole Board member that the prisoner would shortly have to leave to have his midday meal.

2.50 According to our survey, nearly a quarter of parole clerks had experienced some difficulties in obtaining the Parole Board member's interview report within a reasonable time of the interview taking place. The Chief Executive of the Parole Board has since reminded members about the need to submit their reports on time and that they should not claim fees for interviews until the reports have been submitted. The Board now checks dossiers which are received late to see if a late interview report has contributed to the delay.

Deportees

2.51 Where a foreign national is found guilty of an offence, the court may recommend that they are deported once they have served their sentence. The Immigration and Nationality Directorate is responsible under the Immigration Act 1971 for deciding whether to act on the court's recommendation and serve the prisoner with notice of deportation. The Directorate may also use its administrative powers under the Act to serve notice of deportation in other cases where the Home Secretary considers deportation to be in the public interest.

2.52 The parole process for deportees has a number of features which distinguish it from that for other prisoners.

- The parole applications are dealt with by the Parole Unit, not the Parole Board, because Section 46 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991 gives the Home Secretary sole power to release prisoners subject to deportation.
- Because the intention is to deport the prisoner on release, the parole decision is not required to consider detailed plans for release into the community.

- The Immigration Service's Enforcement Directorate does, however, have to make timely arrangements for removing the deportee from the country once they are released. Arrangements for removal include: confirming that the deportee has a valid passport or travel document (or making the necessary enquiries with the relevant Embassy or High Commission to obtain one); advising the deportee of any remaining rights of appeal against deportation; booking travel tickets; and informing the deportee of the arrangements which have been made.

2.53 Deportees are not permitted to opt out of the parole process. Their application for parole follows the same 26-week timetable as for other prisoners and, except for a release plan not being required, the parole clerk in the prison concerned compiles the parole dossier in the same way. Once complete, the dossier goes to the Parole Unit for the application to be determined. An administrative officer in the Unit makes the initial recommendation, based on the assessed risk to the public of the applicant re-offending while in the United Kingdom or elsewhere. The officer's team manager, who is normally a Higher Executive Officer, either agrees or rejects the recommendation. Where the decision is taken to refuse the parole application, the Home Secretary's confirmation must be sought. If the application is agreed, the Parole Unit contacts the Immigration and Nationality Directorate to agree a date for the prisoner's release.

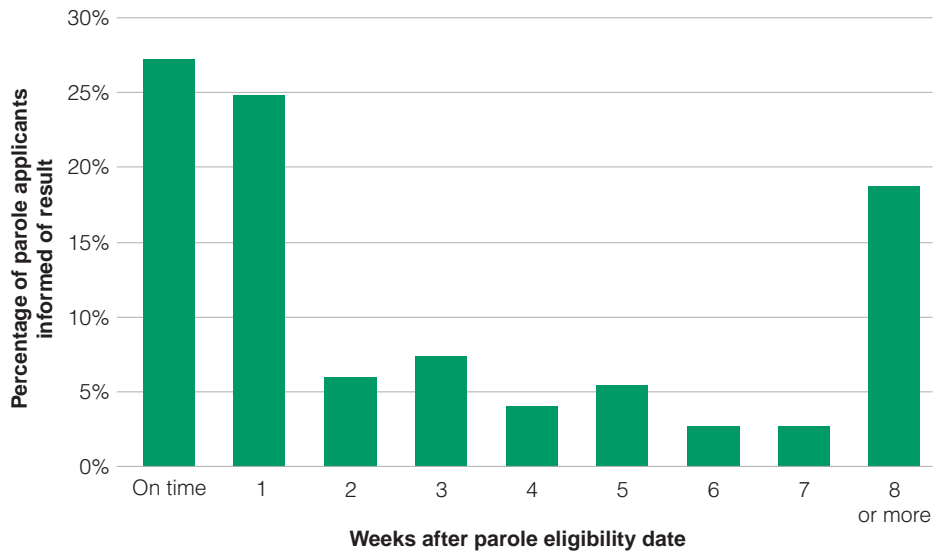
2.54 In 1998-99, 202 deportees applied for parole and 76 per cent (154) were successful, compared with 39 per cent for all applicants (paragraph 1.4). The Parole Unit told us that the higher success rate of deportees partly reflected the fact that the criteria for the early release of deportees are different from those for United Kingdom nationals. The two sets of criteria share a common focus on risks of re-offending, but deportees are not supervised on release and so their cases do not involve consideration of issues such as the likelihood of licence conditions being breached. The types of crimes committed by deportees tend also to fall into a narrow range, and so deportees, as a group, cannot readily be compared with the wider range of offenders subject to domestic parole procedures.

2.55 Figure 15 shows that only 27 per cent (42) of the results of deportees' parole applications were notified on or before their parole eligibility date in 1998-99, compared with 58 per cent of applications overall (paragraph 2.8). The remaining 73 per cent were notified late, and for one in five the extent of the delay was at least eight weeks. The Parole Unit does not have information on how soon after their notification the deportees were removed from the United Kingdom. However, we estimate that delays in relation to deportees may have cost in the region of £0.5 million (Appendix 4, paragraph 18).

Delays notifying decisions to grant parole to deportees

Figure 15

Of 149¹ deportees granted parole in 1998-99, only 27 per cent of the results were notified on target. Almost one in five results were notified at least eight weeks late.



Source: Analysis of Prison Service data, 1998-99

Note: 1. In a further five cases, insufficient information was available for this analysis.

2.56 The Parole Unit explained that these delays had been caused partly by a backlog of work in processing parole applications. This had arisen because of the need to prepare for the additional responsibilities the Unit acquired in early 1999 in connection with the Home Detention Curfew Scheme, under which prisoners released early are monitored by means of electronic tagging.

2.57 The Parole Unit considered that changes in the organisation and working practices of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate during 1998 had also had an impact. Following these changes, communications with the Directorate had become more difficult because of problems identifying who needed to be contacted to arrange release dates for individual deportees. The Parole Unit and the Directorate are working on improvements in their approach to co-ordinating their respective activities in handling the parole of deportees.

2.58 In the first six months of 1999-2000, 38 per cent of deportees were notified of the results of their parole applications on or before their parole eligibility date, a slight improvement on 1998-99. The Prison Service considers that further improvements will result from re-organisation of caseloads in the Parole Unit.

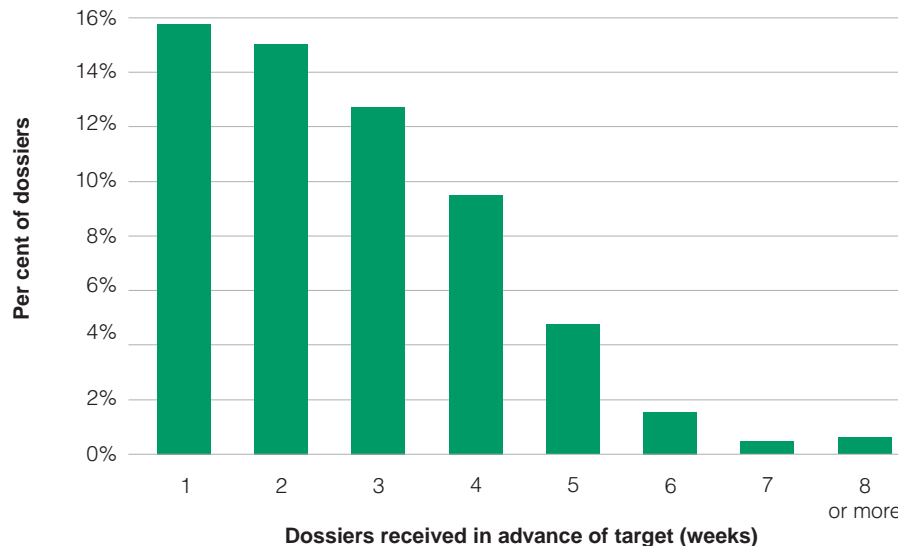
Dossiers received early by the Parole Board

2.59 With the large degree of co-ordination required to ensure that dossiers arrive at the Parole Board on time, it is to be expected that some will arrive early. Our analysis of dossiers reaching the Parole Board between October 1998 and September 1999 showed that 7 per cent of dossiers arrived more than a month before the target date (Figure 16). In these cases, parole assessments will have been made without the benefit of observing the prisoner's progress during part of their sentence. If the parole hearing is held early, there is an increased risk that material matters which occur subsequently will necessitate a re-panel or a delayed release while additional conditions are incorporated into the prisoner's licence. It is therefore important that parole assessments are not undertaken substantially ahead of the normal timetable.

Extent to which dossiers reach the Parole Board in advance of the target

Figure 16

In the 12 months to September 1999, 437 dossiers (7 per cent of all cases) were received more than a month before the due date¹.



Source: Analysis of Prison Service data, October 1998 to September 1999

Note: 1. In 1998, the target date was 11 weeks before the applicant's parole eligibility date. From January 1999 it was 10 weeks.

Recommendations

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- The Prison Service should plan changes to its Inmate Information System to allow monitoring of the release of parolees relative to prisoners' parole eligibility dates and publish the results in its Annual Report, together with an estimate of the cost of releasing prisoners after their parole eligibility dates (paragraphs 2.4 and 2.10).
 - The Prison Service and the Parole Board should include in their Annual Reports the results of prisons' performance against the new indicator that 80 per cent of dossiers should arrive in the Parole Board by the due date (paragraph 2.7).
 - The Prison Service should:
 - monitor the number and reasons for transfers that take place during the parole timetable to ensure that they were fully justified;
 - monitor closely the impact of the new Parole Standard in improving the management of transfers during the parole process and, in the light of good practice, consider standardising procedures across the Prison Service;
 - monitor the performance of prisons in handling the transfer of prisoners during the parole process and consider whether more prescriptive guidance is needed, based on good practice (paragraphs 2.21 to 2.26).
 - The Prison Service should routinely produce reports for managers on the frequency and extent to which individual parole reports are provided late by report writers, enhancing the Inmate Information System as necessary (paragraph 2.27).
 - Prison Service instructions should provide guidance to prison officers and seconded probation officers, and their managers, on the priority to be accorded to writing parole reports (paragraphs 2.28 and 2.29).
 - The Prison and Probation Services, in conjunction with the Parole Board, should review the effectiveness of the current arrangements under which prison officers and probation staff based in the prison provide separate parole assessments (paragraphs 2.28 and 2.29).
 - The Prison Service and the Probation Service should secure the co-operation of the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and the courts to ensure that all reports needed to plan the prisoner's time in prison are available at the start of the sentence (paragraphs 2.32 to 2.34).
 - Prisons should ensure that staff log the receipt of key documents such as police reports and record the date they are received on the prisoner's file. A prison manager should be held responsible for ensuring that the prison always receives such documents and that, once received, a master copy is always retained on the prisoner's file (paragraphs 2.32 to 2.34).
 - The Prison and Probation Services should consider whether there is a case for identifying in advance prisoners whose parole assessment reports are likely to be particularly difficult to complete and commissioning their assessment reports earlier than at present to ensure that they are produced on time (paragraphs 2.35 to 2.41).
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- In planning its resources, the Probation Service should take account of the potential costs to other criminal justice agencies of delays in providing parole assessment reports (paragraphs 2.35 and 2.41).
 - The Prison and Probation Services should identify which factors most often lead to field probation officers being unable to provide their reports on time. Where prisons are providing essential information late, improvements should be pursued through better co-ordination of sentence plans and monitoring of prisoners' progress throughout their sentences. Where other factors are involved, such as approved hostels not being able to hold suitable accommodation open for potential parolees, the Probation Service should consider whether more formal arrangements, such as service level agreements, would be beneficial (paragraphs 2.35 to 2.41).
 - The Prison Service should monitor the enhancements to the Inmate Information System to prompt the Parole Board to request timely interviews with prisoners, to ensure that they are operating satisfactorily (paragraph 2.44).
 - Prisons should review their working practices and accommodation to ensure that adequate facilities and time slots are available for prisoners to be interviewed by members of the Parole Board (paragraphs 2.45, 2.46 and Figure 14).
 - The Parole Board should monitor the success of the steps taken to improve geographical coverage by its members responsible for interviewing parole applicants; avoid gaps between the departure of members whose appointments have ended and new members being ready to conduct interviews; and ensure that members submit their interview reports on time (paragraphs 2.46, 2.47, 2.50 and Figure 14).
 - The Prison Service should:
 - review the work of the Sentence Enforcement Unit (formerly the Parole Unit) to ensure that it can process parole applications of prisoners subject to deportation on time;
 - in conjunction with the Home Office, review communications between the Sentence Enforcement Unit and the Immigration and Nationality Directorate to ensure that paroled foreign nationals are released on their parole eligibility date or as soon as possible thereafter (paragraphs 2.51 to 2.58).
 - The Parole Board should consider what is the earliest reasonable time it should accept dossiers in relation to the prisoner's parole eligibility date, and the Prison Service should ensure that prisons act upon the Parole Board's advice on this matter (paragraph 2.59 and Figure 16).
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Part 3: Supporting the parole process

3.1 The administration of parole in prisons is largely the responsibility of the parole clerk, a relatively junior grade in the Prison Service. This Part of the report concerns the arrangements in prisons for supporting the parole process. It examines:

- the role of sentence planning in preparing a prisoner for release;
- management input to the administration of parole;
- training of parole clerks, their managers and parole report writers, and guidance on parole procedures; and
- information technology support.

3.2 We also make some suggestions about how procedures at the Parole Board might be improved.

Planning for prisoners' release

3.3 Of the 6,078 prisoners who applied for parole in 1998-99, less than four in 10 were successful, broadly the same level as for previous years.

3.4 Our examination of Parole Board decisions indicated that the Board rejects the majority of applications for parole, at least in part, because it does not consider that the prisoner has done enough to address their offending behaviour and prepare themselves for release. This was borne out by Professor Hood and Dr Shute's research (Appendix 4), which found that failure to address offending behaviour was cited in 96 per cent of the cases it examined in which parole was refused. Two examples of the Parole Board's assessments from the cases we examined where parole was refused are reproduced at Cases 3 and 4.

Case 3

Mr A was convicted of a serious offence of violence. He has not yet done offence related work in anger management and cognitive thinking skills as recommended, nor has he addressed his drinking problem. He has not yet accepted full responsibility for the offence and has shown little victim empathy. In these circumstances, the risk of re-offending is high.

Case 4

Mr B sexually abused four stepchildren from two of his marriages. Although he has taken the Sex Offenders Treatment Programme, the results show that he has a lot of work to do if he is to reduce his risk of re-offending to an acceptable level. Relapse prevention work and work on victim awareness is essential.

3.5 Conversely, our examination showed that successful applicants had, among other things, been able to demonstrate that they had addressed their offending behaviour and had taken steps to prepare themselves for release (examples at Cases 5 and 6). This was again borne out by Professor Hood and Dr Shute's research, which showed that in 98 per cent of cases examined where parole was granted, the Board's decision attached considerable weight to the prisoners' efforts in addressing their offending behaviour and to the outcome of the courses that they had attended. The review also showed that prisoners who completed appropriate offending behaviour courses were more than twice as likely to get parole than those who did not.

Case 5

Mr C was convicted of a serious offence of violence. He has completed relevant offence-related work in anger management. He has accepted responsibility for his past violence and has used his time in custody constructively.

Case 6

Mr D has taken responsibility for his offence. He has begun to consider the causes and consequences of his offending, his drug problems and his anger problem, and he has improved his thinking skills, thereby reducing the risk of re-offending. He has recently behaved well and used his time in prison constructively.

3.6 The 1988 Carlisle Report (paragraph 2.5) considered that much more could be done in prisons to prepare prisoners for release, and that the better the preparation the more likely it was that they would be granted parole. The report was particularly impressed with arrangements in Canada where parole was fully integrated into prison régimes for preparing prisoners for release, and recommended that the Prison Service should draw up a sentence plan for each prisoner serving more than four years to help prepare them for release. The Prison Service subsequently introduced sentence planning from 1 October 1992 for all prisoners sentenced to four years or longer on or after that date, and has since extended sentence plans to all prisoners serving 12 months or more.

3.7 The objectives of sentence planning, set out in Figure 17, are directed at two main aims: to make the best use of the prisoner's time while in prison, and to help prepare them for their safe release into the community.

Objectives of sentence planning

Figure 17

The objectives most relevant to parole are highlighted.

■ **To identify factors relevant to**

- rehabilitation of the offender
- protection of the public from harm from the offender
- prevention of further offending
- successful completion of the prisoner's release on licence

■ **To prepare the prisoner for release**

- To develop, improve or increase the offender's employment skills
- To make constructive use of the prisoner's time in custody
- To provide the focus for all work with the prisoner

■ **To inform all assessments and decisions made in relation to the individual, such as release on parole**

■ **To provide the basis of the supervision plan for prisoners released on parole**

3.8 The Prison Service and the Probation Service are jointly responsible for sentence planning, reflecting their common objective of helping offenders to lead law-abiding lives, and the need for the sentence plan to cover both the time in custody and any period of release under supervision. In 1994-95, a joint review of sentence planning by the two Services concluded that it was not working as intended. The process was not proving to be meaningful either for prisoners who were the subject of sentence planning or the prison and probation staff who were operating it. Three of the review's findings were of particular relevance to the contribution of sentence planning to the parole process.

- There was no joint ownership of the plans between prison staff and the supervising probation officers working alongside them in prison (both of whom provide reports on the prisoner's parole application).
- The plans made little reference to risk or how to prevent re-offending.
- There were no clear links between individual sentence plans and the prison régimes available for helping prisoners lead law-abiding lives after release.

3.9 Following this review, a joint Prison Service and Probation Service working group consulted widely across both Services, and revised the arrangements for sentence planning. These focused on an assessment of the risks of prisoner re-offending, substance abuse, control, escape, vulnerability, and self harm, and were introduced in 1997, together with a joint training programme designed to enable managers in both Services to implement them alongside their day to day operational activities. At the same time, the Prison Service's Standards Audit Unit added sentence planning to its audit programme for prisons.

3.10 Cases 5 and 6 on page 41 confirm that prisoners have a better chance of obtaining parole if they can demonstrate to the Parole Board that they have met their sentence plan objectives to address their offending behaviour. It is important therefore that sentence plans are closely integrated with preparations for prisoners' release, including parole. We examined a selection of sentence plans for prisoners serving four years or more to assess whether there were clear links to parole criteria. We found little evidence of the requirements of parole being clearly spelt out in the plans or what prisoners needed to achieve to have a reasonable expectation of obtaining parole. Acklington prison had recently introduced a six-week induction and assessment programme for all new prisoners. The programme is intended to provide an opportunity for a range of staff including prison officers, medical and educational staff and probation officers to assess the prisoner's needs, abilities and suitability for different prison activities. The prison staff believe that this is resulting in an improvement in the quality of sentence plans and the encouragement of prisoners to work towards their release, whether on parole or otherwise.

3.11 Generally, our findings mirrored those of the Shepherd Report on parole (Appendix 4), which concluded that parole and sentence planning were still not sufficiently closely integrated, and that greater integration would help to ensure

the timely production of the reports on prisoners that are needed for the consideration of parole. Parole clerks also told us that they felt isolated from other relevant departments in their prison, including Sentence Planning.

3.12 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation told us that there were advantages in parole becoming more integrated with sentence planning, but considered that effective sentence planning still had to establish itself in some prisons. The work of the Prison Service's Standards Audit Unit (paragraph 3.9) has confirmed the need for improvements. Between April 1999 and September 1999, the Unit visited 34 prisons and assessed performance on sentence planning as deficient or unacceptable in 12 (35 per cent) because, for example, sentence plans had not been prepared in consultation with the prisoner, completed within the required time limits, or periodically reviewed with the prisoner. Some prisons fell short of producing sentence plans which addressed the prisoner's offending behaviour and provided for the constructive use of the prisoner's time while in custody.

3.13 In early 1998, the Prison Service's Lifer Management Unit (Figure 1) reviewed the sentence planning arrangements for lifers by examining 210 plans in 13 different prisons. The Unit judged only 39 per cent of plans to be satisfactory or better. A particular problem was the failure to identify clearly what the prisoner needed to do to reduce their risk of re-offending. The review of lifers by Her Majesty's Inspectorates of Prisons and Probation (Appendix 4) found similar problems. It also noted difficulties with shortage of places or unavailability of re-offending programmes in the prison in which prisoners were based, so that the targets in some lifers' plans were unachievable. Usk, one of the 10 prisons we visited, was finding it difficult to meet demand from determinate sentence prisoners for places on the Sex Offenders Treatment Programme. This meant that some prisoners would not be able to demonstrate to the Parole Board that they had tried to address their offending behaviour by attending the relevant programme.

3.14 Professor Hood and Dr Shute's research found that prisoners were generally ignorant about the way parole operated, including the factors taken into account by the Parole Board in assessing prisoners' suitability for parole. Prisoners need to be given a clear idea of the criteria against which their applications for parole will be assessed and the kinds of issues and information which will be taken into account. Given the weight the Parole Board attaches to prisoner rehabilitation, this information needs to be supplemented by periodic reports to prisoners of performance against their sentence plans.

3.15 Prisoners may opt out of applying for parole and in 1998-99 around one in nine did so. Whilst it is for the prisoner to decide whether to opt out or not, none of the prisons we visited gave prisoners an assessment of their performance against

the targets in their sentence plan that would have enabled them to make an informed decision about their parole application. The absence of such information, and their lack of knowledge of the parole criteria, means that some prisoners may have an unrealistic expectation of the outcome of their parole application and account, in part, for why less than 40 per cent of all applications are successful.

3.16 The Prison Reform Trust and the Prison Service jointly published a Prisoner's Information Book in 1996, which contains some information on parole, but little about how the parole decision itself is taken. They are now working on producing a joint booklet on parole which is expected to be available by summer 2000.

3.17 "Throughcare" is the term used for seeing offenders through custody and the completion of supervision in the community. In 1993, the Prison Service and the Probation Service jointly published a national framework for throughcare, which included sentence planning, and the Prison Service published further instructions on throughcare and the responsibilities of the Prison and Probation Services in 1998. Together with the Probation Service, the Prison Service is also developing a Prison-Probation joint offender assessment system, due to be introduced from 2001, which is expected to promote greater integration of sentence planning and parole. The system is intended to provide a single assessment of prisoner risk and need throughout their "criminal life cycle" from initial contact with the Probation Service; pre-sentence through to custody; sentence planning; assessment for release, including on parole; and during supervision on licence.

Managing the administration of parole

3.18 The Prison Service's Standards Audit Unit first began to audit parole procedures in prisons from August 1998. Up to 31 March 1999, the Unit had examined parole in 31 prisons against agreed standards for the timeliness and despatch of parole dossiers; the completeness of dossiers sent to the Parole Board; the use of the Inmate Information System; and whether there is a senior nominated officer with responsibility for the parole process at the prison. In nearly three-quarters of the prisons, the Unit assessed performance against the standards as acceptable overall. In the remainder, the Unit assessed performance as deficient or unacceptable. There is currently no review of the Unit's work to identify examples of good practice in prisons which might be operated more widely, but there are plans to undertake reviews in future.

3.19 Until recently, parole managers and prison Governors received no routine information on parole performance to enable them to focus their management attention on parole effectively. The Parole Unit now supplies the monthly reports described in paragraph 2.3, which focus on prison performance in getting complete dossiers to the Parole Board by the due date. As we explained in paragraph 2.3, there are benefits from summarising data on the level and frequency of the different causes of delay to provide information to enable the Parole Unit and individual prisons readily to compare performance and assess globally the problems with particular parole reports. Since our examination, the Prison Service has made progress by requesting a change to the Inmate Information System which will enable it to determine whether field probation officers' reports are being received on time (paragraph 2.41).

3.20 Parole clerks are a relatively junior grade, and in some matters which can cause delays in the parole process, such as the transfer of prisoners and late reports, management support is especially important. In 1998, the Prison Service held a series of conferences for parole clerks and their managers to discuss how the parole process might be improved. Parole clerks highlighted the lack of management support for parole and its relatively low priority in prisons as particular issues preventing improvements. Our survey showed that 90 per cent of parole managers spend less than 10 per cent of their time on parole-related work. Some of the parole clerks we spoke to felt that they needed more effective management support in chasing late reports from report writers, both in and outside the prison. Our survey indicated that where written reminders were sent requesting outstanding reports, 86 per cent were sent out by parole clerks and only 11 per cent by either their managers or by prison Governors.

3.21 It is a particular responsibility of parole managers to ensure that prisoners' dossiers are sent to the Parole Board complete. However, the Board reported that in 1997-98 it spent so much time acquiring missing documents that it felt unable to measure performance against its own targets for progressing cases. In the 31 prisons examined by the Standards Audit Unit (paragraph 3.18), the auditors found that 15 (48 per cent) did not meet the standard for providing the Parole Board with complete dossiers 10 weeks before prisoners' parole eligibility date.

3.22 While the percentage of dossiers arriving at the Parole Board on time remained at between 50 and 60 per cent in the eight months to June 1999, there was a significant reduction during the same period in the proportion of dossiers which were incomplete, from around one quarter to 4 per cent of all dossiers received. This improvement followed the Parole Board's decision to return all incomplete dossiers to prisons, holding them responsible for obtaining the missing documentation. From April 2000, prisons are to be monitored against a new

national target that incomplete dossiers returned by the Parole Board should amount to no more than 5 per cent of all dossiers. The Prison Service will begin producing routine information on the extent to which dossiers are submitted incomplete for the first time in November 1999 to enable performance against this target to be measured.

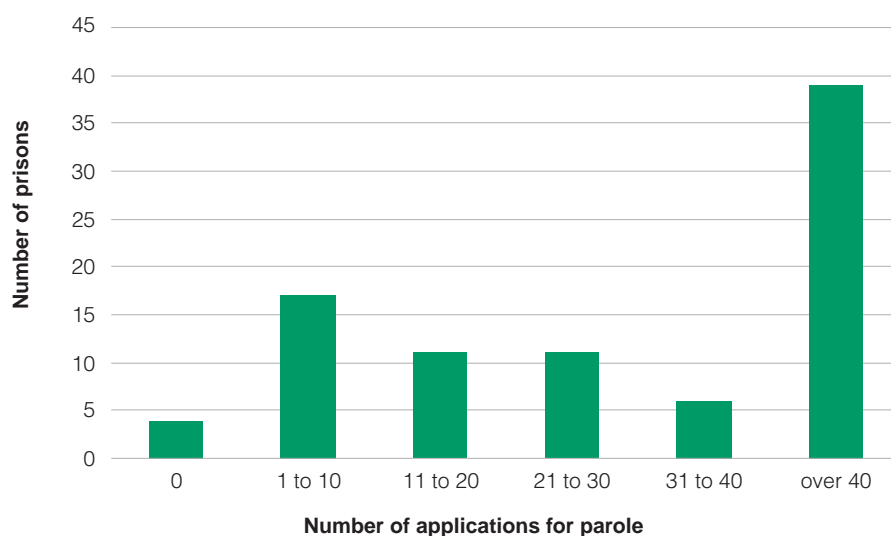
3.23 Following the parole conferences in 1998, the Prison Service required each prison to have a manager accountable to the prison Governor for the operation of parole in the prison. Our survey indicated that there had since been some improvements in parole management, in that managers have generally been appointed at an appropriate level and are easily accessible to parole clerks. However, managers' ability to provide practical advice and support depends on their own knowledge of parole. More than half of the clerks responding to our survey considered that their manager's knowledge of parole was either basic or poor.

3.24 We found that parole clerk's caseloads varied widely (Figure 18), and that consequently over 90 per cent combine their responsibility for parole with other duties. Our survey indicated that around a third of parole clerks spend less than 25 per cent of their time on parole, with other responsibilities typically including the administration of disciplinary action against prisoners.

Parole workload by prison during 1998

Figure 18

The amount of parole work varies widely between prisons. Some of those with over 40 applications included prisons with many more, the highest being a prison which dealt with 280 applications during 1998.



Source: National Audit Office survey of parole clerks

3.25 Our findings from visits to prisons suggested that allocation of parole responsibilities does not always receive sufficient management attention. Managers were not generally assessing the parole workload to ensure that it was reasonable, particularly alongside any other duties of the parole clerk. The results of our survey suggested that this position is common across the Prison Service. Typical comments included:

“Managers should make sure that enough staff time is allocated to parole duties. Workload has increased and managers should be aware of it.”

“The main barrier to effective processing of parole applications is the amount of other duties which also have to be kept up to date.”

“Personally I find that I cannot give parole cases my full concentration with so many other duties to perform.”

3.26 At Sudbury prison, we found that the parole clerk had taken the initiative to draw to her managers’ attention inconsistencies between her workload and that of other parole clerks in prisons in the same Area. She had had responsibilities for activities other than parole despite Sudbury dealing with the highest number of parole applications in the Mersey and Manchester Area. Following discussions with managers, her non-parole duties were redistributed so that she could work full-time on parole.

3.27 We concluded from the analysis of our survey results, and discussions with staff at the prisons we visited, that parole clerks with a small parole caseload find it more difficult to process applications efficiently and effectively than those with a larger caseload, who are able to concentrate wholly or mainly on parole applications. In prisons with fewer applications, there was less likely to be a proper system in place for obtaining the necessary reports on the prisoner and for ensuring that the parole dossier is complete. Staff dealing with very small numbers of applications might effectively need to re-learn the parole process each time they deal with a case. We found that a helpful informal network operated between parole clerks, so that those with less experience of dealing with applications might contact a clerk with greater experience for advice.

3.28 Some of the parole clerks we spoke to said that their ability to cope with their parole caseload was reduced by the lack of effective cover when they were absent from work. Our survey indicated that nearly a third of parole clerks did not have a specified person to take over their parole work when they were absent.

Training and guidance

Training of parole managers

3.29 Our survey showed that less than 40 per cent of parole managers have received any training in parole matters or have previous experience of parole. About one third had had training in the use of the Inmate Information System, which supports the administration of parole. The Parole Unit told us that it had invited parole managers and parole clerks to visit the Unit and the Parole Board in London to learn more about their part in the process and to discuss how to improve the administration of parole. However, very few had felt able to take up the offer because of pressure of work.

Training of parole clerks

3.30 Problems with availability and access to parole training has meant that around two-thirds of parole clerks are undertaking their responsibilities without the benefit of formal training. Of the 80 clerks responding to our survey who had not attended the Prison Service Training College's two-day parole administration course, 16 said that they had not had time to attend; 19 wanted to attend but there was no course available around the time they took up their responsibilities; and 13 were booked to attend a course that was later cancelled. Between June 1998 and February 1999, six courses were scheduled to run, but four were cancelled, in three cases just days before the course. All of the cancellations related to problems with trainer availability or the course itself, resulting in a five-month gap between courses up to April 1999.

3.31 Since April 1999, provision has been more consistent, with four courses completed and none cancelled. A member of staff in the Parole Unit has also visited parole clerks who were unable to attend training to give them one-to-one instruction.

3.32 Most of the clerks who attended the course said that they had found it useful. Our survey suggested a number of ways in which it might be improved. In particular, parole clerks felt that there should be more instruction on the use of the Inmate Information System for parole. Since April 1999, the Prison Service has run an updated course at intervals of one or two months, which integrates the administration and computer system aspects of the original course. The change is designed to help the clerks understand how they can best use the Inmate

Information System to support their work. The Prison Service intends to develop training by distance learning for those staff who find it difficult to spend two days at the Prison Service Training College for either work or domestic reasons.

Training of report writers

Prison officers

3.33 Prison officers complete the prison parole assessment report, which provides the officer's assessment of:

- the prisoner's behaviour while in custody;
- whether the prisoner has used their time constructively;
- whether the prisoner accepts responsibility for their offending behaviour; and
- the likelihood of their re-offending.

Since the prison officer will generally know the prisoner better than other colleagues who are providing assessments, it is important that the full value of the prison officer's potential contribution is secured.

3.34 All prison officers receive training in report writing as part of their induction training. However, we found that prison officers were not generally trained in writing reports for the Parole Board or in making the kinds of personal assessments expected of them. This was confirmed by the results of Professor Hood and Dr Shute's research, which found that only 15 per cent of prison officers sampled had received relevant training in report writing. Two-thirds said that they would welcome some training.

3.35 We examined a sample of prison parole assessment reports. Our examination suggested that reports need to be much more sharply focused on the issues being assessed if they are to be of maximum use to the Parole Board in helping them to judge the prisoner's most likely conduct once released. For example, many of the observations by prison officers are not sufficiently specific to be of assistance – examples at Figure 19.

Figure 19**Some observations by prison officers drawn from prison parole assessment reports**

Has the prisoner attempted to use their time in prison constructively?	Does the prisoner accept responsibility for the offence?	What is the prisoner's attitude towards the victim of their offence?	What is the likelihood of the prisoner avoiding re-offending before the sentence fully expires?
"Has been an active volley ball player since his arrival in the prison."	"He says he does."	"I don't think he thinks there is a victim involved."	"Mr X does not want further imprisonment and I believe he will make a determined effort to achieve this."
"The prisoner has used his time by doing all the things that have been asked of him, and also doing everything that has been open to him."	"Yes, he always has."	"Says he feels sorry for them."	"He tells me he is determined not to waste any more of his time serving a prison sentence."
"Yes, to his full advantage."	"See separate Probation Officer's report."	"See separate Probation Officer's report."	"See separate Probation Officer's report."

Seconded probation officers

3.36 The report of the seconded probation officer based at the prison aims to assess the prospects of successful rehabilitation if early release is granted. It includes information on the prisoner's offending behaviour, their attitude to the offence, their prison history and makes a recommendation for or against release on parole. Professor Hood and Dr Shute's research found that only one in 10 seconded probation officers sampled had received training specifically in writing reports for parole reviews.

Field probation officers

3.37 The field probation officer's report provides an assessment of the risk of re-offending and a recommendation for or against release. A more detailed explanation of the role of the field probation officer is provided at paragraphs 1.19 and 2.35 to 2.37. Professor Hood and Dr Shute's research found that just a quarter of field probation officers sampled had received specific training relating to parole. Around half of officers said that they needed training, in particular to gain a better understanding of the requirements of the Parole Board.

Training of staff engaged in lifer reviews

3.38 The Prison Service provides a four-day course to all staff working with lifers in prisons. The joint thematic review of lifers (Appendix 4) found that, as with parole, not all staff had attended the training.

Guidance and procedures for parole clerks

3.39 In June 1998, the Prison Service decided to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of parole procedures by ensuring that parole clerks and their managers had job descriptions setting out their roles and responsibilities for parole. The joint thematic review of lifers also found that job descriptions were needed for staff working on lifer reviews. Our survey showed that job descriptions for parole were partly in place – three-quarters of parole clerks and just over half of parole managers had job descriptions.

3.40 Prior to May 1998, the Prison Service's parole instructions existed piecemeal in separate documents. In May 1998, the Prison Service brought these together into a parole manual (Prison Service Order 6000). Our survey indicated that a majority of parole clerks (63 per cent) felt that the manual was an improvement on what existed previously. Almost all (97 per cent) felt that it was useful or of some use. There were three particular areas where they felt the manual could be improved. Staff wanted:

- more detailed guidance on the practical use of the Inmate Information System;
- guidance to prison officers in explaining the parole procedures to prisoners; and
- advice on prisoners' second and subsequent parole reviews.

3.41 The Inmate Information System has its own manual but it is cumbersome and the Prison Service's contractor, SEMA, is currently re-writing it. The Prison Service might usefully invite parole clerks' views through the quarterly parole newsletter to inform the revision of the manual and ways in which the parole manual might also be improved.

3.42 The Shepherd Report recommended that prison Governors issue a local order, or its equivalent, to explain how parole procedures contained in the manual would be put into practice in their prison. The Prison Service decided not to implement this recommendation, although our survey found that around one-third of parole clerks had been issued with local guidance to supplement that in the manual.

3.43 In 1998, the Prison Service introduced a parole newsletter to promote communication between all those involved in the administration of parole, and to provide a vehicle for sharing good practice. Over 90 per cent of parole clerks responding to our survey considered that the newsletter was an effective means of providing useful information.

Information technology support

3.44 As explained in paragraph 2.2, when the Inmate Information System was adapted to support parole in April 1996, many parole clerks found it difficult to operate and this, combined with a lack of appropriate training, meant that it was not used or not used properly by some staff. As a result, reliable information to monitor prison performance against the parole timetable could not be produced. The results of our survey indicated that parole clerks who handle a relatively small number of parole applications each year (50 or less) are less likely to make full use of the system than those with a larger caseload.

3.45 The system has since been improved to make it easier to use. However, our survey indicated that use of the system by parole clerks is not yet comprehensive:

- 59 per cent said that they made full use of the system;
- 30 per cent said that they made some use of it; and
- 5 per cent said that they did not use the system at all.

Our survey also showed that 36 per cent of staff found the system not at all user friendly. The Prison Service invited all parole clerks to attend training on the system in April and May 1998. Our survey indicated that three-quarters of parole clerks had taken up this offer, the large majority finding the training very useful or of some use.

3.46 Since our survey, the Prison Service has been working with their contractor, SEMA, to improve the Inmate Information System and make it easier to use with a large number of changes made in September 1999. However, the system does not enable direct electronic communication between prisons and the Parole Board, and all communications therefore have to be by telephone or on paper.

3.47 Creation of an electronic dossier would be beyond the capacity of the current system. However, an electronic parole dossier will be feasible in future as part of the Prison Service's and wider criminal justice plans for electronic records

for offenders. By sending complete dossiers to the Parole Board electronically, prisons would save up to a week from the parole timetable and would have instant acknowledgement of the dossier's receipt. Electronic prisoner records would have further benefit in terms of availability of complete information to appropriate staff for the purpose of sentence planning, sentence monitoring and parole reviews.

Consideration of parole applications by the Parole Board

3.48 Once a determinate sentence prisoner's parole dossier has been properly completed and sent to the Parole Board, the case for release is considered by a panel of three members of the Board. Panels meet most days of the week. About three weeks before meetings, the Board's secretariat sends the prisoners' dossiers direct to the panel members. The panel members read them in detail beforehand and draft a decision, with reasons, for those cases on which they have been assigned to take the lead.

3.49 Each panel meeting aims to decide 24 cases, involving an estimated preparation time of 16 hours for each member and three to four hours for the meeting itself. We noted that for lifer cases, the Lifer Review Unit summarises the content of dossiers to assist the members of lifer panels in considering lifer cases. There is no similar summary provided for parole cases, though such a summary might be a helpful reference for parole panel members in view of the large numbers of reports and documents (20 or more) that they have to read, and the potential for overlaps, for example between the assessments provided by the prison officer and the two probation officers. However, the Parole Board considers, and we agree, that summarising the much larger number of determinate sentence cases would be resource intensive, and that a review of the effectiveness of the separate prison and probation parole assessments, as suggested at the end of Part 2 of this report, could be more beneficial.

3.50 The time needed at the meeting to decide individual cases varies widely. Those cases where the decision to accept or reject the application is clear may require only a short discussion. However, difficult cases, on which opinion may be divided, can take much longer. At the Parole Board panels we attended, most cases were decided unanimously by the three members. Professor Hood and Dr Shute's research examined a sample of decisions and found that in eight out of 10 cases the decision was reached without any dissent being expressed.

3.51 For each case, one of the panel members takes the lead, starting off the discussion with their summary of the case, their views about releasing the prisoner and their rationale, and the conditions of any parole licence. This means that every

case took up part of the meeting, even where all three members have independently taken the same view of the case in preparing for the meeting. Some discussion on all cases is necessary to ensure that there are sound reasons for the decision and the license conditions. However, given the need for panel members to review dossiers comprehensively and make an assessment before the meeting, it should be possible to reduce the time taken up at the meeting for cases where there is a consensus on release, by identifying and deciding these cases before more detailed discussion on the remaining cases begins.

3.52 All the Parole Board's panels take place in London. Most panel members have professional responsibilities, for example in criminal law, the Probation Service or psychiatry. Travelling regularly to panels inevitably causes some disruption to their professional and private lives, and may not make best use of their time. The Carlisle Committee (paragraph 2.5) made no recommendation on whether the Parole Board should have a regional presence although some members of the Committee were in favour of this.

3.53 With appropriate use of technology, it should be possible for the Parole Board in London to arrange and service panels convened at locations outside London, for example in facilities provided by another Government Department, where it is more convenient and cost effective to do so. Use of other technology, such as video conferencing, might enable some meetings to be dispensed with altogether. The Board intends to examine with the Prison Service the feasibility of regional panels, as part of its response to Professor Hood and Dr Shute's research. The review will also examine use of new technology, without which the Board considers that regional panels would not be cost effective.

Recommendations

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- The Prison Service should ensure that all prisons properly integrate sentence planning with preparations for prisoners' release, including parole. Plans should clearly show what the prisoner is expected to achieve during custody and reflect the resources available in the prison to support this (paragraphs 3.3 to 3.13).
 - Prisoners who are eligible to apply for parole should be given a written assessment of their performance against the targets in their sentence plans so that they can make informed decisions about their parole application (paragraphs 3.14 and 3.15).
 - Where parole clerks experience difficulty in obtaining outstanding reports, parole managers should lend their support to ensuring that report writers improve their performance (paragraph 3.20).
 - The Prison Service should require prison Governors to explain any unsatisfactory performance against the target that no more than five per cent of dossiers should be returned to prisons as incomplete (paragraph 3.22).
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- Prison Governors should ensure that parole managers play a full part in ensuring that parole arrangements are efficiently and effectively operated in their prison (paragraph 3.23).
 - The Prison Service should hold prison Governors and managers accountable for their prisons' performance against the parole timetable, including the costs of parolees not being released on time (paragraphs 3.18 to 3.23).
 - The Prison Service should consider possible options for improving the allocation of parole workload in prisons and raising the level of expertise on parole among parole clerks and their managers. Options might include, for example, piloting arrangements under which prisons with a relatively high parole workload would take on parole work from prisons in their area with a small parole workload (paragraphs 3.24 to 3.27).
 - Prison Governors should ensure that the parole clerk has a named person to take responsibility for parole during the clerk's absence (paragraph 3.28).
 - The Prison Service should supplement the formal training of parole clerks and their managers with a planned programme of visits to the Parole Board Secretariat and the Sentence Enforcement Unit (formerly the Parole Unit) to learn about the Secretariat's and the Unit's roles and responsibilities; and occasional attendance at meetings of Parole Board panels (paragraph 3.29).
 - In implementing the Prison-Probation joint offender assessment system, the Prison and Probation Services should work jointly to ensure that the full value of prison officers' potential contribution to parole assessments is secured (paragraphs 3.33 to 3.35).
 - In collaboration with the Probation Service, the Prison Service should undertake a training needs analysis for parole report writers and agree a planned programme of training (paragraphs 3.34 to 3.37).
 - The Prison Service should continue its efforts to ensure that all parole clerks and their managers have job descriptions and set a deadline for this to be achieved (paragraph 3.39).
 - The Prison Service should review the impact of the latest changes to the Inmate Information System, including the extent to which training has enabled parole clerks to make full and effective use of the system (paragraphs 3.44 and 3.45).
 - The Prison Service and Parole Board should explore further the scope for using technology to support parole, including use of video conferencing for meetings of Parole Board panels and the electronic transmission of dossiers from prisons to the Parole Board (paragraphs 3.46 and 3.47).
 - The Parole Board should consider whether any useful changes could be made to the organisation of parole panels given that members will have already arrived at the same view about most cases in preparing for the panel (paragraphs 3.48 to 3.51).
 - The Parole Board should review the arrangements for panel meetings and give consideration to holding them outside London where this would be more cost effective (paragraphs 3.51 to 3.53).
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Figure 20: Preparation and consideration of a parole application for a determinate sentence prisoner

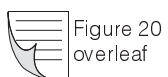
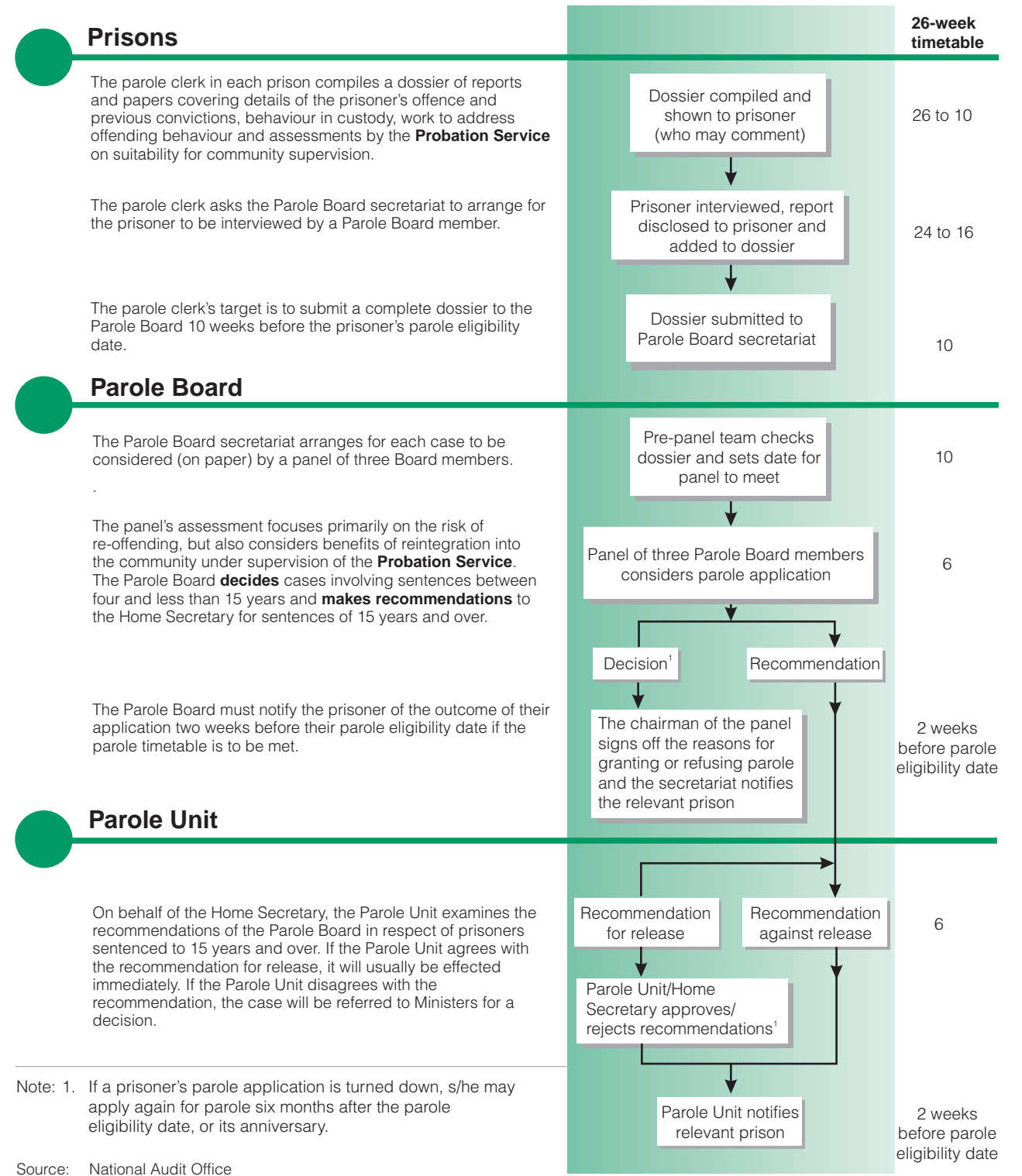


Figure 20
overleaf

Figure 20 Preparation and consideration of a parole application for a determinate sentence prisoner

Showing the key stages in the 26-week process ahead of a prisoner's parole eligibility date.



Note: 1. If a prisoner's parole application is turned down, s/he may apply again for parole six months after the parole eligibility date, or its anniversary.

Parole

Figure 21: Preparation and consideration of a review for a mandatory life-sentenced prisoner

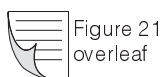
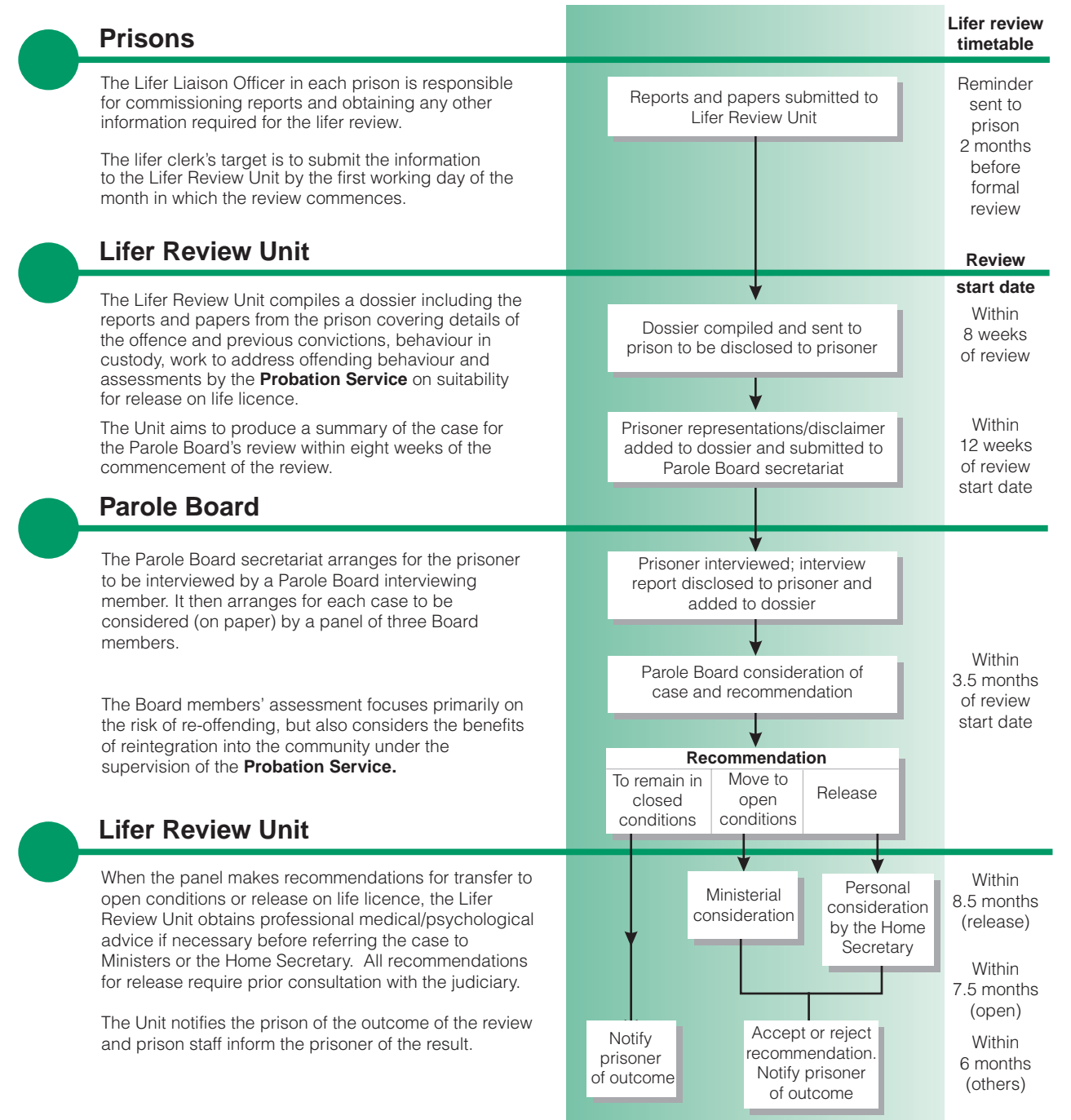


Figure 21 Preparation and consideration of a review for a mandatory life sentence prisoner ¹

Showing the key stages in the review process three years ahead of a prisoner's tariff.



Note: 1. Cases involving discretionary lifers (convicted of crimes other than murder) prisoners detained at Her Majesty's Pleasure (convicted of murder committed when under the age of 18) are considered on tariff expiry and subsequently at an oral hearing by a panel consisting of three Board members. The Panel can direct release on life licence or make recommendations to the Home Secretary for managing the prisoner within the prison system, for example further preparation for release in an open prison.

Source: National Audit Office

Appendix 1

Recommendations

1 The Prison Service should plan changes to its Inmate Information System to allow monitoring of the release of parolees relative to prisoners' parole eligibility dates and publish the results in its Annual Report, together with an estimate of the cost of releasing prisoners after their parole eligibility dates (paragraphs 2.4 and 2.10).

2 The Prison Service and the Parole Board should include in their Annual Reports the results of prisons' performance against the new indicator that 80 per cent of dossiers should arrive in the Parole Board by the due date (paragraph 2.7).

3 The Prison Service should:

- monitor the number and reasons for transfers that take place during the parole timetable to ensure that they were fully justified;
- monitor closely the impact of the new Parole Standard in improving the management of transfers during the parole process and, in the light of good practice, consider standardising procedures across the Prison Service;
- monitor the performance of prisons in handling the transfer of prisoners during the parole process and consider whether more prescriptive guidance is needed, based on good practice (paragraphs 2.21 to 2.26).

4 The Prison Service should routinely produce reports for managers on the frequency and extent to which individual parole reports are provided late by report writers, enhancing the Inmate Information System as necessary (paragraph 2.27).

5 Prison Service instructions should provide guidance to prison officers and seconded probation officers, and their managers, on the priority to be accorded to writing parole reports (paragraphs 2.28 and 2.29).

6 The Prison and Probation Services, in conjunction with the Parole Board, should review the effectiveness of the current arrangements under which prison officers and probation staff based in the prison provide separate parole assessments (paragraphs 2.28 and 2.29).

7 Prisons should ensure that staff log the receipt of key documents such as police reports and record the date they are received on the prisoner's file. A prison manager should be held responsible for ensuring that the prison always receives such documents and that, once received, a master copy is always retained on the prisoner's file (paragraphs 2.32 to 2.34).

8 The Prison Service and the Probation Service should secure the co-operation of the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and the courts to ensure that all reports needed to plan the prisoner's time in prison are available at the start of the sentence (paragraphs 2.32 to 2.34).

9 The Prison and Probation Services should consider whether there is a case for identifying in advance prisoners whose parole assessment reports are likely to be particularly difficult to complete and commissioning their assessment reports earlier than at present to ensure that they are produced on time (paragraphs 2.35 to 2.41).

10 In planning its resources, the Probation Service should take account of the potential costs to other criminal justice agencies of delays in providing parole assessment reports (paragraphs 2.35 and 2.41).

11 The Prison and Probation Services should identify which factors most often lead to field probation officers being unable to provide their reports on time. Where prisons are providing essential information late, improvements should be pursued through better co-ordination of sentence plans and monitoring of prisoners' progress throughout their sentences. Where other factors are involved, such as approved hostels not being able to hold suitable accommodation open for potential parolees, the Probation Service should consider whether more formal arrangements, such as service level agreements, would be beneficial (paragraphs 2.35 to 2.41).

12 The Prison Service should monitor the enhancements to the Inmate Information System to prompt the Parole Board to request timely interviews with prisoners, to ensure that they are operating satisfactorily (paragraph 2.44).

13 Prisons should review their working practices and accommodation to ensure that adequate facilities and time slots are available for prisoners to be interviewed by members of the Parole Board (paragraphs 2.45, 2.46 and Figure 14).

14 The Parole Board should monitor the success of the steps taken to improve geographical coverage by its members responsible for interviewing parole applicants; avoid gaps between the departure of members whose appointments have ended and new members being ready to conduct interviews; and ensure that members submit their interview reports on time (paragraphs 2.46, 2.47, 2.50 and Figure 14).

15 The Prison Service should:

- review the work of the Sentence Enforcement Unit (formerly the Parole Unit) to ensure that it can process parole applications of prisoners subject to deportation on time;
- in conjunction with the Home Office, review communications between the Sentence Enforcement Unit and the Immigration and Nationality Directorate to ensure that paroled foreign nationals are released on their parole eligibility date or as soon as possible thereafter (paragraphs 2.51 to 2.58).

16 The Parole Board should consider what is the earliest reasonable time it should accept dossiers in relation to the prisoner's parole eligibility date, and the Prison Service should ensure that prisons act upon the Parole Board's advice on this matter (paragraph 2.59 and Figure 16).

17 The Prison Service should ensure that all prisons properly integrate sentence planning with preparations for prisoners' release, including parole. Plans should clearly show what the prisoner is expected to achieve during custody and reflect the resources available in the prison to support this (paragraphs 3.3 to 3.13).

18 Prisoners who are eligible to apply for parole should be given a written assessment of their performance against the targets in their sentence plans so that they can make informed decisions about their parole application (paragraphs 3.14 and 3.15).

19 Where parole clerks experience difficulty in obtaining outstanding reports, parole managers should lend their support to ensuring that report writers improve their performance (paragraph 3.20).

20 The Prison Service should require prison Governors to explain any unsatisfactory performance against the target that no more than 5 per cent of dossiers should be returned to prisons as incomplete (paragraph 3.22).

21 Prison Governors should ensure that parole managers play a full part in ensuring that parole arrangements are efficiently and effectively operated in their prison (paragraph 3.23).

22 The Prison Service should hold prison Governors and managers accountable for their prisons' performance against the parole timetable, including the costs of parolees not being released on time (paragraphs 3.18 to 3.23).

23 The Prison Service should consider possible options for improving the allocation of parole workload in prisons and raising the level of expertise on parole among parole clerks and their managers. Options might include, for example, piloting arrangements under which prisons with a relatively high parole workload would take on parole work from prisons in their area with a small parole workload (paragraphs 3.24 to 3.27).

24 Prison Governors should ensure that the parole clerk has a named person to take responsibility for parole during the clerk's absence (paragraph 3.28).

25 The Prison Service should supplement the formal training of parole clerks and their managers with a planned programme of visits to the Parole Board Secretariat and the Sentence Enforcement Unit to learn about the Secretariat's and the Unit's roles and responsibilities; and occasional attendance at meetings of Parole Board panels (paragraph 3.29).

26 In implementing the Prison-Probation joint offender assessment system, the Prison and Probation Services should work jointly to ensure that the full value of prison officers' potential contribution to parole assessments is secured (paragraphs 3.33 to 3.35).

27 In collaboration with the Probation Service, the Prison Service should undertake a training needs analysis for parole report writers and agree a planned programme of training (paragraphs 3.34 to 3.37).

28 The Prison Service should continue its efforts to ensure that all parole clerks and their managers have job descriptions and set a deadline for this to be achieved (paragraph 3.39).

29 The Prison Service should review the impact of the latest changes to the Inmate Information System, including the extent to which training has enabled parole clerks to make full and effective use of the system (paragraphs 3.44 and 3.45).

30 The Prison Service and Parole Board should explore further the scope for using technology to support parole, including use of video conferencing for meetings of Parole Board panels and the electronic transmission of dossiers from prisons to the Parole Board (paragraphs 3.46 and 3.47).

31 The Parole Board should consider whether any useful changes could be made to the organisation of parole panels given that members will have already arrived at the same view about most cases in preparing for the panel (paragraphs 3.48 to 3.51).

32 The Parole Board should review the arrangements for panel meetings and give consideration to holding them outside London where this would be more cost effective (paragraphs 3.51 to 3.53).

Appendix 2

Contents of a prisoner's parole dossier

The prisoner's parole dossier will contain at least 14, and possibly 20 or more, reports and documents.

Mandatory reports

There are 14 mandatory reports or documents. If the dossier does not include mandatory information, the Parole Board returns the dossier to the prison concerned so that the missing information can be obtained.

1 Summary of offence(s)

This provides a brief description of the offence(s) for which the prisoner was found guilty and sentenced.

2 Sentencing Court/Court of Appeal papers

These papers are required to prevent any confusion about the sentence that the prisoner has been given. For example, in cases of multiple convictions it is important to be able to distinguish which conviction attracted which sentence. In every case where the prisoner has appealed against conviction or sentence, papers from the Court of Appeal must be included in the dossier.

3 Court transcripts of sentencing remarks

The transcripts provide information about the circumstances of an offence and the rationale for the sentence.

4 List of previous convictions

5 Pre-sentence medical and/or psychiatric reports

The court cannot decide that a custodial sentence is justified unless it has obtained and considered a pre-sentence report. The court may also request a medical/psychiatric report in relevant cases.

6 Copy of previous parole dossiers

It is important for any past review papers to be available to the Parole Board so that progress can be monitored.

7 Adjudications and additional days awarded

The prisoner may have adjudications against him, for example, for fighting or being unlawfully at large. These adjudications may lead to days being added to the prisoner's sentence, which would put back the parole eligibility date.

8 Prison parole assessment¹

This report by a prison officer details the prisoner's history and behaviour while in custody and provides an assessment of their suitability for parole. The prison Governor must ensure that an officer with personal knowledge of the prisoner completes the report. The report should be written by one officer only, based upon information supplied from other appropriate members of staff and following an interview with the prisoner.

9 Seconded probation officer's report¹

This report should include in-depth information on the prisoner's offending behaviour, their attitude to the offence, prison history, a risk assessment, and prospects for successful rehabilitation if early release is granted.

10 Report(s) on offence related work

These reports cover how the prisoner has performed on offending behaviour courses such as the Sex Offenders Treatment Programme and Anger Management.

11 Prison medical/psychiatric/psychological reports²

The Parole Board needs to know of any medical or psychiatric information relevant to the parole decision. Where the prisoner is receiving treatment from a psychiatrist or psychologist, a report must be obtained.

Notes: 1. Supplementary reports may be made by prison and probation officers.
2. A report may be required from both a medical officer and a psychiatrist.

12 Parole Board member interview report**13 Prisoner's disclosure form/representations**

The prisoner may make representations at the interview with the Parole Board member and in writing. The prisoner has a further opportunity to make representations on receiving a copy of the interview report.

14 Parole assessment report

This report is provided by the field probation officer and includes, for example: a programme of supervision incorporating an assessment of the prisoner's likely responses to supervision and proposals for managing this, including frequency of contact; a recommendation for or against release; and an assessment of the risk of re-offending.

Optional reports

There are four optional reports or documents.

15 Sentence planning documentation

Although it is not essential for the dossier to contain all the sentence planning documentation, the prison parole assessment (8 above) must be based on the conclusions and contents of the documentation. If it is felt that, in particular cases, the sentence planning documentation should be seen to support an assessment, this must be included as part of the dossier.

16 Prison Chaplain's report**17 Letters/other papers**

These might include letters of support from the prisoner's family, friends and former or prospective employers.

18 Press cuttings and photographs

These may be included in the dossier if they are part of the prisoner's representations at 13 above.

Appendix 3

Criteria for the release on parole of determinate sentence prisoners

In deciding whether or not to recommend release on licence, the Parole Board considers primarily the risk to the public of a further offence being committed at a time when the prisoner would otherwise be in prison and whether any such risk is acceptable. This must be balanced against the benefit, both to the public and the offender, of early release back into the community under a degree of supervision which might help rehabilitation and so lessen the risk of re-offending in the future. The Board takes into account that safeguarding the public may often outweigh the benefits to the offender of early release.

Before recommending early release on licence, the Parole Board must consider whether:

- 1** the safety of the public will be placed unacceptably at risk. In assessing such risk, the Board takes into account:
 - a) the nature and circumstances of the original offence;
 - b) whether the prisoner has shown by their attitude and behaviour in custody that they are willing to address their offending behaviour by understanding its causes and its consequences for the victims concerned, and has made positive effort and progress in doing so;
 - c) in the case of a violent or sexual offender, whether the prisoner has committed other offences of sex or violence, in which case the risk to the public of release on licence may be unacceptable;
 - d) that a risk of violent or sexual offending is more serious than a risk of other types of offending;
- 2** the longer period of supervision that parole would provide is likely to reduce the risk of further offences being committed;
- 3** the prisoner is likely to comply with the conditions of their licence;

- 4** the prisoner has failed to meet the requirements of licensed supervision, temporary release or bail on any previous occasion and, if so, whether this makes the risk of releasing them on licence unacceptable;
- 5** the resettlement plan will help secure the offender's rehabilitation;
- 6** the supervising officer has prepared a programme of supervision and has recommended specific licence conditions.

Criteria for the release of long-term prisoners liable to deportation from the United Kingdom

The decision whether to parole a prisoner liable to deportation from the UK focuses primarily on the need to protect the public from serious harm and the prevention of further offending. Before deciding whether or not to release a deportee in advance of automatic release at the two-thirds point of their sentence, the following factors - the weight and relevance of which may vary according to the circumstances of the case - are taken into account:

- a)** the offender's background, including any previous convictions and their pattern;
- b)** the nature and circumstances of the original offence;
- c)** where available, the sentencing judge's comments and probation and medical reports prepared for the court;
- d)** any risk to the victim or other persons, including persons outside the jurisdiction;
- e)** attitude and behaviour in custody including offences against prison discipline;
- f)** attitude to other inmates and positive contributions made to prison life;
- g)** remorse, insight into offending behaviour and steps taken, within available resources, to address offending and to achieve any treatment or training objectives set out in a sentence plan;
- h)** any medical or psychiatric considerations;
- i)** any other information, including representations by or on behalf of the offender, which may have a bearing on risk assessment.

Appendix 4

Study methodology

Questionnaire survey

1 We undertook a questionnaire survey of parole clerks and parole managers in the 128 prisons in England and Wales which handle parole applications. We received a 100 per cent response. The survey methodology and the results are set out in Appendix 6. The data obtained from the surveys were used to form a view on how parole work is organised and managed in each of the prisons.

Visits

2 We visited 10 prisons to see how parole was administered in practice. We selected the prisons on the basis of their performance between August 1998 and November 1998 in submitting complete dossiers to the Parole Board on time. We visited five prisons from the top performance quartile and five prisons from the bottom performance quartile.

3 During our visits to the prisons, we spoke to the parole clerk and the parole manager about the way the parole process operated in their prisons, and any factors which they felt had a particular impact on their performance in meeting the parole timetable. We discussed similar issues for evidence of good practice with prison staff responsible for progressing cases for the early release of prisoners serving life sentences.

Parole events

4 We participated in several events organised by the Prison Service to inform ourselves about the parole process, including attending:

- a Parole Forum of parole clerks and their managers;
- the London South Area Conference on Parole at Latchmere House Prison in London;
- the South Coast Area Conference on Parole at Guys Marsh Prison ; and

- the Parole Administration Procedures Training Course at the Prison Service Training College near Rugby.

Lifer Review Unit

- 5** To familiarise ourselves with the processes involved in considering an application for early release from a prisoner serving a life sentence we:
- spent half a day each with a caseworker in the Prison Service's Lifer Review Unit dealing with an application from a prisoner serving a mandatory life sentence and an application from a prisoner serving a discretionary life sentence;
 - attended a half-day training course run by the Lifer Review Unit.

Parole Board

- 6** To help understand the role and responsibilities of the Parole Board we:
- observed two Parole Board member interviews of prisoners at Wandsworth Prison;
 - observed two Parole Board panels considering parole applications for determinate sentence prisoners;
 - observed a Parole Board panel considering review applications from prisoners serving mandatory life sentences;
 - attended new Parole Board members' training seminar.

The Shepherd report

- 7** In late 1997, the Prison Service asked Mike Shepherd, a prison Governor, to review the timeliness of parole procedures in prisons. During the course of his review, Mr Shepherd visited 17 prisons to speak to Governors, parole clerks and parole managers, and discussed parole with senior officials in the Prison Service headquarters, including Area Managers and Operational Directors.

8 Mr Shepherd reported in May 1998 and made 16 recommendations for strengthening the processing of parole applications in prisons, including the need for: improved management oversight of parole work; clear procedures on how parole should be operated locally; better training; improved communications between the different people involved in parole across the Prison Service; and a more effective database to monitor the progress of parole generally and in individual cases.

9 Since May 1998, the Prison Service has been implementing the Shepherd report's recommendations including: appointing a member of staff in the Parole Unit to maintain liaison with key participants in the parole process, especially in prisons; introducing area parole conferences at which parole clerks and others can discuss problems and share good practice; and the publication of a regular parole newsletter and directory.

10 We met Mr Shepherd at the start of our study to discuss his findings and what more needed to be done to improve the effective management of parole.

Research for the Prison Service by Professor Hood and Dr Shute

11 In August 1998, the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate commissioned Professor Hood, a Director of the Centre for Criminological Research at the University of Oxford, and Dr Stephen Shute of Birmingham University and an Associate of the Oxford Centre, to carry out a study of parole procedures and decisions for determinate sentence prisoners.

12 Professor Hood and Dr Shute's research involved tracking 151 parole applications from prisoners in 14 prisons through the parole process, observing interviews between Parole Board members and prisoners and discussions with prison staff and inmates, and observing Parole Board deliberations on these 151 cases and a further 287 prisoners (438 in all). Professor Hood and Dr Shute's final report was submitted to the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate in January 2000.

13 We maintained contact with Professor Hood and Dr Shute during our respective studies and exchanged provisional findings.

Thematic Review of Lifers by Her Majesty's Inspectorates of Prisons and Probation

14 This joint thematic review had its origins in the Inspectorates' shared concern at the rise in the number of lifers, and the fact that in 1996-97, 60 per cent of lifers had passed their tariff expiry date by more than a year before being released on licence. The report was published in February 1999. We discussed lifer issues and their relevance to our study of parole with the co-authors of the report.

Liaison

15 We liaised with other people with an involvement in parole and considered their work. For example, we:

- reviewed the work of the Prison Service's Standards Audit Unit in examining parole procedures in prisons;
- discussed the role of the Probation Service in parole with the Chief Probation Officer for Humberside;
- invited and received comments about the parole process from the Prison Reform Trust, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation and the National Association of Probation Officers;
- consulted the Parole and Lifer Review Branch of the Scottish Home and Health Department about the way the parole system operates in Scotland.

The cost of releasing parolees late

16 Professor Hood and Dr Shute's research found that 21 per cent of first review cases in their sample (88 per cent of the 438 cases referred to in paragraph 12) were already past their parole eligibility date by an average of 28 days when their cases were reviewed by the Parole Board. Ten per cent of those released following their second or subsequent parole reviews were also released late. Based on the sample results, Professor Hood and Dr Shute put the costs of these delays at around £1 million.

17 Using global information, the Shepherd report estimated the cost of releasing parolees after their parole eligibility date in 1996-97 at £1.7 million. We asked the Prison Service to provide comparable information for previous years, but it was unable to do so because of the lack of accurate and complete data.

18 In 1998-99, 853 prisoners were not notified of the result of their successful application for parole by the target of two weeks before their parole eligibility date, with an average delay of 5.4 weeks. As the two weeks is allowed for the prison to make all necessary arrangements to release the prisoner on time, many of the prisoners will have been released late. The average cost of keeping a prisoner in prison for a week is £446. The cost of delays to the Prison Service may therefore have been in the region of £2 million calculated as follows: $£(853 \times 5.4 \times 446) = £2.05$ million. We estimated the costs to the Prison Service of delays in releasing deportees at: $£(149 \times 10.3 \times 446) = £0.5$ million, based on an average delay of 10.3 weeks.

19 For the majority of prisoners released on parole under the supervision of the Probation Service, these costs are partly offset by the reduction in the time spent under supervision by parolees who are released after their parole eligibility dates.

Appendix 5

Summary of Prison Service actions in response to recommendations in the Shepherd Report

Recommendation	Action to date
1. Member of staff in Parole Unit should be appointed specifically to take responsibility for establishing and maintaining liaison on parole procedures with key participants, including those in prisons. They should also be responsible for some of the work arising from the recommendations in the Shepherd Report.	The Parole Unit appointed a dedicated member of staff as "Establishment Liaison Officer" in October 1998. The Officer carries out the various tasks recommended by the Shepherd Report.
2. Parole Unit should continue discussions with Standards Audit Unit to establish baselines against which prison performance in relation to parole can be measured.	The Prison Service's Standards Audit Unit began including assessments of prisons' parole systems in their audit programme from August 1998, based on agreed baselines. The Prison Service has also published a Parole Standard in the revised Parole Manual and provided guidance to prisons on assessing themselves against the standard.
3. When baselines are agreed, they should be published to prisons and included in the Parole Manual.	
4. Parole Unit should continue discussions with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons on how parole performance might best be included in its prison inspections.	Head of Parole Unit met Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons in summer 1998 to brief them on the parole system and identify baselines which they might use when conducting their inspections. Prison Service and Parole Board have also been monitoring references to parole in Inspectorate reports to identify good and poor practice.
5. Parole Unit should continue to publish information about parole performance on monthly basis. The information should be copied to Directors, Area Managers and prison Governors and should reflect the monthly performance of Parole Unit, Parole Board and prisons.	Since summer 1998, monthly reports have been circulated to Area Managers and prison Governors on prisons' performance in submitting complete parole dossiers. Reports include the Parole Unit and Parole Board's performance against key targets. The Inmate Information System has been upgraded to make it more accurate in reflecting prisons' performance against key targets.
6. Parole Unit and Training Services should discuss the management and delivery of parole training and establish a method by which they will take parole training forward.	A general review of training for Prison Service staff involved in parole was carried out with Training Services in 1998. The initial focus was on the content and frequency of the training course for parole clerks.
7. A training needs analysis should be undertaken to determine the training requirements of staff in prisons (including their managers), the Parole Unit and the Parole Board secretariat with regard to the administration of parole, the maintenance and use of the Inmate Information System and the contribution of reports for parole purposes.	In the summer of 1998, a series of one day refresher training courses were run for parole clerks and their managers. A full training needs analysis has not yet been undertaken.

continued

Recommendation	Action to date
<p>8. In light of training needs analysis, all existing parole related training should be reviewed and any new training (including courses, desk training, and "pocket guides") commissioned.</p>	<p>A pilot for a new training course for parole clerks was first run in April 1999. The course was considered successful and a further four two day courses held in 1999, with none cancelled.</p>
<p>9. Whenever appropriate, staff from prisons, the Parole Unit and the Parole Board secretariat should train together, not only to benefit from the training but also to share different experiences of and perspectives on the parole process.</p>	<p>Two Parole Forums have been established to facilitate discussion between Prison Service headquarters and prisons on a more regular basis. Further consideration is being given to joint training involving the Parole Board.</p>
<p>10. Parole Unit should sponsor Area Parole Conferences on an annual basis. The programme for each conference should allow for the discussion of current parole issues, including those relating to information technology, and facilitate the sharing by prisons of good practice.</p>	<p>A series of conferences for all parole clerks and their managers was held in March/April 1998 and repeated in April 1999. These conferences are now an annual event with dedicated funding.</p>
<p>11. Parole Unit should include in Parole Manual, as appropriate, guidance or instruction on:</p>	<p>In preparing revised Parole Manual prisons were consulted on:</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ model Job or Task Descriptions for parole clerk, their supervisor and the senior manager responsible for parole within the prison. The descriptions should include responsibilities for monitoring and support; ■ local parole procedures; ■ the possible use and format of monthly monitoring information circulated by the Parole Unit; ■ parole training; ■ information on parole for prisoners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ model Job Specifications for parole clerk and senior manager, including responsibilities for monitoring and support; ■ key areas of procedural weaknesses, for example on the transfer of prisoners during the 26-week parole timetable.
<p>12. Parole Unit should publish a Parole Newsletter on a quarterly basis.</p>	<p>A Parole Newsletter has been published on a quarterly basis since July 1998. It is sent to every parole clerk and parole manager and contains feedback on issues raised at Area Conferences.</p>
<p>13. First issue of Newsletter should contain feedback on issues raised by syndicate groups at Area Parole Conferences and summarise replies to parole questionnaire.</p>	
<p>14. Parole Unit should publish a directory of those involved in parole covering staff in the Parole Unit, the Parole Board secretariat and individual prisons. The directory should be regularly updated.</p>	<p>A parole directory, along the lines suggested, was published in July 1998 with regular updates to ensure that it remains accurate.</p>
<p>15. The Parole Unit should review issues raised by parole conferences, in particular those relating to the integration of parole and sentence management, and take any action considered appropriate.</p>	<p>The Prison Service and Probation Service are developing a Prison-Probation joint offender assessment system, which is expected to promote greater integration of sentence planning and parole.</p>

continued

Recommendation	Action to date
<p>16. Prison Governors should ensure that in their prisons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ a senior manager, accountable to the Governor, is given responsibility for the overall operation of parole procedures within the prison;■ a local order, or its equivalent, is published indicating how parole procedures contained in the Parole Manual are to be put into practice within the prison;■ roles in relation to parole procedures are set out in job descriptions or similar document;■ monitoring occurs to ensure that procedures are being followed.	<p>In August 1999, Head of the Parole Unit wrote to prison Governors to highlight the important role of senior managers in supporting the parole process. This message has been reinforced in subsequent monthly bulletins and in the revised Parole Manual</p>

Appendix 6

National Audit Office surveys of prisons

We undertook questionnaire surveys of parole clerks and parole managers in 134 prisons. Through the surveys we sought to obtain views on:

- parole support, guidance and training;
- the Inmate Information System;
- the parole process;
- management of parole;
- communications about parole; and
- barriers to progressing parole applications within the 26-week parole timetable.

We received responses from all but six prisons. These six did not respond because as Remand Centres or Young Offenders Institutions they did not handle parole applications. There was therefore a 100 per cent response from prisons processing parole applications. Some prisons did not provide an answer to every question, and these are shown as “no response”.

This Appendix aggregates and summarises the responses to our surveys and is set out in the format of the questionnaires which the parole clerks and parole managers completed.

Survey of parole clerks

General

1. Do you have duties relating to matters other than parole?

Yes	No	No response
117 (91%)	8 (6%)	3

If "yes" please specify what percentage of your time is spent on parole:

1-25%	42 (36%)
26-50%	29 (25%)
51-75%	26 (22%)
>75%	18 (15%)
No response	2

2. Do you have a job description that covers your parole duties?

Yes	No	No response
95 (74%)	27 (21%)	6

3. Is there a specified person who will cover your parole work when you take:

	Yes	No	Don't know	No response
■ Planned absences, for example annual holiday, training, jury service, maternity leave	79 (62%)	41 (32%)	3 (2%)	5
■ Unplanned absences, for example sick leave	75 (59%)	41 (32%)	4 (3%)	8

Parole support, guidance and training

4. Have you referred any queries to the Prison Service Parole Unit?

Yes	No	No response
100 (78%)	25 (20%)	3

If "yes" was the response:

	Yes	No	No response
Timely	75 (75%)	18 (18%)	7
Helpful	91 (91%)	6 (6%)	3

5. Have you referred any queries to the Parole Board secretariat?

Yes	No	No response
105 (82%)	20 (16%)	3

If "yes" was the response:

	Yes	No	No response
Timely	81 (77%)	18 (17%)	6
Helpful	90 (86%)	13 (12%)	2

6. Do you know what the role of the Parole Unit Establishment Liaison Officer is?

Yes	No	No response
82 (64%)	35 (27%)	11

7. Is written guidance available to you on parole procedures:

	Yes	No	No response
Comprehensive	117 (91%)	5 (4%)	6
Up to date	100 (78%)	23 (18%)	5
Easy to understand	110 (86%)	11 (9%)	7
Easy to use	107 (84%)	13 (10%)	8

8. How useful is the Parole Manual in helping you to carry out your duties?

Very useful	Of some use	Don't know	No response
71(56%)	53 (41%)	1 (1%)	3

Is the Parole Manual an improvement on previous guidance?

Yes	No	Don't know	No response
80(63%)	1 (1%)	44 (34%)	3

9. Do you have any additional guidance/instructions on how the parole process should be organised and managed in your particular prison, for example, how to deal with your local probation service, which prison officers should complete prisoner forms?

Yes	No	No response
41 (32%)	80 (63%)	7

10. Have you completed the Parole Administration Procedures course?

Yes	No	No response
44 (34%)	80 (63%)	4

If "yes" how useful was it?

Very useful	Of some use	No use	No response
14 (32%)	21 (48%)	7 (16%)	2

Did it cover everything you needed to know?

Yes	No	No response
27 (61%)	15 (34%)	2

Inmate Information System

11. Have you received training in the use of the Inmate Information System?

Yes	No	No response
98 (77%)	26 (20%)	4

If "yes" how useful was it?

Very useful	Of some use	No use	No response
49 (50%)	46 (47%)	2 (2%)	1

If "no" why not?

No time available	No course available	Hand over sufficient	No response
5 (19%)	14 (54%)	5 (19%)	2

12. How user-friendly is the Inmate Information System for parole work?

Very user-friendly	Reasonably user-friendly	Not at all user-friendly	No response
6 (5%)	69 (54%)	46 (36%)	7

13. To what extent do you make use of the Inmate Information System to assist you in your parole work?

Full Use	Part Use	No use	No response
76 (59%)	39 (30%)	6 (5%)	7

14. How often do you have difficulties obtaining the following reports for inclusion in the prisoner's parole dossier?

	Always	Sometimes	Never	No response
■ Police reports	33 (26%)	82 (64%)	7 (5%)	6
■ Court papers (including transcripts of sentencing remarks)	16 (13%)	88 (69%)	15 (12%)	9
■ List of previous convictions	4 (3%)	61 (48%)	56 (44%)	7
■ Prison parole assessment	2 (2%)	58 (45%)	62 (48%)	6
■ Seconded probation officer's report	10 (8%)	48 (38%)	65 (51%)	5
■ Prison medical/psychiatric/psychological reports	7 (5%)	41 (32%)	75 (59%)	5
■ Parole Board member interview report	2 (2%)	28 (22%)	92 (72%)	6
■ Parole assessment report by Field Probation Officer	19 (15%)	88 (69%)	16 (13%)	5

15. Do you send out written reminders to encourage those concerned to send their reports as quickly as possible?

Yes	No	No response
104 (81%)	18 (14%)	6

16. Are the reminders sent out by:

You	Your parole manager	Governor responsible for parole	No response
110 (86%)	8 (6%)	6 (5%)	4

17. Do you experience any problems in arranging Parole Board members' interviews?

Yes	No	No response
38 (30%)	85 (66%)	5

Management of Parole

18. Are you clear to whom you are responsible in the prison for parole?

Yes	No	No response
110 (86%)	13 (10%)	5

19. Do you receive management support in carrying out your parole work?

Yes	No	No response
102 (80%)	22 (17%)	4

How would you rate the management support available to you in terms of:

	Right level	Too senior	Too junior	No response
Seniority	101 (79%)	7 (5%)	2 (2%)	18
	Good	Basic	Poor	
Parole knowledge	46 (36%)	56 (44%)	8 (6%)	18
	Easy	Difficult		
Access	104 (81%)	7 (6%)		17

20. How often do you see the monthly performance statistics provided by the Parole Unit?

Regularly	Only when there are problems	Never	No response
101 (79%)	12 (9%)	10 (8%)	5

21. Are you asked for explanations when parole deadlines are missed?

Yes	No	No response
97 (76%)	19 (15%)	12

22. Is the Parole Newsletter an effective means of circulating information on parole?

Yes	No	No response
117 (91%)	5 (4%)	6

Do you find the Newsletter:

	Yes	No	No response
Interesting	101 (78%)	16 (13%)	11
Useful	108 (84%)	10 (8%)	10

Should the Newsletter be issued more frequently?

Yes	No	No response
35 (27%)	83 (65%)	10

23. Do you think annual area conferences provide an effective forum for discussing problems and possible solutions?

Yes	No	No response
110 (86%)	3 (2%)	15

24. Have you seen positive actions taking place in response to the issues raised at last year's area parole conferences, in the field of:

	Yes	No	No response
■ Management	43 (34%)	40 (31%)	45
■ Training	35 (27%)	51 (40%)	42
■ Process, for example, changes in timetable/policy	76 (59%)	12 (9%)	40
■ Communication	70 (55%)	17 (13%)	41
■ Inmate Information System	59 (46%)	31 (24%)	38

Survey of Parole Managers

1. Are your parole duties set out in a job description?

Yes	No	No response
67 (52%)	55 (43%)	6

2. Have you received any training (internal or external) in parole procedures?

Yes	No	No response
50 (39%)	76 (59%)	2

3. Have you received any training in the use of the Inmate Information System?

Yes	No	No response
41 (32%)	84 (66%)	3

If "yes" was it:

Formal Course	Desk Training
19 (46%)	22 (54%)

4. Have you read the Parole Manual?

Yes	No	No response
100 (78%)	24 (19%)	4

If "yes" did you find it:

	Yes	No	No response
Comprehensive	90 (90%)	4 (4%)	6
Up to date	78 (78%)	12 (12%)	10
Easy to understand	81 (81%)	12 (12%)	7

5. Have you referred any queries to the Prison Service Parole Unit?

Yes	No	No response
50 (39%)	75 (59%)	3

If “yes” was the response:

	Yes	No	No response
Timely	36 (72%)	11 (22%)	3
Helpful	38 (76%)	9 (18%)	3

6. Have you referred any queries to the Parole Board secretariat?

Yes	No	No response
39 (30%)	87 (68%)	2

If “yes” was their response:

	Yes	No	No response
Timely	28 (72%)	10 (26%)	1
Helpful	28 (72%)	6 (15%)	5

7. Do you know what the role of the Parole Unit Establishment Liaison Officer is?

Yes	No	No response
72 (56%)	50 (39%)	6

8. Does your prison have internal targets for processing parole applications?

Yes	No	No response
87 (68%)	36 (28%)	5

If “yes” do they measure:

	Yes	No	No response
Timeliness	84 (97%)	1 (1%)	2
Quality	58 (67%)	22 (25%)	7

9. If targets exist, how frequently do you report performance against them?

Weekly	Monthly	Quarterly	Ad hoc	Never	No response*
3 (2%)	45 (35%)	6 (5%)	26 (20%)	13 (10%)	35

*indicating that there are no targets

10. Do you have designated cover for your parole clerk when s/he takes:

	Yes	No	Don't know	No response
■ Planned absences, for example annual holiday, training, jury service, maternity leave	91 (71%)	34 (27%)	2 (1%)	1
■ Unplanned absences, for example sick leave	85 (66%)	35 (27%)	1 (1%)	7

11. Has Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons reviewed parole procedures at your prison in the last two years?

Yes	No	No response
32 (25%)	84 (66%)	12

If "yes" how useful was it?

Very useful	Of some use	Don't know	No response
5 (16%)	19 (59%)	7 (22%)	1

12. Has the Standards Audit Unit reviewed parole procedures at your prison?

Yes	No	No response
74 (58%)	42 (33%)	12

If "yes" how useful was it?

Very useful	Of some use	Don't know	No response
18 (24%)	40 (54%)	13 (18%)	3

13. Do you receive from colleagues in other prisons examples of good practice in the administration of parole?

Yes	No	No response
19 (15%)	101 (79%)	8

14. Do you:

	Yes	No	No response
■ Circulate examples of good practice to colleagues	18 (14%)	102 (80%)	8
■ Advise the Parole Unit of examples of good practice	11 (9%)	103 (80%)	14

15. Is the Parole Newsletter an effective means of distributing information on parole?

Yes	No	No response
99 (77%)	9 (7%)	20

Do you find the Newsletter:

	Yes	No	No response
Interesting	85 (66%)	17 (14%)	26
Useful	91 (71%)	11 (9%)	26

Should the Newsletter be issued more frequently?

Yes	No	No response
27 (21%)	77 (60%)	24

16. Do you think annual area conferences provide an effective forum for discussing problems and possible solutions?

Yes	No	No response
106 (83%)	12 (9%)	10

17. Have you seen positive actions taking place in response to the issues raised at last year's area conferences, in the fields of:

	Yes	No	No response
■ Management	50 (39%)	39 (31%)	39
■ Training	32 (25%)	55 (43%)	41
■ Process, for example, changes in timetable/policy	64 (50%)	24 (19%)	40
■ Communication	73 (57%)	20 (16%)	35
■ Inmate Information System	55 (43%)	35 (27%)	38

Glossary

Category C prison	All adult male prisoners are categorised according to their security risk ranging from Category A, the highest risk offenders who are viewed as being the most dangerous to society, to Category D, normally men who are convicted of petty offences or classed as lower risk as they come to the end of long prison sentences. A Category C prisoner is one who cannot be trusted in open conditions but who would not have the ability or resources to make a determined escape attempt.
Determinate sentence	Any sentence of imprisonment imposed by the court for a set period (up to a maximum term given by the Act of Parliament that created the particular offence).
Licence Expiry Date	The date on which the prisoner's period of compulsory supervision by the Probation Service ends. It applies to prisoners serving 12 months and over. It will normally be at the three-quarters point but run to the end of the sentence for sex offenders if ordered by the sentencing court under Section 44 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991.
Life sentence	<p>A sentence of imprisonment of an indeterminate length. There are three types of life sentence.</p> <p>A mandatory life sentence must be imposed on all persons convicted of murder (anyone found guilty of murder committed when under the age of 18 must be sentenced to "detention during Her Majesty's pleasure").</p> <p>A court may impose a discretionary life sentence as the maximum penalty for a number of the most serious offences, for example, manslaughter, robbery and rape.</p> <p>An automatic life sentence must be imposed on all offenders who are convicted for a second time of a serious sexual or violent offence under Section 2 of the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997 (unless the court is of the opinion that there are exceptional circumstances).</p>

Non-Departmental Public Body

A Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) is a body which has a role in the process of national government but is not a government department or part of one, and accordingly operates to a greater or lesser extent at arm's length from Ministers. There are three categories of NDPB:

- bodies with executive, administrative, regulatory or commercial functions, which are generally described as “executive” NDPBs;
- advisory committees and commissions;
- tribunals and other judicial bodies.

The Parole Board is an Executive Non-Departmental Public Body.

Non-Parole Release Date

The date on which a prisoner serving four years and over who has not been granted parole must be released.

Parole Eligibility Date

The earliest date on which a prisoner may be released on parole.

Standard List Offences

These include all notifiable offences and some of the more serious summary offences.

The term notifiable offence broadly covers more serious offences ranging, for example, from theft and handling stolen goods to violence against the person.

A summary offence is one which is triable only in a magistrates' court. Summary offences which are classed as standard list offences include, for example, common assault and prostitution.