

INDEPENDENT MONITORING BOARDS

Each Prison and Young Offender Institution (YOI) in England and Wales must have an Independent Monitoring Board (IMB). Board members are appointed by the Home Secretary and are charged with monitoring the rights and well-being of all prisoners within the prison or YOI to which they are appointed.

What?

Board members must satisfy themselves as to the humane and just treatment of prisoners and the range and adequacy of the programmes preparing them for release. To do so, they will require a good first hand knowledge of their prison or YOI and have frequent contact with the prisoners. They will need to know the standards which the establishment is expected to meet and the impact its performance has on the prisoners.

Board members visit frequently, and often without notice. They have access to all prisoners and must be willing to engage with any who want to see them.

Board members' concerns are taken up with local management; if not satisfactorily resolved, they may be taken to a higher level including, if necessary, to the Home Secretary.

Members are required to attend monthly Board meetings, and take their turn in making monitoring visits and dealing with prisoners' complaints. They must also be prepared to visit the prison or YOI at any time if a serious incident occurs.

The role of a Board member is both demanding and challenging. Prisons are complex. Board members need to relate the situation before them to a mass of regulations. The role requires commitment, but for those with the time and the desire it can be a most rewarding way of getting involved. The opportunity to engage with people from diverse backgrounds during a difficult time in their lives can help to broaden the Board member's horizons and develop a deeper understanding of a section of the community that is marginalised and often misunderstood.

Who?

There are no specific qualifications required to become a member of an IMB. However applicants need to have energy, commitment, a fair amount of free time and the ability to challenge thoughtfully, decisions made elsewhere. Sensitivity and open-mindedness are also required in dealing with prisoners. Board members are given central and local training to equip them for the role.

Board members are drawn from the ranks of those who work, those who do not, those with previous voluntary sector experience and those with none. There is a particular need for members of ethnic minority communities, as currently they are under represented on many boards.

How?

Send your name and address to the Independent Monitoring Board Secretariat. They will send an application pack. (see [Useful Addresses p.27](#))

QUICK GUIDE

- monitor the rights and well-being of prisoners within the Prison or YOI
- monthly board meetings
- attend the Prison or YOI at any time if a serious incident occurs
- demanding, challenging role
- needs energy, commitment and fair amount of time

NOT FOR YOU?

Try looking at:

- » Policing ([page 5](#))
- » Youth Justice ([page 6](#))
- » Magistracy ([page 10](#))
- » Probation ([page 12](#))