

PPI payments and prisoners



Written by Peter Bates, peter.bates96@outlook.com

Contents

- 1. Summary 2
- 2. Innovation in English prisons 2
- 3. Coproducing prison research 3
- 4. Guidance on payment 4
- 5. Neighbouring practices 6
 - 5.1 Convict criminologists..... 6
 - 5.2 Participatory action research 7
 - 5.3 Payments for research participation 7
 - 5.4 Payments to ex-prisoners 8
 - 5.5 Coproducing service improvements..... 8
 - 5.6 Forensic mental health services 8
- 6. Factors affecting prisoners..... 9
 - 6.1 Financial matters 9
 - 6.2 Social benefit 10
 - 6.3 Fraternisation 10
 - 6.4 Dignity..... 10
 - 6.5 Rehabilitation 10
- 7. Factors affecting the public..... 11
 - 7.1 Public opinion 11
 - 7.2 Equalities 11
 - 7.3 Procedural justice 11
 - 7.4 Public funds 11
- 8. Factors affecting researchers..... 11
 - 8.1 Informed consent and coercion 11
 - 8.2 Research quality 12
 - 8.3 Researcher knowledge 12
- 9. Factors affecting the prison 13

9.1 Safety, security and culture	13
9.2 The incentives system	13
9.3 Administrative capacity	13
10. Conclusion	14
11. How this paper is being written	14
Appendix 1: Money and prisoners in England	15
Where do prisoners get money from?	15
How do prisoners store their money?	16
How do prisoners access their money?	17
How do prisoners use their money?	17
Appendix 2: Countries that have published prison research.....	18

1. Summary

In England, health research should be coproduced with people who have lived experience and nonsalaried Public Contributors should be offered a payment in recognition of their contribution¹. The offer of funds is known as a Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) payment². This paper asks why such payments are denied to people in prison.

There are many other issues that arise in conducting research with this group of citizens, who may have difficulties in accessing the usual advertising³, live in such coercive circumstances that their ability to give free and informed consent may be doubted, and be subject to gatekeepers who oppose the principles of coproduction and payment. This paper focuses narrowly on the practice of making payments for coproducing prisoner research. It is one of a suite of resource guides⁴ that consider niche topics in the coproduction of research.

Many activities in prison are tilted towards rehabilitation and attract small payments, prisoners are engaged as partners in service improvement and the newest set of priorities for research favour coproduction, mirroring practices in the community. Historically, the National Research Committee has stood alone against these positive moves and banned all incentives. There is an opportunity to revise these outdated prohibitions and recognise that research can take its place alongside other initiatives that make prisons and the community safer.

2. Innovation in English prisons

His Majesty's Inspector of Prisons has identified a range of innovative projects that are considered to support positive outcomes⁵. These include initiatives as diverse as Storybook Dads (HMP Pentonville), prisoner feedback on food (HMP Wakefield), prisoners and staff coproducing service improvements (HMP Ranby), increasing health awareness (HMP Thameside), prisoner run shop (HMP Warren Hill), a peer support group for first timers (HMP Eastwood Park), Here2Help peer mentors (HMP Hewell), prisoners as neurodiversity helpers (HMP Onley), cycle repair (HMP Hewell),

barista training (HMP Wormwood Scrubs), prisoners dining with visiting relatives (HMP Lincoln), prison choir (HMP Fosse Way), access to legal texts in the library (HMP Bure) and more. The general approach of consulting with serving prisoners to identify the potential for improvement in prisons has been demonstrated by several organisations, including the Active Citizens programme run by the Prison Reform Trust⁶. Beyond the prison gate, the *Prison Service Journal* has included ex-prisoners on its editorial board since the early 2000s.

Such examples show that it is helpful for prisoners to develop a range of skills in study and learning, task completion, health literacy, coproduction and peer support. Moreover, they show that individual prisons have the freedom to innovate by creating new, local responses to the issues they face. This is a fertile environment for the coproduction of research, since it meets so many of these objectives.

3. Coproducing prison research

In its most recent statement about research priorities, the Ministry of Justice declared:

*We want to engage with researchers to enhance our scientific capability and explore how innovative methods can be applied to justice research and analysis. These include but are not limited to... **Co-production**: to explore the co-production of research with people with lived experience, to promote engagement with the research process and findings. This includes understanding effective approaches in engaging justice system users in the co-design, co-production and dissemination of research.*

Ministry of Justice (25 September 2025) *Areas of Research Interest 2025*⁷

Over the past twenty five years, health research has moved forward to embrace coproduction approaches, including payment, but there appears to be little sign of a parallel shift in practice for prisoners' research⁸. We might ask why the following arguments have not been set out before, and wonder if researchers are so dependent on the goodwill of the Ministry of Justice that they are afraid to raise challenges? After all, co-production requires a range of views, which can only arise when a diverse array of opinion is expressed by people who feel able to engage in respectful dialogue. The tone of most research that is carried out sounds rather like Liebling's⁹ 'prudent, reserved engagement' with prison authorities rather than the rage of Fine & Torr ¹⁰, and it is difficult to find researchers who are willing to engage in robust dialogue or press for change in this field.

Where prisoners have become involved in designing and delivering research they have reported substantial benefits in terms of improved self-esteem, agency, confidence and hope for the future. These are welcome by-products of the knowledge production process, rather than the primary aim. Coproducing research improves the value and significance of the findings, so it is much more than a cynical attempt to offer 'coproduction therapy' where the main output is psychological or social gain for the Public Contributor¹¹.

Serving prisoners generally have few opportunities to contribute to decision-making¹², as the restriction of freedom is used to punish as well as to maintain discipline within the prison environment. Few prisoners may use the normal tools of the researcher such as an audio recorder and computer¹³, and access to the internet and academic library is limited¹⁴. Many have low levels of

health literacy and educational attainment. Despite these restrictions, consulting with people in custody is possible¹⁵ and several user-led organisations¹⁶ are promoting the democratisation of decision-making in prisons¹⁷. In this context, Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) is sometimes considered in English prison research¹⁸ (but PPI payments have not been made¹⁹), while the Chief Medical Officer has given his support but PPI payments have not been made²⁰.

“Good practice would be to include people with lived experience in the:

- *design of research*
- *delivery of research*
- *development of research outputs*
- *dissemination of learning*
- *decision making panels*

...Patient and public engagement is very central to research prioritisation and design. We should try to replicate involvement of patients and public in prison and on probation, in the same way that we do other cohorts of the population. Wherever possible, people with lived experience should be involved in the prioritisation and planning of research.

... Funders should offer dedicated funding that recognises these unique challenges. This should include flexible timelines, extra support for gaining approvals and lived experience involvement and specific calls for under-researched topics like physical health.”

Chief Medical Officer 2025²¹

4. Guidance on payment

The goal for prison culture is to blend punishment and community safety with a prevailing ethos of engagement and rehabilitation. This will give prisoners the best chance of reintegrating in society after their sentence, whilst reluctantly permitting a degree of noncompliance, so that individual choice is not completely submerged. The ethos of engagement and rehabilitation is manifested in the many innovations seen across the prison estate, through initiatives that promote drug-free living, therapy and social skills, education and employment. This alchemy of community safety, punishment and rehabilitation is tricky, as it needs to be coercive whilst motivational, to reward progress but not profiting from crime. How does prison research align with these aims?

Applications for permission to conduct research in UK prisons are dealt with via a process²² managed by HM Prison and Probation Service National Research Committee (NRC) and support is provided by the Health and Justice Research Network²³. The relevant clip from the NRC Guidance issued in 2024²⁴ is shown in the Box 1 below and The Ministry of Justice has explained that their use of the term ‘participation’ in this guidance covers both research participation and coproduction²⁵. This means that payments for Public Contributors are confined to undefined, ‘very exceptional circumstances’. No such exceptions have been found²⁶.

Box 1: Published guidance on payments to prisoners

Participation should not automatically lead to any financial benefits or losses for participants, nor should they feel that they will incur social benefits or losses due to their participation or non-

participation. For example, timing of prison-based interviews may result in a loss of earnings from spending time in an interview when participants would normally be in work or education. Researchers should address this issue in their research application. Offering incentives to supervised individuals for participation in research will only be considered in very exceptional circumstances where there is strong evidence that response rates have become problematic. Separate approval via the NRC must be sought prior to any payments.

Ministry of Justice National Research Committee (April 2024) *Applicant guidance* page 28

A request for clarification yielded the following²⁷.

Box 2: Clarification from NRC

Offering incentives to defendants in criminal cases, people in prison, or people under probation supervision for participating in research is a particularly sensitive issue and has the potential to undermine public trust in government research more generally. Current MoJ policy is that financial incentives should not be offered to people while they are in custody. However, a prisoner should not lose pay by participating in research during working time. This should be agreed beforehand with prison staff and an assurance should be given to that effect.

The MoJ will consider the use of incentives on a case-by-case basis and incentives may in some circumstances be offered to people who are under supervision of the CJS, or to defendants^a. This option should only be considered when a research study is at risk of not being able to answer the research question of interest due to lack of participants for example. Clear and compelling reasons will have to be provided on the benefits of using incentives in this particular context.

In relation to the use of incentives or payment to lived experienced researchers who are no longer under the supervision of HMPPS – they would be outside of the remit of MoJ policy and therefore NRC approval for their use would not be required.

The MoJ policy on the use of incentives in research is currently under review. Whilst there is no publication date yet, we hope to know the outcome of the review early in 2026.

For a short time, payment was countenanced for offenders in the community²⁸ (at least in theory, even if no practical examples have been found), but, at that time, the guidance instructed that payment must be in the form of vouchers rather than cash, a practice that flouts the evidence of efficacy with vulnerable populations and most current practice in health research²⁹. The absence of provision for vouchers in more recent guidance suggests that the MoJ response to reward has hardened.

Obtaining permission for a specific piece of research to be carried out rests on multiple local and national gatekeepers³⁰ and is also influenced by the extent to which the proposed culture and practice of the research aligns with the prevailing ethos of the prison or a particular division within it. Thus, Haarmans and colleagues³¹, had no problem in eliciting support for a proposal to use the empowering approaches embedded in Participatory Action Research (PAR) within an experimental pathway for offenders with Personality Disorder in a service committed to rehabilitation. In contrast,

^a Author's note: The phrase 'under the supervision of the CJS or defendants' excludes anyone in custody, as they are denied payments by the policy mentioned in the previous paragraph.

Watson and colleagues³² had more difficulty, perhaps encountering situations where the proposed research was seen as a threat to the prevailing culture of control.

5. Neighbouring practices

Whilst this paper focuses on the rationale for offering or denying PPI payments to serving prisoners for their coproduction of research, this section acknowledges that there are neighbouring practices that may suggest some solutions. For example, paying research participants to say thankyou for permitting their conversation to be recorded (i.e. offering a gift to a research participant) is not the same as making a payment in acknowledgement of a prisoner's contribution to a project management meeting, but the issues in one field (incentive vs inducement) may apply to the other.

5.1 Convict criminologists

People with lived experience of the criminal justice system are increasingly found in the staff team in justice services, including prisons, while it is now commonplace for prisoners to act as mentors or drug counsellors whilst serving their sentence³³. At the same time, there is a growth of 'convict criminology' within academia, where some sit within a social movement called 'desistance' in which the ex-prisoner reframes their own identity, professional helpers step back from directing the transformation, and success stories rather than regulation give birth to positive change³⁴. The desistance movement shares many of these hallmarks with the recovery movement in mental health, where the person takes charge of their own recovery journey, learns to live well despite the enduring consequences of their experience, and promotes change in the community's response to affected persons.

The desistance movement has led to an increase in the number of people with a criminal background who are employed within the prison and probation services, as well as the number of convict criminologists employed as academics and researchers in higher education. Reforming recruitment, retention and professional development programmes to ensure that ex-offenders are not subject to unfair discrimination, and that relevant lived experience is valued alongside other competencies, is a vital step in the journey towards a fair society.

Alongside the establishment of equitable career pathways, it is vital to create more opportunities for serving prisoners to contribute to the development, design and delivery of health research. Such individuals are not qualified researchers and do not hold a contract of employment. Instead, they contribute their expertise and, in the wider community are recognised through participation (PPI) payments. They assist the research team through their recent or diverse lived experience, enriching the study with insights that are more varied than a convict criminologist can bring. Both Public Contributors and convict criminologists act alongside colleagues who have no personal, lived experience of prison to sharpen research questions, engage research respondents and interpret research findings.

5.2 Participatory action research

One way of coproducing research involves the use of the ethos and methodology known as Participatory Action Research (PAR). This approach provides a wider framework for considering how prisoners may get involved in coproducing research in collaboration with academics and is sometimes chosen as an approach that acknowledges power differentials and lends credence to voices that otherwise may not be heard. It is unusual for prisoners to be involved in making decisions about the shape of research³⁵. Those few examples of PAR in English prisons include Sullivan et al (2008)³⁶, Ward & Bailey (2013)³⁷ and Haarmans et al (2021, op cit) and PAR has been used in prisons elsewhere, such as the USA³⁸ and Canada³⁹.

5.3 Payments for research participation

More than ten years ago, Charles and colleagues⁴⁰ found evidence of poor investment in UK prison research. They reviewed all applications to UK Research Ethics Committees submitted over a two year period and found an average of only 1 in 271 studies were prison-related. Much more recently, Mambro's team found 426 prisoner studies across 53 countries that were published in English or French⁴¹ before 30 September 2022 (see Appendix 2). Two thirds of them (68%) were from the English-speaking world and the UK had fewest prison studies per head of population, trailing behind Australia, the USA and Canada.

In research participation, the prisoner provides the data, which is analysed and reported by the research team, while in coproduction, the prisoner is part of the team and so helps to design the research, collect and analyse the data, and publish the results. Almost a third (131 out of the 426 studies Mambro and colleagues found or 31%) paid prisoners for research participation. Internationally, the practice of offering payment was more common in 2013-2022 than in the previous decade. In the UK, 34 studies were conducted, of which three (10%) made a payment to the prisoners, substantially below the international comparator.

The three UK studies that did compensate prisoners for research participation comprised:

- Sheard et al (2009)⁴² who added credit worth £5 to prisoner's phones for participation in a drug trial that gathered data from medical records and a urine sample from each prisoner.
- Hayes and colleagues (2013)⁴³ who investigated the circumstances of male prisoners aged over 60 residing in 12 prisons in the northwest of England. Prisoners were not directly compensated for participation in research but rather carried out the participation in the time they would otherwise be in the classroom and were compensated as if they had engaged in the lesson. A similar approach was taken in a Canadian study, except that research participation was completed in the prisoner's usual work time and so compensation was provided as if the prisoner had been at their usual workplace⁴⁴. This most likely requires the research activity to be of sufficient duration, as one-step consultations would not easily fit into the working regime. Practice elsewhere such as the USA⁴⁵ contrasts with the UK's parsimonious approach.
- Young et al (2018)⁴⁶ deposited £20 per participant into a common fund managed by a group of prisoners in Scotland, where arrangements differ from those in England. They used the funds to purchase items that would benefit everyone incarcerated in the prison.

So, it appears that none of these three studies added money directly to the accounts held by English prisoners. A systematic review of peer-reviewed literature published by Treacy and colleagues in 2021⁴⁷ also found no examples where PPI payments were made to serving prisoners.

5.4 Payments to ex-prisoners

Awenat and colleagues studied suicidal thoughts and behaviour in prisoners in the north of England. A Service User Reference Group (SURG) advised the academic team, comprising four ex-prisoners who had been suicidal during their own imprisonment. All members of the SURG were then interviewed individually about their experiences in the group and the results analysed⁴⁸. This study made payments to these ex-prisoners rather than people currently in custody and it was not clear if they were still under the supervision of the Ministry of Justice or not.

Taylor and colleagues engaged people 'near to and after release' as Peer Researchers and paid them for their involvement, but the account⁴⁹ does not specify how payment worked for serving prisoners.

In the study by Hemming et al⁵⁰, an ex-prisoner was paid £15 per hour to contribute to the process of data analysis. More recently, a study team worked with the Prison Reform Trust to assemble an advisory group of ex-prisoners to help guide their study of RECONNECT services for adult prison leavers⁵¹.

Simpson has employed lived experience leaders as part of research teams and paid them the going rate of between £300 to £600 per day, depending on the funder⁵².

5.5 Coproducing service improvements

Some activities in the prison are not considered research but include many parallel activities. This is particularly the case for service improvement activities where serving prisoners collect feedback from their peers and contribute ideas for improving the prison. Lived experience leadership often shapes the charities that engage in these activities from outside, supporting serving prisoners. For example, EP:IC Consultants have a contract with NHS England to work on the health and justice agenda in multiple prisons across England and this includes paying serving prisoners to lead the work inside the prison.

5.6 Forensic mental health services

Forensic mental health services are not prisons but share some aspects which impact coproduction in both settings as discussed by Whiting et al⁵³. Internationally, PAR has been used in secure mental health settings⁵⁴. MacInnes and colleagues⁵⁵ conducted research in forensic mental health settings, rather than prisons. Whilst there will be many similarities with a locked forensic psychiatric unit, the differences mean that this cannot be considered a precedent for making PPI payments to people in prison⁵⁶. Callaghan and colleagues have worked on the challenges and opportunities of undertaking PPI activities in secure psychiatric settings⁵⁷.

6. Factors affecting prisoners

The next four main sections cover different factors which may influence the decision to withhold or provide PPI payments to prisoners. They are, of course, not easily disentangled, since each one will affect several others. For example, offering a payment (item 5.1) may trigger social benefits (5.2) that lead to rehabilitation (5.6), whilst stirring up public opinion (6.1) and requiring administrative capacity to deliver (8.3). That being said, it is helpful to separate out the various arguments in play so that an informed decision can be made.

6.1 Financial matters

Some commentators⁵⁸ worry that any money that reaches prisoners will be used for illicit purposes. From this pessimistic viewpoint, prisoners are expected to misuse the money they have, so it is best to deny them payments and include this as part of their punishment.

There is an acknowledgement that very small benefits fail to effectively incentivise prisoners⁵⁹, so differences between incentive levels need to be sufficient.

Further to this, it appears that not all positive activities in the prison are equal. Once people are motivated to do something by a working incentives scheme, then it is possible to differentiate activities by adding value to the ones deemed to be especially valuable⁶⁰. The low level of payments for work inside the prison (see Appendix 1) amplifies the power of payments which are made and shifts the threshold at which an incentive becomes an inducement. PPI payment rates could match those offered in the community or match prison rates of pay for other activities, although a precedent has been set by NIHR who pay the same rate to Public Contributors in Low and Middle Income countries as they do to those based in the UK⁶¹. It would, of course, be possible to pay the usual sum and have the prison allocate a portion to the prisoner's spend account for everyday use, and the remainder to the prisoner's save account for use on release from prison.

Where it does happen, involving prisoners or ex-prisoners in research, consultations and other service improvement activities is often carried out by an independent, user-led organisation contracted for the role. The people are therefore recruited, managed and remunerated by the independent organisation rather than by the prison or directly by the research institution.

Excessive payments to one prisoner could trigger intimidation from others inside the prison in a practice sometimes called 'baroning'. Prisoners with perceived large amounts in their account could be the target of bullying by the baron, who would 'encourage' them to buy items from the prison shop on their behalf. These could then be sold on at a profit to prisoners with little or no cash, large rates of interest could be charged on an in-kind loan, and favours extracted, such as getting relatives to smuggle in drugs. These mechanisms enable the baron to get around the spending and cash limits and make a profit for themselves.

Question #1

There are differentials in pay, which if logically applied, could suggest a ladder of activity, rising from unwanted behaviour to the most desirable activities. Some HMIP reports indicate that unwanted differentials in pay have been eliminated and some desired behaviours have attracted rewards, but is there a coherent ladder?

6.2 Social benefit

Permitting prisoners to coproduce research and receive PPI payments would bring the research into line with other activities in the prison that serve the rehabilitation agenda. As we have seen, many other innovative projects in the prison estate encourage prisoners to give and receive peer support, work together on projects and contribute their ideas for service improvement. Similarly, being involved in research will provide time out of one's cell and deliver educational gain, skills acquisition, social skills, opportunities to interact with family, friends and other citizens, and many other competencies that improve the prospect of desistance post release. All these things contribute to mental health and future integration in society, so count as social benefits. It is hard to think of any 'social benefit' that coproduction of research provides that is not already being provided by approved projects elsewhere in the prison.

Coproduction methods raise expectations for change which prison staff may be pessimistic about meeting, potentially amplifying frustration, cynicism and poor behaviour amongst prisoners.

6.3 Fraternisation

The use of participatory methods almost inevitably builds relationships between prisoners, some of which may continue after release, and there are some hints that the NRC has hitherto assumed that 'fraternisation' will be unpopular with victims, the media or the general public. Whilst English prison regimes no longer follow the extreme Separation approach adopted in some prisons after 1835⁶², there has perhaps been a reluctance to approve methods which promote the formation of relationships between offenders. This may discourage the coproduction of research.

6.4 Dignity

It is exploitative to take the knowledge and labour of prisoners without compensating them, at least to the same level as other constructive activities which are remunerated in the prison.

6.5 Rehabilitation

Payments are offered to Public Contributors who are not supervised by the Ministry of Justice so there should be a clear pathway enabling people to move from the restrictions of prison life into active citizenship in the community. At present, the benefits of citizenship (in the form of payments for engaging in research) arise at the last possible moment in this journey, as the offender passes beyond the oversight of the MoJ. While a regime based on punishment seeks every possible way to shrink freedom and opportunity, one based on rehabilitation will choose the least restrictive practice during incarceration and reinstate life opportunities at the first possible moment that is concomitant with community safety.

7. Factors affecting the public

7.1 Public opinion

Beyond the prison gates, making a payment may be perceived as making prison more pleasant or enabling offenders to profit from their crimes⁶³, thus adding to the distress experienced by victims.

The guidance statement refers to the danger of undermining public trust. Sensationalist newspaper headlines have certainly condemned anything that appears to be a reward, swinging back into the punishment/rehabilitation debate mentioned above. But again, many other innovations in the prison estate have the potential to be cast in such a judgemental light yet continue to be deployed. If payments are made to citizens who coproduce research in the community, and it helps rehabilitation, then the appropriate response to such remarks is steadfast courage.

7.2 Equalities

Justice requires equitable access to healthcare and the fruits of research, whether one is incarcerated or not⁶⁴. To treat prisoners less well than other citizens is discriminatory, especially when other vulnerable groups are offered payment, including drug misusers. When arrangements shrink the amount of research being carried out, poor understanding of health needs leads to diminished quality of life and premature death, so that UK prisoners die on average 25 years earlier than the general population⁶⁵.

7.3 Procedural justice

Within the prison, a visibly fair incentives system can contribute to the belief in procedural justice, thereby promoting a pro-social attitude toward authority and internalisation of good behaviour. Researchers themselves may have varying opinion about the advisability of making payments⁶⁶.

In the current system, prisoners who are spending time working and earning within the Incentives Policy Framework may substitute involvement in research for their usual work and continue to receive payment. Prisoners who are not currently working are able to start working but cannot move directly from unremunerated inactivity to remunerated research. This means that poorly motivated prisoners and those who have difficulties in maintaining work habits are excluded from research and denied an opportunity which may engage them.

7.4 Public funds

The simple economics of supply and demand suggest that there is no need to pay if prisoners are willing to engage for nothing⁶⁷, thus releasing public funds for other priorities.

8. Factors affecting researchers

8.1 Informed consent and coercion

Constraints upon prisoner autonomy may invalidate both informed consent and compromise privacy, both of which are vital elements of ethical research⁶⁸ and so promoting informed consent

and removing coercion may be the most significant challenge facing the NRC when designing systems for research participants.

Years ago, Moser et al⁶⁹ showed that 29 out of the 30 prisoners in their study were able to make an informed choice, and that if their decision was influenced at all, it was by the hope of appearing cooperative, avoiding boredom, meeting new people and helping others – benign responses which are eagerly sought by the best prisons. However, many prisoners have mental health challenges or intellectual disabilities which make it more difficult to ensure that consent is meaningful.

Mambro and colleagues⁷⁰ advocate for payments to be made for research participation within the prison and show that such payments are not coercive, while steps should be taken to minimise the risk of exploitation and undue influence, perhaps adapting Smith-Merry and Mellifont's framework⁷¹ for payments to research participants so that it is useful in the context of coproduction.

Payment may trigger memories of unethical research where prisoners were used as disposable subjects to test dangerous interventions⁷². However, while the ethical requirements for research participants are of interest, this paper is all about payments for Public Contributors involved in the coproduction of research. Public Contributors are entitled to be supported through ethical engagement practices, just as their salaried colleagues should be regulated by ethical human resources policies, but their role is not considered especially vulnerable and so they do not require approval from the Research Ethics Committee before engaging in coproduction. This means that decisions about payments for research participants should not influence the quite separate decision about payments for Public Contributors. In particular, the threshold for those involved in research coproduction may be aligned a little more towards the rehabilitative agenda.

8.2 Research quality

Payment can raise prisoner self-esteem as well as strengthening their level of engagement, commitment and truth-telling, as they will take the task more seriously in exchange for the payment. Admittedly, setting payment levels too high might create an unwanted inducement whereby the prisoner gives the answers they think the researcher wants to hear, but setting payment levels at zero does not solve this problem. The same opportunities and threats apply to research in the community and are answered with a moderate level of payment. That way, more diverse voices come to the table, more rigour is added to the debate and the purity of research is enhanced.

8.3 Researcher knowledge

When Charles and colleagues⁷³ surveyed researchers in 2010-2012, over 60% of researchers stated that they did not know the guidance. It is not known whether this has changed and nowadays requests for approval now result in prompt decisions⁷⁴. Delays have arisen when nonsalaried Public Contributors have sought permission to collect research data from NHS patients⁷⁵, so there may be some parallels here.

9. Factors affecting the prison

9.1 Safety, security and culture

Ward and Bailey pointed out in 2012⁷⁶ that Participatory Action Research is especially valuable when addressing sensitive topics. In their study, PAR enabled women prisoners who self-harm to have more control over how they contribute and what they disclose, so this research format is more likely to be safer, and to engage and benefit more respondents as well as yielding good quality data.

Dually qualified researchers (i.e. fully qualified and employed academics who are also ex-prisoners) can be denied access to the prison estate by the security checks applied at the gate to all prison visitors⁷⁷.

Fine & Torr ⁷⁸ reported on a Participatory Action Research study carried out in a USA prison, specifically noting that ‘too many tears, or bringing in too much food could provoke an officer to shut us down’. This highlights the gatekeeping role of prison staff, who may be friendly or hostile⁷⁹ towards the research team. This hints at a wider prison culture, which may be open to scrutiny or secretive and fearful of criticism.

9.2 The incentives system

For prisoners, contributing to research may be recorded as a positive case-note, thus impacting parole reports. His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons⁸⁰ expects each establishment to operate its incentives scheme in a way that promotes good behaviour and prepares people for release.

Whilst it appears that, whilst many other activities in the prison are tilted towards engagement and rehabilitation, the NRC insists that participation in research is determinedly neutral. Out in the community, research participants are often thanked with a cup of tea, a gift card, a small payment, while Public Contributors receive PPI payments for getting involved in shaping the direction of individual studies. We know that Public Contributors gain enormously from these opportunities to use their experiences, as it enhances their self-esteem, grows their skills and enables them to contribute to society. Such payments are not considered coercive inducements that invalidate the findings.

9.3 Administrative capacity

There has been a perceived decline in the overall amount of prison-based research as staff reductions in the early 2010s combined with rising demand pressure on prison services, creating a progressively more challenging environment for researchers⁸¹. Day-to-day management challenges have pushed research from a ‘must have’ to nothing more than a ‘nice to have’⁸².

Responding to an individual application to conduct research in the light of unfamiliar and complex policy guidance is too demanding for Governors, so it is less burdensome to simply reject all requests. Creating and utilising procedures for authorising and administering payments is disproportionately burdensome for the prison.

The circumstances of individual prisoners can affect the opportunity to participate in research too. For example, Crabtree⁸³ notes that the prisoners who got involved with his study were normally working in clerical jobs, so could leave their desks to spend time with the research team, while

prisoners working in the kitchen may have no such freedom. He goes on to offer some advice on the selection of co-researchers from the population of serving prisoners.

10. Conclusion

Making payments to this group of citizens may be possible in the future, albeit in carefully crafted circumstances. Perhaps the review team considering NRC policy will reflect on the potential for PPI payments to enhance the quality of research, motivate prisoners and drive improvements in the prison system.

11. How this paper is being written

The investigation that generated this paper is driven by simple curiosity. The work is unfunded and is conducted as a piece of citizen science rather than under the control of any organisation.

Accountability is achieved by following the *Writing in Public* framework⁸⁴. Many people have been approached for advice⁸⁵, and I am grateful to the people⁸⁶ who have contributed to this evolving resource⁸⁷. Please send me your suggestions for further improvements.

Appendix 1: Money and prisoners in England

Where do prisoners get money from?

The following arrangements apply to England only as other nations within the UK may have their own rules.

Friends, relatives, government departments and agencies, local authorities and charities may all send money to a prisoner's account⁸⁸. There are particular arrangements to regulate the publication of writing and art created by prisoners⁸⁹.

Convicted prisoners may not conduct business transactions, apply for loans or gamble for financial gain. Some prisoners are eligible for a Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL)⁹⁰, enabling them to carry out activities outside the prison. ROTL provisions permitted an average of just over 1,000 prisoners to work in the community in the year to March 2025⁹¹.

Payments to prisoners sit within Rule 8 of the Prison Rules 1999 and are regulated by PSO4460 *Prisoner's Pay*⁹². Unconvicted prisoners are not obliged to take part in paid activities. The funds to pay prisoners are drawn from the sum received from the Government under the 'variable prisoner funding formula' (VPPF), which must also cover costs of prisoners' meals and clothes. Governors have some discretion to set local payment rates, so they vary from task to task and from prison to prison. It has been suggested⁹³ that tasks which serve the prison function (e.g. cleaning) are rewarded more highly than tasks which serve the intended outcomes of incarceration (e.g. education or therapy).

Prisoners are eligible for pay if they complete the full working week and demonstrate the required level of performance and effort required. The full working week in prison is normally ten morning, afternoon, or evening sessions, or five night shifts⁹⁴, although these shifts are often much shorter than in ordinary jobs in the open market⁹⁵. Detailed and local implementation arrangements are reviewed by an Incentives Forum made up of staff and prisoners⁹⁶.

Weekly earnings limits in 2025

Level	Unconvicted prisoners	Convicted prisoners
Basic	£30.25	£6.00
Standard	£66.50	£21.75
Enhanced (both initial and enhanced)	£72.50	£36.25

There may be a separate Education, Skills and Work programme, as well as an Enrichment programme, including activities which, beyond the prison gates, would be called volunteering, leisure and therapy. Some Education opportunities may be framed as 'day release' and so paid as if the prisoner was in their normal workplace in the prison. There may be ways for prisoners to work inside the prison for outside organisations⁹⁷. Guidance is provided on the provision of education⁹⁸.

The Governor may authorise financial bonuses for productivity, achievement or progress by prisoners as shown in any of these activities⁹⁹, phone credit, and in at least one prison, tokens augment cash payments¹⁰⁰. Across the prison estate, poor behaviour may result in deductions. Prisoners found guilty of disciplinary offences may be punished by losing up to 84 days full pay (less the cost of phone calls or postage, so that the prisoner may maintain family contact)¹⁰¹.

Question #2

There are multiple currencies in use (pay, tokens, phone credit, letters of appreciation, access to facilities and so on). How well do they work together?

Whilst such opportunities may be theoretically available, the UK prison population has grown, whilst behaviour has deteriorated and the staff workforce has shrunk in both numbers and experience, leading to nearly half of male prisoners spending less than two hours out of their cells during weekdays. The number of starts on education programmes has plummeted¹⁰² and investment continues to fall¹⁰³. Prisoners who are ready to work and have been assigned to a level on the incentives scheme that permits them to earn may find that the regime prevents them from reaching their workplace and thus receiving their wage.

If a research team were able to offer payment, they would have to decide on several matters, including

- where the money comes from – is it part of the Ministry of Justice budget and paid as if the research activity was an ordinary work or educational activity in the prison programme, or are payments sent to an individual prisoner’s account by the research body?
- if the money comes from the research body, is it transferred as a block grant for the prison to administer, or are individual payments made into prisoner accounts by the research body? (iii)
- whether the payment rate should match that offered to citizens in the community, or match the payment rate offered in the prison? This is similar to the dilemma facing the NIHR International Team who must decide whether to offer participation payments at the UK rate or in line with the prevailing economy in the country where the Public Contributor resides¹⁰⁴.

How do prisoners store their money?

Prisoners may hold three accounts inside the prison, as well as holding one or more bank accounts in the community. The accounts within the prison are called *private*, *spend* and *save*. Money earned within the prison is credited to the prisoner’s individual *spend* account for daily use¹⁰⁵, while funds cannot be drawn from the *save* account until the prisoner is released.

The combined value for a prisoner is not permitted to rise beyond £900 – insufficient for the downpayment on rented accommodation in some parts of England.

Question #3

How does the spend account work? The save account? What money goes in and out of these two accounts? Has the combined value threshold been increased over time? Why is it so much lower than the cost of setting up a home after release?

How do prisoners access their money?

The Incentives Policy Framework¹⁰⁶ regulates how prisoners can access their money and it offers four incentive levels, called Basic, Standard, Enhanced Initial and Enhanced Extended¹⁰⁷. In the year to March 2024, prisoners typically started on Standard (45% of the prison population) and those who did well progressed to Enhanced Initial (49%).

Poor behaviour led to 5% being downgraded to Basic whilst fewer than 1% of prisoners rose to the highest level which is only available at the discretion of the Prison Governor¹⁰⁸. The Prisoner Pay Review carried out in 2023 by HM Prison and Probation Service found that the average weekly pay of prisoners was £11.62¹⁰⁹.

A prisoner's assigned incentive level is unaffected by conviction or by transfer from one prison to another¹¹⁰. Access to private cash is governed by a policy¹¹¹ that sets spending limits which are revised each year, with 2025 figures shown in the table below. Unconvicted prisoners are not obliged to take part in paid activities and their spending limits are higher.

The incentives system includes access to money but also includes a range of other privileges, ranging from permission to wear one's own clothes to time out of one's cell, use of the gym, TV, better accommodation and visits.

Question #4

The table above shows no difference in pay between Enhanced Initial and Enhanced Extended, so why bother moving on to the top level?

How do prisoners use their money?

Prisoners may buy food, batteries and toiletries¹¹² from the Prison 'canteen or other items via approved mail order businesses as well as add credit to their phone. Prices in the canteen are generally above those in local supermarkets and are rising more quickly¹¹³. DHL have a monopoly and agree price increases with HMPPS. They may send their money to family members or others, but there are defined limits to these transactions¹¹⁴. Funds may be saved in preparation for release from prison.

Where prisoners gain permission to work for an ordinary employer outside the prison under the ROTL rules, the prison service insists that the employer matches or exceeds the national minimum wage levels¹¹⁵. The prisoner is provided with a payslip, but the money is sent to the prison. The employee's net earnings are then significantly reduced by a levy¹¹⁶ in compliance with the Prisoners Earnings Act 1996 and those funds are transferred to a voluntary organisation that provides victim support. The balance is placed into the prisoner's account.

Rumours suggest that some Governors have permitted payments to be made into a prisoner's account which cannot be accessed until they leave, thus avoiding any interference with the prison culture whilst helping with resettlement.

Question #5

Do staffing or discipline problems result in some prisoners being denied access to the shop?

Question #6

Is there any truth in these rumours? Is this how Enhanced Extended works?

Appendix 2: Countries that have published prison research

Mambro et al (2024) reviewed 426 prison research studies published in English or French, looking for information about payments being made to research participants. Her data is in columns 3&4.

Country	Pop (millions)	No. of studies that paid for participation	No. of studies that did not pay for participation	Total studies	Studies per 00,000,000 pop ¹¹⁷
Australia	27	19	17	36	133
Norway	6		4	4	67
USA	342	84	116	200	58
Switzerland	9		5	5	56
Canada	39	4	17	21	54
UK	69	3	31	34	49
Spain	47	2	15	17	36
Greece	10		3	3	30
Portugal	10		3	3	30
Sweden	11		3	3	27
Taiwan	24		4	4	17
Italy	61		6	6	10
France	68		4	4	6
Brazil	220		8	8	4
Iran	90		4	4	4
Germany	84	3		3	4
Ethiopia	119		4	4	3
Nigeria	237		3	3	1
One study		11 ^b	20 ^c	31	
Two studies		4 ^d	26 ^e	30	
2-nation studies			2 ^f	2	
4-nation study		1 ^g		1	
Total		131	295	426	

^b Each of the following countries conducted one study that paid prisoners for participation: China, Ethiopia, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Mexico, Nigeria, Norway, Philippines, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan.

^c Each of the following countries conducted one study that did not pay prisoners for participation: Belgium, Belize, Bolivia, China, Cyprus, Fiji, French Guiana, Georgia, Ghana, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Israel, Lebanon, Luxemburg, Pakistan, Philippines, Russia, Singapore, Togo.

^d Indonesia conducted two studies that paid prisoners for participation. Netherlands did the same.

^e The following countries conducted two prisoner studies that did not pay people for participation: Chile, Colombia, Germany, Ireland, Malaysia, Malawi, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Peru, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Tajikistan.

^f One study was in Denmark & Estonia; the other study was in Italy & Brazil.

^g One study that paid prisoners for participation collected data from Belgium and France, Germany and Portugal.

¹ NIHR (Jan 2025) [Payment guidance for researchers and professionals | NIHR](#).

² See NIHR (22 April 2021) [Payment-guidance-for-members-of-the-public-considering-involvement-in-research.pdf](#). Also Bates P (4 May 2022) [How to make sense of payments for public contribution](#).

³ [Home - People in Research](#). For an analysis of the adverts found on this site, see <https://peterbates.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Going-cheap-on-expenses.pdf>.

⁴ See in particular, Bates P (18 June 2022) [Explaining the benefits of Public Contribution to health research](#), Bates P (2025) [PPI payments and asylum seekers in UK health research](#) and [How To Guides – Peter Bates](#)

⁵ The examples in this paragraph are selected from the ‘Notable positive practice’ (usually paragraph 1.6) identified in the reports written following unannounced inspections undertaken during 2025 by HM Inspectorate of Prisons. These reports can be found at [Our reports – HM Inspectorate of Prisons](#).

⁶ Prison Reform Trust (2016) [A different lens: Report on a pilot programme of active citizen forums in prison](#). A more recent report that uses this approach is Edgar K, Vince C & O’Brien R A (2025) [A measure of hope? How purpose, meaning and fulfilment can ease the harms of long-term imprisonment](#). Prison Reform Trust.

⁷ [Ministry of Justice areas of research interest 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

⁸ PSI 2010/41, paragraph 5.4 declares that “Taking part in research should not automatically lead to any financial benefits or losses for research participants. In addition, potential participants should not feel that they will incur social benefits or losses due to their participation or non-participation in the research... It is not generally desirable for offenders in custody to be paid for being involved with research.” https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20110602060737mp_/http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/guidance/prison-probation-and-rehabilitation/psipso/psi_2010_41_research_applications.doc.

⁹ Liebling A. Whose side are we on? Theory, practice and allegiances in prisons research. *British journal of criminology*. 2001 Jun 1;41(3):472-84.

¹⁰ Fine M & Torr  ME (2006) Intimate details: Participatory action research in prison. *Action Research*, 4(3), 253–269. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476750306066801>.

¹¹ Veldmeijer L & van Os J (2025) “They talk the talk but don’t walk the walk”. Introducing the concept of participatory assimilation in mental health care innovation. *Psychosis*. Oct 3:1-2.

¹² Prisoners are one of the groups identified as routinely excluded from opportunities to contribute to research about them. See Beresford P (2020) PPI or user involvement: taking stock from a service user perspective in the twenty first century. *Research Involvement and Engagement*. Jun 26;6(1):36.

¹³ Some prisoners are permitted access to a laptop – see, for example, [Report on an unannounced inspection of HMP Ranby by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons \(10-20 February 2025\)](#), para 3.31.

¹⁴ There is a Virtual Campus and Digital Education Platform for prisoners, but prisoners often do not have sufficient access to a laptop or the internet. See, for example, [Report on an unannounced inspection of HMP Wormwood Scrubs by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons 9-19 June 2025](#), para 5.26.

¹⁵ [Improving behaviour in prisons: A thematic review by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons April 2024](#) paras 4.4 to 4.11.

¹⁶ See, for example, User Voice (2025) *Transforming justice services through lived experience: Our work in prisons*. Downloaded from [Prison Council & Consultations 2025](#) 15/09/2025.

¹⁷ Lived-experience, or user-led groups, including [User Voice](#), [Lived Expert](#) and the [Prisoner Policy Network](#) were named by McNaull G, Johnson M, Maruna S, Daniel H & Scully H (2024) Collaborative Research in a Pandemic: Co-producing solutions to a crisis. *Prison Service Journal* 272.

¹⁸ Treacy and colleagues asked 30 prisoners from one prison for advice about their research plans and a further 16 prisoners from a second prison. Treacy S, Haggith A, Wickramasinghe ND, *et al* (2019) Dementia-friendly prisons: a mixed-methods evaluation of the application of dementia-friendly community principles to two prisons in England *BMJ Open*; 9:e030087. <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/9/8/e030087>. Also Danica Darley is running a study 2026-2028 in which serving prisoners will collect interview data from other prisoners – see <https://sscr.nihr.ac.uk/research/care-settings/navigating-neurodisability-through-the-prison-gates/>.

¹⁹ Rutherford R, Bowes N, Cornwell R, Heggs D & Pashley S (2024). A systematic scoping review exploring how people with lived experience have been involved in prison and forensic mental health research. *Criminal Behaviour & Mental Health*, 34(1), 94–114. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cbm.2324>. Also Rutherford R, Pashley S, Bowes N, Heggs D & Cornwell R (2025), Rapid Review of Literature Reporting the Experience of Patient and Public Involvement in Prison and Forensic Mental Health Research. *Int J Mental Health Nurs*, 34: e13483. <https://doi.org/10.1111/inm.13483>.

²⁰ Rutherford R, Bowes N, Cornwell R, Heggs D & Pashley S (2024). A systematic scoping review exploring how people with lived experience have been involved in prison and forensic mental health research. *Criminal Behaviour & Mental Health*, 34(1), 94–114. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cbm.2324>. Also Rutherford R, Pashley S, Bowes N, Heggs D & Cornwell R (2025), Rapid Review of Literature Reporting the Experience of Patient and Public Involvement in Prison and Forensic Mental Health Research. *Int J Mental Health Nurs*, 34: e13483. <https://doi.org/10.1111/inm.13483>.

²¹ Chief Medical Officer (6 Nov 2025) [The health of people in prison, on probation and in the secure NHS estate in England](#) pages 405 and 407.

²² See NHS Health Research Authority (26 Oct 2022) [Prison research - Health Research Authority](#) and [Research at HMPPS - HM Prison and Probation Service - GOV.UK](#) (accessed 14 Oct 2025).

²³ [Health and Justice Research Network | The University of Manchester](#)

²⁴ The NRC meets monthly and a summary of each research report is uploaded to the MoJ internal Evidence Library. Unlike in other government departments, there is no evidence that the membership and minutes of the NRC are placed in the public domain. Ministry of Justice (2024) *National Research Committee: Applicant Guidance*. Available at [What makes a good research application](#).

²⁵ “I can confirm that the guidance on incentives applies to all research activity with prisoners/people under supervision, whether that is participation or coproduction.” Personal correspondence from Katie Hughes, Research Officer at the Ministry of Justice 10 Sept 2025.

²⁶ One researcher commented, “In projects I have worked on previously we have suggested thanking serving prisoners for the time in research with phone credits or even a library voucher, but our suggestions were rejected by NRC as they state no prisoner should be incentivised to take part in research.” Another researcher explained that the NRC had even refused to sanction payments to people on Probation and suspected that even the provision of lunch at a meeting would be viewed as enabling prisoners to ‘profit from crime’. Personal communications, 19 and 29 September 2025.

²⁷ Personal communication from Karen Morgan, Senior Social Researcher, NRC, 17 Sept 2025. A follow up message was sent to Dr Morgan on 18/09/2025 asking (i) whether specific arrangements have been made to overcome access barriers that prevent lived experience researchers from entering the prison; and (ii) for further information about the review of incentives in research that is expected to be complete in early 2026; and (iii) providing a link to the online version of this document. No response. A follow up question might ask if the membership and minutes of the NRC are placed in the public domain.

²⁸ PSI 22/2014 ([Research applications](#)) paragraphs 4.8 and 4.9. PSI 22/2014 replaced PSI 13/2012 which in turn replaced PSI 2010/41. See [psi-index-1997-2018-10-25.pdf](#).

²⁹ See Bates P (2025) [Going cheap on expenses](#).

³⁰ The Ministry of Justice National Research Committee, local NHS Research Ethics Committee, NHS provider Trust, University and prison.

³¹ Haarmans et al obtained permission to form a PAR team as one offer within the booklet of service activities and clinical interventions that people could choose when they were in an Offender Personality Disorder service within an English prison. Eight men participated in the research from inception to dissemination. Haarmans M, PAR Team, Perkins E & Jellicoe-Jones L (2021) "It's Us Doing It!" The Power of Participatory Action Research in Prison: A Contradiction in Terms? – Phase 1. *International Journal of Forensic Mental Health*, 20(3), pp.238-252. None of the prisoners received payment for their participation (Haarmans, personal correspondence Oct 2025).

³² Watson TM & van der Meulen E (2019) Research in carceral contexts: Confronting access barriers and engaging former prisoners. *Qualitative Research*. Apr;19(2):182-98.

³³ Honeywell D (October 2025) *Embracing the views and perspectives of those with lived experience*. Academic Insights 2025/08, HM Inspectorate of Probation. Page 8

³⁴ Honeywell D (October 2025) Op cit.

³⁵ Johnson ME, Brems C, Mills ME, Eldridge GD. Involving incarcerated individuals in the research process: Perspectives of key stakeholders. *Action Research*. 2018 Mar;16(1):43-64.

³⁶ Sullivan E, Hassal P & Rowlands (2008) Breaking the Chain: A prison-based participatory action research project *The British Journal of Forensic Practice*, 10(3), 13–19. <https://doi.org/10.1108/14636646200800015>.

³⁷ Ward J & Bailey D (2013) A participatory action research methodology in the management of self-harm in prison. *Journal of Mental Health*, 22(4), 306–316. <https://doi.org/10.3109/09638237.2012.734645>.

³⁸ Crabtree JL, Wall JM & Ohm D (2016). Critical reflections on participatory action research in a prison setting: Toward occupational justice. *OTJR: Occupation, Participation and Health*, 36(4), 244–252. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1539449216669132>. Hill and colleagues used an ethnographic and PAR approach to develop their understanding of 'illicit marketplaces' in prison. Hill RP, Rapp JM, Capella ML. Consumption restriction in a total control institution: Participatory action research in a maximum security prison. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*. 2015 Sep;34(2):156-72.

³⁹ The following papers report on different aspects of the same study which involved 190 Canadian women prisoners in a participatory research project between 2005 and 2007. Martin RE, Adamson S, Korchinski M, Granger-Brown A, Ramsden VR, Buxton JA... Hislop TG (2013) Incarcerated women develop a nutrition and fitness program: Participatory research. *International Journal of Prisoner Health*, 9(3), 142–150. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPH-03-2013-0015>. Also Martin RE, Murphy K, Hanson D, Hemingway C, Ramsden V, Buxton J, Granger-Brown A, Condello L-L, Buchanan M, Espinoza-Magana N, Edworthy G & Hislop TG (2009) The development of participatory health research among incarcerated women in a Canadian prison. *International Journal of Prisoner Health*, 5(2), 95–107. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449200902884021>. Also Ramsden V, Martin R, McMillan J, Granger-Brown A & Tole B (2015) Participatory health research within a prison setting: A qualitative analysis of 'Paragraphs of Passion'. *Global Health Promotion*, 22(4), 48–55. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1757975914547922>. Also Martin RE, Korchinski M, Fels L, & Leggo C (2017). Arresting hope: Women taking action in prison health inside out. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2017.1352156>.

⁴⁰ Charles et al reviewed all 14,355 applications to UK Research Ethics Committees that were submitted between 1 April 2010 and 31 March 2012. Fifty three of them were classed as prison-related research proposals - studies looking at issues in relation to prison or the prison environment, that is, prisoners selected as subjects because of their status as prisoners. Charles A, Rid A, Davies H, Draper H (2016) Prisoners as research participants: current practice and attitudes in the UK. *Journal of medical ethics*. Apr 1;42(4):246-52.

⁴¹ Mambro A, Afshar A, Leone F, Dussault C, Stoové M, Savulescu J, Rich JD, Rowan DH, Sheehan J, Kronfli N (2024) Reimbursing incarcerated individuals for participation in research: A scoping review. *International Journal of Drug Policy*. Jan 1;123:104283.

⁴² Sheard, L, Wright, NM, El-Sayeh, HG, Adams, CE, Li, R, & Tompkins, CN. (2009). The Leeds Evaluation of Efficacy of Detoxification Study (LEEDS) prisons project: a randomised controlled trial comparing dihydrocodeine and buprenorphine for opiate detoxification. *Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy*, 4, 1. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1747-597X-4-1>

⁴³ Hayes AJ, Burns A, Turnbull P & Shaw JJ (2013) Social and custodial needs of older adults in prison. *Age and Ageing*, 42(5), 589–593. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ageing/aft066>.

⁴⁴ Kronfli N, Lafferty L, Leone F, Stoové M, Hajarizadeh B, Lloyd AR, Altice FL (2024) Using nominal group technique to identify perceived barriers and facilitators to improving uptake of the Prison Needle Exchange Program in Canadian federal prisons by correctional officers and healthcare workers. *International Journal of Drug Policy*. 2024 Aug 1;130:104540. The 2025 report from HM Inspector of Prisons mentions short courses, which we note here may be a suitable vehicle for participatory research. See HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (October 2025) *Just passing time': A review of work and training provision in adult prisons* paragraphs 6.12 to 6.18.

⁴⁵ “All incarcerated researchers received refreshment – for example, juice, granola bars, cheese, and crackers – and \$20 on their jail account (books) for their participation in project workshops (for a maximum payment of \$80 for four workshops.” Fields J, González I, Hentz K, Rhee M & White C (2008) Learning from and with incarcerated women: Emerging lessons from a participatory action study of sexuality education. *Sexuality Research & Social Policy*, 5(2), 71–84. <https://doi.org/10.1525/srsp.2008.5.2.71>.

⁴⁶ Young S, González RA, Fridman M, Hodgkins P, Kim K, & Gudjonsson GH (2018) The economic consequences of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder in the Scottish prison system. *BMC Psychiatry [Electronic Resource]*, 18(1), 210. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-018-1792-x>. Jun 25.

⁴⁷ Treacy S, Martin S, Samarutilake N *et al* (2021) Patient and public involvement (PPI) in prisons: the involvement of people living in prison in the research process – a systematic scoping review. *Health Justice* 9, 30. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40352-021-00154-6>.

⁴⁸ Awenat YF, Moore C, Gooding PA, Ulph F, Mirza A & Pratt D (2018) Improving the quality of prison research: a qualitative study of ex-offender service user involvement in prison suicide prevention research. *Health Expect* 21 (1): 100–109. <https://DOI.org/10.1111/hex.12590>. Also Awenat Y. Forensic Patient and Public Involvement: The Development and Maintenance of an Ex-offender Service User Reference Group. In Pratt D, (ed.) (2015) *The Prevention of Suicide in Prison: Cognitive Behavioural Approaches*. London, UK: Routledge.

⁴⁹ Taylor C, Gill L, Gibson A, Byng R, Quinn C. Engaging “seldom heard” groups in research and intervention development: Offender mental health. *Health Expectations*. 2018 Dec;21(6):1104-10.

⁵⁰ Hemming L, Pratt D, Bhatti P, Shaw J & Haddock G (2021) Involving an individual with lived-experience in a co-analysis of qualitative data. *Health Expectations*. Jun;24(3):766-75.

⁵¹ Study NIHR204681 is due to report its findings in December 2025. The RECONNECT service aims to coordinate support before and after release for prisoners with health needs. See [NHS commissioning » RECONNECT](#).

⁵² Dr Ella Simpson, personal communication, December 2025.

⁵³ Whiting *et al* (in press) *BMC Research Involvement and Engagement*.

⁵⁴ For an example from Canada, see Livingston JD, Nijdam-Jones A, Team P.E.E.R. (2013) Perceptions of Treatment Planning in a Forensic Mental Health Hospital: A Qualitative, Participatory Action Research Study. *International Journal of Forensic Mental Health*. 12(1):42-52. doi:[10.1080/14999013.2013.763390](https://doi.org/10.1080/14999013.2013.763390).

⁵⁵ MacInnes D, Beer D, Keeble P, Rees D & Reid L (2011) Service-user involvement in forensic mental health care research: areas to consider when developing a collaborative study. *J Ment Health* 20 (5): 464–472. <https://doi.org/10.3109/09638231003728109>.

⁵⁶ From a management point of view, a forensic inpatient unit is not part of the prison estate. However, some individual patients are under the supervision of the Ministry of Justice and therefore may find that the NRC treats them as if they were in prison when it comes to PPI payments.

⁵⁷ Clifford N, Jeynes C, Callaghan I *et al.* Patient and public involvement in secure mental health research: setting-specific considerations and a protocol for involvement in the CORAS study (Collaborative Risk Assessment and management). *Research Involvement and Engagement* 11, 127 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40900-025-00768-2>.

⁵⁸ Seddon T (2005) Paying drug users to take part in research: Justice, human rights and business perspectives on the use of incentive payments. *Addiction Research & Theory*. Apr 1;13(2):101-9. DOI: 10.1080/16066350512331328122.

⁵⁹ See, for example, [Lowdham-Grange-web-2025.pdf](#) para 3.11.

⁶⁰ The report on HMP Fosse Way indicates differences between pay levels for working in the industrial workshops, education and specific classes in English and Mathematics. [Fosse-Way-web-2025.pdf](#) para 5.17.

⁶¹ On 18 Sept 2025, an informal inquiry was sent to NIHR's international team to find out how they address this dilemma when engaging Public Contributors in Low and Middle Income Countries. The response indicated informal routes of inquiry had been closed and the only way to obtain information was to submit an inquiry under Freedom of Information rules, which was done as case FOI-1643396. In their response dated 20 October 2025, DHSC and NIHR declared that "Public contributors based in low and middle income countries are paid the same rates via the same mechanisms as UK-based public contributors." Prisons work on a micro-economy, where National Minimum Wage rates do not apply and people work for miniscule hourly rates, endorsed by the Government as a means of motivating the prisoner without costing the public purse very much or suggesting that people can profit from crime. Suggestions that incarcerated Public Contributors should receive the same as anyone else are rejected due to the fear that the payments would be so comparatively large that they would increase the amount of financial abuse between one prisoner and another. The NRC currently refuses all proposals and insist that people receive nothing for PPI activities. NIHR research in Low and Middle Income countries (LMICs) forms the second parallel example. Despite the fact that some Public Contributors in LMIC's subsist on a tiny budget, NIHR offers the 'lucky winner' of a PPI opportunity exactly the same payment as her counterpart in the UK. No attempt is made to equate the payment made in our different countries to the [national minimum wage in that country](#), the value of one meal or one week's rent or the cost of one course of antibiotics. Instead, the Public Contributor who lives in York village outside Freetown, Sierra Leone receives the same offer of payment as the Public Contributor living in Yorkshire, England. PPI is not governed by a contract of employment, yet we must decide if we are 'buying' knowledge or means-testing the recipient. If the knowledge we get from a prisoner, a resident of Sierra Leone and a child is all of equal value, then we should value it as such, rather than continue to operate a system that is capricious.

⁶² First report of the Select Committee of the House of Lords on gaols and houses of correction, Lords' Paper 42, recommendation 4, "That entire Separation, except during the hours of labour and of religious worship, and instruction, is absolutely necessary for preventing contamination, and for securing a proper system of prison discipline" and recommendation 5 "That silence be enforced, so as to prevent all communication between prisoners".

⁶³ Seddon (2005) op cit shows that some people are hostile to the idea of making participation payments to offenders who use illicit drugs.

⁶⁴ Council of Europe (25 Jan 2005) *Additional Protocol to the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine, concerning Biomedical Research*. Strasbourg. <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Treaties/Html/195.htm>.

⁶⁵ Chief Medical Officer (6 Nov 2025) [The health of people in prison, on probation and in the secure NHS estate in England](#) page 400.

⁶⁶ Some researchers in Ward & Bailey's team thought that prisoners should be paid, whilst others considered this unfair to the prisoners who were ineligible to take part in the study. Ward J & Bailey D (2012) Consent, confidentiality and the ethics of PAR in the context of prison research *in* Love K (ed) *Studies in Qualitative Methodology: Ethics in Social Research*, 12, 149–169. [https://doi.org/10.1108/S1042-3192\(2012\)0000012011](https://doi.org/10.1108/S1042-3192(2012)0000012011).

⁶⁷ Ward & Bailey (2012, op cit) report that 89% of the questionnaires they issued to women in prison were completed and returned. These participants may have been especially eager to help with the PAR process, especially where participation provided an opportunity for personal interaction, rather than filling in a form for a stranger. They may have been under-occupied or bored and so eager to join in with anything on offer.

⁶⁸ The closed environment combines with the requirement to escort prisoners around the prison and attend interviews with them, rendering participation neither private nor confidential. See Gostin LO, Vanchieri C & Pope A (2007) *Ethical considerations for research involving prisoners*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

⁶⁹ Moser DJ, Arndt S, Kanz JE, Benjamin ML, Bayless JD, Reese RL, Paulsen JS & Flaum MA (2004) Coercion and informed consent in research involving prisoners. *Comprehensive psychiatry*. Jan 1;45(1):1-9.

⁷⁰ Mambro et al (2024), op cit.

⁷¹ Smith-Merry J & Mellifont D (2025) Payment of Participants with Disability in Research: A Scoping Review and Framework. *Social Sciences*. Jun 13;14(6):374.

⁷² Joseph Mengele conducted experiments on prisoners at Auschwitz II-Birkenau from 1942-1945. From 1932 to 1972, African-American prisoners at Tuskegee, Alabama were denied access to treatment for syphilis so that researchers could track the natural progress of the disease. Philip Zimbardo subjected students to his now discredited 'Prison Experiment' in 1971. In the USA in 1972, 85-90% of new drugs were first tested on prisoners. See London AJ (2012) A non-paternalistic model of research ethics and oversight: Assessing the benefits of prospective review. *The Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics*. 40(4):930-44.

⁷³ Charles et al (2016) op cit.

⁷⁴ Aoife Watters conducted some prison research in Ireland and the ethical approval process took more than a year. Quoted in Rainbow JA (2024) *Researching prisons* Routledge. Chapter 3 'Doing prison research'.

⁷⁵ As prisoners are counted as NHS patients, barriers may have been erected by the NHS Trust and/or the Prison Governor. For details of the challenges facing Public Contributors who wish to cofacilitate Focus Groups in NHS settings, see Bowness B, Bates P, Chauhan A, Osman Y, Shlovogt T & Lawrence V (2025) Public co-researchers in research: approved in principle, undermined in practice? *Research Involvement and Engagement* 11, 63. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40900-025-00708-0>. Also <https://peterbates.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/How-to-get-approval-for-Public-Contributors-to-interview-NHS-patients.pdf>.

⁷⁶ Ward J & Bailey D (2012) op cit.

⁷⁷ Honeywell D (2023) A Critical Reflection on Being a Lived Experience Researcher. *Irish Probation Journal*. Oct 1;20.

⁷⁸ Fine M & Torr  ME (2006) op cit.

⁷⁹ At the time of writing, Jennifer A. Schlosser had 16 years experience of working in prisons in the United States. She comments on the culture as follows: "Not once in the many months I was there collecting my data (or, for that matter in all the years I've spent working in prisons since) was I ever threatened, dehumanised, or objectified by any incarcerated person the way I was (and continue to be) by guards, officers, and prison employees." Things may be different in the UK, of course. Quoted in Rainbow (2024) op cit.

⁸⁰ [Our reports – HM Inspectorate of Prisons](#). Reports published between 01/01/2025 and 04/10/2025 have been reviewed.

⁸¹ More people are being sent to prison and stay there for longer sentences, while more of them have recognised additional needs. Staffing levels have been cut and staff turnover has increased, replacing seasoned and experienced staff with younger and less experienced employees. Overcrowded cells and more frequent prison transfers have disrupted relationships with staff and so behaviour has deteriorated. Vacancy levels in the workforce have risen. As a result, obtaining approval for research may be delayed, prisoners are more likely to be unable to leave their cell, staff may not be available to escort prisoners to meetings and prisoners may be less amenable to help anyone in authority. See, for example, [Sentences are 58 per cent longer than a decade ago – insidetime & insideinformation](#).

⁸² This is illustrated by the reports of unannounced inspections by His Majesty's Inspector of Prisons. None of the 67 reports published between 01/01/2025 and 06/10/2025 mention any research having been carried out in the prison or in partnership with serving prisoners.

⁸³ Crabtree et al (2016) op cit.

⁸⁴ Bates P (2024) [How-to-write-in-public.pdf \(peterbates.org.uk\)](#).

⁸⁵ Inquiries were sent to the following – posted on my account at LinkedIn, also to 11:11 Prison Support, Gareth Addidle, Amy Allard-Dunbar, Rob Allen, Caragh Arthur, Rebecca Askew, Yvonne Awenat, Neil Baker, Tine van Bortel, Andi Brierley, Gill Buck, Laura Bowden, Centre for Mental Health, Jon Collins, Emily Cooper, Paul Crawshaw, Sacha Darke, Camilla De Camargo, Dani Darley, Heather Draper, Sophie Ellis*, Morag Farquhar*, Jessica Fields, Abbie Gardner, Loraine Gelsthorpe, Chris Griffiths*, Kathy Hampson, Nicholas Hardwick, Paula Harriot, Ruth Hatcher*, Dave Honeywell, Rob Knight, Caroline Lanskey, Alison Liebling, Nicholas Lord, Ralph Lubkowski, Shadd Maruna, John McDaniel, Douglas McInnes, Emma Murray, Francis Pakes, Samantha Pariser, Emma Palmer, Jonathan Parker, Ricky Piper, Cody Porter, Sandra Prew, Katie Price, Revolving Doors, Grace Sheward, Ella Simpson*, SNAP, Paul Taylor, Craig Thomson, User Voice, WEPHREN and Nicola Worthington*. The draft report has been shared with the people marked *.

⁸⁶ Comments and advice have been gratefully received from Sandra Beeton, Jamie Bennett, Alex Bradley, Ian Callaghan, Ben Crewe, Rod Earle, Manuel Eisner, Carole Gardener, Donna Gipson, Paul Hogan, Kate Horton, Sarah Leonard, Poppy Lyons, Mark Monaghan, Karen Morgan, Charlotte O'Brien, Sean Ormerod, Emma Palmer, Jake Phillips, Rosie Rutherford, Tasha Cowperthwaite, Rachael Timoney, Samantha Treacy, John Tully, Danny Whiting and Dominic Willmott as well as some who preferred to remain anonymous. All named people have been invited to correct the draft report.

⁸⁷ All errors and omissions are the sole responsibility of the author. The information is provided in good faith, and so readers engage with the contents at their own risk and undertake not to hold the author liable for any injury, loss, or damage arising through reading or acting on its contents.

⁸⁸ Ministry of Justice (1 April 2025) [Incentives Policy Framework](#) para 5.36.

⁸⁹ "Prisoners are prohibited from publishing material about their own crime or past offences, or those of others, except where it consists of serious representations about their conviction or serious comment about crime, the criminal justice process or the penal system." PSI 37/2010 *Prisoners' Access to the Media* (Para 2.2) and paragraph 11.3(j) (i) of PSI 49/2011 *Prisoner Communications Services*. Dr Ella Simpson is currently part of an editorial team for a Guide to Studying in Prison which will be co-authored with a number of people who are currently studying in prison. She hopes that authors will be allowed to register with the [Authors' Licensing and Collection Society](#), which will enable them to claim royalties on their contributions.

⁹⁰ Prison Rule 9 (Prison Rules 1999) and Prison Service Order 6300 set out how Release on Temporary Licence works and who is eligible. The Prisons and Probation Policy Framework (May 2019) also provides for Resettlement Day Release. See also [ROTL-Self-Help-Toolkit.pdf](#).

⁹¹ [HMPPS Annual Digest 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

⁹² Prison Service Order 4460: [Prisoners' pay](#).

⁹³ This comment was made by an ex-prisoner. No corroboration of this has yet been found.

⁹⁴ Prison Service Order 4460: [Prisoners' pay](#) paragraphs 2.4 and Annex B.

⁹⁵ Rule 31 of the Prison Rules 1999 states that 'a convicted prisoner shall be required to do useful work for not more than 10 hours a day, and arrangements shall be made to allow prisoners to work, where possible, outside the cells and in association with one another'. This means that all adult prisoners, excluding those on remand (i.e. unconvicted), the retired and those deemed unfit, for example for medical reasons, are required to take part in education, training or work during their time in prison." HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (October 2025) [Just passing time: A review of work and training provision in adult prisons paragraphs 2.16 and 3.1](#).

⁹⁶ Prison Service Order 4460: [Prisoners' pay](#) Annex B.

⁹⁷ The [Inside Job](#) project engages some serving prisoners to work for them inside the prison and pays into a holding account that they maintain on behalf of the prisoner until they are released.

⁹⁸ <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67eaa0f7f0edd954a99fe97a/prison-education-library-services-pf.pdf>

⁹⁹ For example, studying English or Mathematics is incentivised at Fosse Way prison. [Fosse-Way-web-2025.pdf](#) para 5.17.

¹⁰⁰ At HMP Altcourse, phone credit can be earned, as well as £10 to spend in the visits café, and positive work in education is rewarded with a token that can be used in a vending machine that dispenses books. [Report on an unannounced inspection of HMP Altcourse by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons \(7-18 July 2025\)](#).

¹⁰¹ In accordance with Prison Rule 55 (1)(d).

¹⁰² CIPFA website [Prisons](#)

¹⁰³ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/sep/14/prisons-in-england-and-wales-to-cut-spending-on-education-courses-by-up-to-50>.

¹⁰⁴ Inquiry sent to NIHR International Team 18/09/2025. No response has yet been received.

¹⁰⁵ [PRISONERS EARNINGS ACT 1996](#)

¹⁰⁶ The current [Incentives Policy Framework](#) was formerly the Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme. See also [HMPPS Annual Digest 2023 to 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

¹⁰⁷ A fifth level, Entry, was introduced in 2013 and abolished in 2019.

¹⁰⁸ Ministry of Justice (1 April 2025) [Incentives Policy Framework](#) paragraph 5.4.

¹⁰⁹ [POVERTY PAY RATES – insidetime & insideinformation](#)

¹¹⁰ Ministry of Justice (1 April 2025) [Incentives Policy Framework](#) paragraph 5.6.

¹¹¹ [PRISONERS EARNINGS ACT 1996](#)

¹¹² The prison may restrict the number of certain items that can be bought at one time as well as the amount of money spent.

¹¹³ [Watchdogs warn over 'canteen inflation' – insidetime & insideinformation](#)

¹¹⁴ Ministry of Justice (1 April 2025) [Incentives Policy Framework](#) para 5.36

¹¹⁵ PSO 4460 Prisoners' Pay, Paragraph 2.7.3 and 2.7.4 indicates that prisoners are not formally included in the National Minimum Wage Act 1998. However, the prison service is unwilling to give businesses which employ prisoners a commercial advantage, so insists on equal pay and conditions for prisoners and other employees.

¹¹⁶ When a prisoner has permission to work for an ordinary employer outside the prison, their net pay consists of earnings after removing tax, national insurance contributions, court-ordered deductions and child support payments. The employer provides the employee with a payslip but must transfer the net pay to the prison service. The prison service takes a levy and transfers it to an approved victim support charity before transferring the balance into the prisoner's private bank account held in the community. Prisoners receive the first £20 of their net pay along with 60% or more of their net earnings above this figure. Governors are required to set the usual levy rate at 40%, but may, in exceptional circumstances, reduce it to any figure between 0% and 40%. See [PRISONERS' EARNINGS ACT 1996](#).

¹¹⁷ This metric takes no account of the proportion of the population who are incarcerated in each country, the purpose of the research, the spend on each study, the number of prisoners who participated, the type of knowledge gained or the action that was taken in the light of findings.