

# Unlocked

Leading change  
on the inside



## TRANSFORMING PRISONS:

OUR 2025 – 2026  
IMPACT REPORT

# OUR IMPACT AT A GLANCE

**140,000+** **£59**

prisoners reached by Unlocked participants and Ambassadors since 2017

saved for society over a five-year period for every £1 invested in our programme

**£1.5m+** **9 IN 10**

fundraised income invested in frontline innovation, including accelerator projects led by Unlocked participants

participants tell us they had not considered a career in the prison service until they heard about Unlocked

**3/4** **17**

of our Ambassadors continue to work towards our mission of breaking cycles of reoffending

percentage points higher retention for our participants after two years than those who join the same prisons via the standard recruitment route



“ The Unlocked Graduates initiative has been game-changing and life-changing for both our justice system and the individual prison officers who have taken part. You can always spot an Unlocked Graduate, they are optimistic, professionally curious and adept, full of enthusiasm for the role and dedicated to ensuring our prison system is purposeful, effective and rehabilitative.

**PAULA HARRIOTT**  
CEO of Unlocked and lived experience leader

# CEO FOREWORD



**NATASHA PORTER OBE**  
CEO and Founder, Unlocked  
Graduates

I am really pleased to share our latest impact report which documents an incredible 12 months of progress at Unlocked Graduates. It outlines some of our key achievements from a year in which we remained at the forefront of innovation in the recruitment, training and development of outstanding prison leaders, driving reform across the system.

Participants on our programmes have continued to lead change on the landings over the past year, despite the well-documented challenges facing our prisons. Every day, they go into one of the toughest working environments, refusing to accept the status quo and continuing to show up for those in their care. This is a group of people who have put themselves in the middle of one of the country's most challenging systems, and they are determined to fix it.

Our current and former participants have now reached over 140,000 prisoners across England and Wales since 2017. Over the past 12 months, I have spent a huge amount of time in our partner prisons, seeing first-hand the incredible impact they are having on the landings and hearing from prisoners who tell us how much of a difference these transformational prison officers are making.

We have continued to find new and innovative ways to support these leaders to drive real change, and many of these are shared in this report with the hope that others across the system might benefit from them. Our approach is showing success, and retention for those on our programme remains significantly above the standard entry route, and over 85% of our most recent cohort were still operational at the end of their two years with Unlocked. Most importantly, this means that more outstanding officers are continuing to have an impact on the landings.

“ Regarding the Unlocked Graduates Programme, contributors were unanimous in their praise, highlighting its high-quality intake and the retention of all participants.

HOUSE OF LORDS JUSTICE & HOME AFFAIRS COMMITTEE  
‘Better prisons: less crime’ report, 2025

We remain determined to share the solutions that we know work. We were incredibly proud to publish *Leading Prison Landings: The Unlocked Guide to Jailcraft* last year, making our training model available to anyone for the first time, and codifying and sharing what it is that the best officers do to transform outcomes.

Unlocked ChangeMakers, our new development programme for custodial managers, completed its pilot last year, and we are pleased to be welcoming our second cohort of CMs in spring 2026 to build on the success of this first year. This programme aims to transform the quality of middle leadership in prisons, supporting officers on the landings to have the greatest impact possible. It applies learnings from our graduate programme, allowing us to develop the next generation of outstanding middle leaders who can drive real culture change across the service.

2026 marks 10 years of Unlocked Graduates, giving us the opportunity to reflect on some of the incredible progress we have made so far to transform the system. We look forward to sharing this impact over the course of the next year and celebrating some of the incredible work being carried out on the frontline to inspire the next decade of change.

Finally, the achievements outlined in this report – and those of the past nine years – would not have been possible without our colleagues across HMPPS, our partner organisations, and our funders. Their incredible support allows us to continue developing innovative solutions to one of the greatest challenges facing society, and ultimately break cycles of reoffending. Most importantly, I would like to thank those working on the frontline of our prisons who are supporting some of society's hardest to reach people and helping to change lives every day.

N. Porter

# WHY WE EXIST

## THE PROBLEM

Over 40% of those who leave prison today will be reconvicted within a year. Not only does this recidivism make our communities less safe, but it also has a significant human and social impact. It breaks up families, destroys livelihoods and prevents people from meaningfully contributing to society. And it is expensive, **costing the taxpayer over £23bn every year.**

But there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Most of the more than 86,000 prisoners in England and Wales require tailored, expert care and robust security. Many come from some of society's most vulnerable groups and have a disproportionately high risk of drug addiction, mental illness, homelessness, and suicide; **in the year to June 2025 there were over 76,000 reported incidents of self-harm.** Data suggests that over two thirds of prisoners have the literacy skills below those expected of an 11-year-old, and around a quarter were in care as children.



## OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

We recruit, train and challenge outstanding individuals to lead prisoner rehabilitation with the aim of creating high-performing leaders who will break the cycles of reoffending in prisons and throughout society.

## OUR SOLUTION

We believe that the way to break cycles of reoffending is by inspiring the country's best and brightest to lead change on the frontline. In the same way an outstanding teacher can transform a child's life, **a remarkable prison officer can radically alter the outcomes for a prisoner in their care.** Prison officers are the agents of change within prisons, they set the culture on the landings and have the power to create a safe and secure environment focused on rehabilitation. Evidence shows that a good prison officer is critical to improving prisoner outcomes across a range of key measures, including self-harm, violence, engagement in purposeful activities and reduced reoffending post-release.

Unlocked Graduates exists to make this happen. Since 2017, we have been recruiting, training and supporting diverse groups of ambitious graduates to deliver reform on the frontline of some of our most challenging prisons while developing incredible leadership skills in the process. They are encouraged to be radical disruptors, pushing boundaries to come up with new solutions and acting as a catalyst for change across the prison system.



# TRANSFORMING PRISONS: OUR 2023 – 2026 STRATEGY

Our 2023-26 strategy reflects on everything we have learnt since 2016 and identifies the steps required to build the prison system we need. As we enter the final year of this strategy period, we remain committed to these four key areas of work:

- 1 RECRUIT, DEVELOP AND RETAIN MORE HIGH-QUALITY GRADUATES AS PRISON OFFICERS**
- 2 SUPPORT AMBASSADORS TO PROGRESS INTO OPERATIONAL PRISON LEADERSHIP ROLES**
- 3 MAINSTREAM OUR SOLUTIONS SO ALL PRISON OFFICERS BENEFIT FROM OUR RESEARCH AND WORK**
- 4 PROVE WHAT WORKS IN PRISONS TO CATALYSE WHOLE SYSTEM CHANGE**





# STRATEGIC GOAL 1

## RECRUIT, DEVELOP AND TRAIN MORE HIGH-QUALITY GRADUATES AS PRISON OFFICERS

Exceptional outcomes in prison require exceptional leaders. Finding and inspiring the next generation of prison leaders is at the heart of what we do. We are unapologetically focused on recruiting, retaining and developing the best and most diverse pool of prison officers, ensuring that people in custody receive the support they need to lead fulfilling lives post-release in order to break cycles of reoffending.

### OUR IMPACT:

- ▶ We have placed, trained and developed nearly **900 prison officers** in **38 different prisons** across England and Wales since 2017 on our award-winning, two-year Leadership Development Programme.
- ▶ **Retention for those on our programme remains significantly higher** than those joining via the standard entry route:
  - ▶ Data published by the Ministry of Justice shows **retention for our participants is 17 percentage points higher** than those who join through the standard entry route after two years.

- ▶ This rises to 30 percentage points when taking into account those participants who left the service for reasons considered beyond Unlocked's control.
- ▶ Over **85% of our 2023 cohort were still operational** at the end of their time on our programme, continuing to have an impact on those in their care.
- ▶ Continued to develop our unique training and support model for outstanding prison officers, ensuring participants have the tools to do their job excellently:
  - ▶ Introduced our **new, bespoke instructional coaching model** for prison officers and **published a training manual for transformative relational practice, *Leading Prison Landings: The Unlocked Guide to Jailcraft***.
- ▶ In a recent survey of governors at our partner prisons, **100% of respondents rated the quality of Unlocked's training and support as good or excellent:**
  - ▶ In a survey, 100% of our participants reported that their Mentoring Prison Officers (MPO) **provided effective support to develop them as leaders**.
  - ▶ Our MPO team were shortlisted for **Frontline Team of the Year** at the prestigious Third Sector Awards 2025.
- ▶ Continued our efforts to **transform perceptions of the prison officer role**, putting it on the map as a career where top graduates can gain outstanding leadership skills while making a real difference:
  - ▶ Around 90% of participants in our most recent cohort tell us **they hadn't considered a career in the prison service before hearing about Unlocked**.

“ I have really seen the impact Unlocked Graduates participants are having at HMP/YOI Styal, and how they've grown. They have also positively impacted on their colleagues. They support each other as a cohort, and I have been so impressed with how they have gripped some of the issues we face and their resilience in doing so.

**NICKY HARGREAVES**  
Governing Governor, HMP/YOI Styal



## STRATEGIC GOAL

# 2

### SUPPORT AMBASSADORS TO PROGRESS INTO OPERATIONAL PRISON LEADERSHIP ROLES

If we are to see real change, it is vital that the prison service attracts and retains the very best talent. Therefore, our Ambassadors must continue to have impact beyond their two years on the programme. For most, this translates into promotion on the landings, becoming policymakers or working towards reducing reoffending in other mission-aligned roles.

#### OUR IMPACT:

- ▶ The majority of Unlocked Ambassadors stay focused on prison reform after completing the programme:
  - ▶ 75% of those who have completed the programme since 2017 continue to work towards our mission of breaking cycles of reoffending in their primary role.
  - ▶ Nearly 40% of all operational Ambassadors have now been promoted to a frontline leadership role.

- ▶ Supported the **growth of our self-led alumni network**, creating more **opportunities for Ambassadors to build their own networks and develop their influence** as leaders:
  - ▶ Hosted events to **promote knowledge sharing in the prison service**, alongside study visits to high-performing prisons to highlight examples of best practice, demonstrating that change is possible.
  - ▶ **Launched Unlocked Trailblazers**, a peer mentoring programme for operational Ambassadors to support them to progress into leadership roles in their prisons, ensuring they can have the greatest possible impact.
- ▶ Our participants and Ambassadors have been **nominated for and won multiple awards this year**, including:
  - ▶ **Georgia Beck**, Unlocked Ambassador – won a Prison Officer of the Year Award in her region for her work supporting the prisoners in her care and her colleagues.
  - ▶ **Georgia Deane**, Unlocked Ambassador – nominated for an HMPPS regional award for her work in supporting the prisoners in her care.
  - ▶ **Abdul Kayani**, Unlocked participant – nominated for an HMPPS regional award in the Change and Innovation category for his Inside Out project which has significantly increased purposeful activity on his wing.
  - ▶ **Eli Nelson**, Unlocked Ambassador – nominated for the Ministry of Justice awards in the Humanity category for his efforts to support prisoners and his project to launch an on-wing library in his prison.
  - ▶ **Jim Crossland**, Unlocked participant – nominated for the Ministry of Justice awards in the Outstanding Leadership category for being a leader in his prison and his work to support prisoners and staff with diabetes.

“ Being a part of the Unlocked Ambassador Network has meant that there is always someone to reach out to. It’s very easy to be quickly put in touch with contacts who are sometimes the missing piece for something you are working on [...] The level of enthusiasm and genuine support in doing so is felt in every interaction.

**ZAHRAH**  
Unlocked Ambassador

# SPOTLIGHT ON: LEADING PRISON LANDINGS

## SHARING OUR MODEL

Prison officers are working with some of the hardest to reach people in some of the toughest public sector environments. They need – and deserve – the highest-quality training materials to do their job excellently. In summer 2025, we published *Leading Prison Landings: The Unlocked Guide to Jailcraft*, a training manual for frontline staff giving them the tools to take their professional development into their own hands.

Over nearly a decade, we have continually innovated and refined our uniquely successful approach to training and developing transformational prison officers. This book makes the Unlocked model available to anyone for the first time, supporting all prison officers to hone their jailcraft and ultimately transform outcomes for those in their care.



“ This book has real potential to transform how we train and support our frontline staff. By embedding practical insights and reflective learning, this resource can help us refine training approaches, develop exceptional prison officers, and ultimately deliver better outcomes for those in our care.”

PAUL CROSSEY  
Governing Governor, HMP & YOI Feltham B

## TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICE

The relationships that frontline staff can build with prisoners are key for creating rehabilitative environments in prisons. We know that good prison officers can have a significant impact on outcomes for the prisoners they work with across a range of measures, including post-release. This book is the first of its kind, codifying transformative relational practice in prisons and outlining what the best officers do to make a real difference on the landings.

It is broken down into 24 key techniques that anyone can learn. To support prison officers to build these strategies into their everyday practice – either on their own or with the support of a coach or mentor – we have developed an accompanying suite of videos that replicate real scenarios as closely as possible.

## WHERE TO FIND IT

*Leading Prison Landings: The Unlocked Guide to Jailcraft* is available to purchase online [here](#). For more information about how to use this book to support frontline staff – both new and experienced – please contact our team at [hello@unlockedgrads.org.uk](mailto:hello@unlockedgrads.org.uk)



## STRATEGIC GOAL 3

### MAINSTREAM OUR SOLUTIONS SO ALL PRISON OFFICERS BENEFIT FROM OUR RESEARCH AND WORK

We have spent nearly a decade collating evidence about the experiences of prison officers and applying this to our recruitment, training and leadership development to ensure the greatest possible impact. Our approach to training and support continues to influence wider prison officer training and development, and organisations from around the world regularly reach out to us to learn from our work.

#### OUR IMPACT:

- ▶ Continued to **work with colleagues to share our evidence-based approaches** to the recruitment, training and development of transformational prison officers across the system:
  - ▶ In a survey, 100% of our partner prisons stated they would recommend the Unlocked programme to colleagues at other prisons.

- ▶ Published **academically peer-reviewed research on the importance of procedural justice in enabling better wellbeing for new prison officers** and how this can accelerate the impact they have in the prestigious Corrections journal.
- ▶ Worked with colleagues in HMPPS to support the development of the Enable Programme to ensure **our learnings can be integrated into new approaches** to training and supporting prison staff across the system.
- ▶ Published *Leading Prison Landings: The Unlocked Guide to Jailcraft*, a **first-of-its-kind training manual for relational practice codifying our uniquely successful training model** and making it available to anyone for the first time.

#### Unlocked ChangeMakers:

In 2025, our first cohort of custodial managers (CM) completed Unlocked ChangeMakers. This development programme applies everything we have learnt about effective middle leadership in prisons to the vital CM role. **It ensures more band 3 prison officers around the country have access to the high levels of support** on the landings that we know allow them to have the greatest impact on those in their care.

- ▶ 95% of our first cohort of CMs reported **an improvement in their ability to drive culture change** as a result of the ChangeMakers programme.
- ▶ In a survey, 100% of respondents who report directly to our first cohort of ChangeMakers noted an **improvement in team development and management** following the programme.

“ I’ve moved from being a reactive manager to a proactive leader who sees challenges as opportunities, and who believes in the capacity for growth in everyone – staff and prisoners alike.

UNLOCKED CHANGEMAKERS  
PARTICIPANT



# STRATEGIC GOAL

# 4

## PROVE WHAT WORKS IN PRISONS TO CATALYSE WHOLE SYSTEM CHANGE

We want to drive system reform, and to do this we need to prove that change is possible, particularly in areas where failure is expected. We ultimately want to use excellence and proof of concept on the frontline to lead evidence-based change and build a system which effectively breaks cycles of reoffending.

### OUR IMPACT:

- ▶ Continued to work with leading academics and other experts to celebrate excellence and prove what works:
  - ▶ **Facilitated the exchange of ideas, sharing evidence of what works** and solutions for change with academics, policymakers and – most importantly – frontline staff, including at our Annual Conference.
- ▶ **Invested over £1.5m of fundraised income in frontline innovation** and accelerator projects to date:
  - ▶ Continued to invest in the development of our new middle leadership programme Unlocked ChangeMakers.



Analysis from independent experts provides indicative evidence that **for every £1 spent on Unlocked Graduates, at least £59 is saved for society over a five-year period.**

- ▶ **Supported participants and Ambassadors to lead change projects on the landings** through the Innovation Acceleration Programme (IAP).
- ▶ Continued to **find ways to robustly measure our impact**, including collaborating with international leaders, independent experts and behavioural scientists.
- ▶ Further built out our **world-leading datasets on the experiences of early-career prison officers** and how they can have the greatest possible impact on the landings.
- ▶ **Shared our learnings and insights with colleagues** across the UK and internationally:
  - ▶ Invited to share learnings from our model at the prestigious International Corrections and Prisons Association annual conference in Istanbul.
  - ▶ Invited to present at the 2025 Meeting of the American Society of Criminology in Washington.
  - ▶ Invited to present evidence on the impact of Unlocked and the prison officer role with the Scandinavian Prison Project at the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections.

**“ When I was in prison, my landing officer was an Unlocked participant, and he had a different approach to every other officer. Giving prison officers that living proof that rehabilitation is possible is always going to give them that hope and drive to do the job in prison and understand that they can help a prisoner.”**

**GODFREY**  
Unlocked Lived Experience Trainer

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