

Categorisation – women prisoners

What do the different security categories mean?

The security categories of women prisoners differ from those of male prisoners.

The official definition of female prisoners' security categories are as follows:

Cat A – Prisoners whose escape would be highly dangerous to the public or the police or the security of the state, no matter how unlikely that escape might be, and for whom the aim must be to make escape impossible

Closed – Prisoners for whom the very highest conditions of security are not necessary, but who present too high a risk for open conditions; cannot be trusted in open conditions or for whom open conditions are not appropriate

Semi-Open – Prisoners who present a low risk to the public but who require a level of physical perimeter security to deter abscond

Open – Prisoners who present a low risk; can reasonably be trusted in open conditions and for whom open conditions are appropriate

What determines my initial security categorisation?

According to the Prison Service:

“Prisoners must be categorised objectively according to the likelihood that they will abscond and the risk that they would pose should they abscond.”

If eligible, a prisoner must be assigned to a semi-open or an open security category even if it is clear that it will not be possible to allocate her to a semi-open or an open prison immediately. The suitability and allocation process may follow immediately, but will be distinct from security categorisation.

The criteria applied at initial allocation to the assessment of risk to the public or risk of abscond are as follows:

- the current sentence is 3 years or more;
- the current offence is a serious offence of: actual/threatened harm; sexual nature; drug dealing or importation;
- the prisoner has previously received a sentence of 3 years or more within the past 5 years; has a previous conviction within the past 5 years for a serious offence of actual/threatened violence/harm, a sexual nature, drug dealing or importation or the pattern of previous offending gives cause for concern;
- the nature of Schedule 1 gives cause for concern;
- there are concerns about the prisoner's association with serious criminal;
- the prisoner is diagnosed or is suspected of suffering from any psychiatric or psychological problems;
- there are further charges outstanding or the prisoner is awaiting sentencing;
- there is concern about any escape or abscond from any form of custody, breach of licence, community service order or community sentence during the past 3 years;
- the prisoner is subject to enforcement action under the Immigration Act 1971

If none of the above criteria apply then categorisation to open

conditions **must** be regarded as appropriate initially.

If only points 8 or 9 above apply, then categorisation to semi-open conditions must be regarded as appropriate initially.

Categorisation to closed conditions must otherwise be applied.

How soon after I have been sentenced should I expect a review to consider my recategorisation?

ACR (Automatic Conditional Release – prisoners serving over 12 months but less than 4 years) held in closed or semi-open conditions **must** have a recategorisation review every 6 months.

DCR prisoners (Discretionary Conditional Release – those serving more than 4 years) must have their security category reviewed annually. Their first recategorisation review must take place no later than 12 months after sentence (except in the case of Category A prisoners who are considered by the Category A Committee - and Life Sentenced prisoners, whose cases are considered by Lifer Management Unit).

Who will decide on my recategorisation?

Recategorisation of all female prisoners (save for Cat A and Lifers) is to be carried out by the OCA Unit. Any decisions may be made by a board or by a single manager, i.e. governor grade.

Procedures must be completed by staff specially trained and able to competently fulfil the OCA role. Staff completing the form must be responsible to a senior manager as designated by the Governor. The form must be countersigned by an officer of at least one grade higher than the member of staff completing it.

Can I appeal if I am not happy with the result after a review of my categorisation?

Yes. There is no special appeals procedure specifically for settling matters of categorisation. If, after a review, you do not believe that you have been placed in the correct category you should pursue your concerns via the normal complaints system. In the case of Category A prisoners, you can still use the complaints procedure but your complaint form will be sent to Prison Service Headquarters for response, rather than being answered in the prison.

If you feel your concerns have still not been addressed satisfactorily then it may be that you need to appeal to the Prison and Probation Ombudsman. (Ashley House, 2 Monck Street, London SW1P 2BQ.)

It is also possible in some circumstances to judicially review categorisation decisions.

The Prison Service has a duty to give reasons for decisions about categorisation, so in order to mount your appeal you should request a full explanation of the decision in writing.

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