

Fairer justice system for neurodivergent people to reduce crime

Improving support could help end their cycle of crime and make the country safer.

Quicker recognition and better support for offenders who have neurodivergent conditions such as autism, ADHD and dyslexia, will help combat crime according to the Lord Chancellor, Robert Buckland QC.

Neurodivergent offenders often have speech and language needs which make it difficult for them to understand and take part in the processes from arrest, through court, and potential sentencing.

A new call for evidence will provide a clearer picture of how many offenders are affected by these conditions and what support is already available in the criminal justice system.

The review will cover a wide range of neurodiversity, including learning difficulties, learning disabilities and emotional and behavioural changes due to acquired brain injuries.

Greater understanding and support from the police, prison and probation service will boost public safety by helping people with these conditions engage better with rehabilitation and stop committing crime.

Lord Chancellor Robert Buckland QC MP said:

As a barrister, part-time judge and now as Lord Chancellor, I've too often seen people with conditions like autism and dyslexia struggle through their brush with the law. It might be that they get lost in the complex legal language or fall foul of it simply because it's harder to see right from wrong.

My family's experience of autism has taught me that those with neurodivergent conditions have so much to offer when they get the right help. That is why I want to build a criminal justice system with better support that cuts reoffending and which keeps the public safer.

The courts, judiciary and legal sector also have a role to play in supporting the government build a fairer criminal justice system which is easier to understand and navigate. Some studies have suggested that over a third of all offenders have some form of learning disability or difficulty and over half of prisoners may have sustained acquired brain injuries.

The call for evidence, which is being led by HM Inspectorates of Prisons and

Probation, will be an opportunity for the public, charities and those across the criminal justice system to share their experiences and suggest ways that it can be improved.

Charlie Taylor, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, said:

For many years the inspectorate has been concerned about the outcomes for neurodiverse prisoners and we are pleased to take on this commission from the Lord Chancellor.

Findings from the call for evidence will also support the Ministry of Justice to develop a training package to educate frontline staff about neurodiversity and when someone might need extra support. Three prisons, HMP Whatton, HMP Wakefield and HMP/YOI Parc, and the Lancashire division of the National Probation Service have all received accreditation from the National Autistic Society in the last few years for the work they do to support autistic people. Probation staff already interview offenders and work with agencies such as social care and the police when providing sentencing recommendations to judges. The interviews mean they can pick up on any speech or communication difficulties and ensure that an offender gets the support they need during their rehabilitation. Next year, the National Probation Service will pilot a new screening tool to identify those with neurodiverse conditions and provide advice on how to support them.

The [call for evidence](#) will close on 15 January.