

First generation of Unlocked prison officers graduate as scheme expands to north

- Graduation follows two years working in prison alongside experienced officers
- Scheme will now be rolled out across prisons in the north
- Success down to efforts of all involved, with best practice being spread across estate

The 36 graduates of the two-year programme joined staff from the prisons in which they have been working at a reception at 10 Downing Street.

Working with experienced prison staff, the Unlocked officers were challenged to identify positive changes they could implement while also integrating as dynamic officers on the wings. Meaningful changes that the graduates have brought about range from revamping the induction process at HMP Brixton to changing how medicines are dispensed at HMP Wandsworth.

The scheme has been so successful that it will now place officers in several prisons around Manchester from September 2019, in addition to prisons in London and the south east.

The graduates are part of a wider recruitment drive across the prison estate, with more than 4,700 additional officers recruited since 2016 and staffing levels at their highest in seven years. This comes alongside an additional £70 million investment in prison safety, security and decency, with £16 million to improve conditions for prisoners and staff and £7 million on new security measures.

Justice Secretary David Gauke said:

I want to congratulate all of the Unlocked Graduates, and the prison officers who have supported them, for their tireless and innovative work. Their desire to make a difference is inspiring.

We want our prison officers to come from the broadest possible range of backgrounds in order to reflect the society they serve, and I am delighted to see that the scheme will soon be expanding to Manchester.

Officer numbers are at their highest level since 2012 which is vital to ensuring our prisons can fulfil their purpose of protecting the public, reducing reoffending and rehabilitating

offenders.

Natasha Porter, founder and CEO of Unlocked Graduates said:

Our pioneer officers have achieved amazing things in their two years. They have literally saved lives and made a thousand tiny differences in the prisons where they have worked.

Their achievements have only been possible thanks to the support and experience of the prison officers they have worked alongside and learned from.

Jack, one of the first generation of Unlocked Graduates and currently a prison officer at a central London prison said:

I can't quite believe this amazing two years are over but I'm so proud of what the first generation of Unlocked Graduates has achieved. Our work would not have been possible without the support of amazing colleagues in the prison service, as well as our brilliant mentors.

I'm looking forward to seeing what my fellow Unlocked officers do next. I know many of us will carry on working as prison officers continuing to play a crucial role on the frontline of the prison service, some will progress even further up the ranks of the prison service and others will go on to give prison officers a voice in government, civil society and charities.

Unlocked is a two-year leadership programme specifically aimed at encouraging the brightest and best graduates and career changers to become prison officers. The programme is aimed at raising the status of the profession by attracting a different kind of leader to work in prisons and help identify ways to reform the prison system, reduce reoffending and improve rehabilitation.

While working as full-time frontline prison officers in HMPs Brixton, Coldingley, Downview, High Down, Isis and Wandsworth, the graduates were also required to undertake a rigorous programme of study to complete a Master's degree focused on system reform in prisons.

More information about the scheme can be found at <https://unlockedgrads.org.uk>