

[News story: Prisons and Courts Bill: what it means for you](#)

The Prisons and Courts Bill will transform the lives of offenders and put victims at the heart of the justice system, helping to create a safer and better society.

The bill covers:

- prison safety and reform
- court reform
- the judiciary
- whiplash compensation

Latest news on the Prisons and Courts Bill

The bill was introduced on 23 February 2017. Follow its progress on the Parliament website.

Join the conversation

Follow [@MoJGovUK](#) for the latest updates on the bill. Use #PrisonReform and #CourtReform to join the conversation on Twitter.

What the Prisons and Courts Bill covers

The Prisons and Courts Bill paves the way for the biggest overhaul of prisons in a generation and the delivery of a world-class court system. Victims and vulnerable witnesses are central to the Prisons and Courts Bill, with a range of measures that will bolster their protection in court.

Prison safety and reform

The Prisons and Courts Bill sets out a new framework and clear system of accountability for prisons. It will enshrine into law that a key purpose of prison is to reform and rehabilitate offenders, as well as punish them for the crimes they have committed.

Governors will take control of budgets for education, employment and health and they will be held to account for getting people off drugs, into jobs and learning English and maths. League tables will measure prisons on key areas such as safety and progress on education and work.

Across the country, more than 2,000 new senior positions are being created for experienced prison officers to be promoted into. These posts, which cover specialist mental health training, will have a salary of up to £30,000.

Could you see yourself as a prison officer? Find out more and [apply here](#).

Court reform

Measures relating to courts underline a commitment to victims and the most vulnerable, as well as improving the system for those who use it every day.

The use of virtual hearings will be extended, allowing victims to take part without running the risk of coming face-to-face with their assailant.

Many hearings, such as bail applications, will be resolved via video or telephone conferencing, allowing justice to be delivered more swiftly.

Offenders charged with some less serious criminal offences, such as failure to produce a ticket for travel on a train, will be able to

- plead guilty online
- accept a conviction
- be issued a penalty and
- pay that penalty there and then.

The judiciary

This bill will provide a better working environment for judges, with modern court facilities and better IT that will help manage cases more efficiently.

It will be easier for the judiciary to deploy judges more flexibly, allowing judges to gain experience of different types of cases. It also gives the judiciary more flexibility when it comes to handling case backlogs.

Whiplash compensation

Car insurance premiums will be cut by around £40 a year, with new fixed tariffs capping whiplash compensation pay-outs and a ban on claims without medical evidence.

We held a wide-ranging [consultation](#) on our plans for reform.

[Press release: Justice Secretary Elizabeth Truss unveils landmark Prisons and Courts Bill](#)

- Historic Prisons and Courts Bill will transform the lives of offenders and put victims at the heart of the justice system, helping to create a safer and better society.

- New legislation underpins measures outlined in the ground-breaking Prison Safety and Reform White Paper, which will transform how our prisons operate.
- Modernisation of our courts will improve access to justice, better protect the vulnerable and further enhance our status as a world-leading centre for dispute resolution.

Justice Secretary Elizabeth Truss today (23 February 2017) unveiled the historic Prisons and Courts Bill, paving the way for the biggest overhaul of prisons in a generation and the delivery of a world-class court system.

This key piece of legislation will underpin measures in the recently published Prison Safety and Reform White Paper, and will help transform how our prisons are run. Prisons will punish people who break the law and give offenders the skills they need to turn their lives around, driving down the £15 billion annual cost to society of reoffending.

It sets in law for the first time that a key purpose of prisons is to reform offenders, as well as punish them for the crimes they have committed.

Victims and vulnerable witnesses are also central to the Prisons and Courts Bill, with a range of measures that will bolster their protection in court.

The government is giving courts the power to put an end to domestic violence victims being quizzed by their attackers in the family courts, calling time on what the Justice Secretary has described as a “humiliating and appalling” practice. This follows an urgent review she commissioned last month.

Car insurance premiums will also be cut by around £40 a year, with new fixed tariffs capping whiplash compensation pay-outs and a ban on claims without medical evidence, helping to crack down on the compensation culture epidemic.

Justice Secretary Elizabeth Truss said:

Prison is about punishing people who have committed heinous crimes, but it should be a place where offenders are given the opportunity to turn their lives around.

I want our prisons to be places of discipline, hard work and self-improvement, where staff are empowered to get people off drugs, improve their English and maths get a job on release.

Our courts should be places where victims get the justice they deserve, and where our outstanding independent judiciary can flourish and focus on the cases that matter.

Changes announced today build on and underpin measures contained in the Prison Safety Reform White Paper, which highlights how the government will

drive reform in our prisons.

Governors will take control of budgets for education, employment and health and they will be held to account for getting people off drugs, into jobs and learning English and maths. Data for league tables detailing how prisons are performing in these areas will be publicly available from August 2017.

Across the country, more than 2,000 new senior positions are being created for our valued and experienced officers to be promoted into. These posts, which include specialist mental health training, will have a salary of up to £30,000.

Prisons and Courts Bill measures relating to courts underline the government's commitment to victims and the most vulnerable, as well as improving the system for those who use it every day. We are making our courts more open and modern to help cement our place as a world-leader.

Key measures within the legislation will make our courts swifter, more accessible and easier to use for everyone. They will be efficient and fit-for-purpose, with facilities across the entire estate that are modern, user-friendly, and work in favour of our dedicated judges and magistrates.

The use of virtual hearings will be extended, allowing victims to take part without running the risk of coming face-to-face with their assailant. Many hearings, such as bail applications, will be resolved via video or telephone conferencing, allowing justice to be delivered more swiftly.

Offenders charged with some less serious criminal offences, such as failure to produce a ticket for travel on a train, will be able to

- plead guilty online
- accept a conviction
- be issued a penalty and
- pay that penalty there and then.

And businesses will be able to recover money much more easily, with digital services that allow them to issue and pursue their cases quickly. This will give them vital confidence to do business here, and will enable our world leading justice system to remain the international destination of choice for dispute resolution.

Justice Minister Sir Oliver Heald said:

Britain has the best justice system in the world, but it should also be the most modern, because we have a vision for a justice system that truly works for everyone. Victims and the most vulnerable are at the centre of our changes, which will help deliver swifter and more certain justice for all.

We want courts that are efficient and fit-for-purpose, with facilities across the entire estate that are modern, user-friendly, and work in favour of our hard-working and dedicated judges and

magistrates.

The Prisons and Courts Bill underpins this vision – building on the good progress we have already made in improving the experience of all users and cementing our reputation for global legal excellence so we can go on attracting business to the United Kingdom.

BCC/DHL: Confidence boost for exporters ahead of Article 50 trigger

The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), in partnership with DHL, today (Thursday) publishes its latest Quarterly International Trade Outlook, which shows that confidence among exporters that their turnover will improve jumped in Q4 2016, ahead of further moves towards Brexit.

Although the number of businesses reporting that their export sales and orders would improve remained largely constant in the last quarter of 2016, businesses in both manufacturing and services are increasingly confident that they will continue to improve turnover, and that profitability will increase or remain steady in the coming 12 months.

The BCC/DHL Trade Confidence Index, which measures the volume of trade documentation issued by accredited Chambers of Commerce, fell by 1.42% on the quarter – but remains nearly 5% up on the last quarter of 2015.

The results serve as a reminder that businesses are continuing to trade in spite of the uncertainty around Brexit. But to maintain this positivity, the government must focus on the fundamentals of the economy – helping exporters recruit to close a growing skills gap, and provide support for those seeking to navigate currency fluctuations.

Key findings from the report:

- The BCC/DHL Trade Confidence Index, a measure of the volume of trade documentation issued nationally, fell by 1.42% on the quarter. The Index now stands at 119.96 – and is up 4.81% on Q4 2015
- The balance of manufacturers reporting improved export sales fell slightly to +16, down one point from the previous quarter. Looking at services, the balance of firms reporting improved export sales remained constant at +8
- The balance of manufacturers reporting improved export orders rose to +13 from +12 in Q3, while in services this rose one point to +6
- Looking at expectations of turnover over the next 12 months, the balance of manufacturers confident of an increase rose nine points to +43 – in

services this rose seven points to +35

- Confidence that profitability would improve rose to +21 for services companies – up from the four-year low of +15 seen in Q3 2016. The balance of manufacturers remained constant at +22

Commenting on the findings, Dr Adam Marshall, BCC Director General, said:

“Many exporters remain confident, in spite of uncertainty over our relationship with the EU. Our findings serve as a reminder that it is businesses that trade with other businesses, not governments – but they need support if they are to continue to be positive.

“Our economic forecast suggests that inflation is going to rise above the 2% target this year, which will create pressure on many firms. In addition, the fluctuating currency markets are affecting our exporters and importers – so there are warning signs on the horizon.

“The government cannot give businesses much certainty around either Brexit or currency markets, but it can act closer to home. The Chancellor’s Budget must focus on cutting the up-front costs that government imposes on every business, and promote investment and exports.”

Ian Wilson, CEO DHL Express UK and Ireland, said:

“UK exporters continue to be undeterred in their ambition to take their products and services overseas, despite turbulent economic times.

“Whilst this confidence might come as a surprise during these uncertain times, the rapid evolution of e-commerce and technology means that more businesses than ever are realising the opportunity that exporting presents.

“With online technology in overseas markets advancing, UK exporters should remain confident that their products are now more accessible than ever.”

Ends

Notes to editors:

The Trade Confidence Index is a measure of trade documents issued by Accredited Chambers of Commerce for goods to overseas markets where documentation is required.

Spokespeople are available for interview and a full QITO report is available from the press office.

Balance figures are the percentage of firms that reported an increase minus the percentage that reported a decrease. If the figure is a plus it indicates expansion of activity and if the figure is a minus it indicates contraction of activity. A figure above 0 indicates growth, while a figure below 0 indicates contraction.

The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) sits at the heart of a powerful network of 52 Accredited Chambers of Commerce across the UK, representing thousands of businesses of all sizes and within all sectors. Our Global Business Network connects exporters with nearly 40 markets around the world. For more information, visit: www.britishchambers.org.uk

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[Syria negotiations may not yield breakthrough, but momentum needs to be maintained – UN envoy](#)

22 February 2017 – A day before negotiations on the crisis in Syria kick off in Geneva, the United Nations Special Envoy for the war-torn country acknowledged that while he is “not expecting a breakthrough,” the proactive momentum needs to be sustained, and the top United Nations relief official told the Security Council that the country’s humanitarian needs would remain critical for a long time.

“As has been stated so many times already, there is no humanitarian or military solution to this conflict,” the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Stephen O’Brien, told the Security Council today.

“A genuine political commitment to peace will be needed if 2017 is to offer any different prospect than the death and destruction of the past six years,” he added, emphasizing the need for fighting to stop.

The conflict, now into its sixth year, has left hundreds of thousands of women, men and children dead and millions more dependent on aid both within the country and beyond Syria’s borders.

However, humanitarian actors continue face myriad challenges in reaching those most in need.

In particular, Mr. O’Brien voiced serious concerns over continued attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, which have further limited humanitarian access to those areas, as well as leading to further

displacements that in turn add to the humanitarian needs.

He also underlined that the conflict has taken its worst toll on children: thousands have been killed and maimed or have lost their parents to the violence. Many more have suffered physical and psychological trauma, forced into early marriages and lag years behind in school.

The formal education system has lost about 150,000 education personnel and one in three schools in the country have been damaged, destroyed or rendered inaccessible, and 5.82 million children and youth from pre-school to secondary school-age are in need of education assistance inside Syria.

Concluding his briefing, the UN relief chief urged: "The eyes of all of Syria, and the eyes of the world, are looking to Geneva [where intra-Syrian negotiations will be held]."

"Millions of battered and beleaguered women, men and children depend on meaningful action and the constructive engagement by the Syrian parties and their allies [...] to assure Syrians that an end to the conflict may finally be within reach."

I am not expecting a breakthrough, but I am determined to keep the momentum – UN envoy

Also today, speaking to the press in Geneva, the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, said is critical that the momentum provided by the negotiations "outpace" those that wished to see the negotiations come to nothing.

"There are spoilers, we have seen it all the time during the last talks and perhaps they may even be attempting or tempted to [do] something before or during the talks to provoke one side or the other to walk out," he warned.

"I am not expecting a breakthrough, but I am expecting and determined for keeping a very proactive momentum," said Mr. de Mistura, highlighted the need to "outpace" those wished to "spoil" the negotiations and see that it come to nothing.

"There is a rush between us and the spoilers [...] we have to outpace those few but clear spoilers with momentum on the political track," he added.

On the eve of the UN-facilitated negotiations between the parties to the conflict in Syria, Mr. de Mistura said he would be continuing to push for a resolution to the conflict based on Security Council Resolution 2254 that endorsed a road map for peace process in war-battered Middle East nation, including non-sectarian governance, a new constitution and free and fair elections.

Also, the UN envoy said that while the ceasefire remained fragile, it was largely holding and noted that "we would not have been able to have these talks if there was a breakdown of the cease-fire."

Mr. de Mistura added that the bottom line remains that it is "delicate moment" and that there are fragile incidents but these need to be controlled

and need to be taken care of.

In conclusion, he noted that one should not focus too much on the rhetoric and even dismissive statements but instead to “look for the substance, for what would happen during the talks and at the end of the talks,” he said.

Central African Republic: Four UN peacekeepers wounded in ambush by armed group

22 February 2017 – The United Nations peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic has reported that its troops on patrol were ambushed yesterday outside of Ippy in Ouaka prefecture.

During the exchange of fire with the FPRC's (*Front Populaire pour la Renaissance de Centrafrique*) coalition, four peacekeepers were wounded, including one severely, according to the Office of Spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General, which added that the attackers fled the scene after the incident.

Clashes between the mainly Muslim Séléka rebel coalition and anti-Balaka militia, which are mostly Christian, plunged the country of 4.5 million people into civil conflict in 2013.

In a news release issued earlier this month, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission (MINUSCA) had stressed that two factions of the ex-Séléka armed group, namely the FPRC coalition and UPC *Mouvement pour l'Unité et la Paix en Centrafrique*, represent a threat for civilian populations and that UN peacekeepers will respond in case of violence.

The spokesperson's office said that peacekeepers prevented a hostile crowd – including members of the FPRC – from entering a camp for internally displaced persons in Ippy, which is some 70 miles from the city of Bambari, earlier yesterday. Some people in the crowd fired at peacekeepers, who returned fire, killing two FPRC members.

MINUSCA reiterated its resolve to use force to protect civilians in accordance with its mandate and calls on all armed groups to immediately cease hostilities and to resolve any dispute through dialogue within the framework of the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation, the office added.

Meanwhile, the UPC leader, Ali Darassa, left Bambari yesterday following the Mission's calls for him to leave the town, the office said. The Mission has reinforced its police presence in Bambari.