

Violent prisoner jailed for longer

News story

William Johnstone has had his sentence increased under the Unduly Lenient Sentence (ULS) scheme.



A convicted murderer who attacked a prison officer has had his sentence increased under the Unduly Lenient Sentence (ULS) scheme.

William Johnstone, 41, currently serving two life sentences at HMP Durham, attacked a prison officer on 12 April 2020. Johnstone threw a kettle of boiling water at the officer as she unlocked the door to his cell. She suffered burn injuries leading to permanent scarring. Johnstone claimed to be acting in self-defence, as he believed that he was about to be assaulted by a fellow prisoner.

Johnstone has 11 previous convictions for 22 offences. In November 2002 he was convicted of murdering his mother's partner before dismembering her body. He was sentenced to life imprisonment with a minimum term of 14 years. In April 2006 he entered a fellow prisoner's cell and attacked him with an improvised knife. Following this offence, he was sentenced to automatic life imprisonment.

On this latest offence, Johnstone pled guilty to, and was convicted of, attempting to cause grievous bodily harm with intent. On 22 December 2020 he was sentenced to 3 years' imprisonment at Durham Crown Court.

Following a referral to the Court of Appeal under the Unduly Lenient Sentence (ULS) scheme by the Attorney General, on 9 November 2021 the Court found the sentence to be unduly lenient and increased it to 5 years' imprisonment with a 4-year extended licence.

After the hearing at the Court of Appeal, the Solicitor General, Alex Chalk QC MP, said:

Johnstone's act was a cowardly attack on a committed public servant acting in the execution of her duty. I want to make it clear that

attacks on public servants, who protect society and deliver services on our behalf, should be met with appropriate prison sentences. I am glad that the Court of Appeal chose to increase his sentence today.

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