

Categorisation – women

What is my security category?

Your security category determines what type of prison you can be held in. You are usually told what your initial category is shortly after you have been convicted.

Prison staff consider things like:

- Likelihood of escape or abscond
- The risk of harm to the public in the event of an escape or abscond
- Any control issues that impact on the security and good order of the prison and the safety of those within it

You should be given the lowest security category which can manage those risks.

What are the different categories in women's prisons?

The main two security categories of women prisoners are:

Closed Conditions - Prisoners for whom the very highest conditions of security are not necessary but who present too high a risk for open conditions or for whom open conditions are not appropriate.

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

There are also two other categories used, though very few women prisoners fall into these categories:

Category A - Prisoners whose escape would be highly dangerous to the public or the police or the security of the state and for whom the aim must be to make escape impossible.

Restricted Status - Any female young person or adult prisoner convicted or on remand whose escape would present a serious risk to the public and who are required to be held in designated secure accommodation.

When will I be considered for open conditions?

Three years is usually considered the maximum time a person should spend in open conditions in the women's estate. If you have longer than three years left to serve it is unlikely you will be recategorised for open conditions.

However, an assessment of your individual needs and risks may support earlier categorisation to open conditions. There are more details in PSI 39/2011 *Categorisation and Recategorisation Of Women Prisoners*.

There are several reasons why you may not be recategorised as suitable for open conditions - for example if you have previously escaped or absconded from prison, or have a significant history of serious offending. There are more details included in PSI 39/2011.

If you have a sentence of less than 12 months you should be considered for categorisation and a move to open conditions as soon as possible after sentencing.

If you are serving an indeterminate sentence you can only be transferred to open conditions following a recommendation by the Parole Board and/or a decision by the Secretary of State.

How often is my security category reviewed?

Prison staff should regularly review your security category, unless you have a sentence of less than 12 months or are already a category D prisoner.

If you are serving a determinate sentence of more than 12 months but less than 4 years, or an extended sentence of less than 4 years you should have a review every 6 months.

If you are serving a determinate sentence or extended sentence of 4 years or more you should have a review every 12 months until you are in the last 2 years of your sentence, when you should have 6 monthly reviews.

You may also have your security category reviewed whenever there has been a significant change in your circumstances or there is behaviour that impacts on the level of security required, whether negative or positive.

If you are serving an indeterminate sentence you should have Sentence Planning and Review meetings at least every 12 months. Your security category should be considered at each meeting.

Can I appeal a categorisation decision?

If you are not happy with the categorisation decision it may be worth speaking to your Key Worker in the first instance. They can pass these concerns on to your Prison Offender Manager who can explain the process and reasons for the decision.

You can appeal your security category if you think it is wrong. You can do this using the normal complaints procedure.

A review should be done by someone senior to the person who made the original decision.

The prison should give you a written copy of the categorisation decision and the reasons for the decision - make sure you have this so that you can write your appeal using that information.

Further information

The following may be of interest to you. If you are unable to access them elsewhere feel free to contact our Advice and Information Service and we will be happy to send you a copy.

Useful PSIs and PSOs (these should be available in the library):

Women's Policy Framework

PSI 39/2011 *Categorisation and Recategorisation Of Women Prisoners*

Information sheets

Prisoners Advice Service information sheet on '*Categorisation – Women Prisoners*'

Contact our Advice and Information Service

We are a small service which provides information and advice for people in prison. We are independent of the prison service.

Our freephone information line is **0808 802 0060**.

This number is **free** and you do not need to put it on your PIN.

This number is open:

Monday	3pm – 5pm
Wednesday	10:30am – 12:30pm
Thursday	10:30am – 12:30pm

When we are not taking calls you can still leave a short voicemail. Please give your name, prison number, the prison you are in and what information you are looking for. Voicemails will be checked during working hours Monday to Friday and we will respond as soon as possible by post or email a prisoner.

You can write to us at:

**Prison Reform Trust
FREEPOST ND 6125
London
EC1B 1PN**

You do not need to use a stamp.