

## Categorisation

### What is my security category?

Your security category determines what type of prison you can be held in.

Prison staff consider the following things:

- How likely you are to escape or abscond
- The risk of harm to the public if you did escape or abscond
- Any ongoing criminal behaviour whilst you have been in custody;
- Any violent or other behaviour that impacts the safety of those in prison;
- Any control issues that impact on the security and good order in prison

You should be given the lowest security category that can manage these risks.

If you are in a high security category (like A or B) you will have less freedom in prison to do things than other prisoners. Prison staff will do more to check on you and to stop you escaping.

### What are the security categories for adult male prisoners?

**Category A.** This is where prison staff think you will harm someone outside prison and/or you might try to escape so everything possible will be done to stop you escaping.

**Category B.** This is where prison staff think you should have no chance of escaping.

**Category C.** This is where prison staff think you will not escape, but that you cannot be trusted in an open prison.

**Category D.** This is where prison staff think they can trust you to be in an open prison.

**Closed prisons.** These are Category A, B and C prisons. Most people in prison are in closed prisons. These prisons are secure and people cannot escape from them.

**Open prisons.** These are Category D prisons. In these prisons you have more freedom than in other prisons to move around and do things. You may have your own cell with your own keys. You may be put in an open prison if staff think you can be trusted.

## Reviewing your security category

How often your security category is reviewed will depend on what type of sentence you are on and what category of prison you are currently in.

If you are serving a determinate sentence and are held in a Category B or C prison, you should have a review every 12 months *until* you have less than 3 years to serve. When you have less than 3 years left to serve you should have a review every 6 months.

If you have 28 days or less to serve until earliest release at the time of initial categorisation, you will not need to be categorised unless you are transferred out of the Reception prison.

You may also have your security category reviewed whenever there has been a significant change in your circumstances or 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.

If you are a category D prisoner you will not need regular reviews but could be recategorised if there has been a significant change in your circumstances or behaviour that impacts on the level of security required.

If you are a category A prisoner, staff who work at Prison Service Head Office will check your security category. We recommended reading the [Category A Review Self-Help Toolkit](#) written by the Prisoners' Advice Service for more details. It includes information about when and how Cat A reviews take place, who makes the decision and how you can make representations.

Full guidance can also be found in the following documents:

- PSI 08/2013 *The Review of Security Category – Category A / Restricted Status Prisoners*
- PSI 09/2015 *The Identification, Initial Categorisation and Management of Potential and Provisional Category A / Restricted Status Prisoners*

## **When will I be eligible to be considered for open conditions?**

If you are serving a determinate sentence, you are eligible to be considered for open conditions when you reach 5 years from your earliest release date. This was increased from 3 years in April 2025.

For standard determinate sentences this will be when you are 5 years from your conditional release date (CRD).

If you are serving a determinate sentence which has a parole eligibility date (PED), such as an Extended Determinate Sentence (EDS) or a Sentence for Offenders of Particular Concern (SOPC) then this will be when you are 5 years from your PED.

There are several reasons why you may not be recategorised for open conditions. These include if you are:

- currently on the Escape List (E-List)
- a Foreign National Prisoner where there is both a deportation order against you and your appeal rights from the UK have been exhausted.

People with a history of escape, abscond or serious ROTL failure can be considered for open conditions and ROTL, if:

- this happened more than two years ago AND
- you have only done this once on your current sentence.

If you are ineligible for open conditions or ROTL due to recent or repeat escape, abscond or serious ROTL failure you will only be considered for ROTL in exceptional circumstances. There is more information about this in the *Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) Policy Framework*.

If your circumstances mean that you may be appropriate for consideration for open conditions when you have five years or more to serve, this would have to be approved by the Governor of the prison you are in.

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. There is more information about this in the *Generic Parole Process Policy Framework*.

## **How are categorisation decisions made?**

All categorisation decisions must be fair, objective and in line with current policy.

They must be based on individual security risk assessments taking account of all available information

For example, the following information could be considered:

- Previous Convictions (if any);
- Details of current offence(s);
- Current custodial record;
- Previous record;
- Security Department assessment of relevant evidence and intelligence;
- Public Protection information (MAPPA) (if available);
- Prisoner Escort Record (PER) form;
- OASys (if opened prior to sentence) or Pre-Sentence Report (PSR) or other assessments prepared for the court;
- Any relevant and available information from the police or other law enforcement agency.

## **Can I appeal my 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 Policy Documents (these should be available in the library):

*Security Categorisation Policy Framework*

*PSI 08/2013 The Review of Security Category – Category A / Restricted Status Prisoners*

*PSI 09/2015 The Identification, Initial Categorisation and Management of Potential and Provisional Category A / Restricted Status Prisoners*

*Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) Policy Framework*

*Generic Parole Process Policy Framework*

*Prisoner Complaints Policy Framework*

## Information sheets

Prisoners Advice Service information sheet on ‘*Categorisation – Male Prisoners*’

Prisoners Advice Service Self-help toolkit ‘*The Categorisation and Recategorisation of Adult Male Prisoners*’

## Contact our Advice and Information Service

We are a small service and we are independent of the prison service.

We can give you information on prison rules, life in prison and how to get help in prison.

Our freephone information line is **0808 802 0060**. This number is for **prisoners** only. This number is **free** and you do not need to put it on your PIN.

This number is open:

- Monday afternoon from 3pm to 5pm.
- Wednesday and Thursday morning from 10.30am to 12.30pm.

At other times, you can call on **0207 251 5070**. This number is open from Monday to Friday 10.00am - 5.30pm. This number is **not free** but you do not need to put it on your PIN.

You can also write to us at:

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

You do not need to use a stamp.