

Release plan diary



Introduction

When the time comes for you to be released (in Scotland, liberated) there is a lot required and it can sometimes feel overwhelming or daunting. Creating your own release plan diary, so that your release and post-release experience is as smooth as possible, will help. We hope the example below will give you some ideas on what to include and how to structure your own release plan diary.

This release plan was written by a long-sentenced prisoner following her release and ideas have been added by others who have served long sentences. The framework and ideas can be used by anyone.

3 months before release

Put in applications and start gathering the information required for the following:

- Visit the **Resettlement Office** to help with outstanding resettlement issues.
- If you haven't already done so and you are seeking supplementary funding, now might be a good time to make applications for funding and grants. Speak to your probation officer about this.
- Open a bank account – this may be done by the resettlement officer; if it isn't, see the *Opening a bank account* entry in the Directory.
- Contact Jobcentre Plus to find out about benefits you could apply for. A Universal Credit (UC) application must be filled in online at www.gov.uk/apply-universal-credit If you need help with the application or have any questions please call: 0800 328 5644. If you can apply for Jobseekers Allowance, fill in the online application at www.gov.uk/jobseekers-allowance/how-to-claim or call 0800 055 6688 Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm.
- Ask someone who works in the library to look up information for you on **National Careers Service, Skills Development Scotland, Careers Wales** or **nidirect Careers Service**. They have websites that give information and advice on getting jobs. Also, turn to the *Getting into employment* section of this Directory. If you have the Virtual Campus in your prison, you may gain access to a lot of useful information on jobs pre-release.
- Ask your personal officer about charities that give advice on **housing** (temporary or permanent). Your prison may have connections with different charities that provide advice and guidance on this. Additionally, you will hopefully find some information that is useful to you in the *Finding a place to live* section of this Directory.
- **Find a mentor** – have a look at the section in this Directory on mentoring. Prison chaplaincies might be able to help you contact local organisations in the area you are going to.

2 months prior to release

It is now a good time to:

- Start thinking about applying for jobs. You can do this with Jobcentre Plus or with a job club or employment hub if your prison has one.
- In some prisons you can apply for voluntary work in the community. See the section in this Directory on volunteering.
- Get valid **photo ID** from Resettlement or try CitizenCard, see the note at the end of this diary.

1 month prior

- Talk to your personal officer about signing release papers.
- Contact HMRC to get documents that show your name and **National Insurance number** if you don't already have your NI number. Call on 0300 200 3500. Their written reply should arrive within 15 days.
- If you need **medication** you should apply to see healthcare. Healthcare can provide you 7 days of medicine on the day you are released from prison.
- Talk to your probation officer to get addresses for **support networks** in the area you are moving to.
- Finish any applications for Universal Credit or Jobseekers Allowance.
- If you are of retirement age, make a note to contact Age UK to ask for their help in claiming benefits.
- Find out about your transport from the prison to your new accommodation.
- Return any books you have borrowed from the prison.
- Start planning what you want to take with you and pack what you can.
- Check with your personal officer what you can throw away and what you can leave behind.
- Put the property you want to take with you in bags and take them to reception.
- When you are released, you will receive the money from your prison account(s). This will be given to you in cash. If you have a lot of money in your account(s), some prisons will give you some in cash and the rest as a cheque. If you want all the money in cash, you may need to ask for that, before your day of release. You will need to sign to confirm you've received your money.
- Try and prepare yourself mentally for release. This will not be easy, but think about what you would like to achieve and maybe note down a few aims and objectives for yourself, which can give you a path to stay focused on. Don't be hard on yourself if it takes longer than you first think to achieve some of your objectives.

Your day of release

- Read your **release papers** carefully and then sign them.
- If you need **medication**, go to the discharge nurse. You will have to sign a form when you collect your medicine.
- Sign a form to say you have collected your property. Make sure to check you have everything before signing. Anything left behind will be thrown away and you cannot ask for it back.
- Make sure you know where you are getting your **transport** from.
- Make sure you see your probation officer on time or you will be in breach of your licence and may have to go back to prison.
- Go to your new **accommodation** and make sure you know any rules that you need to follow. Breaking rules in your accommodation could cause you problems.
- Sign any documents to do with your accommodation that you need to. Make sure you read them carefully and keep a copy for yourself.
- If you are in a hostel, you can ask your key worker to help you.
- It will not be easy when you are released if you do not have a **support network**. If you are in a hostel there are people who can help you. Remember the **Samaritans** or a support agency in your area can help you with your feelings. You will find a few national support organisations listed at the end of the *Emergency* section of this Directory.

Day after release

- If you have a question about **Universal Credit** then call 0800 328 5644.
- If you have a long-term disability or a medical reason that you cannot work then you should apply for **PIP**. To apply call 0800 169 0350.
- For **pension** queries call the Pension Service on 0800 731 7898.
- For more information on benefits, please see the appendix *Benefits* in this Directory.
- Register at the local **doctors**. It can take a few weeks to arrange an appointment or any medicine you need. If you need medicine right away then call the doctors and they will help.
- If you have the contact details of someone you trust who can support you then you should contact them.

In your first week

- You will sometimes need to have documents to prove where you live. Until you start receiving letters and bills you can use your tenancy agreement.
- Visit the bank and apply for any cards or deposit books you may need. You will need to take your photo ID with you and proof of where you live. For more information see *Opening a bank account* at the end of this section.



Stories of hope - Chris

This is not written from the perspective of somebody who can't understand the thoughts and emotions of a person being released from prison. I too have left those gates after serving years inside and experienced all those conflicting emotions that are thrown your way. One point I'd like to emphasise is ... it gets easier.

The anxiety of being released into an ever-changing society can be daunting at any time. Whether you've spent weeks, months or years being locked up, to be thrust into society again is a huge adjustment. Children have grown up, technology has dramatically upgraded, and the world you once left is no more. It's time to mentally prepare for the new chapter in your life, the one you have envisaged since you began your sentence.

During this time ensuring your physical health is paramount. Whereas in prison you've been restricted, you're now free as a bird. Use your time wisely. It will help you in the long run, trust me! Everything you planned whilst in your cell is now there and ready for you to achieve. The career change you planned whilst away is ready for you. The training you need to make that career change is just a phone call away. Don't be afraid to ask for help. There are lots of organisations set up to help you at this time of your transition. Don't hesitate in reaching out and utilising the support that's on offer. You're not alone. There are people who want to help and support you in making the change. They don't know how to reach you, but you can reach them. Help with writing a CV, help with finding the right training course, help with that great business idea you have; there is support for it all.

Keep that mindset you had pre-release – getting back on your feet, working, making a change. It's important you focus on this and remember, 'Rome was not built in a day, but it was built nonetheless'. You're about to build your very own 'Rome'. It won't be built overnight, but with hard work and dedication you'll get there.

Chris Leslie, a former Hardman Award winner, co-founded a support organisation for people with convictions called 'Inside Out Support Wales' www.insideout.wales Chris is now also a trustee of The Hardman Trust.

Release plan diary

- Set up an email account if you do not already have one. A lot of online services need you to have email to use them.
- Join your **local library** so you can borrow books and use the internet. The people who work in the library can help you with setting up an email account and using the internet.
- You can go to your local **Citizens Advice Bureau** or a **Law Centre** for help. They can help you if you have debt or need legal advice or need help filling out forms or applications. We have also listed organisations that offer free debt advice in the *Dealing with debt* section of this Directory.
- If you have Universal Credit make an appointment at your local Jobcentre Plus as soon as possible. You will need to take your photo ID with you to the first appointment.
- If you are in temporary housing you should apply for permanent housing. You could start by going to the local council and looking at local newspapers. Also see the *Finding a place to live* section in the Directory.
- If you follow a religion you could contact your local place of worship. They may be able to provide you with support.
- Try and make time for short walks so you can clear your head and relax.

In the first month

- If you can work you may want to **apply for jobs**.
- Make sure **your CV** is up to date and has the right address, email and phone number on it. See *Getting into employment* in this Directory for tips on writing your CV, and organisations who can help.
- Some jobs need you to do a DBS check before you start work. See the appendix in this Directory *Ten things to know about criminal records*. You can still apply for jobs even if you have a criminal record. **Do not let DBS checks put you off applying for jobs.**
- If you had any doctor or hospital appointments booked while you were in prison you should call and have them moved to your local doctor or hospital.
- You may want to book an appointment at **the opticians** to get your eyes checked. You may need glasses.
- You may want to register at your local **dentist**. It is important to look after your teeth.
- If your next accommodation is likely to be unfurnished, apply for **furniture grants**. Further details are available in the *Finding a place to live* and *Emergency* sections and help may also be available from your council or, for example, from Salvation Army charity shops.
- Sign up to any special clinics or support groups you need to.



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3 months later...

- Keep looking for jobs if you do not already have one.
- Hopefully by now you can move to a permanent address.
- ... but if you don't have a permanent address, there are a number of places you can go to around the country which offer support, classes and free food. Ask probation or phone the national homeless charities' helplines to see if they know of places in your town or city.
- If you are able to move to another address you need to let **your bank** know.
- You may need to contact the companies that provide **water, gas and electricity** and tell them your new address.
- If you are getting benefits then you need to tell the Department of Work and Pensions that you have moved.
- If you are moving to your own place, tell your local council your new address so you can pay council tax. If you are living alone or are disabled you may be able to pay less council tax.
- You may need to apply for a **television licence**. This can be paid by direct debit.
- You can sign up for **free courses** and join local organisations. These are a great way to have fun and meet new people.
- You can also think about **volunteering**. Charities require all sorts of help and there are regional and government schemes that promote volunteering. Volunteering can help show your willingness to work and may lead to a paid position.

Now you can start living your life and making the most out of your new-found freedom!!!

Obtaining personal ID

You can get a photo ID card from CitizenCard. Your Personal Officer will need to help you with the application and you will need a photograph that Reception should be able to take for you. The card costs £15 and will take 21 days to receive, so make sure you apply in plenty of time. If you need one urgently they can provide one in a couple of days but it would cost £30.

CitizenCard, 7 Prescott Place, London SW4 6BS

www.citizencard.com

contact@citizencard.com

Replacement birth, adoption or marriage certificates

To get a replacement certificate you should try the UK Record Office website www.ukrecordoffice.co.uk or write to them at:

UK Record Office, 4200 Waterside Centre, Solihull Parkway, Birmingham Business Park, Birmingham B37 7YN
Telephone: 0121 247 4304

Opening times are Monday to Friday, 9am to 4pm.
Email: info@UKOfficialRecords.co.uk

Opening an email account

There are a series of easy steps to take. If you have a mentor or a friend who is good with computers then you may want to ask them for help. You could also go to your local library for help. Alternatively, you may wish simply to try following points 1–3 below.

To create a free Gmail account:

- 1 open an internet browser and type www.google.com/gmail
- 2 press Return/Enter and click 'Create account'
- 3 you will then be able to follow the step-by-step instructions on the screen. (Make a note of your email address (username) and password for future reference.)

To access your email in the future, go to www.google.com/gmail press Return/Enter and click 'Sign in'. Then enter your username and password.

You are now ready to use your email account.

Opening a bank account

HMPPS works with the six largest commercial banks to ensure that, as the end of sentence approaches, all prisoners are able to apply for a bank account. If the application is accepted then the normal documentation, debit card and PIN are held in 'valuable property' until release and money can be deposited into the account.

On release you can use the account immediately by activating it in a local branch. Prisons manage the scheme in different ways according to the needs of their population and, in most cases, probation will help you. In some cases – for example at several open prisons – prisoners are able to open credit union accounts into which they can deposit savings.

Banks stress that, whether assisted or not, you should complete the application documentation as accurately as possible, in particular details relating to your previous addresses. Applications flagged by bank systems as containing fraudulent information can cause severe difficulties with future applications.

If you find yourself walking out of the gate without a bank account you will need to get together every bit of identification you can, for banks require all sorts of documentation that you may just not have. If you are going to a hostel then make sure you ask your support worker for help, they will know which banks are easiest for someone with little or no paperwork to get started. They will also be able to write you a letter or even come with you to help. If you have a mentor then do ask them for assistance.

Every bank seems to have its own system but all need proof of identity and proof of address. The most common things that are accepted, assuming you don't have a birth certificate, passport or driving licence, are:

- ID card (Citizens Card is the most common)
- letter from local or national Government department
- tenancy agreement (you will have one of these from your hostel)
- HMRC correspondence with name and National Insurance number on (you can request this whilst in prison)
- letter from your doctor, solicitor or probation officer/social worker
- prison release papers

So whilst you are still inside you should write to HMRC asking for details of your National Insurance years as that letter (not just the one asking for your NI number) may be counted by some banks.

There is a very thorough guide to opening a bank account on the Nerdwallet website. It's a good place to look if you are not sure how to open an account while you are in prison, or upon your release.

www.nerdwallet.com/uk/current-accounts/prison-bank-account-guide

Two prison leavers write from their experience

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If people recently released from prison choose to open a bank account 'outside', either the hostel they are staying at can help or they can go along to the bank they want to open an account with and take supporting photo ID, proof of address and details of former address. They will usually get their bank cards within 7 working days.”

Cassie

“

The banks I went to all said you would probably need to book an appointment so you should take what you have with you for them to check before the appointment. In that way if they need more you will have time to get it together. I ended up using a bank that was very helpful and some are happy just to have prison release papers along with a hostel tenancy agreement! Several others seemed quite open to making special arrangements but one or two seemed disinterested, so be prepared to shop around.”

Bob