

Victoria Atkins MP
Minister of State
Ministry of Justice
102 Petty France
London
SW1H 9AJ

13 December 2021

Dear Minister,

Answer to PQ from Rachael Maskell MP

I was surprised to read your answer to this PQ from Rachael Maskell MP – Written questions and answers – [Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament](#)

We believe from the correspondence we receive from prisoners and from our own observation during visits to prisons that some prisoners in some prisons are still required to spend 23 hours a day in their cells. We know this is not your intention or desire, and that, for now at least, it is less common than it has been for much of the pandemic. But it does not seem accurate to say “prisons are not limiting prisoners to leaving their cells for one hour per day”, and I would question the basis on which such a general assertion could be made.

To the best of our knowledge, and for understandable reasons, prisons are not currently required to make any return on the extent to which all the prisoners in their care are spending more than one hour a day out of their cell. It has always been made clear that the fact that a prison is at a certain stage on the recovery framework does not mean that anything that might be considered the “normal” regime for that stage will always be delivered. But for precisely that reason, it seems misleading to give the impression that all prisoners currently have the opportunity to spend more than one hour out of cell each day. The honest answer is surely that no-one at the centre currently knows from day to day what the precise situation is, but that in some prisons on some days, operational necessity will dictate that an hour or less out of cell for some prisoners is what has to be enforced. If you can really give a guarantee that that is never the case, it would be helpful to know on what evidence that guarantee is assessed.

I am copying this letter to Rachael Maskell MP.

With best wishes,



Peter Dawson
Director
Prison Reform Trust