

PUBLIC SAFETY THROUGH PRACTISED RESPONSIBILITY

The Ladder



A graduated prison, work, treatment and resettlement model

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A policy proposal for independent evaluation, democratic scrutiny and protected pilot development.

Executive proposition

Confinement is the sentence. Deliberate suffering is not.

The Ladder contains risk at a hardened external perimeter while creating a controlled internal route from dependence to demonstrated responsibility. People progress through ordinary-life environments only after sustained evidence of safe behaviour, work, learning, treatment and accountability. Confirmed failure removes earned autonomy; recovery and ascent remain possible.

Core operating rule

Contain risk at the perimeter; build capability inside; attach comfort to responsibility; make every consequence evidenced; and release people only after they have repeatedly practised freedom.

1. Why test a different model

Evidence	Latest finding	Implication for The Ladder
Reoffending	The proven reoffending rate for the January-March 2024 cohort was 28.9%.	A pilot must be judged against matched conventional-custody outcomes, not anecdotes.
Employment	Among people serving 12 months or more, 37.8% were in employment six months after release (May 2024-March 2025 cohort).	Real work and an employment bridge are central, but outcomes must be independently verified.
Accommodation	80.6% were in settled accommodation three months after custody in the reported cohort, with exclusions; official evidence treats accommodation as necessary but not sufficient.	The Gate needs a real housing route, not a discharge into instability.
Education	Official analysis states that people taking prison learning have significantly lower reoffending than peers; causal strength varies by study.	Learning should be purposeful, accessible and tied to recognised qualifications.
Cost	MoJ publishes annual cost-per-place and cost-per-prisoner data; the 2024-25 publication is the correct benchmark for a pilot business case.	Alex Anderson's £5.05m contribution model remains an illustration until tested.

2. The physical and behavioural ladder

Stage	Environment	Responsibilities	Movement test
Secure floor	High security, assessment, stabilisation and treatment	Safety plan; clinical needs; basic education; no deliberate	Multidisciplinary evidence that risk can be managed at Level 1

Stage	Environment	Responsibilities	Movement test
		deprivation	
Level 1	Private bedsit within secure site; visible staff; structured day	Work readiness, treatment, learning, hygiene, budgeting and respectful conduct	Sustained reliability, not one-off compliance
Level 2	Flat with less direct supervision	Real work or education; regulated rent, bills, food, savings; sponsor role for Level 1	Stable performance, safe relationships and practical competence
Level 3	Household setting within the perimeter	Greater domestic autonomy; employment; mandatory sponsor role for Level 2	Repeated safe use of freedom and completed release plan
The Gate	Sentence ends; release or voluntary civilian transition tenancy	Ordinary legal duties; voluntary support; no hidden extension	Release at lawful expiry remains unconditional

3. Progression, warning and sponsor algorithm

1. Level 3 residents are randomly allocated a Level 2 resident to sponsor; Level 2 residents are randomly allocated a Level 1 resident.
2. Sponsors model practical routines, help resolve problems early and record agreed support. They are not private prison officers and cannot impose punishment.
3. Concerns require recorded evidence, prompt disclosure to the affected resident and review by trained staff. Three confirmed warnings can move both sponsor and resident down one level where the evidence shows a genuine supervision failure.
4. Serious violence, coercion, escape activity or immediate danger can trigger rapid return to the secure floor, followed by a prompt independent review.
5. Disability, illness, neurodivergence, language or communication needs, poverty and protected disclosures cannot be treated as misconduct.
6. All material decisions are reasoned, recorded, witnessed where possible and appealable to an independent body.

Random allocation reduces favouritism and organised exploitation, but the algorithm must include conflict, gang, safeguarding and accessibility exclusions. No resident should be punished solely for another person's act. Sponsor consequences require proof of a defined failure to act, not collective liability.

4. Daily life: work, learning, treatment and responsibility

- Real industries and services under public or tightly regulated operation, with health and safety, worker representation and no displacement of ordinary workers through artificially cheap labour.
- Real wages with transparent deductions for tax, National Insurance where legally applicable, regulated rent, utilities, food, victim compensation where ordered, and protected savings.
- Education from literacy and numeracy through vocational, digital, civic and higher learning; recognised qualifications and disability adjustments.

- Evidence-based mental-health, addiction, trauma and offending-behaviour treatment, based on consent and clinical need. No ideological coercion or punitive denial of healthcare.
- Level 3 households plan meals, manage budgets, maintain homes, resolve ordinary disputes and practise appointments, travel planning and digital access within secure controls.
- Family contact and restorative processes where safe, lawful, desired by the victim and clinically appropriate.

5. Rights, safety and due process

Risk	Safeguard
Coercion disguised as rehabilitation	Confinement is the court's sentence. Treatment and learning are not ideological tests; sentence expiry cannot be extended administratively.
Arbitrary demotion	Published thresholds, disclosed evidence, representation, written reasons, time-limited emergency action and independent appeal.
Sponsor bullying or exploitation	Random assignment with exclusions, staff supervision, confidential reporting, rapid separation and sanctions based on proven individual conduct.
Unsafe work	Ordinary health, safety, equality and labour inspection; independent worker representatives; no commercial secrecy over incidents or pay.
Discrimination	Outcome monitoring by protected characteristic; reasonable adjustments; independent ombudsman; stop conditions for material unequal harm.
Victims ignored	Victim input into safeguards and evaluation without transferring sentencing or disciplinary power to private individuals.
Surveillance overreach	CCTV and digital monitoring limited to necessity, logged access, retention limits and independent audit.

6. The Gate and civilian transition

The sentence ends on the date set by law. Release cannot be made conditional on reaching Level 3 or on accepting a civilian programme. The Ladder's job is to make safe freedom routine before that date, not to create an indefinite sentence.

- Identity documents, benefits and bank access arranged before release.
- Confirmed accommodation and healthcare handover; no discharge into avoidable homelessness.
- Employment or education bridge with the resident's consent.
- Optional transition tenancy outside the perimeter, governed by ordinary housing law rather than prison discipline.
- Five-year follow-up for evaluation, using privacy-preserving linked data and voluntary qualitative research.

7. Separate voluntary military pathway

Strict separation

Military service is not a rung of The Ladder and is never the price of release. It is a separately legislated voluntary option for eligible adults after prolonged stability, independent advice and assessment.

- Eligibility only after 12-24 stable months at Level 2; Level 3 residents may also apply.
- Independent capacity, safeguarding, security and suitability assessment, with access to legal advice and a cooling-off period.
- A possible 10-15-year secure-service model would require ordinary pay, training, healthcare, pension rights and independent military justice safeguards.
- Combat deployment only under lawful democratic authorisation and the rules applying to the armed forces generally.
- Injury, disability, redundancy, whistleblowing or any non-fault discharge can never return a person to prison. Time served is credited. Alleged desertion or misconduct requires judicial process.

8. The 300-person demonstrator

Period	Activity
0-6 months	Co-design, legislation, site and workforce plan, independent evaluator, preregistered protocol, comparator and stop rules
6-18 months	Build or adapt one secure campus; recruit and train staff; establish industries, clinical services and appeals
18-54 months	Operate with 300 residents: 100 spaces per residential rung, secure-floor capacity flexed to need
54-60 months	Independent decision: scale, amend, continue research or stop
Up to five years	Track reconviction, serious harm, employment, accommodation, health, victim outcomes and public cost

9. Illustrative economics - not a forecast

Alex Anderson's original illustration assumes 300 residents; employment of 70%, 85% and 95% by rung; and £27,500 average earnings. It produces approximately £1.89m tax and National Insurance, £2.16m rent and utilities, £1.00m operating surplus and £5.05m total direct contribution. These are scenario inputs, not evidence of achieved results.

Line	Illustrative annual amount	Required validation
Tax and National Insurance	£1.89m	Employment status, tax treatment, wage distribution and actual hours

Line	Illustrative annual amount	Required validation
Rent and utilities	£2.16m	Affordability, lawful deductions, real service costs and retained savings
Operating surplus	£1.00m	Independent accounts; no exploitation or artificial labour subsidy
Total direct contribution	£5.05m	Avoid double counting; compare with full public cost and outcomes

The 2024-25 MoJ prison-unit-cost publication should be used to construct the comparator. Scale only if audited public value and safety outcomes exceed conventional custody after adjusting for resident mix, capital costs and selection effects.

10. Evaluation and stop conditions

- Public operator, independent ombudsman, judicial oversight, worker representation and structured victim input.
- Matched comparator and preregistered outcome measures; publish null and adverse results.
- Primary safety outcomes: serious violence, self-harm, escape, victimisation, staff injury and proven reoffending.
- Capability outcomes: qualifications, employment, settled accommodation, health continuity, savings, debt and family contact.
- Equity analysis by sex, race, disability, age, religion, sexuality and sentence type, with privacy protection.
- Mandatory pause or closure for uncontrolled violence, exploitation, systematic discrimination, manipulated accounts, unlawful punishment or materially worse outcomes.

Evidence and sources

Accessed 12 August 2026. The figures below support the diagnosis or demonstrate policy precedent; they do not, by themselves, prove the projected results of Alex Anderson's proposed systems.

- **Ministry of Justice, Proven reoffending statistics: January to March 2024:** <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/proven-reoffending-statistics-january-to-march-2024/proven-reoffending-statistics-january-to-march-2024>
- **Ministry of Justice, Offender employment outcomes to March 2025:** <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/offender-employment-outcomes-update-to-march-2025/offender-employment-outcomes-statistical-summary>
- **Ministry of Justice, Offender accommodation outcomes to March 2025:** <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/offender-accommodation-outcomes-update-to-march-2025/offender-accommodation-outcomes-statistical-summary>
- **Ministry of Justice, Prison education in England:** <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prison-education-in-england-educational-background-and-needs/prison-education-in-england-educational-background-characteristics-and-criminogenic-needs>
- **MoJ/HMPPS, Prison performance data 2024 to 2025:** <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prison-performance-data-2024-to-2025>
- **HM Inspectorate of Probation, custody and resettlement evidence base:** <https://hmiprobation.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/our-research/evidence-base-probation-service/specific-types-of-delivery/custody-and-resettlement/>
- **HM Inspectorate of Probation, accommodation evidence base:** <https://hmiprobation.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/our-research/evidence-base-probation-service/specific-areas-of-delivery/accommodation/>
- **Ministry of Justice, impact of employment on reoffending:** <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7c4f9740f0b6321db3855b/impact-employment-reoffending.pdf>