

Final Report: Review of Culture within the Scottish Prison Service

March 2026

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Executive Summary

Crowe Advisory Ireland Ltd. was commissioned by the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) to conduct an independent review of organisational culture across all SPS establishments, Headquarters (HQ), the SPS College, the Fauldhouse facility, and associated functions. The review, carried out between May and August 2025, assessed how SPS policies, behaviours and leadership practices shape workplace culture, and examined their impact on both staff and those in custody. The methodology combined extensive site visits, over 700 direct staff engagements, structured discussions with prisoners, and a confidential staff survey completed by 826 employees.

Overall, the review identified an organisation with committed staff, strong professional values and many examples of positive practice, but also facing significant cultural challenges. While most staff expressed pride in their work and positive relationships with colleagues, there were persistent concerns regarding accountability, communication, consistency of leadership, and the handling of inappropriate behaviour.

Staff survey results revealed mixed perceptions of the organisation. Respondents reported strong peer relationships and high levels of personal motivation, but a substantial proportion felt undervalued and expressed concerns about transparency, communication, and team morale. Notably, almost three-fifths of respondents reported experiencing inappropriate behaviour in the workplace, and confidence in the consistency and robustness of bullying and harassment processes was low. Staff also highlighted perceived shortcomings in promotion systems, performance management and training, particularly the balance between theoretical instruction and practical skills development.

Direct engagement during site visits presented a more nuanced picture. Staff generally articulated strong commitment to SPS values, recognised the importance of integrity and professionalism, and demonstrated a genuine belief in rehabilitation. In many establishments, the culture was described as collaborative and supportive. However, variations between establishments were significant. Issues raised repeatedly included inconsistent leadership visibility, a perceived divide between HQ and prisons, the existence of small pockets of unprofessional or inappropriate behaviour, and concerns about the organisation's capacity to deliver rehabilitative services due to operational pressures.

Prisoners who participated in the review similarly described a wide range of experiences. Many reported respectful day-to-day interactions with staff and positive engagement with purposeful activity, but others raised concerns about limited access to rehabilitation, inconsistent communication, and the impact of time spent in cells. Views on fairness and respect were generally positive, though isolated instances of poor behaviour or cultural insensitivity were noted. As with staff, experiences varied significantly between establishments.

Drawing on international practice, the review considered cultural change initiatives in comparable uniformed services and correctional systems. Lessons from these organisations highlighted the importance of clear values, transparent performance systems, strong leadership accountability, independent oversight mechanisms, and structured approaches to communication and staff development.

The report sets out 12 recommendations to support the SPS in strengthening culture and improving organisational coherence. These include:

- establishing a modern, values-driven performance management framework;
- reinforcing anti-bullying and misconduct processes, including independent oversight;
- improving communication and strategic clarity;
- enhancing leadership development;

- strengthening the consistency and capacity of rehabilitative provision; and
- developing a national framework to support innovation and share good practice.

Three priorities are identified as critical foundations for wider reform:

- implementing a values-based performance management framework;
- establishing robust, independent complaint and misconduct arrangements; and
- creating a structured, organisation-wide communication and cascade system to ensure consistent understanding of policies and expectations.

Despite the challenges identified, the review recognises the significant strengths within the SPS. Staff demonstrate professionalism, compassion and commitment, and many establishments showcase strong teamwork and innovation. These strengths provide a solid platform from which the SPS can drive meaningful, sustainable cultural development. With clear leadership, strengthened accountability and an agreed long-term strategic direction, the organisation is well positioned to build a more consistent, open and supportive culture for staff and those in its care.

1 Introduction

1.1 Context

Crowe Advisory Ireland Ltd. ("Crowe") was appointed by the Scottish Prison Service ("SPS") in November 2024 to undertake a review of culture within the organisation. The purpose of the review was defined by the SPS as follows:

> *To assess the existing culture of the SPS and consider the extent to which it and its employees have created a culture of trust free from discrimination, unfairness, and inequality. The review will also measure current policies and practices and take into account what we can learn from our responses to past events. The review will seek to identify areas for improvement, highlight areas of good practice and make recommendations for improvement to support SPS to deliver prison services in a way that is focused on being person-centred and inclusive of all. SPS is seeking specific recommendations on how we embed collaborative and on-going staff consultation which enables SPS to measure progress.*

The Crowe team engaged to undertake the review has an extensive background in similar assignments for public sector clients in the UK, Ireland and internationally, and specialises in working with criminal justice organisations including police, prisons and probation services.

1.2 Terms of Reference

The terms of reference for this review stated the SPS's expectation that the review would seek to:

- *Understand how policies, processes and systems are applied and interpreted by our staffing groups and the impact on people and culture;*
- *Understand how the behaviours and decisions of leaders at all levels impact on people and culture;*
- *Understand how culture(s) impact on the efficient and effective service delivery of prison services in Scotland i.e. performance and risk management to enable delivery of the values and strategic intent set out in SPS' 2023 – 2028 Corporate Plan (hereafter referred to as the CP2328);*
- *Identify areas of strength, examples of good practice and exemplar behaviours; and*
- *Identify areas of challenge and room for improvement, based on the lived experiences of staff and those in our care.*

It was also stated by the SPS that the review should consider:

- *How SPS's culture(s) have changed over time;*
- *Any differences in experiences of staff and those in our care, based on, but not limited to, their age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation;*
- *Whether certain behaviours or practices are more or less prevalent within particular staffing groups, functions, establishments or teams across SPS.*

The SPS also stated that the final report should include:

- *Proposals for a clear way forward with regards to developing cultural strategy and interventions.*
- *Recommendations on actions required, including, but not restricted to, changes to Management Information systems, policies, and practices (HR and Operational).*
- *Proposals for measures for on-going staff consultation designed to measure SPS' progress in developing a culture that enables the delivery of SPS's CP2328 and, where those in our care and the staff group all feel supported and able to be their authentic selves.*

The full project requirement / terms of reference are presented in Appendix 1.

1.3 Review Methodology

At the commencement of this assignment, we undertook a review of various background documents provided by the SPS. The main themes emerging from these documents, which helped inform the design of our survey and information-gathering approaches, are set out in Appendix 2 of this report.

Our approach in undertaking this assignment was centred around engagement with as wide a range of stakeholders as possible – SPS staff (uniformed and non-uniformed, at all grades), those in the care of the SPS, others from the NHS and local authorities working within prisons, and volunteers and staff from non-profit organisations working with the SPS. [1]

Following initial engagement with SPS senior management, we commenced the planning of our stakeholder engagement, with particular focus on site visits to each of the 16 SPS establishments [2], to the SPS College, and to SPS Headquarters. Between mid-May and mid-July 2025, we conducted site visits to each of the SPS establishments (typically, each visit lasted two days and involved two members of the Crowe team). Further details on the conduct of the site visits are included in Section 3 of this report.

In addition to the site visits to the establishments and to the SPS College and the Fauldhouse facility, we carried out online focus group meetings with staff from all HQ functions. All SPS staff also had the opportunity to respond to a confidential survey seeking their feedback and opinion. Details of the survey are included in Section 4 of this report.

1.4 Project Governance

This review was commissioned by the Equality and Human Rights Oversight Board (EHROB) and managed by the Organisational Culture Review Project Board. As part of the ongoing delivery of the project, Crowe met with both the EHROB and the Project Board on several occasions during the assignment. We also met separately with the non-executive members of the SPS Advisory Board on one occasion, in order to hear their views on culture within the SPS.

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1 At various points in this report, and for ease of reference, we use different terminology to refer to those in the care of the SPS, including "prisoners", "persons in custody", and other wording. These terms should be regarded as interchangeable.

2 HMP Addiewell, which is operated by a private sector provider under contract to the SPS, was out of scope for this review.

2 SPS Site Visits

2.1 Overview

Between mid-May and mid-July 2025, the Crowe team conducted site visits at each of the SPS establishments, on the following dates agreed with each Governor in Charge (GIC):

Establishment	Date	Establishment	Date
HMP Perth	14 to 15 May	HMP Barlinnie	27 to 29 May
HMP Edinburgh	3 to 4 June	HMP Low Moss	22 to 23 July
HMP Castle Huntly	9 to 10 June	Bella CCU	11 June
HMP Glenochil	17 to 18 June	HMP & YOI Stirling	19 to 20 June
HMP Shotts	23 to 24 June	HMP & YOI Polmont	25 to 26 June
HMP Greenock	1 to 2 July	Lilias CCU	7 July
HMP Kilmarnock	8 to 9 July	HMP Dumfries	10 to 11 July
HMP Inverness	15 to 16 July	HMP & YOI Grampian	17 to 18 July

Two members of the Crowe team conducted each visit[3], with two days being spent on site at each location, with the exception of HMP Barlinnie (up to three days, due to its larger size), and the two CCUs (half a day, as they are of smaller scale).

2.2 Information Requested from each Establishment

Ahead of the visit to each establishment, we requested the following information:

- The current number of staff in the establishment, by function and by grade.
- The number of people currently in the care of the establishment.
- An organisation chart for the establishment (including the GIC, their direct reports, heads of function and senior uniformed staff, etc.).
- Details of other non-operational staff working in the establishment (e.g. estates & technical, HR, administration, etc).
- Any other key stakeholder groups who should be engaged with as part of this visit, for example social workers or education providers; NHS, Social Work, Education, 3rd Sector Partners.
- Any agreements with outside providers in relation to engaging with people in their care and/or their families.
- The shift patterns for the days of our visit (this allowed us to plan our engagements accordingly).

Each establishment appointed a contact person (single point of contact, or SPOC) with whom we engaged to prepare the site visits via email and Teams meetings.

[3] With the exception of Lilias CCU, where one Crowe consultant visited the establishment.

2.3 Breakdown of a Typical Visit

Whilst each visit was organised on a bespoke basis to suit the configuration and circumstances of the establishment, the visits typically consisted of:

- An initial meeting with the GIC and management team.
- One-to-one meetings with senior staff and managers.
- Focus group meetings with selected groups of staff (e.g. those in support roles such as administration, procurement, HR, estates etc.).
- A walk-though each part of the prison, giving our team the opportunity to talk to individual staff members and small groups of staff in their own work environment, with specific focus on the issues central to this review.
- Opportunities to talk to prisoners as part of the walk-through, to get their perspective on the culture within the establishment and what it means for them.
- Engagement with other stakeholders based in the establishment, such as contracted service providers, third-sector organisations, etc.

Although no two visits were the same, the following schedule prepared by HMP Perth was broadly representative of how most visits took place (with flexibility built in) – staff members' names have been redacted for data protection purposes:

Schedule:

Area or Team	Time	Person Responsible	Based	People required
SMT (All)	Wed - 0900 till 1000	[redacted]	Boardroom	HR, Finance, Estates, SMT
A Hall	Wed - 1015 till 1145	[redacted]	A Hall – Manager meeting area	Any available staff and prisoners
B Hall	Wed - 1015 till 1145	[redacted]	B Hall – Manager meeting area	Any available staff and prisoners
Non-Ops Staff	Wed - 1300 till 1400	[redacted]	Training Suite	Any staff available from all areas
C Hall	Wed - 1415 till 1545	[redacted]	C Hall – Meeting rooms	Any available staff and prisoners
SRU	Thurs - 0930 till 1000	[redacted]	SRU Managers area	Staff
Estates & Finance	Thurs - 0930 till 1000	Relevant managers, Estates & Finance	Identified room	Staff
Regimes	Thursday 1000 till 1130	[redacted]	Walk around all areas	Staff, partners, 3rd sector
Union POA	Thursday 1300 till 1345	[redacted]	Training room	Reps
Chaplains	Thursday 1400 till 1445	Chaplains	Chaplaincy	All available
Cross Reach	Thursday 1400 till 1445	[redacted]	Visits waiting area	All available
Any other areas				

Acknowledgement: We are grateful to all those who contributed to this review, and we wish to express our sincere appreciation for the time, honesty and openness shown by everyone who engaged with us. Staff across all establishments and functions, along with individuals in custody and partner organisations, shared their experiences candidly and constructively. Their willingness to participate, often while managing demanding operational pressures, was central to the depth and quality of the insights presented in this report.

2.4 Topics for Discussion / Questions Posed

We used a flexible approach in our engagement with people at each of the establishments – a highly structured, inflexible approach was felt to be unlikely to generate the type of relaxed sharing of views and experiences which were essential for this review. Instead, we chose to conduct each discussion using a series of prompts, and dealing with key themes, which were central to our assessment of current culture in the SPS.

The key topics which we covered were referenced to the current values of the SPS, and included:

SPS Staff	
Topic	Questions / Issues for discussion
General	Role, length of service, views re whether they enjoy the job
Rehabilitation	How are prisoners treated within this prison? Is there focus on rehabilitation?
Compassion	Is there compassion shown within this prison?
Inclusivity	Is there respect shown within this prison? Is there fairness?
Openness	Is there openness within the way the prison operates?
Ethical, Moral and Professional Standards	How do you rate integrity within this prison?
Humility	Is there humility within the way the prison operates?
Minorities	How are minorities treated within the SPS? (staff and prisoners)
Innovation	What level of innovation do you see within the prison?
Accountability	Is there clear accountability? Who makes the key decisions?
Leadership	How would you describe leadership within the prison? Within the SPS?
People Development	How well does the SPS develop its people? And help them grow their skills and develop their careers?
Future Change	What would you like to see change regarding the way the prison is run? Or the SPS?

Prisoners	
Topic	Questions / Issues for discussion
General	How long have you been here? What's it like in this prison?
Rehabilitation	How are prisoners treated within this prison? Is there focus on rehabilitation?
Compassion	Is there compassion shown within this prison?
Inclusivity	Is there respect shown within this prison? Is there fairness?
Openness	Is there openness regarding your sentence? Are you kept informed?
Ethical, Moral and Professional Standards	How would you rate the staff in terms of how they treat you / other prisoners?
Minorities	How are minorities treated within the SPS? (staff and prisoners)
Future Change	What would you like to see change regarding the way the prison is run?

3 Staff Survey

3.1 Overview

As part of our engagement with staff, we developed and distributed a survey to all staff across the SPS. Whilst the site visits provided an important opportunity to engage with people in person, gaining deeper insights into some key aspects of SPS culture, it was important that there was an opportunity for all staff across the organisation to engage with this review and have their voices heard.

In order to ensure that survey was disseminated as widely as possible, and that staff were encouraged to complete the survey, the Crowe team involved in the site visits brought survey cards which included QR codes to each of the establishments for dissemination. Several hundred cards were distributed during each visit and were made available in common areas, staff canteens and other locations. These cards ensured that staff who did not wish to complete the survey on SPS computers could do so in their own time and on their own personal devices. In addition to this, the survey online link was shared by management within each establishment, encouraging staff participation.

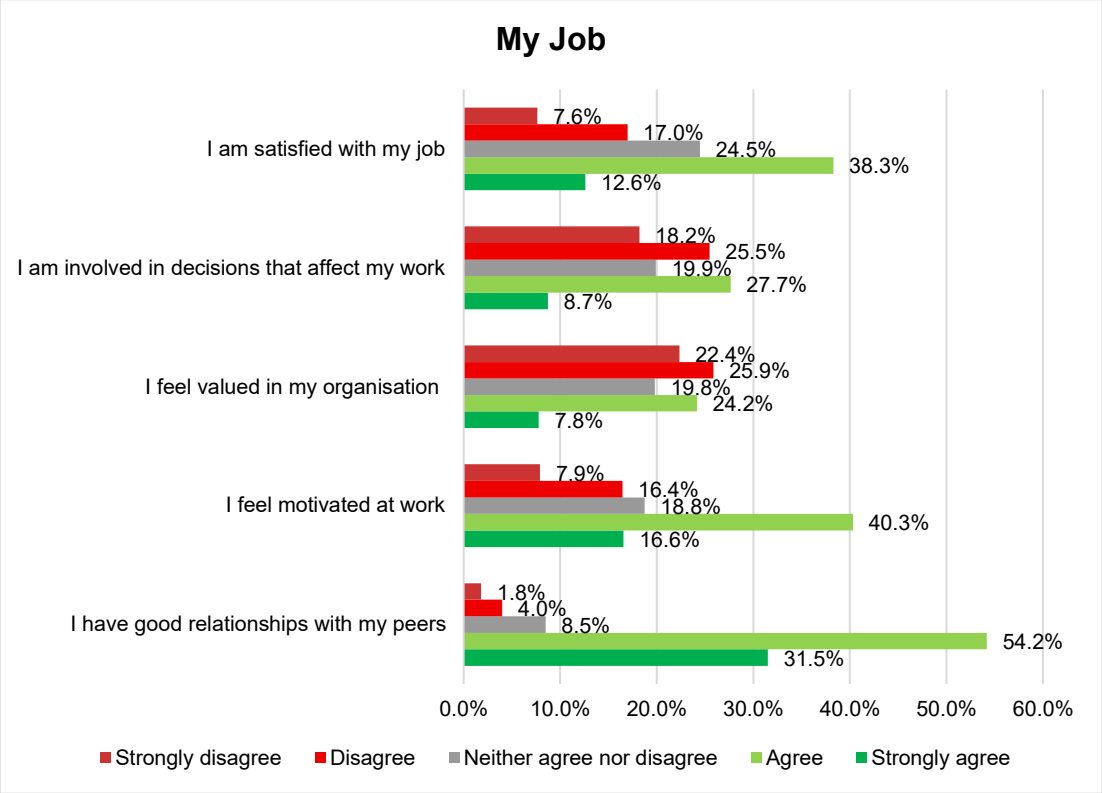
In total, 826 staff from across the SPS responded to the survey, approximately 15.9% of the total SPS staff population. The number from each establishment, and the percentage of staff which that number represents from each location, is broken down in the table below.

Location	Number of Staff Responses	Total Staff	Percentage who Responded
Central	**158**	**546**	**28.9%**
Fauldhouse	3	**12**	25%
Headquarters	144	**422**	34.1%
SPS College	11	**112**	9.8%
Establishments	**668**	**4633**	**14.4%**
Bella CCU	10	**38**	26.3%
HMP Barlinnie	73	**629**	11.6%
HMP Castle Huntly	32	**127**	25.2%
HMP Dumfries	56	**162**	34.6%
HMP Edinburgh	92	**454**	20.3%
HMP Glenochil	48	**393**	12.2%
HMP & YOI Grampian	41	**332**	12.3%
HMP Greenock	25	**205**	12.2%
HMP Inverness	15	**139**	10.8%
HMP Kilmarnock	26	**334**	7.8%
HMP Low Moss	48	**365**	13.2%
HMP Perth	52	**378**	13.8%
HMP & YOI Polmont	55	**436**	12.6%
HMP Shotts	61	**377**	16.2%
HMP & YOI Stirling	31	**228**	13.6%
Lilias CCU	3	**36**	8.3%

In the following sections, we present the main findings from the survey by theme, and also include our commentary, along with a selection of direction verbatim quotations from the

survey responses, presented in blue shaded boxes. (The reader should note that we present the exact words used by respondents, including any original spelling or grammatical errors).

3.2 Survey Theme: My Job



The statements in the above graph aim to identify how respondents feel about their own role and contribution to the organisation. Within this section, the average level of agreement (selection of either "agree" or "strongly agree" as a response) was 52.4%, while the level of disagreement (selection of either "disagree" or "strongly disagree" as a response) was 29.3%.

The highest level of agreement (85.7%) in this section, by a significant percentage, was to the statement "I have a good relationship with my peers". Across the entirety of this survey, this statement reflected the strongest positive sentiment from respondents. When asked if respondents had any further comments in relation to their jobs, a number of them highlighted the good relationships they have with their peers. An example of this is included below:

"Working in the SPS and at my establishment, I have a good relationship with my peers. This job bonds people very strongly, and most of the staff are friendly and approachable and will take the time to help each other and those new to the role."

Other highlighted that while they had good relationships with their peers, they did not feel valued by the organisation:

"I have a fantastic relationship with my peers but don't feel valued within my establishment."

In response to the statement "I feel valued in my organisation" almost half of respondents (48.3%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed. This reflects a significantly high percentage of staff who do not feel valued by the SPS. In the further comments section, the reasons given

for this lack of feeling valued were varied but included the lack of consistency and follow through around performance management and personal development, a lack of value shown by those in other roles, a lack of flexibility and poor communication from the organisation, and concerns around the current process for promotions. Respondents felt that they were often just expected to go beyond the responsibilities of their role without any recognition, and specific reference was made on a number of occasions to not feeling valued by senior management.

"I feel that management do not understand my job role and do not value what I do."

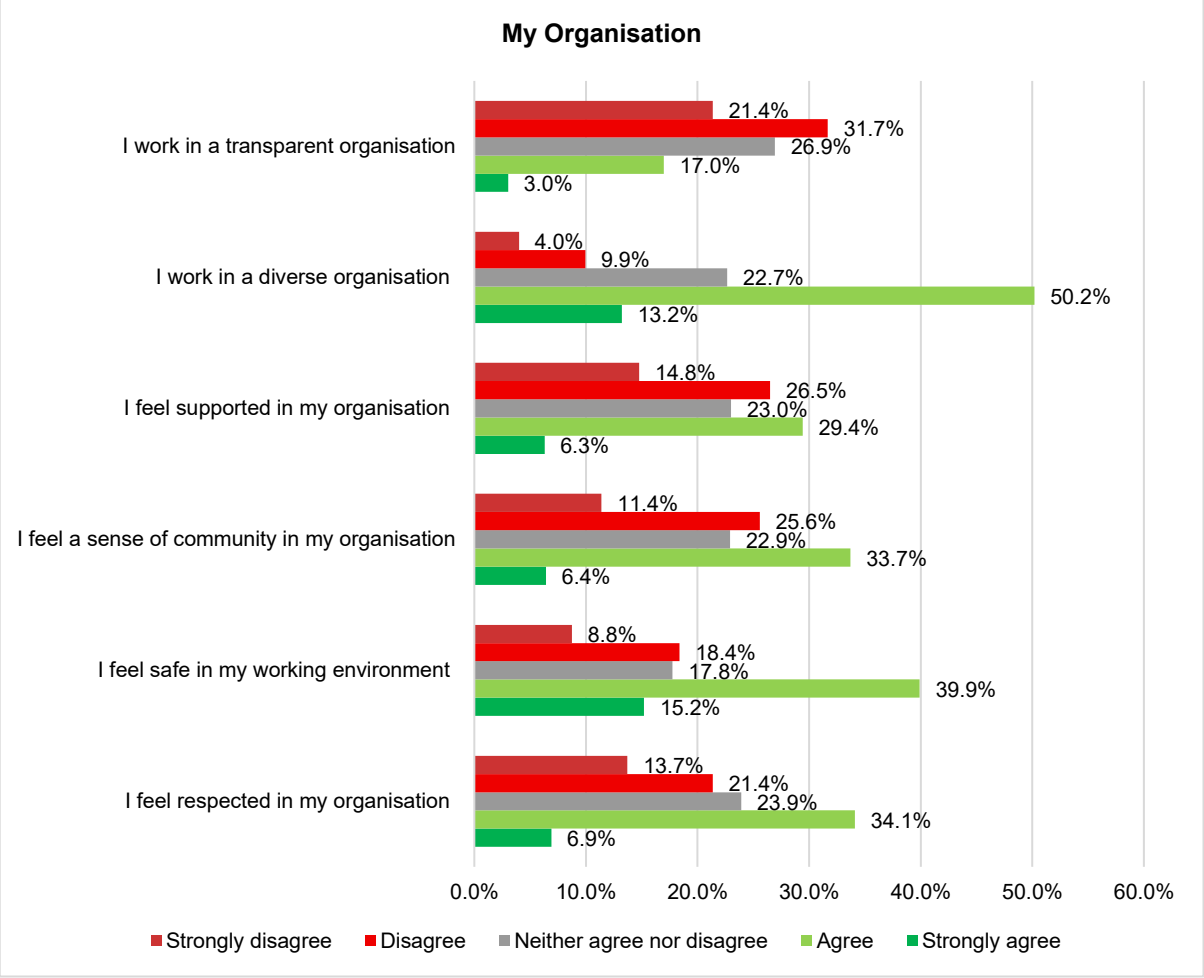
"There is no incentive to work hard as I don't feel valued or recognised."

"I feel valued by those who I work with, the organisation as a whole on the other hand is different so wasn't sure how to handle this one. In general I don't fell non ops staff are valued at least shown their value."

"I have a fantastic relationship with my peers but don't feel valued within my establishment."

"There is apathy from top to bottom. As a result the uniformed staff feel undervalued and unimportant."

3.3 Survey Theme: My Organisation



The statements in the graph above aim to understand how the respondent feels about the SPS as an organisation. Responses vary significantly with the average level of agreement being 42.6% and the average level of disagreement being 34.6%.

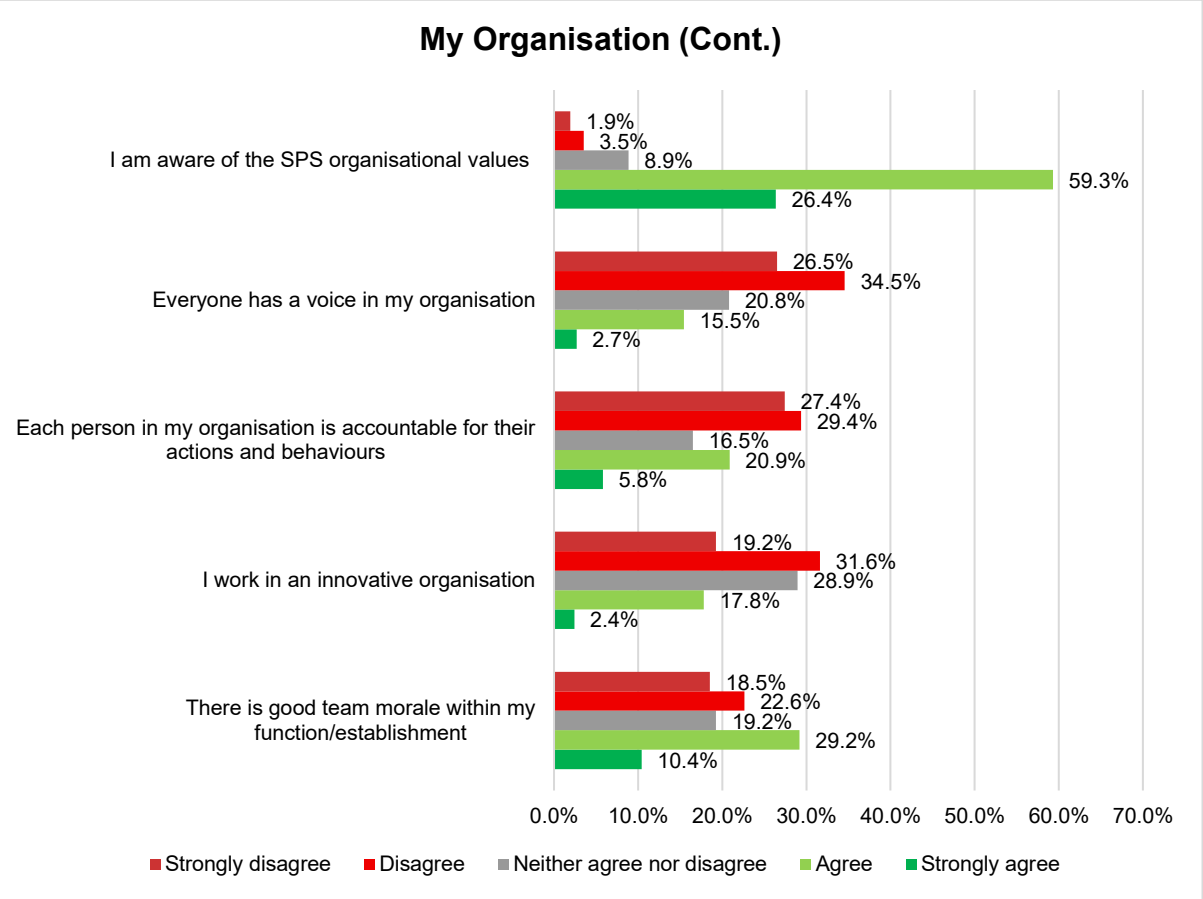
Almost two thirds of respondents (63.4%) agreed that they work in a diverse organisation. However, only a fifth of respondents (20%) believe they work in a transparent organisation, with over half (53.1%) disagreeing with this statement. When asked for further comments, a number of respondents expanded on why they did not believe that the SPS was transparent.

"Transparency internally is very poor - very little information is routinely shared."

"My local establishment adopted a micromanagement approach that has effectively eradicated transparency and the voice of subordinates who fear repercussions."

In addition to the above, comments also mentioned a lack of transparency in the recruitment process, a culture of blame, and a lack of transparency when it comes to the actions and decisions of senior management.

While more respondents agreed than disagreed, it is still considered significant in terms of culture that over a quarter of respondents (27.2%) do not feel safe in their work environment. Those who disagreed attributed this lack of safety to low staffing levels, high levels of new or inexperienced staff across grades, the current challenges with drugs in prisons, and a perceived lack of support from senior management when it comes to violence from prisoners.



The statements in this section again focus on how respondents feel about the organisation they work for. The average level of agreement is 38.1% and the average level of disagreement is 43.1%.

The majority of respondents (85.7%) agreed that they are aware of the SPS organisational values, although when asked to expand on their responses some respondents indicated that while they were aware of these values, they did not believe that they were adhered to by everyone within the organisation.

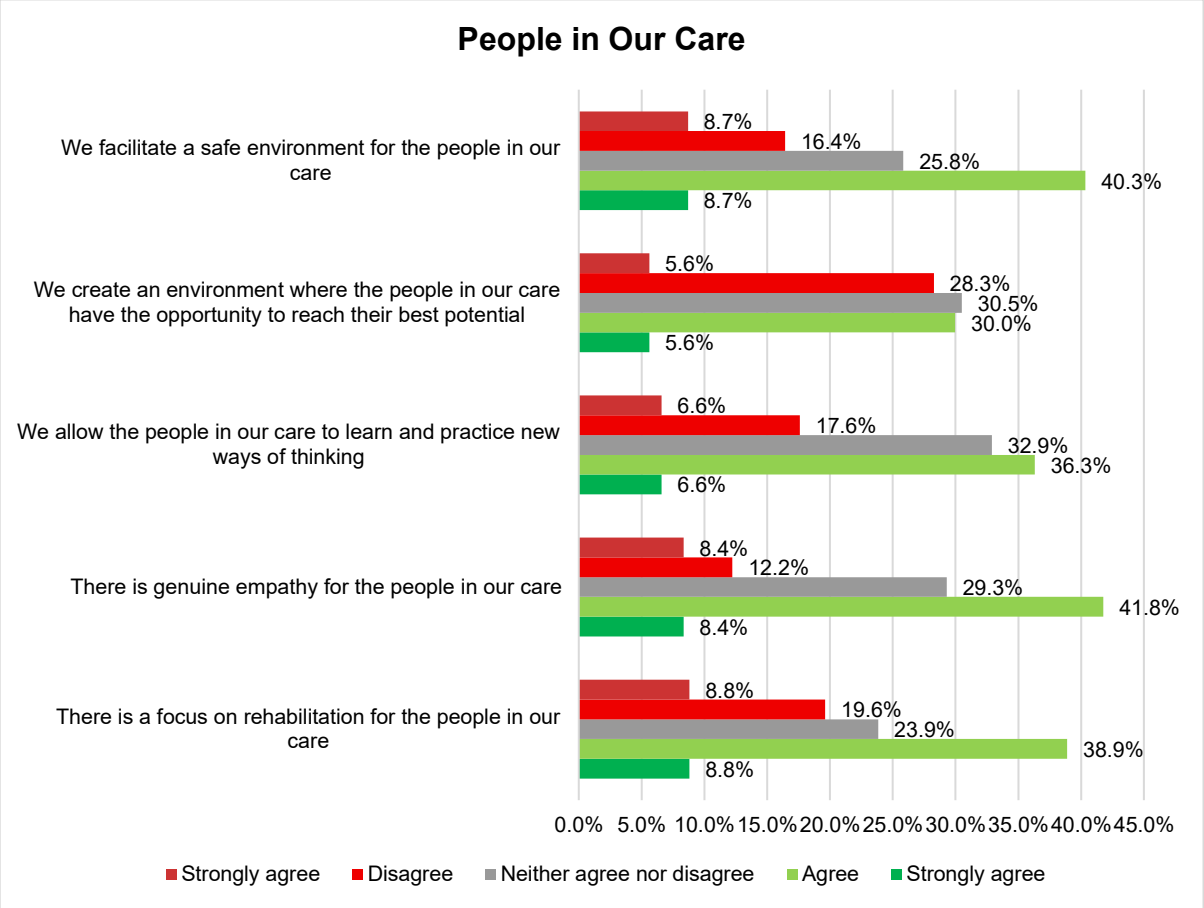
In terms of accountability, just over a quarter (26.7%) of respondents were of the view that each person in the organisation is accountable for their actions and behaviours. It was concerning to note that almost 57% of staff disagreed that each person in the organisation is accountable for their actions. When asked for further comments, respondents frequently expanded on why they had disagreed with this point, with a view being held by a significant number of respondents that a lack of accountability was particularly displayed at management levels within the organisation and that issues are regularly hidden and not addressed among certain groups.

"There are a list of managers who are untouchable and never held accountable for there actions or words."

"The organisation is only transparent when the SM are looking at the lower grades. They expect the lower grades to be accountable for there actions however are not willing to be accountable for their bad decision making or actions. We live in a blame culture which is encouraged by the SM."

"SPS is clearly still a "boys club" mentality and one that I witness daily at work."

3.4 Survey Theme: People in our Care



This section of the survey, and the statements within, aim to establish the views of SPS staff in relation to the treatment and support of those in the care of the SPS. The average level of agreement in this section was 45.1%, while the average disagreement level was 26.5%.

In response to asking respondents if they had any further comment in relation to people in the care of the SPS, there was a variety of additional responses provided. One key theme in these responses was in relation to the use of the term “people in our care” which a number of respondents disagreed with, suggesting that this term does not adequately represent the reason why people are in prison.

Additionally, a number of respondents acknowledged that while staff would like to provide more opportunities and support to prisoners, the current prisoner population and staffing shortages, along with issues such as drug misuse and organised crime, prevent this from happening. Several respondents suggested that rehabilitation is not a priority for the SPS.

Many of the responses to this section indicated staff’s willingness and desire to support people in the care of the SPS more effectively. There was, however, a small number of responses that indicated a very negative attitude from staff towards the prison population, and others who suggested that this attitude, while not the majority, is commonplace in establishments.

"High prisoner numbers, inadequate regimes and shortages of staff in key areas has affected the ability of colleagues to focus on rehabilitation in favour of ensuring that the physiological and safety needs of those in our care are met."

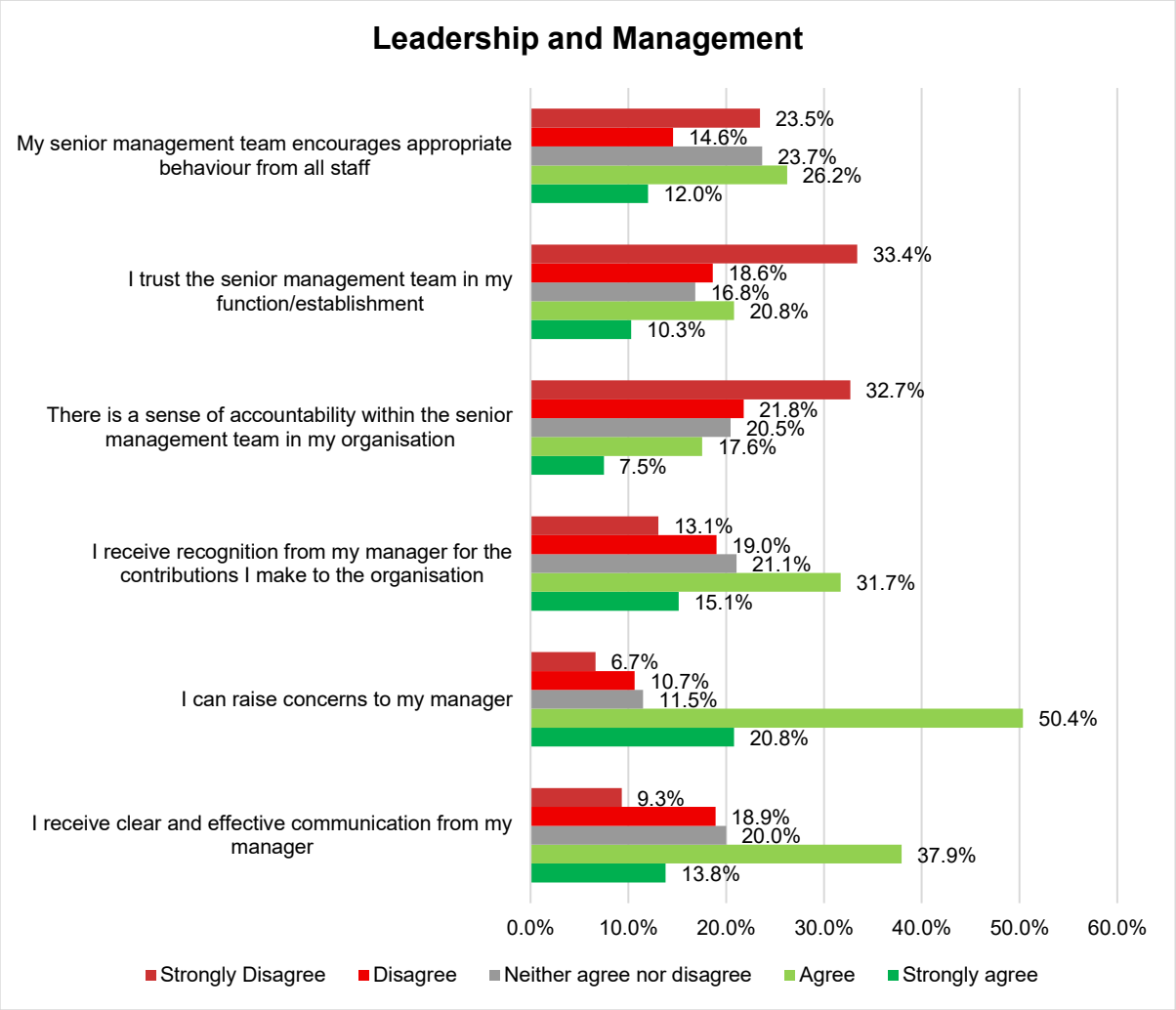
"The people in our care is a joke for the terminology they are prisoners who have done wrong."

"We only warehouse prisoners at this time, no staff in halls, no staff to run programmes, absolutely no chance for rehabilitation sadly."

"It is the purpose of what we do."

"I do feel that there is empathy for the people in our care but the staff are so busy and frustrated that this sometimes falls away."

3.5 Survey Theme: Leadership and Management



The statements within this section of the survey aimed to identify the sentiment of respondents towards leadership and management within the SPS, and can be broken down into sentiment towards their manager, and sentiment towards senior management. Overall,

the average level of agreement with the statements offered is 44.0% and the average level of disagreement is 37.0%.

The average level of agreement decreased to 31.5% when questions were specifically focused on senior management, whereas the average levels of disagreement increased to 48.2%. Respondents who expanded on their responses to this section primarily highlighted the lack of accountability from senior management as a key issue, with some also alluding to a lack of trust and an inability to be able to challenge decisions which have been made without repercussions. While many staff feel that can raise concerns, they do not believe that these concerns will be adequately addressed, and in some instances, they feel that they will be ignored entirely. A significant gap between staff and senior management is clearly evident within the responses to this question, with a lack of trust and respect being frequently discussed. The comments in relation to staff show that direct line managers reflect a more positive sentiment, expressing more relationships of trust and understanding.

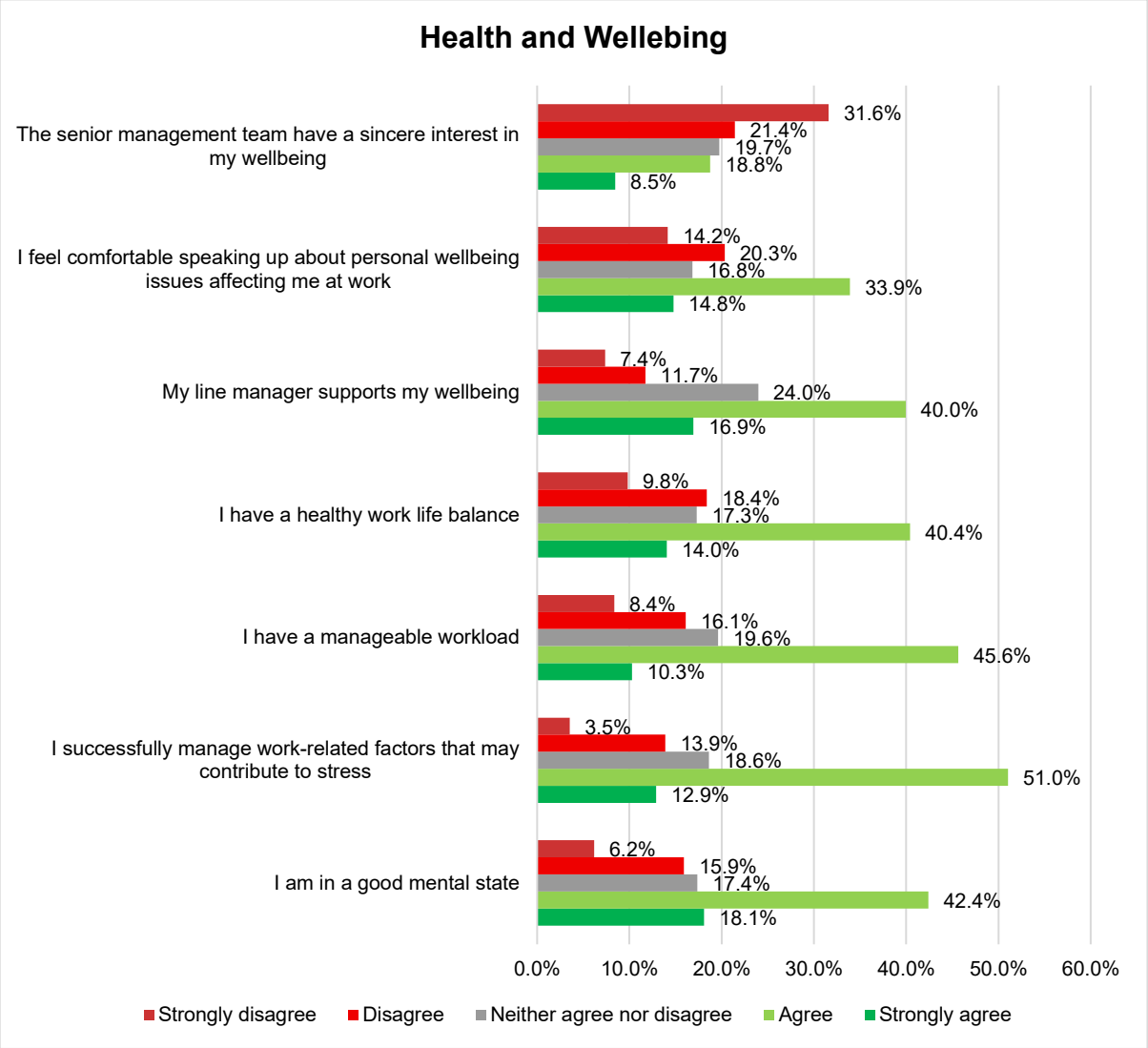
"I have absolutely no faith in my Senior Management team, as they have consistently failed to support and value their staff, nor do they take any responsibility or accountability."

"I have had a member of senior management tell me I am a woman and should be making the cups of tea ....."

"It depends on which manager they are all different."

"I've noticed that some managers engage in micromanagement, which creates a toxic environment. This behaviour negatively affects staff, people don't feel they can speak freely or even interact socially in a natural, human way."

3.6 Survey Theme: Health and Wellbeing



The statements in this section focused on the respondents' views in relation to their health and wellbeing, and the support they receive from the organisation. The average level of agreement in this section was 52.5%, while the average level of disagreement was 28.4%, reflecting the most positive sentiment expressed in any section of this survey.

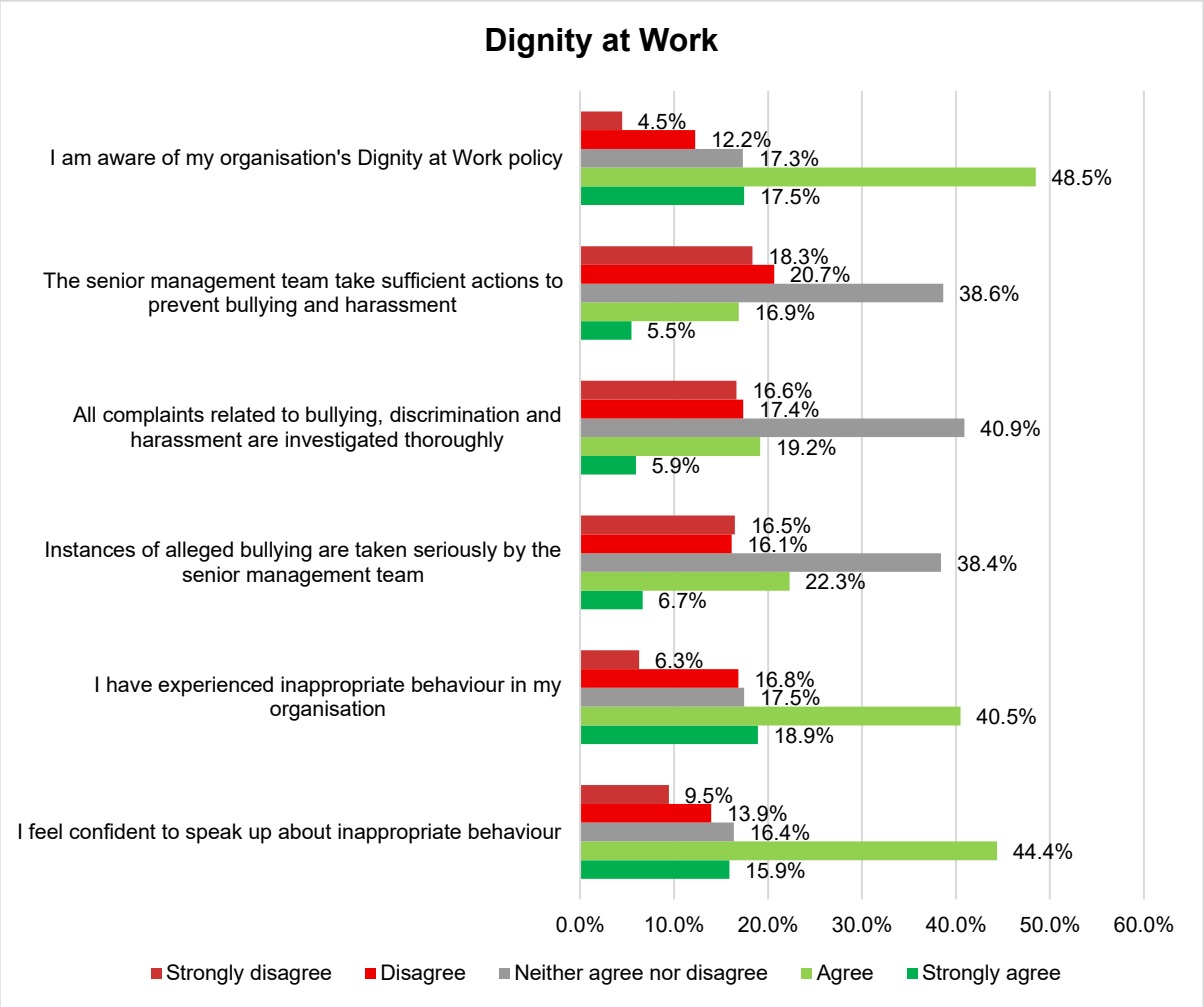
When asked for further comments, a number of respondents referenced their direct managers as being supportive but comments related to the senior management were again significantly more negative with specific issues in relation to wellbeing including the lack of cover for sickness absence, manager turnover preventing building of relationships, the move to the 35-hour week, and the lack of wellbeing resources and supports including trauma-informed supports, considering the nature of the prison officer role.

"While there are some resources available, I feel that more can be done to support health and wellbeing especially mental health in the workplace. The nature of the job can be emotionally and mentally draining, and it often feels like there is limited understanding or acknowledgment of that impact."

"The state of the mental health in operational employees in the SPS is concerning. There is a lack of suitable in house mental health support for employee mental health in the SPS and a poor approach to confidentiality on this issue."

"My line manager consistently advocates for and encourages work life balance".

3.7 Survey Theme: Dignity at Work



Of those who responded to this survey, 59.4% (almost three fifths of respondents) agreed with the statement "I have experienced inappropriate behaviour in my organisation". This represents a very significant proportion of staff in the SPS.

Only a quarter of respondents (25.1%) believe that all complaints relating to bullying, discrimination and harassment are investigated thoroughly, only 29% believe that instances of alleged bulling are taken seriously by senior management, and fewer than a quarter (22.4%) believe that senior management take sufficient action to prevent bullying and harassment. Awareness of the Dignity at Work policy was around a two-thirds of respondents (66%).

While 60.3% of respondents agreed that they would feel confident speaking up about inappropriate behaviour, further comments made at the end of this section suggested that

some of those who agreed also stated that they did not believe this would lead to any action being taken. Further expansion of the answers given to the above statements focused on a belief that bullying in the SPS is often covered up and that there is a lack of proper investigation into reports of bullying incidents, that how cases were treated depended on the people involved, that respondents were fearful of the process and the perceived lack of confidentiality when reporting, and a fear of repercussions from reporting. A small number of respondents focused on "bullying from the top" and felt that this was not adequately addressed, as well as referring to a number of people who had left the organisation due to the extent to which they were bullied.

"This kind of environment leaves people feeling small, anxious, and constantly on edge. Everyone deserves to be treated with respect and basic human decency, regardless of their role or contract type. Building a culture of trust, support, and fairness would make a huge difference in how safe and valued people feel at work."

"Management at all levels have a poor understanding on how to resolve and manage these situations. The culture within the establishment is that of male superiority and sexist remarks."

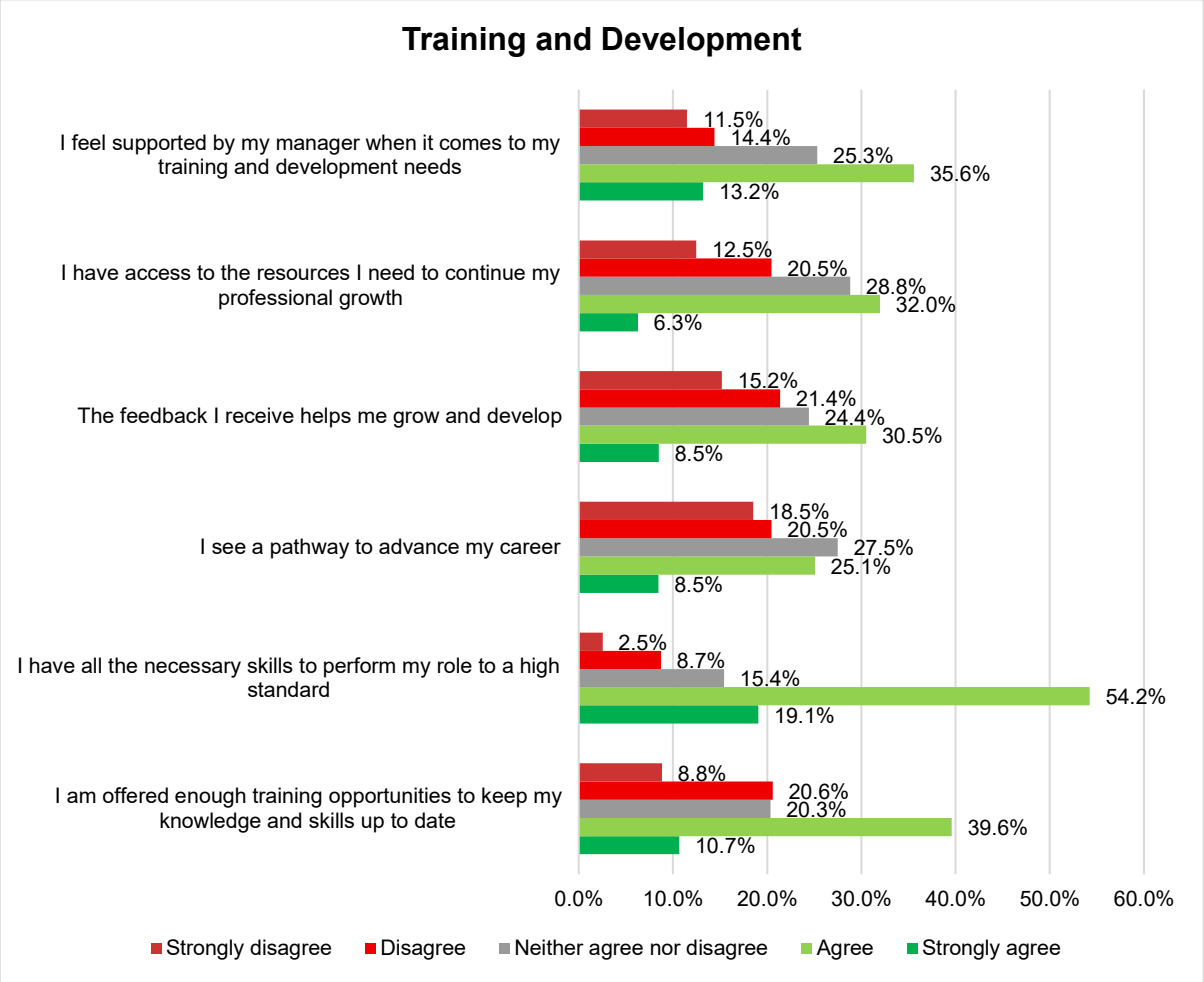
"People are not treated well following reports of inappropriate behaviours. This has led to a toxic culture within the establishment."

"While i also take responsibility for reporting these issues which in some cases wasn't done for fear of repercussions i also know that managers and people above me were aware of what was happening and also did not report it."

"I am a young woman and the SPS is still a very male dominated space, sometimes it can be hard to speak up and say that certain comments are inappropriate when in a group. They may be just 'jokes' but sometimes that can be hard to discern and would still be inappropriate in a work environment. "

"I was recently bullied and harassed BECAUSE I raised a concern about inappropriate behaviour. The person carrying out the behaviour has not been spoken with."

3.8 Survey Theme: Training and Development



This statements within this section of the survey were focused on respondents' views on the opportunities available to them to grow and develop their career in the SPS. The ability of staff to grow and develop is central to organisational culture and creating an environment where staff feel valued and motivated. The average level of agreement in this section is 36.2%, while the average level of disagreement is 29.2%.

Almost three quarters of staff (73.3%) agreed that they have all the necessary skills to perform their role to a high standard, and over half (50.3%) agree that they are offered enough training opportunities to keep their knowledge and skills up to date. A similar number (48.8%) feel supported by their manager when it comes to their training and development needs.

Just over a third of respondents agreed that they received feedback to help them grow and develop (39%), have access to the resources they need to continue their professional growth (38.6%), and see a pathway to advance their career (33.6%).

When asked if they had any further comments on this topic, several common themes emerged in the responses. These included concerns about the inadequacy of the performance management systems within the SPS to support training and development. Respondents highlighted issues such as training days not taking place or leaving teams short-staffed, a lack of constructive feedback, perceptions of favouritism ("face fits" or advancement depending on

"who you know"), and the tendency to reward interview performance over actual job competence. Some noted that while certain managers are encouraging, others do not support progression. Additional challenges mentioned included balancing workload with learning opportunities and the need for staff to seek out development opportunities on their own rather than being offered them.

"Too much stock is put into what a person can say/write about when it comes to promotion, there is 0 input from management regarding someones ability to do a role. A member of staff acting up for 2 years can be passed over for a promotion because they are lacking an ability to interview well whereas a member of staff with no experience can get a promotion because they can talk about experiences they might not even have had."

"I haven't had any annual feedback on performance since 2019. I feel my job doesn't have room for development."

"the organisation in my opinion is very good at developing staff and opening up opportunities".

"Training is all online, we look after it ourselves or personally look our more opportunities which is great. I only receive feedback once a year in a review, never any encouragement or "good job" when doing difficult tasks throughout the year."

"I have always been supported by the organisation in terms of my training and development."

"I feel that i am nearing an end to my career within SPS and the pathway is now less obvious for me. I have found Feedback from unsuccessful promotion campaigns to be contradictory and have not given me assistance for any future application that i would then consider. While i have always , and still do look for opportunities for self development i feel that the current promotion process is cumbersome, not designed to assist you and would describe it as an exercise to discard applicants given the many obstacles that you have to overcome to be successful. Given my age and years of service and the many roles i have covered, some on numerous occasions, that training and development needs are now less of a priority for my manager."

"I have been very fortunate during my career in the SPS that the managers I have had, have always supported my development and exposed me to opportunities and experiences to develop my skills further sometimes outwith the role I was in"

4 Key Themes / Findings – Staff Engagement

4.1 Overview

This section provides a summary and synthesis of the main findings emerging from the direct engagement which we conducted with staff across the SPS, including personnel based at each of the establishments and people based at HQ.

It was important during the site visits that we were able to speak to staff informally and in a manner designed to encourage them to talk to us openly and frankly. We did this, in the main, by walking through each prison (escorted by a staff member at a distance) and speaking to staff individually or in small groups, typically at their place of work – in an office, on a landing, in a workshop or kitchen, or in other operational settings.

Across the 16 establishments we engaged with GICs, senior management teams, and officers at all grades – typically 60-80 staff per visit. Overall, we met in excess of c. 700 staff during the site visits. Only two staff declined to talk to us during the site visits, when invited to take part.

These interactions typically lasted anything from five minutes to half an hour, depending on operational pressures and how the day was unfolding in each prison. Whilst staff had been advised in advance (generally by email) that the Crowe team would be visiting, many of them were not very aware of the purpose of the culture review (and some were completely unaware), and the selection of staff to talk to our team often fell to who happened to be available at the time. We did not form a view that there was any attempt to distort the integrity of the review process, for example by directing us to staff who would provide more positive feedback. By contrast, we were struck by the honesty of those SPS staff whom we met, and the diversity of views they expressed.

As part of the site visits, there were some focus group sessions which were organised by the Governor in Charge or the SPOC assigned to assist us – these were relatively few and tended to involve staff from related work areas (e.g. administrative and procurement staff or NHS personnel working in the prison, etc).

The vast majority of the engagement with HQ personnel was conducted by MS Teams video meetings. We met in excess of 100 HQ staff in focus group sessions via this method.

The following paragraphs set out the majority opinion we heard during the site visits and remote focus group sessions, and some specific feedback which we believe it is important for the SPS to note.

We recognise that the opinions summarised in this section are different in some cases from those arising from the staff survey, as presented in Section 3. This is natural, and may arise from the fact that those who met us in person may not have gone on to complete a survey (i.e. some or all of the 826 survey respondents were a different cohort of staff from those who met us in person, and had different views), or because some people may have been more reticent in person than when giving an anonymous survey response. As with all such stakeholder feedback, we assume that all opinions are honest and valid. There are no “right answers” and opinions between different individuals, or people in different work settings, may legitimately differ from one another, as may their experiences of working in the SPS.

4.2 Experiences of Working in the Scottish Prison Service

Across establishments and SPS central functions [4], staff described a broad spectrum of experiences reflecting the diversity of cultures, management styles, and operational environments across the Scottish Prison Service. Some prisons maintained a relaxed, informal atmosphere characterised by first-name interactions and a sense of mutual respect between staff and prisoners. Others adopted a more formal tone, emphasising hierarchy and the use of traditional or militaristic titles such as “sir” and “ma’am.”

Despite these differences, the majority of officers and managers expressed that they enjoy their roles and derive genuine satisfaction from the work. Many described the job as “wonderful” and rewarding, though often frustrating given staff shortages, administrative burdens, and procedural rigidity. The sense of camaraderie and solidarity among colleagues was repeatedly emphasised, captured by the phrase “we’re all in this together.”

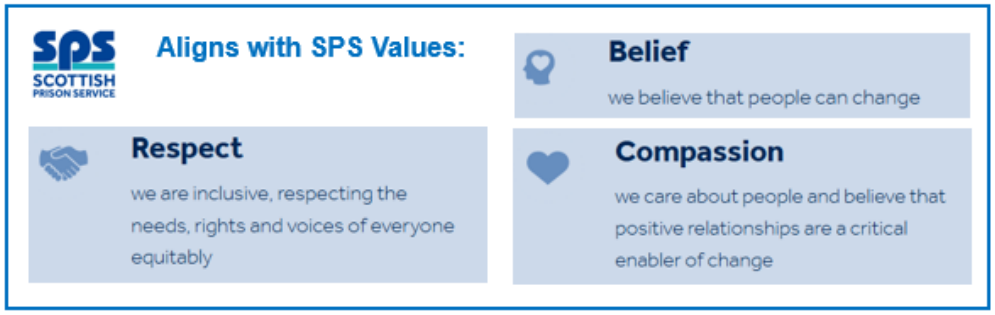
Many staff see the SPS as a job for life, and we met significant numbers of officers whose parents, siblings, spouses / partners or children were also serving within the SPS. Many staff were ex-HM Armed Forces and enjoyed the same levels of camaraderie they had experienced in the military, and also were accustomed to the functioning of a uniformed, discipline service.

Family Days in some establishments, in which staff families are invited to visit the prison, were viewed as especially positive and morale-boosting. Officers reported that these events helped their families understand and appreciate the challenges of prison work and reinforced a shared sense of pride.

Staff also valued the security, salary, and benefits associated with their roles, including generous leave and pension arrangements. However, they expressed growing frustration at what many perceived to be a blame culture, excessive finger-pointing, and low levels of professionalism among some colleagues. Issues such as poor timekeeping, casual dress standards, and a tendency to overlook minor misconduct were cited as indicative of declining standards in some areas. A more serious extension of this issue was the view shared by a range of staff that the SPS has a tendency not to deal adequately with more serious misconduct, by allegedly letting staff resign rather than investigate complaints properly, alongside the view that some of the reported problems relating to bullying and sexist behaviour (see Section 4.4 below) will disappear when those responsible retire from the SPS (again denoting a corporate failure to tackle the problem).

[4] Including SPS Headquarters, the SPS College, the Fauldhouse facility, and staff working in regional roles in Estates.

4.3 How Staff Treat Persons in Custody



Most staff stated unequivocally that prisoners are treated fairly and with respect, describing a culture that has improved considerably over recent years. Officers consistently referred to a shared ethos of "treating others as you would want to be treated," noting that this principle guides daily interactions and underpins the maintenance of order and decency.

"The important thing is to treat people fairly."

Whilst the majority of staff commented positively on the treatment of those in custody, there was a sizeable minority who reported more negative experiences. We were told that there are still pockets of poor staff behaviour, staff who were in the role for the wrong reasons, and staff who purposely attempted to get a reaction out of prisoners for an opportunity to use force. This is notable, especially in the context of some staff telling us that "raising these issues goes nowhere" and can lead to them becoming being victimised by colleagues.

"Prisoners are mostly treated well but some staff here are still old school and don't like to see the men getting things."

Staff acknowledged that managing prisoners requires emotional intelligence, patience, and empathy. One officer noted that they are "only one step away from being here," highlighting the importance of humility and non-judgment.

"Prisoners want stability. They are just guys who made wrong choices, but they want the things that everyone else wants in life."

There were numerous examples in some establishments of rehabilitative and compassionate practice, including structured education programmes, employment initiatives, recovery groups, and partnerships with external employers in construction and catering. Officers derived personal satisfaction from helping prisoners secure work or reconnect with families, and some described prisoners returning to thank them after release. In other establishments, particularly the larger, older prisons, staff frequently referred to "warehousing" of prisoners and stated that there was minimal access to rehabilitation opportunities, with a consequential impact on progression as some programmes have long waiting lists.

Due to the current pressures in the organisation, staff sometimes described feeling empathy fatigue, and that it was sometimes difficult to find the time to undertake the personal officer role and fully support persons in custody to the level they would like.

The Segregation and Reintegration Units (SRUs) were identified as the most challenging environments within SPS establishments. Officers there recognised that offenders held within the SRUs are often unpredictable or violent, requiring careful management by experienced

teams. De-escalation was emphasised as a core skill, with staff using the minimum necessary force and prioritising safety.

Support for prisoners from minority backgrounds or other countries was described as strong, with provision for interpretation and immigration support. However, isolated concerns were raised about occasional favouritism – for example, certain prisoners receiving extra privileges such as evening showers – though such cases were reported to be rare.

In some prisons, we heard comments from staff suggesting that certain groups of prisoners – particularly Offence Protection prisoners – were considered to be easier to manage, and would consequently get favourable treatment or access to programmes. It was often stated by Residential Officers that Offence Protection prisoners were in many cases considered to be highly manipulative, and as a result staff would prefer to maintain a professional distance from such prisoners.

4.4 How Staff Treat Each Other



Within most establishments, staff described a supportive and close-knit working culture in which colleagues “have each other’s backs.” Mentoring relationships between senior and junior officers were common, with more experienced staff taking pride in guiding new recruits and helping them develop confidence.

However, some officers reported undermining behaviour, where individuals bypassed their line managers to seek approval from more senior figures. This was said to erode authority and contribute to tension within teams. Others in various prisons described a small number of cliques or internal networks that reinforced perceptions of “jobs for the boys.”

Sexism towards female officers was an issue which was raised throughout our engagements with staff. While it was frequently highlighted that there have been improvements in recent years in the SPS in challenging and addressing sexism in the workplace, with some establishments very actively enforcing a zero-tolerance policy, there are still pockets of inappropriate behaviour existing throughout the organisation. These challenges were often attributed to the establishments typically being male-dominated environments, and a belief by some colleagues that female staff could not perform certain control and restraint duties when it came to male prisoners, despite there being clear evidence that this was not the case and these officers having received the necessary training. Female officers also described feeling undermined when male colleagues stepped in uninvited during incidents. In these situations, the intervention was not requested, and the perception was that their authority and relationships with prisoners were compromised, sometimes unintentionally, by such actions.

In some instances, female officers also stated that they had experienced unprofessional, and sometimes sexualised, comments which were couched as “banter”, despite the fact that such behaviour made these female officers feel uncomfortable. It was reported that despite these comments being heard by other members of staff, no action was taken.

A common theme when raising the question of generational attitudes to female prison officers was a response that “some people just won’t change their views” and that hopefully in time those views will “retire out of the organisation”.

Some reference was made in a small number of prisons to the influence of Freemasonry amongst uniformed officers and governor grades, which was generally felt to be much less prevalent than in previous decades, and non-existent in some prisons. A small number of staff told us that they had been the victims of anti-Catholic bias from colleagues, although again the prevailing view tended to be that this was less common now than in the past, and more likely to manifest itself through soccer-related banter.

Staff in several establishments from certain cohorts (Operations Officers, or staff in support roles) stated that they felt that they were undervalued and often treated as “second class citizens” by some of their Residential Officer colleagues.

While teamwork was strong at local level, staff observed that the culture has become more individualistic over time, with some adopting a “not my job” mentality. Both older and younger officers were described as occasionally resistant to change.

The viewpoints expressed by staff in HQ and central roles was similar to the views of staff based in establishments, with a mostly positive and close working culture, but again some issues around cliques and internal networks

4.5 Openness



(This refers to openness both within specific establishments and across the Scottish Prison Service as a whole.)

Levels of openness varied considerably between establishments. In prisons with a more informal culture, communication between staff and management was open and direct, fostering trust and cooperation. In others, communication was more hierarchical, and staff felt less comfortable raising concerns or suggesting changes.

“No consultation – if a manager wants to change it, it is changed.”

“Communications from upstairs [in the establishment] can be lacking.”

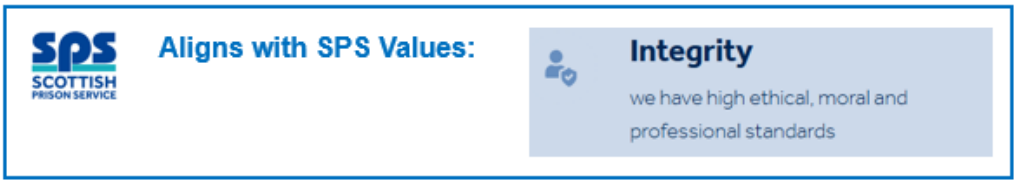
Within Headquarters (HQ) and central functions, the level of openness also varied, with some staff saying that they had a very strong culture of openness within their functional areas, whilst others suggested that there was not open communication where it was needed.

At a corporate level, prison-based staff repeatedly identified a disconnect between HQ and the prisons, describing HQ as “out of sight, out of mind.” While HQ was credited with effectively managing prisoner movements, it was criticised for poor communication, limited visibility, and slow responsiveness. Many staff found HQ personnel difficult to reach due to hybrid working patterns and compressed working hours. Some expressed cynicism about remote working, reporting that HQ staff were often uncontactable and slow to respond during the working day.

HQ staff often commented that staff in some establishments were not open with them and did not wish to be communicated with or share what they were doing, citing the fact that certain data is kept within establishments and staff based in those prisons can be reluctant to share it with HQ colleagues.

Within some of the support functions (such as procurement, personnel or estates), where staff in SPS establishments have a dual reporting line to the local GIC and to a manager in that functional area at HQ, there were frequent comments that some HQ managers never visit their direct reports within the prison, and in a small number of cases it was stated that functional staff based in prisons had never met their manager in person despite having worked for that person for several years. By contrast, some support function staff reported a very close working relationship with their HQ-based manager, including regular meetings on site within the prison.

4.6 Integrity Amongst Staff



Integrity was described as a core value among operational staff. Officers stated that they take accountability seriously and would not tolerate misconduct or corruption. The use of CCTV, body-worn cameras, and structured reporting systems was seen as reinforcing high ethical standards.

Nevertheless, staff expressed frustration at what they perceived to be inconsistencies in accountability, with certain behaviours overlooked depending on who was involved. The perception that advancement can depend on “who you know” rather than merit was seen as undermining confidence in fairness and professionalism.

4.7 How Minorities are Treated within the Scottish Prison Service (Staff and Prisoners)



Feedback across establishments indicated that minorities are treated fairly and with respect. Both staff and prisoners described a culture of inclusivity – "everyone is the same in here." Equality and diversity mechanisms are in place, including case conferences for transgender prisoners and monitoring arrangements for minority groups.

As part of our general engagement with staff, a number of staff shared with us that they were LGBTQ+ people and that they had not been discriminated against due to their sexual orientation. The general view was whilst discrimination may have been evident 10-20 years ago or more, "society has moved on" and these officers are treated fairly by colleagues.

There was significant evidence in many prisons of positive efforts to embrace the concepts of equality, diversion and inclusion, and we were invited to observe a meeting of the EDI Committee in one establishment. The meeting was well-attended by staff from across the prison and by one prisoner representative, with the GIC lending authority to the discussions, and a range of actions agreed to build on previous measured progress. This was a good demonstration of positive and genuine commitment in one prison to EDI and reflected well on the genuine efforts being contributed to deal with EDI matters in a practical and routine manner.

Some officers acknowledged that misogyny and outdated attitudes persist in certain parts of the Service (see Section 4.4 above), though less so than in the past. Female staff reported generally positive experiences but emphasised the need for continued vigilance and support to ensure equal treatment.

4.8 Innovation within the Scottish Prison Service



Innovation was a notable strength. Many of the most successful rehabilitative and wellbeing initiatives were locally led, developed by staff who saw unmet needs and responded creatively. Examples included gym programmes, meditation classes, recovery groups, steroid awareness sessions, and prisoner-led education initiatives.

Partnerships with employers, voluntary organisations, and external education providers have also expanded, helping to improve resettlement outcomes. Some staff stated that they felt empowered to "find their niche" and develop initiatives that improved the quality of prison life. This appears to be dependent on the support of the establishment or line manager, with some staff being encouraged to be innovative and being supported in their ideas (a feature of some

of the smaller prisons), and others feeling that their suggestions are not considered and that some areas of the SPS are still resistant to the change which innovation brings.

Staff advised us that innovation often relies on individual enthusiasm rather than structural support, with limited central coordination or recognition of good practice across the Service.

HQ and central staff also noted that innovation is difficult in the environment in which they operate when it comes to technology advancements, as these tend to require major initiatives and significant expenditure.

"Post pandemic, the organisation has been in crisis mode which doesn't leave the room to innovate."

4.9 Accountability within the Scottish Prison Service



Accountability was described as uneven. At establishment level, Governors were generally visible and respected, and staff felt accountable for their actions. However, at the organisational level, decision-making was seen as opaque. Many officers were unclear about who makes key strategic or HR decisions, particularly in relation to recruitment, promotions, and workforce planning.

In some establishments, there was a significant divide and mistrust between staff and senior management, with staff feeling that senior management were not accountable within the organisation.

Blame culture often featured in the discussions around accountability within establishments. A lot of staff said that the lack of accountability came from a culture of blame that starts in the media and with the Scottish Government and feeds down through the organisation. People are reluctant to take accountability because of the fear associated with a culture of blame. Some establishments did, however, appear to have a culture of learning instead of blame, with this often being a deliberate attempt by senior management to promote this culture of learning and to encourage accountability.

"There is a view of 'we can't make mistakes' instead of learning from them. You are very scrutinised and called out if you make mistakes so there is a 'hot potato culture' where people want to pass things on."

"If you make a mistake and own it, you are supported. Management will look at understanding and changing behaviour, not just blame."

Accountability was also raised as a challenge by staff based in HQ and central functions, for similar reasons to those mentioned above around the culture of blame not supporting accountability in decision making; this also reportedly caused challenges and created tensions between HQ and establishments.

The HR Business Partner (HRBP) model was a particular source of confusion. Staff argued that HRBPs should support local Governors but instead report primarily to HQ, creating tension over ownership and accountability.

Some staff felt that HQ's size and structure had become bloated, with too many non-operational roles and insufficient focus on frontline delivery.

"Accountability is poor with regard to headquarters. All engagement is by Microsoft teams."

4.10 Leadership – Within Establishments and SPS-Wide

Leadership within establishments was mostly described as strong and accessible, with Governors and senior managers generally seen as supportive and engaged. Staff appreciated leaders who modelled respect, offered encouragement, and listened to their teams. In some establishments, we had reports of micromanagement and a disconnect between staff and management teams. There were also comments made to us about some senior people being more focused on the next promotion rather than looking at the wider impact of decisions.

In some of the establishments we visited, there appeared to be distance between staff and senior management, and some staff had very strong negative views about the senior management teams within these prisons, feeling that these groups were inaccessible, and did not consider the staff when making important decisions.

"As far as the SMT in our prison is concerned, staff feel like we're just a shirt".

By contrast, corporate leadership was often described by staff within establishments (including some in local management positions) as lacking clear direction. Staff characterised the organisation as poor at change, reactive rather than strategic, and focused primarily on managing immediate operational pressures. While the SPS senior management team was described as capable and skilled in dealing with the Scottish Government, many staff felt that the SPS lacked a compelling long-term vision. There were frequent calls for a five- to ten-year plan to clarify the Service's future direction and priorities.

"SPS leadership is reactive"

The HQ staff views on leadership were generally more positive, but there were still issues raised around support and leadership seeming to be "dependent on who you are reporting to".

4.11 Development, Training, and Career Progression

Staff valued opportunities to act up into higher roles, which allow them to gain leadership experience. However, most felt that promotion opportunities are limited and that the system lacks transparency. The process was described as overly rigid and procedural – "bizarre" in some cases – with heavy reliance on Teams interviews for Band C and D roles that use scripted questions and no follow-ups. Officers argued that this method fails to assess candidates' interpersonal skills or suitability for custodial work.

With regard to the interview process, a major concern for many staff was that the SPS interview questions are well-known, and because of Civil Service rules it is not possible to

question what is said in an interview, even if the interviewer knows that someone is not being truthful. This is felt to undermine the integrity of the process. A number of senior SPS staff advised us that they knew individuals were not truthful in the interview, but they were unable to challenge what was stated. Related to this, the focus at interviews on individual achievements, and what was described to us as a tendency to mark interviewees down for acknowledging that there was a team involved, were considered to undermine the need for teamwork within the SPS.

"A lot of good officers can't get through interviews but do the job every day"

The Scottish Prison Service College was widely criticised. Staff felt that it is now too far removed from operational practice and that recruits return with insufficient practical skills and understanding of prison life. A general concern was that there is too much focus on theory within the College. As a result, establishments must invest additional time mentoring and training new staff in the practical skills required at operational levels.

"We've had new recruits in this jail who were shocked to learn that they would actually have to engage with prisoners. They were encouraged by the recruitment ads to think that it was some sort of desk-based role in an office somewhere."

It was noted that in relation to additional training opportunities, they are available if staff look for them, and those who sought those opportunities largely had a positive experience in being supported to undertake additional training and development opportunities. However, many staff stated that they could be difficult to find and initially getting in contact with the right people could be difficult if the line manager was not supportive. There are reportedly significant issues with some staff being able to take the time they need for training due to staff shortages.

There were strong calls for a revitalised mentoring culture and more structured coaching, particularly for junior staff and new managers. One approach suggested was a 70/20/10 training model (on-the-job learning, classroom-based education, and external learning) as an effective framework for development.

Concerns were also raised that younger staff are being promoted too quickly, moving on before mastering the basics of prison work. Similarly, we were told of staff being promoted beyond their level of demonstrated competence. These issues were said to erode confidence and competence at First Line Manager level and weaken "jail craft."

"People who were not able to cope with the job were promoted to manage these areas."

While the SPS offers generous benefits and good job security, many officers felt that family-friendly policies do not work effectively for senior grades, and that HQ staff enjoy more flexibility than those in frontline roles.

4.12 Suggested Changes Proposed by Staff

Staff offered a range of suggestions to strengthen the SPS:

- Develop a clear five- to ten-year strategic plan that articulates the SPS's purpose, direction, and values. (It was acknowledged by many staff that this is not just a matter for the SPS, and that the overall policy direction on criminal justice rests with the Scottish Government.)
- Rebuild trust and communication between HQ and establishments, including more visible leadership and in-person engagement.
- Reform recruitment and promotion processes to include face-to-face assessment and behavioural testing, reducing over-reliance on Teams interviews.
- Strengthen the Scottish Prison Service College by increasing operational involvement and ensuring recruits are fully prepared for custodial work.
- Create a consistent, SPS-wide mentoring and coaching framework for staff at all levels.
- Address perceived inequities in grading, pay, and flexibility between HQ and operational staff.
- Tackle pockets of unprofessional behaviour and undermining culture to restore confidence in standards and integrity.
- Encourage the sharing of innovation and good practice between establishments.
- Improve mental health support for both prisoners and staff.
- Promote and reward visible leadership, professionalism, and fairness as core values.

5 Key Themes / Findings – Prisoner Engagement

5.1 Overview

This section provides a summary and synthesis of the main findings emerging from the direct engagement which we conducted with prisoners across the SPS.

As with the staff engagement, it was important during the site visits that we were able to speak to prisoners informally and in a manner designed to encourage open and frank conversation. Our engagement with prisoners was typically opportunistic, with the officer escorting us asking prisoners if they would like to talk to us. These conversations took place on landings, in common areas, and occasionally in cells, with the escorting officer maintaining a discrete distance to facilitate privacy. We generally met prisoners individually or in small groups. Some of these conversations were quite fluid, for example one of the Crowe team might be talking to a prisoner on a landing, and several more prisoners might casually join the conversation.

Across the 16 establishments, we engaged with between 5 and 30 prisoners per visit. We estimate that we engaged with between 120 and 140 prisoners during the site visits – the fluidity of some of the conversations makes it difficult to give a precise number.

These conversations typically lasted between five minutes and half an hour, and we found most of the prisoners we met to be interested in providing their opinions and sharing their experiences. None of them were particularly aware of the nature of this review, although several stated that officers had informed them on the day that they might be asked to speak to some external researchers. We encountered no hostility during the process, although a number of prisoners were keen to contextualise their opinions by claiming that they were innocent of the crimes for which they had been convicted and that the criminal justice system as a whole was treating them unfairly.

In all instances, we were not told of the offences committed by the prisoners we met, or (in the case of remand prisoners) for which they were to face trial. Some of the prisoners we met were in sections of the prison exclusively housing Offence Protection prisoners. Our team maintained a non-judgemental, professional approach in all of these discussions, to ensure balance and fairness.

The discussions with prisoners explored their perceptions of living conditions, staff treatment, rehabilitation opportunities, compassion, respect, minority experiences, and suggestions for improvement. The findings reflect diverse experiences but reveal recurring themes regarding the quality of relationships, access to purposeful activity, and the uneven delivery of rehabilitative support.

The following paragraphs set out the majority opinion we heard during the engagement with prisoners, and some specific feedback which we believe it is important for the SPS to note.

5.2 Experiences of Being in Custody within the Scottish Prison Service

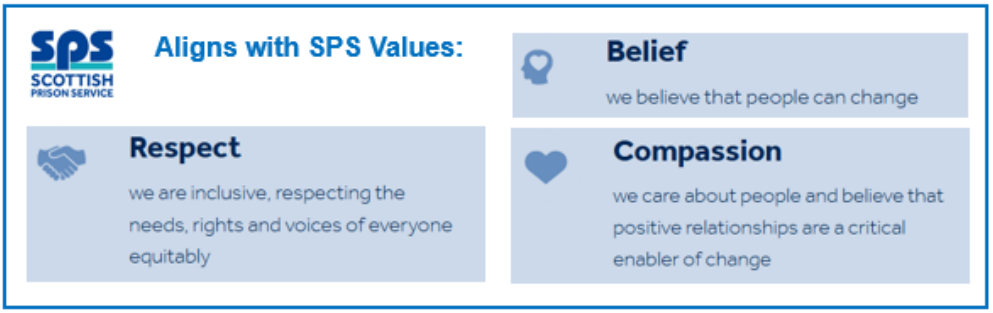
Prisoners' descriptions of their living environments vary significantly between establishments. Some reported relatively positive conditions, describing the smaller prisons as "quiet and safe," with an atmosphere more akin to a "hostel than a prison." Others presented a more critical view, depicting the system as "on its knees" and certain establishments as deeply negative or oppressive.

Frequently, the prisoners whom we met had positive things to say about their current establishment but were much more negative about other prisons they had been in previously, both recently and (for those serving long sentences, or repeat offenders) in periods up to 20-30 years ago.

A small number of prisoners highlighted the availability of help and the professionalism of staff, while others spoke of hostility, poor communication, and a sense of institutional stagnation.

Prisoners involved in purposeful activity – such as catering, workshops, gardening, or education – tended to report greater satisfaction and better emotional well-being. However, mental health challenges were a common concern, particularly for prisoners with limited access to activity or those held on remand.

5.3 How Staff Treat Persons in Custody



Perceptions of staff treatment were generally moderate to positive. Many prisoners described staff as "respectful," "okay," or "fair," and around 90% of officers were said to conduct themselves professionally. Nevertheless, a minority of officers were described as disengaged or disrespectful, fostering a "them and us" culture. Many of the prisoners we spoke to mentioned that there are officers whom prisoners would try to avoid engaging with, leaving others overwhelmed with questions.

Access to rehabilitation varies widely. Prisoners on remand frequently reported an absence of rehabilitative opportunities, while others described excessive waiting times—up to seven or eight years—for specific programmes such as the Self-Change Programme.

Positive feedback was given on certain structured activities, including the gym, open-cell regimes, and vocational training (particularly catering and construction). Such opportunities were valued both for skill development and for helping time pass more quickly. However, many felt that rehabilitative support remained inconsistent, with limited progression opportunities and insufficient mental health services.

5.4 Compassion and Support



Evidence of compassion within prisons is uneven. Some prisoners gave positive examples of staff support, especially in response to family bereavement or through access to education and external partnerships (e.g., the Greene King or Amey training and employment schemes). Others felt that compassion depended entirely on individual officers rather than institutional policy.

Concerns were repeatedly raised about the handling of mental health and neurodiversity, with calls for better-trained staff and more timely access to support.

Overall, compassion is present but inconsistently applied and not embedded across the SPS.

(As a general point, it is worth noting that individual perceptions can also be very different. In one of our site visits, two prisoners told us separately about how another (named) prisoner was treated through a difficult time. The two accounts were very different: one prisoner said staff could not have shown more compassion, and the other stated that they just left the prisoner in his cell and showed no hint of compassion.)

5.5 Respect, Fairness, and Communication



Respect and fairness were widely discussed, with mixed assessments.

Many of the prisoners we met told us that they were treated with respect by SPS staff, while others qualified their responses, stating that respect was extended by some officers but withheld by others. A recurring comment was that only about 10% of officers engage with prisoners on a genuinely respectful basis, while the majority maintain distance or adopt a “them and us” stance.

Racism was generally not perceived as systemic. Several prisoners stated that “everyone is just a number,” indicating procedural equality. However, this procedural fairness did not always translate into genuine respect or personal recognition.

Information about sentences and progression was seen as adequate by some, but others reported poor communication and excessive time locked in cells, limiting opportunities for

exercise or outdoor access.

Access to personal officers was flagged as an issue, with some prisoners telling us that they did not know who their personal officer was or did not have one assigned. Most saw the personal officer as the key link to access services. In the smaller prisons, the assignment of personal officers was far less of an issue, and these relationships worked extremely well because officers had the time to engage, get to know the people they were responsible for, and help them accordingly.

5.6 How Minorities are Treated within the Scottish Prison Service (Prisoners)



Views on the treatment of ethnic, religious, and other minority groups were largely positive, though with important caveats.

Several prisoners affirmed that minorities are treated “the same as everyone else,” and that overt racism is rare. However, others described isolated but serious incidents, including verbal abuse during Ramadan, a lack of cultural appreciation by some staff of religious festivals, and differential treatment of non-English-speaking prisoners.

Several prisoners alleged that misogyny, racism, and homophobia were more prevalent in some establishments where they had previously been incarcerated than in others, suggesting variation in institutional culture across the system.

Overall, while equality appears to be an aspiration of the Scottish Prison Service, there remain instances where cultural sensitivity and understanding fall short of expected standards.

5.7 Suggested Changes Proposed by Prisoners

Prisoners whom we met offered a range of suggestions to strengthen the SPS:

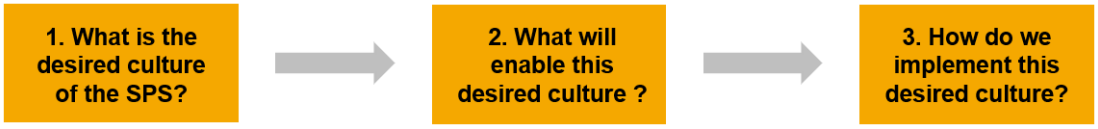
- Increased time outdoors, beyond current daily allowances (e.g. a reported 45 minutes in some establishments), ideally separate from gym access.
- Enhanced mental health and neurodiversity training for staff, particularly regarding ADHD and trauma-informed care.
- Expanded access to education, vocational training, and work parties, including opportunities for accreditation at college level.
- Better recognition of cultural and religious observances, such as Ramadan and Eid celebrations.
- Improved access to personal possessions (e.g., bedding and clothing) to promote autonomy and dignity.
- More effective induction for newly sentenced prisoners and clearer communication about available programmes and progression routes.
- Greater support for foreign nationals, including facilitation of family contact and involvement of external charities.

6 Developing the Culture of the SPS

6.1 Overview

A culture model is used to define and articulate the culture within an organisation. It consists of setting out specific culture value statements and indicators that will be used as the foundation of the organisation. Early in this assignment, we created a model for development of the culture model for the SPS that was underpinned by three key questions, which were used to benchmark the current state of culture in the SPS, as well as setting out what the desired culture might be.

The three questions are outlined below:



In this section, we present what we considered as an optimum starting point for the development of a bespoke organisational culture for the SPS. The detailed work we undertook between May and August 2025, including extensive engagement with staff, prisoners and other stakeholders during visits to each SPS establishment, helped us to define the current culture more precisely, to identify any gaps between the current culture and a future desired model, and to refine the desired future culture for the SPS based upon the findings and analysis arising from this review.

6.2 Current Values of the SPS

The seven organisational values that currently underpin the culture at the SPS consist of the following (as stated in the SPS Corporate Plan):

- **Belief** – we believe that people can change;
- **Respect** – we are inclusive, respecting the needs, rights and voices of everyone equitably;
- **Openness** – we work with others to achieve the best outcomes;
- **Integrity** – we have high ethical, moral and professional standards;
- **Compassion** – we care about people and believe that positive relationships are a critical enabler of change;
- **Humility** – we cannot do this on our own, we recognise that we need to work and learn from others;
- **Innovation** – we continually find ways to improve the delivery of prison services in Scotland.

These core values directly influence the current overall behaviour and culture within the SPS and build the foundation and potential for a cohesive culture. In earlier sections of this report, we have presented our findings from engagement with staff and prisoners with reference to current SPS values; in the following sections, we will discuss what we consider are the gaps between a new, expanded set of “cultural enablers” and the current behaviours of staff within the SPS.

Building upon the seven current values, we propose that the SPS should move towards a more unified culture covering both SPS staff and persons in custody. It is important to note that in order for organisational values to have an impact on culture, they must be lived and breathed through every member of the organisation, regardless of their position or rank.

6.3 What Is the Desired Culture of the SPS?

We propose that the following statement should define the SPS culture:

A unified service culture focused on building a safe, respectful and supportive environment for staff, people in care of the SPS and all other stakeholders. The SPS promotes accountability, trust, transparency, diversity and innovation, where everyone shares the same organisational values and professional standards.

6.4 Enabling Factors for the Desired Culture

In order for the SPS to achieve this desired culture, clear enabling factors must be identified that will directly impact and enforce this cultural change. We have highlighted the following as potential enablers for the SPS desired culture:

- **Inclusivity**: Everyone in our organisation should feel valued and respected, with the ability to be their authentic selves at all times.
- **Compassion**: We show understanding and concern for everyone in our organisation, particularly the individuals in our care.
- **Integrity**: We value honesty and openness in all aspects of our role.
- **Fairness**: We treat everyone equally, regardless of their background.
- **Accountability**: Everyone in the SPS is accountable for the work we do, the resources we manage, and the people for whom we are responsible.
- **People and development**: We are dedicated to the development of everyone in our organisation, helping them grow their skills, behaviours and competencies.



- **Rehabilitation**: We believe everyone in our care deserves the opportunity to change; we support people in care to live law-abiding lives.
- **Leadership**: We expect all staff to reinforce positive behaviours, to maintain high standards of ethics, and to demonstrate a professional approach at all times.

These are the key enabling factors that should be embedded across the SPS. It is important to note that there may be other enabling factors that are specific to certain establishments and head office functions, which may complement those presented above.

In the following section, we set out our findings regarding the extent to which the current culture and behaviours within the SPS match the cultural enablers presented above, and the current values of the SPS.

7 SPS Values and Culture Enablers – Gap Analysis

7.1 Overall Observations Regarding Staff Engagement

It is noteworthy that the responses provided in the staff survey (completed by 826 people) showed an underlying level of negativity in every question posed, ranging from 5% of staff who said they were not aware of the organisational values of the SPS, up to very high percentages (between 50% and 60%) who said that the organisation is not transparent, does not show accountability, or does not have a sincere interest in the well-being of staff. Some responses were particularly worrying, for example more than 20% of staff stated that they are not "in a good mental state", whilst nearly three fifths of staff said that they had experienced inappropriate behaviour within the organisation.

By contrast, the feedback which we received from over 700 staff during the site visits and (for HQ and central staff) via engagement by Teams was, on the whole, more positive – most staff were positive about working in the SPS, and both understood SPS values and aimed to apply them during their working day. It is unclear why there was a level of difference – in some cases quite significant – between what people said to us in person, and what was stated in the survey responses. It may simply be down to genuinely different opinions and experiences expressed by the people we met in person as opposed to those who contributed via the online survey.

Across both methods of engagement, there were significant issues of concern which arose from SPS staff, including:

- Sexist attitudes and disrespect being shown by some staff towards female colleagues.
- Allegations of bullying, and associated feelings that complaints would not be acted on and that negative repercussions would follow for complainants.
- The presence of a blame culture within the organisation, and a limited sense of true accountability.
- An inability for the SPS to achieve its objectives in respect of rehabilitation and the capacity to run programmes in education and employment-focused skills development in some prisons, due to overcrowding and staff pressures.
- A strong belief that the selection process for certain grades is overly dependent on video interviews and is generally not fit for purpose, resulting in people being promoted beyond their competency.
- A concern that the SPS College is overly focused on theory and is not enabling officers in their early careers to learn the practical skills of "jail craft".

Related to the above point, we also observed in many prisons that older, more experienced Residential Officers – those who have well-developed "jail craft" skills – are often assigned to functional areas such as Offender Outcomes, kitchens, gardens, workshops and other parts of the prison away from the front line in the halls and on the landings, places where trouble can quickly break out and where experience is needed to de-escalate such situations. We had numerous examples quoted of tense situations (e.g. fights, stand-offs, prisoners refusing to comply, etc.) where the staff on duty were inexperienced and with limited service, and where matters had quickly escalated. The suggestion often made to us was that more experienced

officers would have been able to deal quickly with such situations and would have been able to de-escalate matters. We suggest that the SPS might consider options for assigning staff so that officer experience can be more balanced between front-line residential roles and those in functions such as Offender Outcomes, workshops, kitchens and gardens.

7.2 Overall Observations Regarding Prisoner Engagement

Our discussions with prisoners highlight that engagement in purposeful activity – whether work, education, or creative projects – plays a crucial role in prisoners' mental well-being and attitudes toward imprisonment. Where such opportunities exist, prisoners describe their experience more positively; where they are absent or inconsistent, frustration and negativity can be observed.

The data suggest that positive relationships with staff, meaningful occupation, and responsive support services can significantly improve prisoner morale and institutional stability.

Conversely, inconsistency, perceived indifference, and long waits for rehabilitative opportunities risk undermining motivation and mental health.

Whilst there are clear examples of good practice and professionalism within the SPS, overall experiences from the perspectives of those in custody remain highly uneven.

Key strengths include:

- Generally respectful treatment of prisoners by most staff;
- Opportunities for purposeful activity in some establishments;
- Evidence of compassion and support in individual cases;
- Broad procedural equality across ethnic and religious groups.

However, persistent challenges include the following:

- Limited and inconsistent access to rehabilitation and education;
- Weak mental health provision and staff training gaps;
- Inconsistent communication and lack of trust;
- Isolated but concerning reports of discrimination and disrespect;
- Limited time outdoors and restricted autonomy.

Improvement efforts should therefore focus on strengthening staff capability in mental health and cultural awareness, expanding access to purposeful activity, and ensuring that compassion and respect are embedded as systemic norms rather than dependent on individual discretion.

We now move on to consider how the behaviours and attitudes of SPS staff match the current values and culture enablers of the SPS.

7.3 Current SPS Culture – Match with Values and Enablers

7.3.1 SPS Values

"Belief – we believe that people can change"

Crowe's assessment – strong adherence, somewhat limited by operational capacity

This value was articulated strongly across the organisation. The majority of SPS staff recognise that a key component of prison is helping those in custody to take responsibility for their offending behaviour, and to take advantage of the opportunities in prison (education, skills development, future employment, addressing substance misuse, social work intervention etc) which will reduce the likelihood of their returning to prison. The capacity of the SPS to bring these opportunities to life is patchy across the system, however, and staff also recognise that for many of those in custody, offending behaviour is related to wider social issues (poverty, addiction, family breakdown, low educational achievement etc) which sees many prisoners return to the SPS after liberation, despite the good work done to prepare them for life after prison.

"Respect – we are inclusive, respecting the needs, rights and voices of everyone equitably"

Crowe's assessment – reasonable adherence, but some significant concerns

The prevailing sense is that the majority of people across the SPS – both staff and prisoners – understand and adhere to the principle of respect. A frequent comment from many staff was "give respect, get respect", and there was a strong sense of the practical benefits arising from this type of approach, for example in terms of de-escalation and maintaining calm within the halls and landings. However, we were concerned at the negative and dismissive attitudes of some male staff towards female colleagues which we heard in many instances. The presence of cliques amongst staff groups in many prisons was reported to us, and whilst there do not appear to be any significant respect issues around how staff engage with their LGBTQ+ colleagues or with those from ethnic minorities, there are some lingering issues around religious bias within some establishments.

"Openness – we work with others to achieve the best outcomes"

Crowe's assessment – wide variations in adherence, mixed experience across the SPS

We found that openness varied considerably across the organisation, ranging from some staff feeling that their managers were not open and that communication was poor, to others (particularly in the smaller establishments) expressing the view that there was a lot of open dialogue and clarity on what was happening at establishment level. A persistent comment across all prisons was that staff in HQ and central functions were often not accessible and that relationships between the establishments and HQ were not strong. For prisoners, the question of openness was largely connected with whether a personal officer was assigned to the individual prisoner or not – where a personal officer was assigned, it was generally felt that there was good clarity around progression and expectations for the individual's time in custody, but where no personal officer was assigned, the feedback was much more negative.

"Integrity – we have high ethical, moral and professional standards"

Crowe's assessment – strong belief in this value across the SPS

Generally, professional integrity was a value which staff recognised and adhered to. Many staff referred to the fact that in the past, the behaviour of some officers fell far short of what would be deemed acceptable now, and that this would not be possible now due to use of CCTV and bodycams and the general acceptance by staff of higher standards of professionalism across the SPS. Many staff told us that they would not tolerate wrongdoing by colleagues and would report it through the appropriate channels; a small percentage, however, indicated that they would be reluctant to do so for fear of repercussions or being ostracised by work colleagues. Staff typically want to do a good job and make a positive impact, and many see this as a means to their development and future prospects within the SPS.

"Compassion – we care about people and believe that positive relationships are a critical enabler of change"

Crowe's assessment – good adherence to this value, within professional boundaries

On the whole, SPS staff appear to have a reasonably compassionate approach to those in custody, generally treating them fairly and recognising that many have ended up in prison through various societal, economic or other circumstances not entirely of their making. Whilst maintaining a generally compassionate view, staff typically seek to maintain a distance from prisoners, and to deal with them professionally. Many staff told us that they did not want to judge them (or even know anything about their offences), as they had received due process through the courts. The work of Personal Officers was frequently cited as an example of a compassionate approach in action, at a practical level.

"Humility – we cannot do this on our own, we recognise that we need to work and learn from others"

Crowe's assessment – good adherence to the value in relationships with colleagues and with those is custody

The concept of humility *per se* did not feature often in our engagement with SPS staff or with prisoners, although a common view expressed by staff was that many officers and prisoners came from similar backgrounds, and that life choices or opportunities had led them to meet within the prison context on opposite sides of the staff / prisoner divide. As noted earlier, many staff choose not to be judgemental about those in custody, which would also indicate that humility does apply in those instances. On the wider level, with regard to staff "working and learning from others", there was strong evidence of the operational bond between staff being a significant feature of how people work together, whether in terms of protecting and supporting each other in operational settings, or mentoring younger staff and helping them to improve their "jail craft".

"Innovation – we continually find ways to improve the delivery of prison services in Scotland."

Crowe's assessment – reasonable adherence but limited by operational pressures

Innovation is a strength within the SPS, with much work done at local levels to develop initiatives in critical areas like education, training and employment. Much of this is dependent on local leadership in each prison and appears to lack a centrally coherent strategic approach. Many staff working as personal officers take a personal interest in ensuring that the prisoners they work with are prepared for life after liberation, including helping them to access programmes tailored to their needs, along with putting them in touch with supports in areas such as housing and welfare benefits. However, the pressures on the prison system – especially in the larger prisons – mean that the SPS is often unable to achieve what it wishes in respect of innovative work, leading to feelings that prisoners are being "warehoused" in some establishments, and are within a "revolving door" system. Over half of the staff who responded to the survey stated that the SPS is not an innovative organisation.

7.3.2 Future Culture Enablers

Inclusivity: Everyone in our organisation should feel valued and respected, with the ability to be their authentic selves at all times.

Crowe's assessment – reasonable adherence, but some significant concerns

This relates to the current SPS value "Respect", and as we have commented above, most SPS staff and those in custody adhere to this principle. We were concerned to note a significant number of reports from female SPS staff regarding the dismissive attitudes shown by some male colleagues. LGBTQ+ staff and prisoners appear to be treated fairly, as are most people from ethnic minority backgrounds, but there were some reports of religious bias and the influence of Freemasonry in a small number of prison establishments. Overall, a mixed set of reports, with work needing to be done by the SPS in relation to sexism.

Compassion: We show understanding and concern for everyone in our organisation, particularly the individuals in our care.

Crowe's assessment – good adherence, within professional boundaries

This future enabler is the same as the current SPS value "Compassion", and as noted in Section 7.3.1 above, the majority of the SPS staff with whom we engaged have a reasonably compassionate approach to those in custody.

Integrity: We value honesty and openness in all aspects of our role.

Crowe's assessment – strong belief in this enabler across the SPS

This future enabler is the same as the current SPS value "Integrity", and as noted in Section 7.3.1 above, the majority of SPS staff regard professional integrity as an important aspect of their role and aspire to reach high standards.

Fairness: We treat everyone equally, regardless of their background.

Crowe's assessment – partial adherence, but evidence of bullying, and organisational weakness to prevent or deal with instances of bullying.

Fairness is related to several of the current SPS values, particularly "Belief", "Respect" and "Compassion". Whilst many staff across the SPS adhere well to the value of fairness, and minorities on the whole report that they are fairly treated, we have concerns regarding the treatment of female staff by some of their male colleagues. It was also concerning to note that over 20% of staff whom we surveyed stated that they had personally experienced inappropriate behaviour at work in the SPS, and that between 30% and 40% of staff reported that senior management would not take actions to prevent bullying, would not investigate complaints properly, and would not take them seriously.

Accountability: Everyone in the SPS is accountable for the work we do, the resources we manage, and the people for whom we are responsible.

Crowe's assessment – negative opinions and mixed reports on adherence

Worryingly, the staff survey showed that nearly two-thirds of staff did not believe that people are accountable for their actions and behaviours. We received a wide range of comments from staff who criticised the lack of accountability within their establishments, particularly with regard to senior management, and there were frequent references to a "blame culture" within establishments and across the SPS more generally. By contrast, when discussing their own personal behaviours at work, many officers stated that they did feel accountable for their actions, partly because they had to operate to high professional standards due to the presence of CCTV cameras and bodycams, and partly from a sense of professionalism.

People and development: We are dedicated to the development of everyone in our organisation, helping them grow their skills, behaviours and competencies.

Crowe's assessment – broadly positive, with some improvements to be considered

The SPS has invested significantly in the development of its people, and many staff feel that there are good opportunities for progression. A frequent concern expressed was that staff training is overly theoretical and that "jail craft" is being lost within the SPS, particularly as recent new recruits may often have had the impression that the job was desk-based and would not involve direct engagement with prisoners. The interview and selection process for Band C and D roles in particular was widely criticised and was felt to result in situations where people were promoted above their true level of competency.

Rehabilitation: We believe everyone in our care deserves the opportunity to change; we support people in care to live law-abiding lives.

Crowe's assessment – strong belief and adherence where operational capacity permit

This enabler is closely related to the existing SPS value "Belief" and was widely held as a core principle by the majority of staff. A general view from staff was that they are supportive of efforts to improve outcomes for those in custody through the accessing opportunities for

education, skills development and employment, whilst also helping them where possible to deal with issues such as addiction, housing and welfare benefits. We saw much evidence of positive action and local initiatives to support these principles, although this varied between prisons, with larger establishments often constrained by operational capacity and resources.

Leadership: We expect all staff to reinforce positive behaviours, to maintain high standards

Crowe's assessment – mixed responses, with some good levels of adherence and some problems needing to be tackled

The staff survey showed low degrees of trust in senior management at establishment or functional levels; by contrast, our direct engagement with staff during the site visits gave a much more positive impression, with GICs and managers in many (but not all) establishments described as supportive and engaged with staff. In a small number of prisons, staff had little confidence in their local management and reported that they did not feel listened to. In the staff survey, we noted quite positive responses in relation to open communications and the belief that staff can raise concerns with their managers. Of concern were the findings that fewer than two-fifths of staff reported that their senior managers encourage appropriate behaviour from all staff, and over half said that there was no sense of accountability within the organisation. At corporate level, a common concern expressed by staff was that the SPS needs clearer strategic direction and a compelling long-term vision.

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8 How Do Other Organisations Compare with the SPS?

8.1 Overview

Against the backdrop presented above for the SPS, a natural question arises: how do other organisations compare with the SPS in terms of culture, and specifically with regard to the more troubling aspects of SPS culture which have arisen within this review?

Before addressing this question, it is important to note the context for the SPS. As a uniformed, disciplined organisation which plays a vital role in the Scottish criminal justice system, there are critical aspects of the SPS which make it very different from many other organisations. Foremost amongst these is the fact that SPS frontline staff go to work each day in an environment where they may face aggression, violence or physical assault, in work situations which can become volatile at short notice. Staff are often outnumbered by prisoners, whose behaviour can be unpredictable or manipulative, and there is a strong sense of staff having to cover each other's backs. As with other prison systems in which the Crowe team has worked, staff in the SPS display an *esprit de corps* which is recognisable; their working environment, and the challenges they face daily, are very different from the vast majority of the working population.

8.2 Finding Appropriate Comparators

In that context, there is little value trying to compare the culture in the SPS with – for example – other large organisations in public administration, in retail, or in manufacturing, to name but a few. Perhaps the only appropriate and reliable comparators are prison services in other jurisdictions, or police forces, or the military. As with the SPS, these organisations are uniformed, they are discipline-based, they face dangers and hazards in the work environment, and there is generally a strong sense of camaraderie amongst staff who feel that they are "in this together", often facing hostility from those they engage with. A further point of relevance is that all of these organisations share a common history of being male dominated for generations, with women only entering the workforce in significant numbers in the last two or three decades.

8.3 Cultural Challenges in Other Uniformed Services

It is important to acknowledge that cultural issues such as sexism, bullying, and lack of accountability are not unique to the Scottish Prison Service; they have been documented across a range of uniformed organisations internationally. For example, the Metropolitan Police Service in London has faced significant scrutiny in recent years following high-profile reviews and inquiries. Reports have highlighted systemic problems including misogyny, racism, and a "*canteen culture*" that normalises inappropriate behavior. The Casey Review (2023) [5] concluded that these issues were deeply embedded and compounded by weak internal accountability mechanisms, creating an environment where misconduct could persist

[5] https://www.met.police.uk/police-forces/metropolitan-police/areas/about-us/about-the-met/bcr/baroness-casey-review/

unchecked. The report stated very starkly that the Met was *"institutionally racist, misogynist and homophobic".*

Similar concerns have arisen within the HM Armed Forces in the UK. Independent reviews and parliamentary inquiries have revealed patterns of bullying and sexual harassment, particularly affecting women and minority personnel [6]. Despite formal equality policies, cultural resistance and hierarchical structures have often hindered progress, leading to calls for stronger leadership and independent oversight to ensure safe and respectful workplaces.

Police forces in other jurisdictions have also faced comparable challenges. In Australia, the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide exposed toxic elements within the Australian Defence Force (ADF), including a culture of silence around bullying and harassment [7]. Likewise, New Zealand's Defence Force launched "Operation Respect" in 2016 to address sexual harm and discrimination, but subsequent audits found gaps in implementation and leadership accountability, underscoring the difficulty of achieving lasting cultural change. [8]

These examples illustrate that uniformed organizations, by virtue of their disciplined, hierarchical nature and historically male-dominated composition, are particularly vulnerable to entrenched cultural problems. While reforms are underway in many jurisdictions, the persistence of these issues demonstrates that cultural transformation requires sustained effort, robust systems of accountability, and visible leadership commitment.

8.4 Cultural Change in Comparator Organisations

8.4.1 Preamble

While cultural failings have been documented across many uniformed services, there are instructive cases where sustained, evidence-based reforms have improved daily behaviours, accountability, and trust. The following examples – Norway's prison system, Iceland's police, and the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) – offer practical lessons relevant to the SPS context. It should, however, be noted that these solutions are bespoke to the organisations and the national cultural context to which they relate – not all may be suited to the SPS or to Scotland. As with all such comparisons involving other jurisdictions, there are no "magic solutions", and efforts to address the issues reported within the SPS must be developed in a highly tailored manner to suit the needs of the SPS, its staff, and those in its custody.

8.4.2 Norway's Prison System: Normalisation, Dignity, and Staff Well-being

Norway's corrections model is widely recognised for embedding *normalisation* – the principle that life inside should resemble life outside as much as possible, in order to reduce harm, improve behaviour, and prepare people for successful re-entry to society post-liberation. This

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6 93 formal complaints of bullying were made in 2023 (up from ~20 in 2019); the Ministry of Defence paid out approximately £1.7 million in settlements. The "Reaffirming our Standards" programme was launched to combat unacceptable behaviour by improving reporting, leadership accountability, and HR processes. https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ministry-of-defence-policies-to-tackle-unacceptable-behaviour
A tri-service independent complaints team was introduced in 2025 following inquiries including the death of Gunner Jaysley Beck, aiming to remove serious harassment complaints from the direct chain of command.

7 https://defenceveteransuicide.royalcommission.gov.au/news-and-media/media-releases/royal-commission-final-report-makes-122-recommendations-change

8 https://www.nzdf.mil.nz/media-centre/story-collections/operation-respect/

framing centres human dignity in daily routines, physical environments, and staff-resident interactions, and is consistently linked to lower recidivism and safer facilities. Crucially, it is reported that Norwegian reforms explicitly tie staff wellness to resident outcomes, training officers to prioritise communication, dynamic security (relationship-based safety), and restorative responses instead of default punitive measures.

These design choices reportedly reduce volatility, lower stress, and help curb bullying and blame dynamics among staff by clarifying the mission and the behavioural expectations for everyone in the institution. International exchange programmes (e.g., UCSF/Amend's partnership with Norway's Directorate of Correctional Service) have helped translate these practices into other jurisdictions, demonstrating that culture change is portable when supported by leadership, technical assistance, and ongoing measurement. [9]

Key takeaways for the SPS to consider:

- **Mission clarity and daily practice alignment:** Make dignity and rehabilitation operational in routines, spaces, and policies – this reduces "command-and-control" reflexes that can fuel bullying and blame cultures.
- **Staff capability and wellness:** Invest in training that emphasises communication, de-escalation, and restorative techniques; measure the impact on staff stress, safety incidents, and attrition.

8.4.3 Icelandic Police: Gender-Responsive Policing and Structural Change

Iceland's police leadership has adopted a gender-responsive policing agenda that makes equality part of daily work, via enhanced training standards, stronger career pathways for women (including leadership roles), and inter-agency collaboration to address domestic and gender-based violence more effectively.

Iceland joined a UN-linked international network on gender-responsive policing in 2025, signalling an explicit commitment to policy, practice, and data improvements that raise public trust and encourage reporting. Leadership messaging has stressed the value of appointing senior leaders who can challenge legacy cultures, and reforms have included decentralised decision-making in sensitive casework and cross-sector coordination (with municipalities, health services, and NGOs). [10]

These changes have not eliminated challenges – research still records harassment concerns and masculine norms that undermine retention – yet the system has moved from awareness to structured action, with transparent commitments, capability building, and partnerships that keep the agenda active and visible. [11] For organisations like the SPS, this is a model of how to combine representation goals with operational reforms (case handling, training, leadership behaviours) and external collaboration.

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9 UCSF (University of California, San Francisco) houses the *Amend* initiative, which partners with Norway's prison service to bring public-health-oriented practices to U.S. prisons. These include de-escalation training, increased out-of-cell time, restorative environments, and reduced use of solitary confinement. https://www.ucsf.edu/news/2023/08/425946/how-norway-helping-restore-humanity-inside-us-prisons

10 https://island.is/en/news/iceland-joins-global-network-on-gender-equality-in-law-enforcement

11 https://eca.unwomen.org/en/stories/interview/2024/12/ask-a-national-commissioner-how-does-iceland-have-such-a-high-representation-of-women-in-leadership-roles-within-the-national-security-sector-and-why-is-it-important-to-include-womens-voices-in-peace-and-security

Key takeaways for the SPS to consider:

- **Leadership and external collaboration:** Publicly codify equality aims and build partnerships (e.g., with health, local authorities, NGOs) to improve response quality and accountability.
- **Representation and role redesign:** Pair recruitment and promotion targets with changes to decision-making, case processes, and support for those handling gender-based harm.

8.4.4 New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF): Operation Respect – Resetting Strategy, Governance, and Accountability

NZDF launched Operation Respect in 2016 to eradicate harmful behaviours (bullying, harassment, sexual misconduct) and strengthen complaint and support systems. Independent reviews (2020) and a comprehensive Auditor-General assessment (2023) identified critical gaps – notably strategy clarity, governance, data, complaint handling, and resourcing – and called for urgent changes [12]. NZDF has since begun a formal "reset": developing a clearer, organisation-wide strategy and plan; strengthening leadership roles and oversight; prioritising improvements to complaints and discipline systems; refining communications; and building better data collection for decision-making. The reset reframes culture change as essential to operational effectiveness, aligning the programme with broader performance and mission goals. [13]

The NZDF case is instructive because it shows that acknowledging shortcomings and transparently resetting, with stronger governance, defined outcomes, resourced plans, and system-level reforms, can re-energise culture change initiatives. It also reinforces the importance of independent scrutiny and regular climate surveys to surface issues and track progress.

Key takeaways for the SPS to consider:

- **Strategy and governance first:** Define outcomes, allocate resources, and clarify leadership accountabilities; treat culture change as a core enabler of operational performance.
- **Complaints systems and data:** Improve reporting pathways, independence, timeliness, and user trust; build organisation-wide data plans and publish progress indicators.

8.5 Considering the Role of Performance Management in Comparator Organisations

8.5.1 Preamble

Many of the cultural problems exhibited in uniformed organisations may be traced back to inadequate performance management arrangements as a partial cause; within the SPS, we earlier reported that many staff felt that management did not take complaints seriously, or that

[12] Office of the Auditor-General NZ (2023): *Operation Respect: Progress and Effectiveness*

[13] https://www.defence.govt.nz/publications/operation-respect-review/

staff accused of serious misconduct were permitted to retire in place of an investigation being initiated. In Section 9, we will discuss how performance management within the SPS might be improved, and in advance of that, the following paragraphs outline how some other uniformed organisations have taken steps to ensure their performance management.

8.5.2 Australian Defence Force (ADF)

The ADF has integrated 360-degree feedback systems into its leadership and promotion frameworks, embedded within its Defence Culture Blueprint. Officers solicit structured input from peers, subordinates, and supervisors, enhancing self-awareness and cultural alignment. A 2025 paper highlighted how embracing multi-source feedback supports broader culture-change ambitions by reinforcing leadership competencies across the ADF. [14]

The Australian National Audit Office (2021) assessed the ADF's "Pathway to Change" (2017-2022) programme and emphasised the need for stronger alignment between cultural goals and performance metrics. Though progress was uneven, the audit reinforced embedding performance measures into governance and accountability systems. [15] One of the key findings of the 2021 audit was that whilst *"Defence has been largely effective in promulgating the strategy and the overarching governance arrangements are largely fit for purpose… there were weaknesses in the centre holding the line functions to account for implementation".*

Key takeaways for the SPS to consider:

- **Multi-Source Feedback for Leadership Accountability:** Introduce 360-degree feedback for governors and senior managers, focusing on values, communication, and team climate. Use results in promotion decisions and leadership development plans.
- **Link Cultural Reform to Performance Frameworks:** Make cultural behaviours based upon SPS values part of formal performance objectives for all staff. Include these in annual appraisals and quarterly reviews, alongside operational KPIs.
- **Governance and Transparency:** involve external representation in oversight; publish quarterly cultural metrics (complaints handling, training completion, climate survey results) to build trust internally and externally.

8.5.3 British Army

The British Army integrates values and standards (courage, discipline, respect, integrity) into its performance management and leadership development. The Army's Advanced Leadership Development Programme (ALDP) includes training on managing unacceptable behaviours, emphasizing values-based conduct and feedback-driven culture. The Army operates a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) model focusing on sustained professionalisation and adaptability to evolving threats and organisational needs.

A 2025 research review by the Centre for Army Leadership (CAL) confirms that British Army values – Integrity, Courage, Discipline, Respect for Others, Loyalty, Selfless Commitment – are widely understood across the organization, regardless of rank or corps. This suggests strong institutional penetration of these values into everyday activities, not just doctrine. [16]

14 https://theforge.defence.gov.au/article/unlocking-leadership-excellence-360-degree-feedback-part-1
15 https://www.anao.gov.au/work/performance-audit/defence-implementation-cultural-reform
16 www.army.mod.uk/media/d02crup5/cal_research_paper2_values.pdf

Aligned with this focus on adherence to values, the Army enforces compliance and job effectiveness through a clear structure of command discipline, formal appraisal mechanisms, and leadership training that emphasises accountability. This structure includes:

a) Chain of Command & Accountability

Orders flow through a well-defined chain of command, and adherence is closely monitored at each level. Non-compliance triggers immediate corrective action, from retraining to formal disciplinary measures, reinforcing that soldiers must follow instructions or face consequences. This system ensures operational consistency and readiness across units.

b) Structured Performance Appraisals

Officers and soldiers undergo annual Performance Appraisal Reports (PARs), which assess:

- Technical competence and mission readiness.
- Leadership and teamwork.
- Adherence to Army Values and Standards.

One comprehensive qualitative study in 2015 evaluating the British Army's annual individual performance appraisal system confirmed that it provides a structured, comprehensive assessment framework, aligning individual duties with organisational goals and offering a fair basis for performance feedback and accountability.[17]

c) Leadership Development and Early Intervention

Leadership courses, such as the Junior Command and Staff Course and the Advanced Leadership Development Programme, train officers to set clear expectations and identify performance issues early. Supervisors are held accountable not only for their own conduct but also for that of their subordinates, reinforcing a culture where responsibility is shared and performance is actively managed.

d) Evidence of Effectiveness

The 2015 qualitative appraisal study referred to above found that the system enhances role clarity and accountability by establishing transparent performance criteria and formal feedback mechanisms.

"Soldiers of Character," a study involving 240+ junior officers and published by the University of Birmingham and the Jubilee Centre in 2018, found that personnel consistently applied Army values, including discipline and respect, which underpin obedience and effectiveness, in real-world and simulated scenarios. This suggests that compliance and values-driven behavior are deeply internalised, not just formally mandated. [18]

In combination, these elements – formal appraisals, disciplined supervision, and leadership training – create a performance management model that ensures soldiers do their jobs

[17] https://bootcampmilitaryfitnessinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/3b119-a-qualitative-study-to-evaluate-the-purpose-and-comprehensiveness-of-the-british-armys-annual-individual-performance-appraisal-system-maxwell-2015.pdf

[18] www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Soldiers_of_Character.pdf

effectively and follow orders. The available studies cited above provide evidence that these systems are operationalised successfully, forming a robust basis for accountability and effectiveness.

Key takeaways for the SPS to consider:

- **Values Embedded in Performance Appraisal:** Ensure that SPS core values are clearly defined and measurable in staff appraisals. Include behavioural indicators such as teamwork, professionalism, and respectful communication alongside operational KPIs.
- **Leadership Accountability Through Structured Reviews:** Introduce quarterly leadership reviews for prison governors and unit managers, focusing on safety, staff well-being, and cultural indicators. Tie promotion and progression to verified delivery of these objectives.
- **Continuous Professional Development (CPD):** Develop a CPD framework for SPS staff that combines technical training (security, incident management) with cultural modules (dynamic security, communication, restorative practice). Make CPD completion a prerequisite for advancement.

8.5.4 Norwegian Correctional Service

Norway's model embeds performance management into its "*normalisation principle*" [19]. Staff performance is assessed not only on security compliance but also on relational skills, communication, and contribution to rehabilitation goals. Key features include:

- Regular staff development reviews linked to professional standards.
- Emphasis on dynamic security – officers are evaluated on their ability to build trust, to communicate effectively, and to de-escalate conflict, not just enforce rules. This is seen as central to safety and culture.
- Continuous feedback loops through team meetings and audits.

The reported impact of these measures in Norway includes lower violence rates, high staff retention, and strong alignment between organisational mission and daily practice. [20]

Key takeaways for the SPS to consider:

- **Prioritise Dynamic Security as a Core Competency:** Introduce dynamic security training for all staff and make it a formal performance criterion. Assess officers on relationship-building, conflict resolution, and contribution to a safe, respectful environment.
- **Link Staff Well-being to Organisational Performance:** Include staff well-being indicators (stress levels, sickness absence, engagement survey scores) in the SPS performance framework. Hold leaders accountable for creating psychologically safe workplaces.

[19] The principle that "life inside should resemble life outside" is codified in Norwegian law and operational guidelines. It underpins staff performance expectations, emphasizing relational security and rehabilitation. *Source:* Pratt, J. & Eriksson, A. (2014). *Contrasts in Punishment: An Explanation of Anglophone Excess and Nordic Exceptionalism.* Routledge.

[20] Johnsen, B., Granheim, P.K., & Helgesen, J. (2011). *Exceptional Prison Conditions and the Quality of Prison Life: Nordic Prisons in a Comparative Perspective.* European Journal of Criminology

8.5.5 *New Zealand Department of Corrections*

New Zealand's Department of Corrections has developed a structured performance management system that integrates operational, cultural, and rehabilitative goals. At the core is a Balanced Scorecard framework, which measures prison performance across multiple dimensions: safety and security, rehabilitation outcomes, staff development, and cultural responsiveness. Each prison is required to report quarterly against these indicators, ensuring alignment with national strategic priorities. [21] [22]

Staff performance is managed through annual appraisals that incorporate both technical competencies and behavioural expectations linked to organisational values. Leadership accountability is reinforced through governance boards that review establishment-level performance data and intervene where standards fall short. Importantly, cultural safety and inclusion are embedded into performance metrics, reflecting New Zealand's commitment to reducing inequities for Māori prisoners.

This system emphasises continuous improvement rather than punitive oversight. Climate surveys, staff engagement measures, and rehabilitation success rates feed into dashboards that inform decision-making at all levels. By combining quantitative KPIs with qualitative assessments of staff behavior and cultural alignment, New Zealand Corrections has created a performance management culture that prioritises safety, dignity, and rehabilitation alongside operational efficiency. [23]

Key takeaways for the SPS to consider:

- **Balanced Scorecard for Holistic Performance:** Develop a similar scorecard for SPS, including domains like *Safety & Security*, *Rehabilitation Outcomes*, *People & Culture*, and *Operational Effectiveness*. Report quarterly at establishment and HQ level.
- **Cultural Safety Embedded in Metrics:** Include cultural indicators in SPS performance reviews – such as staff training in equality/diversity, complaints handling timeliness, and climate survey results – to ensure that culture is tracked alongside operational KPIs.
- **Governance and Transparency:** Involve external representation in oversight; publish quarterly performance summaries (including cultural metrics) to demonstrate transparency and progress.

8.6 International Comparators: Summary and Conclusion

International comparisons show that there is no single, perfect model for culture or performance management in uniformed organisations. Each system – whether Norway's normalisation approach, the British Army's values-driven appraisal framework, New Zealand's balanced scorecard, or the Australian Defence Force's multi-source feedback – reflects its own history, legal context, and operational realities. Attempting to "parachute" any one model wholesale into the SPS would almost certainly fail. Cultural change is deeply contextual and must be tailored to the unique challenges of the SPS.

21 Department of Corrections NZ (2023). *Annual Report and Statement of Performance Expectations*
22 Office of the Auditor-General NZ (2023). *Operation Respect: Progress and Effectiveness*
23 Department of Corrections NZ (2022). *Strategic Plan and Balanced Scorecard Framework*

However, these examples offer valuable lessons and practical elements that SPS should seriously consider, including:

- **Values Embedded in Performance:** Like the British Army, define SPS core values and integrate them into appraisals and promotion criteria.
- **Independent Complaints and Investigation Mechanisms:** as with the NZ Defence Forces "Operation Respect" and UK Armed Forces, consider introducing independent triage teams for serious misconduct, removing cases from the direct chain of command.
- **Balanced Scorecard Approach:** Adopt NZ Corrections' model of measuring safety, rehabilitation, staff development, and cultural indicators—not just security metrics.
- **Dynamic Security Competencies:** From Norway, make relationship-building and de-escalation core performance standards, supported by structured training.
- **Leadership Accountability & Feedback:** Introduce quarterly reviews and consider 360-degree feedback for senior leaders, as seen in the ADF.
- **Governance & Transparency:** Establish external oversight and publish cultural metrics to build trust.

The common thread is alignment, between mission, values, and measurable outcomes. This is supported by strong leadership and continuous improvement. The SPS can draw on these proven practices to create a system that is credible, context-sensitive, and capable of driving real cultural change.

9 Recommendations for Strengthening Organisational Culture in the SPS

9.1 Overview

Based on the findings emerging from survey responses, staff interviews, prisoner engagement and on-site observations, and taking into account aspects of good practice seen in comparator organisations across the world, we have identified 12 detailed and actionable recommendations to support cultural development and organisational improvement across the SPS. These recommendations are aligned with the SPS's existing values and the proposed future culture enablers presented in the previous section of this report. Of necessity, given the inter-related nature of the proposed actions, there is some overlap between recommendations.

9.2 Recommended Actions

9.2.1 Recommendation 1: Develop a Values-Driven Performance Management Framework for the SPS

Many of the concerns which we have identified in this report require the strengthening of performance management for staff across the SPS. As reported earlier in this document, there is a perceived failure by the SPS to deal effectively with misconduct or poor behaviour, which is almost certainly allowing such actions to continue unchecked – albeit that a small minority of staff are responsible for such behaviour.

Current SPS performance management processes are perceived as inconsistent, overly procedural, and disconnected from cultural priorities. Staff feedback highlights concerns about lack of accountability, opaque promotion systems, and insufficient recognition of ethical behaviours. International comparators, such as the British Army's values-based appraisal, NZ Corrections' Balanced Scorecard, and ADF's 360° feedback, demonstrate that embedding cultural indicators into performance systems improves trust, leadership quality, and operational effectiveness.

There is a clear need to create a modern, transparent, and values-embedded performance management system that aligns individual behaviours and outcomes with the SPS's organisational values and strategic goals. The framework should move beyond compliance and annual appraisals to become a continuous improvement tool that drives accountability, fairness, and cultural transformation.

Recommended actions:

- **Values Integration**
  - Embed SPS values (Respect, Integrity, Openness, Compassion, Humility, Innovation, Belief) and future cultural enablers (Inclusivity, Compassion, Integrity, Fairness, Accountability, People and development, Rehabilitation and Leadership) into performance objectives for all staff.
  - Define measurable behavioural indicators (e.g., respectful communication, ethical decision-making, dynamic security practices).

- **Balanced Scorecard Approach**
  - Introduce a multi-domain scorecard covering (for example) Safety & Security, Rehabilitation Outcomes, People & Culture, and Operational Effectiveness.
  - Require quarterly reporting at establishment and HQ level, with cultural metrics weighted equally to operational KPIs.
- **Continuous Feedback & 360° Reviews**
  - Implement structured 360° feedback for all staff, incorporating peer and subordinate perspectives.
  - Use feedback to inform leadership development plans and promotion decisions.
- **Link to Career Progression**
  - Make cultural performance and CPD completion prerequisites for promotion.
  - Require evidence of delivering cultural objectives in leadership roles.
  - Publish anonymised quarterly dashboards on performance and cultural indicators.
  - Establish external oversight for fairness and credibility.

A suggested timeline for this recommendation would be:

- Months 1-3: Design framework, define indicators.
- Months 4-6: pilot scorecard in 3 establishments.
- Months 7-12: Launch revised appraisal system and 360° pilot; train managers.
- Months 13-24: Implement new model service-wide; embed cultural KPIs in quarterly reviews; publish first annual report.

KPIs to demonstrate how successful the new model is could include:

- ≥95% completion of appraisals on time.
- +15% improvement in staff confidence in fairness and accountability (via a confidential survey).
- Reduction in complaints about promotion bias by 20% within 12 months.
- Visible improvements in cultural indicators (e.g., bullying prevention, trust in leadership).

This framework positions performance management as a strategic lever for cultural change, ensuring that the SPS not only measures what matters but actively rewards behaviours that build trust, inclusivity, and operational excellence.

Our recommendation directly supports the values and enablers of ***Integrity***, ***Fairness***, ***Inclusivity***, ***Accountability*** and ***Leadership***, and is essential for rebuilding trust across the SPS, ensuring a safe work environment, and demonstrating organisational commitment to ethical and professional behaviour.

9.2.2 *Recommendation 2: Implement a Robust Anti-Bullying Framework and Strengthen Confidence in Behavioural Misconduct Processes*

Our assessment revealed deeply concerning findings regarding inappropriate behaviour and bullying within the organisation. Over 20% of staff surveyed reported experiencing inappropriate behaviour personally, and between 30% and 40% expressed a lack of

confidence that senior management would take action to prevent bullying, investigate complaints properly, or treat concerns seriously. This represents a significant cultural risk, with potential impacts on staff wellbeing, trust in leadership, retention, performance, and organisational legitimacy.

Recommended actions:

- **Develop and implement a comprehensive Anti-Bullying and Harassment Framework**, including clear definitions, standards of behaviour, reporting routes, investigative procedures, and consequences for breaches. This framework should align with national legislation, public service standards, and SPS values.
- **Establish an independent reporting and investigation mechanism** (e.g., an external investigation panel) to ensure impartiality. This helps counteract perceptions that complaints will be ignored or mishandled at a local or senior management level.
- **Mandate training for all staff and managers** on recognising, preventing and responding to bullying and inappropriate behaviour. Training should include bystander interventions, responsibilities of leaders, and practical case-based scenarios.
- **Introduce mandatory reporting responsibilities for managers**, making it clear that failure to act on witnessed or reported misconduct constitutes a breach of management duties.
- **Provide confidential support services for staff**, including access to occupational health, counselling, and advisory services for those experiencing or reporting inappropriate behaviour.
- **Publish anonymised annual data** on complaints, investigations, outcomes and lessons learned, demonstrating transparency, fairness and follow-through.
- **Strengthen leadership accountability** by incorporating standards on workplace conduct, psychological safety and complaint handling into leadership appraisals, promotion criteria and performance objectives.

In line with the above, the SPS should ensure that the proposed Anti-Bullying and Harassment Framework is embedded within the new Performance Management Framework set out in Recommendation 1. This should entail the following integration measures:

- **Embed Behavioural Standards into Appraisal Criteria**

  Action: Incorporate anti-bullying and harassment standards into the revised appraisal templates as mandatory behavioural indicators.

  Detail: Indicators should include respectful communication, psychological safety, and zero tolerance for inappropriate behaviour.

  Outcome: Staff performance ratings will reflect adherence to these standards, making cultural compliance a core part of job performance.

- **Link Leadership Accountability to Performance Reviews**

  Action: Add specific metrics on complaint handling, team climate, and dignity-at-work compliance into leadership appraisals.

  Detail: Governors and staff from FLM grade upwards must demonstrate proactive prevention, timely investigation, and resolution of bullying cases.

  Outcome: Leadership progression and bonuses tied to cultural KPIs, reinforcing accountability.

- **Make Training Completion a Performance Requirement**

  Action: Mandate completion of anti-bullying and harassment training (including bystander intervention and case-based scenarios) as part of annual performance objectives.

  Detail: Non-completion triggers performance improvement plans; completion logged in HR information system and linked to promotion eligibility.

  Outcome: 100% compliance tracked quarterly; training becomes a measurable performance deliverable.

- **Introduce Mandatory Reporting as a Performance Metric**

  Action: Include “duty-to-report” compliance in manager scorecards.

  Detail: Failure to act on witnessed or reported misconduct constitutes a breach of performance standards and triggers corrective action.

  Outcome: Creates a culture of responsibility and eliminates passive tolerance of bullying.

- **Integrate Complaint Data into Balanced Scorecard**

  Action: Add bullying/harassment indicators to the People & Culture domain of the proposed new Balanced Scorecard.

  Detail: Metrics include number of complaints, resolution times, and staff confidence scores from climate surveys.

  Outcome: Quarterly reporting ensures transparency and drives continuous improvement.

- **Reward Positive Behaviour and Ethical Leadership**

  Action: Introduce recognition schemes for managers who demonstrate exemplary handling of complaints and foster psychologically safe environments.

  Detail: Link recognition to performance ratings and career progression.

  Outcome: Reinforces desired behaviours and sets visible role models.

- **Publish Annual Cultural Performance Report**

  Action: Include anonymised bullying/harassment data and leadership compliance metrics in the annual public report.

  Detail: Highlight lessons learned and improvements achieved; benchmark against international standards.

  Outcome: Builds trust internally and externally, demonstrating SPS commitment to transparency.

- **Governance and Oversight**

  Action: SPS to review quarterly dashboards and audit integration of anti-bullying standards into performance management.

  Detail: Independent oversight ensures credibility and prevents dilution of cultural priorities.

  Outcome: Sustained alignment between performance systems and cultural objectives.

This set of recommendations directly supports the values and enablers of ***Integrity***, ***Fairness***, ***Inclusivity***, ***Accountability*** and ***Leadership***, and is essential for rebuilding trust across the

SPS, ensuring a safe work environment, and demonstrating organisational commitment to ethical and professional behaviour.

9.2.3 *Recommendation 3: Introduce Independent Complaints & Misconduct Oversight*

The objective of this recommendation is to restore trust in bullying/harassment handling and serious misconduct investigations, and to ensure consistent, impartial outcomes. Linked with this, the SPS should consider the impact of the current practice of allowing retirement in lieu of misconduct investigation (see shaded box below).

Our review identified a lack of confidence amongst staff regarding the effectiveness of the mechanisms for handling complaints within the SPS, aligned with a reported long-standing practice within the SPS that enables staff accused of misconduct to retire rather than undergo investigation. Furthermore, the SPS currently advises complainants that "action has been taken" but cannot disclose the nature of the action because disciplinary outcomes relate to the employment record of the person complained about. Whilst this approach is legally compliant, staff who had complained about colleagues told us that they felt uninformed, unsupported and sometimes sceptical that any meaningful action occurred.

These practices undermine accountability and staff confidence in the system, perpetuate a culture of impunity, and damage organisational credibility. They also risk reputational harm and potential legal exposure for the SPS. International comparators such as the NZ Defence Force's Operation Respect and UK Armed Forces reforms have explicitly addressed similar issues by introducing independent complaints systems and prohibiting avoidance of disciplinary processes.

Issue of concern: at present, an SPS employee accused of misconduct may resign or retire, which typically means that no misconduct investigation takes place. We note that it is not legally possible for the SPS to prevent a staff member from retiring or resigning.

We understand that a current practice within the SPS is for employees to submit a request to resign with Pay in Lieu of Notice (PILON), meaning that they do not have to work their notice period. This tends to be a key contributor to investigations being stopped, as the employee has not been interviewed before they leave the organisation.

Many of the staff who raised this issue of concern were individuals who had lodged complaints about colleagues, leading to misconduct investigations. A significant number, particularly women reporting sexual harassment or gender-based unfair treatment, made these complaints to have their experiences acknowledged and to feel vindicated. They were not always seeking sanctions against the colleague concerned, though some did say they expected outcomes up to and including dismissal.

When the subject of the complaint retired, often unexpectedly, and the investigation was therefore halted, these complainants felt left in limbo. They told us that they received neither vindication nor meaningful support from the SPS. Meanwhile, the staff member they had complained about was able to leave with an unblemished employment record.

In that context, we suggest that the SPS considers adopting a policy to continue such misconduct investigations, even if the individual resigns or retires. The SPS can legally:

- complete the investigation even after the person leaves;
- issue findings;
- record the outcome on their HR file;
- use outcomes to adjust pensionable pay calculations (if within rules); and
- disclose outcomes to future employers through reference policies.

Such a policy, which we understand would be fully compliant with Scottish employment law, would also provide closure to complainants, and act as a deterrent. The SPS should also consider whether it is possible and appropriate to amend the current practice whereby staff members can resign with pay in lieu of notice, so that they would have to work their notice period whilst an investigation is ongoing. This may also require such investigations to be fast-tracked, where possible, and recognising that the investigation would continue after their departure.

We also note that in serious cases, where there is a suspicion of criminal wrongdoing (e.g. complaints about corruption or use of unlawful force), the SPS already reports such cases to Police Scotland.

Recommended actions:

Policy and Practice Revision

- **Design & Charter:** Draft an Independent Complaints Panel (ICP) charter (scope, authority, remit, standards, confidentiality).
- **Constitute ICP:** Appoint external panel members (legal, HR, EDI practitioners) and an independent chair; agree conflict of interest protocol.
- **Confidential Reporting Channel:** Launch 24/7 phone and secure web portal managed by the ICP; publish workflows and SLAs.
- **Duty to Report:** Amend SPS policy to mandate manager reporting of witnessed/known misconduct; define sanctions for non-compliance.
- **Investigation Standards:** Train and accredit investigating officers via SPS College; create case templates, evidence packs, and outcome rubrics.
- **Case Dashboards:** Publish anonymised quarterly dashboards: volume, triage timeliness, outcomes, remedies, lessons learned.
- **Whistleblowing Protections:** Reinforce protections; test uptake with pulse surveys; promote via comms campaigns.
- **Amend SPS HR and disciplinary policies** to ensure that retirement or resignation is not used as a means of avoiding investigation for misconduct.
- **Require investigations to proceed regardless of employment status** (including post-retirement if allegations arise during service).

Governance & Oversight

- Mandate that all misconduct cases are logged and reviewed by an Independent Complaints Panel (ICP) and reported quarterly to the SPS senior management and EHROB.
- Introduce external audit of compliance annually.

Performance Management Integration

- Embed accountability for handling misconduct cases into leadership appraisals and promotion criteria.

- Make failure to enforce this policy a breach of management duties, triggering formal performance consequences.

Transparency

- Publish anonymised annual data on misconduct cases, including outcomes where staff retired or resigned during investigation, to demonstrate follow-through.

Feedback to Complainants

- The SPS should consider adopting a Structured Feedback Framework for complainants, whereby a standardised, formal closure statement would be provided, setting out:
  - What stages of the process have been completed (e.g., triage, investigation, fact-finding, decision-making);
  - Confirmation that the case was considered under the appropriate SPS policy;
  - Confirmation that the organisation has taken action proportionate to the findings;
  - A statement that the SPS is satisfied the matter has been addressed in line with policy and employment law;
  - Where relevant, confirmation that learning from the case will be applied across the organisation (without naming individuals).
- This would reassure complainants that the process was robust and serious, even if the specific disciplinary outcome cannot be shared.
- In advance of any investigation, and in line with the above Feedback Framework, the SPS should provide a guide to complainants stating what the SPS can and cannot tell them, setting out:
  - What information the complainant will receive;
  - What information cannot legally be shared;
  - The typical timelines and decision points;
  - Their right to clarify procedural concerns.
- Similar approaches are in place within NHS Scotland and a range of other public sector organisations across the UK.

Communication & Training

- Issue clear guidance to all staff and managers; include scenario-based training on handling misconduct cases under the revised policy.

KPIs to demonstrate the success of this new policy could include:

- ≥90% cases triaged within 5 working days within 6 months of implementation.
- Median investigation duration ≤ 45 days within 12 months of implementation.
- ≥85% of substantiated cases result in corrective action.
- Staff confidence in fairness and accountability of the complaints process improves by 15% in annual culture survey.
- 100% compliance: No cases closed due to retirement without investigation.
- Quarterly dashboards show all allegations investigated to conclusion.

9.2.4 *Recommendation 4: Address Gender Bias and Strengthen Equity and Inclusion Across the Workforce*

Evidence from the assessment indicates that while the principle of respect is generally upheld, there remain pockets of sexist behaviour and dismissive attitudes towards female staff. This presents both an ethical concern and an operational risk.

Recommended actions:

- **Introduce mandatory training** on gender equity, inclusive conduct, and respectful workplace behaviours for all SPS staff, with priority focus on establishments where issues were most frequently reported.
- **Implement facilitated discussion sessions** within teams to surface and challenge embedded cultural norms that undermine equality.
- **Strengthen the complaints and reporting processes** to enhance visibility and accessibility, ensuring that staff feel safe raising concerns without fear of retaliation.
- **Strengthen managerial responsibilities for early intervention** in inappropriate behaviour and monitor follow-through at establishment and regional levels.

This recommendation reinforces the enablers of ***Inclusivity, Fairness***, and ***Respect***.

9.2.5 *Recommendation 5: Rebuild Trust and Strengthen Accountability Across All Levels of the Organisation*

A significant proportion of staff expressed low confidence in accountability mechanisms within the SPS, particularly concerning senior managers. This perceived lack of consistency and fairness undermines trust and damages organisational cohesion.

Recommended actions:

- **Define and communicate clear expectations** for leadership behaviour, alignment with values, and decision-making transparency.
- **Introduce consistent, structurally embedded processes** for addressing misconduct or performance concerns at all levels, accompanied by staff-facing summaries of actions taken ("you said, we did").
- **Reinforce and publicise whistleblowing protections** to reduce the risk of ostracism or informal sanctions.
- **Develop an annual organisation-wide accountability review**, assessing behavioural standards, decision-making consistency, and staff perceptions.

This recommendation strengthens the enabler of ***Accountability*** and supports ***Integrity*** and ***Leadership***.

9.2.6 *Recommendation 6: Strengthen Communication, Transparency, and Engagement Across the SPS*

Our review found significant variance in perceptions of openness and communication across the SPS. Staff frequently reported difficulty accessing HQ functions, unclear strategic direction, and inconsistent messaging. Poor communication exacerbates mistrust, undermines accountability, and weakens cultural reform efforts. International comparators (NZ

Corrections, British Army, NZ Defence Forces) demonstrate that structured, transparent communication is essential for cultural transformation.

Recommended actions:

- **Review / revise organisational structures** with particular focus on senior and middle management roles, in order to optimise clarity around responsibilities, to improve accountability and reporting arrangements, and to improve engagement between HQ and SPS establishments.
- **Develop clear lines of responsibility between HQ and establishments** with defined service standards for response times and issue resolution.
- **Establish scheduled engagement forums** between HQ senior personnel and frontline staff, using both digital and in-person formats.
- Require senior leaders to undertake **regular governance visits** to sites with structured follow-up mechanisms.
- **Introduce standardised communication channels** (e.g., monthly bulletins, briefing packs for governors, FAQs on policy changes) to reduce inconsistency in information flow.

We recognise that there are particular challenges in ensuring that all SPS policies, procedures, and cultural guidance issued by HQ are communicated clearly, consistently, and promptly to all 16 establishments, reaching every level of staff, from senior leaders to frontline officers. Whilst some staff will have ready access to IT systems during their working day, we also recognise that digital-only solutions will not reach most uniformed staff who spend their day on landings, in SRUs, or escorting prisoners. For SPS, the communication strategy needs multi-channel, layered delivery that works in a high-security, operational environment. The following suggested actions set out how to make sure policy and guidance from HQ reaches every officer, every time:

Mandatory Face-to-Face Briefings

- Governor-led team briefings for all staff after any major policy update.
- Use structured briefing packs with:
  - Key messages in plain language.
  - “What this means for you” sections for frontline staff.
  - Scenario-based examples (e.g., handling bullying complaints, applying new performance standards).
- Require attendance logs and digital sign-off for compliance.

Shift-Change Huddles

- Introduce 5-minute huddles at every shift handover to reinforce key updates.
- Supervisors deliver one key message per huddle (policy change, cultural priority, anti-bullying reminder).
- Use laminated “policy cards” or pocket guides for quick reference.

Visual Communication

- Posters and QR codes in staff rooms, muster points, and locker areas linking to short videos or summaries.

- Colour-coded policy boards in each wing:
  - Green = current policy
  - Amber = under review
  - Red = urgent update.

Cascade Accountability

- Make policy cascade a leadership KPI:
- Governors confirm completion of briefings within 10 working days.
- Unit Managers responsible for shift huddles and staff sign-off.
- Audit during governance visits: randomly ask officers to explain recent changes.

Integration with Performance Management

- Include policy compliance and briefing attendance in annual appraisals.
- Link failure to cascade or attend briefings to performance consequences.

Reinforce Through CPD

- Embed policy updates into mandatory training days and refresher courses.
- Use scenario-based exercises to show practical application.

Feedback Loops

- After major updates, run pulse surveys or quick paper feedback forms during huddles.
- Publish "You said, we did" summaries to show action on feedback.

The above approach mirrors the British Army's chain-of-command cascade and NZ Corrections' structured engagement, ensuring face-to-face reinforcement, visual cues, and accountability tracking, all of which are critical in environments where most staff do not sit at desks.

This recommendation aligns with the value of ***Openness*** and supports cultural cohesion and organisational clarity.

9.2.7 *Recommendation 7: Strengthen Operational Capacity to Deliver Consistent, High-Quality Rehabilitation*

While staff strongly support the principle of rehabilitation, operational capacity constraints, particularly in larger prisons, limit delivery, leading to concerns about "warehousing".

Recommended actions:

- **Increase protected time for rehabilitative activities** by reviewing shift patterns, staffing levels, and operational deployment strategies.
- **Expand partnerships** with education, employment, housing and health providers to ensure continuity of support for individuals preparing for release.
- **Develop national commissioning frameworks for rehabilitative programmes** to ensure consistent availability across establishments.

- **Improve access to personal officers** for those in custody across the SPS, including reviewing resource levels in establishments where operational pressures significantly limit consistent personal officer work.
- **Introduce service-level metrics for rehabilitative activity and progression** to monitor variance and improve consistency across the system.

This recommendation strengthens the SPS values ***Belief*** and ***Innovation,*** and the enabler of ***Rehabilitation***.

9.2.8 *Recommendation 8: Reinforce Ethical Standards and Reward Professional Integrity*

Although integrity is widely valued, some staff reported reluctance to report wrongdoing due to fear of ostracism. Sustaining high ethical standards requires active reinforcement.

Recommended actions:

- **Introduce formal recognition schemes** for staff who demonstrate ethical decision-making or challenge inappropriate behaviour.
- **Provide a confidential ethics support line**, allowing staff to seek advice before taking action.
- Ensure that **investigations into misconduct or ethical breaches are handled consistently** and that lessons learned are disseminated across the service.
- **Integrate ethics modules into all leadership and management programmes**.

This recommendation supports the SPS value of ***Integrity*** and builds organisational trust.

9.2.9 *Recommendation 9: Professionalise Leadership Capability and Ensure Consistent Behaviours Across the Organisation*

The assessment revealed significant variation in the quality of leadership, with some establishments demonstrating strong, supportive management, while others lacked staff confidence.

Recommended actions:

- **Implement a leadership competency framework** that defines expected behaviours, communication standards, and alignment with SPS values.
- **Introduce 360-degree feedback for all leaders**, with outcomes incorporated into annual development plans.
- Require all newly promoted leaders to undertake **leadership development training** focused on communication, accountability, ethical behaviour and staff engagement.
- **Link promotion and career progression explicitly to evidence of value-driven leadership**.

This supports the enabler of ***Leadership*** and strengthens organisational cohesion.

9.2.10 *Recommendation 10: Reform Recruitment, Selection and Promotion to Strengthen Capability and Operational Readiness*

Concerns about overly theoretical training and inappropriate promotion decisions suggest a need for more robust and practical recruitment and assessment processes.

Recommended actions:

- **Redesign selection processes for mid-tier roles** to assess interpersonal skills, decision-making, and operational judgement alongside academic criteria.
- **Improve training for new recruits** by integrating structured mentoring, shadowing and supervised on-the-job experiences to build "jail craft".
- **Review the promotion system** to ensure it rewards competence, leadership behaviour, and alignment with SPS values, rather than tenure alone.
- **Standardise job advertisements and induction processes** to provide clear expectations about the operational realities of the role.

This recommendation supports ***People & Development*** and ***Integrity***.

9.2.11 *Recommendation 11: Develop a Coherent National Strategy for Innovation and Learning*

Innovation is a cultural strength in many prisons but lacks a central framework, leading to variability and missed opportunities to share effective practice.

Recommended actions:

- Establish a **national Innovation and Practice Development Hub** responsible for capturing local initiatives, evaluating outcomes and scaling successful models.
- **Introduce small-scale innovation funding** for staff-led improvement projects, encouraging cross-establishment collaboration.
- **Incorporate innovation metrics** into establishment and regional planning processes.
- **Facilitate regular cross-site learning events** focused on rehabilitation, education, and staff development.

This supports ***Innovation***, ***Humility***, and continuous improvement.

9.2.12 *Recommendation 12: Develop and Communicate a Clear, Long-Term Strategic Vision within the Constraints of National Policy and Funding*

Staff across the SPS expressed a strong need for clearer strategic direction and a compelling long-term vision to guide operational and cultural priorities. However, it is essential to acknowledge that SPS does not have full autonomy over its future strategy. The organisation operates within the broader criminal justice framework set by the Scottish Government, which determines overall policy direction, legislative priorities, and funding allocations. SPS's strategic planning must therefore align with national objectives while ensuring internal clarity and cultural coherence

Recommended actions:

Collaborative Strategic Planning

- Undertake a strategic planning process that involves staff, prisoners, partners, and senior leaders, while maintaining close alignment with Scottish Government policy priorities and budgetary constraints.
- Engage proactively with the Scottish Government to influence policy discussions on areas critical to SPS operations (rehabilitation, staffing, infrastructure).

Define SPS's Contribution within National Framework

- Develop a 5- to 10-year organisational vision that clearly articulates the SPS's role in delivering national criminal justice outcomes, while embedding SPS values and cultural standards.
- Position cultural reform as a key enabler of operational effectiveness and compliance with government objectives.

Communication and Cascade

- Communicate the agreed vision widely using multiple channels (governor briefings, shift-change huddles, monthly bulletins, and leadership forums).
- Embed the vision into local action plans, leadership objectives, and staff development programmes to ensure consistency from HQ to frontline staff.

Monitoring and Reporting

- Establish mechanisms to monitor progress against strategic commitments and cultural objectives, reporting annually to staff and stakeholders.
- Include transparent updates on how SPS priorities align with Scottish Government policy and funding decisions.

This approach will ensure that the SPS provides clarity and direction for its workforce while recognising the external dependencies that shape its operational environment. By embedding cultural priorities into a strategic vision aligned with national policy, the SPS can strengthen internal cohesion, improve accountability, and maintain credibility with Government and the public.

This recommendation strengthens ***Leadership***, ***Openness***, and organisational coherence.

9.3 Top Three Priorities

We recognise that within the 12 sets of recommendations presented above (many of them overlapping and all of them inter-related), there is potentially a large body of work for the SPS to progress. In that context, it is important to identify a small number of high-priority action to progress, which can both set the scene for later changes, and provide a significant amount of momentum to facilitate other reforms and improvements.

We identify below what we believe are the top three areas in which initial progress is required:

1) Implement a Modern, Values-Driven Performance Management Framework

Why:
Current performance management is inconsistent, overly procedural, and disconnected from cultural priorities. Staff feedback shows low confidence in accountability and fairness, and international best practice demonstrates that embedding values into performance systems drives cultural change.

What to Do:

- Redesign appraisals to include behavioural indicators tied to SPS values (respect, integrity, openness, accountability).
- Introduce Balanced Scorecard reporting across four domains: Safety & Security, Rehabilitation Outcomes, People & Culture, and Operational Effectiveness.
- Implement 360° feedback for all staff and link results to promotion decisions.
- Make cultural compliance and CPD completion prerequisites for progression.
- Publish quarterly dashboards and annual cultural performance reports for transparency.

Impact:
Creates a culture where professionalism, fairness, and leadership accountability are measurable and rewarded.

2) Establish Robust, Independent Mechanisms for Complaints and Misconduct

Why:
The current approach—allowing staff to retire rather than face investigation—undermines integrity and trust. Over 30–40% of staff believe complaints are not handled seriously. International comparators (NZDF Operation Respect, UK Armed Forces) show that independent oversight is essential.

What to Do:

- Create an Independent Complaints Panel (ICP) with external members to handle serious misconduct cases.
- Ensure that retirement or resignation is not used as a means of avoiding investigation; all cases must be concluded.
- Mandate manager duty-to-report and embed compliance into performance reviews.
- Publish anonymised annual data on complaints and outcomes.
- Provide confidential support services for staff and reinforce whistleblowing protections.

Impact:
Restores confidence in fairness, eliminates impunity, and aligns the SPS with public service standards.

3) Build a Structured Communication and Cascade Framework

Why:
Staff report poor communication and lack of clarity on strategic direction. Policies and cultural guidance from HQ often fail to reach frontline officers. Without consistent messaging, reforms in performance management and anti-bullying will not stick.

What to Do:

- Develop mandatory cascade protocols: CEO → Governors → Unit Managers → shift-change huddles for frontline staff.
- Use structured briefing packs with plain language and “what this means for you” sections.

- Introduce face-to-face briefings, shift huddles, and visual communication (policy boards, laminated cards) for staff who don't use computers.
- Make communication quality a leadership KPI and audit during governance visits.
- Integrate updates on cultural priorities, complaints handling, and performance milestones into all channels.

Impact:
Ensures every staff member, from HQ to frontline staff, understands policies, cultural expectations, and strategic priorities, reinforcing accountability and cohesion.

These three priorities are interdependent:

- Performance management sets expectations and measures cultural behaviours.
- Independent complaints handling enforces accountability and fairness.
- Structured communication ensures everyone understands and applies the rules consistently.

9.4 Next Steps

We would suggest that the SPS should take a structured and transparent approach to considering this report and progressing the recommended improvements.

As an initial step, senior leadership should convene a cross-functional steering group, including representation from establishments, HQ functions, trade unions and staff networks, to review the findings in detail and agree which issues require immediate action and which should be incorporated into longer-term planning. This group should validate the recommendations, identify any gaps, and ensure alignment with existing organisational strategies.

Early communication with staff will be essential to demonstrate openness, acknowledge the concerns raised, and signal a clear commitment to cultural improvement.

Following this initial review, the SPS should begin developing a three-year project plan to deliver sustained change. We consider three years to be an appropriate timescale, bearing in mind the range and complexity of issues to be tackled – there is no "quick fix" possible, although some early successes should be targeted to build confidence and to demonstrate commitment. The three-year plan should include clear objectives linked to each recommendation, defined ownership at senior and local levels, and measurable outcomes relating to culture, leadership, staff wellbeing, and rehabilitation delivery. Workstreams should be established for priority areas such as accountability, training, leadership development, inclusion, rehabilitation capacity and bullying prevention.

A detailed implementation timeline, supported by appropriate resourcing and risk management, should be created. Progress should be monitored quarterly, with transparent reporting to staff and stakeholders, ensuring the programme remains credible, evidence-based and outcome-focused.

9.5 Final Comments

While this review highlights several serious issues requiring focused and sustained action, it is important to recognise the significant strengths which we have identified across the Scottish Prison Service. Staff demonstrate a strong commitment to rehabilitation, uphold high standards of integrity, and generally maintain positive and compassionate relationships with those in custody. During our visits, we met over 700 staff, the majority of whom came across as being decent, professional, and committed to improving the lives and prospects of those in custody. Many establishments show good levels of teamwork, operational cohesion and locally driven innovation. These positive elements form a solid foundation on which to build.

With clear leadership, improved accountability and a coherent long-term plan, we believe that the SPS is well positioned to address the current challenges and achieve meaningful, lasting cultural improvement.

Appendix 1: Terms of Reference as issued by the SPS

SPECIFICATION

1. Commission Parameters

The Supplier shall be responsible for:

- Providing the Purchaser with the required Services;
- Be responsible for coordinating and delivering all requirements of this Contract for the Prices detailed in Schedule C;
- Meeting the agreed timescales; and
- Demonstrate compliance with all relevant legislation and regulatory provisions.

2. Introduction

The Scottish Prison Service (SPS) employs approximately 4,600 staff across our prisons, headquarters, college and training and storage facility at Fauldhouse. The work of our staff is the most critical component in the successful delivery of our services, and we recognize the need to ensure our staff are supported to carry out their roles, feel a sense of satisfaction from work, are engaged with change and operate in a workplace where we promote wellbeing, equalities, and respect.

SPS has implemented many interventions with the aim of influencing organisational culture and specifically reinforcing to managers their role in creating a progressive workplace culture. This includes CEO-led workshops, leadership development programmes and a new competency framework. Whilst we are confident that we are making progress, we also recognize the need to continue to prioritize this work and to make sure we are focusing on the areas that will make the greatest positive impact. We therefore consider now an opportune time to take stock.

This commission is about finding a Supplier who, acting as a "critical friend", will carry out an assessment of the current workplace cultures and levels of trust within the SPS, the extent to which it facilitates or hinders the development of the service, and support our endeavours by proposing a clear way forward with regards to culture and interventions designed to achieve our organisational vision and aims.

3. Purpose

To assess the existing culture of the SPS and consider the extent to which it and its employees have created a culture of trust free from discrimination, unfairness, and inequality. The review will also measure current policies and practices and take into account what we can learn from our responses to past events. The review will seek to identify areas for improvement, highlight areas of good practice and make recommendations for improvement to support SPS to deliver prison services in a way that is focused on being person-centred and inclusive of all. SPS is seeking specific recommendations on how we embed collaborative and on-going staff consultation which enables SPS to measure progress.

4. Scope of the Assignment

The assignment encompasses all SPS activities related to culture hitherto and should take a whole-system view on culture looking forward. SPS would work with the appointed Supplier during the inception phrase to agree an appropriate approach.

SPS recognises that it's the people who work for SPS that determine the strength of the organisation and we are keen to find a Supplier who will ensure this review captures the human side of SPS, and who can work with us to nurture learning as we move forward. Additionally, guided by The Scottish Approach to Service Design (SAtSD) - gov.scot (www.gov.scot), this work must ultimately aspire to help SPS understand and meet the needs of those in our care i.e. using inclusive, accessible and ethical research methods to understand whether our organisational culture does or doesn't enable staff to build good quality relationships that support desistance, enable recovery from substance use and enhance broader wellbeing.

To achieve the purpose as set out above the review will seek to understand the following:

- Understand how policies, processes and systems are applied and interpreted by our staffing groups and the impact on people and culture;
- Understand how the behaviours and decisions of leaders at all levels impact on people and culture;
- Understand how culture(s) impact on the efficient and effective service delivery of prison services in Scotland i.e. performance and risk management to enable delivery of the values and strategic intent set out in SPS' 2023 – 2028 Corporate Plan (hereafter referred to as the CP2328);
- Identify areas of strength, examples of good practice and exemplar behaviours; and
- Identify areas of challenge and room for improvement, based on the lived experiences of staff and those in our care.

The review will also specifically need to consider:

- How SPS's culture(s) have changed over time;
- Any differences in experiences of staff and those in our care, based on, but not limited to, their age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation;
- Whether certain behaviours or practices are more or less prevalent within particular staffing groups, functions, establishments or teams across SPS.

We expect the final report to include:

- Proposals for a clear way forward with regards to developing cultural strategy and interventions.
- Recommendations on actions required, including, but not restricted to, changes to Management Information systems, policies, and practices (HR and Operational).
- Proposals for measures for on-going staff consultation designed to measure SPS' progress in developing a culture that enables the delivery of SPS's CP2328 and, where those in our care and the staff group all feel supported and able to be their authentic selves.

5. Skills and Competencies Required

- Experience of, and expertise in, research and consultancy on culture and behaviours within an organisational setting, and how they shape organisational development preferably within the public sector;
- An understanding of how organisational culture(s) might or might not support the delivery of effective prison practices;
- Experience of working with clients collaboratively i.e. co-creating insights, acting as a "critical friend"
- Experience of producing utility-focused deliverables, that communicate sensitive topics appropriately and enable pragmatic improvement in large organisations.

6. Methods and Data

Over the Contract Term, the Supplier shall gather evidence of the experience our staff have in their working environment and the wider culture of the organisation. It is proposed that this would be done through a range of channels, which can give ample space to the wide range of voices we need to hear so that all feel valued and listened to. To fully understand our culture, we anticipate engagement with those in our care to gain their perspective and lived experience. It is expected the approach taken should fully capture the diversity of SPS employees and those in our care, and is representative of sex, age, race, role, pay grade, operational status, sexuality, neurodiversity, and disabilities as well as geography.

SPS will work with the Supplier to agree the final approach, but envisages the appointed Supplier making use of a range of methods and data sources, including (but not limited to):

- Review the external (UK and international) literature of cultural issues in prison services / similar organisations.
- Gathering secondary documentation, reports, policies, and procedures, using sources including but not limited to:
    - Civil Service People Survey findings.
    - SPS Internal Audit on Culture findings.
    - Staff demographics and diversity data.
    - Absence, misconduct, and turnover statistics.
- Gathering primary evidence (largely qualitative in nature) which may include:
    - Establishment and HQ visits to talk to staff (Operational and Non-Operational) on the job and assess workplace culture.
    - Interviews with people in our care.
    - Engagement with external stakeholders – SPS' Partner perspective.
    - Interviews with current - and where possible previous – employees through a range of approaches including in-person, via video, or telephone.
    - Focus groups consisting of differing establishments, functions, staff, and interests.
    - Online surveys.

It is not expected the review will reopen past bullying and harassment complaints or employee relations' processes, nor will it reach conclusions or make recommendations in respect of any individual concern raised. Where evidence is revealed of individual(s) currently exhibiting or experiencing inappropriate behaviours, or a person discloses information which raises a concern regarding the safety of an individual, these matters will be referred to SPS (Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) for appropriate actions to be undertaken. Existing avenues for the raising of complaints or concerns available to staff will not be affected. Contributors to the review process will be provided, where appropriate, with information about existing processes for support and raising concerns.

It is expected all data and information that is accessed and gathered by the research team will be handled and processed in accordance with SPS' data protection and disclosure policies.

7. Contract Timeline

The overall project will commence in xxx 2024 and it is anticipated the research will be undertaken across a 6-month period. This will include the undertaking of desk-based literature reviews, alongside qualitative fieldwork across all SPS operated prisons, HQ, SPS Fauldhouse Central Stores and SPS College, and the

completion of a report detailing findings and recommendations. Timescales will be tight, with the expectation that field-based research at each of the prisons within SPS' control (estimated to be 2 days per location) alongside the Headquarters functions and SPS College, desktop and external literature reviews, the compilation of draft and final reports, alongside presenting the final report and recommendations in person to SPS' Equality and Human Rights Oversight Board, will be concluded following a 6-month period. We anticipate the research will take no more than 70 days,

- Inception phase – internal document reviews, external literature reviews, interviews, report writing – 12 days
- Delivery phase – set up, 2 days in each prison (16 x 2), plus days in HQ, SPS College, Fauldhouse Central Stores – 50 days;
- Analysis and report writing – 8 days.

The Contract is expected to start in September 2024 once the successful Supplier has been identified.

8. Deliverables(s) and Outputs

SPS is keen to meet regularly with the Supplier to ensure a shared understanding of scope/focus and later in the contract period, hear about emerging findings e.g. via bi-weekly update meetings. We are mindful that this is a sensitive piece of work, requiring careful consideration in terms of internal oversight and engagement during planning and implementation, and communications once completed.

The key deliverables of the review to the SPS will include:

- An inception report to summarise findings for the inception period (circa week five), and fully define scope (and a framework for defining culture) and intended approach.
- A draft final report (circa week 22), enabling both parties to provide comment.
- A final report, including case study write ups where examples of good practice have been identified, alongside recommendations and proposals to assist SPS moving forward (circa week 26). The final report, of publishable standard, submitted to the SPS at the end of the review should be written for internal consideration but it should be accompanied by an executive summary intended for publication on the SPS website.
- The Supplier may also be asked to present the information contained within the final Report to SPS. A presentation slide pack for the presentation shall be required. The exact date of the presentation will be confirmed with the Supplier and the Purchaser.

Appendix 2: Background Document Review

Overview

We began the process of building our as-is picture of the SPS's culture and values, and the granular detail of how the organisation functions, by conducting an in-depth document review.

Documentation that was covered during this review included:

- Civil Service People Survey findings;
- HM Inspectorate of Prisons of Scotland Annual Reports; and
- Other relevant research reports.

Civil Service People Surveys

Each year, the Civil Service runs a People Survey that covers the following nine core themes:

- my work
- my team
- resources & workload
- organisational objectives & purpose
- learning & development
- pay & benefits
- my manager
- inclusion & fair treatment
- leadership & managing change

The main findings from the survey over the last three years include:

- **2022:** (1363 responses were recorded this year). The theme that scored the lowest was pay and benefits, with dissatisfaction evident across perceptions of fairness and competitiveness of pay. The theme of leadership & management also scored low, reflecting limited confidence in the SPS senior management. Another significant finding from this survey was that only 29% of SPS staff felt that appropriate action was taken when incidents of bullying and harassment occurred.
- **2023**: (1092 responses were recorded this year). The findings from this survey were broadly similar to those from the 2022 survey. Again, the themes of leadership & management and pay & benefits scored the lowest, with significant declines in the confidence in senior managers' decision making, and only 25% of respondents feeling that their pay reflects their performance. It was recorded that only 29% felt the culture in the SPS supports career progression.
- **2024:** (794 responses were recorded this year). There was a notable increase in scores across the theme of pay & benefits. However, leadership and change management remained weak, with confidence in senior managers reporting at only 36%. 15% of staff reported experiencing discrimination, with only 30% of them reporting appropriate action being taken.

HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland Annual Reports 2023/24

The HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland is an independent body that inspects and monitors the treatment and conditions of prisoners in Scotland's 17 prisons. An annual report is produced for each prison, detailing the observations over the year against the following nine standards:

1. Lawful and transparent custody
2. Decency
3. Personal safety
4. Effective, courteous and humane use of authority
5. Respect, autonomy and protection against mistreatment
6. Purposeful activity
7. Transitions from custody to life in the community
8. Organisational effectiveness
9. Health and wellbeing

Main themes throughout the annual reports highlighted positive staff-prisoner relationships with many establishments noting compassion and empathy from staff, though some concerns were raised around staff attitudes and communication. Most prisons were described as safe and well-run, but issues such as drug use, rising violence, and limited time out of cells were noted in several locations. Healthcare and mental health services faced challenges, particularly due to staff shortages and delays in access. There were also concerns around reporting and complaints, with some prisoners expressing fear about reporting bullying or misconduct. Drug misuse was a recurring issue, with some prisons experiencing consistently high levels and others reporting intermittent spikes. It was additionally noted that vulnerable groups such as non-English speakers and transgender prisoners were not always adequately supported.

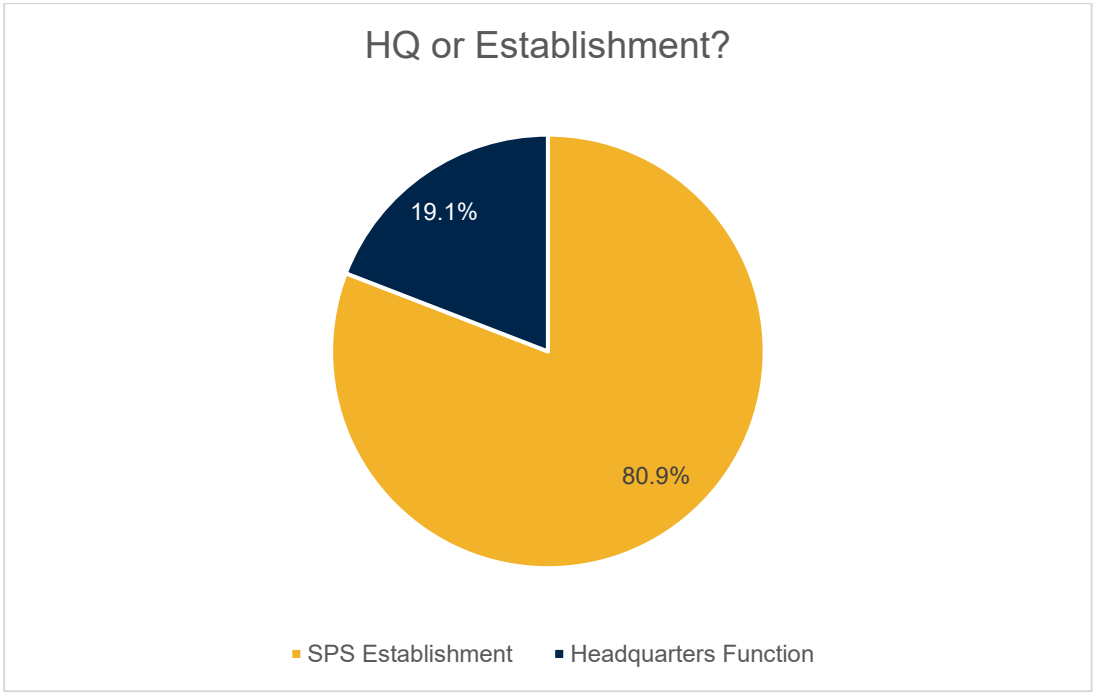
Other Relevant Research Reports

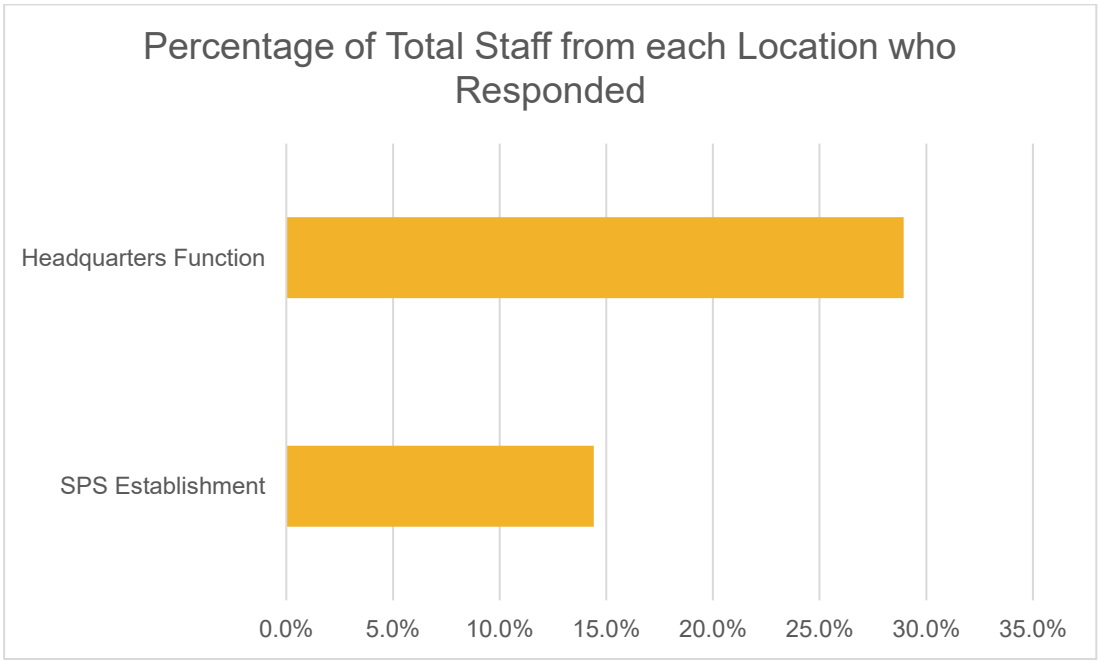
The table below details analysis of a selection of other relevant research reports which we reviewed, highlighting the key findings

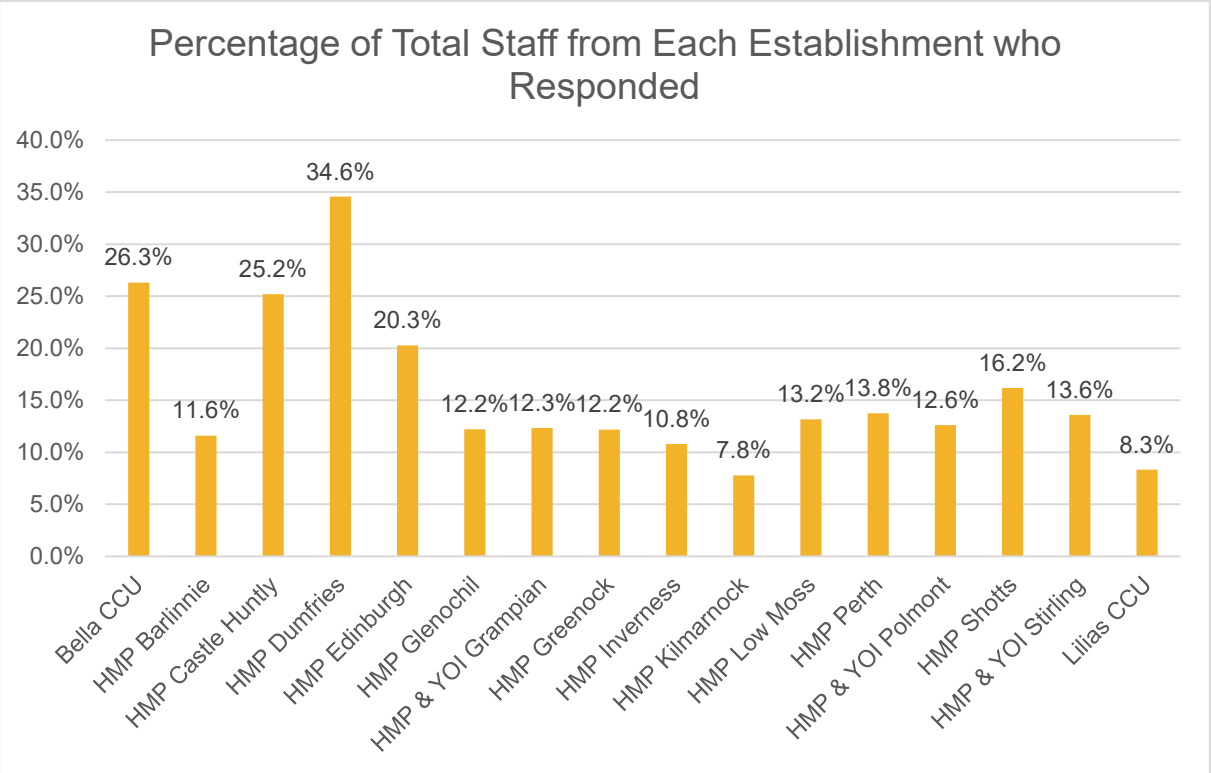
Document Title	Summary
Developing prison culture: Participatory Action Research (PAR) as an approach to achieve culture change *Dr Rachel A. Gibson, Dr Helen Wakeling & Dr Flora Fitzalan Howard, March 2025*	This report investigates how Participatory Action Research (PAR) can be used to foster positive culture change within prisons. The study involved both staff and prisoners in attempt to gain as much lived experience as possible. The findings that were developed highlighted the potential that PAR has to enhance communication and support more humane and effective prison environments.
Dynamics of Performance Measurement and Organisational Culture *Umit S Bititci, Kepa Mendibil, Sai Nudurupati, Patrizia Garengo & Trevor Turner, 2006.*	This research focuses on the relationship between performance measurement, management styles and organisational structure. Various performance measurement tools were implemented into organisations to determine this relationship. It was found that there is a bi-directional interplay between organisational culture, management styles and performance measurement.
Understanding and Managing Organisational Culture *Orla O'Donnell and Richard Boyle, 2008.*	This study emphases how organisational culture influences performance and change in public sector organisations. It identifies six key areas for managing culture with leadership highlighted as essential to cultural change.
Mapping and Re-Mapping Organisational Culture: A Local Government Example *Gerry Johnson, 2021.*	This paper elaborates on the idea that to change an organisation's strategy, it is necessary to understand its current culture first. Through this method, it is possible to identify barriers and subsequently design a new culture to support this strategic change.
Think Twice: The SPS Strategic Approach to Encouraging Respectful Behaviour in Prison *Scottish Prison Service, April 2018.*	Strategic document formed in partnership with *respectme,* Scotland's Anti-Bullying Service, Scottish Association for Mental Health and LGBT Youth Scotland.

Appendix 3: Survey Feedback

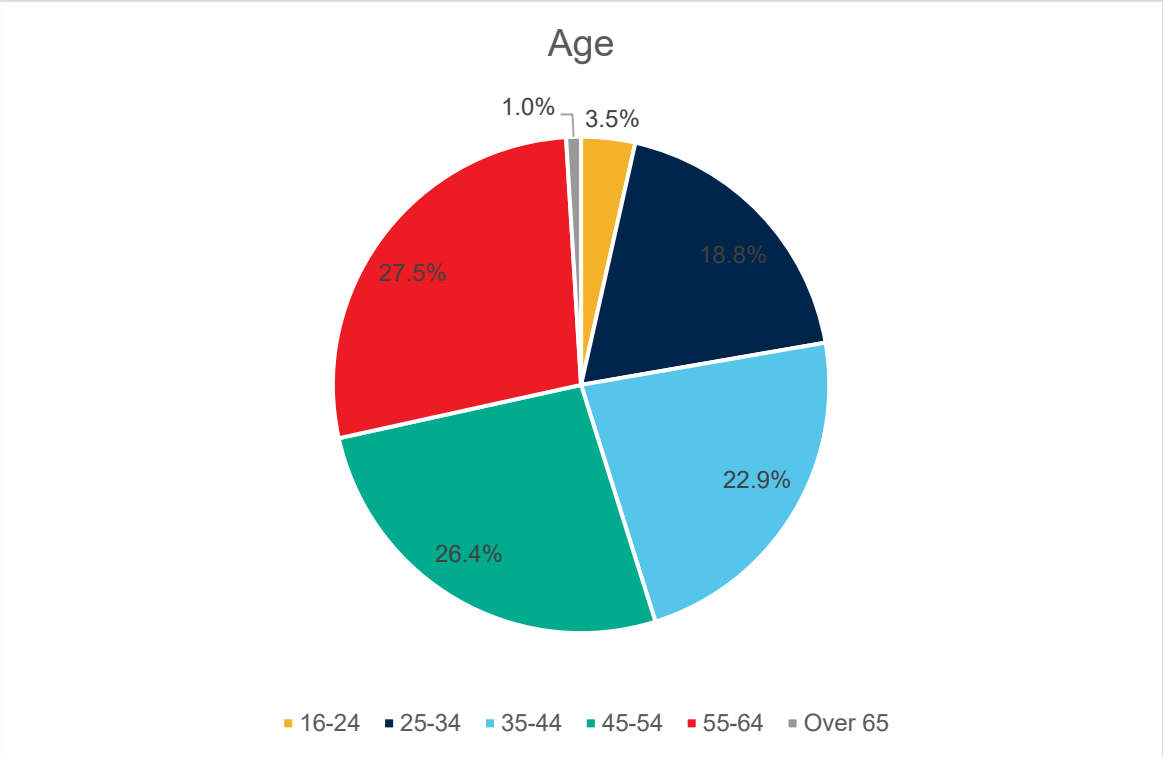
Staff Location



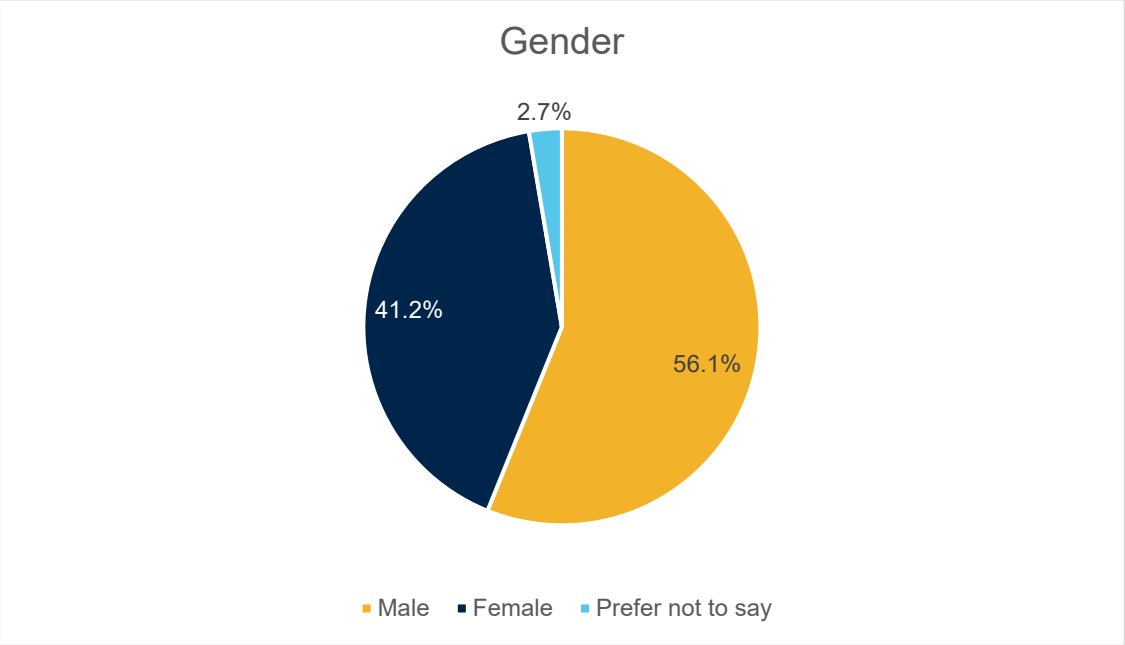



Percentage of Total Staff from Each Establishment who Responded
40.0%
35.0%
30.0%
25.0%
20.0%
15.0%
10.0%
5.0%
0.0%
26.3%
11.6%
25.2%
34.6%
20.3%
12.2%
12.3%
12.2%
10.8%
7.8%
13.2%
13.8%
12.6%
16.2%
13.6%
8.3%
Bella CCU
HMP Barlinnie
HMP Castle Huntly
HMP Dumfries
HMP Edinburgh
HMP Glenochil
HMP & YOI Grampian
HMP Greenock
HMP Inverness
HMP Kilmarnock
HMP Low Moss
HMP Perth
HMP & YOI Polmont
HMP Shotts
HMP & YOI Stirling
Lilias CCU

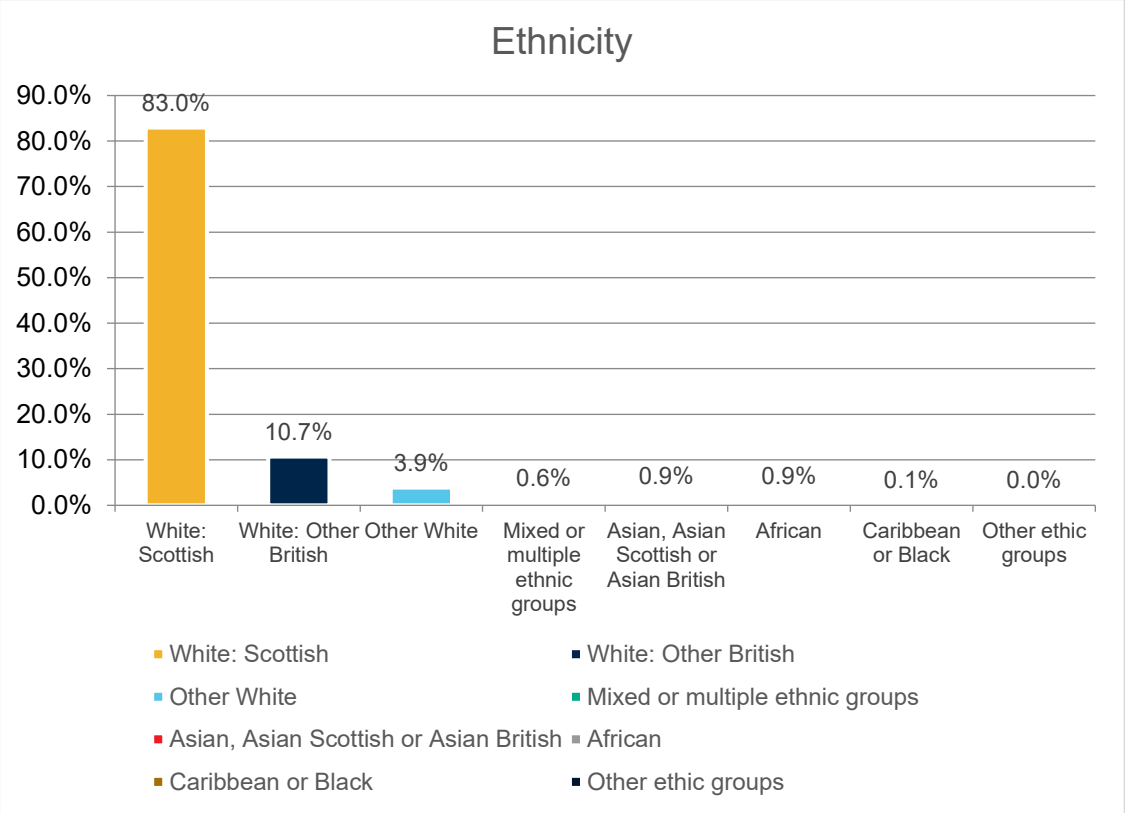
Age


Age
1.0%
3.5%
18.8%
27.5%
22.9%
26.4%
16-24
25-34
35-44
45-54
55-64
Over 65

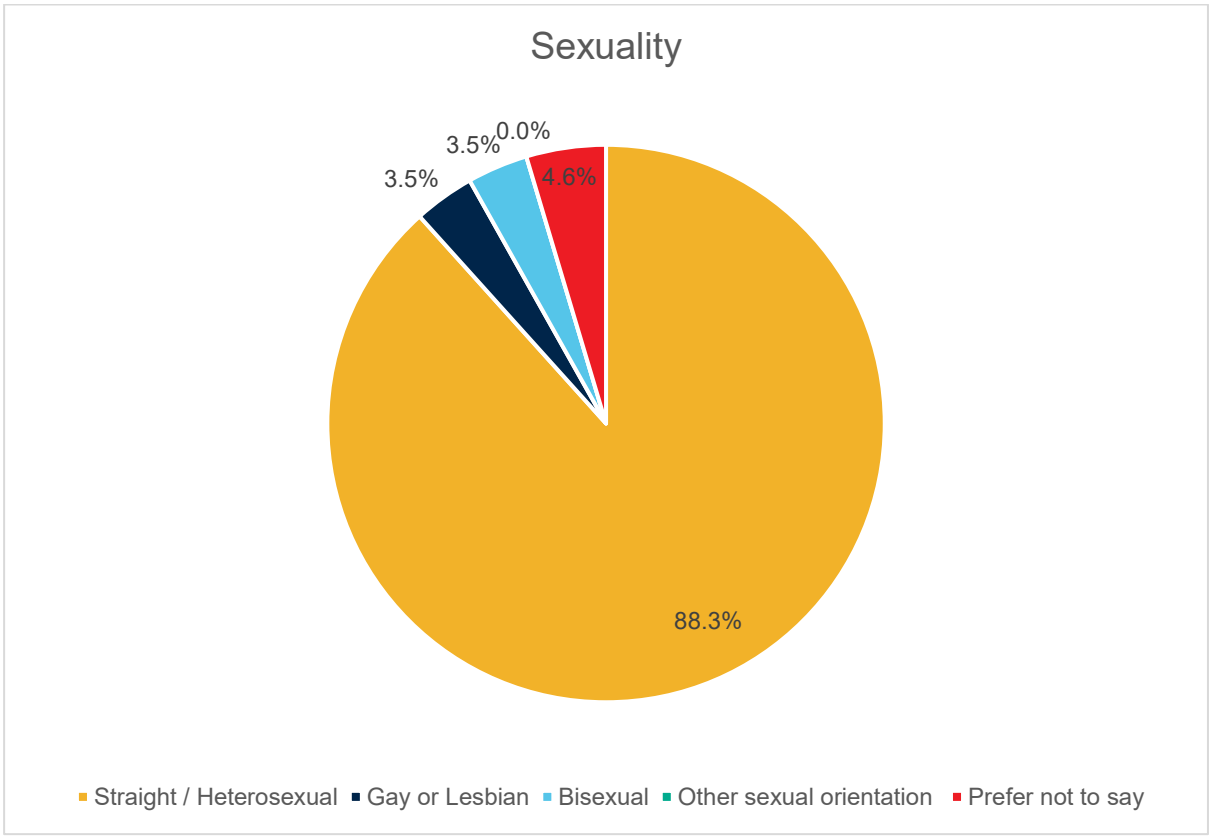
Gender



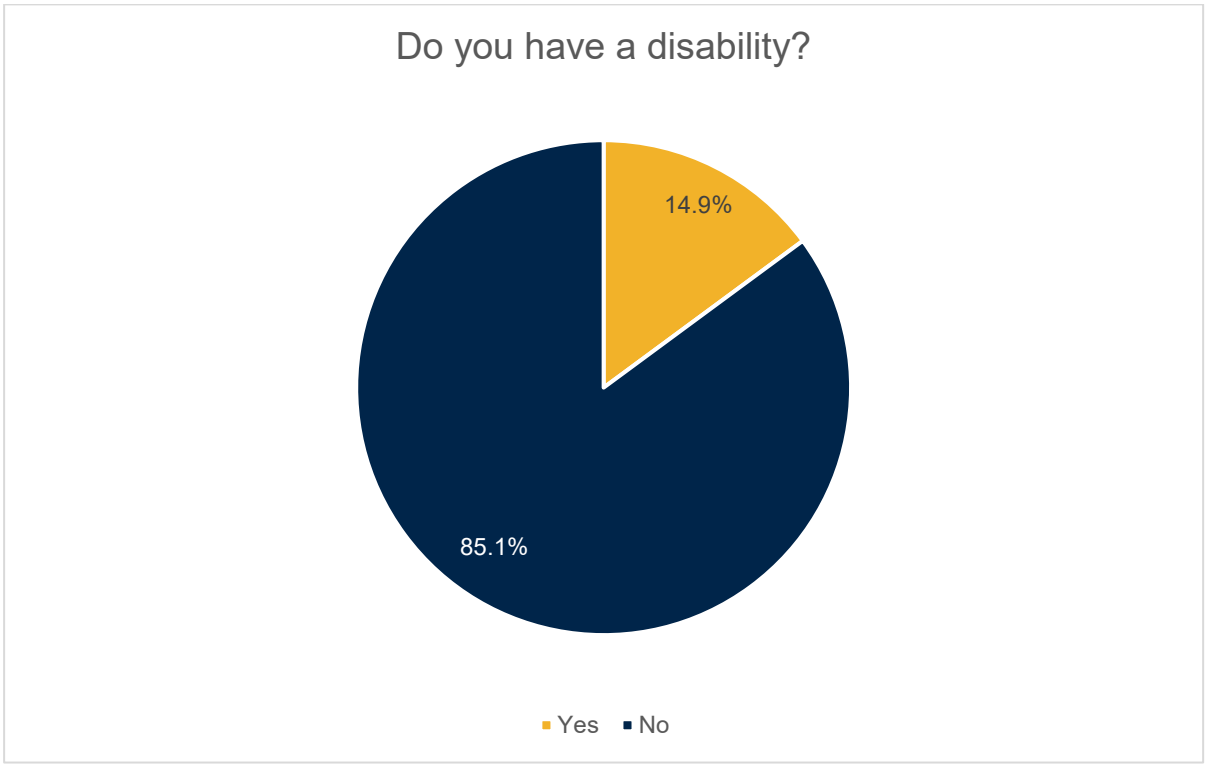
Ethnicity



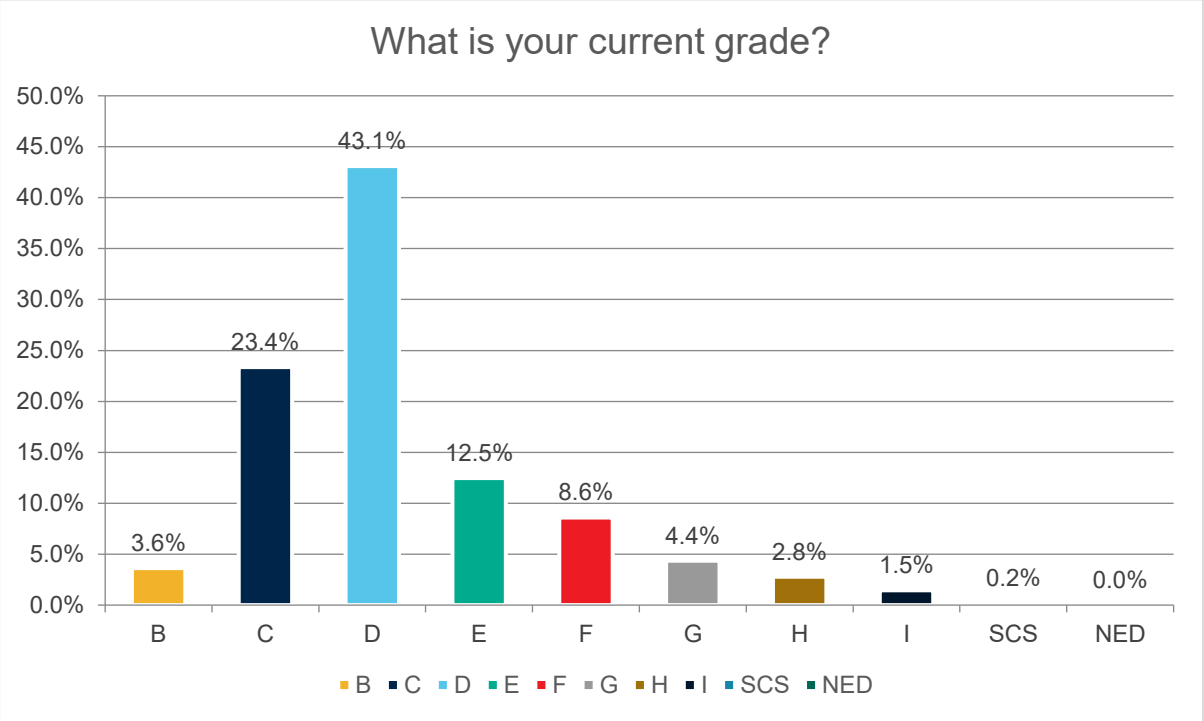
Sexuality



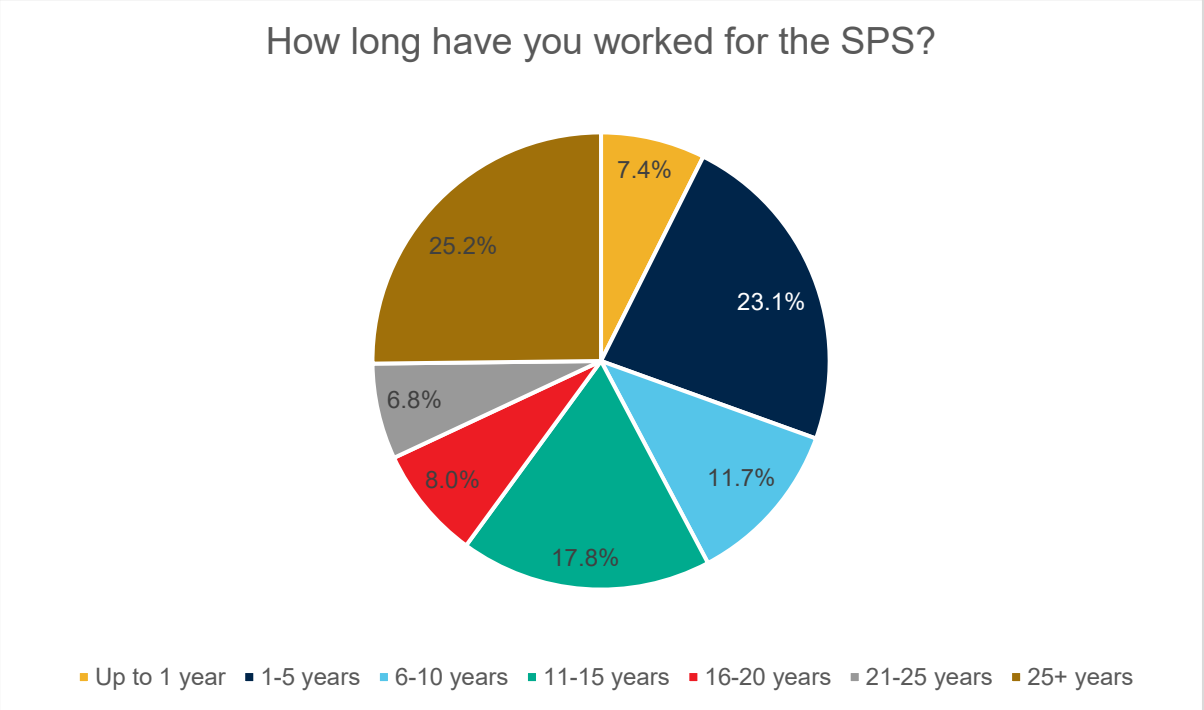
Disability



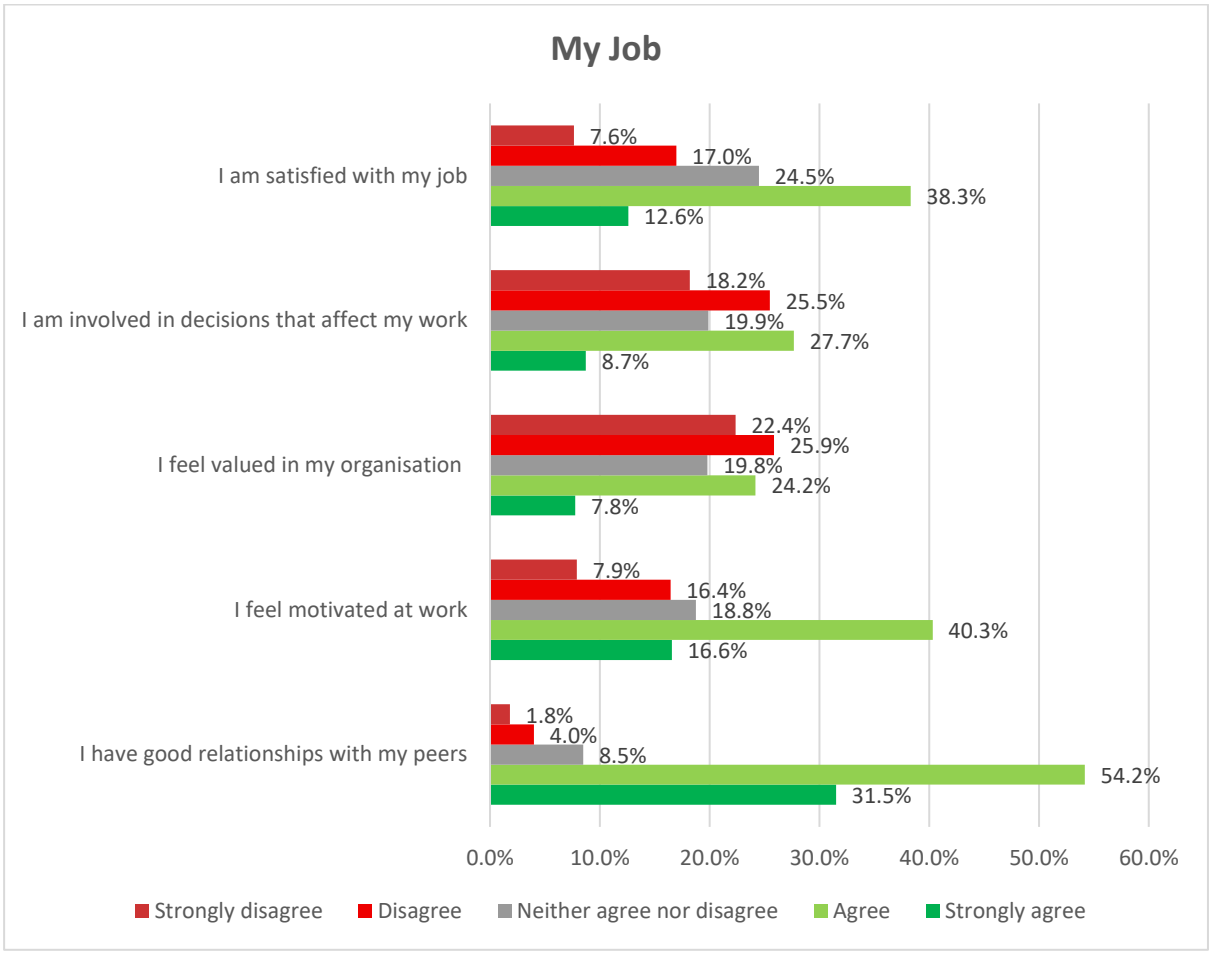
Current Grade



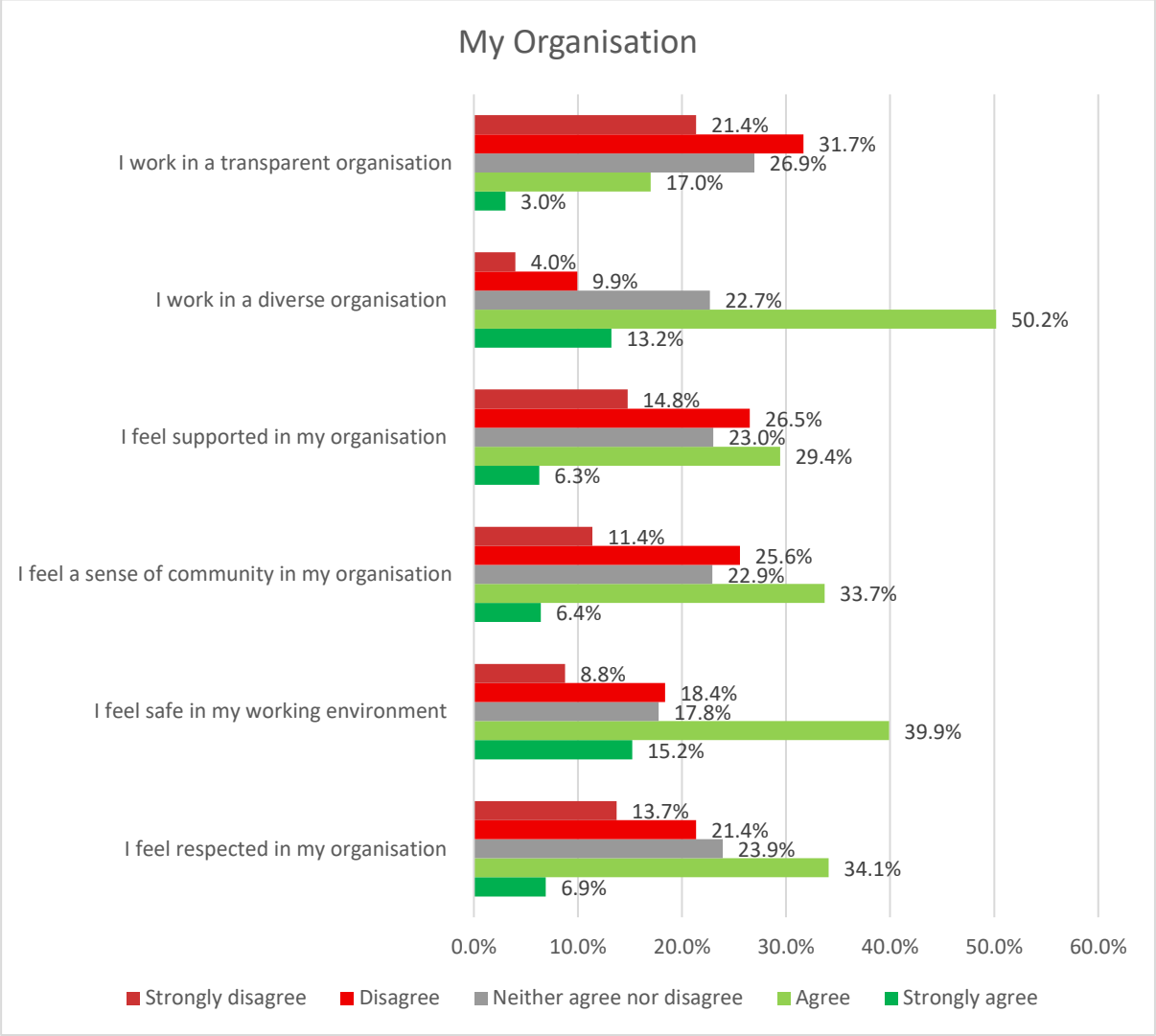
Length of Service

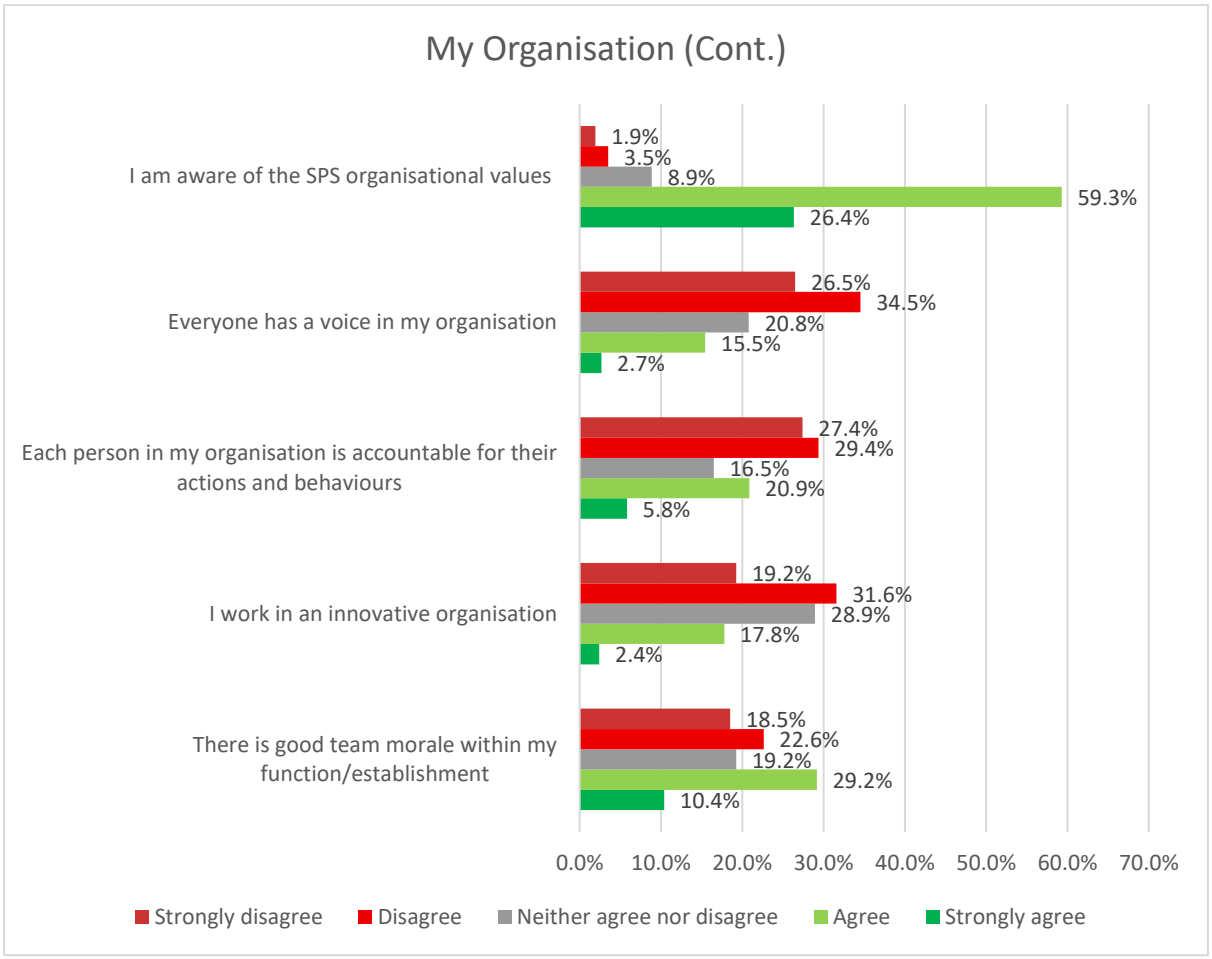


My Job

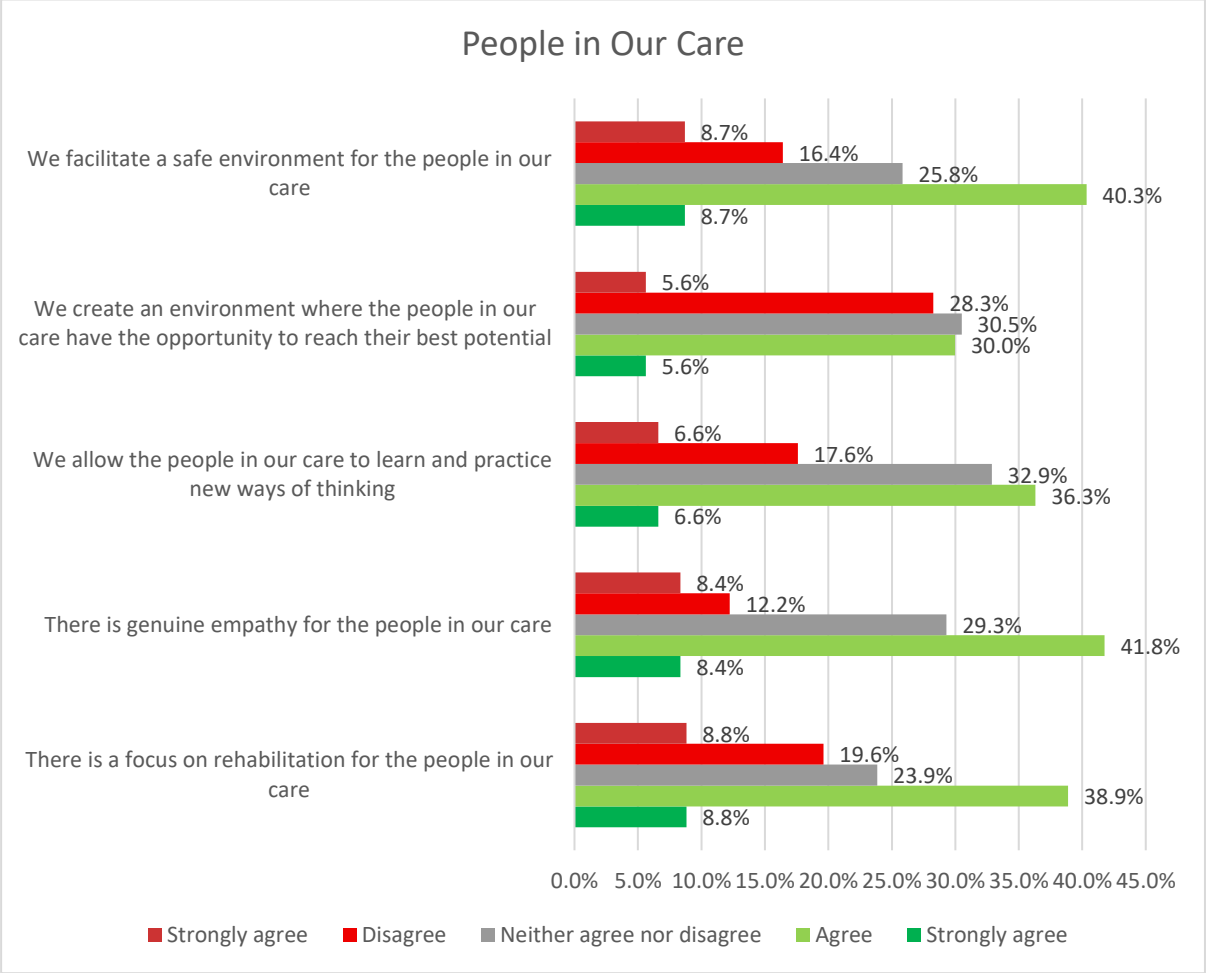

My Job
I am satisfied with my job
7.6%
17.0%
24.5%
38.3%
12.6%
I am involved in decisions that affect my work
18.2%
25.5%
19.9%
27.7%
8.7%
I feel valued in my organisation
22.4%
25.9%
19.8%
24.2%
7.8%
I feel motivated at work
7.9%
16.4%
18.8%
40.3%
16.6%
I have good relationships with my peers
1.8%
4.0%
8.5%
54.2%
31.5%
0.0%
10.0%
20.0%
30.0%
40.0%
50.0%
60.0%
Strongly disagree
Disagree
Neither agree nor disagree
Agree
Strongly agree

My Organisation

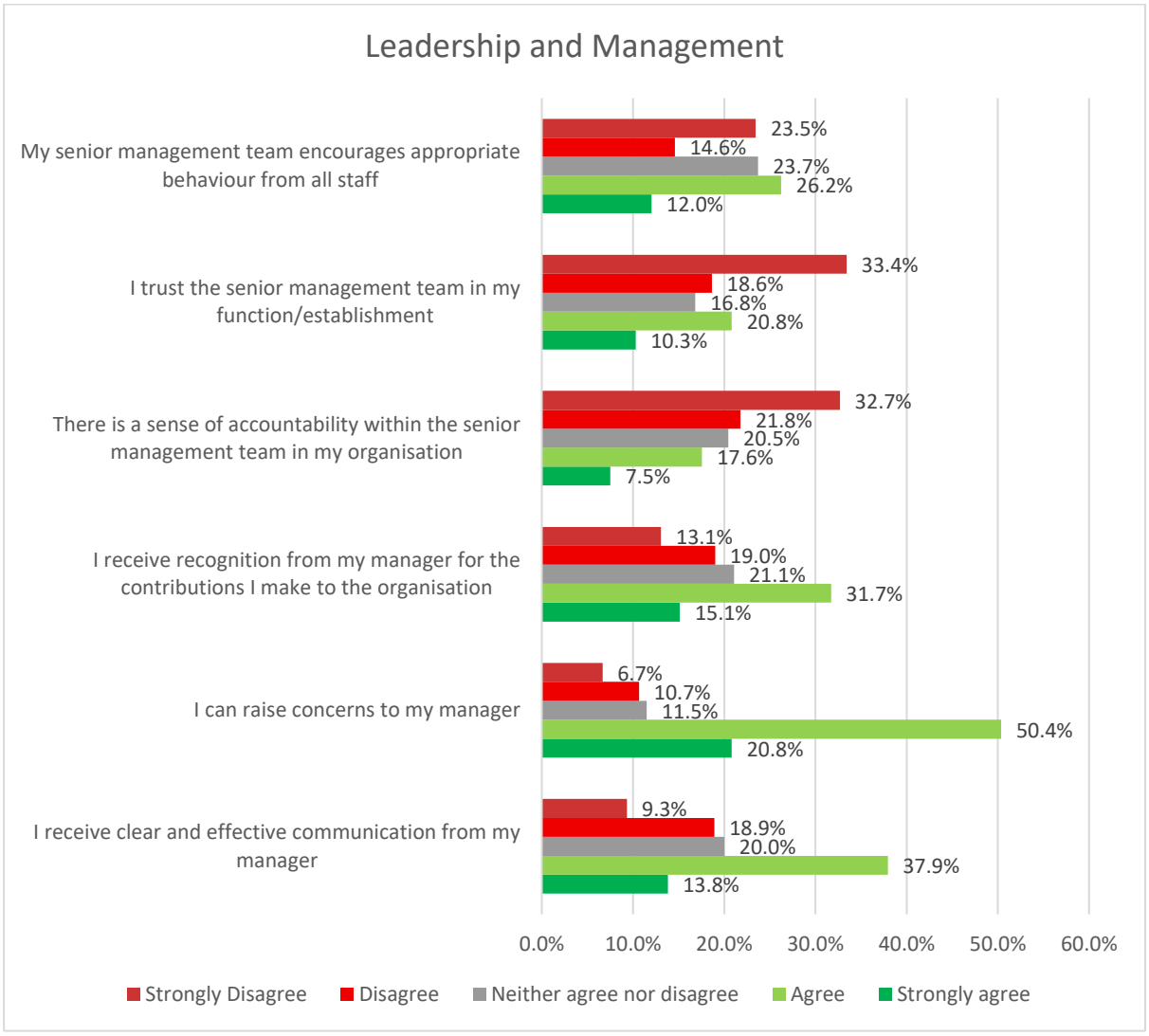



My Organisation (Cont.)
I am aware of the SPS organisational values
1.9%
3.5%
8.9%
59.3%
26.4%
Everyone has a voice in my organisation
26.5%
34.5%
20.8%
15.5%
2.7%
Each person in my organisation is accountable for their actions and behaviours
27.4%
29.4%
16.5%
20.9%
5.8%
I work in an innovative organisation
19.2%
31.6%
28.9%
17.8%
2.4%
There is good team morale within my function/establishment
18.5%
22.6%
19.2%
29.2%
10.4%
0.0% 10.0% 20.0% 30.0% 40.0% 50.0% 60.0% 70.0%
Strongly disagree
Disagree
Neither agree nor disagree
Agree
Strongly agree

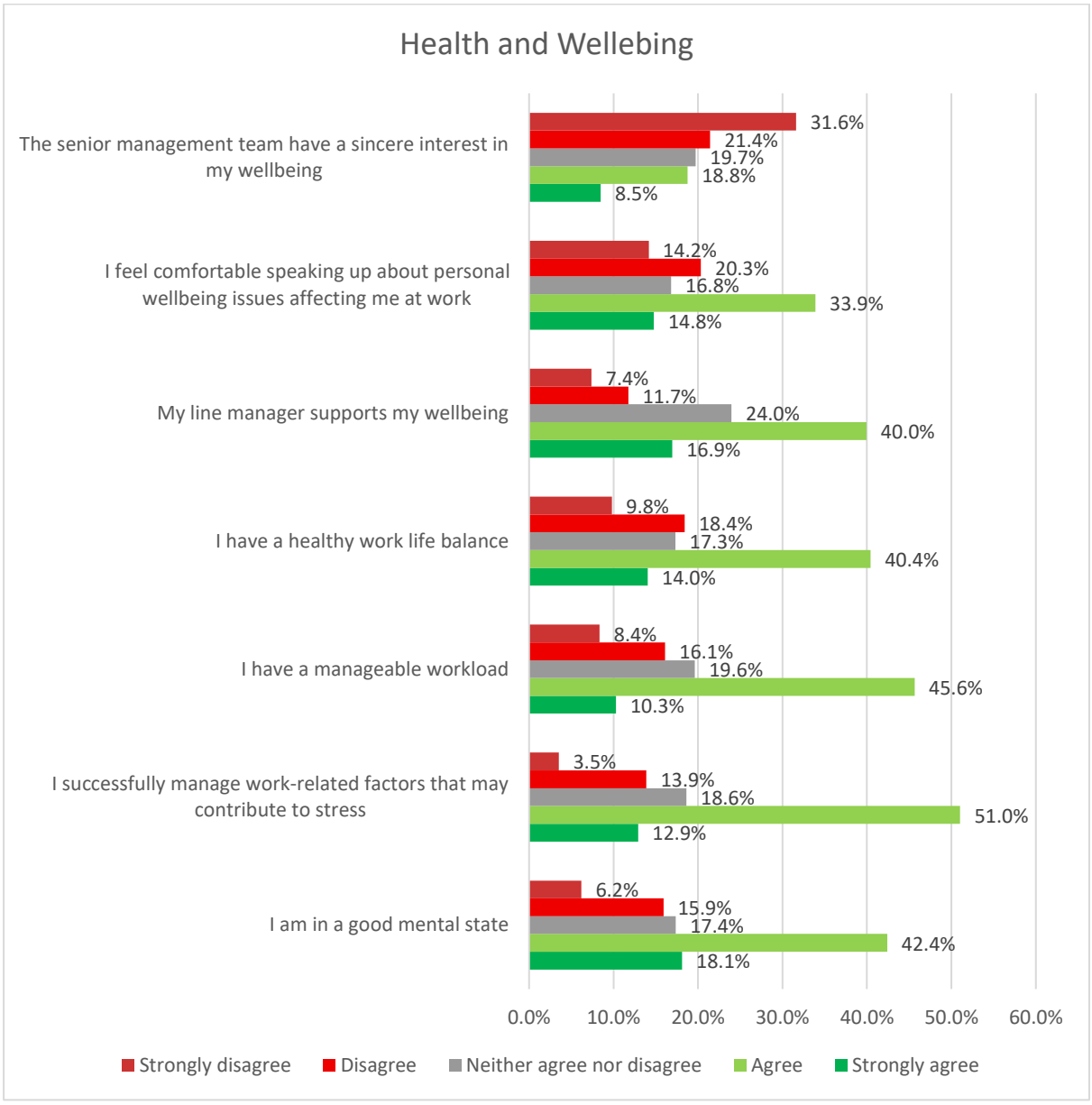
People in Our Care



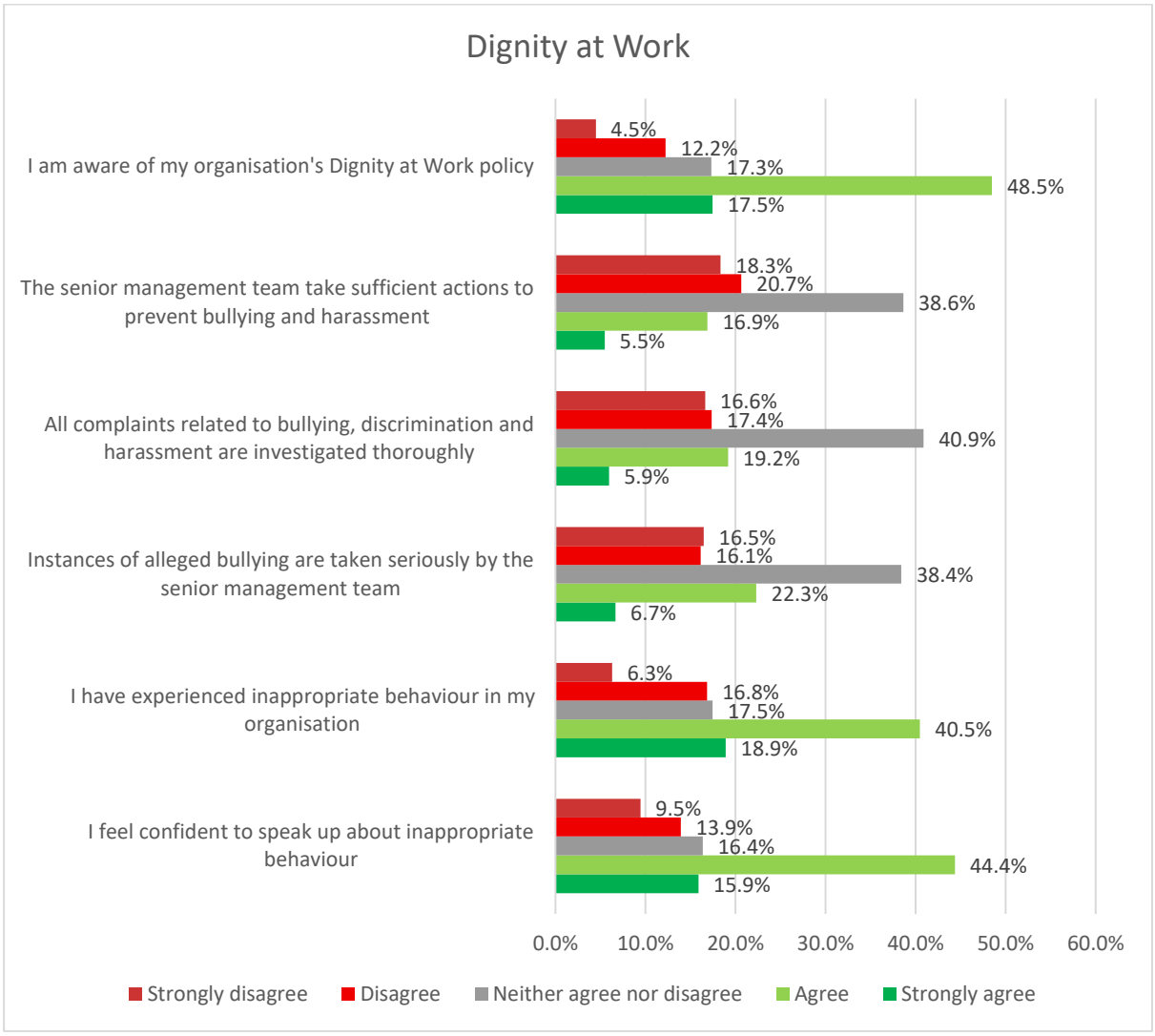
Leadership and Management



Health and Wellbeing



Dignity at Work



Training and Development

