# Getting ready for your PCO assessment

HMP Bronzefield | Your guide to the assessment centre

Thank you for your interest in becoming a Prison Custody Officer (PCO) at HMP Bronzefield. This guide will help you prepare for the four assessment activities. You do not need prison experience or rehearsed answers; we want to understand your approach, potential and motivation.

## Before you attend: get to know the role

Re-read the advert and explore the official HMP Bronzefield and Sodexo Justice websites. Bronzefield is a women's prison in Ashford, supporting adult women and young adults on remand and serving sentences. Think about how officers balance safety and professional boundaries with dignity, respect and support for rehabilitation.

You may support women experiencing trauma, mental health difficulties and complex circumstances. Consider how you would stay calm, listen without judgement and work with colleagues. No previous experience is needed: successful applicants receive a nine-week training programme delivered locally.

## Written English and maths assessments

These assess the communication and numerical skills needed for the role. Practise reading information carefully, writing clear and accurate responses, and working through everyday calculations. Follow the instructions, check your answers and use the time available sensibly.

## Group activity

This is an opportunity to show how you communicate and work with others. Contribute your ideas, listen to different views and help the group work towards its task. Make space for others to speak, stay respectful if you disagree and focus on a shared outcome.

## Scenario-based activity

You will have the opportunity to demonstrate your judgement and approach to a realistic prison-based situation. Focus on the information provided; you are not expected to know prison procedures before training.

- **Listen and understand.** Pay attention, ask appropriate questions and avoid assumptions.
- **Stay calm and respectful.** Show empathy, communicate clearly and avoid confrontation.
- **Be fair and professional.** Maintain boundaries and avoid promises you cannot keep.
- **Think about safety.** Consider risks and recognise when you would need support from colleagues.

**How to prepare:** think through how you would respond to someone who is upset or reluctant to cooperate. Practise explaining a calm, fair next step rather than learning a script.

## Competency-based interview

Prepare real examples showing communication, teamwork, resilience, integrity and sound judgement. These can come from work, military service, education, volunteering or everyday life.

Use **STAR** to structure your answers: **Situation** - what was happening; **Task** - your responsibility; **Action** - what you personally did; **Result** - the outcome and what you learned.

- When have you stayed calm under pressure or handled a difficult conversation?
- When have you supported a team, maintained a boundary or made a fair decision?
- Why do you want to be a PCO at Bronzefield, and what have you learned about the role?

## Your final check

Follow your invitation for the location, arrival time, required documents and any restrictions on personal belongings. Plan your journey and come ready to ask questions about the role and training. Let the recruitment team know in advance if you need reasonable adjustments.

**Be yourself, take time to think and show us how you would bring calm, fairness and professionalism to the role.**