

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **INQUEST OPENS INTO DEATH OF 19 YEAR OLD WOMAN IN PRISON**

10.00am Monday 14 January 2008

Sitting before HM Coroner for West Yorkshire (Eastern District), David Hinchliff  
Wakefield Coroner's Court, 71 Northgate, Wakefield WF1 3BS

The inquest into the death of 19 year old Petra Blanksby opens on 14 January 2008 and is expected to last for two weeks. Petra died on 24 November 2003, following an incident at HMP New Hall on 19 November when she was found in her cell having tied a ligature around her neck.

At the time of her death Petra was on remand having been charged with the offence of arson with intent to endanger life. The offence with which Petra was charged took place at her own home and it is believed that the fire was an act of self-harm and the only life endangered was her own.

Petra had an alarmingly long history of serious attempts at self-harm and had been under the care of the mental health services for many years. She had previously been diagnosed with a personality disorder. Throughout her time in HMP New Hall, Petra was subject to an open F2052SH (identified as being at risk of suicide and self harm). During the 130 days Petra spent in HMP New Hall she was involved in at least 90 incidents of serious self harm, some resulting in hospital admission.

Petra, like many of the women at New Hall, had a long history of self harm and mental health difficulties. In her introductory remark to her 2003 inspection report on New Hall prison, Chief Inspector of Prisons Anne Owers said "New Hall is holding women and girls who should not be there" and "there is an urgent need to provide alternative therapeutic environments where appropriate treatment and support can be offered".

Deborah Coles, Co-director of INQUEST, said

*"This inquest must explore the key question as to why a woman with such severe mental health problems and at such risk of suicide was sent to prison in the first place. Delay in this inquest taking place has caused great distress to the family as well as frustrating the opportunity to learn lessons".*

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Peter Blanksby, Petra’s father, commented:

*“The delay has been really difficult. It’s disgusting that we have had to wait all this time. We need to know why my daughter was sent to prison when she had so many problems and why they couldn’t take care of her when she was there”.*

The family is being represented by INQUEST Lawyers Group members Jo Kearsley of Farleys Solicitors, Burnley and barrister Leslie Thomas of Garden Court Chambers.

Further Information	<a href="http://www.inquest.org.uk">www.inquest.org.uk</a>
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## Notes to Editors

INQUEST is the only non-governmental organisation in England and Wales that works directly with the families of those who die in custody. It provides an independent free legal and advice service to bereaved people on inquest procedures and their rights in the coroners courts.

### Self inflicted deaths at HMP New Hall 1994-date

Name	Date Of Death	Age	Status	Mode
Kelly Hutchinson	01/05/2006	22	Convicted	Hanging
Victoria Robinson	02/02/2005	26	Remanded	Hanging
Mandy Pearson	12/10/2004	27	Convicted	Hanging
Marie Walsh	29/07/2004	29	Convicted	Hanging
Louise Davies	18/04/2004	32	Convicted	Hanging
<b>Petra Blanksby</b>	<b>24/11/2003</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>Remanded</b>	<b>Hanging</b>
Jessica Adam	21/06/2003	22	Convicted	Hanging
Helena Price	14/02/2003	27	Convicted	Hanging
Jacqueline McPartline	18/08/2002	32	Convicted	Hanging
Miranda Cox	26/01/2002	41	Remanded	Hanging
Victoria Winterburn	04/01/2002	21	Remanded	Hanging
Sheena Creamer	07/08/2000	22	Remanded	Hanging
Teresa Lohinski	07/03/1999	22	Convicted	Hanging
Michelle Wilcox	30/05/1998	32	Convicted	Septicaemia
Michelle Pearson	05/07/1994	23	Convicted	Hanging

Source: INQUEST monitoring