

Sport and physical education across the secure estate: an exploration of policy and practice

Gwen Lewis and Rosie Meek consider levels of participation in different types of prisons



Despite widespread recognition of the importance of sport in diverting people from criminal behaviour in community settings (Nichols, 2007) the potential benefits of sport in prison settings have only recently become the focus of academic attention (see Lewis and Meek, 2012). In the UK, current policy stipulates a statutory requirement that all prisoners across the secure estate have the opportunity to participate in a minimum of one hour (or two hours on average for those under 21) of physical education per week. The Prison Service's Physical Education Instruction advocates sporting activities that also fulfil wider resettlement policy agendas, incorporating education, training and employment and attitudes, thinking and behaviour. In spite of such ambitious objectives and the routine delivery of physical education in prisons, there has been no exploration to date of whether participation is equitable across diverse offender populations, or the extent to which current practices are congruent with existing policy.

Identifying discrepancies in levels of sporting participation and practices in prison according to age, gender and security level represents an important first step in assessing current provision and constructing principles of best practice.

Method

To assess variation in sporting participation levels across types of secure establishments, we obtained average monthly prisoner participation level (PPL) data for the year 2010-2011 for 107 English and Welsh public sector prisons from the Ministry of Justice through a Freedom of Information request. Prisoner participation levels represent the total number of individual prisoners within an establishment who participated in physical activities during a set time frame (figures are typically collated monthly), expressed as a percentage of the total prison population for that prison, thus providing a useful measure to compare engagement in physical activity across establishments. The 107 establishments considered were categorised into nine groups according to type of prison, as specified by the Ministry of Justice website and their most recent inspectorate report. The categories and frequencies of each type of establishment considered are illustrated in the table.

In order to assess differences in the delivery of physical education (PE) and sport in relation to resettlement policy, data from the

most recent reports (published between 2006 and 2012) and made public by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons for 105 establishments were analysed for content (inspectorate reports for two prisons were not utilised as, due to re-roles, they related to different populations compared to those held during the period 2010-2011). In cases where the most recent inspection was a short follow up, the previous inspectorate report was also considered, with a total of 144 inspectorate reports analysed for the purposes of this study.

Participation

Our analysis shows that PPL in physical education for the year 2010-2011 differed significantly according to type of prison ($F(8, 98) = 8.39$, $p < .001$), with substantial variation between establishments within the same category.

As expected, given that PE is scheduled as part of the core

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curriculum within juvenile facilities, average participation levels were highest within the juvenile estate, with a significant statistical difference from all

other types of prisons, other than Immigration Removal Centres. Average PPL within the young adult estate varied greatly across establishments, ranging from 50 per cent to 83 per cent, but on average were among the highest after the juvenile establishments. However, considering that sports participation is typically higher among younger populations in the community (Department of Culture Media and Sport, 2011), it is somewhat surprising that participation levels in young offender institutions (YOI) are not consistently higher.

Number of prisons considered according to establishment type and average/range of Prisoner Participation Levels (PPL) in physical activity				
Type of Establishment	Number of prisons considered	Average Monthly PPL (%)	Minimum PPL (%)	Maximum
Juvenile	5	90	63	100
Young Offender Institution	10	67	50	83
Split YOI and Adult	3	55	50	63
Category B and C	37	60	44	82
Category D Open prisons	9	63	52	76
Local Prisons	25	50	28	68
High Security	9	60	45	86
Female Estate	7	48	29	89
Immigration Removal Centre	2	72	71	74
Total	<i>n</i> = 107	56%		

Note: Establishments where reception criteria incorporated two or more categories were placed according to their principal population

In terms of the male adult population, average PPL within local prisons were significantly lower than those within the category B/C estate. The transient nature of local prison populations and high proportions of remand prisoners whose sentence length is yet uncertain may present a particular challenge for PE departments in trying to motivate prisoners to engage and sustain participation. Furthermore, the diverse range of prisoners held within local prisons makes it difficult to ensure PE provision meets all prisoner needs and thus maximise participation. Despite large variations in PPL within the high security estate, average participation levels did not differ significantly from the rest of the adult male estate, thus suggesting that although elevated security concerns might restrict participation levels, physical activity remains an important aspect of the regime of high security establishments.

Average PPL in immigration removal centres was consistently high, but did not differ significantly from any other types of prison. Despite language barriers presenting a unique challenge for delivering PE within such establishments, it is anticipated that the less constrained regimes allow detainees to utilise facilities without restriction, thus

facilitating higher levels of participation.

The female estate had the lowest PPL of all prison types (although the difference was only statistically significant when compared with Juvenile and YOI establishments) and was characterised by the greatest variation across establishments (PPL range: 29-89 per cent). Lower levels of participation within the female estate may reflect the well documented lower levels of sports participation among females more generally (Department of Culture Media and Sport, 2011). However, inspectorate reports also indicate that establishments holding female prisoners are much less likely to have outdoor sporting facilities, suggesting that participation may also be limited by provision.

Aligning sport with resettlement priorities

In practice, analysis of HM Inspectorate of Prisons' reports indicates that integrating education

through accredited sports courses is well embedded in PE provision across the secure estate, in spite of accredited qualifications no longer being a mandatory requirement of the Prison Services PE specification. Inspectorate reports for the majority of prisons identify the availability of accredited courses, but also reveal less availability of accredited courses within high security (75 per cent) and local (88 per cent) prisons. This may be partially explained

by the elevated security and risk concerns within high security establishments and the difficulty of delivering accredited courses which take time to complete to transient remand populations.

Despite the wide availability of accredited sports courses,

opportunities to translate skills into tangible employment opportunities after release, which can play a significant role in reducing reoffending (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002) remain scarce. Analysis of inspectorate reports identified clear links from PE departments to

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employment in the community among 40 per cent of juvenile and 30 per cent of YOI establishments, but such links within other types of establishments were either non-existent or unusual. Furthermore, only 4 per cent of inspectorate reports considered across all establishments utilised sports-related Release on Temporary Licence opportunities, and those that did predominantly held younger offenders or females.

Although links to employment are clearly limited, inspectorate material indicates that community partnerships can be drawn upon to facilitate games with external teams and to a lesser extent, to deliver sporting activities or courses in some establishments

– predominantly those with young offenders and adult males (excluding high security establishments for evident security reasons), with a relative absence of such practice within the female estate. Links with community organisations have consistently been identified as an element of best practice within community-based sports interventions targeting offenders (Nichols, 2007), thus making the case for the development of such practice, where possible, across the estate.

Increasingly, policy has promoted opportunities for reducing offending and facilitating the resettlement of offenders through sports-based programmes addressing offending behaviours and attitudes, both in the community and custody. However,

practice examples that explicitly integrate offender behaviour programmes with PE provision remain limited. Analysis of inspectorate reports identified only six category B/C, three YOI and one open prison, delivering such initiatives. Although evidence of the potential benefits of such programmes and principles of best practice are beginning to accumulate in the context of young offender populations (see Meek, 2012; Meek and Lewis, in press), further effort is required to establish the extent to

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which sports-based resettlement initiatives can be promoted among other populations such as adults, females and vulnerable prisoners.

In conclusion, participation in physical activity within prison varies dramatically according to age and gender, mirroring trends found in the general population. Despite levels of participation varying according to security level and an establishment's remit, these differences are less stark than one would anticipate, suggesting relative equity of access when comparing establishment type. However, variation between prisons of the same type remains substantial, suggesting that access to physical education can be dependent on the operational priorities of different establishments. Corresponding with variable levels of participation, practical delivery of sport across the secure estate is especially divergent, and alignment with wider policy agendas is variable, although this is to be expected considering the needs

and security issues associated with different prisoner populations. Inspectorate reports suggest that although education is well embedded, the holistic integration of resettlement objectives into PE provision is not widespread and there is evidently a need for greater dissemination of such examples of good practice across the estate. ■

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