

Press release: Sport a pillar of youth rehabilitation: Minister publishes independent review

- leading academic highlights the power of sport in transforming lives of young offenders
- community partnerships to support the development of sport and physical activity in custody
- offenders engaging in structured programmes learn self-discipline, team work and leadership and communication skills – all crucial for a successful life on the outside

The review, authored by Professor Rosie Meek, was commissioned to identify best practice across the estate and highlights the vital role that sport can play in rehabilitation and reducing reoffending.

In addition to Professor Meek's review, the Ministry of Justice has also published its response which highlights the steps that will be taken to boost sporting provision in prison.

Many of the sporting programmes currently delivered across the youth estate help offenders to get vocational qualifications and provide them with tangible employment prospects on release.

There are already some positive examples of community projects working with young people:

- at Wetherby YOI, Leeds Rhinos are providing training sessions, offering life coaching and mentors to support vulnerable young people
- Manchester United, Everton and Fulham Football Clubs also support education programmes working with young people at risk of offending in the community
- Saracens offer coaching qualifications at Feltham YOI

The review highlights how engaging in structured programmes can help to teach offenders self-discipline, team work and leadership – crucial skills for a successful and crime-free life in the community.

Team sport was shown to improve mental and physical health, helping young people with often complex behavioural issues to change their attitudes and lifestyles.

Justice Minister Edward Argar said:

I'm grateful to Professor Rosie Meek for her important work on this review, and to my predecessor for commissioning it.

This review rightly highlights that sport can help to reduce

violence, improve wellbeing and have a positive impact on rehabilitation. I want sport and physical activity to be a key part of life custody and I welcome the findings of this review.

During my visits across the youth estate, I have been inspired by the passion and dedication of staff, and of the external organisations we partner with, already delivering sports programmes and helping to change the lives of young people.

We know that sport on its own does not provide all the answers, but it is a central pillar for helping young offenders to build skills which will ultimately reducing reoffending and help them to turn their backs on crime for good.

Professor Rosie Meek, Royal Holloway University of London, said:

I am delighted to have carried out this review and am pleased to have the backing of the Ministry of Justice for this important work.

I strongly believe that sport can be a powerful tool in reducing reoffending and improving the lives of people in custody, which is why I was so pleased be asked to carry out this review.

There is already evidence that sport can have a positive impact on people in custody and I hope that the recommendations outlined in the review will help to improve the lives of people in our justice system.

The [sports review](#) was carried out by leading academic Professor Meek, in partnership with the National Alliance of Sport and Clinks, who support voluntary organisations that work with offenders and their families.

Note to editors

Professor Rosie Meek is a chartered psychologist, founding Head of the Law School and Director of the Prisons Research Group at Royal Holloway University of London, UK. She is a Fulbright Distinguished Scholar and was author of the 2014 book *Sport in Prison: Exploring the Role of Physical Activity in Correctional Settings* (Routledge).