

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: Royal Holloway, University of London		
Unit of Assessment: 20 Social Work and Social Policy		
Title of case study: Sport and physical activity in prisons: improving policy and practice		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2013-2018		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Rosie Meek	Professor	2013-date
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2013-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Meek's research on sport and physical activity in prisons resulted in policy change and improvements for the 80,000 adults and children held in English and Welsh prisons. Her research led to a new cross-government Sports Forum, an audit of every youth prison and the development of a physical activity strategy for women and girls in custody. Meek's research facilitated sporting bodies to work in prisons and empowered prison staff to improve physical activity provision. She has given evidence to major government inquiries, prompted the UN resolution on the use of sport to reduce youth crime, and instigated transnational prison sport initiatives. The research has stimulated widespread coverage in national and sports media.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>With a prison population of 80,000, England and Wales have one of the highest rates of incarceration in Western Europe. However, over half of adults and over 70% of children released from prison will reoffend within a year and the total annual estimated economic and social cost of reoffending is GBP18,100,000,000. Working with people in prison and tackling reoffending is one of the biggest challenges our society faces. Professor Rosie Meek's research demonstrates that sport and physical activity have a unique and important – yet often overlooked - role to play in responding to this challenge.</p> <p>Research led by Meek has explored the rehabilitative potential of sport and physical activity as a crime prevention technique, demonstrating that sport can offer an alternative means of excitement and risk-taking to that gained through engaging in offending behaviour. It can provide access to pro-social networks, positive role models, and offer the opportunity to gain new experiences and achievements. Sport and physical activity can be a positive, cost-effective and healthy leisure activity representing an alternative to offending which not only has intrinsic value but also provides a relatively easy way to establish a more positive self-identity and support desistance from crime (R2, R6). Meek's research showed that women and girls in prison are significantly less likely to participate in sport and physical activity than their male counterparts, demonstrating a monthly average participation in physical activity of only 48% of women in prison, with some women's prisons recording participation as low as 29% in a month (R3, R4). It also confirmed that despite an expectation that those held in custodial settings should have the opportunity to be physically active, most prison establishments fail to meet minimum standards in this domain and sedentary behaviour in prisons has consequently been identified as a high-risk health behaviour (R1, R3).</p> <p>Access to and uptake of physical activity and sports based interventions have been shown to improve health and wellbeing, support prisoners' attitude change and the development of life skills and foster relationships that inspire and motivate adults and children, including those with complex offending histories and challenging and disruptive behaviour (R5, R6).</p>		

Since 2013, research into physical activity and prisoner behaviour has identified the following key findings:

- Health promotion and wellbeing of prisoners with a particular focus on the types of activity which have the greatest impact (team-based) and in what capacity/context (adopting a collaborative approach based on choice and diversity of offering);
- The sport and fitness sector being a route into further education and employment for young people and adults in the Criminal Justice System (for example as personal trainers, coaches and mentors);
- The manner in which sport and physical activity can be used as a violence reduction strategy in prisons and a way of improving relationships between staff and prisoners and between different groups of prisoners. For example, Meek demonstrated an 83% reduction in incidents of violence among detainees at HMP High Down who took part in their community-led table tennis programme;
- An increase in the number of transferable skills, including communication, goal setting, fostering enhanced interpersonal relationships, prosocial behaviour and the regulation of emotions;
- Changes in staffing structures, resource allocation and partnership arrangements between prisons, community groups and sporting bodies to bring about reforms and best support efforts to reduce reoffending.

Collectively, this work has led to the increased adoption of sports-based interventions and evaluations in prison settings, enhanced prison staffing and targeted governance to support effective sport and physical activity in prisons. This includes better sports and Physical Education resources in prisons, a heightened awareness of the importance of access to physical activity in prisons, and a greater commitment to the development of prison-community partnerships that draw on sports initiatives in efforts to reduce reoffending.

3. References to the research

R1. Lewis, G & Meek, R. (2013). The benefits of sport and physical education for young men in prison: an exploration of policy and practice in England and Wales. *Prison Service Journal*, 209, 3-11 <https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/sites/crimeandjustice.org.uk/files/PSJ%20209%20September%202013.pdf> (QI: double peer reviewed, leading publication that targets academics and practitioners)

R2. Parker, A., Meek, R. & Lewis, G. (2014) Sport in a youth prison: male young offenders' experiences of a sporting intervention, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 17, 3, 381-396 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2013.830699> (QI: double peer reviewed, leading interdisciplinary journal of youth studies)

R3. Meek, R. (2014). *Sport in Prison: Exploring the Role of Physical Activity in Correctional Settings*. Abingdon: Routledge (QI: the first and currently the only academic text dedicated to the topic of sport in prisons, based on extensive primary research with prisoners and staff). Available from HEI on Request.

R4. Meek, R. & Lewis, G. (2014). Promoting well-being and desistance through sport and physical activity: the opportunities and barriers experienced by women in prison. *Women and Criminal Justice*, 24, 2, 151-172 <https://doi.org/10.1080/08974454.2013.842516> (QI: double peer reviewed, leading international journal)

R5. Meek, R. (2018). *A Sporting Chance: An Independent Review of Sport in Youth and Adult Prisons*. London: Ministry of Justice https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/733184/a-sporting-chance-an-independent-review-sport-in-justice.pdf (QI: commissioned by the Ministry of Justice, based on research throughout England and Wales, published alongside a government response)

R6. Morgan, H., Parker, A., Meek, R. & Cryer, J. (2019). Participation in sport as a mechanism to transform the lives of young people within the criminal justice system: an academic exploration of a theory of change. *Sport, Education and Society*, 1-14 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2019.1674274> (QI: double peer reviewed, leading journal)

4. Details of the impact

Drawing on her extensive academic research, Meek's independent review 'A Sporting Chance' was undertaken on behalf of the Ministry of Justice in 2018, in order to improve sports and Physical Education (PE) provision in prisons, young offender institutions, secure training centres and secure children's homes throughout England and Wales. Good practice examples were identified and the findings informed a dozen recommendations, 11 of which were accepted by government and have subsequently shaped national policy and practice (E1). The key areas of impact resulting from this body of work are as follows:

Enhancing prison governance and staffing to support the effective use of sport and physical activity in prison.

Meek's research has directly influenced the work of the Ministry of Justice and HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), and shaped daily practice in all 122 prisons across England and Wales. There is now a greater recognition and understanding of the role of sport by prison managers and staff, and the profile of sport and physical activity in prisons has been elevated across the prison staffing structure. Job descriptions for prison PE staff have been adapted to reflect Meek's recommendation that staff engage more closely with community organisations in supporting prisoners to prepare for release.

Meek's work is cited in two key HMPPS operational documents, the 2019 *Strategic Review of Physical Education in Prisons* and the 2018 *Model for Operational Delivery: Young Adults (18-25)*. Alongside leading the 2018 independent review on behalf of the Ministry of Justice, Meek's research featured in the Digital, Culture, Media & Sport Committee inquiry, their 2019 report (E1), and in a further ten citations in Hansard parliamentary debates since December 2017 (E1).

[text removed for publication], at HMPPS confirmed in November 2020 that "[text removed for publication]". Specifically, the resulting governance included a joint action plan between HMPPS and the Youth Custody Service, with the creation of local action plans to address the Review's recommendations: "[text removed for publication]" (E2). In addition, the governance recommended the creation of the *Sports Forum*: a strategic, cross-government approach, bringing together Sport England, the NHS, the Home Office and Department for Digital, Culture Media and Sport: "[text removed for publication]" (E2).

Improving outcomes for children and preventing youth crime

Meek's research has been instrumental in improving health and educational outcomes for the 650 children in custody in England and Wales, through improving access to and better integrating sport and physical activity in youth custody settings. Her 11 adopted research recommendations have been integrated into the way that the Youth Custody Service awards tenders for externally contracted work. Overseeing these reforms, Rob Lawman, Senior Policy Advisor in the Youth Justice Policy Team confirms: "*Rosie's piece of work raising the profile of this agenda of youth custody shouldn't be underestimated*" (E3).

This development has been driven by a commitment from prison leaders to adopt Meek's recommendation that physical activity and sports-based interventions are more effectively used to support the most vulnerable and excluded children in our youth justice system: "[text removed for publication]" (E2). On improving outcomes for children in prison, Novus, the educational provider for 570 children held in youth custody establishments within England, confirm that Meek's research has led to the development of a new specialist post within the staffing team, who has full time responsibility for Sport and Enrichment Coordination (E6).

This work has also improved access to physical activity for young people at risk of engaging in crime. Meek was the sole academic representative to lobby for better access to sports facilities for socially excluded youth, which was subsequently incorporated into the Conservative manifesto for the 2019 General Election. Huw Edwards, CEO of UK Active testifies that: *“Rosie’s influence on the framing and engagement of that agenda has been huge... Rosie’s influence on opening up schools and public facilities to lower-income families and at-risk young people has also led to practical interventions on the preventative side of criminal justice (E7).* Specifically focusing on improving access and outcomes for the BAME children who now represent more than half of all children in youth justice settings, Meek’s work has resulted in the funding and delivery of new initiatives that seek to tackle disproportionality in justice settings: *“Recommendation 8 ...led to our launching the £1.7m Levelling the Playing Field project in January 2020 alongside the Youth Justice Board” (E4).*

Meek’s research has also been instrumental in developing international use of sport for youth crime prevention. Her work with the UN Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC) led to the 2019 adoption of General Assembly resolution 74/170 entitled *“Integrating sport into youth crime prevention and criminal justice strategies”*. The UNODC have confirmed that: *“[text removed for publication]” (E5).*

Increasing physical activity and improving conditions for women and girls.

Meek’s research highlighting the low rates of physical activity for women and girls and the gendered barriers to engaging in physical activity in prison has led to improved conditions for women and girls in England and Wales, including the construction of a dedicated strategy, the procurement of women’s PE clothing and targeted interventions and programmes: *“[text removed for publication]” (E2).*

Focusing specifically on the small number of girls in custody, Novus has provided a clear link between Meek’s research calling for a trauma-informed approach to working with girls and engaging more effectively with this under-served and vulnerable group: *“With boys making up the majority of learners at Rainsbrook [Secure Training Centre], girls had previously been left behind and put off sport for a variety of reasons. Now, we have sought the girls’ feedback about what they want and have initiated specific girls’ gym sessions, as well as dance and netball” (E6).*

Establishing relationships between prisons and community groups.

As well as facilitating prison staff to engage in more community partnership working, Meek has addressed the All Party Parliamentary Group for Sport and used her research findings to support a broad range of voluntary, community and sporting organisations (including UK Coaching, England Boxing, Table Tennis England, parkrun, UK Active, the Change Foundation, and the Youth Sport Trust) on the use of sport and physical education in prisons and in reducing crime. Her research findings have been instrumental in establishing relationships between prisons and external providers, leading to the delivery of new initiatives that support people in prison and after release from custody: *“Rosie’s recommendations in this area have given us personally the opportunity to open up those conversations and we’ve found prison staff more receptive as a result” (E6).* Meek’s research has been instrumental in enabling sporting organisations and bodies to deliver programmes in Criminal Justice settings for the first time, as demonstrated by the CEO of UK Active, representing their 4,000 members: *“We now have partnerships and projects in place, and many ongoing conversations taking place investigating those two key areas from Rosie’s Review that are relevant in our area - raising physical activity levels and developing employment opportunities post-release. That narrative wasn’t on the radar of my membership prior to our engagement with Rosie” (E7).*

In turn, her work has also led to prison education providers engaging directly with sporting bodies: *“We are now empowered to approach local organisations and national governing bodies as the examples cited in Rosie’s report provide all the evidence we need to prove the potential benefits of them getting involved... these fruitful partnerships are what will leave a massive ‘Rosie footprint’ all over the prison estate. It will be her legacy” (E6).*

In providing the theoretical framework and evidence base for organisations to deliver in criminal justice settings, the research has led to sustained impact in the sports for development sector. Brighton Table Tennis Club and Richmond RFU have enacted programmes using Meek's research as a 'way in' to prison settings. The Head of Community Rugby at Richmond Rugby states "... we thank Rosie for providing the evidence base which laid the platform for our holistic programme to flourish" (Head of Community Rugby, Richmond Rugby) (E10).

As well as empowering organisations around the world to develop an evidence-based approach to using sport as a crime reduction technique, Meek was also a key figure in the establishment of the Alliance of Sport in Criminal Justice, a charitable organisation with a global membership of over 400, "It's fair to say that the Sporting Chance Review has positively impacted on the work of all these members. It's changing the game for sport in criminal justice in so many ways" (E4). With further global reach, Meek's work has been critical in the development of parkrun in custodial settings, an initiative promoting health and wellbeing, as confirmed by World Champion Triathlete Chrissie Wellington, Head of Health and Wellbeing at parkrun: "We drew heavily on her research to inform the development of this initiative, and its evaluation... To date, parkrun events have been set up on over 30 custodial sites in the UK, Ireland and Australia, with the demand for more to be activated. As of December 2019 - two years on from the first ever prison parkrun at HMP Haverigg in Cumbria - over 4,000 parkrunners had clocked up over 23,000 walks, jogs and runs within prison walls" (E8).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

E1 Collated notable articles and mentions of Professor Rosie Meek's research into sport and physical activity (2017 – 2019)

E2 Testimonial letter from [text removed for publication] Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, 2020

E3 An interview with Rob Lawman, Senior Policy Advisor, Youth Justice Policy Team & Patrick Taylor, Senior Policy Advisor, Youth Custody Policy at the Ministry of Justice, 2019

E4 Testimonial letter from James Mapstone, Co-Founder and Chief Executive & Justin Coleman, Co-Founder and Chief Operations Officer, The Alliance of Sport in Criminal Justice, 2020

E5 Testimonial letter from [text removed for publication] for the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2020

E6 Testimonial letter from Sally Garratt, Operations Director & James Thomas, Sport and Enrichment Co-ordinator at Novus education, 2020

E7 Testimonial letter from Huw Edwards, Chief Executive Officer of UK Active, 2020

E8 Testimonial letter from Chrissie Wellington OBE, Global Head of Health and Wellbeing at Parkrun & Glen Turner, Health and Wellbeing Lead, parkrun Australia & NZ, 2020

E9 Testimonial letter from Tim Holton, Founding Director of the Brighton Table Tennis Club, 2020

E10 Testimonial letter from Dominic Palacio, Head of Community Rugby and Club Safeguarding Officer at Richmond Rugby Football Club, 2020