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# Fit for Release

How sports-based learning can help prisoners engage in education, gain employment and desist from crime



August 2012

Professor Rosie Meek, University of Teesside  
Nina Champion and Seb Klier, Prisoners Education Trust





## Prisoners Education Trust

**Our vision is that every prisoner has the opportunity to benefit from education.**

### Our beliefs

- Education has the power to enrich, change and develop people throughout their lives.
- Offering prisoners access to education improves their self-esteem and enables them to choose a more constructive way of life – making it less likely that they will re-offend.

### Our purpose

- We support prisoners to engage in rehabilitation through learning. We do this by providing access to a broad range of distance learning opportunities and related services, to enable prisoners to lead more fulfilling lives and to contribute positively to society.
- We focus on those whose needs are not served by statutory prison education and who want to progress.
- We work to influence policy and practice so that education provision for prisoners becomes more effective; and we enable prisoner learner voice to be heard.



Rosie Meek is a Chartered Psychologist and Professor of Criminological Psychology in the School of Social Sciences and Law at Teesside University. She carries out qualitative and quantitative research in applied psychology and programme evaluation in criminal justice, with a particular focus on prison regimes, resettlement and desistance. Rosie is a Fulbright Distinguished Scholar and is currently working on a book on the role of sport in prisons.



HMP/YOI Portland  
Rugby Academy



# Introduction

## The annual cost of reoffending is the same as the cost of hosting the 2012 Olympics<sup>i</sup>

As we celebrate the Olympics coming to London, our report 'Fit for Release' examines how sports-based learning in prison can be used to address offending behaviour and help reduce reoffending.

Sport is increasingly being recognised as a positive diversion, intervention and rehabilitation tool for use with prisoners, and current policy has developed to advocate the use of sport and physical activity as a vehicle to achieve non-sport policy objectives.<sup>ii</sup> Several theories have been proposed to describe how sport may contribute to crime reduction, for instance as an alternative means of excitement, competition and risk taking, in conferring primary health benefits and in contributing to desistance<sup>iii</sup> by providing an alternative social network, access to positive role models, improving employability, making reparation and developing a pro-social identity.

In this report we draw together a compelling body of evidence from prisoner learners and other stakeholders which demonstrates the value of sport as a rehabilitative tool in prison settings, specifically in relation to educational and employment opportunities. We recognise that while sport alone will not necessarily prevent reoffending, it offers an effective and powerful way in which to embed numeracy and literacy, promote higher level learning and motivate prisoners who may be difficult to engage in other resettlement, educational or psychological interventions.

We reveal the strong motivations for prisoners to engage in sports and fitness studies, typically against a backdrop of especially disrupted and negative educational experiences. We also highlight an enthusiasm for, and commitment to, employment in the sports and leisure industry by prisoners with a history of worklessness and lack of career aspirations.

Such motivation requires support and guidance in order to be nurtured into life-transforming opportunities and we argue that policy makers, prison staff, educational providers and sporting bodies all hold a responsibility for making such aspirations possible. This report investigates what qualifications and skills employers in the sports and fitness industry are looking for and their opinions about employing ex-offenders. We highlight how sports-based projects and support with distance learning in prisons can help prisoners achieve their education and employability goals.

As phase 4 of the Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) begins, we hope that this report raises awareness that sports-based learning can be utilised with custodial populations to address offending behaviour and ultimately reduce reoffending. We also hope that the case studies will inspire best practice to be shared across the prison estate and that the recommendations will be acted upon so that prisoners can be better supported in becoming 'fit for release'.

**Professor Rosie Meek, Social Futures Research Institute, Teesside University**  
**Nina Champion and Seb Klier, Learning Matters Project, Prisoners Education Trust**

Note: All footnotes are grouped in the Reference section, page 24

# Chapter one

## More than just a gym

### The power of sport

Sport has long been recognised as an effective incentive, or way of increasing motivation among those who might otherwise be reluctant to participate in other activities. Although most of the attention in this area focuses on the positive use of sport in a community context, a growing body of research has explored the role of sport in prison settings. This research shows that carefully planned and skilfully delivered sports-based activities can be an especially effective way to reduce violent incidences, improve relationships between staff and prisoners, identify resettlement needs, and ultimately create opportunities for individuals to desist from crime following their release from custody.<sup>i</sup>

### Engaging reluctant learners through sport

Sport can be a useful 'hook' activity with which to engage prisoners who are initially reluctant learners. The 'hook' can be a way to get individuals to engage in areas they enjoy, subsequently exposing them to learning in a comfortable environment. Apprehensions about attending education and training often stem from previous negative and disrupted educational experiences, which offenders are more likely to have experienced than non-offenders.<sup>ii</sup> Some prisoners will avoid going to the education department of a prison - which will typically contain traditional-style classrooms and predominantly use conventional teaching methods - due to the negative connotations these rooms and teaching styles have for them. In order to engage reluctant learners, embedding learning into other prison activities is a useful means of making it more relevant and less intimidating. Indeed, the specification for phase 4 of the Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS 4)<sup>iii</sup> actively promotes this:

*"Basic and functional skills in literacy, numeracy, language and ICT can be taught in many ways, including embedding them in vocational programmes and in arts, music, cookery and similar programmes."*

Although sport is not mentioned specifically, the following innovative example of embedded learning in the gym at HMP Wandsworth serves to demonstrate the potential for using sports and fitness as a hook to engage initially reluctant learners.

### Sports and desistance from crime

In the commissioning criteria discussion paper<sup>iv</sup> NOMS confirm the need for evidence-based practice relating to desistance literature. Desistance theorists have identified the importance for offenders of a 'hook for change', something that will engage them and enable them to develop a pro-social identity, as well as contribute to building positive social networks'. The example from HMP Wandsworth also highlights how sports and fitness activities can support such a process of desistance.

### Embedded learning in a prison gym

The gym at HMP Wandsworth is a typical gym but with a notable difference. While other prisoners pump weights and run on the treadmill, sitting on one of the benches away from the main activity is a teacher. Rather than teaching sports and fitness though, she is a literacy and numeracy skills tutor helping a prisoner called Mike (all prisoner and ex-prisoner names in this report have been changed). Mike explains how he avoided the prison education department 'like the plague' as he struggled at school due to dyslexia. He was, however, a keen boxer and so when he was sentenced to custody he spent a lot of time in the prison gym. It was here that he saw other prisoners sitting with the tutor doing work. He was intrigued and soon enough the tutor had persuaded him to start working through some learning tasks with her whenever he was in the gym.

All the literacy and numeracy examples and questions used by the tutor are related to sports, such as calculating football scores and reading and analysing extracts from biographies of sports personalities, making the subjects relevant and interesting. This, combined with the patience and persistence of the tutor and a more relaxed environment he was comfortable in, enabled this prisoner to succeed, boosting his self-esteem. Mike described how it was "nice that someone cared about me to make that sort of effort".

Having achieved his level 1 and level 2 basic skills qualifications, the prisoner is now enrolled on the 'Positive Pathways' project funded by the Football Foundation at HMP Wandsworth gym. On this course he will complete four qualifications: First aid at work, Focus gym instructor level 1, FA football coaching at level 1 and Royal Society for Public Health health training at level 2. He hopes the qualifications will enable him to make a living in the sports and fitness industry after his release from prison.

#### Sample sports-themed literacy and numeracy questions

1. A body builder bought 6 tubs of Maxi Muscle priced at £15.98 each. How much change did he receive from £100?
2. Here is a tabloid newspaper's assessment of Manchester United's team performance against Middlesbrough. The final score was 2-2. Look carefully at the marks awarded to each player for his performance in the game and try to calculate the mode, the median, the range and the mean averages.
3. Jack wanted to buy his son an Arsenal football shirt at The Emirates Stadium shop. The shirt cost £50 (Outrageous!! In my opinion!) but luckily there was a 15% reduction in a sale. How much did he save? And how much does the shirt cost now?
4. A newspaper article is given as a reading comprehension with questions including:  
Salomon Kalou is described as mediocre. What does that mean?  
Raul Meireles was described as petulant. What does that mean and what unsportsmanlike behaviour did he display?  
Why do you think the verdict on John Obi Mikel is for him "To Go"?
5. Punctuation is missing from this short article on Fabio Capello. Needless to say the journalist who wrote it was sacked! Can you put in the correct punctuation so the article makes sense to the editor?
6. Pictures from an article in Men's Health magazine entitled 'Get Usher's Abs! Do these two circuits everyday for a Hollywood Six Pack!' are given along with descriptions of the exercises suggested. Prisoners are asked to write the name of each of the exercises next to the appropriate description and picture.

The outreach work done in the prison gym is continuing to encourage reluctant learners to explore the potential of learning in a safe and unthreatening atmosphere. The 'Positive Pathways' project gives prisoners the incentive to complete their basic skills qualifications, helping to increase their confidence and motivation to undertake further education both within the prison and beyond.

#### Embedded employability skills

The gym staff have also arranged for potential employers to come to the gym to meet the prisoners and give advice about careers in the fitness industry.

*"We felt it was important that the men understood what was going to be required of them at a job interview with a gym. We therefore invited a national fitness employer to give a presentation. They informed the men that to get a job with them they would have to go through a three-stage interview process consisting of a general interview, a role-play scenario in a team and a more in-depth interview. They emphasised that soft skills such as approachability, good eye contact, politeness and confidence were as important as good fitness knowledge. The employer advised the men to obtain knowledge in related areas such as nutrition in order to impress employers and to be able to offer a more holistic service to customers. He explained that gyms offered a variety of roles from trainers, instructors, reception staff, membership sales and catering. The men found the presentation very useful and informative. As staff we also learned from the experience and as a result changed our programme to include role-play scenarios and increased development of soft skills to prepare the men for such interviews after release. I would recommend that other prison gyms establish relationships with sports and fitness employers too."*

**Claire Veillard, Literacy and Numeracy tutor, HMP Wandsworth**

The 'Positive Pathways' project helps to develop the essential work skills required to survive in a workplace as prisoners are taught how to give and receive constructive criticism and develop prisoners' presentation skills. Many of the prisoners described improved self-esteem and communication skills from designing and facilitating circuit classes.

#### Higher learning potential identified

At HMP Wandsworth, a number of the prisoners who go to the gym are identified by the tutor as having higher learning potential and are encouraged to apply for funding from Prisoners Education Trust for distance learning courses. The tutor takes time to help prisoners with their assignments in the gym.

The 'Review of Offender Learning'<sup>vi</sup> states that 'We agree that higher education is an important learning progression route for some prisoners'. In the academic year 2011/2012 there were thirty eight prisoners studying for modules as part of the Open University (OU) Foundation Degree in Sports and Fitness. Sport as a hook for higher education is highlighted in these quotes from some of the prisoners who applied to Prisoners Education Trust to fund their OU studies:



*"[I want to do this course] to further my education and practical experience in the fitness industry."*

*"I believe if I start this course, it will be the start of my future."*

These prisoners study sports and fitness at degree level despite not having access to the internet or the online tutor support that OU students outside of prison benefit from. This shows the high level of motivation of these learners to study given these limitations and the need for support to be offered by prison staff or peer mentors. Another potential barrier to completing the OU foundation degree is the requirement to achieve a level 2 qualification in practical coaching or fitness instruction as not all prisons offer this qualification.

Sport in prison can also inspire prisoners to go into higher education after release. As two participants in the Second Chance<sup>vii</sup> sports academy at HMYOI Portland testify:

*"I'm going to study Sports Science on an access course and hopefully off to university the year after."*

*"I'm even considering going to university to do a foundation then possibly doing physiotherapy. Before I never had anything like that in my mind."*

### Intergenerational learning benefits

The positive impact of this work can also be seen in the effects on learning across generations and between family members. For example, Wandsworth's numeracy tutor explained that one prisoner was excited to be able to help his fourteen-year-old son with his maths homework on a visit, where he was able to explain mode, median and mean averages using sports-related examples. The tutor also encourages students to design homework worksheets for their children to enclose with their letters.

### Opportunities for giving back to society

Prisoners are encouraged to engage in community activities by applying for release on temporary licence (ROTL). Work and volunteering through the ROTL scheme is an area that has been identified in previous research as playing a key role in preparing individuals for release.<sup>viii</sup> Where appropriate, individuals can be encouraged to help out at football summer camps and facilitate sports sessions with young people, giving them valuable practical experience and references. Prisoners are often motivated to gain skills and experience through sports-based learning to pursue opportunities to help others not to go down the same path as they did.

*"I do coaching with kids who are badly behaved and try to make them not likely to offend, not be like me basically."*

### New 'pro-social' identities

Embedded learning and the Football Foundation 'Positive Pathways' project enable the prisoners, proudly wearing their identifiable red sports kit, to develop new 'pro-social' identities as 'students', 'coaches' and 'trainers'. The visibility of the learners can be seen as a particularly important element of the programme considering that allowing the development of positive alternative self-concepts has been identified as a key element of successful sports interventions.<sup>ix</sup>

### Prison Inspections

HMP Wandsworth is not alone in providing embedded learning in the gym. Analysis of Her Majesty Inspectorate of Prisons reports across 105 establishments has indicated that 93% of the prisons considered offered accredited sports courses. Moreover, as the HMIP annual report 2011-12 observes:

*"Some gymnasiums supported resettlement pathways with good developmental work with families. This included sports days and links with family days. Some open prisons had forged good links with the community."*

However, although accredited sports courses are widely offered, forging links with the community to increase opportunities for post-release employment tends to be an exception rather than the rule. Only 11% of 105 inspectorate reports we looked at explicitly referred to links with employers in the community, thus highlighting the need to increase community partnerships so that the potential benefits accrued from qualifications can be brought to fruition.



In looking at what qualifications are available to prisoners in this domain, the HMIP annual report also notes that there is room for improving how prison gyms can help prisoners become fit for release by developing the range and number of accredited courses offered:

*"Although the range and number of accredited PE courses tended to be limited, pass rates were generally high. Where the range of courses was better, the qualifications and the work experience prisoners gained gave them the opportunity of finding employment in the leisure industry on release. However, in some prisons accredited courses were unavailable due to staff shortages."*

Moreover, despite the high pass rates clearly indicating a good level of engagement with and motivation for undertaking sports-related qualifications, inspectorate reports frequently draw attention to the fact that many courses offered are only of a basic level and therefore do not satisfy employers' requirements. Offering higher level qualifications, as well as equipping prisoners with soft transferrable skills, is a key way in which prison gyms can support the resettlement pathways of education and employment.

Taking the accumulated evidence into account it is especially concerning that, since the publication of PSI 58/2011, education is no longer a mandatory requirement in physical education provision within the secure estate.<sup>xi</sup> It is also concerning that the HMIP annual report observes that in some prisons staff shortages are having a negative impact on the delivery of sports-based learning.

Like HMP Wandsworth, the gym at HMYOI Portland also uses sports and fitness as a hook for learning, for example through their partnership work with the Second Chance Project and the resulting Rugby and Football Academies. The following two case studies from prisoner learners who have now been released show the positive impact that sports-based learning had on helping them desist from crime and gain employment.

### Case Study One

***"Rugby is good for you. You have to learn to be disciplined and you have to be disciplined in life too really. Team work as well, now I work in teams on the rail tracks, so that helped."***

Leon left school with a couple of GCSEs, but was sentenced as a young offender for supply of class A drugs. While in prison he gained a level 1 coaching qualification through the Second Chance rugby and football academy projects. Since his release in 2011 he has been able to find employment doing rail engineering after gaining a rail track qualification in prison. In his spare time he has done voluntary work coaching young people rugby.

#### **What did you learn from the coaching academies?**

Rugby is good for you, you have to learn to be disciplined and you have to be disciplined in life too really. Teamwork as well, now I work in teams on the tracks so that helped. I found it good because it teaches you discipline. You can't just lash out if you're getting tackled, you have to stay calm. I was lacking a bit of discipline getting myself in that situation to get myself locked up. Now I can actually talk to someone without thinking they're being rude to me or trying to say something I don't want to hear, and get angry about it, I just sit back and think of what he's said before I answer.

It feels like you are in a different place [doing sport]. You're just not concentrating on being in jail and you release a lot of stress out with it as well, that's good. You get to know more people you wouldn't normally associate yourself with, that's another good thing, it teaches you a lot. You can communicate better with people and that's pretty much what my jobs about, communication, and you learn that in rugby as well – good communication.

Just the whole experience of being in jail and the academy has made me realise the life that I was leading. It is not the life to be in. I used to think 'Why am I going to work hard hours when I can make triple that standing on corners', do you know what I'm trying to say? That's what I thought, but that's not a life is it - looking behind your shoulder every two minutes?

#### **What have you been doing since you were released?**

In jail I did the course with rail track, and they've got an agency in the area I live so I just took my stuff walked in there myself, asked if I could speak to the main guy and that's it got the job from there. It's fixing rail tracks, if there's any problems on the tracks we just go and fix it, we build new railways, new lines, everything. While I was off work with rail track I was helping kids like young offenders play rugby. That was through Justin [from the Second Chance project] who linked me with a rugby club. It was voluntary. You just know a bit more about the game and that, once you have done the coaching and stuff in prison. It was good fun but it would have been better if I had got paid for it. With the voluntary

work, because I used to be a young offender, they thought it would be good to help out with the young offenders. It was good for them, good for me, good for everyone.

#### **What are your plans going forward?**

I'm going back to education as I want to be a civil engineer now. I start college in September as I have to get my Maths GCSE and that before I can get on the apprenticeship. You won't see me on the street, no way; I'm like work, home, work, home, work, home. That's my life now, I've learnt my lesson. I also want to do more coaching work.

#### **What advice would you give to someone in prison?**

I'd say don't just think about it, do it. Do the qualifications inside, everything you can. It keeps you occupied and learning gives you something to fall back on. It fills up your time, gives you a focus and something to commit to, so it stops you reoffending.

### **Case Study Two**

***"I just enjoy playing football, it's fun and I love working with children. It's just great getting to play football and coach them."***

Steve was a young offender who was released on electronic tag after serving one year in prison. While in custody he gained a level 1 coaching qualification through the Second Chance football academy. After release he did voluntary football coaching which enabled him to complete his level 2. He now does football coaching and spent a year saving up to pay for courses to enable him to join the Merchant Navy, which he has nearly completed. He is looking forward to his new career, and makes the case for more higher level sports qualifications to be available in prison.

#### **What qualifications did you do in prison and were they useful for you after release?**

I did loads, obviously the football academy [with Second Chance], lots of different classes like English, Maths and cooking. I just got in as many as I could really. Maths and English were helpful. I needed my Maths and English for the Merchant Navy, so that helped a lot, I didn't know it would help, but it did in the end. Before I went to prison I played for a lot of different football clubs and I used to do football coaching in the school holidays, but I didn't have any qualifications.

The football courses helped because if I didn't have those qualifications I wouldn't be able to coach so many children. Everything about it [the academy] was good. It got us out of our cells more. It got us working together so we could communicate with people, because some of us weren't that good at that. Getting to know everyone, team building, playing the matches. I didn't expect to go in and do something like that, it was good. I'm more confident. I've got my shirt upstairs on my wall.

#### **What have you been doing since being released?**

I've been coaching voluntarily on Saturdays and for myself with the after-school clubs. I completed my level 2, I was coaching a team when I got out on Saturdays, volunteering, and they offered me the level 2 so I thought why not just do it. I just enjoy playing football, it's fun and I love working with children. It's just great getting to play football and coach them.

I'm going into the Merchant Navy in a couple of months, but I'm doing it this summer holidays as I work in a school and I also work for my mum's company - she runs all these after-school clubs. I do football coaching for myself and I coach up to about 30 children at a time. I'm going to do it this summer holidays again before I go away.

Now I've paid for all the basic courses I need to do to join the Merchant Navy. They were a lot of money, I had to save up for about a year, so I've just recently paid for them and I'm doing them the week after next. I've just passed my medical and I've got a two-week placement in August and if I'm good enough they will take me on, if not I will apply elsewhere. I had to wait so long to join because of my criminal record, but now that's all finished I can finally do it now. It's so many years ago but I had to be off license and then wait a year after probation.

#### **What advice would you give to someone in prison?**

I'd just say keep applying for everything really, start looking for a job, get as many qualifications as you can. If you get the qualifications and you still can't get a job, do more qualifications and keep bettering yourself so you can get employment. Getting a job gives you something to focus on. If young offenders have jobs when they're out then they won't re-offend. They need qualifications that can get them jobs, ones that are of a high enough level for employment. I think for prisoners an FA Coaching Level 2 would be more useful, more than FA level 1, because you don't really need FA Level 1. You can go straight into FA Level 2 and then get a job in football after.

# Chapter Two

## Going the distance

Prisoners Education Trust funds over 2000 prisoners a year<sup>i</sup> for distance learning courses in subjects and at levels not otherwise available in prison, thus enabling them to progress from the basic skills qualifications gained either in custody or in the community. Sports-related courses are especially popular. In 2011 the Trust funded 162 prisoners to engage in exercise and fitness courses leading to a wide range of gym instructor, personal trainer and sports nutrition qualifications. Sixteen prisoners were funded to complete ‘Introduction to Sport, Fitness and Management’ Open University degree level courses.

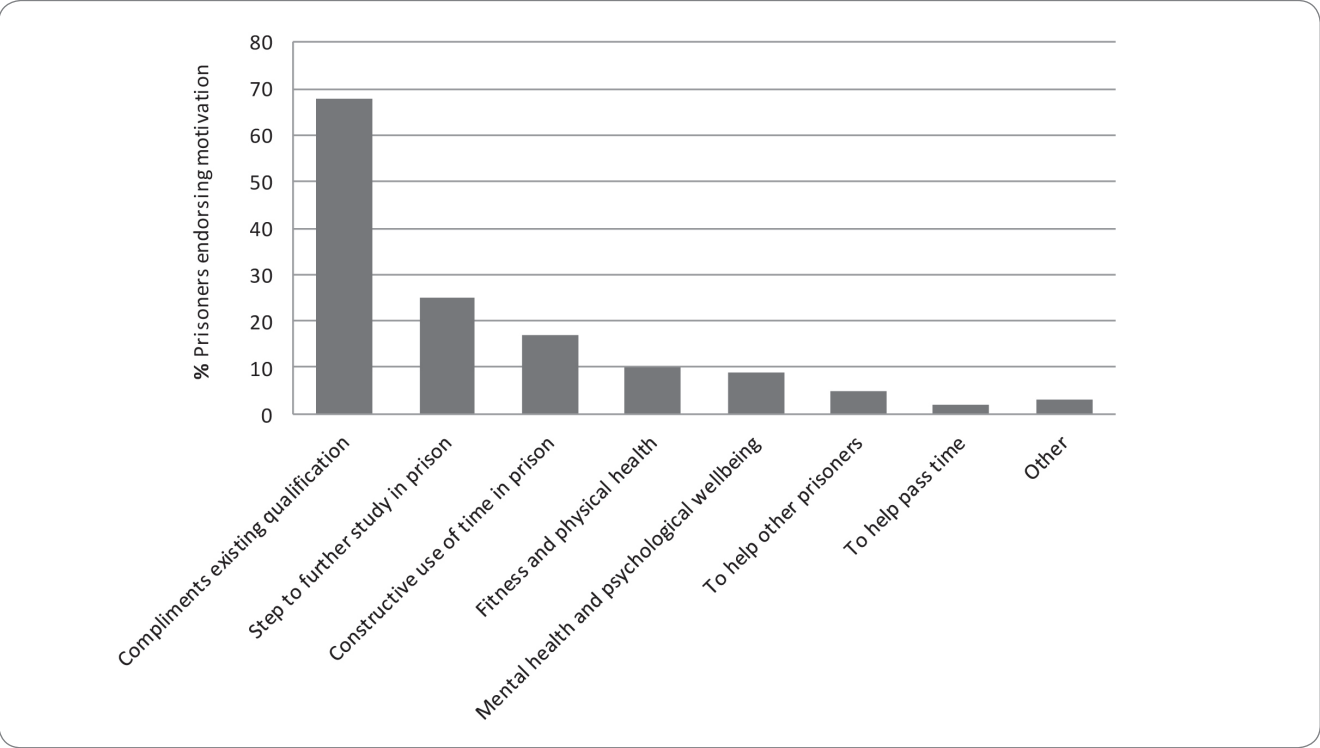
When prisoners apply to Prisoners Education Trust for funding, they are required to do so with the approval of the prison and to write a personal statement explaining their motivations for embarking on the course. We recognised the potential value of these letters as a research tool and took the opportunity to carry out an in-depth analysis of the content of 314 personal statements, received between 2010-2012, written by prisoners to support their applications for the funding of sports qualifications. The applications were predominantly from male prisoners (97%), ranging in age from 18 to 57 years (mean age 30 years). Four percent of those applying for such courses had previously served in the armed forces.

The handwritten supporting statements were subjected to a content analysis to assess the applicants’ key motivations for undertaking sports-related qualifications. Preliminary analyses led to the identification of a series of themes and sub-themes concerning the perceived benefits of undertaking the studies. A team of researchers used these categories to code the applications, with high levels of inter-rater reliability.<sup>ii</sup> The motivations and perceived benefits of undertaking sports qualifications whilst serving a prison sentence were explored and summarised in terms of the perceived benefits during their ongoing incarceration, as well as after release.

### Pre-release motivations of prisoners applying to do sports-related distance learning courses

In terms of motivations to complete sports qualifications relating to their time in custody, the majority of prisoners indicated that undertaking such courses would complement or supplement the existing qualifications they had gained. A significant number (25%) of prisoners also reported that undertaking sports qualifications would allow them to progress onto further study within prison but at a higher level, suggesting that sports qualifications can serve to build the confidence, skills and motivation necessary for engaging in further education within prison. Some applicants referred to their sporting studies as providing a stepping stone to further education, despite the fact that (or indeed especially if) they had previously avoided, or had negative experiences of, traditional classroom-based education. Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of applicants endorsing each of the identified pre-release motivations for undertaking sports qualifications in prison.

Figure 1. Pre-release motivations and benefits to undertaking sports qualifications in prison



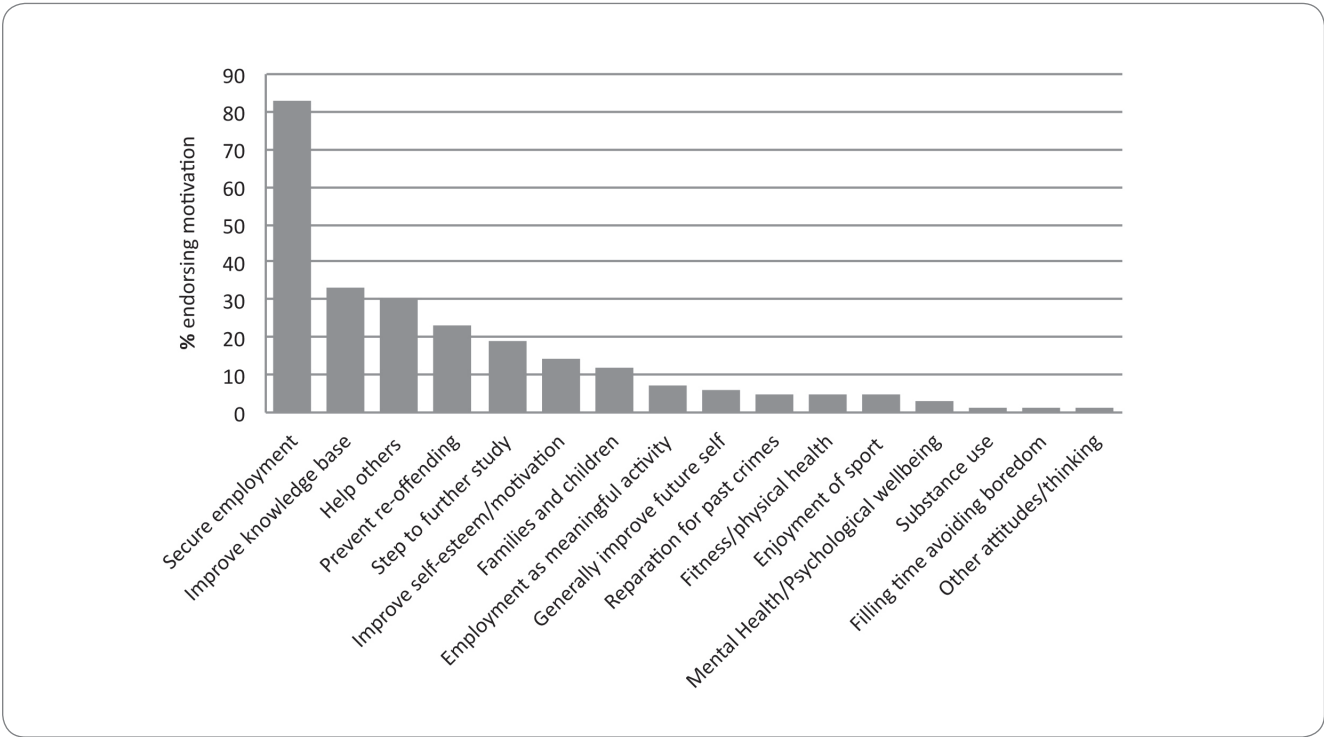
17% of prisoners identified their motivation for engaging in such study as a way of using their time in custody constructively (*‘trying to make good out of a bad situation’*) demonstrating how facilitating sports courses in prisons not only improves the skill set of prison learners but can also contribute to the current ‘Prisons with a Purpose’ agenda.<sup>iii</sup> Likewise, a substantial proportion of applicants identified the perceived potential benefits of undertaking sports qualifications in terms of improved physical and psychological health (*‘I think the course will help me feel good within myself’*). This illustrates how such provision is perceived to improve prisoner quality of life in prison and can play a secondary role in the whole prison approach to promoting health.<sup>iv</sup> Indeed, opportunities for improving physical and mental health in prison are vital considering the well-documented elevated levels of both physical and mental ill health within the prison population.

A smaller, but still substantial, group of learners (particularly those serving longer sentences) made reference in their personal statements to using the requested qualification in order to help fellow prisoners, in terms of improving skills, fitness and confidence. Such motivations demonstrate how offering sports qualifications may contribute to the promotion of pro-social behaviour within prisons, and serves to highlight the potential for qualified prisoners to take on peer mentoring roles.

Post-release motivations of prisoners applying to do sports-related distance learning courses

Although the pre-release impact of embarking on distance learning courses are noteworthy and have been explored elsewhere<sup>v</sup>, of particular interest were the post-release motivations and benefits to undertaking sports qualifications in prison. Figure 2 illustrates the percentage of learners endorsing each of the identified post-release motivations.

Figure 2. Post-release motivations for undertaking sports qualifications in prison



The great majority of the learner applications referred explicitly to the post-release employment-related benefits of undertaking sports qualifications in prison. Such benefits were identified as being through improved skills and qualifications, which would facilitate the uptake of a career in the sports and leisure industry, for example as gym instructors, personal trainers or nutritionists. Reflecting a general awareness that self-employment may be a more successful career path in light of restrictions imposed by criminal convictions, 18% of the personal statements specifically stated that increasing the chances of being able to pursue self-employment after release was a primary motivation:

*“I have found it difficult getting employment with my criminal history in the past, if I could complete this course I hope to become a self-employed personal trainer.”*

One in three applicants cited the opportunity to improve knowledge of the sport and leisure industry generally, as well as in relation to specific sports, nutrition, health, anatomy and management. Furthermore, 7% of the applications referred to wanting to pursue a sporting qualification in order to follow a career that was felt to be meaningful, fulfilling and enjoyable:



*"I have finally found a career that I would enjoy."*

*"It will allow me to do a job I love, I don't want another meaningless job."*

*"I believe it is always good to have a job in something you enjoy and this qualification will help me get there."*

Aside from career-oriented motivations, a substantial one in five of all of the applicants identified the opportunity to progress onto further study after release as a primary motivation for undertaking a sports qualification in prison.

It is of particular interest that the identified prison learner motivations for engaging in sports education strongly map on to the resettlement pathway of education, training and employment - one of the key seven resettlement pathways identified in the Reducing Reoffending National Action Plan (Home Office, 2004)<sup>vi</sup> which guides current resettlement service provision. Aside from the primary motivations of education and employment, several other resettlement pathways were strongly represented in the content of the applications. For example, some learners indicated that the qualifications would encourage them to lead healthier and more active lifestyles after release, thus improving their physical health, whilst others reported improvements to mental health and psychological wellbeing, or in dealing with substance addiction.

Specifically, 14% of prisoners' personal statements reflected the sentiment that undertaking sports qualifications in prison would enhance their self-esteem, improve their confidence or increase their motivational levels - whether that be motivation to seek employment and/or education or in leading a life free of crime. Some applications also referred to the way in which the qualifications would have a positive impact on their attitudes and thinking after release:

*"I feel sport in general gives me great confidence in life and helps me achieve my aims."*

A noteworthy 12% of the applications stated that they not only felt that the qualifications would benefit themselves after release, but also their children and families:

*"I have four children who I adore and have finally hit the point in my life where I need to start living a normal respectable life so I can be a decent role model for my children."*

*"I have three children now and have had enough of prison life. I don't intend to come back here and want to make a better life for me and my family."*

*"This will assist me to [be] a positive role model for myself, my family and my friends."*

Almost a third of all applicants reported that completing sports qualifications would encourage pro-social endeavours such as enabling them to help others develop fitness, skills, knowledge and lead healthier lifestyles:

*"I would like to be able to help people reach their personal goals."*

Furthermore, 5% specifically referred to wanting to undertake sports qualifications as a means of reparation for their past crimes and an opportunity to give back and contribute meaningfully to society:

*"This would award me with the opportunity to influence others' lives and give them a better role model than I had to look up to."*

*"I want to give others direction not to make the same mistakes as me."*

It was particularly striking that almost a quarter (23%) of all offender statements explicitly stated that the opportunity to undertake a sports qualification would help prevent reoffending, and enable them to desist from crime after release:

*"It will be very beneficial in preventing me from reoffending'."*

*"This opportunity would allow me to break the cycle of offending and reoffending."*

*"This will help me get my life back on track and stay out of trouble in future."*

Predominantly, desistance from crime was linked to the opportunities for employment that completing courses would provide. Prisoners also reported that sports-based learning would act as an impetus to continue sporting involvement for enjoyment alone after release, thus providing a means to fill time and alleviate boredom. A number of prisoners felt the qualifications would provide them with a more positive outlook on their future selves generally and allow them a fresh start:

*"This will help me make a positive new start on my release."*

*"It will let me start fresh when I get out and get my life back on track."*

Indeed, the motivations and perceived benefits of undertaking sports qualifications coincide with the notion of sport as a 'hook for change' that can help foster the development of pro-social identities to facilitate desistance from crime.

### Case Study Three

We found that over three quarters of prisoners applying to Prisoners Education Trust for funding for sports-related courses want to work in the fitness industry, many as personal trainers. Daniel was one of these hopefuls who has succeeded after release.

#### ***"The more knowledge I have, the more I can help people."***

Daniel was excluded from school as a teenager before he was able to gain any qualifications. At the age of 19 he was sentenced and served three years in prison. Whilst in custody he was funded by Prisoners Education Trust to do a level 3 personal trainer distance learning course. Daniel was recently released and is receiving support from the Prisoners Education Trust resettlement project where he has been provided with a bursary and a mentor. He is now working as personal trainer in a gym.

"There wasn't much to do while I was in prison so I ended up going to the gym and I found it was something I enjoyed. I was quite small when I was younger too, so it was a way to gain weight. Then I thought I might like to carry it on as job. I had played sports like basketball before, but this area was new to me. I completed a level 2 Personal Trainer course in prison and I liked it but I found the level meant I could only work as an assistant in a gym on release, not do anything by myself.

I realised that I wanted to do more than that, so I decided to do a distance learning course – Personal Fitness Trainer Level 3. My teacher was quite encouraging about distance learning. She showed me the different courses I could do and helped me with my application for funding from Prisoners Education Trust which I received. I enjoyed the course and because I was doing it myself, without a teacher through distance learning, it meant that I could carry on doing other learning whilst I was doing it including IT, Maths, English and Painting & Decorating. For prisoners wanting to study in this area, I would say that the main thing is to ensure that you have enough time and that it's what you really want. If you can do it in prison you should, as you can apply for funding from Prisoners Education Trust.

After I was released I was able to get a job in a gym because I had a friend who had been through the same thing and who could recommend me. He had been out of prison for a while and had worked his way up to assistant manager at the gym, so he was able to vouch for me. Both he and the manager of the gym knew that I had a criminal record, but my friend told me he was putting his trust in me and the manager put his trust in him. Once I was comfortable at the gym, I was able to tell all my colleagues about my past and it didn't bother anyone.

The key to building up a client base is just to be confident and to talk to people. If you see someone doing something wrong, show them how to do it properly. Just by talking to people and saying 'Hi', it gives them the confidence to ask you for advice. I do one-to-one and classes too. There is potential to do and to earn more. I'm looking to go further and

do one qualification per year to further my knowledge and to keep up to date. The more knowledge I have, the more I can help people.

My job keeps me really busy so I don't really think about reoffending or anything like that. My main motivation after leaving prison was just not to go back and doing sports and fitness has definitely helped."

#### Case Study Four

We found that 4% of prisoners applying to Prisoners Education Trust for funding for sports-related courses had previously served in the armed forces. Ex-army veteran David was funded by Prisoners Education Trust to do a degree in Criminology with the Open University whilst in prison. He used fitness in prison to relax his mind sufficiently to study. After release he took qualifications in fitness and started his own personal training company. He is now starting a PhD and has recently published a book about his experiences.

#### ***"Education changed my life and fitness was part of that process."***

"I left school in 1979, aged 16 as an unskilled, uneducated young person. I chose the army to escape as unemployment was soaring as hundreds lost their jobs in the steel industry. I didn't make a success of my army career though and I deeply regret it, as I do for not succeeding at school. Aged 20, I gained my first criminal convictions for two attempted robberies. I then spent the rest of my early adult years drifting, moving from one job to another and committing crimes. My directionless way of life also included several periods in psychiatric hospitals for clinical depression, until July 1995 when I began a five year prison sentence for wounding. I went to prison an uneducated individual with massive failings to overcome. With few apparent skills or abilities, my prison beginnings were unpromising. With a sheer determination to turn things around, I embarked on a programme of part-time education.

When I was in prison, I was always on the weights. By the time I went there I had been doing sports and fitness for years, so I was already very fit. It was also the feel-good factor I got from it at that stage - you could go back to your cell and chill out a bit. I found that from doing fitness in prison the mind became more focused on things. For example, I could go back to my cell and read a book after going to the gym as I wasn't agitated and restless. You look after the body and the mind takes care of itself. If you're agitated, how can you sit down to study? If you go to the gym and get all the frustration out, and come back chilled out, releasing endorphins, you can do other things with your mind then. It helped me to study for and complete an Open University degree in Criminology while in prison.

After I was released from prison I took a Level 2 Gym Instructor course at my local college. I also started martial arts. I wanted to channel myself, lead a better life. I took up karate and I also did Kung Fu. In 2005 I saw a course in Ikedo so I did it and qualified as a black belt and then got my licence to teach that. I knew that with my record it might be difficult to work in the industry, but education had been such an important part of my development so I wanted to do it anyway.

As I was fed up with CRB checks, I set up my own personal training company. It's called Fighting Fit, incorporating fitness with martial arts, focusing on people wanting to learn self-defence. I've since tried to make a business of it. I would encourage former prisoners to look at the self-employed route. It's definitely lucrative but you have to be in the right area and have a unique selling point. For me it was being able to combine fitness training with martial arts. I find that there is nothing more rewarding than giving something back. Working in the fitness industry enabled me to afford a master's degree in social research methods. I have recently published a book and am about to start a PhD researching education and desistance from crime. I also guest lecture at universities. Education changed my life and fitness was part of that process."

# Chapter Three

## A Sporting Chance

Given that 82% of prisoners applying for sports-related distance learning courses were interested in working in sports and fitness, the question needs to be asked: 'How well does prison education prepare prisoners for employment or self-employment in this industry?'

Earlier this year a prisoner, John, wrote to Prisoners Education Trust requesting funding for a level 3 personal trainer course. He had done his homework and told the Trust in his application that he had written to several gyms and asked them what qualifications they required. His research had highlighted his need to have a minimum level 3 qualification. Unfortunately his prison only offered level 1 and 2 fitness qualifications, so without funding from Prisoners Education Trust for his distance learning course he would not be 'job-ready' on release.

This chapter builds on this prisoner's research by analysing job advertisements for fitness roles by looking at the qualifications and soft skills required. We also contacted employers in order to capture their experiences and opinions about employing ex-prisoners. We spoke with a range of employers and looked at the requirements from a number of companies, including high street gyms, sports teams, leisure centres and health spa settings.

### 1. Job advert analysis

#### a. Personal Training

During one week in July 2012 there were 33 fitness employers advertising for personal trainers on the website [leisurejobs.com](http://leisurejobs.com). A personal trainer is a job role involving exercise direction, instruction and assessment of a client, both in and outside of a gym setting. Through reading and analysing the person specifications for those adverts we found that:

##### Qualifications required

- Nearly three quarters of employers (73%) required a level 3 fitness qualification.
- Of those, over half (62%) required the level 3 qualification to be recognised by the Register of Exercise Professionals (REPs).
- 6% required a sports degree or equivalent.
- 12% wanted candidates to have a first aid qualification.
- 9% indicated that other supplementary qualifications such as sports massage or group fitness qualifications were desirable.

##### Insurance, CRB checks and driving licences

- 15% required the candidate to be fully insured.
- 9% mentioned the need for a CRB check in their job advert, although this would not necessarily preclude employment.
- 6% required candidates to have a clean UK driving licence.

##### Previous experience

- Over a third of employers were looking for candidates with previous experience (36%).

##### Soft skills

- Over half of employers specified that they wanted candidates that were 'passionate, motivated, ambitious, driven and / or enthusiastic'.
- One in five employers (18%) wanted their potential personal trainers to demonstrate excellent customer service skills.
- One in five (18%) wanted evidence of good communication skills.
- Other soft skills mentioned in the job adverts included; organisational skills, team player, interpersonal skills, proactive, vibrant personality, outgoing, lively and ability to build rapport easily.

#### b. Fitness / Gym Instructors

During one week in July 2012 there were 28 employers advertising for fitness / gym instructors on the website [leisurejobs.com](http://leisurejobs.com). A fitness instructor is a job role within a gym, which involves advising clients on ways to use equipment and undertake appropriate exercise regimes, ensuring a healthy diet and advising on other related areas, including motivation and encouragement. Through reading and analysing the person specifications for those adverts we found that:



**Qualifications required**

- 40% of employers wanted level 2 qualifications for fitness instructors, although nearly a third were looking for a minimum level 3.
- 10% required a first aid qualification.

**CRB checks**

- 28% mentioned the need for a CRB check in their job adverts, although this would not necessarily preclude employment.

**Previous experience**

- A third (32%) of the employers wanted candidates with previous experience of gym or fitness instructing.

**Soft skills**

- 64% of employers specified that they wanted candidates that were 'passionate, motivated, ambitious, driven and / or enthusiastic'.
- Half (50%) of employers wanted their gym / fitness instructors to demonstrate excellent customer service or customer care skills.
- Other soft skills mentioned in the job adverts included; friendly, proactive, high energy, professional, good interpersonal skills, fun, upbeat, willing to go that extra mile, team player, tidy appearance, work independently, honesty, integrity, good communication skills, hardworking, mature, personable, outgoing, good organisational skills and physically fit.

**c. Sports coaching**

During one week in July 2012 there were 31 employers advertising for sports coaches on the websites leisurejobs.com, jobswithballs.com and sportscoachuk.com. Sports coaches train and advise people who are playing a particular sport, devise appropriate training regimes and encourage people playing sport to achieve their full potential. Through reading and analysing the person specifications for those adverts we found that:

**Qualifications required**

- 41% required a level 2 qualification and 6% required five GCSEs above grade C.
- One in five only required a level 1 qualification to be coach, however 10% required a degree level qualification.
- 6% requested candidates who have completed the FA Youth Award.
- 6% asked for good IT skills, for example they want the coaches to use Powerpoint and Word to 'enhance learning'.
- A quarter of employers wanted coaching candidates to have a first aid qualification and one in five (19%) want candidates to have a child protection or child safeguarding qualification.

**CRB checks**

- 45% of the adverts stated that a CRB check will be carried out, although this would not necessarily preclude employment.

**Previous experience**

- Nearly half of the coaching employers (45%) required previous experience.

**Soft skills**

- 12% of the employers specified leadership skills.
- Other soft skills mentioned in the job adverts included; passionate, good communicator, ability to act as a role model, outstanding knowledge, reliable, motivated, enthusiastic, ability to work under pressure, good at problem solving, positive attitude, good organisational skills, inspiring, knowledge of health and safety, creative, ability to build good relationships, friendly, confident, vibrant and fun.

**2. Employer Survey**

Our research has confirmed that gaining employment into the sports and leisure industry is an incredibly frequent aspiration among prisoners, particularly the young male prisoners who make up the largest part of the prison estate. It is encouraging to see the extent to which prisons, educational providers and community organisations are committed to supporting prisoners in engaging with, and achieving, sports-related qualifications. However this also raises questions about whether sufficient opportunities for ex-prisoners are available in such a competitive industry, and indeed whether or not raising aspirations around employment opportunities could be damaging if potential employers see a criminal conviction as a key barrier. In order to explore this further, we invited employers from across the industry to respond anonymously to a series of questions we posed regarding the employment of ex-prisoners.

Electronic surveys were distributed widely, resulting in nine representatives from sporting employers responding to our request. Whilst it is acknowledged that responses from such a small sample should not necessarily be seen as representing the sector as a whole, the responses were valuable in highlighting some of the prominent concerns, as well as positive perspectives, that this crucial part of the industry have about employing ex-prisoners.

### Employing ex-prisoners

Over half of our employer respondents had previously employed an ex-prisoner employee, and all reported that they would be willing to consider employing ex-offenders with relevant qualifications and experience and whose convictions did not present safeguarding concerns. The employers who had employed ex-prisoners had mixed experiences. For example, one coaching organisation had an ex-prisoner who was facing other difficulties including trying to get custody of his child and issues with drinking alcohol in the evenings that impacted on his performance at work. However the same employer also worked with another ex-prisoner whose 'ability, decorum and work' was described as 'exceptional'. The employer emphasised that:

*"We must take every person as a single case for employment based on their ability, commitment and proven outcomes and evidenced safe practice."*

Another employer stated that they complete individual risk assessments and ex-prisoner employees could be provided with mentors to guide and support them. This suggests that, overall, it is well worth offering prisoners sports-related accredited courses in order to support them in seeking employment opportunities upon release.

Although employers in the industry reported being willing to employ former prisoners with relevant skills, qualifications and experience, it was acknowledged that ex-offenders can still present specific concerns for employers. Primary concerns focused on worries regarding reoffending and safety concerns. All employers in the survey stipulated that prospective employees are required to declare previous criminal convictions and are typically considered on a case by case basis. Sexual offences, offences concerning children or vulnerable adults, racially motivated and many violent offences would preclude the applicant from consideration. As such, although sports-related qualifications offer a viable route to increasing employability for some offenders, consideration clearly needs to be given to the realism of utilising such qualifications for certain groups of offenders.

### Qualification levels

The employers we spoke to identified sports coaches as the primary vacancy they recruit for, and all identified sports coaching qualifications as a prerequisite for considering applicants for such roles. Employers identified a level 1 coaching qualification as a minimum requirement, although most sought applicants with level 2 qualifications since these demonstrate applied experience and aptitude for further training, as illustrated in the following quotes:

*"Level 1 qualifications are introductory, if a level 2 in sport/personal fitness or gym instruction is achieved then this will allow the employer to understand that the client has worked in the industry and owns experiential and theory-based competent practice. I have managed to ensure voluntary placements with level 1 qualifications, but this has always meant that the client has had to have the ability to gain, or be working towards a minimum of a level 2 [qualification] in order to secure a work placement."*

*"We hold all National Governing Body qualifications at level 2 as a sign that motivated work has been attended and thus would take this qualification very seriously and offer a Level 3 to ensure they are fully competent in this field."*

Some employers also noted the need for Level 2 English and Maths qualifications in addition to sports specific qualifications. This demonstrates the benefit of offering prison-based sports qualifications of a higher level that are effectively integrated with key skills.

### Experience required

The opportunity for prisoners to gain practical experience (through work placements in the community if eligible for ROTL, or as a gym orderly, for example) whilst undertaking qualifications was recognised as being particularly valuable:

*"Valid experience - qualified and unqualified - is a big part of what we look for."*

*"Mainstream coaches we have used in the past generally have to be qualified, experienced and have great reputations."*

### Soft skills

In addition to sport-specific qualifications and relevant experience, employers also highlighted personal attributes in terms of communication skills and reliability as the key qualities they look for when recruiting employees:

*"Without communication and reliability there would be no coaching roles."*

*"Coaches need to be able to relate to young people and be a positive role model, to do this you must be reliable and honest."*

The job advert analysis and employer surveys highlight the importance of prisoners having a positive attitude, communication skills, reliability and team work skills to secure employment in this industry. This supports the findings of previous research carried out with a range of employers.<sup>i</sup> As such, qualifications and roles which promote the development of transferable soft skills and allow individuals to show their commitment and reliability can clearly play a critical role in enabling prisoners to demonstrate their aptitude for employment in the sports and leisure industry.

### Benefits of employing ex-prisoners

Despite recognising that some offence categories would exclude a considerable number of ex-offenders from a career in sports and leisure, employers clearly recognised the benefits of employing former prisoners. Specifically, employers stated that helping a reformed prisoner to become a positive role model (six employer respondents), giving people a second chance (five respondents) and helping society (three respondents) were all noteworthy benefits. Two employers expressed the view that former prisoners could offer unique skills and benefits to companies running social inclusion programmes and activities for young people at risk of crime:

*"We run social inclusion programmes and these guys speak with knowledge and understanding about how it really is and the consequences associated with this type of behaviour."*

*"This helps us prevent offending, but also helps us as an organisation to engage with hard to reach young people as the ex-offenders have been there and done that."*

Such examples serve to demonstrate the value that offering appropriate sports qualifications - particularly those that equip individuals with relevant skills and experience - can have, not only in terms of improving prisoners' employment prospects upon release, but also in creating skilful and motivated employees.

The willingness of employers in the sport and leisure industry to consider ex-offenders, coupled with recognition of the potential benefits associated with taking on former prisoners, serves to highlight how sports qualifications obtained in prison can offer viable post-release employment options. Although we can't claim that the employers who responded to our survey were necessarily representative of the industry, they were positive about employing ex-prisoners, acknowledging the need to pay attention to managing risk. They also recognised the value of employing those with appropriate skills and experience. This, together with the job advertisement analysis, highlights that, where possible, prisons should look to provide higher level qualifications and opportunities for practical experience and activities that develop a prisoner's soft skills in order to give them the best chance of finding employment in the sports and fitness industry. As one young person who took part in the Second Chance Sport Academy at HMYOI Portland told us:

*"Since I've got out I've got a job. I think because I was able to explain in the interview that I didn't just sit around in jail and I was involved in sport, that made the employer realise there was more to me than just an ex-criminal."*

## Chapter Four

### Breaking the cycle of 'no experience, no job; no job, no experience'

The 'Breaking the Cycle' Green Paper<sup>1</sup> sets out to deliver 'reformed and revitalised training that involves employers and education providers working closely with senior prison managers to tailor their training to the needs of the labour market'. It also commits to 'a greater number of employer-led training workshops to increase offenders' work skills and establish working relationships with employers prior to release'.

HMP Downview have teamed up with YMCA gyms to help prisoners break the cycle of 'no experience, no job; no job, no experience'. This is crucial given that we found in the job advertisement analysis that a third of fitness instructor employers require applicants to have previous experience. Some YMCA gyms in London run a volunteer programme for people with a qualification in fitness to gain valuable work experience as gym instructors, and for the past few years they have offered prisoners on temporary licence (ROTL) volunteer placements and additional qualifications to make them ready for a career in the fitness industry after release.

#### Employer perspective

**Daniel Rex, a YMCA Gym Manager, explains how the programme works from an employer's perspective, what he looks for in a candidate and what more prisons could do to make prisoners 'fit for release'.**

"We started to work with HMP Downview two years ago after Latchmere House prison closed. So far we have had five volunteers from Downview. We also have other volunteers at the gyms who are not in custody, but who need experience. The women at HMP Downview have an interview with myself first. This gives me the opportunity to find out how much they know and what level they are. Based on that I can decide if we will be able to take them on. What I'm looking for is someone who really wants to do it. There are often too many applicants for the volunteer spaces we have available. Sometimes I refer them to another YMCA centre or if they have a low level of knowledge I give them feedback and ask them to improve their knowledge and re-apply in the future.

After the interview the new volunteer will complete two weeks of induction training at the gym. After that I set up some regular shifts. Normally they start with a couple of shifts a week, but most of them enjoy it and quickly want to take on more shifts, up to four or five a week. All volunteers are provided with an experienced gym instructor to supervise and coach them throughout the placement. We try to give them as much training as possible so they will be able to find a job in the future. I can't guarantee that vacancies will be available with the YMCA after the end of the volunteer period, but the aim is to get them ready for interviews and to get a job in fitness anywhere.

Many of the volunteers from prison only come with a basic level 1 qualification, so they train for level 2 and then up to level 3 if they have time. To be able to work in a gym you have to have a level 3 REPS (Register of Exercise Professionals) qualification. Prisons only provide really basic fitness qualifications. One thing prisons could do to help prisoners get work in the fitness industry is provide level 3 qualifications. When prisoners have more knowledge about fitness, they will have a better chance of getting a job. For example we are currently training all our instructors and volunteers at YMCA gyms in 'suspension training' which is a new technique. When they go for job interviews they will be asked about these new training techniques so they need to know about them. We have a free training programme called YMCA Fit which has various courses available to people who meet the criteria to expand their fitness knowledge. Most of our volunteers fit the criteria so they can do these courses for free.



*The benefits of the volunteer programme to the women prisoners are gaining experience of working in a gym environment, building confidence, practicing social skills and having the opportunity to work in a team and function within a team. They also learn from their colleagues and from management, for example by learning to communicate and respond to constructive criticism, to listen and improve their performance. They learn a lot.*

*The main benefit to the YMCA gym of having volunteers is a lot more support for customers on the gym floor as there are more instructors per shift to help. However, our main objective through the programme is to be able to offer people an opportunity to get real experience and learn skills to hopefully lead to a paid job. It's hard to come out of prison and work in a professional gym if you have only ever worked in a prison gym. In real gyms people pay membership and they expect good service. The volunteers we have had from prisons have been absolutely brilliant. They have got excellent feedback not only from their colleagues but the members too. That is something that really rewards me as a manager. I would encourage other gyms to work with local prisons to run similar schemes for prisoners on ROTL (Release on Temporary Licence).*

*When people come from the prison the main problem they have is lack of confidence and social skills. That is one of the biggest challenges I have faced running this programme. It is a vital skill in the fitness industry. You have members that pay to come to the gym, they expect an instructor to say hello, show you how to use the machines and to be friendly. They can take a while before they feel confident enough to approach a member and have a conversation. I would say prisons should do more activities encouraging team work to help them build social skills. I think the isolation they go through being in prison means they find it hard to trust people. That comes across in inductions, in team meetings, in every situation. My advice for prisons would be to give prisoners a chance to work in a social environment where they have to talk and be nice to people. Then they will learn that people respond in a positive manner if you are positive with them. If your attitude is negative that is the reaction you get back from people.*

*When I interviewed our current volunteer Claire (see below), I was very impressed with her positive attitude. She struggled at the beginning as the professional gym was a completely new environment for her to work in. Initially she found it hard to get out there and talk to members, but she took on board all the advice we gave her and within three weeks she was more confident and enjoying it. Members even started asking specifically for her. When you get that response from a member you know she is doing something right. She has been absolutely brilliant. She has been a really important part of the whole team and we will all miss her. I wanted her to apply for a position here but unfortunately it wasn't a full-time position available and she is moving back home which is some distance away. She will get a good reference from me as I have been very happy with her performance. I've got no doubt she will get a job and will do well anywhere. She has got the attitude to succeed. She is ready.*

*This is a perfect example of how the scheme works and how good it can be. For me even if just one person finishes the scheme and pursues a career in fitness that is enough, as it is a way for that person to turn their life around into something healthy and fun. It's a great example to show other employers and I would encourage more schemes like this to be set up."*

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## Prisoner perspective

***"I feel I'm getting better physically, emotionally and mentally."***

**Claire is about to complete her volunteer placement with a YMCA gym. She was previously excluded from school and dropped out of a catering course at college. At 28 she seemed to have got her life back on track and was working in a factory, but her addiction to alcohol resulted in her ending up in prison for the first time. Working out in the prison gym helped her cope with prison life and recover from her addiction and has now opened up a new career path for her. She argues that prison gyms should be protected from staff cuts.**

*"During the first three months of my sentence I was very low. I didn't know what I was going to do. There have been tough times in here trying to comprehend what's going on in my mind. There is all this built up tension in prison, so I got involved in the gym. Being in that environment gave me an outlet. I needed somewhere to vent how I was feeling because you go through so many emotions in prison. Once you have a work out your mind just seems calm, it's not like everything's crazy.*

*I used to play football when I was younger for my area. In prison I found fitness was something I could put a lot of positive energy into and get something out of it. When I was in the gym I found out I could do some courses. I did all the courses available including healthy living and Focus fitness instructor level 1. I went on to be a gym orderly in the prison. I helped with the upkeep of the gym, did inductions and advised girls on exercise programmes. I learnt about communication and this gave me confidence and self-belief.*

*The SO [Senior Officer] of the gym saw quite a bit of potential in me and said I was approachable. He told me the prison has this scheme where they can send girls out to work in a gym outside at the YMCA to get their level 2 fitness instructor qualification. I was quite anxious at first, but I thought it was a challenge. Before I came in to prison my job was totally different to what I'm doing now. I was a production operator manufacturing contact lenses. Working in a gym being active is a totally different flip of the coin from sitting on my butt all day in a room!*

*I have been working at the gym by going out on ROTL for nearly a year and I'm just finishing my level 2 qualification. In the gym I do inductions and write programmes for people. I love seeing the results. I like seeing how happy they are when they achieve their goals. That gives me satisfaction. Everyone, all my colleagues I work with, know my situation, but I can't tell members of the gym because some people don't see the whole picture, they just think 'prison, oh my god, the worst thing ever'. The reaction of my colleagues was 'no way!'. I think a lot of people have a preconception of prisoners as unapproachable. We are just like everyone else, but we have made a mistake.*

*My family are so proud. I had to build a lot of relationships up again as I broke a lot of trust. Even though I was working and lived alone I was a handful due to my drinking. It had started to take over my life. I think the prison does offer a lot, but I feel there wasn't a lot of effort into the alcohol side as much as there is for drug addiction. The gym and fitness has helped me to fight alcohol addiction though. I feel I'm getting better physically, emotionally and mentally. If you are depressed exercise is great to get you out of that depressed mind. If you have addictions to alcohol or drugs, it's a focus I find. I'm out soon so I'm working with probation to get funding for a level 3 personal trainer course. Perhaps I will do some voluntary work too. I want to use my experiences to help others.*

*In the prison due to regimes and cover of staff I feel the amount of gym time we get is not enough. It's meant to be everyday but when they are short on staff they always take away gym staff. Why does the gym have to suffer as it's like the heart of a prison? I'm not just saying that because I love my fitness but it's the only outlet girls have. Going to the gym can tackle a lot of issues. The atmosphere in the gym, even though it's in prison, it feels so different. It's another little world where you can focus on you and your health and your mind. They should protect the staff in the gym as it is an important place for prisoners to come to deal with their issues, get involved in learning and perhaps even find a new career like I did."*

# CONCLUSION

Sport alone will not necessarily provide a panacea for reoffending, but it certainly offers a valuable alternative when seeking effective means through which to motivate and inspire offenders. This particularly applies to those who are hard to engage through traditional routes in education as well as wider resettlement or psychological interventions.

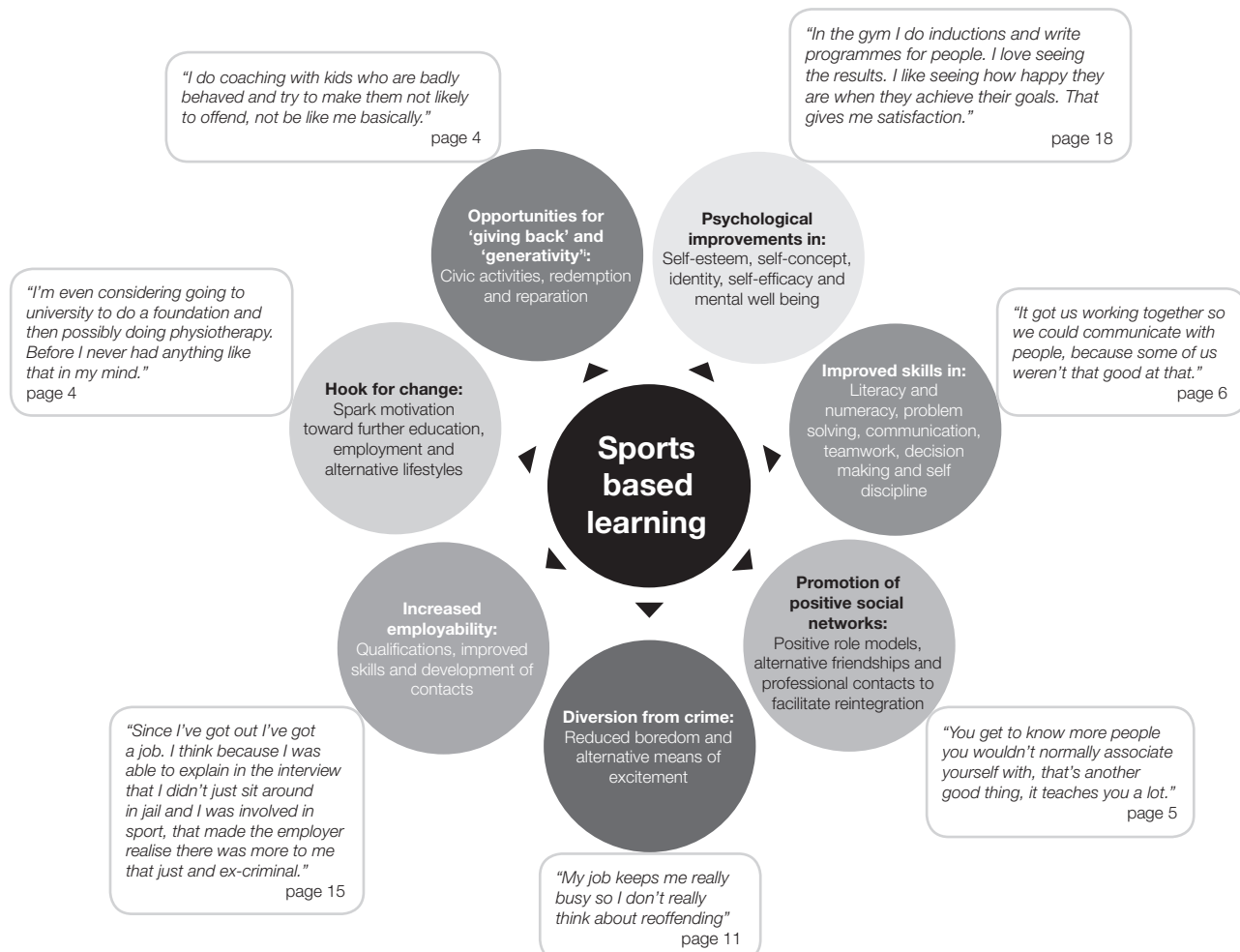
Our findings show that it is vital to engage with employers to ascertain what qualifications and soft employability skills they require in order to tailor the learning opportunities appropriately. The need for prisoners to have access to higher level qualifications is an important observation and needs to be addressed if prisoners are to be released 'job ready'. Partnerships with fitness training providers and support with distance learning are vital to enable prisoners to access these qualifications.

OLASS 4 'recognises the importance of the personal and social skills which employers rate highly in employees' and states that providers must 'take account of the distance many offenders will have to travel in developing these softer employability skills in order to be considered job ready'. We hope this report encourages OLASS 4 providers to consider sports-based learning and distance learning as means to achieve this outcome.

As the YMCA case study indicates, it is helpful if prisoners gain practical experience in the field in which they want to work. We hope that providers will consider the sports and fitness industry for potential apprenticeships and work placements. OLASS 4 providers have also been asked to use embedded learning and we hope this report inspires providers to look at the potential for embedding learning in the prison gymnasium. A full list of specific recommendations can be found at the end of this report.

Although our findings have shown that for a substantial number of prisoners, sports-based learning offers a meaningful and rewarding pathway into employment, it is also a pathway towards formal education from engagement in basic skills right up to degree level studies. Importantly, our findings also show that sports-based learning clearly has the potential to contribute to the broader resettlement agenda in promoting physical and psychological health, addressing offending behaviour and substance misuse issues, re-building family relationships, providing opportunities to 'give back' to society, and encouraging the uptake of pro-social identities.

Our findings in relation to how sports-based learning can serve to encourage desistance from crime are represented in the diagram below:



# Recommendations

## To ensure prisoners are 'fit for release'

### Listen to prisoner learners

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1. This report draws on the 'learner voice' and has used the suggestions and experiences of prisoner learners to develop these recommendations. OLASS 4 providers should gather the views of prisoner learners and prisoners who are not currently engaged in education, in order to understand what courses and activities would best promote positive attitudes towards learning. As part of this process, OLASS 4 providers should speak to prisoners in the gym to listen to their opinions, their hopes and aspirations, and explore how these could be met using the hook of sports and fitness.

### Use sport as a 'hook' for learning

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2. Where staff shortages are impacting on the gym this should be reviewed and action taken to ensure that access to sports-based learning in gyms is not compromised.
3. PSI 58/2011 should be amended as soon as practical to specify that prison gyms should offer and promote a wide range of accredited courses as a mandatory requirement.
4. A tutor should spend time in the prison gym, where safe to do so, to engage with and motivate reluctant learners through embedded learning, as well as to encourage and support prisoners to complete higher level courses in sports-related subjects through distance learning.
5. Tutors should consider using sports-related examples in their literacy and numeracy learning activities.
6. Prison gyms should contain a small library of books and learning materials relating to sports and fitness to encourage development of knowledge and improve literacy. Prisons should also consider facilitating reading groups in the prison gym focusing on sports-related reading materials such as biographies of sports personalities.
7. Prison gyms should contain a computer, if possible linked to the virtual campus, for prisoners to develop their ICT skills. For example how to make Powerpoint presentations about fitness, designing fitness programmes in Word, tracking fitness progress using Excel spreadsheets, etc.
8. As the virtual campus and other technology in prison is being developed, assistance for prisoners studying distance learning courses, particularly Open University courses, should be considered and piloted. For example enabling prisoners studying towards a Sports and Fitness Foundation degree to have secure relay messaging, email, Skype or video conferencing communication with their OU tutor.

### Use sport to develop 'pro-social' identities

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9. Prisoners working in or learning in the gym should be given the opportunity to wear specific clothing, such as a particular colour tracksuit or t-shirt. This will give them a sense of identity and pride and will encourage other prisoners to approach them and become involved.

### Use sport to develop soft employability skills

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10. Prisons should train and supervise prisoners to work as fitness instructors, coaches and peer mentors in the gym and other sports areas in order to develop their confidence, relevant experience, and soft employability skills.
11. Soft skills developed in the prison gym should be monitored and added to the prisoner's learning record so they are able to recognise their achievements and give examples of these skills in an interview situation.
12. Prisons should develop the leadership and transferable soft skills employers want by running programmes such as the Sports Leader or Duke of Edinburgh Award.



13. Prisoners taking sports-related courses in prison should be advised about distance learning courses, including Open University courses, which they can complete to broaden their knowledge and obtain qualifications at a higher level. Distance learning also develops the transferable soft skills that fitness employers are looking for, including self-discipline, motivation, organisational skills, improved literacy, problem solving skills and the ability to accept and respond appropriately to constructive criticism.

#### **Prepare prisoners for employment and self-employment in the fitness industry**

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14. Accredited courses available in prison gyms should be offered to at least level 2, and level 3 where possible, to ensure that prisoners have sufficient knowledge to be 'job ready'. Level 2 courses should be available to prisoners studying for the Sports and Fitness foundation degree in order to complete their qualification.
15. Prison gyms should work in partnership with community organisations, clubs and sporting bodies to provide prisoners with work experience opportunities on ROTL.
16. Prison gyms should provide advice and information to prisoners nearing release about ways to continue sports and fitness activities in the community, whether through volunteering or participation at a gym or sports club.
17. Information, advice and guidance about self-employment should be available to prisoners, as well as access to accredited courses that develop business skills.
18. Prison gyms should run first aid courses as this is required by approximately one in ten fitness employers and is also a useful life skill.

#### **Ensure 'working prisons' reflect work in the service industry**

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19. The development of the Working Prisons agenda should recognise that many employment opportunities are 'customer-facing'. Therefore the development of soft employability skills such as communication, inter-personal skills, confidence and customer service are vital to prepare prisoners for employment and self-employment in the service industry.
20. A pilot scheme for a working gym in a prison, using a similar model to 'The Clink' restaurant, should be explored and scoped.

#### **Engage with sports and fitness employers**

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21. Prisons should encourage sports and fitness employers to come into prison gyms to give advice and information about careers in the industry. National Careers Service advisors, gym staff and resettlement departments in prisons should build local contacts in this industry. Employers who run social inclusion sports projects in particular should be approached as they may see particular benefits from employing an ex-prisoner to be a role model for 'hard to engage' groups.
22. Employers in the fitness industry should be provided with information about employing ex-prisoners, how to effectively manage risk and the benefits that employing an ex-prisoner might bring to their business. They should also be given information about the Employers' Reducing Reoffending Forum.

#### **Prepare prisoners for further study**

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23. Where it is not possible for a prisoner to complete a level 3 qualification before release, prisons should collate relevant information and provide advice and guidance to prisoners about accessing apprenticeships or college courses in the community after release. A copy of the Prisoner Funder Directory should be kept in the prison gym so prisoners can look for potential financial support to continue studying fitness qualifications after release.
24. Prisoners should be advised about other sports-related roles such as retail, membership sales, catering, reception and administration which they may be able to combine with studying for their level 3 qualifications.
25. OLASS 4 providers should explore opportunities to build links with universities that offer sports degrees to promote higher education opportunities, in particular for young offenders. There may also be opportunities to develop student mentoring, specialist talks by students or even guaranteed interview schemes for prisoners with higher education potential.

# Potential

My heart soars,  
As I gaze at the bright lights  
Of the glorious velodrome:  
An unbefore known  
Sense of Serenity descends  
As I realise,  
I've found my spiritual home

With closed eyes  
I visualise the gleaming track:  
Packed stands  
And the Union Jack,  
Displayed proudly across my back.

The practice,  
Pain, blood sweat and tears:  
Over the years  
Had led me to the present,  
With the desire  
To harness the energy of an adolescent  
To fulfil my potential

This poem was taken from the book 'In Praise of Sport' made by  
prisoners at HMP Wandsworth as part of the Cultural Olympiad for London 2012.



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## Introduction

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## Chapter 2

- i In 2011 Prisoners Education Trust awarded 2,139 grants to prisoners to undertake study in distance learning across a range of academic and vocational courses.
- ii Inter-rater reliability is determined by randomly selecting a sub-sample of coded material and calculating the percentage of agreement between two or more coders. Seven percent of the materials were subjected to multiple coding, revealing a high rate of agreement at 93%, thus confirming the reliability of the coding process.
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## Chapter 3

- i CfBT Education Trust (2011) 'Employers' perception of best practice in prison education'.

## Chapter 4

- i Ministry of Justice (2010) 'Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders'.

## Conclusion

- i The term "generativity" was coined by the psychoanalyst Erik Erikson in 1950 to denote "a concern for establishing and guiding the next generation."