Justice Committee

Inquiry into purposeful activity in prisons

Written submission from HMP Barlinnie Visiting Committee

1. *What is meant by ‘purposeful activity’ and how can this be measured*

Purposeful activity covers a wide range of areas – recreation, work/training, education and offender programmes.

There is a local compliance officer who uses KPIs and historical data comparison to measure effectiveness. Activity is monitored locally each month and by the director each quarter.

2. *The extent to which prisoners have an opportunity to engage in purposeful activity*

In Barlinnie, prisoners have access to a long list of opportunities for purposeful activities. Apart from mainstream recreation and work opportunities, there are many placements in education, training and offender programmes and prisoners are given every encouragement to fully participate.

3. *What are the perceived benefits of purposeful activity and whether there are any examples of best practice?*

In our opinion and by observation, a prisoner engaging in purposeful activity during his sentence will experience a high level of self-satisfaction and achievement. By regular involvement his self-discipline and relationships will improve, as will his health if involved in recreation. He will have the opportunity to gain qualifications and work experience and through the offender programmes address his behaviour.

In Barlinnie, there are many examples of best practice. In the offender programmes area, two are worth mentioning. The Positive Behaviour Programme has proved its worth and can make a big difference to a prisoner’s relationship with family on release. Equally the award winning Positive Parenting Programme which is very popular and again can improve family relationship and make a big difference in offender rehabilitation.

In work and training, two relatively new projects are offering a valuable service, and involve an external charitable organisation and a national company. The first involves bicycle repair where cycles and equipment are sent into the prison, the cycles are refurbished and returned to the charity for onward sale. This project has recently doubled in size. The second project is on behalf of Martin Plant Hire. Where following training, prisoners are repairing and maintaining items of plant hire. This has already resulted in two prisoners securing employment with the company on release.
In education, Motherwell College is providing an excellent service and if prisoners can overcome their initial apprehension find participation in learning from basic needs to Higher Education very rewarding.

4. **What barriers may exist to prevent prisoners engaging in such activities?**

As far as we can see, from the prison management view there are no barriers as long as appropriate funding is made available and a good variety of opportunities are offered to maintain interest. From the prisoners’ side, the biggest barrier is their own choice not to participate. There is no compulsion to be involved.

5. **Whether access to purposeful activities is consistent across the prison estate**

The Barlinnie Visiting Committee is not in a position to comment on this.

6. **Whether access to such activity can be improved**

From our point of view prison management at Barlinnie is offering a wide and varied range of activities and constantly looking for ideas to interest prisoners as the examples show and we very much support their efforts. The Visiting Committee has had a training session regarding the topic and the governor is available for comment when presenting his report at our meetings.

We share the frustration of management when prisoners do not take advantage of the opportunities available and we wonder if the Prisoners’ Survey reveals any reason or comment on what is available.

Gerard McElroy  
Secretary  
Barlinnie Visiting Committee  
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