Justice Committee
Inquiry into purposeful activity in prisons

Written submission from HMP and YOI Cornton Vale Over 21s Visiting Committee

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

We would adopt a broad, inclusive policy to the concept of purposeful activity, defining it as any activity which enables women to participate meaningfully in an activity which promotes:

a) **Work and Work-Related Training**: Employment within the scheme of formally recognised and remunerated activities which is associated with training offering the development and formal recognition of increased levels of skills.

b) **Educational Development**: Formal courses provided in conjunction with an identified educational provider.

c) **Rehabilitative/Supportive Activities**: Formal activities supported by trained staff/volunteers which assist offenders to address their offending behaviour, reduce the risks of reoffending, help address physical/mental health issues or support progression.

d) **Formal Physical Activities**: Organised, supervised activities which promote health, well-being and improved social interaction.

e) **Organised Social Activities**: Organised, supervised activities which promote mental health, well-being and improved social interaction and include an element of individual and collective prisoner responsibility for organisation and delivery.

f) **Informal Social Activities**: Supervised/monitored sessions which promote mental health, well-being and improved social interaction.

In terms of measurements of involvement, we would see two principal opportunities:

a) Formal attendance records maintained by staff which would allow monitoring.

b) Diary records maintained by individual women which could encourage engagement.

In terms of evaluation, we would again see two principal opportunities:

a) Formal attainment records maintained by staff which would allow monitoring and

b) Formal evaluation by individual women, perhaps included in the “diary” involvement.

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

While some women have regular access to some of these activities, very few women have regular access to them all, or even the majority of them. Women on remand are particularly poorly provided for. The current practice of transferring women to other establishments severely restricts regular access to these activities. In general, we are concerned at the proportion of time where women are either locked up in their cells or are in unsupervised groups.
3. **What are the perceived benefits of purposeful activity and whether there are any examples of best practice**

Certain of the activities which we have listed contribute to the process of progression and clearly benefit women in this way. We regularly encounter women who indicate that purposeful activities have been helpful to them, particularly when they are offering better chances on release (e.g. work related training/experiences and community based activities), contribute to their physical/mental well-being (e.g. gym, Link Centre activities, Listener support) and social activities (mainly related to events associated with Christmas or other festivals).

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

   a) The physical layout of the prison in scattered residential blocks.
   b) The smaller scale of the female estate.
   c) Lack of staff for supervision.
   d) Residential blocks not being staffed in the later part of the evening where groups of women are free to associate. We regularly encounter informal concerns from women questioning their safety when groups of women are in association without direct staff supervision.

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

We are not sufficiently experienced to answer this question fully, but do receive regular comments from women who have moved between Cornton Vale, Greenock and Edinburgh or have partners held in the male estate questioning the consistency of provision – usually highlighting their concern that women prisoners appear to be disadvantaged. This is most often related to the perception that the male estate offers more opportunities (e.g. workshop type activities for work and training which also offer higher rates of remuneration).

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

It is our experience that the order of activities which we have listed a) to f) reflects the general availability to convicted women, with a) being most available and f) least available. We consider that the access to and quality of the activities listed a), b) and c) could be improve., However, it is those activities listed d), e) and f) which offer the major opportunities. Given the high levels of uncertainty and possible large scale prisoner movements likely over the next few years we feel that the review of all of these areas presents a real, urgent challenge.

The commitment to a major change in the way in which women are to be imprisoned offers an opportunity to considerably improve their access to purposeful activity and we welcome the decision to consult on the issue and the opportunity to put forward our views.

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