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Using a prison gym to provide vocational and skills training: HMP Lowdham Grange

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Brief description

This example describes how the prison's gym is used effectively to support the reduction of offending and the successful resettlement of offenders on release, by offering a progression route using a range and variety of industry relevant accredited programmes.

Overview – the provider's message

'Approximately four years ago, the prison identified a need to improve the range and variety of courses on offer to support the reducing resettlement agenda and successful resettlement of offenders on release. Subsequently we have introduced a set of accredited programmes that represent a ladder of opportunity for offenders on release. Piloting courses before a full roll out has been very successful in identifying where improvement is needed, as has the use of feedback from offenders completing courses. We have found our offer is very popular with a particularly high demand for the level 2 gym instructor award. But we are not complacent! We know that we must continually improve the range and variety of programmes available, including the offer for those who don't routinely use the gym facilities. My advice to others is not to underestimate the time and work involved in ensuring all staff are appropriately qualified and that robust internal verification arrangements are in place.'

Elaine Tinsley, Acting Senior Education Manager

The good practice in detail

The gymnasium is staffed by a team of four physical education instructors and was judged good in the most recent [inspection](#).

One of the team is a time-served physical training instructor who has been re-designated as a 'sports and leisure' tutor. The role is primarily to provide skills and vocational training to offenders. The tutor operates a weekly programme of courses. The majority of offenders follow level 2 courses that last between 16 and 25 weeks, generally attending one session each week. This pattern of delivery is used to ensure that offenders can also attend work within the prison. All courses have appropriate external accreditation and applicants are subject to relevant security checks. Accredited programmes have been introduced that provide progression from entry level to level 3. Courses include:

- Entry level - taster courses or programmes relevant to those in need of literacy support. These include basic health and fitness and activity leadership. Courses are offered with the support of teaching assistants and run in a similar manner to 'Toe by Toe' sessions.
- Level 1 - including activity leadership, healthy living and circuit training.
- Level 1 - personal skills/performance in cricket, tennis, football, basketball, volleyball, badminton and athletics.
- Level 2 - including gym instructor, gymnasium circuit training instructor and activity leadership.
- Level 3 - a personal trainer qualification. On completion, offenders are able to contribute to the effective working of the gymnasium by offering fitness and training advice in fitness clinic sessions.

In addition, the prison provides programmes for users who would not normally engage with the gym that include:

- A recently developed accredited qualification in 'Drug Awareness in Sport'. This is designed to be used as a course for those on Counselling, Assessment, Referral, Advice and Throughcare (CARATS) programmes who are interested in using fitness and sport to improve their lives.
- A healthy living club to support individuals who are not confident in using the gymnasium facilities, when others are present, because they are over or underweight. Specialist sessions are delivered when they can learn how to train and how to use the equipment.

Provider background

[HMP Lowdham Grange](#) is located near Nottingham. It is a category B prison for convicted men and was expanded in 2010, when the prison population increased by 300. The current operational capacity is 976 with an average length of stay of two years. Typically, offenders serve sentences of between 10 and 12 years.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

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