HM Prison & Probation Service

Ministry of Justice

Policy name: Physical Education and Activity (PE&A) in Custody Policy Framework

Issue Date: 05/11/2026

Implementation Date: 01/04/2027

Replaces the following documents (e.g. PSIs, PSOs, Custodial Service Specs) which are hereby cancelled: PSI 58/2011 Physical Education (PE) for Prisoners and Service Specification for Physical Education (all versions and outputs)

Introduces amendments to the following documents: N/A

Action required by:

X	HMPPS HQ	X	Governors
X	Public Sector Prisons		Heads of Group
X	Contracted Prisons		The Probation Service
X	Under 18 Young Offender Institutions		Other providers of Probation and Community Services
	HMPPS Rehabilitation Contract Services Team		

Mandatory Actions: All groups referenced above must adhere to the Requirements section of this Policy Framework, which contains all mandatory actions.

For Information: By the implementation date Governors[1] of Public Sector Prisons and Contracted Prisons must ensure that their local procedures do not contain the following: PSI 58/2011 Physical Education (PE) for Prisoners and Service Specification for Physical Education (all versions and outputs).

Governors must ensure that any new local policies that they develop because of this Policy Framework are compliant with relevant legislation, including the Public-Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act, 2010).

[1] In this document the term Governor also applies to Directors of Contracted Prisons.

How will this Policy Framework be audited or monitored:

- The HMPPS National Physical Education and Activity Team (NPEAT) is accountable for the oversight and effective management of PE&A and Physical Education (PE) staff training in public sector prisons.

- The HMPPS College of PE monitors staff recruitment and training.

- Regional PE managers conduct operational site visits and a programme of capability building work to provide assurance that the framework is being met. Audits are carried out annually.

- Governors are responsible for ensuring any new local policies to deliver this Framework are compliant with relevant legislation, including the Public-Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act, 2010) and National Governing Bodies of Sport controlling each sport or activity and Sporting Lead Body Guidelines.

- Governors are responsible for ensuring an individual accountable for monitoring and oversight of PE delivery and quality is in place. This could be a Band 5 PE Custodial Manager or the relevant head of function.

Resource Impact: No additional resource impact due to Policy Framework review.

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Approved by OPS for publication: Helen Judge, Chair, Operational Policy Sub-board, October 2026

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1. Purpose

1.1 This Policy Framework sets mandatory standards for delivering safe Physical Education and Activity (PE&A) in custody, aligned with legislation and government policy. Its purpose is to embed PE&A as a cornerstone of rehabilitation in custody, enabling people in prison to develop a passion for sport and movement, build positive lifelong habits, strengthen personal resilience, take ownership of their rehabilitation and recovery and improve their own physical and mental health. Through purposeful and inclusive activity, we aim to:

- improve health and wellbeing,
- build confidence, personal resilience and skills,
- support rehabilitation and recovery,
- enable active and meaningful lives.

1.2 There is established evidence that PE&A can make an important contribution to rehabilitation when it is purposefully designed, delivered well and inclusive in practice (see para 2.1). Governors must develop local policies within these parameters, ensuring continuity of safe, decent, and legal provision while maximising the rehabilitative value of physical activity.

1.3 Participation may present risks to or from individuals, and these must be identified, assessed and managed as part of the wider safety, allocation and regime management processes within the establishment.

Definitions

1.4 For the purposes of this Policy Framework:

- **Physical Activity (PA)**: Any bodily movement that contributes to physical or mental wellbeing, including walking, running, cycling, gym-based activity, active recreation and informal exercise. This can be self-directed or as part of a structured or supervised session.
- **Sport:** A form of physical activity involving organised or structured participation, either individually or as part of a team, governed by recognised rules and standards, including those set by National Governing Bodies where applicable.
- **Physical Education (PE)**: Structured and supervised physical activity delivered by appropriately qualified staff as part of the prison's PE curriculum.
- **Physical Education and Activity (PE&A)**: The collective term used throughout this Framework to describe physical education, physical activity, sport and recreation delivered in custody.

2. Evidence

2.1 This policy framework and the associated guidance is informed by legislative requirements (see Section 4), academic evidence, management information, and other HMPPS frameworks relating to rehabilitation, health and wellbeing, including but not limited to:

- Chief Medical Officers' Report on physical activity guidelines
- HMPPS Sport and Physical Activity Evidence Summary
- PSI 06/2015 - Managing Health and Safety
- Advancing Equality for Offenders and Children in Custody Policy Framework
- The HMPPS National Regime Model (NRM) policy framework
- The Women's Policy Framework
- Health promotion: PSO 3200
- HMPPS Drug and Alcohol Operational Framework
- Prison Safety Policy Framework
- PSI 03/2012 - Activity Allocation
- Incentives Policy Framework
- Prisoner Discipline Procedures (Adjudications) policy framework
- Management of internal security procedures policy framework

2.2 People in contact with the Criminal Justice System experience higher levels of severe health conditions and inequalities, with poorer psychological and physical health than the general population. Scientific evidence from the UK Chief Medical Officers report on physical activity guidelines demonstrates that regular physical activity is associated with decreased mortality and lower morbidity from chronic conditions such as heart disease, stroke and diabetes, alongside more positive mental and physical health outcomes.

2.3 There is growing evidence that sports and physical activity interventions can be effective in reducing reoffending and anti-social behaviour, through supporting conflict resolution, cooperation and positive peer relationships. There are consistent benefits seen for psychological wellbeing, including reduced stress and depression, improved self-esteem, and better emotional regulation. These outcomes support rehabilitation by strengthening the factors known to support recovery (e.g. from addiction or poor mental health) and underpin desistance from offending.

2.4 Sport and physical activity supports rehabilitation through multiple, complementary mechanisms. These include improving mood and brain function, physically diverting people from offending, satisfying the need for excitement, and helping people learn social skills and build positive relationships. They can also provide a sense of achievement and inclusion.

2.5 Team sports, when delivered safely and purposefully, can play a particularly valuable role in custody. HMPPS Sport and Physical Activity evidence suggests they may be particularly effective in supporting conflict resolution, cooperation and pro-social behaviour, helping to build positive peer relationships and contribute to safer, more purposeful regimes. These benefits depend on activities being structured, inclusive, appropriately supervised and aligned to rehabilitative objectives.

2.5 Positive outcomes depend on careful design and high-quality implementation. This includes being clear about how activities are intended to bring about change, ensuring safe and appropriate delivery, and adapting provision to meet the differing needs of individuals (for example, women, older people, young people and people with disabilities). Creating opportunities for continuity into the community can further support longer term rehabilitation and desistance.

3. Outcomes

Prison governors are accountable for delivering and monitoring the following outcomes.

Mandatory delivery targets

3.1 PE must be supervised and organised by HMPPS PE qualified staff as part of an establishment's agreed PE curriculum. This may also involve external parties co-delivering elements of the programme.

3.2 All PE&A provided to people in prison must deliver an offer that:

a. Enables each prisoner access to the legal minimum of 60 minutes of *meaningful, needs appropriate physical activity* for adults (over 21) and 120 minutes per week for children and young people (under 21) as required by Prison Rules 1999.
b. Any restrictions to PE&A as part of the Incentives Policy Framework or Prison Discipline Procedures Policy Framework must still ensure prisoners have access to the legal minimum. Any restriction must be necessary, proportionate, time-limited, recorded and reviewed.
c. Aims to deliver the recommended minimum by the UK Chief Medical Officer of *at least 150 minutes per week*, subject to safety, security and operational constraints.
d. Contributes to mental and physical health, engagement in purposeful activity and stability of the regime.
e. Is purposefully designed, evidence informed and responsive to the diverse needs of the prison population, working within the parameters of the establishment category. This should include tailored delivery for different cohorts such as women, young adults, neurodiverse and older prisoners.
f. Ensures PE&A facilities, activity spaces and equipment are maintained in a clean, safe and serviceable condition to support wellbeing, safety and a positive experience for all prisoners.
g. Provision must take account of prisoner feedback to support engagement and continuous improvement. Establishments must have arrangements in place to gather and review prisoner feedback on PE&A provision at regular intervals.
h. Local Safe Systems of Work on PE&A, facilities and equipment are enforced and good practice in sport safety is followed.
i. Ensures prisoners must complete a Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire (PAR-Q) prior to undertaking any PE, Activity or Sport.
j. A designated PE and healthcare referral programme that includes adapted physical activity must be in place for those identified through the PAR-Q or relevant health information.
k. Prisoners must receive a PE Induction before they use any equipment which must include mandatory elements of first aid and manual handling.

l. Qualifications are delivered, where identified, including those linked to employability.
m. There is a staff training and development offer to support PE workforce planning, including fitness readiness, supervision, and advice for staff interested in progressing into PE roles.

3.3 PE&A must not take place where required safety controls, supervision arrangements or Safe Systems of Work cannot be met.

3.4 The Governor must ensure that an agreed and documented **PE&A Delivery Plan** is in place, reflecting local population need, regime capacity and available resources. The plan should include arrangements for monitoring participation, reviewing outcomes and supporting continuous improvement.

3.5 When planning and delivering PE&A, access must be managed through local activity allocation and regimes processes. Establishments must consider relevant safety risks, including risks arising from bullying, coercion, intimidation, conflict, non-association and prisoner vulnerability, and take appropriate action to manage those risks in line with the Prison Safety Policy Framework. Appropriate measures must be put in place to manage those risks in line with the Prison Safety Policy Framework, while maintaining access to PE&A wherever it is safe and appropriate to do so.

3.6 Where a restriction is necessary, Governors should consider appropriate alternative opportunities for physical activity or other purposeful activity.

Governance and accountability

3.7 Appropriately qualified staff must be in place to deliver the outcomes set out in this policy. Governors must ensure PE staff are suitably qualified, remain up to date with required accreditations and continuing professional development, and that recruitment, training and workforce development arrangements are in place and evidenced.

3.8 Governors must ensure a PE workforce and succession plan to cover current and anticipated workforce gaps is in place to support safe, sustainable delivery.

3.9 As a minimum, staff must:

- Hold a relevant or equivalent qualification appropriate to the activities being delivered.
- Have completed essential safety training (including safeguarding and first aid, or local equivalent).

3.10 Public sector prisons must follow the agreed national PE Instructor recruitment and training pathway, including local readiness assessment, expression of interest processes, fitness testing, recruitment and HMPPS College of PE training arrangements.

3.11 For Privately Managed Prisons (PMPs), access to training through the HMPPS College of PE is covered in the PE&A Training Privately Managed Prisons policy. Where PMPs do not use HMPPS College of PE training arrangements, they must ensure staff hold qualifications and training that meet national governing body or recognised industry standards for the activities delivered.

3.12 Sufficient funding must be provided for equipment infrastructure, assets and training from the prison budget to enable the delivery of the outcomes specified in this section.

3.13 Public sector prisons must use mandatory contracts for all fitness and sports equipment supply, maintenance, and related services.

3.14 Orders should be placed via IProc catalogues. The Contract Management Team must be consulted for non-contract items or advice.

3.15 Any locally procured services must be routed through the **HMPPS Effective Practice Panel (EPP)** as detailed in section 3.22.

Oversight, monitoring and assurance

3.16 Appropriate monitoring arrangements must be in place to assess the safety, quality and accessibility of PE&A provision. These arrangements must:

- Enable the identification of prisoners whose participation in PE&A may present a risk to themselves or others
- Support the appropriate sharing of relevant risk information with PE staff, in line with wider safety and case management processes
- Ensure that concerns arising through PE&A delivery are escalated appropriately and inform wider safety management arrangements
- Enable the identification of wider risks, gaps in provision and emerging issues, and inform timely action to maintain safe, decent and effective delivery
- Ensure PE&A delivery operates in accordance with relevant security policies as set out in the National Security Framework and the prison's Local Security Strategy.
- All gym equipment must be accounted for at the end of every session in accordance with the Management of Internal Security Procedures Policy Frameworks (closed and open prisons).
- Ensure appropriate arrangements are in place for the use, temporary removal, storage and reissue of PE staff personal protective equipment (PPE), in accordance with local risk assessments, safety requirements and security procedures.

3.17 PE&A provision must be subject to regular review through local monitoring and self-assessment processes. Monitoring should consider quality of engagement, participation patterns across cohorts, prisoner feedback, and evidence of contribution to wellbeing, behaviour and rehabilitation outcomes.

3.18 Appropriate systems must be in place to support accurate recordkeeping, monitoring and audit of PE&A delivery.

3.19 Delivery of PE&A must align with the National Regime Model (NRM) Policy Framework, with accountability for ensuring that alignment sitting with the Governor.

Contact sports

3.20 All combative activity is prohibited, including boxing, sparring, pad work, martial arts, boxercise involving simulated combat, or any activity designed to practise or rehearse the use of physical force against an opponent. These restrictions apply across all public and privately managed establishments and must be adhered to regardless of local interest, demand, or external partnerships. The Governor is responsible for ensuring that boxing and other forms of martial arts are NOT delivered in their prison.

3.21 Non-contact, boxing inspired activities may be permitted where they are clearly delivered as fitness or educational interventions. Delivery of these should be discussed with and authorised by the **HMPPS National Physical Education and Activity Team** (NPEAT) with formal endorsement through the **Effective Practice Panel** (EPP).

Community partnerships and the Effective Practice Panel (EPP)

3.22 The Governor is responsible for ensuring community partnerships are used to enhance and supplement existing PE&A provision and, where appropriate, support continuity of participation and engagement on release. PE&A, programmes and digital products introduced to supplement existing provision should be considered through the Food, Physical Activity and Wellbeing (FPAW) Effective Practice Panel (EPP). The EPP provides national assurance that endorsed provision is evidence-informed, supports health and wellbeing outcomes, offers value for money, and complements rather than duplicates existing HMPPS provision.

Prisoners supporting PE&A

3.23 Prisoners may support PE&A only where this is recorded as a goal or step on their Assessing Risks, Needs and Strengths (ARNS) sentence plan, or for education or vocational qualifications. They must not be used to cover PE staffing shortfalls or replace the need for appropriately qualified staff.

3.24 Prisoners supporting PE&A must not control or supervise the discipline of other prisoners, hold informal authority over others, or take full responsibility for any activity where hazards or risks have been identified.

3.25 Prisoners supporting PE&A must be trained, individually assessed, certified for the activity, and supervised by PE staff. Any use of indirect supervision must be risk assessed, documented, time-limited and approved by the Governor or delegated authority.

Residential fitness rooms

3.26 Where a prison chooses to provide residential fitness rooms, the Governor is responsible for ensuring that health and safety for staff and prisoners is prioritised. Residential fitness rooms must not be used until a full risk assessment has been completed.

3.27 Residential fitness rooms provide opportunities for prisoners to engage in recreational physical activity (PA) and support wider health and wellbeing initiatives. Equipment must be located and managed in a way that prevents unauthorised use, ensures appropriate supervision, and supports safe operation within the regime.

3.28 The Governor must ensure that:

- Where PE staff do not directly supervise these areas, additional controls and risk assessments are in place to guarantee safe operation and maintenance.
- Each Fitness Room is managed by a named member of staff who is responsible for ensuring compliance with all relevant Health & Safety legislation including daily equipment checks. As good practice, this role should be undertaken by a qualified PE Officer. Where this is not possible, the appointed member of staff must, as a minimum, have appropriate training or a recognised qualification in the safe supervision of fitness

facilities, or demonstrable knowledge and competence in the safe use and management of fitness equipment.

- Arrangements must ensure fair, safe and equitable access and must not allow informal control or exclusion of prisoners by other prisoners.
- Equipment is purchased only through approved suppliers and meets minimum standards.
- All equipment undergoes annual specialist inspection for safety and suitability.
- Only cardiovascular and cable resistance machines are used in these unsupervised areas.
- No free weights are to be used in these facilities.
- A full risk assessment determines what equipment is suitable for limited supervision environments.
- Daily checks by competent staff ensure the area is clean, safe, hazard free, and fit for use.
- All equipment must be accounted for in accordance with the requirements at 3.16.
- Safe systems of work and equipment instructions are displayed wherever possible.
- Risk assessments and safe systems of work cover all equipment, activities, access controls, and attendance procedures.
- Cleaning and maintenance schedules are in place for both equipment and rooms.

3.29 Before using residential fitness rooms, prisoners must complete the PAR-Q and PE induction process. Governors must ensure that a signed or otherwise recorded acknowledgement is retained confirming that the prisoner has received and understood information relating to the safe use of equipment, conditions of use, relevant health and safety requirements and their responsibilities while using the facility. Prisoners who are subject to a healthcare-imposed medical restriction must not access residential fitness suites until that restriction has been reviewed or lifted.

Outdoor gym equipment

3.30 All outdoor gym equipment must be procured through the approved national contract to ensure consistency, compliance, and value for money.

3.31 Installation must be carried out by qualified contractors in accordance with all relevant British Standards, ensuring the safety and durability of the equipment. Ongoing safety inspections and annual servicing are to be delivered through the designated service and maintenance contract.

3.32 It should be noted that the routine upkeep, supervision, and day-to-day monitoring of outdoor gym equipment does not fall within the duties of PE staff.

Unsupervised team sports

3.33 The Governor is responsible for ensuring that unsupervised team sports are not permitted. Such activities cannot meet the mandatory requirements set out in this framework for:

- safe supervision
- risk assessment
- incident reporting
- adherence to Safe Systems of Work
- suitably qualified member of staff that meets the national governing body recommendations

3.34 Any proposal to depart from this requirement must be discussed with and authorised in advance by the HMPPS National Physical Education and Activity Team (NPEAT). Where any deviation is authorised by NPEAT, the Governor must ensure that all participants have completed the PE induction process, PAR-Q and that a record is maintained confirming participants have been informed of the relevant risks, safety requirements and behavioural expectations associated with the activity.

Staff using PE facilities

3.35 Governors should encourage staff to use gymnasium facilities outside of prisoner usage times to support fitness and wellbeing. Any member of staff participating in physical activity must complete a PAR-Q prior to commencement and where required have health professional clearance. Staff cannot use free weights or play contact sports unless supervised by an appropriate person as identified in 3.9.

4. Requirements

Compliance with legislation

4.1 All PE&A provided to prisoners shall be undertaken in accordance with all current legislation relating to physical education and the National Governing Bodies of Sport guidelines.

Legal requirements

4.2 Governors are required, pursuant to Rule 29 of Prison Rules 1999, to ensure that:
(1) A prisoner aged 21 years or over can participate in physical education for at least one hour a week.
(2) A prisoner under 21 years can participate in physical education for two hours a week. These activities must foster personal responsibility, the prisoner's interests and skills and encourage good use of time on release.
(3) In the case of a prisoner with a need for remedial physical activity (GP Exercise referral), appropriate facilities must be provided.

4.3 Governors are required, under section 149(1) of the Equality Act 2010, to have due regard for equality considerations from the outset and ensure these are actively applied in the design and delivery of PE&A provision. Access must be meaningful and equitable, with barriers to participation identified and addressed for prisoners with protected characteristics.

4.4 Governors are required under section 2(3) of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 to publish and revise a written health and safety at work policy for employees. Regular management checks must be incorporated to ensure compliance. Governors must also ensure that PE&A provision complies with all relevant health and safety legislation, regulations and professional standards.

4.5 Governors must ensure that PE&A records, including personal data, are managed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018, UK GDPR and the Public Records Act 1958. Records must be securely stored, used only for a defined purpose, and retained and deleted in line with retention periods set out in the PE handbook. Retention periods and

secure storage must be applied to all records, including those held outside core national systems.

5. Constraints

5.1 This policy framework has been developed to ensure legal compliance and minimise the risk of litigation. Any derogation from this should be considered on a case-by-case basis and will need to be justified, discussed with and authorised in advance (where possible) by the HMPPS National Physical Education and Activity Team (NPEAT).