



Creativity in a restricted regime

Enabling creativity for wellbeing and a continuing rehabilitative culture in criminal justice settings during Covid-19 and beyond

A guide for prison staff

Introduction

An unprecedented number of people in prison have now been living under a restricted regime for a prolonged period of many months. The situation continues to evolve but is likely to continue for months to come, and as it does, the risk of long-term damage to prisoners' mental health increases. **Access to arts and creative activity is essential for prisoner health and wellbeing, and therefore these activities have a crucial role to play in a restricted regime.**

For the benefit of the whole prison community, we encourage our prisons, education providers, artists and art organisations to work together, to provide every prisoner with access to creativity during regime restrictions in place during the pandemic and into the challenging recovery stages ahead. This document gives recommendations on how those working in prisons can achieve this.

This document has been put together by the National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance (NCJAA) in support of the work of the Arts Forum. Chaired by Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, the Arts Forum provides a vital link between the government, policy-makers and the arts in criminal justice sector. It aims to strengthen partnership working between the [Ministry of Justice](#), [Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service](#), the [Department for Culture, Media and Sport](#) and other government departments, the [National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance](#) and its network.

Background

This document contains guidance for prisons. It is designed to complement the [COVID-19: National Framework for Prison Regimes and Services](#), which outlines how restrictions in prisons will be implemented. It is also intended to sit alongside the Exceptional Delivery Model (EDM) for prison education and in-cell activity. We hope this document can inform and inspire people to produce creative activity in criminal justice settings during the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond. **This document is intended for Governing Governors, Heads of Learning & Skills, Heads of Reducing Reoffending and any and all other prison staff involved in implementation of the EDM for prison education and in-cell activity.** It is designed to promote creative activity in criminal justice settings across the country, including in local areas under enhanced lockdown measures, and throughout periods of national lockdown.

Image courtesy of Irene Taylor Trust.
Credit: Lizzie Coombes



"I know first-hand the impact the arts can have on those in our care, building hope and self-worth and breaking down barriers to create a safer and more positive environment for all. I am delighted to endorse this document, which sets out the reasons why creative arts in custody are now more important than ever and gives practical solutions on developing this vital area of work in spite of Covid-19 restrictions. The evidence is clear: arts in prison are a need-to-do, not a nice-to-do. I look forward to seeing the arts offer in custody continue to develop throughout Covid-19 and beyond as a key part of our recovery." - Ralph Lubkowski, Governor, HMP Hewell



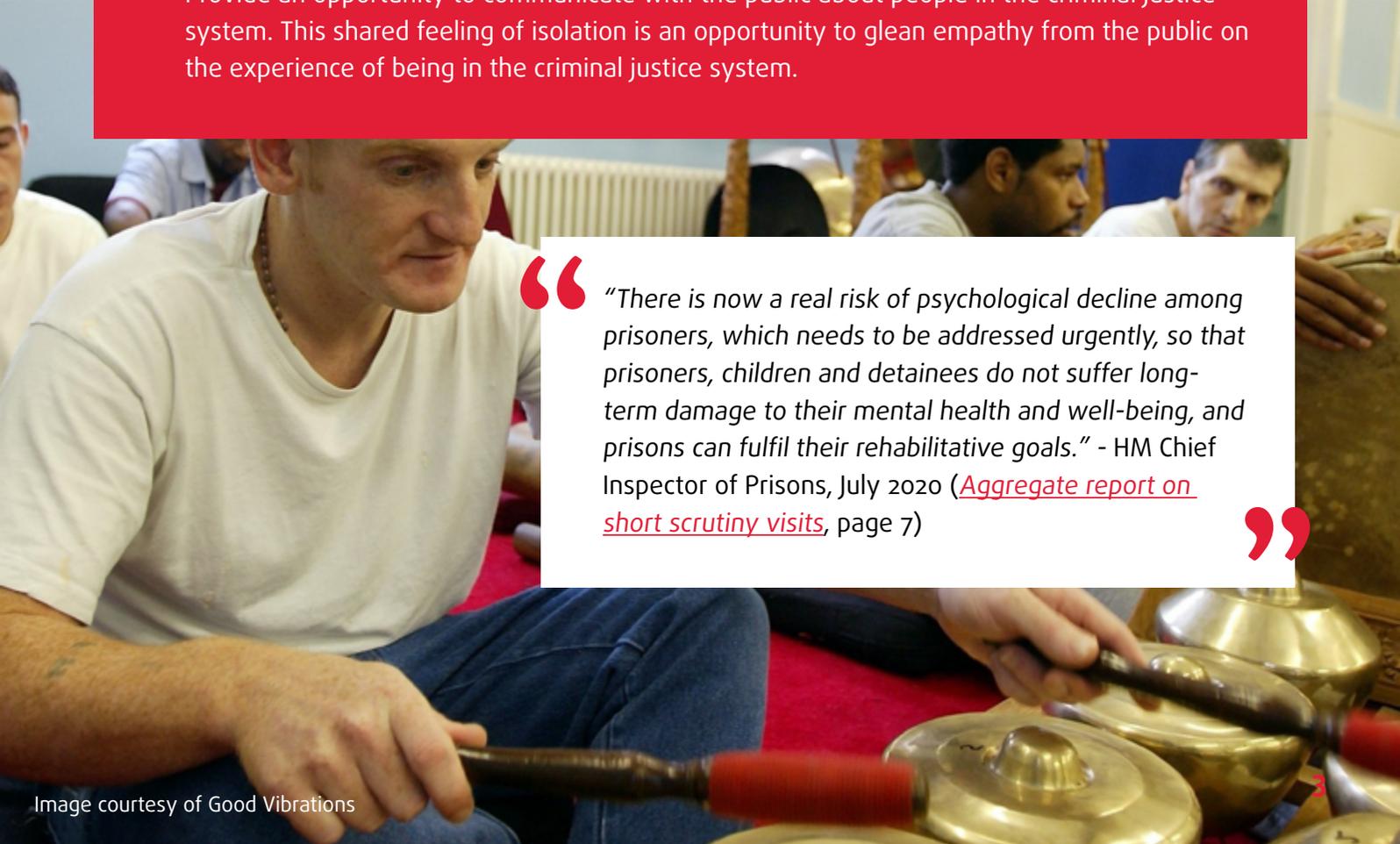
Rationale

With our prisons operating restricted regimes due to the Covid-19 pandemic, people in prison have spent much of their time in their cells, without access to face to face activities and few daily interactions, since March 2020. While restrictions eased in some prisons in early autumn 2020, we returned to a national lockdown in January 2021 and the timing of a return to a normal regime across the estate remains uncertain. **People in prison are at risk of becoming increasingly isolated, impacting their physical and mental health.** Art, music, design and creativity have the power to transform lives – enabling personal development and fostering positive relationships.

To find more information about good practice please see [Enhancing arts in culture in criminal justice settings: a good practice guide \(2019\)](#).

The evidence shows that arts and culture in criminal justice settings can:

- Improve **safety and wellbeing** in prisons.
- Build **family connections and links with the outside** for people in prison.
- Provide **learning opportunities**.
- Positively influence how prisoners interact with staff and other prisoners¹; this is still the case during a lockdown.
- Provide an opportunity to communicate with the public about people in the criminal justice system. This shared feeling of isolation is an opportunity to glean empathy from the public on the experience of being in the criminal justice system.



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“There is now a real risk of psychological decline among prisoners, which needs to be addressed urgently, so that prisoners, children and detainees do not suffer long-term damage to their mental health and well-being, and prisons can fulfil their rehabilitative goals.” - HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, July 2020 ([Aggregate report on short scrutiny visits](#), page 7)

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We seek to encourage meaningful, safe practice for in-cell arts and creative activity during lockdown. Recommendations for minimum creative provision under lockdown stages are outlined below in line with the HMPPS [COVID-19: National Framework for Prison Regimes and Services](#). These recommendations are intended to also sit alongside Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) guidance on safe performing arts and cultural activity during Covid-19.

	Stage	Recommended creative provision
4	Lockdown	Provision of reading materials, paper and pens for writing and drawing. Access to scripts, musical instruments and arts and hobby craft materials. Some communication with external agencies through email to create collaboratively and ensure connectivity.
3	Restrict*	To comply with local EDMs. Carry on with requirements above and reintroduce some face-to-face creative activity from external providers (such as artists in residence). Ensure all activity complies with social distancing and PPE requirements.
2	Reduce*	Reintroduction of complementary creative activity across education and health settings. The minimum requirements outlined in stages 4 and 3 continue.
1	Prepare	Regimes operating without requirements for social distancing or PPE use. Arts and creativity introduced during lockdown continues. Creative strategy implemented for future planning.

* In stages 2-3: move face-to-face/group outside, using awnings, marquees etc. if necessary, to enable them to continue while complying with local EDMs, social distancing and any applicable restrictions.

Funding activity

There are a variety of ways that prisons can fund creative activity. Some activity can be funded through traditional sources including education, health and resettlement work. Activity may also be funded through the Dynamic Purchasing System, whether through adapting existing contracts or obtaining new ones. Work may also be provided by arts organisations and charities who are funded elsewhere. To ensure creative activity is of a high standard and appropriate for criminal justice settings, remunerating providers appropriately is essential.



“Prison can be a very dark and lonely place, but I have seen first-hand the power creative arts in prison can have to guide and motivate those in the darkest of times. During the first lockdown my show on National Prison Radio allowed me to interact with people in prison and continue to advise them on how to stay creative. I support this document, which shows how arts activities in prison are both possible and necessary, especially over lockdown.”

- Brenda Birungi a.k.a. Lady Unchained, poet and National Prison Radio presenter



¹ [Enhancing arts and culture in criminal justice settings: a partnership approach](#) (2019), pages 8-9 & 14

Top tips for effective creative delivery

Arts and creative activity can provide a sense of purpose, motivation and a goal to work towards for people in prison facing ongoing in-cell isolation. **We recommend activities that support participants to feel they are a part of something beyond their cell.** This might include a group of prisoners, contributing individual sections to a collective work, to be displayed/performed collectively when the lockdown eases. Suggested approaches include:

- Have a lead member of staff for creative delivery
- Acknowledge the pressure prison staff are currently under and work with existing contacts to deliver meaningful activities with staff input into design, to assist partners to understand what's possible
- Keep things fresh and replenish resources on time to support them to stay motivated and engaged (see examples from the **Prisoner Learning Alliance** and **Koestler Arts**)
- Reach out to experts
- Seek new creative partnerships in your local area
- In a national lockdown or where the local area is under tightened restrictions, work with existing contacts to identify how activities can be adapted and continue under the enhanced restrictions in the community
- Seek out creative partnerships and projects which foster and maintain family connections for people in prison
- Adapt existing provision through Dynamic Purchasing System contracts, philanthropic work or education and health projects
- Create materials communicating safety measures in place for partners/potential participants to let them make an informed decision about attending
- Seek an artist in residence to capture this experience and provide connectivity
- Work with partners such as National Prison Radio, Local Prison Radio, Internal TV Loop, video calls and in-cell technology
- Provide mechanisms for feedback and a creative community.

It is worth noting that some activity is not suitable for adaptation and cannot easily be modified for new platforms or delivery mechanisms. Some specific face-to-face activities will only be able to commence at stage 1 (Prepare).

Good practice case studies

We know that it is still possible to provide people in prison with the means to engage in high quality arts and creativity during the lockdown, because we are seeing it happen across the prison estate.

Under England's tiered lockdown system, we have seen organisations in local areas under different tiers of restrictions continue to deliver Covid-safe arts activities in prisons. Arts and creative activity can also continue through periods of national lockdown. The following are examples of creative activities that took place under different levels of restrictions in 2020 corresponding to the stages outlined in the HMPPS COVID-19: National Framework for Prison Regimes and Services.

“Prisons should be places of care, control and compassion. Using arts and culture can help us to achieve each of those, all the while allowing those people under our supervision the opportunities to reinvent, build hope and demonstrate positive contributions. Society will benefit from this, and that is why [we] must find ways to allow the arts inside our walls.” - Prison governor

Stage 4

Visual arts (Koestler Arts)

The organisation produces a new activity sheet available every week. The sheets are intended to prompt creative activity which participants can choose to submit to a competition, providing examples of previous entries for inspiration. The activity sheets are designed to require minimal resources – participants only need a pen or a pencil and some paper. By partnering with education provider Novus, they are able to distribute the activity sheets to their learners through in-cell screens and paper packs.

Adaptation of a face-to-face music composition and performance programme (Irene Taylor Trust)

All correspondence takes place through the post. Practitioners write to participants to encourage them to compose lyrics and send them back to the practitioners. The practitioners then set these lyrics to music and send in CDs for participants to review and give feedback on. The practitioners can then edit, arrange and progress the work in collaboration with the participants.

Adaptation of a face-to-face theatre programme (Shakespeare UnBard)

The programme director sends the cast daily activity sheets, including ideas for character development and other rehearsal activities. In their cells, the cast use these resources to rehearse at a specified time each day, at the same time every day. The practitioners in the community rehearse at the same time, so that everyone is symbolically together, while apart.

Adaptation of a playwriting course (Synergy Theatre)

The organisation delivers a playwriting course remotely, via video tutorials and work sheets. The completed worksheets are emailed or posted to the playwright, who provides feedback to the participants. Final scripts are performed by professional actors, recorded and sent to the prison for the writers to watch. The organisation has also screened productions in prisons.

Stages 3/4

Adaptation of a face-to-face music activity (an Occupational Therapy team)

As the men are not able to come out of their cells, the music teacher delivers 'through the hatch' music sessions on the healthcare corridor. The music teacher plays a guitar and sings, alone in the corridor, at a substantial distance from the men, who sing within their own cells. They open the hatch in the cell doors, so that the sound can travel.

Adaptation of a face-to-face theatre programme (Rideout)

Weekly face-to-face, socially distanced, drama workshops in prison exploring issues relating to the maintenance of family relationships whilst in prison in a pandemic. Developed closely with the prison's safer custody team, the workshops use a mix of adapted drama exercises, writing, discussion and audio recording in a space that has been fully risk assessed to be Covid compliant. Staff wear face coverings. The outcome of this work will be a printed booklet for prisoners, and website for family members, that present examples of issues faced both in and out of prison, and offer short, simple pieces of advice.

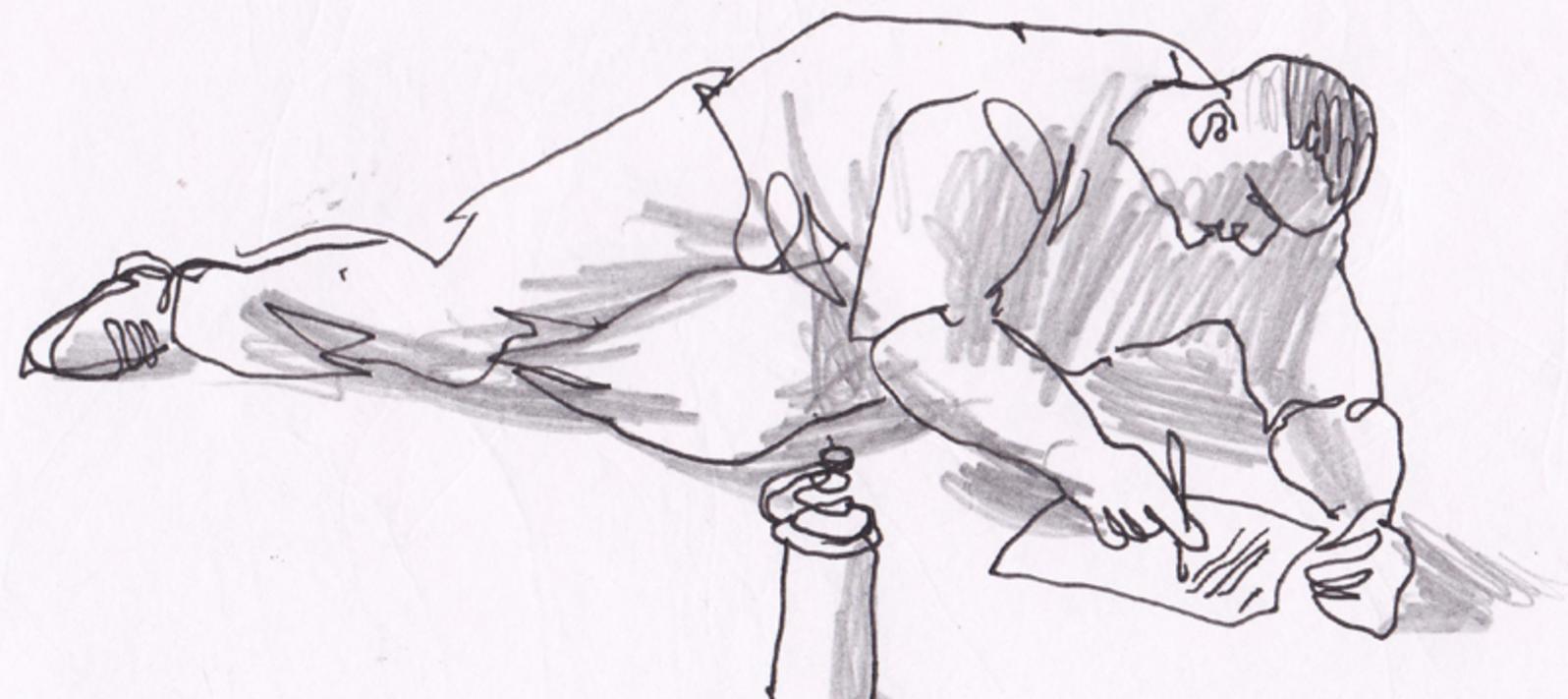
Stage 2/3

Adaptation of a face-to-face theatre programme (Odd Arts)

Facilitated by prison staff, practitioners meet participants for shorter, one-to-one sessions, compliant with Covid-19 social distancing restrictions, including a ban on group workshops. The content of sessions is relaxed to allow participants to continue theatre programme activities and/or to discuss what's on their mind. Participants' comments include "Grateful to be able to get out of my cell. Being locked up for 23 hours is awful," and "All I do is sit all day and watch TV normally, but this used all of my brain."

Image courtesy of Irene Taylor Trust
Credit: Lizzie Coombes

“Engagement with the arts and creativity has been a vital support for many of us during the Covid-19 pandemic – maintaining both mental and physical health and wellbeing, and creating connection despite the physical separation of lockdown. The NCJAA and arts organisations across the country have worked tirelessly to bring arts and creative activities safely into prisons to ensure that the men and women in custody have access to that same lifeline. We are proud to endorse this guidance, which will support prisons and prison staff to deliver high quality creative activity for the people in their care, both during the pandemic and beyond.” - John McMahon, Criminal Justice Policy Lead, Arts Council England



Further information

If you want to learn more about potential creative partnerships contact the [National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance](#) or use the [Clinks Directory of Services](#).

Acknowledgements

This document was put together by the National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance (NCJAA) on behalf of the Arts Forum. The NCJAA aims to ensure the arts are used within the criminal justice system as a springboard for positive change. It represents a network of over 900 individuals and organisations that deliver creative interventions to support people in prison, on probation and in the community, and is managed by Clinks. The NCJAA would like to thank everyone who contributed to the development of this publication.



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