

Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

Oral evidence: Social impact of participation in culture and sport, HC 734

Tuesday 3 Jul 2018

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 3 Jul 2018.

Watch the meeting

Members present: Damian Collins (Chair); Paul Farrelly; Simon Hart; Julian Knight; Ian C. Lucas; Rebecca Pow; Jo Stevens; Giles Watling.

Questions 62-150

Witnesses

I: Dr Phillip Lee MP, John McAvoy, Professional Athlete and Professor Rosie Meek, Royal Holloway University.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Professor Rosie Meek, Dr Phillip Lee MP and John McAvoy.

Chair: Welcome to this second session of the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee in our inquiry into the social impact of culture and sport. I welcome Professor Meek, Phillip Lee and John McAvoy to give evidence this morning. I am sorry that we are in this rather cavernous Boothroyd room and you are therefore sitting a long way away from us, but hopefully we will be able to make do. We have one declaration of interest before we start.

Julian Knight: It's subtle, but I am a Parliamentary Private Secretary in the Ministry of Justice.

Q62 **Chair:** The first question is to John McAvoy, but I would welcome the other witnesses' views on this, too. Sport has clearly played—it plays—a big part in your life and was a big part in your changing the direction of your life. Why do you think sport has the potential to be so impactful on the lives of people who end up in difficult situations?

John McAvoy: Well, Damian, I can literally say sport saved my life. It saved me from death and from spending my whole life incarcerated. I went to prison when I was 18 years old for five years for possession of firearms. After that sentence I came out and I can honestly say I was worse than before I was locked up. I came out and I hated the system even more. I was very disenfranchised from being a young boy. I grew up around a lot of criminals: my family and friends. I had this repulsion towards the system. I went to prison and that hatred just festered and increased.

I went back to prison at 22 years old. I was in the Belmarsh high security unit. I got sentenced to two life sentences for conspiracy to commit robbery. There were 28 men out of 85,000 of us that were deemed to be such a high risk of escaping or a threat to national security that we had to be kept in a high security prison unit. That did not change me. It was only when my friend passed away four years later that I had an awakening when I was in prison. I looked at how precious my life was. We only get one shot at life and I wanted to do something else.

When I was in prison I used to keep myself fit by training in my prison cell. I started going down the prison gym. One day a remarkable man called Darren Davis, a prison officer, saw me on the rowing machine. He went away and came back a couple of days later and gave me all these pieces of paper that had all the world and British records for indoor rowing machines. At this point I was susceptible to changing. I wanted to do something else with my life, but my whole identity from being a 19-year-old boy was as a criminal. All my role models when I grew up as a little boy were criminals, and I aspired to be a criminal when I got older. But I wanted to get rid of that. I wanted to release it and I did not want that life any more.



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When Darren gave me those pieces of paper and I saw those records, I attempted to break some of them, and I did. The first record I broke was for the marathon, and I broke it by seven minutes. When I broke that record, what I realised that day in that prison gym in Nottingham was that everything I had ever wanted as a little boy—to be successful at something in my life and to leave a legacy—I could do it through sport, and I became absolutely consumed with being the best athlete I could become.

What was really important was that there was a man in that prison called Darren Davis, who reached out to me as a prison officer and opened my eyes to that potential, and he allowed me the facilities and access to enable me to reach my potential as an athlete.

I went on to set three world records in prison and eight British records on the indoor rowing machine. When I got released from prison, what sport then did for me, which I didn't really intend to happen, was that obviously I gave up my old life as a criminal. When I got released, my dream was to be a professional athlete, so I joined a rowing club. My whole social circle then changed and I didn't realise I was going into—rowing isn't just a physical sport—the social setting of the sport as well. My group set completely changed. My whole friendship group changed overnight, and I was mixing with people who were in the Metropolitan police, and with judges and people who worked in Government, and that is the power of sport again. It exposed me to more positive role models and inspired me to keep on the track that I was on.

Today, I compete in a sport called Ironman. I am the only Nike-sponsored Ironman triathlete on the planet. I can honestly promise every single person in this room right now that I was as bad as you could ever get. I was the most one-track minded criminal you will ever meet in your lives. I grew up and, honestly, I detested this—I detested the Government, I detested banks, the police. If I have managed to do what I have done with my life and turn my life around, every single one of those 90,000 people in prison today can do exactly the same. That is the power of sport.

- Q63 Chair:** Everyone would agree that it is an amazing story. You are the person who has made it happen. You have turned your life around through sport. You mentioned as well that your potential or your interest was spotted by one of the prison officers. In general, how important was sport within the prison? Were there sports programmes on offer for prisoners to take part in, which could look to encourage people to use sport and physical activity as a means of opening up new aspects in their lives?

John McAvoy: I was very fortunate that at the prison I got transferred to, Lowdham Grange, the prison officer Darren Davis was very passionate about sport. He had done a lot of amazing challenges outside of prison in his private life—he had climbed Mount Everest; he went to the North Pole. He understood what physical activity could bring to the prison estate. Darren provided a lot of sport coaching qualifications, which I participated in. The gym there was also very much more open than some of the other



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prisons I had been to. At the maximum security prisons I was in, you hardly got any physical activity. When I was in Belmarsh maximum security unit, you got three gym sessions a month. Lowdham Grange was a little bit more open with the gym, and I think the governor there at the time really put a lot of emphasis on physical activity. They had training facilities in the exercise yards—things like chin-ups and press-up bars and stuff. But it was really pushed by Darren Davis, the prison officer.

Since I have been released from prison, I have gone back to Lowdham Grange. I went and gave a talk to the inmates. I would recommend that every person in this room goes to Lowdham Grange and sees what Darren Davis is doing. He has set up a sports academy within the prison; once the inmates are trained to be qualified personal trainers, they then train other prisoners to do the same. When I go into that environment and talk to the inmates, I am very fortunate, because they don't see me as someone in authority and they will be more open to being quite honest with me. Every single one of them I spoke to, when I asked, "Will you continue doing this when you get out?", said that they would.

I think you are far more likely to change someone if they engage in stuff that they have a passion for. You do tend to find in prison that a lot of people have a passion for exercise and training. From my experience in prison, it is normally the food that they are eating, then the gym, then the visits. I think that the prison gym is a massive way that you could target some of the most disenfranchised people and try to orchestrate that change in mindset to do something positive with their lives.

Q64 Chair: Do you think that if you had been in a different prison you might not be sitting where you are today?

John McAvoy: Definitely. It was a mistake that I even got transferred there; I should never have gone to that prison—I should have gone somewhere else. It was a bureaucratic mistake. They moved me there. Absolutely, totally. Even though I had the physical prowess to be a good athlete, it is not about that. It was about a man who worked in that prison who reached out to me, who gave me an opportunity and believed in me. I think that is the importance of prison officers—if they see their role as someone who inspires and tries to change. Darren saw that in me and wanted me to change and wanted me to be successful. He reached out to me to the extent that he used to come into work on his days off to facilitate me doing those records. He had no agenda other than wanting me to be a better person.

Q65 Chair: Phillip Lee, looking at John's story, from your time as a Minister at the Ministry of Justice, to what extent does the Department look at outliers of success like that and see if they could replicate the conditions that have led to that success in other prisons, so that other people could benefit from the sort of experience that John has had?

Dr Lee: I always seem to have the tough gig of following you, John. It took some time internally in the Department to even convene the first meeting on the value of sport in the criminal justice system—I think it



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took over six months to get to having a meeting. In fact, I stumbled across John's story in the process of trying to bring that together and he gave his performance at the start of that first meeting. Once that meeting had taken place, the Department became more interested and more engaged, because there were a number of people, not just John. David Dein turned up and talked about pairing football clubs with prisons. There were a series of people there—about 30, I think. Once that took place, it was positive.

The challenge for the Ministry of Justice is that it is dealing with really quite difficult, dark issues on a day-to-day basis, and it is not an easy place for either civil servants or Ministers to be in that regard. The sports meeting, and indeed the subsequent report, are positive. It is about something positive that we can do to turn people's lives around. John is obviously a great advert for that principle, but there is no doubt that it took some time to get any momentum behind it. It got a bit of a boost when David Lidington became Secretary of State. Up until that point it had been like wading through treacle to get anything done, but when David was made Secretary of State it got a bit of a spurt on. That was when I was able to commission Rosie to write her report.

It was not that there were not people in the system who were keen to embrace this; I don't think they felt that they could. There is always this lazy attack, which you have seen evidence of in the last couple of weeks in the press, about providing these facilities for people who have done wrong and are serving time in prison. It is lazy because what are we suggesting here? That we just lock people up and they come out rather like John described—worse than when he went in? We must find a way of rehabilitating and reaching out to these young men. I have seen little evidence of anything better than sport. It was not straightforward; it took some time, but I think we have made some progress.

Q66 Chair: The investment from the Department in this is probably not significant in financial terms, is it?

Dr Lee: There is no actual funding associated with this at all. Maybe Rosie can talk more about this. I think the conclusions of her work suggest that we could do more, and that would require funding. There is an issue of access to sports facilities and tying up prison officer time in that. There are more difficulties in some prisons than others. John is right that Lowdham Grange—I have been there—is not typical of all prisons in its approach to sport. However, I think that most prisons would have more sport in the typical daily routine for prisoners, but that may require some investment.

Q67 Chair: Presumably most prisons have some sort of basic sporting facilities. Is this mainly about training staff to be more aware of how sport can be utilised, or bringing in outside partners who could work with the prison?

Dr Lee: In some of the urban, Victorian prisons such as Wormwood Scrubs there is hardly any outdoor space. A charitable organisation, the 3 Pillars project, is working in there to play rugby. They are literally in the



middle of the prison on some scrubland, almost, at times. It is difficult in the urban, big prisons. Queens Park Rangers, my team, go into Wormwood Scrubs as well. It is easier in prisons where there is more outdoor space. That needs to be borne in mind going forward in the way in which we design prisons.

Outdoor space is hugely important to try to reach these guys. They have to be quite macho sports. Part of it is that you are dealing with individuals who are at one end of the aggression, anti-establishment type end of things. It is about their feeling of self-worth. That is why rugby, martial arts, boxing and those sorts of sports are perhaps better suited to reach out to these predominantly young men.

- Q68 **Chair:** Rosie Meek, do you agree with Phillip Lee that particular types of sports are more effective? Also, do you feel from your experience that there is widespread recognition of the potential power that utilising some of these sports has across the prison estate, or is it very mixed?

Professor Meek: It is incredibly mixed. As John's story illustrates, it is something of a lottery depending on what prison an individual ends up in, in terms of what sort of sports provision they will be able to benefit from. In my review, I identify numerous examples of good practice that are going on across the estate right now, but they are pockets of good practice and they are not widespread. We know that we need to offer a diverse offering in terms of sports; it is no good offering one type of sport and expecting everyone to engage with it, as John's story illustrates again—it was rowing on that occasion that was a hook for him.

Going into prisons with a range of different types of programmes, be they arts, music or sports-based, is one of the most effective ways of engaging with the most difficult-to-engage-with prisoners. Of course, as we have already heard, staff need to have the time and resource to support those activities, but they also need to have the leadership to encourage them to bring in community organisations, for example, and to provide room and space in the day-to-day regime of the prison to prioritise those sorts of sports-based programmes.

- Q69 **Chair:** One of the reasons we are holding this inquiry is the feeling that there are lots of great initiatives and projects, but there is no real co-ordinated strategy or approach. Is that your experience? Having been brought in from outside to look at the way the Government work in this space, what is your impression?

Professor Meek: That is very much my impression. In fact, the first of the 12 recommendations in my review is that we need a co-ordinated approach that encompasses health, education and sport as part of a wellbeing strategy. Without that, as anybody who works in prisons knows, different departments do not tend to talk to each other. Although PE departments have some of the best staff I have seen in the estate in terms of PE instructors, they can be very isolated unless they have a governor on board who is very supportive of a sports agenda. They can operate in extreme isolation and be sidelined time and time again, or



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indeed, the staff can be called up to cover staff shortages in the residential wings of the prison so the gym is closed entirely. I have encountered that on numerous occasions.

- Q70 Giles Watling:** John, you have given Darren Davis very good press. You happened to come across that one individual prison officer who was able to help you. Was there any sign of others working with others there, or was he a one-off?

John McAvoy: No. From my experience of being in prison myself and going into prisons, you tend to find that the relationship between prison officers who work on the wings and inmates is completely different from the relationship between prison officers who work in the gyms—the PTIs—and inmates. I find that inmates are far more susceptible to listening to the PTIs, again, because of the prioritisation of a lot of inmates. They really appreciate the gym; they appreciate getting out of their cells and going and exercising. You tend to find that the banter, the laughing and the joking, and not wearing the uniform, has an effect on inmates. Again, it makes people much more susceptible to being able to change.

- Q71 Giles Watling:** So the prison officers on the wing could be good, well natured and well intentioned, but fundamentally they have to do the locking-up and they have to wear the uniforms, so that is a bad atmosphere. Is that what you are saying?

John McAvoy: From my experience, from the relationships that I have seen develop in the prison gym compared with the prison wing, you tend to find people are much more susceptible to listening when they are in the prison gyms. All the years that I was in prison, I would struggle to tell you about one bad prison officer I ever met who worked in a gym. Everyone was always very encouraging, even when I got transferred to an open prison. One of the prison officers wrote a letter to the governor to let me go out to run an ultra-marathon, and the governor let me do it. That was all because he believed in what I was doing and the fact that I enjoyed sport and he loved sport, so we had that natural connection with each other.

- Q72 Giles Watling:** That is very good to hear. One other thing that occurs to me is that you mentioned your friends and how you changed your friend set—how all that changed when you came out and you had, if you like, seen the light. It is a well-known phenomenon that when drug addicts, for instance, and alcoholics start to leave that set and go straight, people try to drag them back. How did you overcome that? It shows enormous strength of character.

John McAvoy: I completely disconnected from my old life. I stopped communicating with old friends and associates while I was in prison. When I was in prison, when I was doing all my training on the rowing machine, it took me out of prison. I was looking at the little monitor and at the numbers, and I could have been anywhere in the world. It got me away from inmates—the inmates left me alone—and no one spoke to me. What really happened as well, which I did not really realise, was that I developed a really close relationship with Darren. Darren was the first



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male in my life, from being a boy, who actually wanted me to be successful. I had never really experienced that before. I built up a relationship with him. He would come to work and tell me about his wife, his kids and his private life, and then I opened up to him.

I then started going down the gym not just to exercise but to spend time with Darren and talk about books, which was obviously very new to me. I had never really had that relationship with anyone before. I just enjoyed his company and talking about sport all the time.

Q73 Giles Watling: So your earlier friend set has now left you.

John McAvoy: Yes, completely.

Q74 Giles Watling: Dr Meek, may I ask you a similar question about that friend set thing—wanting to drag people back? Is that something you have experienced in your research?

Professor Meek: Absolutely. We know from desistance theory that one of the most important protective factors when someone leaves prison and desists from further offending is a pro-social, positive peer group and support group. We all know that sport can provide that—be it a local team, a mentor or a coach relationship. As John says, that can replace the antisocial influences in someone's life. Someone has to be motivated to make that change, and that is why sport can be particularly influential.

Q75 Paul Farrelly: I have got a few questions for Rosie in a moment. Phillip, just going back to the meeting that took six months to arrange, to anchor it—when did it happen?

Dr Lee: September 2017. That was the second one. The first one would have been six months before that—March or April 2017. I had been a Minister from July 2016.

Q76 Paul Farrelly: Who did you bring together at that meeting?

Dr Lee: Officials tried to reach out to as many organisations as we could find working in this space—both in the community and in custody. Via some PTIs and some forward-thinking governors, we managed to collect about 30 people at the first meeting. It was only then that I realised that the MOJ was funding some of this.

Q77 Paul Farrelly: Which other Government Departments were involved?

Dr Lee: At that point, no other Government Department. Subsequently, DCMS became aware of it, and possibly DH too.

Q78 Paul Farrelly: Your focus was on what you might call mainstream prisons.

Dr Lee: And communities, actually. StreetGames is an organisation that springs to mind. It works predominantly with young offenders.

Q79 Paul Farrelly: The Department for Education has clearly got a role, because you should never give up on excluded pupils.



Dr Lee: Forgive me; there may have been DFE involvement. You would have to ask officials. The excluded pupils thing was because Lawrence Dallaglio's trust is now in the youth estate. He was an excluded child, so his foundation is about working with people who are on the edge of the criminal justice system.

- Q80 **Paul Farrelly:** Rosie, we have met before through your work with Premiership Rugby and the clubs' programmes. Every year, we host the Premiership Rugby community awards here, which are happening for the 13th time on the Terrace next week. Throughout the development of that work, Saracens has always been the beacon that everyone wishes to follow and overtake. We have received evidence from one of Saracens' programmes, Get Onside, which provides mentors for links with sport. The evidence we had is that 92% of participants have not reoffended. Could you talk about Premiership Rugby's efforts and what work you have done with them? Could you also give some examples of good practice from other sports?

Professor Meek: I think rugby is a really good example, because many people who end up in our prisons have never played it before, yet the physicality of it, the teamwork, the discipline and the respect element of it has great appeal. It makes a lot of sense to deliver rugby-based programmes in prison. In fact, some of my earliest work in this field—in Portland, a young offenders institute, about 10 years ago—drew on both football and rugby programmes. The effect was that after release, some players went on to play at quite a high level, having never touched a rugby ball before their prison sentence. We know it is a sport that young men in particular are attracted at least to try out while in prison, and we know that some of the issues associated with rugby—teamwork, respect and discipline, as I have said—are particularly effective with prisoners. But for me, what is most effective is when we provide a rugby-based programme that has structured, wraparound holistic support such as mentors, appropriate skills and training and work placements after release, or giving prisoners the opportunity to come out on ROTL—release on temporary licence—whether to do training at a local club or take part in games. To go back to the previous question, rugby can provide a very powerful new set of social contacts as well as perhaps volunteering and paid work opportunities.

So Premiership Rugby should be applauded for their efforts. Of course, they also have the benefit of being geographically all over the country, so—this is really important—they can do some form of partnering with different prisons around the country so that we do not see the best provision just going into our London jails, for example.

As I said before, we should not be looking just at rugby or football. A lot of people will not want to take part in rugby because they will not feel they have the physical capability to do so. Other sports, such as martial arts-based sports, may be a more effective way of engaging particularly some of our more vulnerable and disaffected young people. So I would be reluctant to say that one model should be encapsulated and replicated to the exclusion of other types of sport.



- Q81 Paul Farrelly:** From John's experience, it is clearly important that it does not just happen in prison and then come to a halt afterwards. What are the challenges for positive outcomes in terms of continuity and funding?

Professor Meek: You are right. Probably the most challenging period in an offender's lifestyle—John may correct me—is coming out of custody. That transition from custody to community can be very difficult, and we know that a lot of people reoffend in those early weeks and months after release. An organisation, community or club that supports people through that period by building up a relationship with them through rapport and trust and offering suitable role models while they are still in custody and then keeps up that level of support through the gate and into the community is critical for a programme to work. Of course, that is going to cost money, and, if it is commissioned by a prison, the prison may be less interested in the post-release element of that programme.

HMPPS has an opportunity to link together pre and post-release provision with some of these sports-based programmes. It is community organisations that will be best placed to do that. That is why another recommendation from my review is that we need to see better relationships between community organisations and prisons. Yes, we do see that happening occasionally, but we tend to see prisons are reluctant to bring community organisations in, and—even more—to let individual prisoners go out on release on temporary licence for sports-based reasons.

- Q82 Paul Farrelly:** We have a few questions about the review coming up. Rosie and Phillip—I am not ignoring you, John—Saracens's evidence is that they saved £1 million that otherwise would have been the cash cost of reoffending. Phillip, in the Department, and Rosie, from your work, what are the challenges in getting people to look at how, if you want to imagine it in hard cash, £1 spent is £10, £20, £30 or £100 saved, let alone the social value, which you cannot quantify in pounds, shillings and pence?

Professor Meek: As you know, in a number of programmes such as these, whether arts, music or sports-based, people are sometimes reluctant to take the long view. These are complex lives we are talking about, and it is difficult to go in with an intervention and undo perhaps a lifetime of negative influences and complex issues someone may have accumulated. We need to take the long view in terms of long-term sustained support and recognise that the investment will come back, though it may not be immediate.

Dr Lee: You hit the nail on the head. The problem is trying to get quality evidence of an intervention working and then trying to create a virtuous circle in the way in which the Government views that and subsequently helps to facilitate and/or fund. The recidivism rate for Saracens in its very small pilot relative to the number of people at Feltham is about 15%. That is about a fifth of the recidivism of anyone going through Feltham. We need more quality work in the assessment of that and there needs to be a large programme, but I am pretty convinced that it is working.



To give an example, when I went to Feltham, I spoke to one of the PTI guys who was lamenting the fact that one former inmate had come back and was playing for a company team against Feltham at rugby. He said, "The bugger was being paid more than me." Saracens had taken this kid, bought him a suit, given him a mentor once he had gone through the gates and given him interview training. I think he was working for Virgin Media.

Those individual case studies are anecdotal. A substantive piece of work is required that looks at a particular intervention, but I am pretty confident that it works. There is quite a lot of inertia in the criminal justice system. There is a lot of risk aversion in the HMPPS and in the MOJ in general. I understand where that comes from—we are dealing with difficult situations and people—but if we cannot overcome that, we will not make any progress. A bit of risk taking is required here. I cannot think of a better thing than the use of sport.

Paul Farrelly: You have just brought back a memory from the '80s. When I first came to London I played rugby against Feltham. The Feltham coach, who was an officer, got sent off.

Q83 Chair: Three years ago, DCMS launched a document based on the integrated support strategy for the Government. Did you ever see much evidence of the integrated sports strategy existing in the Government? Were there interdepartmental meetings with Ministers or officials to discuss it?

Dr Lee: No. The only reason we are talking about it is that I asked for something to happen at the MOJ when I turned up. Lots of little pockets of good practice are taking place, as Rosie alluded to, but I certainly did not detect the sense of some sort of overarching Government strategy bringing in all the relevant Departments that has an impact on the prison system. Perhaps officials are meeting somewhere, but I was not aware of it. It took convening that first meeting—that is what brought it to the fore.

Q84 Chair: So when you brought this up with your officials, they would say, "This is how we do this; this is the work the Department does and this is how we work with other Departments such as DCMS to discuss the role of sport."

Dr Lee: I was not aware of it, no.

Q85 Chair: Even at an official level there was no meeting or co-ordination. In particular, one of Sport England's remits is to fund community sport and to target people who are not otherwise formally involved in sport at all. Ex-offenders could be quite a good group. In your work, was there any sense of how Sport England could support some of the work that is being done through the prisoner stage?

Dr Lee: If I were still at the Department, I would view Rosie's work as a starting point from which I would go in to bat for a broader strategy across Government on the use of sport. The reality is that dealing with recidivism is not just the MOJ's responsibility. In fact, I would argue that for young



offenders it is predominantly the responsibility of DFE, DCLG and DH. The next stage was to commission that work in order to try to bring those together.

I never get the impression there is a lack of money in sport that could be channelled into social action. What was lacking was a sense of a strategic plan with a direction. It is a classic siloed activity of Government. In its defence, the MOJ is the last port of call for people. We are at the bottom of the food chain—let's be blunt. Invariably you are dealing with young people who have come from dysfunctional family backgrounds, with a disproportionate amount of child abuse, exposure to domestic abuse, exclusion from school and so on.

If you are genuinely serious about dealing with reoffending rates, you start away from the MOJ. I thought that sport was going to be one way of getting people to think like that and say, "If we invest further up the chain, we will probably get fewer people ending up in prison at the end."

- Q86 **Ian C. Lucas:** Can I be clear, Phillip, what you are doing in assessing what prisons, for example, are doing as far as sport is concerned? Have you asked the individual prisons whether they are using sport, and if so in what way, or whether they have a specific strategy relating to sport or culture?

Professor Meek: I will answer that because that was very much my remit as part of my independent review. Yes, I did an audit of all of our youth facilities and a cross-section of all of our adult facilities, including men and women. I was struck by the huge variance in the quality and type of provision. The examples of good practice that I celebrate in my review are there because they are fairly infrequent. It seems a huge waste of an opportunity not to have those examples rolled out across the rest of the estate.

Dr Lee: Formally, the report was commissioned from within the youth justice budget. We strayed a bit into the adult territory. I was the Youth Justice Minister and the only way I could get this going was that we were looking at under 18s, but we were actually recognising up to 23. That is where we wanted to look because it was that period that was of interest to me. How old were you when you discovered the rowing machine?

John McAvoy: 26.

Dr Lee: A bit later. That sort of young male was where we were going. But formally, it was all the youth estate was because that was what I was responsible for.

- Q87 **Ian C. Lucas:** What is the next step? Is it to mainstream better practice?

Dr Lee: It is my successor's responsibility, whoever takes this on. For me, what I wanted to change was the typical day at young offender institutes such as Feltham, Cookham Wood and Wetherby. We have this rather perverse situation where we spend 25 hours a week in the classroom under contract. I didn't spend 25 hours a week in a classroom when I was



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at school, so why we expect young people who have been excluded from school prior to going to prison to do that, is beyond me. I wanted to get to the point of maybe half and half on the pitch or in the gym and in the classroom.

My longer-term target was basically to scrap those 25-hour contracts for education and change the typical day for a young offender. I was particularly guided by a Spanish non-profit organisation called Diagrama that runs over 70% of the youth estate in Spain.

Their typical day is much more physical activity and classroom physical activity that is broken up. If you go to Feltham, they spend a lot of time locked up, particularly in classrooms. If you walk past the classrooms, let's just say it doesn't sound as though a lot of learning is going on. It is a very difficult environment for the teachers.

That was my longer-term goal but it was going to be tough because there is this resistance. There is this belief that somehow teaching English and maths came before teaching self-respect and self-worth. Fundamentally, these individuals need the building blocks of life in place first that we all take for granted. Then you can go on to learn about Shakespeare. Let's get the basics right, and I think sport is the way to do that.

- Q88 **Rebecca Pow:** I am interested in what you are discussing currently. Perhaps Dr Lee might comment. Would it not be better, for the sake of prevention rather than cure, to focus much more on the education angle and departments to get your messages through, to introduce them all to sport in the first place? I am doing a similar thing with communication because it turns out a lot of young offenders have communication issues. Isn't it exactly the same?

Dr Lee: Yes, in an ideal world you would intervene earlier with these young boys of about six, seven or eight. The kids involved in county lines now are about 10 or 11. I had a trauma surgeon in from the London Hospital about six to eight weeks ago. He is basically piecing back together all the kids who are being at the moment in London. I wanted to understand how we can intervene. He said, "You've got to get in before 10 or 11." So yes, you are right.

The problem for the MOJ is that we have to deal with what we have already. We should be intervening earlier and we should be trying to shape Government policy further up the food chain. But fundamentally we have, at any one time, 85,000 people in the prison system. There are about 1,000 people in the youth estate at any one time. We have to deal with them. There is a significant chance that anybody in the youth estate at the moment will be in the adult estate later in life. The recidivism rates are pointing towards that.

- Q89 **Rebecca Pow:** I know you have to deal with the ones you have now, because you have them. But you could look to the future. We have discussed already this report that DCMS did, which nobody appeared to take any notice of. I am sure it had some good recommendations. How



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are we going to get that message across that Education needs to speak to the Home Office, Justice and DCMS, so that you could do joint commissioning? It is what we will try to ask the clinical commissioning groups to do with different projects.

Dr Lee: I 100% agree. If I ever have a chance to write a manifesto for Government, it will be imbued with sporting values from top to bottom. It will shape education policy, shape health policy and shape local government policy. At the moment, all I am seeing is a predictable conveyor belt into prisons. We know where these kids are coming from. We know the families. Local government know the families. The Troubled Families Programme highlighted this point. So you are right. I get the thrust. Until you have someone near the top of Government who understands the value of sport and its use in intervening with children, particularly young men from disadvantaged backgrounds—until they fully grasp that, which self-evidently they do not, judging by some of the silliness around boxing and martial arts that has been released in the last two weeks to the press—you will not get what you rightly say is required.

Q90 Rebecca Pow: So clearly that needs data and costing, and then you would make your case. John, if as a young child you had done a lot more sports, exactly as Dr Lee is suggesting, do you think that would have brought something else into your life?

John McAvoy: Yes, unequivocally. I did not do much sport as a child. Predominantly, I think sport can give you exposure to a positive role model. We have a lot of issues in London at the moment with a lot of stabbings. I go into schools and youth facilities and speak to the people that work there. These big vacuums are being created within the city and they are being filled by people who are involved in drugs. They are exploiting and manipulating these young people. I feel that if you had centralised hubs in these areas where young people could go and have exposure to positive male role models, it could change their lives. If I had had that as a child, I would have changed my life.

Q91 Rebecca Pow: Do you think that sport also gives you something else—through using adrenalin, getting your positive hormones going and working in a team? Do you think those are good things that you might have learnt as a child?

John McAvoy: Definitely—100%. I was a driven child. I always wanted to be successful, but the people I was exposed to as a young child—the success that I thought was success was having money—all engaged in crime. That is what led me down that path. Having that drive and ambition, if I had realised that I could have got that as a sportsman, I would have gone off and been a sportsman. The characteristics were there, but they were just misguided into saying something negative instead of something positive.

Q92 Rebecca Pow: Thank you. Professor Meek, we might deal with the offenders and introduce sport, but what about afterwards when they leave? Is it too expensive for people to keep up their sport? How do we keep that going in society?



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Professor Meek: It is a barrier. As John says, we know the power of introducing people to an alternative pro-social group, but simply getting someone to a sports facility, paying fees to attend matches or to go to a gym, and travel and kit costs, are barriers for people who are struggling financially. But I think it goes beyond that. You asked earlier about early intervention. In my view, if we had a co-ordinated approach from community organisations working at different points within the criminal justice system—from our schools and Pupil Referral Units, through to our prisons, our probation services and post-release—that is when we can have the most impact.

- Q93 **Rebecca Pow:** Can I just touch on something else, Chair, which you might think is slightly off course? This will link into the value of our outdoor spaces. I am a great advocate of using nature and the outdoors, which I think is very much part of this whole story. What are your views about the spaces available for sport, and about green spaces and all those things? Have you got any comments to make about that?

Professor Meek: Yes, first I will reflect on how we see that in prisons, because as you can imagine, there are very few green spaces there, and most people in prison spend little or no time outdoors each day. On a beautiful day like today, most people in our prisons will be in a cell right now, and many of those are children. Yes, there are green spaces in communities, but unless people have the facility to get to them, and they have a peer group, a mentor and appropriate adult support to encourage them to go to and use them, they do not serve the most vulnerable groups.

- Q94 **Jo Stevens:** Dr Lee, we are hearing very good things and we would all like to see more of this happen across the estate. However, by next year, 36% of the MOJ budget will have been cut since 2011—that is the biggest hit proportionately of any Department across Government. We have lost up to 6,000 prison officers since 2010

Ian C. Lucas: It is 7,000.

Jo Stevens: It is 7,000. We heard from John about how important that prison officer was in changing the direction of his life. Who is going to fight? Where is that fight coming from to make changes so that we can see more of the good things that are happening? As you said, this is cyclical. If we can stop people getting into a pattern of behaviour early on, it will stop people going to the youth estate and then the adult estate.

Dr Lee: Yes, I agree that the MOJ was proportionately hit quite hard with budgetary constraints at the start of this decade, and that is a manifestation of reluctance on both sides of the House to look at the increasing burden of health and social care funding on central Government. Those areas get protected, and have been since time immemorial, and other Departments feel the consequence. We can argue about the proportions, and there will be political differences, but fundamentally this goes back to my point about the way that sport should be playing a part in other Departments.



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Approximately 80% of DH funding goes on chronic illnesses, which are predominantly lifestyle related—hypertension, diabetes and so on. If we introduced more exercise into schools, and if we provided more facilities for people to be outside in open spaces, the demand on the DH would be less, and that would release funds for what I think is required. I agree that we need more money to be spent proportionately on the criminal justice system, and most people within the system would agree with you about that. The difficulty is that any Government, of whichever political colour, is constantly trying to fight the increasing burden of ageing, which manifests itself in health, welfare and social care costs.

That is why I think sport has such value in all this, because you could reduce those costs. I think the MOJ recognised that the number of prison officers needed to increase, and that is why we increased them—I am looking at Julian for the latest figures, but I think we have recruited a couple of thousand officers since 2016, although yes, we do need more. However, we actually need more Darrens. We must try to ensure that we get prison officers who are motivated to behave like Darren did with John—that is perhaps more important than the total number.

Q95 Jo Stevens: Isn't it very difficult to attract and recruit those sorts of people when you look at what the workplace is like? Assaults are up, serious assaults are up—it is not a great place to be, is it?

Dr Lee: It is particularly challenging in the youth estate, where violence levels are 10 times those in the adult estate. Yes it is challenging. It is particularly challenging in the south-east of England because of competition regarding salaries, and there is a whole different debate around national pay awards, and pay not reflecting the cost of accommodation in those areas. That is a discussion for another day. No, it is not easy. I think the MOJ has made some progress in the last 18 months in addressing that—I am not just saying that—but is there room for more? Yes, of course there is.

Q96 Jo Stevens: Rosie, can I ask you about the pockets of good practice that you saw as part of your review? Is there any correlation between those best-practice areas and the type of prison that they are happening in? I am thinking of new-build, private prisons as against the old Victorian estate—or is that too straightforward?

Professor Meek: Remarkably, there is not a correlation with that. There is certainly a correlation with good leadership, and with a leader, a governor or a local manager, who is willing to try out new initiatives, sometimes contrary to what the public suggest would be a good idea. We know that what is happening in prisons at the moment is not working and that we have to do some things differently, and we also know that we have to manage risk, but at the moment there is such an aversion to trying out new initiatives and programmes that we are in a very stagnant place in terms of seeing any innovation in prisons.

Q97 Jo Stevens: What could make that innovation happen more often?



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Professor Meek: Leaders need to be given more autonomy to try out new programmes and initiatives. They need to be given some funding to do so, and we need to see a bit more flexibility, for example in the youth estate, around the core regime and the educational regime, so that good leaders can be trusted to make decisions. For example, I have spoken to governors who have said, "It would be perfect if we could have our young children out doing PE and exercise in the morning and then settle them down in the classroom in the afternoon. We might actually get some positive educational outcomes." Without that, they are bouncing off the walls, being excluded and being put into their cells or in solitary confinement, because they are unable to sit in the classroom environment.

Dr Lee: I went to visit a secure school for excluded children—it is not part of the criminal justice estate; DfE actually oversees it. I turned up and was walking round—doing a typical ministerial visit—and I went into one room and four kids were doing boxing pad work. I said, "What is going on here?" and the school said, "We know that if we don't do this with these four individuals, they won't learn anything today." That is not even in the criminal justice system—it was in a school. Okay, it is a secure school, because they had been excluded from elsewhere, but fundamentally that headmaster, who is one of those fantastic leaders in the system, recognised that those individuals needed to vent before they could calm down and learn for the rest of the day.

Q98 **Jo Stevens:** Going back to my original question, we know that if people are locked up in their cells for 23 hours a day and are not getting exercise, and not able to have that adrenalin or get rid of their tensions and aggression, it leads to increasing levels of violence.

Q99 **Julian Knight:** John, you are clearly an exceptional athlete, with your global triathlons and Ironman series. I used to have a neighbour who once did an Ironman and he never recovered. Is it harder for an inmate who is not exceptional like you, but who loves sport and takes part in sport, to break from their former life? You described how you went to this rowing club and you were instantly welcomed, but you are a fantastic athlete—first things first—and that always gets you extra leeway in life, so to speak. Do you think that it is more difficult for someone who is not quite as exceptional, but who wants to go down the path that you have done in terms of using sport in a positive sense? Are you an exception rather than, potentially, a rule?

John McAvoy: No, I don't think I am. From my experience of what I have witnessed in prison and since I have been out, I have seen a lot of success stories of men who have been in prison and who have come out. They have not been the most athletically gifted people in the world. For instance, when I was in an open prison, I worked in Fitness First, the gym, voluntarily. For five days a week, I was allowed to go out of the open prison and I was working as a personal trainer. I was not allowed to tell anyone in the gym that I was an inmate, because they did not want anyone to know. There were four other inmates who came from Sudbury and we would get the bus to work every morning. As far as I am aware, all those guys have not gone back to prison. It was a remarkably positive



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scheme that Fitness First had running with the prison. When we handed the baton over when we got released, another inmate came in and did the job.

None of them were exceptionally talented athletes, but they had found a purpose in life and something they had a passion for. They had a passion for sport and for exercise, and they made a career out of it, and it is more likely that they will stick at that. I had a conversation with an inmate recently when I went back to Lowdham Grange, and I said to him, "What do you want to do when you get out?", and he said, "If I have a job, I just want to work in a gym." He has never had a job in his life, but he said, "I love training and I want to make a career out of it. I don't want to get out and be a dustman. I want to do something I love." I tried to explain to him that he could do that and that he was in the right sort of environment for that to happen.

From my experience, I don't think it is necessarily about coming out and being a great athlete. Sport can offer you so much in your life. When people come out of the environment of being incarcerated and go and work in Fitness First, for instance, they are exposed to a whole new world. They are exposed to personal trainers, sport and positive people in their life, which then help them integrate back into society.

Q100 Julian Knight: Rosie, on that point, do you think this is predominantly just for the youth estate or the young person estate—up to 26? Do you think there is potentially a positive impact on older prisoners too, many of whom have spent much of their adult lives incarcerated?

Professor Meek: Of course there is. There is a public health benefit. You may know that the fastest-growing population in our prisons today is the over 50s. That is why I am particularly passionate about promoting sport across a whole range of groups. The health benefits of promoting physical activity among the inactive in prison are enormous. I have a GP sitting next to me, and I think he would agree.

It is not just training and supporting people to become elite athletes. That is a fantastic outcome, but it may be about encouraging people just to become active, to become volunteers in their communities or to do some form of social activity and exercise, both while they are in prison and once they are released.

Q101 Julian Knight: Jo touched on some of the programmes, but I want to get a bit more detail. Are there any programmes that you think demonstrate the absolute best practice? Can you give us a flavour of them? What are their defining characteristics?

Professor Meek: I could give you a number. I will talk about a slightly controversial one, given what we have seen in the press in recent days. It is a fantastic organisation called Fight for Peace, and it is currently working in one of our most difficult secure units in this country. It is working with both boys and girls, individually and in small groups. Those are some of the most violent, disaffected and hard-to-engage children, and it is having incredibly powerful results, not just in encouraging



education, pro-social activity and fitness but in developing positive relationships and role models, and in encouraging good relationships between staff and those very difficult-to-handle children. That is just one example of how sport is being used to deal with a whole range of issues and problems associated with this particular institution.

Q102 Julian Knight: What is its defining characteristic? Is it mentoring, the interaction between the participants or the goal-setting? What is it?

Professor Meek: It is using sport as a hook for change—excuse the pun—to get young people interested in something. That is often a challenge. Then it is about using the very positive relationships with staff as positive role models, mentors and coaches. We should not underestimate the positive influence that people in those roles can have. John's story illustrates that for us. It is about being receptive to what those young children—and they are children in this case—have experienced, the complex issues they have come to prison with and continue to experience, the trauma they have experienced and, as it stands, the pretty grim trajectories of their lives. In this case, boxing and martial arts activities are used to deal with some of those issues in a very effective way.

Dr Lee: Just to build on that, Fight for Peace started in the favelas of Rio. They brought what they learned there here. They are based in Newham in east London. I travelled to the Greenwich and Woolwich area to see the youth offending team down there a few months ago, and I met a kid called Joe Hart—I remember his name because it is the same as the goalkeeper for England. Joe is a 15-year-old lad. He won't mind me talking about this. He is on my Twitter feed and he was happy to be photographed. He joined county lines when he was about 11. Basically, from what I could deduce, that was precipitated by the loss of his grandfather. The male role model had gone, but his grandfather had taught him to box before he passed away.

Joe went into county lines and went off the rails, quite literally. He was earning £5,000 a month, aged 13 or 14, from peddling and doing county lines. He got out of that using boxing—quite literally. The kingpin said, "Just go away." His ambition now is to set up an amateur boxing club for his community, because he thinks that's how he can steer kids from his estate away from a life of crime. I pointed him in the direction of Fight for Peace, because he had not even been told that Fight for Peace was nearby in Newham. I give you that example only because—do not just talk about custody; it is also in the community. Most young offenders are in the community. We only lock up about 1,000 at any one time. There are thousands of young offenders and they are held in the community well. This has been a positive story that started under Labour in 2007, and, to this day, we have managed to go from 3,000 down to 1,000 in the youth estate. But do not underestimate the impact of sports clubs, particularly amateur boxing clubs up and down the country, in keeping kids on the straight and narrow.

Q103 Julian Knight: I know that in my own constituency they do a fantastic job. Rosie, is there any difference in the men's and women's prisons that



you have observed?

Professor Meek: Yes, I am glad you mentioned women because, although they represent a very small proportion of our prison population—only about 5%—my review found that they are being underserved and, by and large, prisons are designed for men. The women I spoke with in our female prisons and girls I spoke with in our youth facilities were not engaged in an activity. My previous research has shown that across the estate women are less likely to be active in our prisons. To some extent, that mirrors issues that we see in the community. Getting this group active and dealing with issues around health, obesity and nutrition among women and girls is a priority, but we also need to recognise that a gendered approach will be more effective here. Women and girls in the criminal justice system have often experienced multiple and extreme forms of trauma. Simply encouraging them to go into a gym and pump iron or take part in sports games, without taking some of those backgrounds into account, may well give us an understanding of why their participation levels are so low.

That said, I have seen some examples of women from prisons going out on ROTL—release on temporary licence—training to become qualified gym instructors and going on to lead really successful lives in those careers. But they are the minority, and I think women's prisons need to be much better resourced in terms of catering to the diverse needs of women, and we need a women and girls physical activity strategy. One of my recommendations refers to this, and it needs to relate not just to sport and physical activity but to nutrition and wellbeing more broadly.

I will mention yoga here because I am passionate about the power of yoga in a range of settings. For both men but particularly women yoga and yoga-based techniques have been found to be incredibly powerful in our prisons. Some organisations go into prison to deliver these, but they are often under-supported.

Q104 **Julian Knight:** On that point, you mentioned a plethora of support strategies that need to be put in place in women's prisons and presumably male prisons as well, and you mentioned wellbeing strategies. What other factors do programmes need to integrate in order to be successful, other than just sport?

Professor Meek: In a prison they need to be part of a co-ordinated effort, so it should not just be resource given to the gym to deliver more sport because that will not work within the current regime. It needs to be part of a commitment through health, mental health, education and physical activity, and that needs to come from higher up. As Phillip has mentioned, at the moment this doesn't happen. Some of the most disaffected staff I have experienced in prisons in recent years have been the gym staff because they feel under-supported and under-resourced.

Q105 **Julian Knight:** Phillip, you mentioned a culture of risk aversion, which we have spoken about a few times. Why do you think that evolved and how do you think it can be overcome within this context?

Dr Lee: It is particularly a problem on the male estate because some



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men who are being held are very difficult to handle, and clearly the introduction of spice in the criminal justice system is causing significant challenges. I fully understand where it comes from when you are tasked with the responsibility of maintaining security by keeping dangerous people away from the broader public. You struggle to get through anything that in any way can be interpreted as soft on that, both within HMPPS and more broadly in the political discussion. I go back to the point that we have to take a longer-term view about how we intervene successfully with these people.

This is part of the problem with the way in which politics has evolved to this point. We are very short-termist. It is reactionary politics. Policy does not come from wise people who have lived it; policy comes from special advisers, who are often neither special nor should be advising. They are sort of in a bubble here, and they have not lived on an estate. They have not had that type of experience. They look at it in a rather clever way, but often they are stupid clever people. They are so closed to the gritty realities of life. Until there is a change at the top in terms of how policy is formulated, we are going to have this problem continuously. We need to be braver and bolder and we need to base it on evidence at every turn—evidence from people who know what they are talking about, not from people who think they know what they are talking about.

Q106 Julian Knight: Jo, my colleague, mentioned MOJ cuts. Working in the Department, we all know what has actually happened in that respect. Was there anything going on in this area before 2011? Is this more the cultural thing we are talking about, rather just strictly money? Is it more to do with that cultural aversion?

Dr Lee: One gets the impression that the risk aversion behaviour is deep-seated. It predates 2011 and goes back many years. I get why we are where we are—I understand it, and I understand the fear of rioting and everything else—but fundamentally it is not a good place. Particularly in the youth estate, the violence levels are shocking. I have seen DVDs of fights and everything else at various institutions. We have to do things differently.

I am a passionate advocate for a particular organisation from Spain. You know that internally from the MOJ. I have been to virtually every single youth estate institution in Britain, and the experience in some of them is difficult. I then went to Spain and I walked into an institution that had exactly the same risk profile—rapists, murderers and so on—among young people, yet the culture was open. There was a sense that you had to treat each child—that is what they are—holistically. They were using sport, music and gardening. They were basically taking these profoundly damaged individuals and turning their lives around. The atmosphere and the culture within that institution was not like they are in institutions in this country, bar the odd exception. I can think of a couple of institutions that are trying to be like that, but the atmosphere is just not present in Britain. It struck me that their recidivism rates, which would profoundly change the youth estate if we could deliver them in this country, were so



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strikingly better than some of the places in this country that it is remarkable that we are not going there.

- Q107 **Julian Knight:** Is that across the board, and not just one example? As we both know, there are examples of best practice that beat the trend, but they sort of remain in isolation.

Dr Lee: But I guess my point is that in order for people to realise it within an institution that has become incredibly risk-averse, you need to bring in a disruptor. You need to bring in somebody whose approach is totally and profoundly different. I think that is desperately needed. That is why I push secure schools, which are a new model coming through. It is important that they do not become bathed in this risk aversion. It is important that that—sadly it has been cut to one, now—is a different type of place. For reasons of confidentiality with children, I cannot talk about it in detail, but some of the institutions are very good at turning around children who have committed appalling crimes. They go off and become functional adults. A number of our institutions—the majority—are struggling to do that, to say the least. It is really important that we change that and change it soon.

- Q108 **Simon Hart:** This is mainly directed at Phillip, but the others can chip in. Since we have all been involved in this, before coming into Parliament and since we have been in Parliament, there have been numerous reports and numerous studies. A Labour colleague, Graham Allen, produced an early intervention paper back in 2011. It is difficult to find anyone who disagrees on this issue, interestingly enough, yet apparently we cannot actually do anything about it. It is an aversion point. I am asking a question, rather than making a statement. Is it because we are terrified of what the *Daily Mail* is going to say? Is it because we are worried about being bombarded by a Twitterstorm? What do we need to do to convert this agreement into activity and give politicians the confidence to see this as a vote winner? If they see it as a vote winner, we'll do it, to be cynical. That is the only reason we are not doing it, I suspect.

Dr Lee: I think it is a leadership problem at core. It is a problem with the structure and the way Government works. I can commission a report. An academic who knows her stuff can come up with a recommendation, based on evidence, and then one individual in No. 10, who is not democratically elected, blocks it and then leaks out silly "Kung fu convict" lines to the tabloid press.

This is a small point, but I think it is symptomatic of the way government has evolved under both political parties over the past 20 to 30 years. Fundamentally, what we need are people who know, who are wise, who have experience at the centre of government, in all aspects of government, not just this narrow one we are talking about today. We need them in the room saying, "The right thing to do, based on the evidence that the experts"—I like experts—"are saying, is what we do."

When it comes to dealing with how this is portrayed in the press, you just need the courage and decent political leadership to say, "I'm sorry if X newspaper does not like this, but it is the right thing to do because it is



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going to deliver the goods that the people want.” I think we all want a reduction in crime. I think that is what everybody seeks, whatever their political persuasion. Less crime is a good thing.

How do we get to less crime? The evidence suggests that a small part of that involves sport. It is not the silver bullet.

Q109 Simon Hart: Just at the moment, you have a prisons Minister who takes a rather different view from previous Ministers; rather more innovative, I would argue. You have got a Home Secretary who is suggesting he is in line with these things. Are you saying that the prisons Minister and the Home Secretary are being blocked by an adviser in No. 10, whose name we do not even know?

Dr Lee: I can only refer to the specific case of this report, but the Department wanted it in the report.

Q110 Simon Hart: Can I change tack a little bit? This is probably for Rosie and John. By the way, are you doing Ironman Tenby—Ironman Wales—this year?

John McAvoy: No.

Q111 Simon Hart: You should. I do not want to give the impression that I am doing it, by the way. This is about goals and incentives and your remarkable story about how someone—the prison officer you talked about—unlocked potential. I wonder whether we are doing enough to incentivise prisoners to achieve physical or academic goals, or indeed any goals.

Maybe it should be linked to parole more generously, I don’t know, but I wonder whether the prison system really does encourage people, whatever their talent may be. It may not be triathlon; it may be an academic qualification or something that older prisoners could get involved in. Is there something that we could do that would improve their performance in prison and get them out sooner?

John McAvoy: I will tell you about a conversation I had with an inmate at HMP Coldingley. He was coming to the tail end of a life sentence. He had been in for 15 years and he had an 18-year tariff. We were chatting and he enjoyed going to the gym. He told me he liked exercise and had done circuits. Coincidentally, I was in the same prison as he was when I was an inmate.

I went back to do a talk and I recognised his face in the crowd. I asked him about where he was and he said he was in a working prison and explained about that. He was basically making Filofaxes every day, being paid £5 a session. He had no money outside—he had no one sending him money.

I asked why he was doing that. He said, “I know that when I come out of here and get released from prison that I am not going to make Filofaxes as a job but that pays me more money a week than going to education or doing something else.” That is an issue I find a lot when I go into prisons



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and speak to inmates. They are encouraged by the fact that they get paid more money to do manual jobs, but they are not actually going to do anything for them at all when they get released, like being able to make a lightbulb or a wheelchair. There is no career path for them there. They could actually benefit if they were either encouraged more financially or if the money was the same to go and do gym qualifications or go to do education. That seems to be an issue I have found going into prisons and talking to a lot of inmates: they are encouraged to follow the money, which is to do jobs that aren't going to help them in their lives.

Professor Meek: I would echo that. In fact, rather than rewarding and incentivising those positive outcomes, the current system is putting barriers in place. John has given one example around financial support, but we know that, for example, people want to engage in higher-level qualifications in sports but they are not available in prisons. It is only because of organisations like the Prisoners' Education Trust, who help support and fund distance learning courses—thank goodness for them—that a lot of people have been able to turn their lives around by getting level 3 qualifications in fitness, nutrition and personal training. That comes down to the flexibility of what we can offer our prisoners.

Q112 **Simon Hart:** If they do achieve those—in those rare occasions—what do they get? What are the advantages?

Professor Meek: Well, there is a direct link into employment post release.

Q113 **Simon Hart:** But they do not get released any sooner as a result of having achieved that?

Professor Meek: No, they do not.

Q114 **Simon Hart:** Would it help if they were?

Professor Meek: That is where it relates to another of my recommendations: we urgently need to reconsider release on temporary licence. In the current time, this is not being used in either the adult or juvenile estate, and it is a huge missed opportunity for people to be going out into their communities, whether for volunteering, working or engaging in training. Because of this risk-averse environment, it is simply not happening—or it is very rare.

Q115 **Ian C. Lucas:** I was struck by what Phillip said: that this is not just about custody but also about outside. In our constituencies—I see this in London and in Wrexham—there are real issues on the streets with people who are homeless, and NPS use has been a real issue in Wrexham.

I want to touch on a particular project happening in Wrexham at the moment. There is a choir which arose from a festival we held, where we saw a positive reaction from homeless people and NPS users to music. In the last few weeks, we have been engaging with 40 to 50 people within Wrexham in that context, which has been extremely successful. It is extraordinary that sourcing any money for any of this is virtually impossible, because none of the people in health, the probation services



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or the local authorities see this as their job, so the MP's office is doing it, with no money except what we can beg, steal or borrow. I am the MP and I cannot get the money.

Phillip, until recently you were a Minister. How do we get the money out of the Government for something useful like this? Everyone in Wrexham is affected by this problem in the town centre—it is not just Wrexham but everywhere else we represent. How do we get through to Government?

Dr Lee: You are right to point out that it is not just sport. I am aware of travelling theatre groups going into women's prisons. You reach people in lots of different ways. You are right—it can be music as well.

Secondly, there are issues around the incentives for probation companies—CRCs. I was not the Probation Minister, but the problem is that it is seen in isolation from all the other parts of the system. We get back to the problem that health, education and everybody should be seeing the value of intervening in this way, but no one is taking ownership.

Thirdly, why does it have to be Government? There is more than enough money washing around sport, and I bet you that there is money washing around music, opera and everything else. That is probably more London-based, but hopefully people are listening to this and then you should get inundated with philanthropists who support choirs and the like.

Ian C. Lucas: They know where I am.

Dr Lee: I am being realistic about where Government is in terms of what it can or cannot afford, but Government could be much, much better in getting away from the siloed approach. With my other hat, I was the offender health Minister. I think it is right that DH has responsibility for health. I would not want to go back in time. I think the decision in 2002 to split responsibility was right. The problem is that there then becomes a mentality that, "That is us, and we are over here." Actually, what is required is a better understanding, particularly in the management of drug addiction in prison, because it affects the stability of the prison. A better understanding is required.

I have noticed through the sport thing that there are a lot of people out there with money who want to help, but they don't want to put money into failing systems. They want to be backing something that is new and that is delivering the goods and they can see the evidence that it is delivering the goods. I was working on something else with regards to a different funding model for using philanthropic and third-sector money for capital investment in the delivery of public services, with the Government guaranteeing the revenue of the services—they take the responsibility for the provision of the services, but the ownership of the institution was third sector or a philanthropist or some charitable trust. Looking ahead, and going back to the comments around health and social care funding, that is a model that the Government should be working on more. It is a way of bringing in the wealth that we know is out there and channelling it into work that delivers the goods, which it sounds like that choir does.



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Q116 Ian C. Lucas: Can I just ask John a question? The largest prison in western Europe is in Wrexham. I was speaking to the governor last week. He was talking about medication of prisoners or people within the institution. When you were in prison, was medication used to control behaviour?

John McAvoy: Not that I saw, but there was a lot of recreational drugs being taken. What I have noticed going back to prison and having conversations with prison officers is that a lot of them now wish that prisoners were taking heroin instead of the synthetic drugs that they are now taking, because of the increase in violence. It is unpredictable how inmates will respond to it. Heroin would sedate them; now they take this drug and one inmate might be sedated but another inmate might become like a zombie, and it might take eight prison officers to pin down one prisoner. From what I have seen going back into prisons as a visitor instead of being an inmate, that seems to have been on the increase. It really is sad to see, when you see these young people using this form of escapism. I found it through sport; they are finding it through taking synthetic drugs and basically making themselves like zombies. You can watch some of the videos online of inmates and they are having epileptic fits on the floor; they are like scarecrows laying on the floor. It is sad to see.

Q117 Ian C. Lucas: So that is the alternative to the approach that you took.

John McAvoy: Yes. When I was in prison, you would normally tend to find that you would get a section of prisoners that would engage in education, a section of inmates that would engage in training, exercise and doing circuits, and then you would get drug abuse, and there was a lot of drug abuse. There were a lot of guys that I saw go to prison who didn't have drug problems who would end up developing drug problems as a form of escapism.

A point was made earlier on. I went into a young offenders institution last year. I was talking to the people who deliver the education. They were a brilliant group of women who go in—they loved the young boys that they worked with. I asked what the one thing would be that they would want me to take away and talk to people like you about. They said that over that last month alone—it was just before Christmas—they delivered about 40% of the education they were meant to because there wasn't enough prison officers to unlock the young people to let them go to education. The tutors had to go on the wings to the cells to push the work under the doors for the prisoners to do in their cells. They did it and they passed it back.

The moment they were unlocked they just started fighting with each other and then the prison was back on lockdown and there weren't enough prison officers to unlock them to engage in education. I really think that that is the key issue—having the prison officers and the motivational, inspirational officers to go in and engage with the young people.

Q118 Paul Farrelly: You probably didn't see me from that distance, but I



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wasn't being rude when I was googling. I was trying to find the story of the kung fu convict, which passed me by. After navigating through lots of "Kung Fu Panda" stuff, I have found it.

Phillip, this story is someone twisting conveniently one fact to discredit not only the report but you, because of the decision you took as a matter of principle to resign from Government. Anyone watching this session could only get the strong impression that when you resign from Government, it is not a step taken lightly, particularly if you have got the passions that you have and you are not sure that whoever follows you will follow through with the good work.

What is happening here is a disgrace, playing games with people's lives—all the lives that John has devoted his time to helping—and all the good work that Rosie has done. With that preamble, could I ask what is happening with the report?

Professor Meek: That is a good question: absolutely nothing at the moment. I submitted it in February and we await the launch.

Dr Lee: My final understanding was that it was coming out before the summer.

Q119 **Paul Farrelly:** Will it see the light of day?

Dr Lee: Yes. I was aware that elements at No. 10 wanted the boxing and martial arts removed before I left. I was obviously exasperated by that but it was above my pay grade. My understanding is that it was scheduled to come out before the summer. That was my understanding before I left.

Q120 **Paul Farrelly:** So it may come out with one or two changes that *The Sun* can't pounce on in a headline?

Professor Meek: I hope not. This is an independent review and I am very proud of the work that has gone into it. A lot of hard work and research evidence have gone into it. It would be a great shame if *The Sun* were influential in changing the content.

Q121 **Paul Farrelly:** I do not want to pre-empt the announcement. You have talked about some of the recommendations. Are there others you would be happy to talk about now without spoiling the impact of your report? Our report will be directed at a different Department, so I hope we can amplify it.

Professor Meek: I have had the opportunity to talk about a couple of my recommendations from the 12 in total—the boxing one being among the most controversial at the moment. There is also the women and girls strategy and the need for a co-ordinated approach. I mentioned briefly the importance of revisiting policy around release on temporary licence and getting people from prison, where appropriate, out into our communities, using sports-based programmes as well as others.

We also need to invest more in leadership and resourcing—no surprise there—and change the culture of the resistance to bringing community groups into our prisons. I feel strongly that we have a network of sports



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bodies and clubs up and down the country who are very willing to go into our prisons but they are not able to because of various policies or reluctance from prison staff, or simply because prisons do not have the staff to escort and look after these groups. We are missing a huge opportunity there.

Where I have seen groups going in—for example, a youth prison in the north of England takes part in the youth football league and hosts football matches in the local community—it is incredibly powerful for a number of reasons. Bringing the community into prisons is an important way to educate our public, and sport can do that in a very effective way.

I should also mention, as an academic, that there is always room to do better evaluation research, so we can look at what is working in the programmes that work, and why and how we should replicate that elsewhere. As an academic, I have devoted my career pretty much to doing that. There is always scope to do more and we need to factor that in to these programmes to ensure that the evaluation is robust and worth while and can inform future practice.

That is part of a bigger need to have an effective physical activity monitoring and evaluation strategy that, again, should span a co-ordinated approach and look at what sort of activity is taking place in prisons and what is working and what is not, and learning lessons from that and disseminating them across the sector.

Q122 Paul Farrelly: Phillip mentioned an example from Spain. As well as touring the prisons of my patch, Staffordshire, did you get a chance to bring an international perspective to the report to see what works elsewhere?

Professor Meek: My remit was to look at England and Wales and I had a relatively short period to do that, from September to February. In previous research, yes, I have spent time looking at establishments and areas with good and bad practice across Europe and also in the US. Areas of good practice will mirror what we have been talking about today, in terms of having a flexible approach and being able to tailor provision to meet the needs of what is actually quite a diverse population in our prisons.

Q123 Paul Farrelly: I hope that your report will be published by the time we produce ours for DCMS and that we can take it into account.

Professor Meek: I do, too.

Q124 Paul Farrelly: To the extent that it is not able to take into account international best practice fully, perhaps you and Phillip might be able to give us some extra evidence, from your experience, which we might be able to take into account

Professor Meek: We would welcome that opportunity.

Q125 Paul Farrelly: John, from what you have seen happen elsewhere, are there are bits of practice overseas that make you think, "If we had that here, wouldn't everything be better?"



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John McAvoy: I was fortunate enough not to be incarcerated abroad, so I've not really got an expert opinion on that.

Q126 **Paul Farrelly:** Maybe you could go and have a tour of Norway and Sweden.

John McAvoy: I was recently invited to go up to the Netherlands, but I was training full time and it didn't coincide with my training regime. Once I have finished racing in a few weeks' time, I would love to go there.

Paul Farrelly: Let us know.

Professor Meek: I will give an example that I witnessed last year in the Netherlands. A football world cup competition was organised by a Dutch prison, which brought together different nationalities by using football, and by bringing in outside teams. It was actually won by a team from Dublin, predominantly made up of ex-prisoners, who had travelled there to take part in the tournament. You can imagine the power of that sort of event in bringing together disparate groups, enhancing communication and giving people something positive to focus on around sport.

Q127 **Chair:** Can I just ask quickly whether you believe that there is a prejudice against sport within the machinery of government? Is it that, as you described today, there is evidence of successful sporting programmes, but we are not seeking to follow those examples simply because someone who is not an expert in the subject decides they do not like the look of it and are just not going to do it? The decision to make young offenders spend 25 hours a week in the classroom is not a resource issue; it is a prejudicial policy approach. It is saying, "I am not an expert, but I feel that that is better for them than what the evidence suggests." Is there a prejudice that exists, be it among officials or whoever else, against taking these programmes as seriously as they should be taken?

Dr Lee: I would not describe it as a prejudice; I just think it is a lack of awareness of the power of sport. Outside John Major's cricketing, I cannot think of a Prime Minister in modern history who has been a sportsman or woman. That is just the way British politics has evolved. You don't have people championing the value of sport and the values within sport—the value of sporting values—around the Cabinet table. It was interesting that David Lidington got it immediately. I said, "Fantastic! David gets it." That is when Professor Meek was commissioned. It is not commonplace in politics to have people at the top who say, "Okay, there is value in this." I don't think it is a prejudice; I just think it is a lack of awareness of its potential beneficial impact on broader society.

Q128 **Chair:** Before David Lidington became Secretary of State, do you believe the report would have been commissioned at all?

Dr Lee: It wouldn't have been commissioned.

Q129 **Chair:** So there would not even have been an agreement to do a study to look at the issues.



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Dr Lee: No. For me, it was really obvious that we should do something. You are rather good for the money, Rosie. To be blunt, it was an incredibly cheap investment, in Government terms, to precipitate a change of attitude and culture. It has made some difference already, but there needs to be follow-through. We need somebody picking up the baton and running with a broader strategy, not just within the criminal justice system, but in schools—particularly with children who are being excluded from school, because they are always on the cusp of entering the criminal justice system, depending on which way they tack. Some of them get lucky and some of them don't. There is a disproportionate number of people in the system who were excluded, have learning disabilities, have been abused as children or have witnessed domestic abuse. We know that. I don't think you can have a strategy just for the criminal justice system; it has to seep into other Departments. It is a challenge to whoever is in Government to pick it up, because it is really worthy of follow-through.

Q130 **Giles Watling:** I am interested in a comment you just made to Paul Farrelly, Professor Meek. You said that the independent review just wants to get it out in the open. You weren't pressured by the Government or anybody else to omit or add anything to the review. You were completely independent?

Professor Meek: I very much enjoyed working with Dr Lee on this. I was given free rein within my remit and I appreciate it that he trusted me to get on with my job. I am an academic, carrying out what I see as robust, good-quality and useful research. That is what I have devoted my career to doing, and that was one of the reasons this was so rewarding. It didn't cost much because it wasn't a commercial enterprise. It was an opportunity, I thought, to use my research expertise and research evidence to hopefully have an impact on policy and practice.

Q131 **Giles Watling:** That is reassuring to hear. Before I turn to the possibility of introducing culture into the conversation, I want to cover the post-prison period, which affects my constituency of Clacton. We have evidence that people are coming out of Chelmsford jail, for instance, and being put into HMOs in our area, where they live in a community, so you kind of have a prison outside a prison. I see these people, and some of them are desperately trying to go straight and be clean and all the rest of it, but fundamentally they are put in a seaside town with nothing else to do except hang around together. We are an area of high unemployment—it's really difficult to get a job round there—so should we not address that part of it to stop recidivism, as you said earlier? I ask all three of you—I don't know what your experience is, John.

Professor Meek: I'll start if you like. The answer is that bringing community bodies and groups into our prisons, which then maintain a relationship with prisoners post-release, is key. These organisations can build up a relationship and provide meaningful use of people's leisure time post-release. We have seen examples of when it works through providing volunteering opportunities, work experience or simply an opportunity to go and do something positive with leisure time, but you need to build up that relationship with someone while they are still in prison. By the time they



come out, it is almost too late. As John will say, we need to build up the trust and the rapport and encourage and motivate them to change behaviour before release from custody. That is where our community groups and bodies have an advantage, because they can follow an individual's journey before prison, in prison and post-release.

Dr Lee: I cited the example of a women's prison because I was women's prisons Minister. In the Pause project, which was started in Hackney in London, they realised that a relatively small number of women were having an adverse impact on children's services in terms of just having children—I can think of one where 11 children were forcibly adopted from one mother. They realised they had to intervene earlier, and a number of these were ending up in the criminal justice system, in Holloway originally.

Their project is essentially about mentoring individuals from prison, out the door, taking them to the housing agency and the bank—often these women are leading chaotic lives, often in the company of abusive partners. They have been remarkably successful. One part of it—it is voluntary—is that they all take a long-acting contraceptive as part of this project in an attempt to try to prevent the cycle repeating itself. The concept of mentoring through the gate is what we need to introduce across the board.

I think there is some merit in this being done by agencies that are not part of government—people in the system with decent, honourable motivations, offering their time to hand-hold, so to speak. The difficulty we have seen, particularly with youth and women, is that they go back into exactly the same circumstances after they leave prison—and, funnily enough, repeat the cycle.

How do you change that? I had conversations with local government about access to accommodation. I tried to improve the transfer of medical notes, pre, during and after prison, particularly for those with mental health issues, to ensure continuity of care, because if they stop taking their medication, they descended and ended up repeating. What you are referring to, which is something the MOJ is very conscious of, is the question of where you go when you leave prison. Where do you live? Without an address, you can't get a job. It all comes down to where you live.

It is a challenge for the MOJ. Clearly there are pressures on accommodation, particularly in the south-east of England. Local government will say, "You can't give preference to ex-offenders over whoever." It goes back to the broader point about needing joined-up government across three, four or five Departments to try to break the cycle of reoffending.

The Government get that. A cross-Government approach was something that David Lidington was pushing. Until you get that, you will just get people going round in circles.

Q132 **Giles Watling:** I'd like to push you a little bit further. Is it positive or



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negative to come out of a prison and be with other people who have been through the same experience, or is it better not to—I hate to use the word—create ghettos?

Dr Lee: It is a positive if people have a place to live. A number of women leave prison with no fixed abode. Funnily enough, they find themselves back in very difficult circumstances and vulnerable in shared accommodation or whatever. It is a positive that people are in accommodation, but I agree that, if they associate with people who have also been lifetime criminals, there is a danger they will repeat. Is it better that they go out into a separate boat? I think it probably is—I do not know what you think, Rosie.

It is about being pragmatic. Having a place to go is a start. Living somewhere is a start. Could we do better? I'd suggest we probably could.

Q133 **Giles Watling:** There is more work to be done?

Dr Lee: Yes.

Q134 **Giles Watling:** Moving on, I wanted to pick up on something that Ian Lucas brought up—recreational drugs. John, is there a policy to medicate to control inside prisons? We did not really get an answer to that.

Dr Lee: No. We are not trying to dose up prisoners so that they do not misbehave. John is right to say that there is a downward trend in the use of heroin in Britain and that it is being replaced by spice. The benefit of heroin is that is sedative and it calms. It is diamorphine—bang and you are out. That is the only benefit of it—there are no others—in terms of management of the individual.

The problem with spice is that it is psychosis-inducing. We are storing up massive problems in terms of behavioural management within the system. Prison officers find it quite scary dealing with individuals who are high on spice.

Anecdotally as a doctor, I should say that there is a tendency sometimes to put people on antidepressants. I remember seeing one patient as a GP. When I asked why they were on sertraline—it is an SSRI drug and an antidepressant—he said, "I don't know, but we all are." I say that anecdotally. That was something I picked up.

I can understand why clinicians in the frontline might say, "This is all I've got left in my armoury to try to manage the situation." That depression and anxiety is probably a manifestation of difficult circumstances in prison—detachment from family and the like. It is very difficult for staff in prison. There is no doubt about that. It is a very difficult environment for prison officers and the health staff, and it is being made harder by the introduction of spice into most of the institutions in Britain. I don't want to be seen to be criticising, but we have to ask ourselves in the longer term whether this is in people's best interest and whether it is a bit short-termist. Have we got to try to change the environment? That is what this is all about—we are trying to change the typical day in prison.



Professor Meek: I echo that. I am certainly not claiming that sport is the solution for everything. I have seen only rare examples of substance misuse teams working in collaboration with PE and gym staff to use physical activity as a way of supporting individual offenders to manage their substance issues. I have seen some powerful ways in which sport has also been almost prescribed as an alternative to other forms of medication. That has huge knock-on effects—individual offenders are much better able to engage in education, therapeutic processes and training.

Q135 **Giles Watling:** We have covered a lot of ground on sport, so if I may, Chairman, I will move on to performing arts.

Q136 **Chair:** I just want to cover off a couple of things on sport. John, from your work, particularly in speaking to offenders and ex-offenders, do you think that effective sporting programmes have been developed to create a different path for young people to take so they avoid being caught up in gangs and gang culture in our cities?

John McAvoy: A friend of mine, Jasper, runs Football Beyond Borders and works with young people on the periphery of gang activity. He uses the medium of football as a sport to get them in, and then gives them the education they need. I keep going back to the fact that sport can deliver and offer to these young people an opportunity to have exposure to positive role models. I cannot understate the number of young people I have come across who have zero exposure to positive people in their lives—none whatsoever. The only role models they have exposure to—the only people they look up to—are people involved in gangs and drug dealers. Those people are like predators. They will manipulate and exploit these young children for their ill-gotten gain and let them take all the risk. These kids just throw their lives away. The sad thing is that, having committed a murder or done something so extreme that they are put in prison for a massive period of time, they will realise at some point during their prison sentence—probably when they are middle-aged men—how foolish they have been.

Q137 **Chair:** Can I ask Rosie and Phillip the same question? Phillip, you spoke earlier about the need to intervene earlier, before someone ends up in an institution. Are there positive examples of the role of sport in dealing with gang culture and gang violence, which, certainly in cities like London, are a major contributor to very violent crimes being committed?

Dr Lee: Yes. I will mention Fight for Peace again. There are a number of amateur boxing clubs. About five years ago, the all-party parliamentary group on boxing produced a report about the benefits of that, which is worth reading if you have not read it. StreetGames is another organisation that does a lot of work. As I said, most young offenders are in the community. That is how we are managing them now. Sport plays a significant part in that. Cricket is also being used to deal with extremism.

The thing is that there is not some overarching strategy here. There are just people who are coming up with good ideas and applying them to their communities. They are all a bit like this. The report is a first attempt to try



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to bring together an overview of what is happening at the moment, but we could be doing so much more. It is obvious—to use a sporting metaphor, it is an open goal.

Professor Meek: Phillip has mentioned a number of excellent programmes. I will add one more into the mix: an organisation called the Change Foundation, which was previously called Cricket for Change because it solely used cricket and its president was—I think it still is—Phil Tufnell. One of the things I find most admirable about their work is that they work not just in prisons—in fact, they are leading the work in Belmarsh Prison with people at risk of radicalisation, which is very powerful—but in communities. They have evolved so that they do not just use cricket. They use dance to work with girls in the care system who are at risk of ending up in the criminal justice system. They use street football, rugby, cricket and any number of other sports. But they rely on short-term funding. They evaluate every programme they deliver and they know that they work, but they run out of money and have to go begging for small amounts of more cash to carry on with their work. They are in a precarious and vulnerable position, and all the organisations I have worked with in this sector are the same. They cannot plan for long-term provision because they are reliant on short-term funding to support their work.

Q138 **Chair:** Is the real problem that the structure of government—both central Government and local government—means that this does not sit easily with any one area of responsibility, so no one does it? If a community sports programme is doing good, the whole community benefits from it, but the community does not necessarily pay for it—certainly not the local authority or a Government Department.

Professor Meek: Sport falls in the gap. We see this nowhere more than in prisons, where healthcare and education do not want to take any responsibility and it is not commissioned as part of healthcare or education, so it falls to gym staff, who feel like they are not empowered to deliver more innovative programmes. We even see this when we see the inspection of prisons. Ofsted were obviously looking at children's facilities at the educational outcomes around sport, and HM inspectorate of prisons will look at the use of sport as a form of meaningful activity. Aside from that, no one is really inspecting or holding these prisons to account on what they could and should be doing using sport and physical activity.

Chair: I just want to talk a little bit about culture and arts programmes in addition to sport.

Q139 **Paul Farrelly:** We mostly focused on sport, but I wanted generally to ask about your experience, John, Phillip and Rosie, of what impact involvement in cultural activities can have on preventing crime, rehabilitating people, putting people back on the right path. Can I just illustrate that with one example that is very close to me at home in Newcastle-under-Lyme? We have got a fantastic theatre in the round with the New Vic theatre. Even with all the cuts from the Arts Council it has thankfully remained a national portfolio-funded institution, but it is the



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only one in the whole of Staffordshire. One of its amazing activities is a project called Borderlines, which is run by my good friend, Sue Moffatt. It works with all sorts of people, on an inclusion agenda, including young people at risk of offending, in all the areas where we know the risk is greatest. Their challenge has been not the enthusiasm that they bring to it, but funding.

Fortunately, Borderlines has been secured by a generous donation from the Denise Coates Foundation, the Coates family, which own Bet365, and Stoke City. Without that donation, £500,000 for the next few years, who knows where that project would have sat? I know that the police in the past have really welcomed initiatives they have taken that simply have not been taken forward because under austerity the funding simply dried up. That is just one example I am aware of. Are there others that you could cite?

Professor Meek: I am a big supporter of the Koestler Trust, which I am sure many people will have heard of, but if you have not, it is an organisation that supports art in prisons, both through training and providing art materials, but also through showcasing prisoner art in the community. One of the things I am proud of doing as head of the law school at Royal Holloway is setting up sponsorship for one of those art prizes. That organisation serves a number of purposes. One is educating the public in terms of the benefit of taking the arts into prisons, the therapeutic process of that, and the positive artistic outcomes that come from it—we see some outstanding pieces of work—but the other therapeutic benefits it offers to some quite damaged individuals who may not be able or willing to take part in more physical activity, but for whom the arts is equally inspiring and motivating.

Again, these organisations are precarious: they rely on individual private donations and small amounts of community funding.

Q140 **Paul Farrelly:** Yes, there was a Koestler event here early this or last year—

Professor Meek: That's right.

Dr Lee: There is a bit of the Koestler Trust in my constituency office: I was going to mention it. Going on various prison visits, there is a lot of art being produced—particularly on the women's estate, I have noticed—and that is to be celebrated. In terms of travelling, Donmar Warehouse is one of the ones that go round the country to women's prisons, I have noticed.

As I said earlier, it is not just about sport. It is about lots of different activities. Does it need more support? Yes, but I would celebrate philanthropic donation. Over the last 20 to 30 years, the very wealthy have detached themselves very much from the middle—it is not about rich and poor, it is about the exceptionally rich and the rest of us. We need to find ways of encouraging philanthropic donation more, so that we are more like America in that regard. There is some philanthropic action—famously, Edwina Grosvenor is particularly active in the women's justice space—but there are more out there, if they could see evidence that it was



working. What they do not want to do is invest in failing systems. They want to invest in things that demonstrably work, which is why I would go back—this would apply to culture and sport—and say there is a need for more rigorous research into what works. With the evidence, the money will flow, not from Government, but quite a lot from outside Government.

Q141 Paul Farrelly: That is something we have grappled with in previous reports. Before Giles comes in with his performing arts experience, John, inside or in all your activities since, have you come across examples where people might not want to get involved in sport, but getting involved in a production and being included is also a team effort?

John McAvoy: Yes. In the years I was in prison, you would get the guys who would be very averse to education, because they had had such negative experiences of it. I tend to find that when I go into a young offenders institution, the vast majority of them have been excluded from school. They have an adverse reaction to being forced to learn. If you put them in a classroom, they are disruptive, but if you give them more hands-on sport or the arts, you can engage with the most disengaged people. You tend to find that a lot of them are very talented at expression. They are like poets, but they might rap. They discover talents where they are good at painting when they are in prison, because that might be a design of a trainer or something. They are very creative. They might not be academically very clever.

I tapped into sport; you could tap them into something creative. I was on a prison radio show recently, and there was a guy there who had been very disruptive, and his music teacher just started working with him one day. He was phenomenally good at what he was doing, at rapping, and she had helped him and taught him how to read music, and he had come out and become a musician. That happens quite a lot. If you look at a lot of famous rap artists that we have in this country, a lot of them come from very troubled backgrounds. A lot of them have been in custody, and they have used music as a form of expression and to do something productive with their lives. They have a huge platform then. I strongly believe a lot of these musicians have a huge platform as role models, to show these young people that they should not be going down the path and encouraging that sort of behaviour, selling drugs and stuff—the negative rap musicians.

Dr Lee: That has made me think. I also used to chair the BAME panel within the MOJ, which came off the back of the Lammy review and the race disparity audit. There was one chap there who said, “These guys in gangs just don’t talk, but give them a microphone and suddenly they start telling you about their lives and why they’ve ended up where they are.” I remember that.

Secondly, there is one institution for young offenders that I can think of with someone—this chap deserves to have a knighthood as far as I am concerned—who has been there a long, long time and has created his own music room. They have a little recording studio and a series of instruments and everything else. These kids are often deeply troubled, and he uses the



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music room to reach these kids. I went into this music room and it was brilliant. He has got donations from people, so it has not come from Government but from various contacts, and in the middle of that is this child just sitting there, completely immersed in the music space. That is therapeutic in and of itself.

We have to find a way, particularly with the younger ones, of getting into their heads and reaching them in a way that they have not been reached before, because their families are thoroughly dysfunctional. It is sport, it is music, it can be art, and through that there is a path. You will never make any advances by shoving them in a classroom and teaching them maths and English, however important maths and English are—I am not dismissing them as not important, far from it—if you have not reached the kid and understood the child and why that child has behaved sometimes in the most despicable ways. You have to get to where they are and then take them from there to a place, and in the process educate them to be able to become functional members of society. Sport, music and art are so often the way in.

Professor Meek: The arts will experience the same barriers as we see for sports-based organisations in going into prisons—the same barriers caused by rigid educational curriculums or lack of attention to individualised plans. I would encourage you to talk to the Arts Alliance, which is an umbrella organisation that represents lots of arts-based organisations going into prisons and working across the criminal justice system. Again, like the sports-based examples we have given you, they are the sorts of organisations that have the potential to build up relationships with individuals before they are released from custody and maintain that support after release.

Q142 Giles Watling: I have been involved in the theatrical arts for 50 years and have seen how positive it can be. An example was set to us many years ago. Some people who were low-level offenders went to see the Chichester theatre festival and saw, I think, Alastair Sim in a production of “Dirty Dick”. One chap came out of that and his whole life changed around. He saw that there was something else to life than petty theft and all of that.

Recently, I have been working with a group of young people in the performing arts, who are at risk. There is this extraordinary expression “pre-crime”. They haven't been there yet, but they are at risk—I imagine that is assimilated by schools or whatever.

Watching those children engage was just extraordinary. The teacher told me that normally these children are disruptive and they don't pay attention; they have ADHD and they are really difficult. Suddenly, when they are involved in the performing arts, they change.

Do you think that we are ignoring that, as the Government? Do you think we are giving too much emphasis to other areas in the criminal justice system and that this is an untapped vein?



Professor Meek: It is a wasted opportunity. Most people in prison do not plan to return to prison. They don't want to return to prison. Most people in prison will have something that will make them tick and engage. For John, it was sport. For some individuals, it will be the arts or music or something else. Unless we have a system that recognises that and explores those opportunities, we will have the same problem of people returning to custody again and again.

Q143 **Giles Watling:** It needs oversight. It needs an umbrella organisation like the Arts Alliance.

Professor Meek: Absolutely. It needs support, but it needs recognition centrally so that time and resources are given to it within the core regime of the prison day; so that it does not just fall between the gaps as we have seen so many promising interventions fall between the gaps because they do not sit centrally within healthcare or education.

Q144 **Giles Watling:** Phillip, in your tenure, was it one of those things that was ignored and regarded as an add-on and an adjunct, not as a valuable tool?

Dr Lee: Yes, to a great extent, because the contracts were in place to provide 25 hours a week. The providers often want sport and other things in that, but the contract is quite specific on providing a certain amount of time in the classroom. On a visit to any youth institution, you can see that that is not what most of these kids need.

Personally, I think that if we are going to lock up somebody, young or old, we should do it for a decent amount of time in order to try to get to grips with the problems, particularly with younger people. Putting a child in for three months and then burping them out of the system again is an absolute waste of money and time. All the evidence points to that. If we are going to do it, we might as well lock them up for longer and take a more holistic approach to that child.

I go back to Spain again. The Diagrama institution I went to had four areas. In the first area, the psychological team went in and literally just got to know the child when they turned up, worked out why they were there, what was wrong and what they needed to address. As they progresses through the institution, the culture and environment in which they are held changes. In the end, they are in quite open circumstances, going out of the institution to work in the community and coming back in.

That holistic approach takes time—nine to 12 months is the average in Spain. Here, we just go backwards and forwards. As a consequence, we do not have the opportunity to effect any decent change in that child's life, and then we wonder why they keep coming back.

Q145 **Giles Watling:** Are you not then in danger of institutionalising the child, in as much as they cannot then cope without the support systems that you have just described?

Dr Lee: No, because if you take longer with them, they become much more independent, strong and resilient individuals, able to go back out



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into the society. When I worked as a doctor at Feltham young offenders institute in 2009, it was obvious—the staff said—that the young people were committing crimes in the summer so that they had a warm place to live in the winter. They could see a pattern of behaviour.

We think going to prison is an absolute disaster, but for some people it is the path of least resistance. It is a conscious decision particularly for women, because it is a place of security from the environment in which they normally find themselves. We must change that. Part of it is getting to grips properly and in depth for each individual with why they have ended up in that situation. It is about sorting out their accommodation after they leave, trying to get them into employment and then providing mentoring over the course of at least a year, I suspect, after leaving the prison.

If we do not take that all-encompassing approach to those individuals, it is obvious that they will just bounce backwards and forwards. They have pretty useless lives in the process and they commit crimes that damage others—the victims.

Giles Watling: And it is expensive.

Dr Lee: It ends up costing society huge amounts of money. In some youth institutions it is over £200,000 per place per year. It is a massive waste.

Professor Meek: I would look at some of what Philip said, but I would argue that a lot of that support that he just outlined can and should be provided in the community prior to incarceration instead of incarceration. These are children—we should not send them to prison unless it is an absolute last resort. Much of what we have talked about—education, engagement and individualised support—should be done before someone is sentenced to custody.

Q146 **Giles Watling:** Professor Meek, I would like to take you back to the arts involvement again. When you were writing your report, did you find that it was a really positive intervention to introduce the arts into the prison system?

Professor Meek: Without a doubt. I have seen it across the estate. It is almost a win-win situation.

Giles Watling: And cost-effective.

Professor Meek: Very cost-effective. It is a way of bringing community organisations into prisons and of delivering a range of educational and therapeutic outcomes.

Giles Watling: We have three words: entertain, educate and enlighten. If we do not entertain, we cannot do the other two.

Q147 **Chair:** To bring this to a conclusion, Philip you said that it is not necessarily about additional Government money to support these



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projects. But if it can be demonstrated that these projects are more successful than the interventions that the Government currently pay for to address the same problems, is there not a case for saying that there should be public investment in some of these programmes, because the Government will reap the benefits in the end?

Dr Lee: Yes. If it were up to me, I would look at those education contracts and at probation contracts—it is all joined up—and ask where we can place the money to achieve a more effective outcome. You might come to a shared financing model. There is no lack of interest on the part of the professional sports clubs to invest in this. I was really struck by that—Everton, Fulham and QPR, and across the country, Leeds Rhinos and Saracens. A series of professional sports clubs see that there is a real value in contributing to society more broadly through this work. Perhaps there needs to be some sort of shared funding arrangement where Government do so much and the top-up comes from the club.

To unlock this, particularly in the youth estate, is about the education contracts. They are quite specific and detailed in saying it has to be 25 hours a week. That is fundamentally wrong, and we need to get away from that prescriptive, dry education-based contract, and move more towards the inclusion of other things, including sport and music. In my experience, most people in the system who are delivering education want that, because they see the value.

Chair: This seems to sit in quite stark contrast to other things that the Government have done. We made a national policy shift in the way in which children are taught to read and write, based on pilot studies that showed that phonics was a much more effective system. The whole national policy changed. Maybe this is what you are trying to do with your report, but it seems here that we require a similar piece of analysis to say that actually, an intervention of this nature is far more successful than what we have at the moment, or that we are not just going to look at the curriculum of a young offender institution or look at the curriculum of an educational centre for excluded children. Again, we should be saying that there is evidence to suggest that this route is more effective and therefore we should be investing in the more effective route.

Dr Lee: Absolutely, and can I just say in closing that there are some absolutely fantastic individuals in the system doing remarkable work, despite the circumstances that they find themselves in. I have no doubt that if Government took a lead in this way, and followed the evidence of where sport, music and the arts come in, the people in the system—the people delivering and the Darrens of this world—would embrace it. Because, fundamentally, the motivation for serving in the Prison Service as an officer, a PTI, a psychologist or whatever, is fundamentally to make a positive difference, to turn people's lives around. If Government can be seen to take a lead following the evidence on this, I have absolutely no doubt that the staff would embrace it and run with it.

Q148 **Jo Stevens:** I have just one quick question. You talk about the 25-hour a week package of education. Why would you not want to do sport or arts



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on top of that? Why would you want to take that out of the 25 hours?

Dr Lee: I think the problem is that it is seen that that is time away from the cell. When they are not in the cell, they are in the classroom. Therefore, they do not do anything else. They are in the cell or the classroom.

Q149 **Jo Stevens:** But why not have them outside the cell?

Dr Lee: These individuals do not require 25 hours a week, ideally. What they require is time doing other things, probably in the mornings, so that they are then more receptive to formal education in the afternoons. The reality at the moment is that the typical day is quite tight. There is not much flexibility in the system. I think there is an argument for giving governors more independence, which they have to a certain extent over the last couple of years. With the secure school model, I would like to see a completely different environment and approach. Once we have one institution getting it right, the others will follow. That goes back to my point about needing a disruptor in the system—something that is different delivering the goods. That is what we need as a starting point. That is where we need to go. The contracts, I think, are too rigid. I would not be too prescriptive. Some kids might like 20 hours a week; for other kids it might be five.

Q150 **Jo Stevens:** But the reality is that they are not getting that anyway at the moment—are they? It is not possible to deliver that, because of the shortage of staff.

Professor Meek: Or children being excluded because of instances of conflict and violence.

Dr Lee: It is not just the staffing numbers—although I do not dismiss that. It is the culture. The culture has to change. It is about the risk-averse culture in the system. We need to do things differently to get a different outcome. It is about outcomes. It is about these kids going on to lead productive, law-abiding lives. What we have found, albeit with small numbers, is that these programmes involving sports of different kinds deliver the goods in terms of outcomes, so why don't we do it more?

Jo Stevens: I am aware of that. I was shadow prisons Minister for a year, so I have seen these in action. They are very good, but you have this huge barrier, which is that people cannot come out of their cells to participate in them, and that is the blockage. If we can get rid of that blockage, we will allow those other things to flourish.

Chair: It would be interesting to do a comparison. It would be interesting to go to the headmaster of a boys' boarding school and say, "If you followed the day-to-day pattern of a young offenders institution, what do you think the boys would be like after a couple of months?" I do not think anyone would treat a bunch of teenage boys in that way.

Giles Watling: They did at my school.

Chair: And look where you are now. It has been a fascinating evidence



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session. We are really grateful for your time this morning, thank you very much.