Providing a **varied, engaging and purposeful regime offer** means ensuring that **time is well spent in all locations.** Structured on-wing activity (SOWA) can help prisons achieve a fuller regime offer in a more resource effective, innovative way by recognising everyday opportunities to build hope, purpose, responsibility, community and the development of critical life skills into the daily routine; and prevent long periods of inactivity, which are known to create frustration, impact wellbeing, and may lead to violence.

Prisons already deliver on-wing activity – this document aims to offer **guidance, notable examples from across the estate, and evidence of potential benefits,** to support in further development of SOWA as part of transitioning to fuller regimes. This document is not comprehensive or prescriptive but a first step in supporting you to maximise the opportunities in your prison.

**STRUCTURED ON-WING ACTIVITY (SOWA)**

**Supplementary guidance for transition to Stage 1 regimes**



**What is SOWA?**

* Purposeful and enriching extracurricular activity delivered alongside other activities such as work and education
* Delivered in wing groups, either on-wing or in other available locations
* Delivered by anyone in the wider prison community – prisoners, officers, other staff and volunteers

**Flexible**: SOWA can be set up quickly and run for any length of time. It can be run in different locations within a prison, in a small group, 1-1 and in or out of cell.

**Cost-efficient:** It does not always need funding – it can be anything from a quiz to a hobbies group, to substance misuse support, or a life skills class.

**Informal:** SOWA does not need to be accredited, but it does need to be risk-assessed, and in line with relevant PSIs. It is not a replacement for existing contracted services.

**What are the potential benefits?**

**Reducing reoffending**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * The opportunity to design and run activities for peers can help prisoners **develop new skills and establish pro-social attitudes** (See [Do Good Be Good](https://intranet.noms.gsi.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/897081/Evidence-Summary-Do-good-be-good-activities-01.02.18.pdf) and [Desistance](https://intranet.noms.gsi.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/897070/Evidence-Summary-Desistance-from-crime-20.03.18.pdf) summaries)
* Strong **social relationships** and networks are linked with lower rates of reoffending. SOWA can build relationships with others in and outside the prison community.
 | * Opportunities to **exercise control and do things for oneself** are linked with reduced reoffending and better behaviour.
* Research shows that an **environment which reflects wider society** **can improve prisoner behaviour,** as well as **improving their chances of reintegration** and avoiding crime after prison**.** Extracurricular activities and meaningful hobbies **provide a sense of normality** and prepare them for **re-integration.**
 |

**For staff**

* Utilising officer knowledge of prisoner needs and demonstrating trust in officer expertise and skill can p**romote a sense of professional pride.**
* Opportunities for **meaningful interaction** between prisoners and staff through SOWA can improve prisoner behaviour, which in turn **creates a safer working environment**.
* When staff work directly with prisoners, they can become **models of positive social behaviours** and agents of change which can promote **job satisfaction**. (See [Rehabilitative Prison Officers](https://intranet.noms.gsi.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/912421/Evidence-Summary-Rehabilitative-prison-officers-19.11.18.pdf) summary).

**Safety and security**

* **Violence and aggression are less likely where prisoners are engaged in purposeful activity**, and where there is structure. Bringing purpose to on-wing association and interactions may therefore help reduce the chances of violence.
* Purposeful activity can be a **protective factor against self-harm and self-inflicted death;** promote wellbeing and good mental health.
* Research on prison violence also suggests that giving prisoners a **sense of agency and control over their environment** can support wider regime compliance and reduce frustration. This points to the benefit of prisoner led activities where suitable.
* Lack of participation in purposeful activity, boredom, frustration and a lack of support are associated with **substance misuse**.
* Regular interactions and positive relationships between officers and prisoners contribute to **dynamic security.**

**Choose the right activities**

* Activities on offer should **be targeted and suitable to the local population** at a site or on a wing, and delivered in line with existing COVID controls.
* Find out which activities will be the most beneficial, perhaps through **prisoner forums, prisoner feedback or liaising with key workers**. (See [Engaging with your community](https://intranet.noms.gsi.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/1066827/Engaging-with-your-community.pdf) evidence summary)
* Schedule a **range of activities** that meet the range of needs on wing including vulnerable and challenging prisoners, not just those who are easier to engage.
* Structured activities do not need to all be targeted towards a resettlement objective – simply participating in appropriate and purposeful activities can promote prisoner wellbeing. This can involve leisure activities but these must be structured and facilitated safely.
* **Think innovatively and don’t be afraid to try things.** Consider the **examples in the Annex** and how similar initiatives could be implemented at your site. Get in touch with other prisons for hints and tips and to share ideas.
* If you have an idea for an activity run by an external provider, **you may be able to access funds via the Dynamic Procurement System (DPS).** For more information, please contact your local Education Contract manager or the central Education team at EducationNCMT@justice.gov.uk.

**Planning tips**

**Involve everyone**

* Make the most of the **resource you already have:** find out what skills prisoners and staff have to contribute. Enabling prisoner led activities incurs no cost and promotes personal responsibility and self-esteem.
* **Involve your** existing contracted and voluntary **stakeholders** in designing and delivering innovative ideas, as well as your staff and prisoners. This includes health, education providers, activities leads and relevant trade unions, among others.
* Activities should be **accessible for everyone** and avoid excluding people from activities unfairly, for example based on protected characteristics such as race, nationality, disability or age.
* Consider opportunities to build staff skills to arrange and deliver activity as part of continuous professional development.
* Prisoners should have some **choice and control** over their participation to promote autonomy and ensure activities are relevant to their needs.
* Ensure all prisoners have access to SOWA, including remand and unsentenced prisoners.

**Fit SOWA into the day**

* SOWA should **complement, rather than replace**, other activities such as work and education. Avoid conflict with other scheduled activity and try to arrange activity during the time that prisoners would otherwise be unoccupied.
* Keep **a clear distinction between domestics and on-wing activity time** so that prisoners do not have to choose between their basic needs and enrichment activity.
* Include SOWA as part of usual regime management plans and ensure any staffing is profiled accordingly and that risks and local intelligence are considered. Consider opportunities to re-profile to dedicate specific resource to activities, and think creatively about the regime day.
* **Consistency is important for building trust.** On-wing activities can be less vulnerable to cancellation if prisoner escorts aren’t needed. If activities do need to be cancelled, as always, make sure participants know why and have a chance to discuss any consequences. (See [Procedural Justice](https://intranet.noms.gsi.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/897112/Evidence-Summary-Procedural-Justice-07.02.19.pdf) evidence summary)
* **Capture delivery of SOWA** as part of local regime delivery documentation.

For comments, questions or to offer further examples for future guidance, please contact the Regime team via:

jess.tucknutt@justice.gov.uk / Milosz.bruski1@justice.gov.uk

**Annex A: SOWA Catalogue of Ideas**

Thank you to everyone who sent in suggestions for this guidance, which are set out below.

We have split into three themes: activities that develop life skills; activities that support health and wellbeing, and wider prison activities that can be brought on wing. Please consider in your SOWA planning how you can maximise involvement of prisoners, staff, local communities and volunteers, based on the skills and services in your prisons and the wider community.

If you’d like further information on each example, contact the named prison. Please get in touch with jess.tucknutt@justice.gov.uk/ Milosz.bruski1@justice.gov.uk if you have any other examples to share as you develop your Stage 1 plans.

For further examples of notable practice, the Butler Trust have gathered submissions for the Ruth Mann Award for innovation in custody at the [link here](https://www.theknowledgeexchange.uk/ruth-mann-trophy/). The HMPPS Evidence Based Practice team also publish evidence summaries to inform new policies and practices, available at the [link here](https://intranet.noms.gsi.gov.uk/support/evidence-based-practice/evidence-summaries).

|  |
| --- |
| **Developing life skills** |
| **Prisoner consultations and forums**  | * We recognise all prisons are consulting prisoners on future regime. For example, **HMP Wayland** ran a recent prisoner survey through their Way-Out TV system.
* Prisoner forums also should be used to discuss current issues, thoughts and ideas. Prisoners can raise topics of their choice to discuss, ask opinions or advice from others.
* This helps build self-confidence and a stronger sense of community by encouraging prisoners to engage in decisions about prison life, and to seek support from staff and their peers.
 |
| **Lessons on new skill or hobby such as Art, Knitting, a new language, creative writing** | * **HMP Warren Hill** offers arts and craft sessions and card-making classes, as requested by prisoners, while HMP Moorland are planning an angling class, run by a member of staff with relevant skills.
* As well as providing an opportunity for prisoners to learn new skills, prisoners and staff can also practice leadership in sharing their expertise.
 |
| **Peer led cookery classes or creation of a cookbook**  | * **HMP Whitemoor** have developed a cookery book, led by staff and prisoners. All ingredients are available from either the canteen or establishment shop. Recipes differ in difficulty which allows all to take part and build future life skills.
* Prisoners can demonstrate leadership, learn a valuable life skill and build relationships with others.
 |
| **Reading/Improving Literacy peer mentoring** | * Through the use of peer mentoring, prisoners can build stronger relationships with peers and develop leadership skills. It also helps improve literacy in a more approachable, accessible format.
* This example was provided by **HMP Nottingham**, who have been working with the Shannon Trust to run this activity. For more information on the Shannon Trust, visit their website [linked here](https://www.shannontrust.org.uk/).
 |
| **Debate Club**  | * **HMP The Mount** are running debate clubs, working with the Cornergate Foundation. A topic is decided a week before to allow prisoners to research and prepare.
* Prisoners can practice reasoning skills and improve their self-confidence in debating with peers.
* This activity can be delivered by staff, prisoners or an organisation such as the Cornergate Foundation, (website [link here](https://cornergate.org/)).
 |
| **Book Club**  | * **HMP The Mount** runs wing book clubs, which help practice reading skills, communication and debating skills, as well as providing a distraction from stress or anxiety.
 |
| **On-wing libraries** | * **HMP Maidstone** have set up on-wing libraries, with a rotation of stock each month between the wings. Prisoners can pursue hobbies and interests and learn new skills, as well as access an important distraction from stress.
 |
| **Story Book Dads**  | * Story Book Dads supports prisoners in over 100 establishments to read bedtime stories and leave messages for their children. More information can be found on their website, [linked here](https://www.storybookdads.org.uk/).
 |
| **Parenting Classes**  | * These classes help prisoners learn new skills, and strengthen family relationships, which improves wellbeing and reduce the risk of reoffending.
* These classes can be run by trained staff or a contracted provider such as PACT (website [linked here](https://www.prisonadvice.org.uk/)).
 |
| **Improving health and wellbeing** |
| **Mindfulness/Meditation sessions**  | * **HMP Guys Marsh** is planning Mindfulness and Mediation classes. Prisoners can practise healthy coping mechanisms for stress and anxiety.
* These sessions can be run by a trained member of staff or a contracted provider.
 |
| **Yoga**  | * **HMP Whitemoor** is running yoga classes for prisoners, which helps reduce stress and can improve quality of sleep.
* Yoga also can be easily adapted for different fitness levels, and different environments e.g. chair yoga is much lower impact and potentially better suited for older prisoners.
* Yoga, as with all sports, should be delivered by a trained PEI or a contracted provider.
 |
| **Structured leisure activities** | * These activities can be an opportunity for prisoners to develop leadership skills, which each activity is assigned a designated lead that oversees the league.
* Playing team games also promotes collaborative working and help develop interpersonal skills.
 |
| **Sports adapted to the needs of the cohort** | * **HMP/YOI Warren Hill** offers structured competition specifically aimed at older prisoners to promote physical activity and engagement. This includes soft tennis, golf putting and French bowls.
* Physical exercise decreases stress and depression, while group activities encourage social interaction.
 |
| **Park Run**  | * 9 prisons are delivering Park Run (as of Aug 2021), which is an opportunity to promote fitness, normalise the prison environment and increase feelings of community.
 |
| **Wing quiz competitions or Bingo** | * **HMP Usk and Prescod** are running quizzes via their in-cell TV provision, alongside presentations on wellbeing, literacy, numeracy, and chair yoga. **HMP Bronzefield** are running Friday Night Bingo with prizes to provide something to look forward to and to help normalise the prison environment.
* Quizzes provide an opportunity to socialise with other prisoners and staff in a structured, safe group activity, as well an opportunity to learn something new.
 |
| **Choirs or Music Rooms**  | * **HMP Nottingham** provides prisoners with access to a music room to practise singing and playing instruments. **HMP Stocken** introducedprisoner buskers to line the route to work, playing music for prisoners and staff.
* Opportunities to express creativity and play music boosts wellbeing and reduces stress. Choirs can also allow for wider community involvement in prison life.
 |
| **Charity Fundraisers**  | * Fundraisers such as **HMP Frankland**’s bake sale and card making ([link to news article here](https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/19287615.prisoners-unite-raise-2-000-cancer-charity/)) and **HMP Brixton**’s ride for cancer charity ([link to news article here](https://intranet.noms.gsi.gov.uk/news-and-updates/features/hmp-brixton-rides-for-clic-sargent)) help to create a sense of community, and contribute to building a pro-social, non-criminal identity, as well as benefitting a specific cause.
 |
| **Mural Painting**  | * Prisons such as **HMP/YOI Hollesley Bay** have run competitions for prisoners to design and paint murals in communal spaces.
* This helps build feelings of community and encourages investment and pride in the wing environment, as well as promoting creativity.
 |
| **Conversational playing cards**  | * These can be downloaded from the HMPPS Intranet – [link here](http://hmppsintranet.org.uk/resources/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Conversational-Playing-Cards.pdf), and can be used to encourage social interaction and relieve stress.
 |
| **Wing newsletters** | * **HMP Grendon** has been running this activity during the restricted regime, including quizzes, wordsearches, short stories, interviews and physical exercises.
* Wing newsletters help to create a sense of community and provide a distraction from stress.
 |
| **Mental Health First Aid training and delivery**  | * Training prisoners as Mental Health First Aiders provides an opportunity to help others, which builds confidence and develops empathy skills.
* More information on Mental Health First Aiders can be found on the MHFA England website – [link here](https://mhfaengland.org/)
 |
| **Accessing wider prison services on wing**  |
| **Mental health and substance misuse groups**  | * **HMP Maidstone** runs 1:1 or small group mental health and substance misuse services on wing, which empowers prisoners to address their issues in a safe, more accessible environment.
* Speak to your healthcare provider to consider what is possible at your establishment.
 |
| **Education on wing or in-cell**  | * Wing-based 1-1 or small group learning can improve access to education and encourages a blended approach, which mirrors learning in the community.
* Speak to your education provider to consider what is possible at your establishment.
 |
| **Chaplaincy faith groups**  | * 1:1 and group sessions on wing allow prisoners to practise their faith, build closer relationships with the community and seek pastoral support from the chaplains.
* Separately, prisoners can be taken to the chapel as a period of quiet time if the prison environment is causing stress.
 |
| **Prison Business Hub surgeries** | * **HMP Maidstone** runs surgeries for prisoners to enquire about any issue relating to purchases, prisoner monies, pin-phone credits and canteen.
* Prisoners can make appointments, organise their time and build relationships with a wider pool of staff.
 |
| **Offender Management surgeries**  | * **HMP Maidstone** runs surgeries for prisoners to make appointments with Prison Offender Managers to discuss concerns and queries around their sentence. As above, this encourages prisoners to organise their time independently.
 |
| **Home Office Immigration Enforcement surgeries**  | * **HMP Maidstone** runs sessions with Home Office staff to provide prisoners to enquire about their immigration status and other immigration matters.
 |