



**HM PRISON  
SERVICE**

**Prison Service Instruction**

Number  
**50/2008**

**TITLE**

**ACCEPTABLE ACTIVITIES IN PRISONS**

**PROCESS**

**PSO 0050 PUBLIC RELATIONS**

**IMPLEMENTATION  
DATE**

6 January 2009

**EXPIRY  
DATE**

5 January 2010

**CONTAINS MANDATORY INSTRUCTIONS**

***For Action***

Governing Governors, Directors of Contracted-out Prisons and YOI's.

***Monitored by***

Directors of Offender Management/Area Managers/Director of High Security/ Controllers of Contracted Prisons

***For Information***

All Prison Staff

***On authority of***

NOMS Agency Management Board

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***Other Processes Affected***

none

**NOTES**

In this instruction, references to Area Managers also apply to Directors of Offender Management in London and Wales, the Director of High Security for the High Security Estate and the appropriate authority in the case of contracted prisons. References to Governing Governors apply also to Directors of Contracted Prisons.

Issued 6 January 2009

## Acceptable activities in prisons

### Purpose

1. This Instruction sets out arrangements to ensure that activities for prisoners are appropriate, purposeful and meet the public acceptability test. It also contains guidance on the attendance of visitors at events within the prison.
2. Governors are accountable for all such events taking place in their establishment, including those agreed by junior managers or staff.
3. This instruction applies to interventions, educational and offending behaviour programmes (whether CSAP accredited or not), recreational activities (particularly those associated with national holidays and religious festivals), the celebration of religious festivals (see PSI 46/2008), and events such as those marking prisoners' achievements.

### Mandatory actions

4. *Governors are responsible for ensuring that all interventions and activities that take place within their establishment meet the tests set out in this Instruction. They must consider how the activity might be perceived by the public and by victims and whether it meets Prison Service objectives effectively.*
5. *Governors must consider the possible reaction to any existing or planned activities and avoid those which would generate indefensible criticism and undermine public confidence in the Service.*
6. *Where Governors are unsure whether to allow an activity or event to continue or to take place, they must seek advice from the Area Manager/DOM.*
7. *The Area Manager/DOM must, if necessary, take further advice from Policy Advisers and senior officials and, if appropriate, Press Office.*

### Background and guidance

8. Prisons are places which are, rightly, under intense public scrutiny. It is essential that we are able to justify all aspects of prison life to the public. The Prison Service is a public service, protecting the public, carrying out the sentence of the court and seeking to reform offenders. It is crucial that the public has confidence in prison regimes. Adverse attention will be damaging to the credibility of the Prison Service and the National Offender Management Service Agency, and undermine public confidence in the critical and challenging work which we do in prisons.
9. *In considering whether a particular activity should be approved, Governors must consider, in the first place, how it is likely to be perceived by the public and by victims and whether it meets Prison Service objectives effectively regardless of whether the event was made known to the public by the media.*
10. Interventions and Substance Misuse Group are currently compiling a database of appropriate interventions.
11. *Secondly, Governors must consider whether the event or activity is appropriate in terms of those who will take part; it is legitimate to take into account the type of prisoner participating in terms of their offence / offences, the level of risk they present, their identified needs, and how their victim / victims may perceive the activity. For example, some events / activities which are*

*inappropriate for long sentenced prisoners early in sentence may be acceptable for prisoners preparing for resettlement towards the end of their sentence*

12. Further consideration should then be given to:
- Does the activity provide value for money?
  - What value does the activity provide in reducing re-offending?
  - Will the activity improve the prisoners' self esteem / skills / behaviour / contribute to the good order of the prison?
  - How will the activity be perceived if open to media scrutiny?

Governors at Juvenile, YOI and Women's Establishments should take into account the mandatory requirements and specific needs of these groups and balance these with the guidance above. Further advice can be sought from Women's and Young People's Group and Area Managers/ DOMs, if necessary.

13. It is essential that all creative schemes are used appropriately by following this instruction and ensuring the case is made for their contribution to the package of offender management, referring any cases of doubt to Area Managers.
14. The Ministry of Justice and Arts Council jointly support the work of an independent Arts Alliance, launched as part of the NOMS plan of work with the Third Sector. The Alliance and the Government's Arts Forum support the contribution of the arts to reducing re-offending through developing skills, tackling mental health problems and raising confidence. They have information on the impact the arts can have on those who participate in their programmes, including evaluations and statistics and verification of an organisation's credibility. They will be happy to share this with prisons or Area Managers to help assess the case for continuing a programme. The contact is Bridget Edwards, e-mail [CEO@apcentre.org.uk](mailto:CEO@apcentre.org.uk) .
15. The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills have advised that many arts activities that are provided through the Offender Learning and Skills Service arrangements may not lead to accredited qualifications but will engage disadvantaged learners, also that some learning activities may be done for personal interest and that 'learning for learning's sake' may be acceptable and appropriate.
16. *Where an existing activity is being undertaken with a third sector partner, any decision to stop this activity must not be actioned without consulting the Area Manager .*

### **Attendance of guests**

17. For the purpose of this instruction, the term guests includes :-
- other staff and prisoners from within the establishment who are not directly associated with or participating in the event ;
  - official guests such as local community representatives, faith representatives, corporate and third sector alliance partners ; and
  - guests who are relatives and close friends of prisoners, attending other than as part of normal domestic visits arrangements.
18. This Instruction does not deal specifically with the security arrangements for vetting, identifying, admitting and managing guests. The normal local security arrangements apply.

19. *If there is a request for guests to attend an event the Governor should consider the number and type of guests which would be both appropriate and proportionate, and must consider the request in accordance with the following principles.*

**Guests from within the prison community**

- This will include staff and volunteers, IMB, Prison Service staff from other establishments, prisoners from within the establishment who may be invited by staff. Prisoners may only attend with the agreement of the Head of Function and / or Governor.

**Guests from outside the prison community**

- This will include staff from other sections of the Criminal Justice System and members of the public, such as local dignitaries and representatives from local faith groups or Third Sector partners. The request should be supported by the Functional Head and authorised by the Governor.

**Relatives and friends of prisoners**

- The attendance of relatives and friends will only be appropriate for either religious festivals or events to mark a prisoner's achievement. They may only be invited if this is agreed with the Head of Function and Governor. The Governor should apply the public acceptability test to the request, which will take account of the seriousness or notoriety of the individual prisoner's offence. Such visits will only be allowed under controlled conditions which ensure that prisoners and their guests are not able to associate in cells or other private spaces.

**Family days**

20. Family visit days are a recognised and valuable part of the regime, helping to maintain important family ties. Nothing in this Instruction changes the existing arrangements for family days, but Governors should continue to ensure that the type and cost of entertainment and catering provided is appropriate.

**Catering**

21. Refreshments provided at public expense for special events such as those attended by guests or marking achievements should be similar to those which would be provided for an official meeting taking place at a similar time of day; a working lunch such as soft drinks and sandwiches at lunch time or tea and biscuits for a mid-morning or mid-afternoon break.
22. Occasionally, third sector organisations offer to provide refreshments at their expense for events they are hosting. Subject to security requirements, there is no objection to this but the quantity and type of refreshment should be consistent with paragraph 21 above.

**Impact & Resource Assessment**

23. *Governors must ensure they give this matter their personal attention.*

**Michael Spurr**  
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