



Ministry of  
**JUSTICE**

National Offender  
Management Service



**HM PRISON  
SERVICE**

Public Sector Prisons

# HMP Dartmoor

Yoga Review  
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## 1. Background information

The purpose of this document is to review the implementation of YOGA provision at HMP Dartmoor delivered in 2017/2018. Public Health England (PHE) provided funding to assist prisoners with the impact of HMP Dartmoor becoming a 'smoke free' prison.

Yoga was delivered via Prison Phoenix Trust with the organisation being funded via PHE.

## 2. Implementation process

In order to implement the provision the following factors were addressed

### 2.1: Delivery method

- Delivered by Prison Phoenix trust trained instructors – vetting processes were applied.

### 2.2: Equitable access for all prisoners and abilities

- Addressed via the participation agreement signed at the start of their involvement.
- Integrated regime meant that all prisoners could access the weekly session.

### 2.3: Marketing

- **First phase**  
Invitations were sent to prisoners who had enabling roles. For example Listeners, Buddies and Mentors. Two 'taster' sessions were held to enable them to understand the provision and be able to provide information to prisoners they felt would benefit.
- **Second phase**  
A notice to prisoners was sent out and posters advertising Yoga were put up in various locations around the prison e.g. – wings, passageways, healthcare, library, education etc.

### 2.4: Management of waiting lists

- The related administration tasks were undertaken by ISMS team i.e. monitoring of attendees / waiting lists / issuing of movement slips.
- Attendees were reminded to let the team know if unable to attend so that their place was not re-allocated.

### 2.5: Practical considerations

- Location – An area was set aside within the gymnasium.
- Number of prisoners for size of the room – 10.

- Timetabling – the activity took place on a Friday afternoon after the issuing of canteen.
- Length of session – one hour
- HMP Dartmoor was experiencing some regime difficulties at times within the delivery period – instructor called in before leaving home

### 2.6: Budgetary considerations

- Provision of yoga mats – purchased through the recreation budget and held within the gym.
- Initially the funding was provided for a 12 month period (however, due to some regime difficulties within the year some sessions were unable to run and therefore the provision extended past the twelve month period).

## 3. General population information

### 3.1: Age profile

General population data has been captured across the delivery period. 30 prisoners accessed the yoga provision across the delivery period. Specific demographic data on participants was not gathered, however the age profile of participants was readily accessible when collating the snapshot findings (see below). The age range was 26 years to 67 years old.

|        | Profile of prisoners general population<br>Average Q1 to Q4<br>(17/18) | Profile of participants<br>(n=30) | Profile of respondents<br>(n=10) |
|--------|--|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 21- 29 | 18%  | 17%                               | 20%                              |
| 30-39  | 24%  | 30%                               | 30%                              |
| 40-49  | 19%  | 20%                               | 20%                              |
| 50-59  | 17%  | 20%                               | 30%                              |
| 60-69  | 13%  | 15%                               | 10%                              |
| 70+    | 9%   | 3%                                | 0%                               |

## 4. Results of feedback process

### 4.1: Participant feedback

The feedback was gathered from a forum situation and completion of questionnaires. Across the period 30 prisoners attended the sessions with 14 remaining at HMP Dartmoor at the time of the forum (September 2018). In total 10 questionnaires were returned.

#### **4.1.2: Sessions attended**

The sessions were one hour long and as expected respondents attended for varying amounts of time. Ranging from almost all sessions to 10 sessions. A few respondents highlighted that there were times when they found it difficult to physically get to sessions (i.e. being unlocked in time) and also the impact of waiting for a space to become available.

#### **4.1.3: Recognition of progress**

Participants were asked to rate themselves in relation to their skills / experience of yoga when yoga was first delivered and were then asked to rate themselves after attending sessions.

##### **Initial ratings**

80% beginner, 10% intermediate, 10% Advanced

##### **After attending sessions**

10% beginner, 80% intermediate, 10% Advanced

Within the results the majority of the group (70%) recognised that their skills had progressed in the practice of yoga. One participant stated that he felt that it takes years to become 'advanced'.

#### **4.1.4: Key themes**

Some key themes were evident within the questionnaires and forum discussion;

##### **Why they volunteered?**

Participants were asked why they had volunteered to get involved in the yoga sessions and their responses seemed to relate to three main reasons:

##### **1. Previous involvement in yoga**

- *"I've been practising yoga for two years in my cell, learning from cds and books. This was an opportunity to use and enhance my skills and knowledge in a professional and safe environment".*
- *"I have had previous experience of yoga in a jail before coming to Dartmoor. Also I have practiced yoga by myself at home for a number of years".*

##### **2. The theme of relaxation was apparent (also linked to point 3 below)**

*Responses centred on comments such as,*

- *"To help me relax more".*
- *"Thought it would help me relax".*
- *"I wanted to learn relaxation skills".*

##### **3. Impact on mental and physical health (also sometimes linked to point 2)**

This was an enduring theme and was also linked to their overall well-being.

- *"To try and help the situation with my back".*
- *"To improve flexibility (back) and for time out (reflection/ positivity)".*

*One respondent stated "I can stretch and challenge myself – safely, both mentally and physically".*

Other respondents highlighted that they had *"Heard it was good from other inmates and I felt it would be good to try new things"*.

### **Impact on their mental health**

Comments within the forum were centred on the yoga being 'good for your head' and that it assisted mental health. Questionnaire responses generally focussed on yoga helping them to relax and keep calm. This is shown in one comment *"being in a clam, quiet and sensible surrounding for an hour a week was a fantastic experience"*.

A further benefit reported by some participants, focused on an escape from daily prison life; *"It helped me escape from prison life and stopped me having negative thoughts throughout"*.

### **Impact on physical health**

These comments generally related to the benefits of stretching their muscles, improving their flexibility and easing pains. *"My physical health e.g. flexibility, breathing, lack of aches / pains was greatly affected"* and *"...less pain in shoulder, improved movement in back and shoulder"*.

### **Impact on their overall well-being**

A further perhaps unexpected benefit was that the forum group reported the benefits of the social elements of the group, they built rapport with other participants and were able to recognise progress in others. The group reported that it felt that they were doing something positive, that they enjoyed the 'chilled' atmosphere and that they would look forward to the next session.

As shown in 4.1.3 the majority of the group were able to recognise progress in themselves (slowly across the weeks), they reported this had a positive impact on their self-esteem and gave them a sense of achievement.

Comments within the questionnaires around well-being were extremely positive, these are summarised below;

#### Dealing with prison life

- *"Using breathing techniques helps control my emotions and through process, allowing me to remain calm in stressful circumstances and cope with the ever changing regime"*.

#### Self esteem

- *"Good sense of achievement"*
- *"Made me feel good in myself and also gave me the chance to meet new people and gain friends because it was a close group of us"*.

#### Positive outlook

- *"Feeling more alive"*
- *"A good all-rounder"*
- *"Better sleep, fitter, less back issues, improved mobility, create an optimistic view of the day and make time to reflect in the evening"*.
- *"I always feel energised, focussed and relaxed after the yoga sessions"*.

#### Physical well-being

- *"With my back the way it is, it can get you down, by doing yoga it has helped and has had a slight improvement, but any improvement is better than none at all"*

### **Taking it forward i.e. in cell / continue on release**

The participants were asked whether they had continued to practice in their cell since the sessions finished and whether they intended to continue to practice on release.

These responses were fairly positive with the majority reporting in cell practice and an intention to continue after release. Some noted that they had received the yoga books in the post which were very good, another stated that they had a yoga book in their cell but they did not have enough space to do it. Another reported using the relaxation loop to clear their mind and keep positive.

### **Changes in behaviour**

In the general discussion within the forum, the participants reported the impact in terms of their behaviour focussed on being able to deal with stress in a positive way. They reported yoga as a focussing experience and that this helped them deal with the prison environment (focus on a positive experience, encouraged awareness, an escape, released tension, helped balance in work / prison life).

One participant reported that it helped them with their physical condition, which prevented them from 'seizing up', which can make them feel miserable and as a result they 'snap at others'. By avoiding this they avoided the other more negative consequences.

### **The link with reducing re-offending**

Respondents were asked if they saw a link between practicing yoga and reducing re-offending in the future. There were mixed responses to this question.

Some thought that the methods used in yoga would have a positive impact,

- *"I think the meditation part of yoga allows me to focus and channel any negative thoughts into positive ones. Being in a clam state of mind does enable time to reflect and think about offending behaviour and consequences."*
- *"Yes it helps with boredom"*
- *"Yes it is good for healthy mind makes me feel calm and relaxed plus it was good for me to try something I would not normally of done"*
- *"Yes, it helps to keep with general well-being and positivity (healthy lifestyle)"*
- *"Yes to reduce stress; increase acceptance and reflection. This helps me to move on from very deep/ long term issues I used to have".*

Others answered "no" and one respondent noted that they already knew they would not offend again, but could report some benefits *"...I don't think it would stop me but it does make me forget where I am for the time in there. I already know I won't offend again because of what I have learnt so far"*.

### **Anything did not like or would have liked to have seen added**

Participants were asked if there was anything they did not like about the yoga provision or would have liked to have seen added.

There was a mixed response, some were very happy,

- *'every sessions flowed and was full of energy and enthusiasm, a 90 minute session would be great.'*
- *'Very well run and tutor was excellent'*

Others discussed the impact of more practical considerations,

- 'Room was very small for the people'
- 'Not always easy to attend on time due to hold up on movement'
- 'More time'

### **Why should it be in HMP Dartmoor?**

Participants were asked a general question about why they felt that yoga should continue to be provided. The responses related to some of the themes highlighted previously,

- "It is good to help take your mind off the daily stupidity of prison life".
- "It's a good mental escape and it's good for you."
- "It helps people's health and well-being. The more beneficial activities there is available, that prisoners get involved in, then calmer the prison is for everyone, including staff"
- "It helps people relax and takes your mind away from things like drugs, smoking etc"
- "I think it should be in the prison because it helps people and its really good for your body and mind makes you feel like you could do things that you couldn't do, good for progression"
- "To live better and longer so I can be a more positive and productive member of the community."

### **4.2: Instructor feedback**

Extract from the instructor's email (April 2018) ...

*"I have really enjoyed my weekly visits, I have learnt a huge amount and consider it a privilege to have been given this opportunity. It feels like it has been one of the best things I have done.*

*I have been lucky enough to have had a few of the prisoners attend for the whole year and together the group has managed to build a truly cooperative and respectful culture. So the old timers have quietly helped the new members, we have had some really good conversations and shared a lot of laughs. There has developed an unspoken sense of the boundaries and as I believe the sessions have been really valued so the guys have not ever threatened them by behaving inappropriately.*

*Every week I have left the prison feeling greatly satisfied and also humbled. I have seen at first hand the powerful effect yoga has had and this has been borne out by the very many anecdotal comments the guys have made. Things like 'after my first session I slept like a log', 'I am now going to really try and sort out my shoulder', 'I didn't realise how powerful yoga could be', 'Is there any way I could train to teach and pass on what I have learnt?', 'Without going into it, it has been a tough week on my wing but the breathing practice you showed us has really helped' and 'When provoked I found I didn't get so wound up and I managed to think before reacting'. In one session I asked the guys to work in pairs and teach us all a short sequence. Each pair was watched with respect and clapped at the end. One guy, who obviously found it difficult to process instructions proudly led his sequence and afterwards the others told him how clear and easy it was to follow. He was absolutely delighted and left the Yoga session with a big grin.*

*I have to say that the training from the Prison Phoenix Trust was really excellent and we were taught how to teach simple meditation by focusing on the breath. Furthermore we were led to expect the prisoners to really value this aspect of Yoga. Over the year, working with the prisoners I have come to see for myself how these simple practices positively helps to build self-esteem and create an inner sense of freedom. This is incredibly powerful and not something you would ever sense so strongly in a regular community yoga class. Indeed at our annual PPT meeting this year we had a presentation from an ex-prisoner who came to say a general 'thank you' for introducing him to Yoga and meditation while he was in jail. He explained how it had affected him and how it was key to now being able to rebuild his life. Furthermore he looked us in the eye and said 'thank you and I want you to understand how the power of Yoga in Prison doesn't just affect the individual but ripples out positively to family and friends'.*

## 5. Conclusion and next steps

### 5.1: Conclusion

From the feedback provided it seems apparent that prisoners gained significantly from engaging in the yoga provision. This project was started as a response to assist with the impact of the prison becoming smoke free but there were much more holistic benefits to the individuals involved. They were able to recognise progress in themselves, there were positive outcomes for their mental and physical health, and they reported how it helped them deal with the stresses of prison life and could be beneficial to them in the future. They also recognised that there was a social element to becoming involved. There was not one negative comment about the impact of yoga on themselves. Any less positive comments were limited and focussed on practical considerations such as regime difficulties and being able to access the group.

Comparable elements from the instructor's report and the participants' feedback focuses on the social aspects of the group, specifically in terms of building a co-operative and respectful culture, participants helping new participants and the increase in participants' self-esteem through exercises such as teaching a short sequence and receiving positive feedback as a result. The instructor reports that the training via the Prison Phoenix Trust taught them to teach simple meditation by focusing on the breath and to anticipate that this would an aspect of yoga which participants would really value. This supports the feedback from the participants in terms of relaxing, feeling calmer and focussed.

### 5.2: Next steps

There is an obvious benefit to exploring the potential for continued provision, it is anticipated that this will be subject to the availability of funds, so alternative methods of delivery should also be explored.

1. Discuss the feedback from this report at the next Senior Management Team Meeting.
2. Review funding options for ongoing yoga provision within HMP Dartmoor
  - Ask PHE for any funding opportunities
  - Ask Phoenix Trust / previous yoga instructor for costs going forward (see Annex A)
  - Seek volunteer yoga instructors
  - Discuss potential funding in HMP Dartmoor finance meeting

Annex A – Prison Phoenix trust information and costs



Benefits of PPT  
classes - July 2018.ppt