Turning 180 Degrees:
The Potential of Prison University Partnerships to Transform Learners into Leaders

A report for the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellowship Year 2017
Nina Champion, April 2018
An optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.”
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Acknowledgements

"We make a living by what we get, we make a life by what we give."

University helped define who I am. It showed me what is important in my life and how to bring about social change. University is more than the certificate and mortar board. From Law to Policy, my degrees gave me the skills and knowledge to build a career I am passionate about. It gave me friends made over library desks and dance floors; a network of change makers in their own fields who offer me support and guidance. It opened opportunities for developing my own leadership skills through sports and societies. It made me curious and gave me the skills to research, be critical and draw my own conclusions. It broadened my horizons through international exchanges.

University can be a springboard to a new chapter in life. I am very grateful to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for this chapter in my life. I also owe a huge debt of gratitude to my boss Rod Clark, for supporting me in this endeavour, as well as my dedicated colleagues at Prisoners’ Education Trust (PET), who held the fort. I am particularly thankful to my marvellous team: Katy Oglethorpe, Morwenna Bennallick and Robert Cremona. I would also like to thank Robert Norville for taking care of our son while I was away. This trip would not have been possible without the enthusiasm, connections and contacts of Dr. Emma Hughes, Prof. Renford Reese, Dr. Doriën Brosens, Peter Dexters, Assoc Prof. Linda Kjær Minke, Nyggi Aggermæs, Hubert Skrzynski and Piotr Lapinski who introduced me to so many inspiring people on my journey. I hope I can do their stories and experiences justice.

About the author

I am currently Head of Policy at Prisoners’ Education Trust (PET). I began my career as a criminal defence solicitor, before working for various charities managing prevention, rehabilitation and resettlement projects. I have worked at PET since 2011 and have co-authored numerous publications on topics including technology in prison, prisoner learner voice and a theory of change for prison education. In 2012 I established the Prisoner Learning Alliance and continue to provide the secretariat. In 2016 I was elected the Western European Representative for the European Prison Education Association (EPEA). I also sit on the steering committee for the National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance (NCJAA) and the National Alliance for Sport in Desistance from Crime (NASDC). I also oversee two networks launched by PET in 2017: Prison University Partnerships in Learning (PUPiL) and Prisoner Learning Academic Network (PLAN).
Executive Summary

This report is based on travels to four countries: Belgium, Denmark, Poland and United States (California) to explore prison university partnerships. A typology of ten different models of collaboration is set out in the report:

1. Inside and outside students studying together in prison
2. Professors and former professors teaching/mentoring inside students
3. Outside students teaching/mentoring inside students
4. Inside students attending university on day release
5. Digital and distance learning
6. Pipelines to university after release
7. Staff professional development
8. Participatory research
9. Co-production and co-creation
10. Advocacy and activism

The list above reflects the vast array of potential partnership approaches to meet different needs and to suit different establishments. Often these models overlapped, with learners gaining a variety of opportunities to engage with higher education.

I visited new and emerging partnerships in Europe and longer-established partnerships in the United States. Meeting many alumni of these programmes in California, who were now community leaders influencing social change, led me to analyse the findings through the lens of leadership.

Building on the concept of becoming ‘assets to society’, a stated outcome of prison education in England (MoJ, 2017), this report assesses the ways in which prison university partnerships build human capital and social capital. I use the Social Change Model of Leadership Development (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996) as a framework to define the individual, group and community values observed in these partnerships, showing how they have the potential to transform learners into leaders and affect change:

(Higher Education Research Institute HERI, 1996)

As well as the benefits, this report outlines the challenges of prison university partnerships, in relation to five key themes: People, Logistics, Content, Resources and Impact.

In conclusion, assessing the relevance to the UK, I call for universities to see people in prison as future change-makers and urge criminal justice organisations to focus on developing the leadership capabilities of people with lived expertise to drive social change, particularly at this time of ‘prison crisis’.

Universities should be at the heart of this movement offering opportunities both in custody and after release as part of their widening participation strategies. Prisons should support this by removing barriers to successful collaboration and by embracing partnership working.

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1 http://www.prisonerseducation.org.uk/education-contracts
Introduction

“There is treasure, if only you can find it, at the heart of every man.”

Winston Churchill

Background to this report

A year before I applied for a Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellowship, the Secretary of State for Justice at the time (Rt. Hon. Michael Gove MP) gave a speech in the office building of Prisoners’ Education Trust (PET). He quoted Churchill, as above, to argue that education should be at the heart of every prison. In his party conference speech later that year, Gove set out an approach stating that: “We should not treat prisoners as society’s liabilities […] We should see them as potential assets - people who can contribute to society and put something back.”

Visiting new and emerging partnerships in Europe, and with some knowledge of recent partnerships in the UK, the focus of my travels was initially on the immediate benefits and challenges of setting up such partnerships. However, visiting longer-established partnerships in California, and meeting the alumni of such collaborations, turned the focus of this report to the theme of leadership. Meeting many formerly incarcerated individuals leading social change in their communities led me to explore in what ways these partnerships build leadership capabilities. It is these capabilities which provide stepping stones for people to find their own ‘treasure’ (skills, interests and talents) and become ‘assets’ (able to contribute to society). As the founders of one UK-based prison university model ‘Learning Together’ have argued: “Instead of approaching people in prison as sites of deficit to be corrected we could see them as sites of talent, experience and potential to be fulfilled, to their individual benefit as well as to the benefit of our communities” (Armstrong & Ludlow, 2016)

Prison education

There is global political recognition of the importance of prison education; from the 17 recommendations adopted by the Council of Europe in 1989 to the Doha declaration adopted at the UN crime congress in 2015. Penal Reform International has observed: ‘There is a growing recognition of the need to equip prisoners with the skills and education needed to obtain work on release’. This global trend has been driven by robust evidence into the effectiveness of prison education in reducing re-offending and increasing employment. A meta-analysis (Davies et al. 2013) in the United States found:

- Prisoners who participated in education programmes were 43 percent less likely to reoffend than those who did not.
- The chances of obtaining employment after release among those who participated in prison education was 13 percent higher than for those who did not.

This evidence was reflected in research conducted by the Ministry of Justice (2015) in England, which found that people supported by Prisoners’ Education Trust (PET) to study distance learning in prison, including higher level courses up to Open University (OU), were a quarter less likely to re-offend than a matched control group.

University

The value of university is well documented. As the Social Mobility Advisory Group (2016) argues: ‘Universities transform lives. Going to university leads to new ways of seeing the world, to new horizons and networks, and to significantly enhanced job opportunities.’ UK Convict Criminologists have also noted that, for many prisoners, university can be a gateway: ‘higher education has the potential to open up a range of opportunities and pro-social life choices. Importantly, higher education is a form of collateral that can be used as currency to negotiate the stigma commonly experienced by former prisoners in the conventional world.’ (Aresti & Darke, 2016)

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6 https://www.criminaljustice.org.uk/sites/criminaljustice.org.uk/files/P5J%20225%20May%202016.pdf
7 http://www.epea.org/portfolio/council-of-europe-17-recommendations/
8 Global Prison Trends (2017)
9 www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR266.html
11 Social Mobility Advisory Group (UK, 2016)
Prison university partnerships

Prisoners studying with the Open University through distance learning since the 1970’s\(^2\). There is also a ‘long British history of people in universities and prisons learning alongside one another’ state Armstrong & Ludlow (2016), who cite examples from the 1950’s. However mutual learning opportunities, until recently, were few and far between. The Coates’ report (Coates, 2016)\(^3\) features an ‘Inside-Out’ partnership between University of Durham and HMP Durham; a ‘Learning Together’ partnership between University of Cambridge and HMP Grendon and a Convict Criminology partnership between HMP Pentonville and University of Westminster as examples of such good practice. This report defines partnership very widely, including any collaborative activities between a university and a prison.

In 2017 PET launched a new knowledge exchange network called PUPiL (Prison University Partnerships in Learning) to map, promote and support these projects through sharing experience, evaluations and expertise. At the time of writing this report 35 projects are listed\(^4\). However, Coates found that ‘Currently the links between prisons (and their education providers) and colleges and universities in the community are not always strong’ (Coates, 2016). As a result, only 16% of prison leavers have an education or training place to go to at the end of their sentence\(^5\).

The meta-analysis in the U.S. (Davis et al., 2013)\(^6\) looked at the reducing re-offending impact of different types of prison education and different delivery methods and found that the most effective programmes are when prisoners are connected to the community outside. An influential report from Berkley and Stanford Universities in California (Mukamal et al., 2015) argued: ‘Our colleges and criminal justice agencies must break out of their silos. Our policymakers must enable partnership and collaboration between the education and criminal justice fields.’\(^7\) Academics in the UK who run Learning Together partnerships agree: ‘Porous prisons that work in partnership with community institutions to support one another in their missions rather than incapacitating people through disconnecting them from society.’ (Armstrong & Ludlow, 2016)\(^8\)

Theory of change for prison education

The PLA and New Philanthropy Capital worked with prison teachers and former prisoner learners to develop a Theory of Change for prison education to begin to unpick the mechanisms behind the transformative impact of prison education (Champion & Noble, 2015)\(^9\).

These themes were picked up in the Coates Review (2016) and have now formed part of the Ministry of Justice (2017) new definition of prison education: ‘Activities that give individuals the skills they need to unlock their potential, gain employment and become assets to their communities. It should also build social capital and improve the well-being of prisoners during their sentences.’\(^10\) In England prison governors will soon be able to commission a broader range of providers to deliver learning opportunities in their establishments, in line with the new definition. It is important therefore to explore these concepts and understand what works in supporting people to ‘unlock their potential’, ‘build social capital’ and become ‘assets to their communities.’

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\(^2\) http://www.open.ac.uk/about/offender-learning/offender-learning-programme
\(^4\) http://www.prisonereducation.org.uk/pupil
\(^6\) https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR266.html
\(^8\) https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/sites/crimeandjustice.org.uk/files/PSJ%20225%20May%202016.pdf
\(^9\) http://www.prisonereducation.org.uk/news/pla-sets-out-theory-of-change-for-prison-education-
\(^10\) http://www.prisonereducation.org.uk/education-contracts
Human and social capital

Human capital refers to ‘The knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being’ (OECD, 2001). It therefore refers to more than just acquisition of skills, but a greater personal process of change. Social capital is the ‘networks together with the shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation with or among groups’ (OECD, 2001). This includes bonds (the links to people based on a sense of common identity), bridges (links that stretch beyond a shared sense of identity) and linkages (connections to people further up or down the social ladder). Academics who run prison university partnership programmes in the UK, have started grappling with the ways in which social and human capital combine as a result of these collaborations: ‘It is becoming increasingly clear the influential role education/higher education plays in desistance, including a complex interaction of individual, social and environmental processes and factors. Specifically, this involves a shift in one’s sense of self, and the emergence of a pro-social identity and pro-social worldview (a shift in attitudes, values and belief systems)’ (Aresti & Darke, 2016). Desistence theorist Maruna (2017) has argued that prison university partnerships provide important opportunities for prisoners to realise their own strengths and academic potential.

Transformational learning

‘Education should be aspirational. It must offer a learning journey that is truly transformational and enables progression to higher levels.’ (Coates, 2016).

This report explores the idea of ‘transformational’ learning experiences and what it means in the context of prison university partnerships. Transformative learning theory was introduced by Mezirow (1997) as a change process that transforms students’ frames of reference: ‘the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences.’ The transformational learning process is said to begin with a disorienting event which ‘exposes a discrepancy between what a person has always assumed to be true and what has just been experienced, heard or read’ (Cranton, 2002). In this report I explore how prison university partnerships can be a catalyst to help transform learners into leaders.

Leadership

A report from Berkley and Stanford Universities in California argued that; ‘College has the power to change lives […] College can break the cycle of recidivism and transform formerly incarcerated individuals into community leaders and role models’ (2015). There are many schools of thought on leadership, however there is one model I found particularly useful in providing a theoretical context to this report and overlapping significantly with my findings:

The Social Change Model of Leadership was devised in 1994 by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA. This model aims to develop leaders who may not hold ‘traditional’ leadership roles, but rather want to make positive change. It was initially designed to assist in facilitating leadership among university students. Self-knowledge (understanding one’s talents, values and interests and making meaning out of life experiences) and leadership competence (the capacity to mobilise ones self and others) are two of the key elements. ‘The Social Change Model of Leadership Development approaches leadership as a purposeful, collaborative, values-based process that results in positive social change.’ (Komives & Wagner, 2017)

Sources:
24 Maruna. Desistance as a Social Movement. Irish Probation Journal 14, October 2017
Methods

Aims and objectives
The aims are to:

• Explore how prisons and universities can collaborate and describe the benefits and challenges.
• Better understand how prison university partnerships develop individual transformation, in particular leadership capabilities.
• Explore how prison university partnerships develop institutional transformation, in particular social change.
• Stimulate wider interest in prison university partnerships with a view to these initiatives expanding and being researched further.

The objectives are to:

• Describe different types of emerging and established international prison university partnerships and their key challenges.
• Use case studies and testimonies to depict the processes by which leadership capabilities and social change might occur as a result of such partnerships.
• Reflect on the implications for England and Wales and make recommendations.

Approach, methods and limitations
This report is based on observations and conversations held on visits to four countries over the course of five weeks in 2017. It is not a comprehensive assessment of prison education or prison university partnerships in these countries, nor is it an evaluation of them. This report gives an overview of what was witnessed by the author and described in testimonies by individuals involved in the partnerships. As such, the comments are anecdotal and are only meant to give a flavour of the projects visited. It is not the objective of this report to offer any assessment of the different models in terms of effectiveness or impact. This report merely attempts to describe the variety of partnership models witnessed and draw out potential ways in which these partnerships could lead to individual and institutional transformation.

Countries visited:
The author visited Belgium, Denmark, Poland and U.S.A (California). To provide some contextual background on the countries the World Prison Brief provides the following data:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Belgium</th>
<th>Denmark</th>
<th>Poland</th>
<th>U.S.A</th>
<th>For comparison: England &amp; Wales</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prison population (inc. pre-trial detainees/ remand)</td>
<td>10,619</td>
<td>3,418</td>
<td>74,896</td>
<td>2,145,00</td>
<td>84,235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison population rate (per 100,000 of population)</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>666</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of establishments</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>4575</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

29 http://www.prisonstudies.org/world-prison-brief-data
Travel to learn: Findings
Typology of prison university partnership models

I visited a variety of emerging and established prison university partnerships and have used these to develop a typology. A typology is a descriptive framework and therefore no hierarchy is suggested, nor does inclusion denote relative significance in prison education practice. They are not mutually exclusive as it is possible that partnerships include elements of different types as a ‘mixed model.’

1. Inside and outside students studying together in prison

1.1 Inside-Out (Syddansk University and Sobysogard Prison, Denmark)
The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program (Inside-Out) is an international educational programme established at Temple University in Philadelphia by Lori Pompa in 1997 bringing ‘outside’ university students and ‘inside’ prisoner learners together to study as peers on term-long courses in prison to learn about crime and justice together. By providing training courses, Inside-Out is now an international network of over 800 facilitators. One of those trained facilitators is Linda Kjær Minke, a Law professor at Syddansk University, Denmark. Linda runs a Law module called Crime, Punishment and Crime Prevention Strategies. All students get university credits on completion.

1.2 Inside-Out, (Pitzer College and California Center for Rehabilitation prison, U.S.A)
Tessa Hicks-Peterson is an Assistant Professor in Urban Studies at Pitzer College and Assistant Vice – President of Community Engagement. The Dean did the Inside-Out training and ran a pilot course ‘soccer and social change’ four years ago at California Center of Rehabilitation (CRC). They have since run courses in Middle Eastern politics, Latino politics, psychology and history.

1.3 ‘Samen Leren in Detentie’ (Vrije Universiteit Brussel and Beveren prison, Belgium)
In 2017 researchers, An-Sofie Vanhouche, Clara Vanquekelbergh, Jana Robberechts and Prof. Kristel Beyens from Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), were planning a pilot prison university partnership in Beveren prison, known for its advanced in-cell technology. They have one course called ‘learning together in detention’ involving 12 Criminology & Penology Masters students and 12 inside students in each.

1.4 ‘Bars out of the way’ (Leuven University/Thomas More University College and Mechelen Prison, Belgium).
Peterv De Witte and Geerjan Zuijdwegt are both prison chaplains and researchers. They have been running informal ‘talking groups’ with six volunteers from the university and six prisoners called ‘bars out of the way’. The chaplains are however, hoping to introduce a more formal structure for university students and prisoner students to meet and study on equal terms.

2. Professors and former professors teaching/mentoring inside students

2.1 Prison University Project (San Quentin prison and a variety of universities, U.S.A)
Founded in 1996, the college programme at San Quentin State Prison now provides twenty courses each term in the humanities, social sciences, maths, and science, as well as intensive college preparatory courses in maths and English. Classes last for a minimum of two hours. Lecturers come from a range of universities including Berkeley, San Francisco State and Stanford. They also offer ‘study hall’ one to one sessions for students with tutors. All lecturers and tutors are volunteers.

San Quentin prison, U.S.A.

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31 http://www.insideoutcenter.org/training.html
2.2. Lublin prison and Catholic University Lublin (Poland)
Regional Director of Lublin Jacek Gluch did his Masters at Catholic University Lublin in Social Work. He set up a programme where prisoners could study a three-year BA in Social Work. In the first year the inside students all study together with lecturers coming into the prison almost every day. In years two and three part of group could join ‘outside’ students at the university.

2.3. Victimology and Restorative Justice (USA)
Fresno State University lecturers lead a victimology course in Chowchilla prison. Over six weeks of classes they cover the theory of victimology. The course is part of prison preparation for restorative justice, helping prisoners prepare to meet victims of crime.

2.4. La Touline (former lecturers/teachers and Nivelles Prison, Belgium)
Nivelles prison holds long sentenced prisoners. Prisoners who are studying benefit from volunteers, who are selected by the charity La Touline as prison visitors. They are often retired university lecturers. Social Worker Anne-Julie Wagneur explained the logo was a fisherman’s anchor: “We think people can be lost at sea. It is important we try to provide an anchor for them.”

3. Outside students teaching/mentoring inside students
3.1. Prison Education Project – PEP (Cal Poly Pomona & other universities and various Californian custodial establishments, U.S.A.)
In 2011 the California Institution for Men (CIM) teamed up with Professor Renford Reese to form Prison Education Project (PEP). PEP now offers educational opportunities in 12 California correctional facilities. With 800 university student and staff volunteers, PEP has supported approximately 5,000 prisoners. Students from Cal Poly Pomona and other universities volunteer to run taster classes (such as philosophy, physics and film) and study circles. There are also career development and enrichment classes offered including Yoga & Meditation and Modern Dance.

3.2. Nivelles Prison and Universite Libres Brussels (Belgium)
ULB Professor Michel Syblin and the Director of Nivelles prison Marie De Pau initiated this project to enable prisoners to study for degree courses through distance learning. Not only are the fees paid, but students at Nivelles prison are given books and a volunteer student mentor from the university.

3.3. Danish Red Cross for Youth
The Danish Red Cross for Youth runs a network of students who are matched with prisoners studying higher level courses. It runs in ten Danish prisons and the group meets every second month.

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32 http://www.prisoneducationproject.org/
33 PEP Student Volunteers are from: Cal Poly Pomona, Pitzer College, Cal State Los Angeles, USC, UCLA, UC Riverside, LaVerne, Cal State Fullerton, Cal State San Bernardino, Cal State Channel Islands, Long Beach City College, Sacramento State, UC Merced, San Jose State, Cal State Stanislaus, Scripps College, Harvey Mudd College, the University of the Pacific, and San Diego State, Imperial Valley Campus. PEP volunteers from the Google headquarters conduct career development training in the Santa Clara County Jail.
4. Inside students studying at university on day release

4.1 Denmark – Statsfengeslet ved Horsered open prison
There are between 5-10 inside students studying at nearby universities. They can bring a laptop into their cell and have access to the internet. They also have Red Cross student volunteers help them with their studies.

4.2 CUL and Lublin (Poland)
After the first year of the Social Work course being taught in the prison, some of the men could leave on day release to study alongside university-based BA Social Work students. Seven have now gone on to do a Masters.

5. Digital and distance learning

5.1 Beveren prison ‘Prison Cloud’ (Belgium)
In-cell computers with the ‘prison cloud’ system have the capacity for e-learning use. They are currently more focused on self-service facilities such as ordering canteen. They have a keyboard so learners can pay to use Word and Excel.

5.2 Smart learning on ‘KUP’ (Denmark)
KUP is an e-learning system which includes a range of courses and materials including pdfs, e-books and videos. Exams can include a Skype oral exam. The courses include university level courses in business, project management and company law where they can gain credits through ‘smart learning’. The courses include: history, religion, political sciences, maths, English and Danish.

5.3 E-readers and tablets (California, USA)
22 different California Community Colleges provide college programmes inside the prisons either face-to-face or via correspondence courses. E- readers are available to all students enrolled in college correspondence courses. At California Institute for Women, and other establishments, they have kiosks called ‘JPay’ and tablets where students can download learning resources (including at university level) at the kiosk.34

34 http://jpayslantern.com/education/#Home
6. Pipelines to university

6.1 Reintegration Academy, Cal Poly Pomona University
The Reintegration Academy (RA), founded by Prof. Reese at Cal Poly Pomona University in 2009, is a course for people on parole. RA brings 30 parolees to the college campus for one evening a week over ten weeks. Participants receive a meal card, transportation and a gift card to purchase smart clothes. Participants hear from inspirational former prisoners, receive a free laptop and are registered into Mt. SAC Community College. There is a job fair where 25 local employers meet, greet, and interview participants. It ends with a graduation banquet.\(^35\)

6.2 Project Rebound
Project Rebound is a programme to help formerly incarcerated students prepare, apply, enrol and graduate with a degree from one of the Cal State Universities. The program offers academic and financial support, peer mentoring and tutoring, and career placements. It began at San Francisco State University 50 years ago and then expanded in 2016 to Bakersfield, Fresno, Fullerton, Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Bernadino and San Diego.\(^36\) It was founded in 1967 by Prof. John Irwin, who was formerly incarcerated. He did correspondence courses during his prison sentence and then went to University, eventually receiving his Ph.D. in Sociology from Berkeley. In 1997, Irwin helped establish the ‘Convict Criminology’ movement while a Professor at San Francisco State University.

7. Staff professional development

7.1 Officer training at Fresno State University, California, USA
Universities can also be involved in the education of staff, which in turn impacts on prisoners’ learning experiences. For example, a State Correctional Lieutenant at Avenal State Prison did an online distance learning course and some residential study at Fresno State University in criminology led by Dr. Emma Hughes.

7.2 Alumni governors making connections
Many of the prison university partnerships have come about or have been strengthened due to the prison governor themselves having been an alumnus of the university. For example, Rosemary Ndoh, Warden of Avenal prison, is an alumnus of Fresno State University.

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\(^{35}\) [http://www.reintegrationacademy.org/](http://www.reintegrationacademy.org/)

\(^{36}\) [https://www.prisonactivist.org/resources/project-rebound](https://www.prisonactivist.org/resources/project-rebound)
8. Participatory research

8.1 Current prisoners conducting peer research – Vrije Universiteit Brussels (VUB), Belgium
Dr. Dorien Brosens at VUB has been working on participatory research in prisons. One such project in Antwerp prison in 2011 focused on engagement in education, to understand the gaps and motivations. The survey was developed through focus groups with officers, activity providers and prisoners. As a result, the education offer was changed.

8.2 Former prisoners conducting research – ‘Convict Criminology’, U.S.A.
In the ‘Convict Criminology’ movement former prisoners becoming researchers themselves. The author met several people in California who had been formerly incarcerated and were now carrying out research related to prison and criminal justice issues.

9. Co-production and co-creation

9.1 The Consultancy Group, Nyborg Prison, Denmark
‘The Consultancy Group’ is a group of prisoners who invite outside experts from different professions, including university academics, into the prison to participate in workshops, aiming to find solutions to improving rehabilitation in Danish prisons. The prison service devolved a small budget to the group for them to decide how to spend on their activities.

9.2 Voluntary Advisory Board, Avenal prison, California
The voluntary advisory board is made up of the Warden (Governor), senior management team, voluntary organisations, volunteers and academics. Prof. Emma Hughes from Fresno State University sits on the Advisory Board. She is involved in Project Rebound, teaches some of the officers’ criminology and has conducted research into education and the voluntary sector in prisons.

9.3 University art in prison and prison art in university
UCLA student musicians performed a concert at California Center of Rehabilitation. Cal Poly Pomona held an exhibition of prisoner art work at their campus. San Bernadino University tutors and students run arts workshops in prisons and hope to introduce a BA arts programme. Warsaw University professors judged a poetry competition with entries from Opele Lubeski prison in Poland.
10. Advocacy and activism

10.1 Genipi (Belgium): Université Catholique de Louvain, Université Saint-Louis – Bruxelles and Université Libre de Bruxelles

Genipi is a student movement based at three Belgian universities providing academic support to prisoners and campaigning for a reduction in imprisonment. It was started in France in 1976 following a series of violent riots in French prisons. It is made up of students, teachers, researchers, prison workers, ex-prisoners and social workers. In March 2017 Genepi Belgium was set up with 60 members. Genepi France has organised training for members37.

10.2 Pitzer College Abolition Club (USA)
After taking part in the Inside-Out programme, some outside students join the Prison Abolition Club. They take part in three-day critical resistance residential training and get involved with campaigning. They also run open mic nights and fundraise, for example for prisoners’ families38.

10.3 Beyond the Bars Fellowships (USA)
Beyond the Bars Fellows are groups of students, teachers, activists, researchers and former prisoners who are selected and trained to put on conferences in U.S. universities. The conferences are free to attend and open to the public.

10.4 JustLeadershipUSA
JustLeadershipUSA39 trains and supports formerly incarcerated people to become more effective leaders. JustLeadershipUSA has a partnership with Columbia Law School’s Center for Institutional and Social Change. Training includes Community Building, Advocacy and Communication/Messaging.

10.5 Anti-Recidivism Coalition (USA)
The Anti-Recidivism Coalition40 (ARC) was founded in 2013 to provide a support network for formerly incarcerated young men and women, and advocates for fairer criminal justice policies. Through a collaboration with Stanford University, ARC empowers and mobilises young people and their families to play a role in justice reform through leadership development, community organising and direct policy advocacy. Advocacy trainings are trauma-informed to ensure that members are supported in sharing their personal testimony. ARC works with advocacy organisations to create opportunities for members to lend their voices to justice reform efforts.

10.6 Youth Justice Coalition (USA)
Youth Justice Coalition41 (YJC) is a user-led organisation campaigning for youth justice policy reform. They run their own charter school and classes include community organising.

37 https://genepibelgique.wixsite.com/genepi
38 https://www.facebook.com/prisonabolitionclaremont/
39 https://www.justleadershipusa.org/
40 http://www.antirecidivism.org/
41 http://www.youth4justice.org/
Having listed the prison university partnerships I came across on my travels, I will now set out how those partnerships develop leadership capabilities using the six themes of the Social Change Model of leadership development (HERI, 1996).

There are eight key values in the SCM of Leadership divided into ‘Individual’, ‘Group’ and ‘Community’ values (Komives & Wagner, 2017):

**Individual values**
- Consciousness of self: an awareness of personal beliefs, values, attitudes and emotions.
- Congruence: individuals who are genuine, honest and live their values.
- Commitment: intrinsic passion, energy and purposeful investment toward action.

**Group values**
- Collaboration: generating creative solutions and engaging across difference.
- Common purpose: contributes to group trust and shared aims, values and vision.
- Controversy with civility: understanding and integrating multiple perspectives.

**Community values**
- Citizenship: working toward change to benefit others.
- Change: Improving the status quo and creating a better world.

I use these values throughout this report as a framework to explain how prison university partnerships can develop leadership capabilities.

**Individual values**
This first section of the report looks at how prison university partnerships can develop the individual values found in the Social Change Model of leadership including self-awareness, authenticity and commitment.

**Consciousness of self and Congruence**
This section analyses how prison university partnerships help develop the leadership capability of self-awareness, including knowledge of personal values, strengths and areas for improvement, enabling someone to act authentically. (Komives & Wagner, 2017, p.45)

Prisons are inhumane places, reducing residents to a number or surname or an offence type. Prison uniform, regime and an oppressive environment can all combine to a feeling of no longer being ‘human’. The first step in self-awareness is therefore seeing oneself as a human being once again. One Belgian student at Beveren prison explained that: “The fact that we could take off our ‘prisoner jacket’ [whilst we were studying] made us feel more human. It is impossible to explain how much we appreciated this.” The feeling of being human was often connected to being able to mentally ‘escape’ the prison. A Polish student studying Social Work said:
“Everyday prison problems became less on my mind, the lack of warm water or electricity, it was sent to the back of my mind as the main thing on my mind was the topic we were studying and the lecturers.” A distance learning volunteer at Nivelles prison, described that his university volunteers: “Help me to have a long-term vision. It allows me to focus on something instead of tensions between prisoners and wardens. I try to ignore all that. I'm not just turning around and round, I am moving ahead with my life”.

‘Normal’ was another word which arose frequently in conversations. A student in a Danish prison who had a Red Cross volunteer explained: “It’s good to be with someone not in prison. To have normal conversations.” Another student who also had a university mentor said: “They help me set goals, help with the reading; they are just normal people.” The director of the Social Work course at Lublin University also commented: “[Prisoners] feel better when people treat them in a normal way.” The Governor of Nivelles prison in Belgium articulated the importance of humanity: “The words security and order are the big words of prison and the words humanity and re-socialisation are smaller, but we need to make those words bigger. It is not easy. We have to open the possibilities for students to do things like university learning.” Humanity can come in the form of simple human comforts. Assoc. Prof Linda Kjaer Minke from Inside-Out in Denmark explained that “Each week a different student bakes a cake to bring to the prison. Cake is important!”

An alumnus of the Reintegration Academy described his experience of feeling cared about, valued and appreciated: “The Reintegration Academy was every Thursday evening. It was super cool to be on campus and exposed to the lifestyle of college. Dr. Reese is motivational. He tells you ‘you’re just as good as anyone else’. They care about me, they believe in me, they think about me. I want to express how many people see the good in me. [On this programme] we are told ‘we appreciate your talent. We appreciate you’. “ A Project Rebound student also said: “I’m part of something that wants me. It’s inclusive. I’m so used to being excluded, I’ve hardly ever felt that.” Tessa at Pitzer College described one particularly powerful moment in her Inside-Out class where: “a student in his late 50s was in tears after reading it [Angela Davies] – he had no idea there was a movement to abolish prisons or that there were so many people who cared.”

Prison can often be a place of introspection and prison education can be a vehicle for building self-awareness. “Who are you? I couldn’t answer the question. I became introspective. I began re-building myself - my foundation of who I was,” described one Project Rebound Scholar who added: “I became a person of value. I can go to any job now – look at who I am today. There is my portfolio and they go – wow! No one can take education away from me.” A distance learner at Nivelles prison reflected: “If you educate yourself, you also discover yourself.”

A Reintegration Academy alumnus described their journey of self-discovery: “At the start of my sentence I was a walking zombie. Fighting for respect so I wouldn’t be a victim. I didn’t start to pay attention to my inner self until later. I ended up in the hole. I messed up […] I thought why can’t I make better decisions? I have nothing to show for my life. I did some soul searching and realised I needed my GED. I’d hit rock bottom. I had no goals and no plan. Getting my GED made me believe anything was possible. I then did correspondence courses in psychology, counselling and business. I saw Dr. Reese’s TED x [talk] in 2010 on prison TV. I knew I wanted to pursue a better life. Prison doesn't define who you are if you feed your mind with the right information.”

The building of identity through education was another recurring theme. At the Beyond the Bars conference, Ricky Ross who was formerly incarcerated for twenty years and is now an author and teaches literacy to hard-to-reach communities. He said: “I thought I was dumb […] Everything starts with education. Know who you are.” A fellow panellist, Shaka Senghor, author of ‘Writing my Wrongs’, who has taught at university, given a Ted talk and won various awards since his release said: “I made education my re-entry tool. GED and degree are indicators. It was empowering, it gave me an identity.”

This connection was also illustrated by a comment made by one man in a philosophy class in San Quentin who asked the tutor: “When I finish this course, does that make me a philosopher?” Tessa at Pitzer college reflected that “In the class they are all equal. They are all Pitzer College students. A prisoner can say ‘I’m a student of a prestigious college.’ Some of the rituals of university also help to build and reinforce these emerging identities for the learners, their families and peers; “We hold a graduation ceremony where individuals give testimonies. We have a keynote speech, family come, they wear caps and gowns, the Dean attends, the group read a poem they have co-written – and, of course, there is cake!” explained Tessa.

A significant aspect of the prison university partnerships in California, where they have been established much longer than in Europe, is the use of role models to inspire the next generation of scholars. At Cal Poly Pomona's Reintegration Academy students explained that it was one of the most important elements of the programme: “They tell us we can do it. They have similar stories to us. They are sharing. That is the key to it. It inspires hope. It is magical.” said one student. “People drive from far and wide to speak at the Reintegration Academy. They are willing to give back as they got so much from Dr. Reese,” explained another. Project Rebound staff are mostly formerly incarcerated and they also invite back former graduates to meet new
students. As Jennifer Leahy from Project Rebound at Fresno University described: “It connects people at the opposite ends of their stories. From corrections to college. It is super integral to success seeing role models – the movie stars of rehabilitation! It is showing them this is what’s possible, but you need the tools to do it.” A Project Rebound student explained: “They often know a person who did what you want to do – law, social work. If you are shown just one example, then can see it is possible and can be done – it gives you hope.”

Prison university partnerships also provide a route to develop critical thinking skills, which play an important role in developing self-awareness through encouraging reflection of an individual’s values, attitudes and beliefs. An Inside-Out student in Denmark commented that: “I have learnt that it is not necessary to have the same opinions, you can look at something in different ways.” Critical thinking was observed in a Prison University Partnership Philosophy class in San Quentin:

Extract from author observation notes: A discussion ensued that it is easier to ignore suffering if it is further away, but harder if the child is dying in front of you. It leads to one student making the connection between the philosophical discussion and Trump’s rhetoric about ‘America first’. The tutor agrees that “Thinking of ourselves and our families first is a very seductive idea.” Several of the students were struggling to pick a side for the essay. She reflects that it can be hard when a good argument makes you reconsider your original position but that: “philosophy at its best should challenge you. If you can’t address the criticism, then change your own view!”

An alumnus of the Reintegration Academy at Cal Poly Pomona explained: “We were shown how to open your mind, think another way and think logically about a concept. We were given scenarios such as saving a drowning friend. What are your choices? How much does fear control your choices? What type of thinker or learner are you? Who are you as a person? It was about leadership.” The Co-ordinator for the Prison Education Project, Ernst Fenelon, who was formerly incarcerated, told me: “In this environment [university] critical thinking is paramount. Dr. Reese helped me through critical thinking. In those moments where pressure is applied – how to ask the right questions.”

Having the language with which to understand and explain attitudes, emotions and behaviours was another way in which the partnerships helped develop self-awareness. A social work student from Lublin prison admitted: “It was so funny that at first I didn’t know the meaning of some words, the basic meaning. Words like empathy and assertiveness.” Another fellow student commented that: “How I see things has changed. If I saw someone drunk on the street before I would have just thought he was a bum and wouldn’t pay much attention. Now if I was to see that man I would ask myself maybe I need to help him. Maybe I should do something. I see things in a different way.”

Awareness of dreams and aspirations is another critical element of developing consciousness of self (Komives & Wagner, 2017, p.50-51). Feelings of hope and optimism were a recurring theme in discussions with students. A distance learner, who was nearing release, had just received a confirmation letter from Project Rebound: “They said in the letter that they can’t wait to meet me. They said, ‘your college work history is stellar.’ Nothing can hold me back. I feel positive, I feel optimistic, I’m out in 30 days and I’m excited. I can do whatever I want.” As one Project Rebound scholar told me: “On campus everyone is working towards something: towards a future. Back on the streets I didn’t have a focus or dreams to pursue.”

Commitment

This section describes how prison university partnerships develop the individual value of commitment, another key leadership capability. Commitment implies investment of oneself in an activity and the energy and effort required to bring about the intended outcome (HERI, 1996, p.40). Komives & Wagner (2017) recognise that although commitment originates from within, external factors can support commitment through affirmation and validation. This was reflected in many of the discussions I had with learners and staff involved in prison university partnerships:

A distance learner at Nivelles prison, who has support from university student volunteers, described that; “in difficult times, preparing for exams, you take that burden on yourself, to do it the best you can, it helps to improve yourself. You learn about commitment, you must stay committed. There are so many ups and downs in prison. In prison you miss the university dynamic, they [the volunteers] can help bring that and keep you motivated especially with deadlines.”

Persistence to overcome both barriers and fears was a common theme throughout the study. A Polish student explained: “The lectures in English were scary. But it taught me that if you want to learn you have to be persistent, even if it is hard!” A fellow student added that; “in the ethics class, the priest gave us a book to read. He told us you won’t understand it the first time you read it. And the second time! But when he went through it with us we began to understand.” Another learner at the same prison explained that he had tried
university twice in the community before coming to prison. He explains that he gets up at 3am in the morning to study and then goes to work between 7.30am-3pm, then in the afternoons he usually has visit from a university volunteer. “It was my goal in life to get a degree, it is this moment or never. I do my best. It is not always easy.”

The Governor of Nivelles commented: “It is hard to study at that level in prison, it is not an easy choice.” The course Director at Lublin University explained that the prisoner students: “tried to have good marks and worked hard. There was a financial grant for the best marks. The top two prizes included one prisoner. At first he was denied the grant but then he complained, and it was awarded to him.” She described the seven who have now chosen to go on to do a Masters in Social Work as: “the most determined. They see most clearly the benefits of studying and are very hard working.” One of those Masters students said: “After release I will need a job. After 17 years in prison I will be starting from zero. But I will not forget what I have learnt, I want to help people. I’m an optimist. I hope to work for an NGO.” One Project Rebound scholar turned the idea of commitment into a personal brand. He is an entrepreneur who started his own clothing chain called ‘earn your sleep’ while he studies for his degree; “I keep myself busy. I work hard and have long term goals. Earn your sleep is about working so hard that you deserve to sleep; you have earned it.”

Group values

Traditionally leadership is seen as an individual endeavour. The Social Change Model of leadership development however, identifies that leadership is inherently a relational process which involves collaborative relationships and collective action. Komives & Wagner (2017, p 106) identify that collaboration is also a powerful way to learn about ourselves and others. Prison university partnerships enable students to practice coming together in groups and therefore develop these leadership capabilities and values.

Collaboration and common purpose

Discussions with students and staff revealed that prison university partnerships build a variety of relationships which reveal the powerful way in which they enable those involved to learn more about themselves and others:

Between inside and outside students

When inside and outside learners study alongside each other for the first time, ice-breakers are a common method to help bond the group. An Inside-Out student in Denmark admitted: “I was afraid the university students would be prejudiced. During the ice breaker they had to introduce me. I wasn’t sure how they were going to represent me, but then they start to know you. You start to make connections and break down barriers fast.” A Danish Inside-Out student told me that: “The ice breakers made me feel a bit stupid, but now I see the meaning of them.” One Belgian student in Beveren prison, who had been in prison for a long time explained the transformative impact of sharing a classroom with outside students: “After being imprisoned for such a long time, I had to present myself to people. The idea that I had to talk to 16 people made me fearful. What will they think about me? What will they think about us prisoners? But the teachers started to talk, and I was nicely surprised by the way we started to interact. The students were very eager to learn from us and I really liked that because we could tell them a lot.”

In the Polish programme the prisoners were leaving prison on day release to study alongside students who had no choice but to be in the same class as them, leading to greater anxieties: “I was afraid because a lot of things were in the media about this project and the students would have seen it […] But we made some friends on the course. We still have contact, they come to visit us and write to us and we have telephone calls. Sometimes we visit them on day release.” Janek, the prison director reflected that: “They made friends with people from a healthy part of society. It gave them the chance to observe how other people spend their free time and how they relate to each other, what their friendships looks like. One girl invited one of the prisoner students to her house for dinner. He had never seen a normal Sunday family dinner before.”

The bond between the Polish inside and outside students was illustrated by some innovations during the project: “After the first year we had some celebration activities like an ‘Oscars ceremony’ and one group of students at Christmas time organised to go into the prison to make handmade cards for prisoners’ families. They also helped to organise a family day and prepared activities for the children.” The university course tutor observed: “The prisoner students assimilated and were accepted into the class. They were very active in the
activities. They really liked to have laughs. They tried to assimilate, to use the same language and not slang. Some students also took part in university sports and got medals. The classes were mixed with girls. Even love has happened!“ As well as benefiting the learners, it was a benefit to the outside students too: “20-year old university students have nothing to talk about. They had had everything in life given to them, they had no real experience of life. University students don’t know how hard life can be, they need to know how to build relationships with people like us” reflected an inside student.

Between inside students
As well as forming bonds with the outside students, camaraderie and friendship grew amongst inside students as their studies progressed. One Polish student reflected: “In the second year we had no secrets from each other. It was a safe space for people to share personal stories, there was trust that we wouldn’t share those stories once we left the classroom.” Even though some inside students got to go out to university and others had to continue learning behind bars an inside student commented: “There was a bond between the whole 18 – those who carried on studying inside and those who went out. The ones who went out helped us and got books from university, and printed internet resources for those inside.” This was helped by the fact that staff responded to the inside learners’ requests to be placed in cells together, so they could get peace and quiet to study. The cells have between four and 12 prisoners in them. “If someone wants to learn and gain knowledge, they will help find a space for him here,” a prison staff member told me.

As part of Project Rebound, formerly incarcerated students can bond and form supportive networks to help them get through the new experience of being on campus. Jennifer the Project Rebound Co-ordinator at Fresno State University explained that she organises various activities to help facilitate this:

- Academic. New Project Rebound scholars do a unit class in criminology over one long weekend together before they start on their separate courses. They get a Fresno state ID, see the campus and get to know each other.
- Informal workshops on subjects such as career advice and digital technology workshops.
- Social gatherings, including BBQs, bowling and a pool party. All social events are dry. Jennifer explained: “the whole process is to build social capital. They can bring children, family, home boys and home girls.”
- Volunteering opportunities.

With mentors
Bonds also formed with student or professor mentors. A Danish prisoner taking part in Inside-Out, who had a Red Cross student mentor, commented that: “Most people here are on a cross road – do I do the same things, or do I do something positive? If there is no-one to guide you to the other side, it’s easy to think ‘fuck it’ and carry on as you are. It’s important to have a person to show you the way out of crime.” Bonds were also formed through discussing the subject and learning study skills. A Danish prisoner who went to university from an open prison described that: “before an exam I really need to speak to someone about the subject, not just talk about violence or footie. It gives me other perspectives to bounce off. You can get more stupid in prison. It is paramount to build networks of students and see how other people think.” Rosemary Ndoh, Warden of Avenal prison in California, stated that: “I believe everyone has talent, but everyone needs a cheerleader to say, ‘you can do it’.” A Project Rebound student said she had grades good enough to apply to UCLA but: “I had to complete a personal statement; an essay about who you are and what you have accomplished. But I had imposter syndrome. I didn’t feel I belong there, so I didn’t apply. A personal statement was too overwhelming at that time. I had no one to push me then. That is the importance of mentoring. You need these people to push you.”

With family
Being involved in a prison university partnership can also help build or re-build bonds with family and children. One Polish student said: “my mum was surprised that I found I was capable to do this. When I gave her a copy of my thesis she asked, ‘who was this written by?!’” Although his family could not attend the formal graduation ceremony: “I went home after graduation on day release and had a celebration with my family. My ten-year-old daughter was very proud. It meant a lot.” A fellow student explained: “My family are so proud of me. My son is 18 years old, he is a little nervous that his father is getting better results than him!” For some it is a way of making things up to their family, as one student at Nivelles prison doing a degree by distance learning explained to me: “It is my pride. My parents came to Belgium from [another country] when they were young. They feel Belgian, but this has made them feel like outsiders. I made a big mistake, but now I want to be a man doing something with my life. I want my family to see that.”

With authority figures
The partnerships also had given some of the students confidence in communicating with people in positions of authority. A Polish student proudly commented: “When I last went to the court and the judge asked about my education background I could say I have done higher education; that gave me a degree of satisfaction!” In the Danish Inside-Out course Linda uses guest lecturers to help bring the classes to life and has invited judges, prosecutors and the police to speak. She sees it as important to: “build bridges to the legal system”. She said
the inside students said it helped them to see the police in a different light than just their experiences from their time of arrest: “they have to solve cases in groups and work together to collect evidence. In one class the Police and prisoners formed a group against the outside law students. The Police and prisoners won and did a high five when they solved the case! It was magic. It was mind blowing!” As a result, the Police now want to do a full prison university partnership. The Belgian partnership in Beveren prison also uses guest lecturers including a prison officer who works as a teacher in the education centre for new officers. At Project Rebound in Fresno State University one volunteering opportunity involved working with the Police to run a community open day for families. In Nybourg prison in Denmark the prisoners involved the Police at one of their co-operation workshops. That authority figure could also be a teacher as one Project Rebound student explained: “In my first honours class I had to pick from seven different philosophers and explain why. I picked Plato’s allegory of love. I love it, but I didn’t want to write about it as I had an older white male lecturer and I was intimidated. I thought he would judge me. In the end my lecturer told me it was one of the most important papers he’d ever read. That was a big deal for me.”

With others in society
A Polish Social Work student described that; “I did a work placement as part of the course. I was working in a centre for old people. I gave them empathy and help. Just smiling at them helped and I liked it when they smiled back. That was great. I got satisfaction from helping people.”

Controversy with civility
The social change leadership model explains that controversy is viewed as an inevitable part of group interaction. It argues that it can reinforce the other values in the model if it occurs in a culture of civility (HERI, 1996, p.60). Handling difficult situations with civility was mentioned by several students and staff taking part in prison university partnerships. For example, a Polish student who attended Lublin University observed that: “at the beginning there was a problem with communication between the regular students and the prisoners. Some had a negative view of us at the start but after class we could talk with them and after a while they said, ok, we are all students. We were warm to them and they realised we were ok.” I was told that in Polish prisons there are two different subulture groups. Normally they do not socialise, however one student revealed that: “At first we sat separately, but after a while we didn’t pay attention to that.” He went on to say that: “I saw other students who were usually aggressive but that soon disappeared as the course went on. Every day we studied I got on better with the other inmates and my family. We learnt how to solve conflicts. I learnt to ask and make requests. It’s a common thing in prison: you don’t ask you demand. It’s all about saying the word please.”

Community values
The final set of values in the Social Change Model for leadership are community values; developing the social and civic responsibility and mindset to serve the good of the group (HERI, 1996, p.65)

Citizenship
There were various ways in which prison university partnerships develop active citizenship:

Peer teaching assistants
Many of the programmes start preparing students to become role models by giving them opportunities to co-facilitate classes or be peer teaching assistants. Linda who runs Inside-Out in Denmark used two former students as co-facilitators. “They love it so much. They are my co-teachers” she describes. Art tutor Annie Buckley from San Bernadino University ran teacher training at train students to become facilitators. In one of the Prison University Project classes in San Quentin prison the lecturer had a peer teaching assistant help.

Being a role model
Taking part in the partnerships can lead those taking part to become a role model. One of the Polish students doing Social Work explained that: “I finished primary school before prison. I did secondary school in prison and I’ve done 4 years now of university. I want to say 100% I had a chance and I did it. I know lots of others, about 10, who want to do it having seen me do it.” Another student at Lublin doing social work explained how he tries to guide younger prisoners who are not engaging in education: “Some people go bad ways, especially young people, they are so alone in their life, they don’t know what to do. I try to talk to them, I try to help. I say don’t waste your time in prison, education will benefit you. You have to do everything you can to keep you ‘normal’ and not to start behaving badly. Don’t be afraid to ask for help.” The Warden at Avenal prison said the men doing higher education can be role models to their children: “If they get a degree – so will their families.” As one speaker at the Beyond the Bars conference said: “I have a 5-year-old. It’s my responsibility to ensure he is educated.”

Speaking out
The theme of having a voice and confidence to advocate on behalf of themselves and others was mentioned regularly. A Project Rebound student at Cal Poly Pomona said one staff member had: “catapulted me in my
growth. Before I didn’t have the power to advocate for myself. [They] realised I was scared and didn’t know how to speak up. I realised I do have to stand out and advocate for myself.” Peter Dexter, who managed The Consultancy Group in Denmark, reflects that: “part of the problem is that prisoners need different ways to meet and talk and be heard. From the beginning we were focused on how they can take ownership. If we set up a different kind of space, can we have different kinds of conversations?” It is clear prison university partnerships can be one way of providing this important space. At the Beyond the Bars conference in California, Jubb San Cover, who was formerly incarcerated and is now completing his PhD at Yale, ran a workshop on how he works in partnership with prisons using videography to help inside students to find their voice. He bases this on the principal of “don’t have conversation about us without us.” The programme for the Beyond the Bars LA conference stated: ‘It has been of utmost importance to us to place front and centre the experience and expertise of those who have been through the criminal justice system. The time is long past for those voices not only to be heard, but to be recognised as the primary authorities and sources of knowledge about how our criminal justice system operates, what needs to change, and how that might be achieved.’

Many Beyond the Bars Fellows were formerly incarcerated. They work in partnership with the university to organise the conference, while having an opportunity to interact and learn from community activists, students, organisers and academics.

Community leaders
Some learners explained they wanted to become community leaders. One Polish student studying Social Work explained: “My thesis was on social entrepreneurship. I am interested in how you activate people and the role of NGOs. One of the lecturers got me interested in this subject.” At the Beyond the Bars conference Danny Murrillo spoke about setting up the Underground Scholars Initiative (USI) at Berkley University. In prison he had done university correspondence courses. When he started at university after his release, he and another formerly incarcerated student set up USI. In a newspaper interview Murillo said “Education gives people a different outlook on things. It gave my life context. […] I love giving back to folks in the same situation.”

JustLeadershipUSA (JLUSA) support formerly incarcerated people to become community leaders and help them reach their target of halving the prison population by 2030. I met Maria Morales who went on the JLUSA training at Columbia State University. “We learnt about responsible leadership and delegation. The experience was uplifting” she told me. As well as knowledge building there was also lots of networking: “It is all about making connections.” JLUSA alumni become coaches. It is a one-year programme with four residential study retreats per year in New York. Maria explained that you choose one or two people and become phone buddies or peer to peer coaches: “You help guide each other. It is really powerful.” After her fellowship she helped organise a one-day leadership event for her community in San Diego. Maria is now the Co-Founder of the Pillars of the Community Scholars Society and the San Diego City College Social Justice Coalition. I also met Romarilyn Ralston, who also took part in the leadership training with JLUSA and is now Program Co-ordinator for Project Rebound at Fullerton State University. After her release Romarilyn did a degree at Pitzer College in Gender and Feminist Studies and went on to earn a Master’s degree in Liberal Arts from Washington University, where she served on the graduate student council and received a leadership award given to a graduate student who ‘through leadership, service, scholastic achievement and perseverance has served as an inspiration to the University community.’ Romarilyn explained that the JLUSA programme taught her that: “leadership is about building your own personal brand – your own narrative and story. It also taught me how to lobby. Politics is everything.” She has since taken part in Women’s Policy Retreats where they decide on issues to campaign on such as reducing enhancements in sentences, the cost of phone calls in prison and the canteen mark up costs.

Change
The Social Change Model views leaders as change agents. These are not necessarily people who hold formal leadership positions, in fact they suggest that all people are potential leaders who can bring about change. As well as individual change, I identified elements of institutional change which had occurred because of prison university partnerships.

Having Fresno State University’s involvement at Avenal prison had an impact not just on the students, but on the staff and the whole prison culture. One officer, who did a criminology module at the university to become a lieutenant, told me that after writing an essay on Norwegian prisons it made him see the prison differently when he came to work. It made him think ‘What if I’m wrong?’. He says that he no longer views the inmate as the enemy and is now a supporter of rehabilitation programmes, even volunteering to be involved in a creative writing project. He said: “My role is to knock barriers out of the way. If a prisoner has an idea now I say how can we make it work?” He says he realised: “I wasn’t paying attention to volunteers – now I make a point to stop and ask their names, talk to them.” For the prisoners’ graduation, he gave a validation speech and wore a cap and gown. The Warden of Avenal prison is clear that encouraging prison staff to aim high and go to university would change the culture of prisons: “Yes it would cost a lot of money, but we would be investing to develop a
better culture. If we treat inmates like humans, the culture will change. I want my staff to bring ideas to me. I have a manager that knits and crochets. She taught inmates to knit and sent blankets to a hospice for people who are dying to have around them. If you only have a GED as an officer, you can sometimes have a narrow world view. I want to offer leadership for all.”

In Denmark, Linda, who runs the Inside-Out partnership, has also used her position to initiate other collaborations between the prison and the wider community, leading to a culture change. She comments that the prison system is: “Disappearing from the public eye, as it’s more difficult to get research authorised or to get journalists into prisons, so these partnerships help make it visible again. Our imagination is the only limitation. Other organisations may have some knowledge or something to share. The role of university as facilitator of this process is key.” For example, Linda explains how: “I met a guy doing car-pool [a shared lift scheme] who owned a farming college near the prison. I suggested he make a partnership with the prison. He didn’t even know about the prison. I set up a meeting so they could collaborate […] it’s all about connecting people.”

Prison university partnerships can help change the culture of universities too, as Prof. Syblin in Belgium explained: “My goal is to open the university […] I want to improve the university by opening up to different populations. University is a social system that produces certification, yes, but it is important we do more than that. It is a place where we are able to emancipate people intellectually.” A Polish social work student observed: “The professors liked to talk to us as we had different points of view. Each of us had experiences from before and during prison to bring. My life was different to the regular students. They had their heads in the clouds. A lot of the university students read the books, but real life is different. Having us in the class helped them think about the subject differently.”

Going into the prison and meeting prisoners can encourage the outside students to take different perspectives and influence their networks. A Polish student said: “A lot of people in university just know normal people. They had stereotypes about prisoners. We wanted to show them we want something good.” One Inside-Out student in Denmark explained: “I’m having lots of discussions with family and friends about this. I try not to judge anybody. My family say don’t be friends with them, but for them it’s the unknown. There are stereotypes on both sides.” Another said: “It helps you see the person. I have changed my views from what I see in the media.”

Involving people in prison university partnerships can make them more vocal about prison conditions and reform or abolitionist agendas. One of the chaplains from Belgium said: “We have something to offer too. We have intense experiences of prison life. We see what it does to prisoners. We have something to say about penal policy and advocacy.” As the Beyond the Bars Fellowship movement explains: “There is a persistent and urgent need to raise awareness, engage in dialogue, network, organise and take action.” As well as Beyond the Bars and Just Leadership USA, two other user-led organisations in California are bringing together formerly incarcerated scholars to change policy. Anti-Recidivism Coalition (ARC) works with 450 formerly incarcerated men and women, helping them enrol in school or work; and being of service to their community. ARC’s advocacy efforts have been exceptionally successful, leading to numerous reforms in California’s justice system that have drastically improved the way the system treats young people. Youth Justice Coalition (YJC) supports system impacted individuals to become community organisers and activists, by providing campaign strategy training including research, mobilising and educating people, coalition building with other groups and advocacy. They also help prepare people to govern and fill leadership roles. Pitzer College Student Abolition Club joined ARC and YJC in campaigning for Prop 57 (legislation to enable prisoners to earn early release through educational progression). They organised phone banking, emailing, and petitioned the City Council. Prop 57 came into effect in 2017.

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http://www.youth4justice.org/ammo-tools-tactics/organizing-strategies
Challenges

An optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.

Bringing together two institutions, both with their own sets of rules, cultures and agendas will always require thought and compromise. Prison university partnerships are not without their challenges. Across the range of types of partnership, similar themes arose presenting the staff and students with doubts over how to proceed. If issues such as these can be pre-empted in the planning stages, then solutions can be designed in at the planning stages. Ongoing evaluation can help understand if they have been addressed. Typical issues can be divided into five categories:

- **People**
  - **Safeguarding and risk**
    Bringing any individual or group into a prison immediately raises questions of potential risk and how to safeguard everyone involved.

    In Denmark, inside students are strip-searched before and after the classes and the prison also does a risk assessment on those who apply. Where students were going out to university in Lublin, Poland, psychologists determined which prisoners could attend on day release. The university had to inform the prison if they did not turn up or were involved in bad behaviour. The prison also made checks to see if the students were in class and carried out alcohol tests. The prison staff met with teachers regularly to exchange their experiences of the students. In this partnership, as they were studying together in an outside university, there were no restrictions on students developing friendships, or even relationships, or on staying in touch after the course. In contrast, Tessa, who runs the Inside-Out programme at Pitzer College, explained that with Inside-Out programmes there is a strict ‘no contact’ rule between professors and inside students after the course has finished. Tutors attending the Prison University Project at San Quentin must abide by strict clothing regulations regarding both colour and fit. By comparison, in the closed Danish prison, Linda, who runs Inside-Out, adopts her country’s ‘normalisation’ approach and does not restrict, for example, the female students wearing tight dresses: “It is their style. I didn’t do a pre-prison briefing session. I wanted it to be as normal as possible. I know how young people dress” she explains. Another issue can be around whether an officer needs to be in the room. The course director at Lublin University explained that: “Some of my women colleagues did not want to go into the prison to teach. They didn’t want to be alone with the prisoners. The prison offered to have a guard in the room, but we didn’t want that, so they went in to do exams only.”

- **Wellbeing**
  - **Going into a prison environment and studying difficult subject matter, can impact on wellbeing.** One prison Chaplain described an important part of his role, after the student discussion groups, is to ask: “how was it, how did you experience it? I check a little bit on them and understand the emotional impact it has had. The personal impact can be huge.” Tessa at Pitzer College asks the students to all keep reflective diaries: “It gives them a sense of empowerment and solidarity.” It is also important to check the wellbeing of the staff. A volunteer lecturer with the prison University Project in San Quentin only teaches one semester a year otherwise she ‘burns out’. The additional demands of teaching and marking, on top of her full-time day job, is demanding. Switching off can be hard for the students and staff. For example, the course director at Lublin University said: “some of my colleagues didn’t enjoy it, mostly the psychologists. They thought too much about it.” At Project Rebound the co-ordinators had to deal daily with the various emotional and physical wellbeing issues which arose for their students and went to great lengths to support them. Several had located...
doctors, dentists, opticians and therapists who would offer free services for the students. Another arranged for a tattoo remover to remove gang tattoos for free to help students distance themselves from past identities.

Disclosure
One issue which can often arise is that of disclosure to fellow students. A student at a Danish open prison attending university on day release decided to disclose to his peers when he had to explain why he could not join them at a bar on a Friday night. “In here I can use a mobile46, social media and forums to work with other students; we have joint projects, so I need to communicate with them. I wanted them to know.” At Lublin University students were told not to ask the prisoners questions about convictions: “although in small groups they often talked about their own lived experiences” the course director explained.

‘Cleaning up messes’
Students coming to university after release from prison will have multiple barriers to overcome. Some issues will take priority over studies such as housing or children. Others will be the result of ‘messes’ caused prior to custody such as debt and former gang involvement. As Project Rebound has discovered, you cannot easily separate support with academic studies and support with more personal problems, and so there is a challenge about dealing with both and knowing where the boundaries lie, particularly in the age of constant digital communication.

Extract of interview with Jennifer, Project Rebound Co-ordinator, Fresno State University:
Navigating the university system is difficult for any student. There are speed bumps all the time, but it can become a brick wall for this population. My job is to break down these brick walls. One student told me ‘Ok Jennifer – get out your sledge hammer!’ I get loans consolidated. They get food vouchers when they do volunteering. We have a donation closet of canned foods. They come to me for advice. I help them change their internal dialogue; change how they see themselves. I end up ‘playing mum’. Young people want to text so mostly I support them this way, but also over the phone or in person. None present the same set of problems. You need to be flexible and creative to help them get back on track. They have been told many times ‘you can’t’ and they have been beaten down by the system. They keep meeting brick walls. It is easy to think – ‘oh well, I’ll just go back to what I know’. I tell them ‘yes, it is a mess, but I will help you clean it up’. I think often their messes are like a glass bottle of milk dropped on a tile floor. You can be picking up shards of glass for years, but you’ve got to clean it up or it starts to smell and gets sticky and nasty. I tell them ‘You have to take control, own what happened and clear up your mess first’.

Perceptions
Although the staff and students directly involved in the project are almost always enthused and committed to the programme, that is not always the case for the rest of the prison or university. One chaplain in Belgium who wants to run a more formal partnership said: “We are tolerated! We hope this will change after one year when they will see what a great thing it is.” Often universities are heavily reliant on a proactive point of contact in the prison to make things happen. In Beveren prison that is the Education Co-ordinator. The VUB academics explained: “without her strong support it wouldn’t be possible. She helps us with the practical organisation in the prison - sourcing a classroom, communication with officers and governors, communication with prisoners through prison cloud, etc.” But they said not all staff shared her enthusiasm and many were sceptical whether prisoners would show up.

Many universities also take time to adjust. The course director from Lublin University described: “My first reaction was oh my god! I had never known anyone in prison before, I had no experience of it. My grandmother was scared for me going into the prison.” In Belgium a professor had gained funding for his partnership from the university, despite some opposition from his colleagues. Even in Denmark, where they have the principle of normalisation, Peter from The Consultancy Group, described the challenges in implementing this: “quirky approach as policy makers normally don’t see prisoners as the drivers of change” and so progress is incremental. Linda from the Inside-Out project identified that public opinion is a barrier to successful collaboration as: “it’s hard for the prison to open up. They are afraid of the media […] You must be careful how you present it. If I shine too much light on something it can be shut down.” However, at the same time: “It’s so important to know what is flourishing and what is possible.” The course Director at Lublin University in Poland explained that the media were critical of the project at first: “Why are they studying for free?” they asked. The university had one call from a father who said he didn’t want his daughter to study alongside prisoners. The course Director at Lublin University said: “I told him we can’t do that so no, everyone is equal […] nothing else happened after that.”

46 A prison provided Nokia on a wire in the cell
Logistics

Prison logistics and lock downs
Another challenge working in the prison environment are logistics. Belgium suffers from regular prison officer strikes and academics were concerned about the impact of this happening mid-way through the course, particularly as the university students might lose their credits and it would impact the continuity of the course. Even on a normal day there can be logistical issues. One Polish student from Lublin prison explained: “There were some organisational issues between the university and prison. Sometimes lecturers came and were not let in as the prison staff didn’t know the class was planned.” Another difficulty is the logistics of travel. Many prisons are far away from the city centre making travel difficult for students and tutors. In Denmark the Inside-Out students organise ‘car pools’ to share lifts. One inside student appreciates the dedication of his Red Cross student volunteer: “Some students travel for one and a half hours to visit us” he told me.

Selection process
Which students to select, both from the prison and from the university, is an important decision which often depends on the aim of the programme and who is organising it. Concerns about academic capability to complete the course are more frequently raised if the course leads to an accredited degree-level qualification or if there is a lot of reading involved. Tessa from Pitzer College explained: “the prison selects inside students based on behaviour and grades. They all have their GED and are all correspondence course students.” The Belgian chaplains had an aim that the programme would: “reach out to prisoners who are not already engaged in education. To move it beyond the intellectual prisoners.” However, they were planning to bring in Masters students so were concerned how to address the disparity in theoretical knowledge. They felt the inside students’ lived experience would provide a balance to any theoretical understanding they did not yet have. Some programmes only required school-level education, using motivation as the selection criteria. As Linda from the Danish Inside-Out project said: “They need to show motivation because if people don’t turn up, it falls apart. I have twice as many applicants as spaces. I tell them I had to turn down others. You have to come and attend and participate and read texts, and they do! For university student applicants I look if they have done other volunteering. I don’t want someone who just thinks ‘it will look exciting on my CV’. Overall, I also think about getting a good, diverse mix of students.” Sentence length is also a consideration. At Bouvern prison the organisers have focused on longer sentenced prisoners as they will be less likely to leave mid-way through the course. This is particularly important where the course is for a full degree programme like in Lublin, Poland, where the Director explained: “We wanted to do something for prisoners who already have secondary level education. We also had a problem, what to do with long sentenced prisoners. They have time for education.” The other technique used by partnerships was to counter any academic deficits was to provide additional study skills support. For example, Project Rebound in California build relationships with student support services and secured tutors who were sympathetic to Project Rebound, to provide sessions to help with grammar.

What next
An important consideration at the start of a project is to plan what happens after the programme is over and what progression opportunities are available. In Poland the regional prison Director hoped that after release the prisoners might find employment in Social Work, however: “our law doesn’t allow us to employ prisoners in public institutions. They can get work in social care houses but not paid work. NGOs can offer them volunteering and possibly paid work” he explained. This frustration was felt by the students, one of whom said: “There is no centralised programme to help us with what next after the degree course. The project was a complete success, but no-one thought about what next. It is hard to go out and find a job in this field. Working for an NGO is possible, but they are also very reserved. Stigma lasts with a prisoner until the end of your life.” The programme did however adjust to provide some of the BA students with the opportunity to extend their studies to a Masters. The step by step system of Prison Education Project, Reintegration Academy and Project Rebound at Cal Poly Pomona serves as a useful reminder of the importance of joining up different programmes to ensure a ‘pipeline’ from prison to university, volunteering or work where possible.

Content

Accreditation
Whether to accredit courses is another decision to be made. Obtaining accreditation can prove challenging. In Beveren after the pilot course, the plan is to make it part of the curriculum for the ‘outside’ students who will get credits towards their Masters course. The university has agreed but finding the funds to enable this to happen is challenging. Tessa at Pitzer College explained their outside students get academic credits, but the inside students do not, but it is something they are working to change. However, Linda in Denmark has managed to work with her university, so all students get academic credits. Inside students can use them to access university after release if they choose.
Quality control

When projects begin to grow, quality control can become an issue. Inside-Out provide residential training for facilitators and handbooks for them to follow a core set of rules and principles. At the Prison University Project at San Quentin lecturers were all teachers in top universities. The undergraduate students involved in the Prison Education Project were much less experienced in teaching and were given total freedom of the lesson plan and content making quality control more difficult. However more experienced volunteers assisted less experienced and an end-of-class debrief allowed reflections on what had worked and what had not been as successful.

Critiquing the system and ‘sleeping with the enemy’

With partnerships that choose criminology or law-focused topics, this often leads to students critiquing the penal system. In the partnership at Beveren, one of the topics include the complaints Belgium received from the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhumane and Degrading Treatment for its treatment of prisoners. Tessa explained that Pitzer College is known for its abolitionist movement. She said that a lot of the course reading focuses on the abolitionist movement, such as texts by the American civil activist and co-founder of ‘critical resistance’47 Angela Davies. As a result, both inside and outside students often develop a critical view of the prison system. Tessa philosophises that it can feel like: “sleeping with the enemy. We are helping [the prison] look better – it’s a really big tension. But we talk about that tension together.” As Linda from the Danish Inside-Out project explained, she had one prisoner who was: “quite radical left wing. He wouldn’t participate in prison education but because this project was independent of prison, he applied.” The prison allowed him to attend and Linda explained that they discussed his radicalised views in class: “we have open debates and he passed the exam.” It does have to be handled with sensitivity though as Tess explained: “for half the class it is not a theoretical discussion”.

Resources

Money

Another issue, as always, is finances. The partnerships I visited are funded through a variety of sources. In Denmark the prison and probation service pay the inside students’ course fees. All other costs are covered by the university including the tutor’s wage and the cost of guest lecturers. Students can also take a loan from the prison and it is taken out of their prison wages each week. The Prison University Project in San Quentin was set up as a result of cuts to ‘Pell grants’ for higher education in prisons in 1994. It started in 1996 on a shoestring, and the lecturers continue to be volunteers. However, in 2003 they received funding from a foundation to expand and professionalise. They get donations of books from publishers.

In Poland no-one pays for fees for public university so there are no tuition costs. The university did get some additional funding for photocopies and other expenses such as travel but could not afford to buy all the students books. In California Center for Rehabilitation they use e-readers as a means of cutting costs associated with hard copy books and materials. Project Rebound was able to expand given generous multi-year funding from a foundation, but at a meeting about future plans they were aware of the need to source more sustainable funding. Different universities in the programme were able to offer office space and facilities (access to phone, computers etc.) and all relied heavily on volunteers and pro bono support. A lot depended on the imagination and tenacity of the co-ordinators.

Time

Another issue is staff time. All these partnerships take a lot of organisation and often the staff involved from both the prison and university will go the extra mile to help the programme succeed. For example, one tutor at Lublin University described that: “It has meant extra work. Near exam time last year, I went to the prison in my holidays to give them extra support.” A staff member inside Lublin prison dealing with the administration said: “It was a very hard job, I also had other responsibilities, paperwork, plus university paper work, for 30 people. Sometimes I worked 12-hour day to do it all. They need the right staff time to do this, not to do it on top of a normal job. They need a co-ordinator for the prison and a co-ordinator for university.” At Project Rebound the volume of letters from prisoners wanting to find out more information could be time consuming. They had found solutions including newsletters, template letters and FAQs. Fresno University had started to develop ‘Project Rebound Liaisons’ at Avenal prison, where prisoners distribute information.

Technology

Unlike university campuses, in most prisons technology and internet access is very limited or non-existent. This can lead to inside students having challenges that outside students don’t face, which in turn can lead to a shift in dynamics. However, many prisons have made efforts, or are planning towards, greater access to technology to support higher education. A Polish student at Lublin explained: “we have no access to computers, but in the third year the university organised for me to have a laptop to type up my thesis. At the beginning we thought

47 An organization working to abolish the prison-industrial complex. It is considered to have re-invigorated anti-prison activism in the United States.
we would get internet access, but we couldn’t access it in prison." Another Lublin student who had been allowed to attend university on day release described the benefits of using the internet outside for research; “Lots of people like me with long sentences are not interested in new technology, but they will have problems after release.” At the Open prison Denmark students attending university in the day can bring a private computer into their cell and have access to the internet, but they know the laptop can be examined at any time. Most prisoners have to pay 15 euros a month for the virtual desktop, however the university have paid for this during the course as not all students could afford to pay for it themselves. However, through this platform the educational coordinator can send them their course material. They are looking at options to reduce the cost for their students and to see if they can access relevant materials from white listed sites. In Nyborg prison in Denmark students could use unrestricted access to the internet for half hour sessions if they were supervised by a teacher who would sit and do marking in the same room.

Lack of technology in prison means students can arrive at university unable to transition to a digitally-enabled learning environment. At Fullerton University the Project Rebound Co-ordinators have devised a three day ‘Bridge to Success’ programme which consists of three days of community building, transition orientation and ‘tech literacy’. However, one lecturer at San Quentin from University of San Francisco did see it as a benefit: “it makes me a more creative and better teacher. We can’t use technology as a crutch. The learners are more engaged then many of my other students – they are not on their phones for a start!”

Impact

Evaluation

Another challenge is to decide how and if to evaluate and measure the impact of the partnership. As academics, some teachers evaluate their own classes using surveys or other methods to get feedback, such as Linda who runs Inside-Out in Denmark: “I’m so glad I evaluated my first class. [..] I made a list of things that didn’t work. I used a university standard learner questionnaire and added more questions of my own about the guest speakers, mixed gender etc. I have submitted the evaluation to the university and students have read it.” Prison Education Project and Reintegration Academy at Cal Poly Pomona produce a range of evaluation reports based on short questionnaires given to students including a space for comments and suggestions. They are published on the PEP48 and Reintegration Academy websites49.

One of the co-founders of the Beveren project, Clara, is a PhD student studying education behind bars. She teaches on the course and will also evaluate it using action research to look at motivations of students, how they experience the programme and what added value it gives their re-integration path. She plans to carry out interviews before and after to see how it changed their ideas and will ask students to write a journal. They will use the feedback to adapt their model. The feedback from the first course has already been used to adapt the second course. Managing a research process alongside a learning process, whether an internal or external evaluation, requires careful thought into ethics, limitations of different approaches and the consent of those involved. The Chaplains in Belgium visited a Learning Together project in England and it gave them ideas about participatory methods of evaluation.

The Prison University Project at San Quentin received the 2015 National Humanities Medal by President Obama50 in recognition of their impact and they are now preparing to launch a multi-year study. They want to measure a full range of outcomes, including educational and professional outcomes, civic engagement, mental and physical health, family relationships and social-psychological mechanisms to explain the effects of prison higher education on students both pre-and post-release. They have recently conducted a Demographic and Educational Experience Survey to better understand students’ individual life experiences, with particular attention to their relationship to education.51

Moving from a light touch evaluation, to a full blown academic research study requires permission from the prison and Ministry of Justice. At an event at VUB University, Prof. Beyens reflected that as the Director General of the Belgian prison service, and many governors, studied criminology at university this helps in supporting research, in particular longitudinal and ethnographic research. However, she observes that many of the new generation of governors are from managerial backgrounds and therefore can be less interested in longitudinal criminological research and instead they want: “practical quick data.”

48 http://www.prisoneducationproject.org/PEPEvaluationReports.html
49 http://www.reintegrationacademy.org/OutcomeData.html
50 https://prisonuniversityproject.org/about-us/our-mission/
51 https://prisonuniversityproject.org/about-us/results/
Return to inspire: Recommendations and conclusions
There is a growing trend of prison university partnerships in the UK. It is therefore becoming increasingly important to understand both the benefits of this work, as well as the challenges. By examining a range of emerging partnerships in Europe, as well as more established partnerships in the United States, this report offers some insights into the potential of such collaborations, in particular, how these partnerships can develop leadership capabilities. The Social Change Model (SCM) of Leadership Development provided a useful framework through which to examine how prison university partnerships can build individual, group and community values that have the potential to bring about social change.

The challenges of people, logistics, resource, content and impact span the breadth of the partnerships. As these partnerships grow in the UK, taking time to consider these five areas in the planning stages will pay dividends. This report doesn’t attempt to assess what type or model of partnership is more effective or less challenging than others, but what is clear is that different models can be adopted to fit the different type of institution and different types of learner.

Individual learners can also benefit from combinations of approaches which can support them in different ways and at different times along their journey from learner to leader. Therefore, when planning a prison university partnership, it is crucial to consider how it fits into a broader spectrum of support and opportunities for progression.

Transformative learning experiences involve the building of both human and social capital. These concepts map closely onto the individual, group and community leadership values of the SCM. The British Ministry of Justice’s definition of prison education includes these concepts of human and social capital, it is timely for governors and senior managers to be thinking in these terms when planning education provision. Most prison education is based on a deficit model, assessing what prisoners do not know and attempting to fill that deficit. Prison university partnerships take an ‘asset’ or ‘strengths-based’ approach enabling students with lived experience to build knowledge as a community, develop critical thinking skills, find meaning, uncover talents and passions, become role models and affect social change.

This report should be a wake up call to universities in the UK about the pool of talent and future ‘change-makers’ they are missing out on by looking at the conviction rather than the student and the journey of transformation they have undergone. Prison university partnerships benefit the culture of both prisons and universities; adding critical diversity of life experience to other students’ ‘book knowledge’, as well as being inspiring role models to others who would not traditionally have considered higher education. People applying to university who have been in prison should be seen through a lens of being an asset rather than a threat. None of the universities visited by the author required disclosure of criminal convictions, except for in very specific circumstances involving a work placement with vulnerable people. In the Cal State universities, where Project Rebound was operating, they positively encouraged and supported applications.

In England and Wales, and globally, the use of incarceration is increasing. Prisons here are overcrowded and are widely understood to be in a state of ‘crisis.’ There is growing frustration amongst prison reformers that the progress of change is too slow and that often gains made can be short lived and positive projects and education opportunities can be under threat from the wider context. The policy changes happening in California, where people with lived experience and leadership skills are putting themselves front and centre of the reform movement, should encourage reformers closer to home to prioritise leadership development to achieve radical change in our criminal justice system. Students who combine lived experience with leadership capabilities could most effectively lead the cause. As Maruna has identified: ‘the next stage of this evolution will be the emergence of desistance as a social movement’ (Maruna, 2017). Universities should be at the heart of this movement, offering opportunities in custody and after release to build the human and social capital required. Prisons can support this by working to reduce the barriers to successful partnerships and through embracing collaboration.

52 “Education in prisons is considered to be activities that give individuals the skills they need to unlock their potential, gain employment and become assets to their communities. It should also build social capital and improve the well-being of prisoners during their sentences.”

Recommendations: How should England and Wales learn from these international examples?

The price of greatness is responsibility

WINSTON CHURCHILL

For prisons

1. Reach out to nearby universities to investigate potential collaboration opportunities.
2. Use the benefits and challenges described to support the planning stages.
3. Use new flexibilities in education funding to provide sufficient human and financial resource to support such partnerships.
4. Invite role model former prisoners with experience of university to come back into prison to help plan and deliver education.
5. In planning for new education commissioning, think carefully about the new definition of prison education and prioritise strengths-focused learning and working with organisations that have links to the community.
6. Give more focus to opportunities for education and training after release.
7. Co-produce education planning and delivery with prisoners and academics including the Danish example of devolving some budgets.
8. Use the Social Change Model of Leadership Development to plan and evaluate prison education programmes, as well as staff development opportunities.

For universities

1. Reach out to nearby prisons to investigate potential collaboration opportunities.
2. Use and leverage resources, both financial and in kind, to help support this partnership working.
3. Ensure your university application and risk assessment process are fair and transparent and send positive messages to those with experience of incarceration.
4. Invest in widening participation for students with convictions and who have been in prison, following the Project Rebound example in California, but also good practice in England and Wales such as The Open Book project at Goldsmiths University.
5. Support the research capabilities of students who have lived experience of the criminal justice system, for example the ‘Convict Criminology’ movement based at University of Westminster.
6. Develop more participatory methods of research and evaluation in prisons, seeing prisoners not merely as subjects, but co-producing methodologies, findings and analysis.
7. Use the Social Change Model of Leadership Development to plan and evaluate partnership working with prisons for both inside and outside students, and staff.

For policy makers

1. Enable technology to support prison university partnerships such as e-readers, tablets and controlled access to the internet.
2. Put pressure on universities to adhere to fair and transparent admissions and risk assessment processes for people applying to university with a conviction.
3. Seek ways to give greater platforms and opportunities to people with lived experience of prison to have a voice, participate in a meaningful way to influence and change policy.

For PET and PUPiL

1. Provide a hub and network for prisons and universities across the UK to be supported in establishing partnerships, overcoming challenges and evaluating impact.
2. Explore how university students and tutors could support distance learners in prison.
3. Develop further thinking around Prison University Partnerships as a vehicle for developing leadership capabilities and influencing long term social change.

For European Prison Education Association (EPEA)

1. Establish a Special Interest Group for prisons and universities across Europe to be supported in establishing partnerships, overcoming challenges and evaluating impact.
Next steps and dissemination

- Interim findings were presented at the Prisoner Learning Alliance conference in Leicester in September 2017 and at the European Prison Education Association (EPEA) conference in Vienna, November 2017.
- Interim findings were included in a Prison Reform International expert blog in January 2018.
- Findings to be presented to Just Leadership USA in New York in March 2018.
- Final report to be launched at PET’s annual academic symposium in April 2018.
- Findings to be discussed as part of a panel discussion at the International Corrections and Prison Association (ICPA) conference in Prague in May 2018.

For other opportunities to share and discuss the findings of this report please contact the author nina@prisonerseducation.org.uk
There is treasure, if only you can find it, at the heart of every man.”

WINSTON CHURCHILL