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Prisoner-University Partnerships at Westminsterⁱ

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Things are never straightforward for prisoners pursuing higher education. Prisons are far from conducive environments for study, but this is compounded by bureaucracy and poor organisation on the part of administrative staff which I know - on anecdotal evidence - prisoners find extremely distracting and stressful when all they want is to get on with their studies. (Personal communication, prisoner studying LLB Law, 11 June 2015)

At [the first prison] I was made to feel as though my distance learning requirements were disrupting the education department. They were very difficult in recommending computer time and education admin staff made it clear that my use of a computer meant their company... lost out in valuable qualifications... Studying criminology was also a big concern and required all sorts of application and vetting processes... In [the second prison] staff were eager to provide support and even officers tried to help, but... studying resources were minimal. Printing work and contacting Open University tutors was a lengthy process and visits from Open University tutors on occasion were disrupted. (Personal communication, prisoner studying BA Criminology, 11 June 2015)

Convict Criminology

These two extracts are taken from two of hundreds of letters British Convict Criminology (BCC) has received since it first advertised its services to prisoners studying in higher education in August 2012, in this case letters written in the knowledge that two of the current authors were soon to present the first draft of this paper at a seminar at HMP Grendon on prison higher education. The reader will hardly be surprised to hear that many of these letters are likewise characterised by frustration and anger directed at the particular challenges faced by those wanting to study higher education inside prison. More mundane, but just as important, prisoners in higher education also frequently write to us with requests for basic academic information – what they can study, what they should read, how to reference and so on – questions which any university teacher is used to hearing from their personal tutees. Except, of course, in prison students do not usually have personal tutors. The Open

University, which delivers the majority of prison higher education in the United Kingdom, provides useful support through its regional learning support teams. However, currently only students taking an access module are allocated a personal tutor. Further, the role of Open University regional learning support teams is restricted to advising on study choices, careers options, fees and funding.ⁱⁱⁱ

There is a desperate shortage of educated prisoner and former prisoner voices within the discipline of criminology. This is the starting point for Convict Criminology (CC), a critical perspective that we utilise throughout our research, engagement and writings on prison education. As a concept, CC emerged in North America in discussions between 'ex-con' and 'non-con' academics in the 1990s. The North American Convict Criminology group was formally launched in 1997 by Jeffrey Ian Ross and Stephen C. Richards, and following the organising of panels at each of the following annual conferences of the American Society of Criminology, made its first major contribution to the discipline of criminology with the publication of the book *Convict Criminology* in 2003.^{iv} With Rod Earle, Open University, the first two named authors have been leading figures in developing the CC perspective in the United Kingdom since the beginning of 2012 under the guise of BCC. We have written in detail on BCC and its relationship to the original CC movement with North American and British colleagues in a number of articles in the United States and United Kingdom.^v Briefly, CC is concerned with developing critical, insider perspectives in prisons research and prison reform.^{vi} It starts from the specific observation that the voices of prisoners and former prisoners are largely absent in the discipline of criminology; and it aims to bridge the gap between the so-called 'expert knower' and the lived experience of prison through the prisoner becoming researcher, either through working in collaboration with established criminologists or through training to become criminologists themselves. BCC has approximately 100 registered members, around half of which current or former prisoners. Most of BCC's inside members are studying or working towards studying undergraduate or master's degrees in criminology and its cognate disciplines (for instance, Law, Sociology, Psychology and Politics). Two that are currently held in open prisons have recently transferred from the Open University to University of Westminster to complete their Criminology degrees. Two other inside members are currently applying to start PhDs in Criminology. BCC's outside members include prison activists, academics or former-academics and PhD students, more than ten of who have prison experience. These include a former University of Westminster BA Criminology student, who was released from prison on license only this summer and is

starting a PhD under our supervision in 2019. Most of academic members are involved in mentoring prisoners through higher education (our academic mentoring scheme that we outline later). The others self-identify as utilising the CC perspective in their research.

Higher education in prison

Like our colleagues that introduced and laid the foundations for CC in North America, our vision is therefore of a research activist movement that is underpinned by the experience of prison.^{vii} Within this framework, prison higher education is a central concern for CC for two reasons. First, whether our prisoner/former prisoner members have sufficient academic training to theorise, articulate and objectively analyse their experiences of incarceration and/or form research partnerships with established academics, non-con or otherwise, it is essential to our interpretation of the CC perspective that prisons research is not premised in a dichotomy of researcher and research participant but instead insists on treating academics and prisoners as co-producers of knowledge.^{viii} Naturally, the better educated a prisoner or former prisoner, the more they will be able to work with established academics on equal terms.

Second, prison higher education also has a lot to offer to prisoners. It has proven to be instrumental to many in helping them both to survive prison,^{ix} and to desist from crime.^x As activists utilising the CC perspective, we view prison higher education as warranting particular attention in this regard both because its transformative potential is established in academic theories and verified in recent studies of prison practice, and because it is not only established academics but also educated prisoners that say so. Academic and prison service interest in prison higher education has in part, if not in the main arisen and been maintained at the insistence of prisoners. Founder and editor in chief of the *Journal of Prisoners on Prison*, Justin Piché, writes, many prisoners cite education, "as the only positive experience one may encounter while incarcerated".^{xi} The letters we receive from prisoners likewise emphasise both the instrumental and therapeutic qualities of higher education.

We analyse the value of higher education to prisoners in relation to desisting from crime in the next section. We then turn attention to the obstacles the prisoner students we are in contact have faced in their efforts to complete, even start university degrees. Pulled together, the correspondence we have had with prisoners studying in higher education provides a wealth of data from which a number of major themes emerge. We focus most attention on the results of

a consultation exercise that we carried out in 2014, completed by 20 BCC members in prison. We also cite opinions and experiences from a number of letters we received previously and have received since. As researchers utilising a CC perspective, our view is that the unsolicited nature of much of our contact with prisoners does not make the content of these letters invalid sources of knowledge. Indeed, some of the earlier letters prisoners sent us identified a number of issues that we might not otherwise have given sufficient weight in the questions we took into the consultation.

In the concluding section, we outline two measures BCC has developed over the past four years: an academic mentoring scheme for prisoners studying degrees in criminology and cognate disciplines such as psychology, politics and law that we launched in July 2013; and, more recently, partnerships between our university and three prisons (HMP Pentonville; HMP Grendon; HMP Coldingley) which have involved us taking small groups of University of Westminster students once a week to the prison library (Pentonville), education centre (Coldingley) or onto a prison wing (Grendon) to study critical and convict criminology courses with inmates. In developing these initiatives, we have two major objectives. Most obvious perhaps, we aim to support prisoners studying in higher education. More specifically, we have also designed the initiatives as vehicles for, as previously noted, breaking down what for us are artificial barriers between expert opinion and insider knowledge. Some might argue that the first and third named authors, who have never been prisoners, do not have the requisite experience to research within the CC perspective. Yet it is an epistemological fallacy to make such a clear distinction between those that have experienced prison, for however long or short a period, and those that have not.^{xiii} Besides, CC is ultimately concerned with challenging hierarchies of knowledge, not creating new hierarchies of knowledge. Firsthand experiences can be utilised, sometimes better utilised through collaborative research and study. Our academic mentors and University of Westminster students are not just committed to helping prisoners. Universities benefit from researching and studying with prisoners as much as prisoners benefit from researching and studying with university students.

Education, 'rehabilitation' and desistance

The transformative power of education, and in particular higher education, has been documented in a growing body of academic work.^{xiii} In essence, this work typically attempts to understand and identify the complex processes underlying the relationship between

education/higher education and desistance. Mirroring the broader desistance landscape, it is becoming increasingly clear that the influential role education/higher education plays in desistance, includes 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). Accompanying this is an investment in, and attachment to conventional roles and law abiding behaviours.^{xiv} To avoid theoretical repetition here, we will briefly discuss this relationship through the lens of our own observations; our experiential insights, projects and other work. Through such observations it is becoming increasingly clear that higher education is perceived (by prisoners and former prisoners) as a vehicle for change, thus reinforcing the work of others. The transformative potential that higher education provides is immense, and whilst it would be naïve to consider this potential in isolation to other important factors, including meaningful relationships, significant ties to family and/or 'significant others' and employment,^{xv} 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'. This is evident in the second named author's experiences as a (former) prisoner, and our conversations with other BCC ex-con members. Other colleagues who have also studied in higher education and are currently working in third sector organisations within the criminal justice field typically reinforce this view. Runell (2015) concurs, stating that, "engagement in higher education [can] help to lessen the social burdens and stigma typically encountered by ex-felons in the pursuit of traditional goals and aspirations".^{xvi}

For many former prisoners higher education is the gateway to the 'conventional world', a way back into 'conventional society' and a means of developing social capital. Relative to this, and equally important, higher education has provided an alternative way of 'being', giving new meaning and value to the lives of prisoners and former prisoners. For most of these men and women, life has not only become much more meaningful, it has had significant implications for their psychological well-being. This is evident in research the second named author has conducted,^{xvii} but has also been articulated to us through personal communications with good friends and/or colleagues on the 'ex-offender' circuit. Importantly, for those of us further down the desistance trajectory, i.e. those of us that have carved out successful academic careers or are on the way to achieving this, a critical factor in desisting from crime is our attachment to and investment in our 'new lives' or 'self-projects'. These attachments and investments play a

significant role in deterring potential 'transgressions' to past behaviours conducive with our 'old lifestyles'. As Laub and Sampson articulate, those that have invested in desistance have a 'stake in conformity'.^{xviii} Considering the important role higher education can play in desistance, it is necessary to understand and identify the barriers and obstacles prisoners experience when studying higher education in prison.

Barriers to studying inside

While some research has been conducted in this area, we believe there is still much to learn about the transformative potential of higher education. However, arguably this is becoming increasingly difficult in the prison estate as opportunities to engage in higher education, and/or to continue with higher education, are becoming increasingly limited. From our understanding gained through personal communications with prisoner students, this is due to a variety of barriers, including restrictive and risk adverse prison regimes, and because of a lack of resources and available opportunities.

Some of the typical issues experienced by the prisoner students we have consulted or otherwise been contacted by are outlined below. Unsurprisingly most of their comments are as negative as the ones quoted in the introduction, although this is to be expected given the current climate within the prison estate. We are aware that many of the issues and barriers identified are common knowledge for those working in the field, although we feel compelled to highlight these issues. Three main themes are identified.

Access to and availability of higher education level courses

A number of prisoner students have commented to us that there is a lack of higher-level educational courses in prison, in particular degree programmes. They state that the courses available to them were not conducive with their level of education. In some instances educational service providers have tried to encourage or even pressure them to take on lower level educational courses that are not suitable or below their educational level. They perceive this lack of support and lack of interest in their educational goals as a self-serving bias. That is, they believe the service provider would not benefit financially or in terms of their organisational targets by assisting them with their higher-level educational needs and goals. According to these students, most of the courses available in prison are low-level educational courses or vocational courses. In terms of academic support, whilst a few have told us there

are some tutors and prison staff who are willing to help and support them, most students complain about limited academic support, particularly in terms of tutorials. Related to this, many also complain there is little advice and information available on higher education level courses, and in cases where they have identified a course, little if any assistance or advice with the applications process or grant applications. For those that have not identified a funding source, there is little advice available, and for others who are interested in post-graduate study, funding restrictions apply. Specifically, these latter prisoners have commented that they have been unable to apply for a student loan for a master's degree and so are unable to continue with their education. Others that wanted to do a degree were unable to secure a student loan because they would only be eligible for a student loan when they were within six years of their earliest date of release. Yet, even if funding for a degree was secured there was also the issue of degree options. A few have commented that there is a limit on the type of degree they could study. The general view is that the range of available degree programmes has decreased over time.

IT facilities/other resources

Some respondents reported that IT facilities were limited or out-dated. This had a number of implications for studying, for example coursework had to be handwritten, which was particularly problematic as some of the modules on the degree programmes they were studying required computer based work. For those that did have access to suitable computers, access to these was often limited. However, one of the biggest issues was the lack of internet access, which was a particular problem for prisoners doing degrees, as the internet is critical for research based activities. Lack of internet access was also considered an issue because of an increasing trend towards online delivery of courses and tutorials, especially long distance courses. This limited the courses they could do or the support they could get.

Other issues identified included limited classroom or educational spaces, and a lack of study material and academic resources, which of course is related to the issues with internet access. The participants also reported limited availability of photocopying and printing resources, as well as a lack of educational DVDs/CDs. For a few, access to basic materials such as paper and pens was also limited.

Structural barriers

Finally, some prisoner students have reported security restrictions on the types of courses they can do, which has meant being forced to take an Open Degree, which they feel has less value. Relative to this, some prisons permit these types of courses, whilst other prisons do not. If they had been or were to be transferred to these prisons, they were or would therefore be unable to continue with their studies. Other structural barriers reported to us by prisoner students include limitations on the type of learning resources they were allowed to take back to their cells, and more generally, negative attitudes towards prisoners studying higher-level education courses among some prison staff.

Given the importance of prison higher education for desistance as well as the development of CC, as previously outlined, we believe that these barriers have two grave implications. First, in terms of the psychological impact on those prisoners who have decided to use higher education as a vehicle for change, i.e. a means of changing their lives. Specifically, such barriers could prevent these individuals from engaging with desistance. Second, it limits our opportunity to understand the processes underlying the relationship between higher education and desistance, which of course is critical if we are going to facilitate the desistance process. It is particularly important to understand the processes underlying the early phases of this transitional relationship, i.e. when prisoners make the decision to go into, and begin to engage in higher education. It is equally important to understand and map prisoners' developmental trajectory, identifying the complex cognitive/psychological transformations these individuals go through, as well as how feelings of competency, confidence and mastery develop (self-efficacy) as they develop new identities as students. Equally important, we need to understand the external processes and support networks/systems that facilitate these subjective changes and encourage pro-social behavioural transitions.

Connecting prisons and universities through higher education

Many students approaching higher education for the first time in prison without internet access or being able to attend lectures or seminars get but a taste of what life at university is really like. When Westminster University started their reading group here at Coldingley it was for the vast majority of us our first experience of a seminar group. It proved to be an immensely rewarding and invigorating learning experience. For me, it brought back a lot of memories of my own time at university, and enabled me to vocalise a lot of ideas and concepts that I had perhaps not had the opportunity to previously formulate in any coherent fashion. Group learning is such a fundamental aspect of the traditional university approach to study that we perhaps take it for granted, forgetting that it is wholly absent from prison institutions.

Discussion brings course material to life, so this reading group has been an invaluable supplement to study. (Interview, prisoner studying LLM Law, 2018)

For the current authors, prison and post-prison higher education has always been *the* challenge for CC, and more so in the United Kingdom, where we know of only a handful of former prisoner criminologists in permanent academic positions. When the first two named authors met and began exploring the merits of combining academic training with insider knowledge in 2004, neither knew much about CC. As we have heard from so many students since, for all the second named author knew he was the only prisoner or former prisoner studying criminology. We soon came to the conclusion that, unlike our North American colleagues, who defined CC as a collaboration between PhD qualified ex-con and non-con academics,^{xix} in the United Kingdom we needed to connect established academics with prisoner and former prisoner criminology students. Since we launched BCC with Rod Earle in 2012, we have directed most of our activism towards developing and supporting academic support networks for prisoner and former prisoner students, including sharing the platform with ex-con PhD students at academic criminology conferences. Outside prison, several of our undergraduate student members have gone on to study master's degrees. A few of our former prisoner members are now studying or have recently completed doctorates. One has secured a full-time lectureship. Another teaches criminology part time. In the past few years, early career former prisoner BCC members have published over a dozen single or co-authored peer-reviewed book chapters, articles or edited collections in criminology journals.

Even more important to BCC, and the focus of the special journal edition in which this chapter was originally published, is the work we have put in to developing links between university students studying inside and outside prison, the former of who we have explained face particular challenges that make them far less likely to complete their degrees to the standard they might otherwise be capable of achieving. No doubt many potentially good future academic criminologists have failed to make the grade due to their experiences of undergraduate prison education, or have otherwise been put off from advancing beyond undergraduate level before or after release, or (from hearing about others' experiences) starting in higher education in the first place. As previously noted, our efforts to bridge the gap between universities and prisons have centred on an academic mentoring scheme, which commenced in July 2013, and higher education courses at three prisons involving outside as well as inside learners and taught by former prisoner as well as 'non-con' academics. The Pentonville initiative ran for the first time from January to March 2016. It runs twice a year

over 12 Wednesday afternoons and ends with a graduation ceremony attended by friends and family and senior University of Westminster staff. Inside students work towards level 3 credits, that they might put towards a future foundation degree. Outside students gain level 6 (final year bachelor's degree) credits as they would with any other module on their BA Criminology or BA Sociology and Criminology degree. Besides studying alongside serving prisoners, they are trained and assessed as academic mentors. The projects at Grendon and Coldingley both started in the academic year 2017-2018. The Grendon project is taught at level 6 and the Coldingley project at level 7 (master's degree). As with the Pentonville project, these involve University of Westminster students studying alongside prisoner students. For the time-being, however, the students are not formally examined and do not receive university credits. Most of the inside learners are already studying degrees with the Open University. Classes are smaller than at Pentonville (six rather than 10 inside and outside learners) and less frequent (once a month for eight months a year).

In the five years we have been running the academic mentoring scheme we have matched around 30 prisoner undergraduate and master's degree students with 20 academics. Some academics are mentoring or have mentored two, in one case three prison-based students at a time, but the enthusiasm and needs of many of our mentees has convinced us that one to one mentoring should be the norm. Mentors are expected to send additional materials to those provided by their mentee's university (usually the Open University), much of which is increasingly available only through the internet, and to comment on draft coursework.^{xx} The usefulness of the scheme to our student members is highlighted in a survey completed by four BCC mentors and six BCC mentees in 2014, and a reflective exercise on their experiences of mentoring completed by four BCC mentors in 2015, as well as the many informal communications we have had with mentors and mentees. In addition to providing prison-based students with access to study material and feedback on coursework, our mentors and mentees emphasise the value of providing/receiving advice on matters such as what to study, applying for funding, and which additional readings to focus most attention. As distance learners, our mentees also stress the value of having someone with whom to discuss the academic material they have read, and someone they can ask to liaise with their university when, for instance, study materials have not arrived or when they are transferred to another prison.

Yet many mentors naturally go further than this and, like any good, empathetic university personal tutor, find themselves providing emotional as well as academic support. Similar to

the transformative potential of prison higher education more generally, our mentees also place value on the role academic mentoring has played in helping them overcome anxieties related to their studies, and giving them more hope for their post-prison lives. Finally, and of particular interest to BCC, our mentors and mentees are both fully aware of the potential that the scheme holds for helping to create the next generation of former prisoner criminologists. A number of BCC mentors emphasise the role they have played in encouraging mentees to reflect on and analyse their prison experiences, as well as supporting their mentees to publish insider accounts.^{xxi} Mentees put particular emphasis on how the scheme has helped break down barriers between students and teachers, and as one mentee put it, giving voice to, "pro social and pro democratic inmates [that want] to make a difference".^{xxii} With the ongoing barriers and distractions that have been considered when studying through distance learning within a prison based environment, this support through our mentoring scheme not only helps with practical support but however, allows mentees to keep a firm grasp and connection with the world outside prison, which in turn may inspire motivation for change.

In contrast, our second initiative focuses on connecting prisoners with students at a similar level of study. As the master's degree student cited in the introduction to this concluding section testifies, we have found it particularly important to strive towards replicating a collaborative, university learning environment in prison. (Note this is the same student whose letter written to us three years earlier we cited at the beginning of the chapter). When we submitted the first version of this chapter to the *Prison Service Journal*,^{xxiii} BCC's Making Links programme, as we named the Pentonville project, had been running as a pilot project for six weeks. It is coordinated by the current authors with José Aguiar, an educational consultant working at HMP Pentonville. Pentonville is a large local prison that holds a mixture of remand and sentenced prisoners. All of our inside students have been sentenced. Some are medium or long-term prisoners who have not moved on to the main prison estate, but others have only recently been sentenced and are still coming to terms with their imprisonment and acclimatising to the prison environment. At the time of writing (October 2018) the project is running for the fourth time, and for the first time since it was accredited. The project was specifically validated as a CC module, as *British Convict Criminology: Prisons and Desistance* for inside learners, and as *British Convict Criminology: Connecting Universities and Prisons through Higher Education* for outside learners. Over the 12 weeks of the module, we introduce the inside students to the discipline of criminology, with a specific focus on prison and post-prison experience. The required readings are taken from the work of

critical criminologists and prison abolitionists, and in particular the writings of former prisoner criminologists. Lessons consist of two short, interactive lectures followed by small group work discussions and debates. Students are assessed through end-of-course group presentations, and through weekly reflections on how their understanding of prisons and punishment has developed as a result of studying with people from either side of the prison wall.

This experience for students, inside and out, of interacting with one another in a classroom setting, allows them to exchange valuable knowledge in learning styles and the theoretical and practical elements that make up the discipline of criminology. The project not only aims to develop students' ongoing professional links with universities and prisons, and with students studying inside and outside of prison, but also to create a unique learning environment based on equality and respect for opinions and standpoints. In their formal and informal evaluations of the project, students studying on Prisons and Desistance and Connecting Universities and Prisons through Higher Education at Pentonville consistently note its transformative potential. They enjoy sharing theories and ideologies regarding deprivation and punishment, along with the odd heated debate where differences of opinion and views can be challenged and changed. Inside and outside learners bring different areas of specialist knowledge to impart to their classroom peers. The University of Westminster level 6 BA Criminology students who have participated on the project have no prior firsthand knowledge of how it is within prison walls. Hearing the real-life accounts of prisoners has allowed them a depth of understanding they could never gain from their academic texts, few of which are written by former prisoners, even fewer still by people currently serving time. And vice versa, our level 3 prisoner students gain from the academic knowledge that the level 6 students bring to class, for instance theories of crime and punishment.^{xxiv}

The Coldingley and Grendon projects are both reading groups. HMP Coldingley is a relatively low security training prison. It has the highest number of master's degree students of any prison in the country. HMP Grendon is a higher security prison that only holds prisoners convicted for serious violent offences. It runs a full-time regime of psychodynamic therapeutic activities based on principles of communal living, tolerance, reality confrontation and democratic participation. At the time of writing, we are about to return to the prisons for the second academic year. Most of the inside learners and some of the outside learners will be the same. Both projects are designed to develop students' skills in research activism as well as

their knowledge of criminology. Students work in small groups to summarise and check each others' understanding of the articles or book chapters set for the particular session, before coming together to evaluate the relevance of the readings to the inside learners' own experiences of criminal justice, and to discuss the implications of the readings for possible criminal justice reforms. All new students are required to read four Convict Criminology articles,^{xxv} as well as extracts from a number of classic texts on penology, prison culture and prison abolitionism. Besides these papers, in the first year of the projects we read former prisoner John Irwin's groundbreaking 1970 book on inmate culture in California, United States, and Shadd Maruna's recent call for former prisoner-led grassroots organisations, including CC, to come together as a social movement.^{xxvi} In addition to collaborative learning, both groups aim to work towards collaborative writing and publication. The reading group at HMP Grendon has already had a co-written article on their experiences of studying higher education in prison accepted for publication in the Journal of Prisoners on Prison.^{xxvii} We aim to submit further articles from both groups for publication in peer reviewed criminology journals at the end of each academic year. The inside learners at HMP Coldingley are also interested in directly challenging criminal justice policies. We have been joined in some of our sessions by the Prison Reform Trust, a voluntary sector pressure group that has recently launched a Prisoner Policy Network. In future, we will direct some of the reading group's activities towards submitting evidence to Ministry of Justice, parliamentary and voluntary sector consultations.

Similar to other prison-university higher education programmes that have emerged since Temple University commenced its Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program in 1997 in the United States,^{xxviii} we aim to provide a learning environment in which prisoners and undergraduate (or in some programmes, postgraduate) students study on equal terms, as Lori Pomper, founder of the Inside Out Prison Exchange Program puts it, "to provide a community-based learning opportunity, through which everyone involved is seen as having something vital to offer in the learning process".^{xxix} We share with other prison-university higher education programmes an underlying concern to promote the transformative potential of collaborative learning. Beyond this common starting point, each project naturally varies in its underlying aims and objectives. As an initiative premised in the CC perspective, the primary aim of the Pentonville, Grendon and Coldingley projects is to develop insider standpoints and knowledge in the discipline of criminology. Like the Prison to College Pipeline initiative run by John Jay College in the United States,^{xxx} which promotes prison higher education in a

number of different disciplines, we hope to inspire and support some of our Pentonville students to start university courses during and after prison, our Grendon students to advance on to master's degree studies, and our Coldingley students to commence PhDs. (One of the Coldingley students will be released in December 2018; he intends to formally apply to University of Westminster to start a PhD in September 2019). With our specific focus on criminology, and education as a means of transforming criminology, we also hope some of our Westminster students will also eventually become academic criminologists and critically, continue to study collaboratively with prisoners and former prisoners. Five of the eleven Westminster students that participated in the first year of the Grendon and Coldingley projects are now studying master's degrees. Two of these students are now working voluntarily for BCC as teaching assistants on the Pentonville project. Finally, and related to both these objectives, it is essential that our programme is designed and delivered by people with inside knowledge, gained through their own experiences of incarceration or through researching and studying with people that have prison experience.

Postscript

Two years after completing the revised version of this paper outlined in the paragraphs above, we are honoured to have been invited to update it for a second time for publication outside the UK, in this edited collection written in the memory of Professor Alvino Augusto de Sá, who we unfortunately never had the opportunity to meet in person, but whose work with prisoners had so much in common with our own. It did not feel appropriate or necessary to write a detailed second update of the original paper. Instead, we chose to write a postscript that summarised our current position on teaching criminology in prison, and introduced the links we have more recently begun to develop with prison higher education initiatives in Brazil and Argentina.

The revised paper outlined four CC prison education initiatives that Aresti and Darke have developed in the UK over the past few years with third year BA Criminology students at University of Westminster, all of which are co-designed and co-delivered by former prisoners. Two of the original cohort students went on to coordinate the Grendon and Coldingley reading groups while completing their master's degrees. One, Aisha Bint Faisal, continues to coordinate them today on a voluntary basis and is now organising a CC symposium for July

2020, to which members of Professor Alvino's University-Prison-Community Dialogue Group (GDUCC) have been invited. The symposium will be held over four days, three of which will be hosted with our students in HMP Grendon, HMP Coldingley and HMP Pentonville. Our guests will be invited to see the workspace of our projects and watch how the sessions are conducted within the prisons, as well as to listen to a series of academic papers on prison education and the experiences of long-term imprisonment co-authored and presented by the inside and outside students.

Regarding the epistemological underpinnings of our projects, we explained that CC is an international ex-prisoner-led movement that aims to develop collaborative research activism between universities and prisoners, and to support serving and former prisoners through higher education and into academic and criminal justice positions. That it starts with the observation that prisoners' perspectives are largely absent from criminology texts and penal policy, and that the prison system needs to be radically reformed, if not abolished. Some of the students at Grendon and Coldingley have been working with us for nearly three years now. A few have now completed their undergraduate or master's degrees. In addition to the students mentioned in the revised paper above, another two students are currently in the process of transferring from the Open University to University of Westminster to complete their degrees. Another student – also mentioned in the revised paper above – has just started studying for a PhD under Darke and Aresti's supervision.

Both reading groups are also becoming increasingly activist. The co-authored papers they are presenting at the July symposium will be subsequently published as an edited collection of prisoner-led, symposium proceedings. The reading groups agreed to title the symposium *Prisoner Perspectives in Europe and the Americas*. They organised the call for papers around four themes: *Reforming Prisons*, *Hope and Survival*, *Autonomy and Responsibility*, and *Prisoner-University partnerships*. The first of these themes reflects work the two reading groups have been developing with the Prisoner Policy Network (PPN), a former-prisoner run project that in 2019 consulted with 1250 prisoners to produce two reports on the failings of the British prisons to be places of purpose and positive incentive.^{xxxii} More generally, it emerged from the groups' discussions on social movements and prison abolitionism, including Thomas Mathiesen's^{xxxii} call for short-term "positive" reforms aimed at improving the lives of current prisoners, as well as long-term "negative" reforms aimed at ending the use of prison

altogether; and Shadd Maruna's^{xxxiii} call for prison activism to be led by prisoners and former prisoners.

The second and third themes of the symposium – Hope and Survival, and Autonomy and Responsibility – also reflect CC and the reading groups' grounding in critical criminology. They emerged from the reading groups' engagement and critique of readings on specific aspects of prison life, including the classic American and British prison studies of John Irwin,^{xxxiv} Stanley Cohen and Laurie Taylor,^{xxxv} and the current work of Alison Liebling, Ben Crewe and others at the Cambridge Institute of Criminology,^{xxxvi} much of which focuses on the experiences long-term imprisonment, and for which some of the reading group students were research participants. Our prison-based students emphasise that exposing already oppressed groups to long-term imprisonment can only make matters worse, because such individuals suffer psychologically and are consequently more rather than less likely to turn to crime in prison and post-release. In accordance with Cohen and Taylor, they attest to the stresses and consequences of losing their identity, hopes and expectations for the future, exposed to a harsh environment in which they are alienated from the outside world. The oppressed population turns to criminal activities in response to the hardships they are facing and their limited opportunities.

The fourth theme – Prisoner-University Partnerships – reflects the specific approach to prison education we have developed in the past three years through the University of Westminster projects described in this chapter. We have increasingly come to the view that, as critical, convict criminologists, our partnership is less with the prisons that facilitate our projects as with the prisoners – the inside learners – we teach and learn from. Here, our students have been particularly inspired by the approach to education promoted by Paulo Freire in the 1960s.^{xxxvii} Like Freire, and also Cohen and Taylor, whose prison study was based on classes they taught in prison, we teach, study and research *with*, not *on* the inside learners.

Finally, in the revised paper replicated above, we emphasised that higher education has the potential to transform the lives of prisoners as well as the discipline of criminology. Not only do the students gain qualifications and publications, but classes are structured around them reflecting upon both their personal experiences and standpoints on crime and punishment. Such critical learning is demonstrated in pedagogical^{xxxviii} and desistance-from-crime^{xxxix} literature to be valuable means for facilitating individual coping in oppressive environments such as prison, as well as challenging the stigmatising self-perceptions felt by many prisoners.

Making links in South America

Of course, prisoners engaged with critical criminologists long before the recent wave of prison-university – or our more recently preferred term, prisoner-university – partnerships in the UK. This includes South America, where Darke has researched since 2010, and in 2016 led two sessions on a course delivered at an open women's prison, Penitenciária Feminina do Butantã, by master's degree students involved in University of São Paulo (USP)'s Criminal Sciences Research and Extension Programme Centre (CPECC). Darke learned more about the realities of Brazilian prison life from the inmates he studied with in these few hours than he could ever have learnt from his colleagues at the university.

In July and August 2019, Aresti and Darke took a 10,000 km tour of Brazil and Argentina to visit five existing and developing higher education prison initiatives. Their first stop was Maranhão State University (UEM), on the northern coast of Brazil, where they joined anthropologist Karina Biondi in delivering pilot lessons on *Another Vision*, a project she had adapted from our level 3 model for use on the closed unit of APAC de São Luis, a voluntary sector prison run by an ex-prisoner-led NGO in which inmates manage all aspects of the prison regime, including security and discipline. *Another Vision* was fully implemented in September 2019. Classes are designed and co-delivered by Francisco Magalhães, who previously spent five years in custody on remand in the state of São Paulo. Similar to the Pentonville project, the outside learners mentor as well as study alongside the inside learners, few of who completed school, as is the reality across the country's prison system. In spite of these challenges, the project will conclude its first year with the publishing of an edited book of prisoner ethnographic writings. Darke returned to participate in the project in October 2019 and will do so again in April and August 2020. Maranhão State prison authorities have invited Biondi to expand *Another Vision* – with our continuing support – to two more prisons.

The next stop was the town of Porto Velho, in the western Amazonian state of Rondônia, to spend time at a day centre for serving prisoners run by another ex-prisoner-led voluntary sector NGO, ACUDA. Prisoners that attend the centre are currently building a residential centre on the site, which they aim to move into by the end of 2020. ACUDA considers itself to be an abolitionist, research-activist organisation. It has gained permission from judicial authorities for those studying in higher education at the new centre to be given supervised internet access, once a contract for distance learning has been agreed with a local university. As far as we are aware, this will be a Brazilian first.

The final stop in Brazil was USP in the southern state of São Paulo, where Aresti and Darke spent two days with GDUCC, which many readers will know is a second research activist group based in the same department as CPECC. GDUCC was co-founded by Professor Alvino in 2006 and to date has implemented courses in ten prisons across five states, including Penitenciária José Parada Neto, a closed prison they visited to participate in a GDUCC session in July, and an open prison unit in Centro de Detenção Provisória da Capital Chácara Belém II, where Darke participated in a second GDUCC session in October. Similar to our Pentonville initiative and UEMA's Other Vision project, GDUCC's inside and outside learners study social sciences, including psychology and criminology, at foundation level. Our initial understanding is that GDUCC places particular attention on the societal benefits of bringing the outside world into prison. Neither the inside nor outside students need to be university students. This is an approach from which CC can learn.

The final leg took Aresti and Darke to the Argentinean universities of Buenos Aires (UBA) and the Littoral (UNL), and to two of dozens of prison-based university centres set up across the country since the 1980s. UBA currently teaches six undergraduate degrees, including Law, Sociology and Psychology, in five closed prisons, including Cárcel de Devoto, where they spent a morning with the representatives of approximately 150 current university students. UNL teaches in three closed prisons, including Cárcel las Flores, which we also visited a few days later. Around 60 students are currently enrolled. Not only is UBA unique in taking full face-to-face-taught degrees into prison, but guards were banned from the university centre we visited. Just as remarkably, the centre at Cárcel las Flores had several computers connected to the Internet to enable UNL to provide on-line distance learning. Outside learners from the two universities take only occasional seminars with the inside learners on their courses. However, the two groups of students regularly come together at the prisons for extra-curricular activities. In February 2020, a coordinator of the UBA programme spent a week at University of Westminster. Darke will return to UBA for a week in August 2020. UBA are interested in exploring the potential for implementing aspects of our CC reading group model at Devoto and other prisons in Buenos Aires. We are interested in implementing aspects of Argentina's prison university centre model in the United Kingdom.

ⁱ This chapter was originally published as Darke, S. & Aresti, A. (2016) Connecting prisons and universities through higher education, *Prison Service Journal*, 266: 26-32. It was later re-published with an update on

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- the prison higher education programmes provided by the authors through their involvement in British Convict Criminology (BCC), as Darke, S., Aresti, A. & Ellis-Rexhi, N. (2018) Supporting prisoners into academia, in Friso, V. & Ducembrotto, L. (eds.) *Università e Carcere: Il Diritto allo Studio tra Vincoli e Progettualità* (pp.217-237), Milan: Guerini. Here, the original text of Supporting Prisoners into Academia remains unchanged. Instead, we have updated it with a postscript.
- ii Dr Andreas Aresti and Dr Sacha Darke teach criminology in the School of Social Sciences, University of Westminster, UK. They are two of the three founding members of BCC. Natalie Ellis graduated from Westminster University with BA Criminology in 2017. In the third year of her degree, she participated in Aresti and Darke's Making Links initiative at Pentonville prison in London (outlined in this chapter). Aisha Bint Faisal started as a student on the reading groups Aresti and Darke deliver at Grendon prison in Buckinghamshire and Coldingley prison in Surrey (also outlined in this chapter). She graduated from Westminster University with BA Criminology in 2018 and LLM Religion Law and Society in 2019. She has worked as a teaching assistant on the Making Links initiative, and currently coordinates the reading groups at Grendon and Coldingley prisons.
- iii Open University (2014) *Make a New Start Studying with the Open University. A Guide for Learners in Prison 2014/2015*, Milton Keynes: Open University.
- iv Ross, J.I. and Richards, S.C. (eds.) (2003) *Convict Criminology*, Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.
- v Aresti, A. and Darke, S. (2016) Practicing Convict Criminology: Lessons learned from British academic activism, *Critical Criminology*, 24(4): 533-547; Aresti, A. and Darke, S. (2018) Developing Insider Perspectives in Research Activism, *Journal of Prisoners on Prison*, 27(2): 3-16; Aresti, A., Darke, S. and Manlow, D. (2016) Bridging the gap: Giving public voice to prisoners and former prisoners through research activism, *Prison Service Journal*, 224: 3-13; Ross, J.I., Darke, S., Aresti, A., Newbold, G. and Earle, R. (2014) Developing convict criminology beyond North America, *International Criminal Justice Review*, 24(2): 121-133.
- vi Ross and Richards (2003), see n.iv.
- vii Aresti, A. (2014) Contraction in an age of expansion: A convict perspective, *Prison Service Journal*, 211: 19-24.
- viii Aresti et al. (2016), see n.v.
- ix Behan, C. (2014) Learning to escape: Prison education, rehabilitation and the potential for transformation, *Journal of Prison Education and Reentry*, 1(1): 20-31. Citing the work of American convict criminologists, Richards and Jones, Behan writes (at p.26), "when an individual is committed to prison s/he descends... For some students education is part of the process of/or towards ascent. It gives them an opportunity to participate in an environment based on a different culture than that which pervades in many prisons".
- x Ross, J.I., Tewksbury, R. and Zaldivar, M. (2015) Analyzing for-profit colleges and universities that offer bachelor's, master's, and doctorates to inmates incarcerated in American correctional facilities, *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 54: 585-598. Ross, Tewksbury and Zaldivar write (at p.586), "Correctional education has long been recognized as one of the few, if not the only, jail and prison program to consistently show an association with reduced recidivism".
- xi Piché, J. (2008) Barriers to studying inside: Education in prisons and education on prisons, *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons*, 17(1): 4-17, p.4. See also, Ross, J.I., Tewksbury, R. and Zaldivar, M. (2015) Analyzing for-profit colleges and universities that offer bachelor's, master's, and doctorates to inmates incarcerated in American correctional facilities, *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 54: 585-598.
- xii Aresti and Darke (2016), see n.v.
- xiii E.g. Behan (2014), see n.ix; Hughes, E. (2009) Thinking inside the box: Prisoner education, learning identities, and the possibility for change, in Veysey, B.M., Christian, J. and Martinez, D.J. (eds.) *How Offenders Transform their Lives*, Cullompton: Willan; Runell, L.L. (2015) Identifying desistance pathways in a higher education program for formerly incarcerated Individuals, *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, DOI: 10.1177/0306624X15608374.
- xiv Kazemian, L. (2007) Desistance from crime: Theoretical, empirical, methodological, and policy considerations, *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, 23(1): 5-27; Laub, J.H. and Sampson, R.J. (2001) Understanding desistance from crime, *Crime and Justice*, 28: 1-69; Maruna, S. (2001) *Making Good: How Ex-convicts Reform and Rebuild their Lives*, Washington, DC: American Psychological Association; McNeil, F., Farrall, S., Lightowler, C. and Maruna, S. (2012) *How and Why People Stop Offending: Discovering Desistance*, Glasgow: Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services; Uggen, C., Manza, J. and Behrens, A. (2004) Less than the average citizen: Stigma, role transition, and the civic reintegration of convicted felons, in Maruna, S. and Burnett, R. (eds.) *After Crime and Punishment: Pathways to Offender Reintegration*, Cullompton, Willan.

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- xv Laub and Sampson (2001), see n.xiv; McNeil et al. (2012), see n.xiv.
- xvi Runell (2015), p.3, see n.xiii.
- xvii E.g. Aresti, A., Eatough, V., and Brooks-Gordon, B. (2010) Doing time after time: An interpretative phenomenological analysis of reformed ex-prisoners' experiences of self-change, identity and career opportunities, *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 16(3): 169-190.
- xviii Laub and Sampson (2001), see n.xiv.
- xix Ross and Richards (2003), see n.iv.
- xx British Convict Criminology (2013) *Guidelines and Expectations for BCC Mentoring*, unpublished.
- xxi BCC prisoner members have published several articles with the support of their mentors. These include three articles by law student Mark Alexander (Alexander, M., 2015, Innocence projects: A way forward, *Inside Time*, April; Alexander, M., 2015, Innocence projects: Green shoots, *Criminal Law and Justice Weekly*, 180, June 11; Alexander, M., forthcoming 2018, Phenomenology of Freedom: finding transcendence in captivity, *Journal of Prisoners on Prison*, 27(2)) and one article by, since released, criminology student Joseph Leick (Leick, J., 2014, Finding my way through Grayling's maze: A prisoner's struggle to get a book, *Inside Time*, July).
- xxii Personal communication, 5 June 2014.
- xxiii See n.i.
- xxiv For a previous evaluation of BCC's Making Links project at HMP Pentonville written by the third named author from her experience shortly after studying as an outside student, see Ellis, N. (n.d) Making links with British Convict Criminology, *Prisoners Education Trust*, <https://www.prisonerseducation.org.uk/case-studies/pupil-blog-making-links-with-british-convict-criminology> (last accessed 29 October 2018).
- xxv Jones, R. S., Ross, J. I., Richards, S. C. & Murphy, D. S. (2009). The first dime: A decade of Convict Criminology, *The Prison Journal*, 89(2): 151-171; Richards, S.C. & Ross, J.I. (2001) Introducing the new school of Convict Criminology, *Social Justice*, 28(1): 177-190; followed by Aresti and Darke (2016), see n.v, and Darke and Aresti (2016), see n.i.
- xxvi Irwin, J. (1970) *The Felon*. Berkley, CA: University of California; Maruna, S. (2017) Desistance as a social movement, *Irish Probation Journal*, 14: 5-20.
- xxvii Bint Faisal, A., Dean, M., Demirtas, M., Dharmarajah, S., Hinde, D., Mathias, M., Milner, G., Raynor, M., Shah, M., Stanford, A. and Taylor, G. (2018 forthcoming) Insider perspectives of Higher Education within the British Prison System, *Journal of Prisoners on Prison*, 27(2).
- xxviii The first major prison-university higher education initiative in United Kingdom started in 2014, when the University of Durham teamed up with HMP Durham to establish an Inside-Out accredited programme. The university later expanded its programme to HMP Frankland and HMP Low Newton. Similarly, University of Kent set up an Inside Out Programme at HMP Swaleside in 2016. University of Cambridge started taking criminology students to HMP Grendon study in 2015 under its Learning Together programme. Leeds Beckett University established its first of two Learning Together programmes in 2016 at HMP Full Sutton. Today there are at least 50 such projects.
- xxix Pomper, L. (2013) One brick at a time: Power and possibility of dialogue across the prison wall, *Prison Journal*, 93(2): 127-134, p.129. Pomper was writing as part of a special edition of the *Prison Journal* on the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program. See also Davis, S.W. and Roswell, B.S. (eds.) (2013) *Turning Teaching Inside Out*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- xxx See <http://johnjaypri.org/educational-initiatives/prison-to-college-pipeline> (last accessed 15 October 2018).
- xxxi Wainwright, L. et al. (2019) *What Incentives Work in Prison? A Prisoner Policy Network Consultation*, London: Prison Reform Trust; Wainwright, L. et al. (2019) *What do you Need to Make the Best Use of your Time in Prison?* London: Prison Reform Trust.
- xxxii Mathiesen, T. (2015) *The Politics of Abolition Revisited*, Abingdon: Routledge.
- xxxiii Maruna, S. (2017) Desistance as a social movement, *Irish Probation Journal*, 14: 5-20.
- xxxiv Irwin, J. (1970) *The Felon*, Berkely, CA: University of California.
- xxxv Cohen, S. & Taylor, L. (1972) *Psychological Survival: The Experience of Long Term Imprisonment*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- xxxvi E.g. Hulley, S. et al. (2016) Re-examining the problems of long-term imprisonment, *British Journal of Criminology*, 56(4): 769-792; Liebling, A. (2011) Moral performance, inhuman and degrading treatment and prison pain, *Punishment & Society*, 15(5): 530-550; Liebling, A. et al. (2019) Are hope and possibility achievable in prison? *Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*, 58(1): 104-126.
- xxxvii Freire, P. (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York: Herder.
- xxxviii E.g. Freire (1970), see n.xxxvii.
- xxxix E.g. Maruna (2017), see n.xxxiii.