

SPOTLIGHT



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PRISONS RESEARCH CENTRE

NEWSLETTER

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Note from the Director



It has been a remarkably busy period since our first Newsletter, with the Prisons Research Centre Conference 2016

expanding to two days and changing its focus from the reporting of findings to a mainly senior practitioner audience to sustained reflection on 'values, methods, and quality in prisons research: developing the deep structures of practice'. This was an exciting and rewarding way to spend two days, and we enjoyed putting the programme together in as collaborative a way as possible, including coinciding with the launch of Amy Ludlow's 'British Academy Funded 'Rising Stars' in prisons research programme. The deliberations were intense, rich, and honest, and benefitted from a wide range of guests as well as members of the home team giving short, panel-like presentations. We plan to develop this approach, and these themes, further during our next conference in October 2017.

We continue to carry out team-based 'MQPL+' exercises in around

four prisons each year. Some of these have become additionally challenging as we are asked to 'culturally diagnose' prisons 'of operational interest' to NOMS. Reflections on our last few exercises have formed the basis of a chapter Ben Crewe and I have written for the about-to-be-published new edition of the Oxford Handbook of Criminology. We have just completed the report of our research visit to Hull prison, and it was both a relief and an important lesson to find it doing better than its more poorly resourced comparators. Doing prisons research becomes harder, emotionally and theoretically, when prisons decline significantly in quality and safety.

At a guest seminar at the Institute of Criminology in February 2017, I was asked what I was most proud of in my career to date. The Prisons Research Centre, with its particular emphasis on person-centred social science, on long-term, cumulative knowledge, and on humanistic methods is at the top of my short list! We hope this Newsletter gives some sense of what we are all up to, and how much we gain from collaborations with each other, and with others.



The Institute of Criminology, Cambridge

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Prison Officer Summer School

Together with the Butler Trust, the PRC organised and hosted the first ever Prison Officer Summer School in July 2016 ('Unsung Heroes: Prison Officers at their Best') in Cambridge, with the support of NOMS. This was a very special two-day event, involving 120 officer attendees, and an active tailored programme of 'POD' (Prison Officer Development) talks and work groups on topics such as 'prison officers at best' and 'the use of authority'. The event was recorded so that all contributions are available on the Butler Trust [website](#). The feedback (which is also available on the Butler Trust website) was extremely positive: *'It was the most inspirational 2 days of my career, if not my life!' .. 'A massive thank you regarding the Prison Officer School event, can I just say how professional and organised the event was from start to finish. I learned such a lot over the two days, too much to mention'...* *'Back on duty now, surrounded by the hubbub and usual chicanery of the shift, and thought that I must send you a quick note to express my thanks for a lovely couple of days. The whole experience was holistic and generated a fine field of force that was palpable'*. Ninety percent of respondents gave the event a five-star rating, and all of them rated it at least four-stars.

Penal policymaking and the prisoner experience: a comparative analysis

In March 2015, Dr Ben Crewe was awarded a five-year European Research Council grant to undertake this study. The aim of the research programme is to conduct a systematic interrogation of the 'Nordic exceptionalism' thesis, the argument proposed by John Pratt and others that the Nordic countries are distinctive in the degree to which their punishment practices and prison systems are mild and humane. Based in England & Wales and Norway, the research comprises four sub-studies: first, a longitudinal analysis of prisoners' experiences of entry into and release from each prison system, based on interviews with a range of prisoners shortly after admission to prison, shortly before release, and three months post-release; second, ethnographic studies of the experiences of imprisoned sex offenders and female prisoners (populations which are often excluded from macro level debates about penal practices); third, a study of the treatment and experiences of prisoners in

PhD Spotlight: Alice levins

Alice's PhD explores the prison experiences of men convicted of sex offences. Sex offenders make up a sixth of the prison population, but we know very little about how they make sense of their convictions and sentences, their social relationships with other prisoners, or their adaptations to power. Alice spent five months conducting an in-depth ethnographic study of HMP Stafford, a Category-C prison only holding men convicted of sex offences. She shows that we need to take the moral connotations of imprisonment seriously, arguing that we cannot understand sex offenders' adaptations to the prison without understanding how they adapt to the moral meaning of their imprisonment, and suggesting that sex offenders feel morally stained by living among other sex offenders. From March 2017, Alice will be working as a Research Assistant on Ben Crewe's comparative project on penal policymaking and the prisoner experience.



the deepest and heaviest parts of each prison system, where the most difficult prisoners are held; and, fourth, a study of policymaking practices and 'the penal field' in both jurisdictions. The main conceptual framework that will be used to assess prisoner experiences builds on the concepts of the 'depth', 'weight', 'tightness' and 'breadth' of imprisonment. By characterising different aspects of the prisoner experience in this way, and operationalizing them into a survey, the framework will enable a nuanced comparative account of the pains, frustrations and effects of imprisonment, which should make it possible to specify the particular ways in which different prison systems are oppressive. Fieldwork began in both countries in November 2016. Please visit the [website](#) for more information and updates.

'Conceptions of violence, friendship and legal consciousness among young people in the context of Joint Enterprise'

Dr Susie Hulley has recently been awarded ESRC funding to lead a research team on a two-year study, with Dr Tara Young from the University of Kent as Co-Investigator. The study will examine and compare the ways in which notions of friendship and collective violence are conceived by young people and criminal justice practitioners in the context of Joint Enterprise, and will consider young people's understandings of the legal consequences of collective violence. The study, which begins in June 2017, will involve interviews with young people in the community and individuals convicted of serious violence under Joint Enterprise when young. Interviewing these groups will provide insight into the impact that knowledge and experience of Joint Enterprise has on young people's conceptions of friendship and collective violence, as well as their perceptions of the legitimacy of Joint Enterprise. Interviews will also be undertaken with police officers involved in investigating cases of Joint Enterprise, and lawyers who prosecute or defend such cases.

Recent Events

- The PRC Annual Conference was held on 19-20th October 2016, with a new emphasis on "Doing prisons research: values, methods, and quality".
- Prof. Alison Liebling [presented evidence](#) to the Justice Committee inquiry into prison reform on 18th January 2017.
- Anna Schliehe co-organised the [1st international conference for carceral geography](#) on the 13th of December 2016 in Birmingham.
- Prof. Alison Liebling was invited to participate in a 3-day workshop on Carceral Ethnography and Human Rights held at the Oñati Institute, Spain in June 2016. She gave a paper on 'Person-centred social science and the phenomenology of humanity and inhumanity in prison'. The discussions were lively and valuable and led to several new academic friendships.
- Dr. Ryan Williams, Dr. Richard Bramwell and Prof. Alison Liebling co-convened a seminar for the Lammy Review of BAME representation in the Criminal Justice System at Wolfson College in November 2016.
- In March 2017 Alison attended a 1st International Correctional Research Symposium conference in Ghent, co-hosted by ICPA and the Belgian Prison Service. This is likely to be followed by future conferences, and in particular, we hope to contribute to this agenda and to draw in more representatives from countries establishing or developing prisons research centres.
- Prof. Alison Liebling featured in an episode of Analysis broadcast on Radio 4 in November 2016: "[Trusting Inmates](#)". The programme discussed the importance of staff-prisoner relationships that are built on trust and the difference this can make to outcomes.

Future Events

- Prof. Alison Liebling completed work on the latest edition of the Oxford Handbook of Criminology with her co-editors, which is due to be published shortly.
- Anna Schliehe is presenting a paper on the COMPEN project in a session titled global carceral geographies at the [AAG conference in Boston](#).

Learning Together

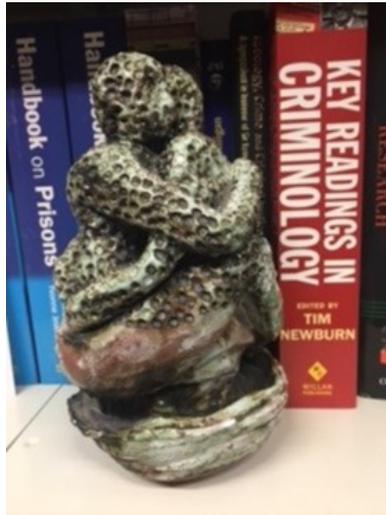
Learning Together (LT) brings together people in criminal justice and higher education institutions to study alongside each other in inclusive and transformative learning communities. LT courses are academically rigorous and their design and delivery builds upon and, through evaluation, advance educational, sociological and criminological research and best practice. LT is led by Drs Amy Ludlow and Ruth Armstrong. Since starting in HMP Grendon three years ago, Ruth and Amy have attracted a great deal of support for their work. Most recently, they have been awarded funding from the HEFCE Catalyst Fund for the development of technology within the evaluation of Learning Together, and [they have received a Butler Trust award](#). Amy and Ruth are currently finishing delivering three LT courses alongside colleagues from the University of Cambridge and Oxford (two in HMP Grendon on criminology and literary criticism, and one in HMP Whitemoor on philosophy and theology). Later this year, Amy and Ruth will move into an intensive period of evaluation, using participa-

tory narrative methods and, with colleagues, lead the second Learning Together Network annual conference on 'Education as the Practice of Freedom', which this year is hosted in HMP Leicester and De Montfort University (15 and 16 June). Amy and Ruth have obtained further ESRC Impact Acceleration funding with which they will travel to New York, Mexico, Uruguay and Canada in June and July this year to explore existing and future best practice in prison and university learning partnerships, and potential for international comparative collaborative evaluation. Please visit the [website](#) for more updates .



Butler Trust Day

The PRC hosted the second 'Butler Trust Research into Practice Day' in September 2016 to coincide with the department's MSt course for senior practitioners, with research presentations from Professors Tony Ward and Fergus McNeil, in house team Alison Liebling, Katherine Auty and Ben Crewe, and from Governors Ian Blakeman and Pia Sinha. Sam Gyi-mah MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Prisons and Probation, gave his first public speech at the event. To close, Alison Liebling was honoured to be presented with the 2016 Perrie Award for 'the person doing most to promote understanding of the work of the Prison Service and influencing policy', presented by Ian Mulholland. The award was accompanied with a Koestler-winning sculpture entitled 'Honeycomb Lovers', produced at HMP & YOI Parc.



New Frontiers of Prisons Research - British Academy 'Rising Stars'

In February 2017, Amy Ludlow hosted the second event in her British Academy funded '[Rising Stars](#)' award. The event, which was held in HMP Low Moss and the Social and Public Health Sciences Unit in Glasgow, brought together 18 early career prisons researchers, Scottish Prison Service practitioners and policy makers and Low Moss residents to explore new conceptual, theoretical, methodological and ethical frontiers in prisons research. Discussions built upon last year's Prisons Research Centre conference and will lead to an edited collection, led by Amy, together with colleagues Ruth Armstrong and Bethany Schmidt.

Prisons and their moral performance in South America

Alison and Bethany were invited to Santiago, Chile in November 2016 by Guillermo Enrique Sanhueza Olivares to participate in a number of activities with academics and practitioners arising from his research adapting MQPL for use in Chilean prisons. They both presented at an academic conference on prisons research and moral performance hosted by San Sebastián University. Members of the Ministry of Justice attended. Alison gave a seminar on the work of prison officers at their best at the prison training school the next day, and they visited two local prisons (one for men, CDP, and one for women, CPF) as well as meeting formally with the MOJ Board to discuss prisons research. In December 2016 Bethany returned to South America, following Alison's visit in 2015, to meet with researchers in the federal prisons system in Buenos Aires, who have adopted the PRC's Measuring the Quality of Prison Life (MQPL) survey and piloted it in three Argentinian prisons. Bethany visited several establishments, including one for young offenders and an agricultural prison. Bethany and Alison continue to work closely with these colleagues, growing relationships and research collaborations.



Prison life in Tunisia

Bethany Schmidt, in partnership with Dr. Andrew Jefferson from DIGNITY (Danish Institute Against Torture) and their two local research assistants, have completed a one-year exploratory study of the quality of life in Tunisian prisons. This entailed intensive fieldwork in four prisons (one women's, two remand, and one high security), interviews with former prisoners, engagement with the prison authorities, civil society, artists and activists, and other criminal justice stakeholders. From July 2017 they will enter a second phase of research, which will include ongoing fieldwork in additional prisons and the creation of Tunisia-specific MQPL and SQL surveys, developed from their ethnographic data. They are particularly interested in how prison life and the practice of punishment have shifted pre- and post-revolution for both staff and prisoners, and at the policy level.

