



## University links with prisons in Scotland: report of events held on 4<sup>th</sup> December at the University of Edinburgh

Liz Cooper, December 2014



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH



## Introduction

On 4<sup>th</sup> December, the University of Edinburgh's Department for Social Responsibility, in collaboration with the Just World Institute, held two events on the theme of university links with prisons in Scotland, under the banner of the Ethics Forum:

1. A public seminar provocatively entitled 'should the university employ prisoners?'
2. A stakeholder mixer event exploring university links with prisons, bringing together academics, Scottish Prison Service, university operations, NGOs/campaign groups, and business.

These events were organised following a question about whether all prison labour should be banned in University supply chains arose in summer 2013 from the Worker Rights Consortium – an organisation the University is affiliated to with regards garment procurement. While the University is not at present knowingly procuring goods from firms that use prisoner labour, consideration of the ethical questions related to prisoner labour in general led to a group of staff and a student representative being invited to see prison work in action at HMP Shotts in March 2014 (see a brief account here <http://tinyurl.com/pu46raw>). The group was impressed by the focus on rehabilitation and tackling the root causes of crime at HMP Shotts and in the Scottish Prison Service more widely, which has led to a desire to take these reflections further. As well as considering potential procurement options from prisons, to provide real work as rehabilitation for people in prison, the Scottish Prison Service proposed that the University may wish to consider employing prisoners on day release on campus, to provide useful work experience and better chances of gaining employment on release. Discussions with academics at Edinburgh on the theme of prisons also led to the addition of a third theme – access to education in prisons, with some initiatives already taking place in Scotland linking universities or colleges with learning inside prisons.

These two events had the aim of sharing and capturing knowledge and views on what work is already taking place that links universities and prisons, what should/could be done, and what areas need further research.

This report sums up discussions held, and next steps identified by participants.

*Any further comments or questions on this initiative should be addressed to Liz Cooper, Research and Policy Manager, Department for Social Responsibility and Sustainability, University of Edinburgh*  
[liz.cooper@ed.ac.uk](mailto:liz.cooper@ed.ac.uk)

## The seminar: 'should the university employ prisoners?'

The seminar was chaired by Professor Tim Hayward, with the audience hearing from a panel of four speakers:

**Briege Nugent, Howard League Scotland** – currently a PhD candidate at the University of Edinburgh. From 2006 to 2008 she worked as a researcher in the Criminal Justice Social Work Development Centre at the University of Edinburgh and during this time played a key role on the evaluation of the 'Routes out of Prison' project.

Briege highlighted the need to focus on communities where a large number of people have a criminal record, which typically have higher levels of poverty and of mental health issues, rather than just focusing on prisons themselves. She called for more consideration of who prisoners are as people, and what is driving them to commit offences. She argued that universities need to update their recruitment processes and do much more to actively support people from disadvantaged backgrounds in the UK, including those who have criminal records.

**Richard Thomson, Director for Policy and Product Development, Recruit with Conviction** - Richard is an experienced project manager, trainer and social entrepreneur with a background in business, third sector and blue chip companies. He started to promote safe recruitment of people with criminal records in 1999 at Apex, and later teamed up with others to develop Recruit with Conviction as a campaign and social enterprise.

Richard described Recruit with Conviction's work directly with employers to encourage provision of jobs for people leaving prison. He argued that it can be a good business decision to employ and train people who have been in prison, as there is a wealth of skill, knowledge, and entrepreneurial spirit – considering that one in five men and one in ten women in Scotland have a criminal record. He called for employers to 'Ban the Box', that is, to remove the tick box from application forms that asks about criminal convictions, leaving this conversation to later on in the recruitment process. He proposed that the University of Edinburgh could play a leading role in this area through training, apprenticeships, and updating its recruitment process.

**Pete White, Positive Prison? Positive Futures...** - Pete was the person with the idea behind Positive Prison? Positive Futures... Pete helped set up the organisation and has been responsible for building many and varied links within the criminal justice system. Pete has a vision of why we are here and where we are going, and ultimately wants to make Scotland a better and safer place to live.

Pete called for consideration of prisoners' future roles as citizens, rather than being labelled as ex-offenders or convicts. He also highlighted the reoffending cycle and the need for this to be considered a public issue that we should all play a role in tackling. He described how several companies are making commitments to employing people with criminal records, but are not making this information public, meaning these success stories remain hidden. He called not only for the University to make efforts in terms of employing people with criminal records, but for the Scottish Prison Service to do the same. He also proposed that universities should make it easier for people in prisons to become students.

**Dennis Phillips, Timpson Foundation & Welfare Manager.** *The Timpson Foundation was established by the shoe repair and locksmiths company Timpson in 2010 to help ex-offenders find work upon release.*

Dennis described Timpson's work to provide employment opportunities for those who have left prison, and to provide work experience for those still in prison through Timpson training academies in prisons in England. The first training academy opened in 2008, and there will soon be seven such academies, including two in women's prisons, providing training to 120 people. This collaboration between business, prisons and the police reduces reoffending, and Timpson's have a high retention rate for people employed in the business after leaving prison, at 75%. There is greater involvement of business in rehabilitation schemes in England than in Scotland, including an Employers Forum, initiated by Timpson Foundation, which has over 100 active company members.

**Iain Davidson, Director of Strategy and Innovation at the Scottish Prison Service and Jim Kerr, Governor HMP Shotts, offered short responses to the panel of speakers.** The Scottish Prison Service expresses commitment to social justice and rehabilitation of citizens, and is committed to providing jobs for ex-prisoners in future. All Scottish Prison Service representatives present were keen to encourage universities to do more in this area.

## Q&A

An audience of University staff and students, and external organisations, initiated discussion on the following with the panel:

- Whether academics should campaign for change in university policy and national legislation regarding approaches to rehabilitation and people with criminal records, and the potential for establishing circles of influence within universities to take work forward in this area
- Whether recruiting ex-offenders is good for business as well as being the right thing for society
- Whether the University should develop initiatives to employ people in prison on day release quietly or publicly – with panel members calling for transparency and media coverage to bring the discussion into the public domain
- The importance of good communication with existing staff at all levels in the university on the potential and reasons for working with prisons and providing work experience to prisoners – the need to gain support from those who would be working directly with prisoners
- Appropriate use of language – regarding people serving prison sentences and those with criminal records
- The potential for establishing an Employers Forum in Scotland on recruiting people with criminal records, reflecting one set up in England by Timpson Foundation
- How to target job adverts to people leaving prisons? The Unlock Your Future jobs board on the Criminal Justice Network's No Offence website was offered as a way to do this <http://www.no-offence.org/static-page/unlock-your-future/>

## The mixer workshop: university links with prisons in Scotland and what next?

The event was chaired by Liz Cooper. Participants divided into three groups to discuss three themes in depth:

1. Work experience in universities for prisoners/after prison
2. Access to education in/after prison
3. Procurement from prisons

The following questions were discussed in relation to each theme:

- What is already being done in Scotland?
- What should/could we do next?
- What areas/questions require further research?

Participants had the opportunity to input into discussion on each of the themes by rotating to the different tables.

### Theme 1: Work experience in universities for prisoners/after prison

<b>What are we already doing?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Glasgow and Strathclyde universities are in discussion about work placements for prisoners - currently working on due diligence</li> <li>• HR departments follow appropriate legislation – but could approaches to employing those with criminal records be updated?</li> <li>• Scottish Government is organising a summit on this topic in May 2015 – university reps should attend</li> </ul>
<b>What should/could we do?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universities could be key influencers in changing approaches and views on providing work for prisoners and ex-offenders (institutional capital)</li> <li>• 2900 jobs exist in Scotland as a result of UoE contractors – looking at contractors' approaches to recruiting people with criminal records is also important, and their ability to provide work placements to prisoners</li> <li>• Link in with widening participation teams/equivalent in universities – involving communities at risk of offending as well as those already convicted of offences</li> <li>• SPS/HEIs reciprocal arrangement: currently prisons offer plenty of access to researchers, but institutions should also offer access to universities for prisoners through placements</li> <li>• Could work placements in universities be an option for Community Orders as an alternative to prison?</li> <li>• Formal partnership between Scottish Prison Service and universities – universities to offer year-long mentoring</li> <li>• University HR policy needs to be positive – Rehabilitation of Offenders Act needs urgent reform. Also review of approach to disclosure of offences committed in childhood</li> <li>• How can existing academic research influence society to change perceptions and practice on employment of ex-offenders?</li> <li>• Could join together on this across Scotland as HEFE sector</li> <li>• Universities should campaign, engage in wider debate on stigma towards prisoners, and help</li> </ul>

<p>reframe, campaign on legislation reform</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set up an Employers Forum in Scotland, reflecting one in England established by Timpson Foundation – importance of keeping businesses involved in these discussions and to find out more about what employers are already doing</li> <li>• Engage and involve prisoners in this discussion! Importance of background and personalised stories</li> </ul>
<p><b>In what areas do we need more research?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What would be an appropriate approach/methodology for universities and contractors regarding offering placements to prisons</li> <li>• Explore different types of work opportunities in HEIs – what can jobs market offer prisoners and those leaving prisons?</li> <li>• De-institutionalise people in/leaving prison – how do we do this?</li> <li>• Trust as core value (taken for granted in society, seen as needing to earn this in prison)</li> <li>• Prejudices/public perception – overcoming stigma around certain offences, stigma around taking jobs from others</li> <li>• Need to scope what research already out there on work placements as rehabilitation and on approaches to recruiting people with criminal records, and draft funding bid to address gaps</li> </ul>

## Theme 2: Access to education in/after prison

<p><b>What are we already doing?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education contracts between prisons and colleges</li> <li>• Education in prisons is narrow in focus – literacy and numeracy</li> <li>• Book group with Glasgow University – PhD students and staff from criminology to support Open University students in prisons (HMP Shotts and plans for HMP Greenock)</li> <li>• Glasgow School of Art lectures in prisons, including student placement projects with in prisons leading to exhibitions</li> <li>• Student placements and research projects in prisons – beekeeping, music?</li> <li>• Philosophy MOOC plans in prison learning centres, involving tutoring by PhD students from University of Edinburgh, in collaboration with New College Lanarkshire</li> <li>• New College Lanarkshire and University of Strathclyde working on accreditation for wider range of courses in prisons e.g. Creative Writing at HMP Low Moss</li> <li>• Music in Community course at University of Edinburgh has worked with prisons (may no longer be running)</li> <li>• Currently initiatives linking universities and prisons regarding education are dependent on ad hoc and specific academic interests</li> <li>• Internet access in prisons limited but this is under review</li> <li>• Student enrolment in universities and colleges takes into account types of offences committed – criminal record not necessarily a barrier</li> </ul>
<p><b>What should/could we do?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add breadth and depth to education beyond traditional disciplines – arts, sports, personal development (linking education to self-esteem and how people feel they can positively impact society)</li> <li>• Co-educational programmes such as ‘Inside Out’ in the USA</li> <li>• For those with criminal records applying to study after, the lack of qualifications is the big issue, big role for FE colleges – collaborative work needs to be undertaken to improve routes</li> </ul>

from prisons into FE/HE e.g. use modern apprenticeships?

- Review of SPS education contract – incentivise and enable
- Provide opportunities for prisoners with degrees to undertake teaching qualifications
- Need an integrated educational strategy – how do universities support this?
- Emphasis should be on keeping people in education to avoid offending
- Access to the internet is a barrier to education in the prison community – to be tackled
- Ongoing development/progression for education in prisons (beyond undergraduate degrees) could universities offer research courses in prisons that would contribute towards a master's degree?
- Work more closely with FE colleges to prevent offending (it is a 'protective factor' towards offending)
- Ensure validity of in-prison qualifications to external employers.

#### **In what areas do we need more research?**

- How to fund FE/HE study in prisons
- There is a need to improve computer literacy among prisoners and among poorer communities in Scotland - how to improve access to technology in such communities?
- Internet access in prisons could be used to support education, how best to do this?
- What should we call it? Education, training, learning or development?
- Accredited qualifications in prison versus education in the wider sense (non-credit bearing)
- Educational facilities in prison are not used to capacity – how to make sure prisoners have access to these opportunities (e.g. rooms not used between 12 and 3 in the afternoon)
- Stigma around education in prisons for people who were excluded from education – need to reconnect them to this process - How to make education and learning appealing to people who might have had bad experiences with education before entering prison
- Exploring challenges faced by people leaving prisons and developing educational programmes to meet these challenges – example: accessing services
- What are the educational needs of prisoners? Moving beyond literacy and numeracy
- How to engage and continually challenge prisoners who are educated (FEHE qualified)
- How are educational needs changing as the profile of prisoners changes (aging population etc.)
- What new skills are needed? What skills best reflect the needs of employers?
- How do people continue on their educational journey post-prison? Post-release cohort study/follow up. How to ensure continuity in education of prisoners post-release
- What kinds of education are associated with what kind of post-release outcomes?
- What kinds of educational opportunities mobilise what kind of engagement post-release (i.e. in sports, chaplaincy, the arts etc.)
- How to deinstitutionalise prisoners post-release
- Where does education sit amongst other priorities, in terms of rehabilitation?
- Need to capture the experience of researchers/students at the university who work in prisons but then move on
- Are educational interventions in prisons effective long-term?

### **Theme 3: Procurement from prisons**

#### **What are we already doing?**

- No current university procurement from prisons in Scotland as far as we know
- Scottish Prison Service has contracts with B&Q/garden furniture for children's charities etc. –

<p>all prisons in Scotland have at least one manufacturing contract with an outside firm or organisation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whether companies/organisations disclose that the goods they buy come from prisons or not varies – some charities do promote this, others do not disclose to customers due to potential stigma</li> </ul>
<p><b>What should/could we do?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lots of manufacturing potential in Scottish prisons to tap into – Scottish Prison Service need to promote what products are available to procurement professionals, and have conversations with procurement professionals to identify what needs could be filled</li> <li>• Identify what manufacturing/service opportunities (including web design, film, music) universities could procure based on which will provide the most appropriate skills training for prisoners</li> <li>• Promote the existing work done in prisons for external market to celebrate successes and get discussion out into public domain e.g. furniture making, bike repair</li> <li>• Explore Scottish Enterprise support available to Scottish Prison Service or to employers e.g. training grants for ex-offenders</li> <li>• Modern apprenticeships provide extra funding for recruiting ex-offenders</li> <li>• New EU regulations on public procurement, and their translation into Scots Law, provide opportunities for procurement from prisons: definition of a ‘supported business’ has changed from ‘disabled’ to ‘disabled and disadvantaged’, and the Scottish definition is on its way – need to make the case for prisoners to be included in the Scottish Government’s new definition</li> <li>• Could people join supported business on release from prison?</li> <li>• Explore opportunity through Community Benefit Clauses in procurement process</li> <li>• Procurement in Scotland has cohesive community of procurement practitioners- would not be too difficult to get a policy consensus on prison procurement in Scotland</li> <li>• Scottish Prison Service to have a clear public face for prisons industries – and a contact person</li> <li>• Potential for identifying student research projects</li> </ul>
<p><b>In what areas do we need more research?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How procurement from prisons can help individual people in their rehabilitation journeys – providing skills, routes to work...</li> <li>• What are the effects of prison industry in Scotland in terms of displacement from outside suppliers including local small businesses (e.g. bike repair)? Do perceptions of this displacement reflect reality?</li> <li>• What are the financial incentives for employers?</li> </ul>

## Feedback on the events

A short feedback form was emailed to participants of the stakeholder mixer immediately after the event, to gather views on the organisation of the event itself, and to capture further ideas on next steps. All those who completed the form (7/23) rated the organisation of the event as good (2), very good (3) or excellent (2), with comments on the relaxed setting, good communication and facilitation. One participant requested further clarity on the origins of the event, and would have liked more in-depth discussion on education and prisons.



All respondents (7) stated that the event was useful for their work, commenting that the most useful aspects included: hearing positive insights from senior representatives of the Scottish Prison Service, the involvement of different sectors (business, government, researchers and university operations), and the ideas forming on taking links between universities and prisons further.

In terms of taking things further, respondents suggested further meetings like this one, focusing on specific themes that were touched on at this broader event. Others suggested establishing a core group of motivated individuals to take the agenda further. One person suggested promotion of the event and its outcomes and plans for further work on the University of Edinburgh website.

## Next steps summary

The discussions by theme, plenary discussions and communication following the event have identified the following proposals for next steps:

- **Establish a network of people interested in working in this area (event participants and others), continuing to involve different sectors including business, university operations (procurement, widening participation, HR...), researchers, government and campaign groups. The network may consider:**
  - scope existing research on links between universities and prisons, and on rehabilitation approaches in Scotland more broadly (see detailed suggestions above), and identify/confirm gaps where further research needed (including projects suitable for student research, and why not research carried out by people in prison?)
  - participation in Scottish Government Employability Summit taking place in May 2015
  - establishing an Employers Forum linking to Scottish Prison Service
  - campaigning for change to legislation/policy in Scotland on recruitment of people with criminal records, as well as awareness-raising to change public perception
  - calling for Scottish procurement regulation to facilitate procurement from prisons (e.g. by universities and their contractors)
  - identifying procurement opportunities from prisons by liaising with Scottish Prison Service on what goods/services they could supply
  - which existing initiatives/organisations/networks to link up with
  - how to get buy in from decision makers and all levels of staff members in universities
  - initiating/continuing discussions with HR departments in universities on approaches to criminal convictions in recruitment (including by university contractors), and on the potential for work placements for prisoners
  - exploring innovative approaches to education in and in collaboration with prisons – bringing in colleges as well as universities
  - engaging and involving prisoners and people with criminal convictions in the above discussions – Scottish Prison Service have offered to arrange the participation of prisoners at future events

A potential network opportunity for university staff has been proposed by Richard Thomson at Recruit with Conviction – to establish ‘circles of influence’ in Higher Education institutions across Scotland entitled ‘*Universal Universities: Smooth the pathway to work and study in Universities for people with convictions!*’, to be launched very soon (interested university staff can express interest here <http://eepurl.com/-VrAb>).

### Thanks for the contributions of:

- Briega Nugent, Howard League Scotland
- Louise Brangan, Howard league Scotland
- Richard Thomson, Recruit with Conviction
- Dughall Laing, Recruit with Conviction
- Pete White, Positive Prison? Positive Futures
- Dennis Phillips, Timpson Foundation
- Trev Gregory, Trade Right International
- Iain Davidson, Director of Strategy & Innovation, Scottish Prison Service
- Jim Kerr, Governor of HMP Shotts
- Colin Brodie, Acting Governor of HMP Greenock
- David Wares, Scottish Prison Service Procurement
- Jo Mitchell, Procurement Policy Manager, Scottish Government
- Juliet Grimes, Procurement Policy Manager, Scottish Government
- Linda Kirk, Policy Officer, Scottish Government, Rehabilitation & Reintegration Unit
- Karen Bowman, Director of Procurement, University of Edinburgh
- Stuart Mclean, Category Team Leader, Procurement Department, University of Edinburgh
- Dave Gorman, Director of Social Responsibility and Sustainability, University of Edinburgh
- Tim Hayward, Professor of Politics and International Relations, University of Edinburgh
- Lesley McAra, Professor of Law, University of Edinburgh
- Richard Sparks, Professor of Law, Head of Law School, University of Edinburgh
- Martin Parker, Senior Lecturer in Sound Design, Director of Outreach, Architecture and Landscape Architecture, Edinburgh College of Art
- Marguerite Schinkel, University of Glasgow
- Anne Schwan, Edinburgh Napier University
- Fergus McNeil, University of Glasgow
- Kirsten Sams, New College Lanarkshire
- Liz Cooper, Social Responsibility and Sustainability Research and Policy Manager, University of Edinburgh
- Caro Overy, Social Responsibility and Sustainability Engagement Manager, University of Edinburgh
- Alexis Heeren, Social Responsibility and Sustainability Engagement Facilitator, University of Edinburgh