

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: University of Glasgow
Unit of Assessment: 22 - Social Work and Social Policy
Title of case study: Desistance and Reintegration: Changing Penal Policy and Practice
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

University of Glasgow research on desistance from crime and reintegration has contributed powerfully to a paradigm shift in approaches to offender rehabilitation, resulting in significant reforms of penal policy and practice. By fostering and sustaining relationships with criminal justice policymakers and stakeholders, the researchers catalysed a number of meaningful impacts. These included significant shifts in rehabilitation policy in all three UK jurisdictions; the delivery of a new practice skills model by the National Offender Management Service of England and Wales, and the ongoing redesign of service provision and prison staff training in Scotland and Northern Ireland. More broadly, the research has challenged conventional wisdom around approaches to 'offender management', effecting a widespread cultural change in the penal system.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)
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Desistance from crime – the process through which people cease and refrain from offending – is of key significance for penal policy and practice. University of Glasgow researchers from the Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research (SCCJR), led by Fergus McNeill (Professor of Criminology and Social Work since 2008; UoG staff since 1998), have worked closely with policymakers, practitioners and reform groups on issues relating to desistance and 'offender management' in several jurisdictions.

Desistance Paradigm:

In the course of his criminological scholarship on 'offender supervision' over the last 15 years, McNeill showed that the combination of a punitive turn in UK Government policy and legislation and the managerialisation of public services changed the tenor of probation practice from one which was concerned with the welfare of people for whom it had supervisory responsibility, to one that prioritised public protection and the delivery of punishments. McNeill's work exposed the paradox that, as penal discourses and practices shifted focus from rehabilitation and support to control, regulation, and surveillance, the likelihood of reducing reoffending and supporting desistance diminished.

McNeill's work went on to highlight the policy and practice implications of adopting an alternative 'desistance-based' approach. The outputs which have had key impacts on policy and practice include: *21st Century Social Work: Reducing Reoffending – Key Practice Skills, Towards Effective Practice in Offender Supervision* and, with Weaver, (Glasgow School of Social Work, Universities of Glasgow and Strathclyde) *Changing Lives? Desistance Research and Offender Management* ('the *Changing Lives?* report').

In developing and advancing the case for a desistance paradigm in these reports and other academic outputs, McNeill proposed that developments in penal policy and practice must recognise, among other things: the importance of listening to and working with 'service users'; the ways in which relationships matter to people under supervision and in prison; the strengths and resources that people bring to the process of change; the need for an individualised and relational approach to supporting positive change; the importance of developing hope and a sense of agency; the need to work at developing social, as well as human, capital and wellbeing; and the need to develop practices and languages, thus supporting 'de-labelling'.

The research findings have continuously been disseminated to and used by academics, policymakers, practitioners (in various sectors), as well as by ex-offenders and their supporters. McNeill has undertaken much of this work in collaboration with others, some of whom have been fellow SCCJR researchers based at the University of Glasgow (Batchelor), and others from different disciplinary backgrounds in criminology and law (including Farrall at University of Sheffield; Burnett at University of Oxford; and Maruna at Queen's University Belfast). McNeill's

Impact case study (REF3b)

academic and professional background in criminal justice social work has allowed him to make a distinct contribution to synthesising theoretical perspectives and research findings, identifying their practical implications, and exchanging knowledge with multiple stakeholders.

DesKE:

As part of a continued commitment to stakeholder engagement, McNeill led an ESRC-funded 'Desistance Knowledge Exchange Project' between 2011 and 2012. DesKE advanced knowledge exchange between academics, policy makers, practitioners, ex-offenders, service-users and their families/supporters in relation to the ways in which desistance can be better supported through supervision and reintegration. McNeill co-ordinated the project, working with Farrall (Sheffield), Maruna (QUB), and Lightowler (of the Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services).

The researchers co-produced a documentary film entitled *The Road from Crime*, which acted as a stimulus for discussions at a series of 10 stakeholder workshops, initially in Glasgow, London, Sheffield, Merseyside and Belfast (and later around the world). The workshops facilitated the co-production of research-informed ideas for policy and practice reform. By August 2013, the DesKE project blog had been viewed over 60,000 times by over 30,000 visitors; the film's webpage had been visited nearly 9,000 times and 'The Road from Crime' had been viewed online approximately 5,000 times.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1. Burnett, R. and McNeill, F. (2005). 'The place of the officer-offender relationship in assisting offenders to desist from crime' *Probation Journal*, 52(3): 221-242. (doi:[10.1177/0264550505055112](https://doi.org/10.1177/0264550505055112)). [This article is the most cited paper for the Journal]
2. McNeill, F. (2006). 'A desistance paradigm for offender management' *Criminology and Criminal Justice* 6(1): 39-62. (doi:[10.1177/1748895806060666](https://doi.org/10.1177/1748895806060666)). [The above research outputs were published in international journals that operate rigorous peer-review]
3. McNeill, F., Raynor, P. and Trotter C. (eds.) (2010). *Offender Supervision: New Directions in Theory, Research and Practice*. Cullompton: Willan [ISBN 9781843929369] [available from HEI]
4. McNeill, Batchelor, Burnett and Knox. (2005). *Reducing Reoffending: Key Practice Skills*, Social Work Inspection Agency, Scottish Government: [Link](#)
5. McNeill, F. (2009). *Towards Effective Practice in Offender Supervision*, SCCJR: [Link](#) [Regarded by Senior Scottish Government staff as: 'an important contemporary research perspective on the context of offender supervision in Scotland'.]
6. McNeill, F and Weaver, B. (2010). *Changing Lives? Desistance Research and Offender Management*, SCCJR: [Link](#)

Key Grants:

Desistance Knowledge Exchange Project, ESRC, £105,197.89, 2011-12. PI: McNeill (with Farrall, Lightowler and Maruna)

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

In addition to having been cited widely in the UK's and Scottish Government's policy documents, the core impacts from the desistance research are that it has supported a challenge to conventional wisdom around approaches to 'offender management'; stimulated practitioner debate; and has helped to effect a cultural change in the practices of probation and prison services across several jurisdictions.

Shaping new practice skills models for probation professionals

The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) – an Executive Agency of the Ministry of Justice which coordinates probation and prison services across England and Wales – used desistance research as part of the evidence base for a new practice skills model for probation professionals. The Deputy Director of Commissioning and Competitions at NOMS explained that NOMS drew in particular upon McNeill and Weaver's 2010 *Changing Lives?* Report, which they had commissioned, with the principles outlined in the report 'feeding directly' into the design of *Skills for Effective Engagement and Development* (SEED) [1].

Impact case study (REF3b)

SEED combines 'core correctional practices and evidence-based approaches with emerging thinking and evidence from the desistance research' [1]. The model involves ongoing training for probation professionals, including: professional development covering relationship-building; pro-social modelling; motivational interviewing; the risk need and responsivity principles, and cognitive behavioural techniques. Participants also received training on desistance research specifically. Early evaluations show the positive impact of the pilot, with 87% of participants stating that the model is very important to their practice [2].

Influencing Training, Practice and Service Delivery in Probation Services

The research has influenced policy and strategic planning in several Probation Services and Trusts, particularly in Merseyside, and Avon and Somerset.

Merseyside Probation Trust: Senior management at the Wirral, a local delivery unit (LDU) within Merseyside Probation Trust, sought and funded their participation in the DesKE project (outlined above, S.2) in late 2012 (this was in addition to the work funded by the ESRC). These additional DesKE workshops brought probation workers and service-users together, for the first time, to discuss issues around probation and reoffending. 'The Road From Crime' film prompted discussion and debate, particularly around the use of the term 'offender', which has since been replaced by 'service user' [3].

Wirral LDU staff have made a clear commitment to adopting desistance principles in their working practices and to involving the 'service user' in the process [3]. A Desistance Planning Team comprising of Wirral staff and service users has implemented a number of innovative measures, including welfare reform workshops which acknowledge and address obstacles to change, and a film club aimed at debating moral and ethical issues. In addition, probation staff attended a series of workshops where they agreed to make three changes based on desistance principles, which run counter to conventional ways of working [3]. The Wirral LDU has expressed its desire to extend the desistance principles to both its staff induction and risk assessment procedures. The research can therefore be seen to have helped redirect the training, working practice and service delivery of probation professionals in important and innovative ways.

Avon and Somerset Probation Trust (ASPT): Similarly, Avon and Somerset Probation Trust (ASPT) has benefited from the desistance research and from links with the DesKE project. The Trust is committed to better supporting desistance in its practice, an agenda that has been supported by the recruitment of a dedicated Desistance Development Officer.

Motivated by the eight key principles outlined in McNeill and Weaver's *Giving up Crime: Directions for Policy* (2007) report, ASPT developed a new operational framework and discussed the implementation of desistance-supporting-practices at an 'away day' for ASPT and its multi-agency partners. According to the Chief Probation Officer of ASPT, the clarity of the principles outlined in the report provided staff with greater focus and direction [4].

To further promote the desistance agenda, ASPT arranged a screening of *The Road from Crime* at the Curzon cinema, North Somerset, in November 2012 [5] and invited McNeill to deliver a presentation on the creative implementation of desistance at their 2013 Annual Conference. Feedback from the events showed that the film had improved understandings of the importance of working within desistance principles. [4].

The Voluntary and Community Sector: One of the barriers identified by people working in the criminal justice sector to desistance is a lack of clear and practical steps to support implementation in daily practice. To that end, Clinks, a charity that supports VCS organisations working with offenders, devised a practical guide for practitioners. This guide draws heavily on McNeill's research [6] and the DesKE project is also listed as a key resource on Clinks' website [7].

Impact case study (REF3b)**Instrumental Impact on Policy and Practice in Scotland and Northern Ireland****Scottish Government:**

Speaking at the launch of *The Road from Crime* at the University in June 2012, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill MSP) commented that DesKE had improved Scottish Government Officials' understanding of the reality of desistance from crime, and influenced their thinking about how public policy can better remove obstacles to desistance [8]. Additionally, it provided an evidence-base to support the Justice Directorate's development of the *Scottish Government Reducing Reoffending Programme*, with McNeill being invited to join the Programme Board to contribute his expertise [8].

The Scottish Government has subsequently invested £10m in a change fund to provide more people leaving prison with mentors, and funded 'Positive Prisons? Positive Futures...', which represents the views of people with convictions in policy-making and service development. Both initiatives reflect the DesKE ethos around engagement, dialogue and co-production of knowledge.

In addition, McNeill was recently appointed to the Review Board for the Scottish Prison Service (SPS), which is currently redesigning its operating philosophy and approach around desistance principles. SPS, which employs approximately 4200 staff who work with the 8000 people detained in custody in Scotland, recently commissioned SCCJR to review and develop models of staff training (at all career stages and for all grades) to support desistance.

Northern Ireland (NI) Prison Service:

The Justice Minister for Northern Ireland commissioned a comprehensive review of Northern Ireland's Prison Service in 2010, resulting in the Northern Ireland Prison Review Team's *Final Report* in October 2011. McNeill was invited to serve as the sole academic member of the high-level Review Team in order to contribute his knowledge of desistance, reintegration and penal reform. The Final Report outlines the vision for the 'New Prison System' which is to be organised around 3 key objectives, including: '*Desistance: a wider picture*' [9]. Following the start of the *Strategic Efficiency and Effectiveness Programme*, established by the NIPS to implement the Review Team's recommendations, the Justice Minister outlined plans in March 2013 for a £202m investment into reforming the NIPS; a significant feature of his announcement on the funding was the need to fund reforms that support desistance by '*changing attitudes towards offender management through positive engagement and interaction*' (see: NIPS Press Release: [Link](#)).

Internationally, the research has exercised similar influences on penal policy and practice. McNeill has been invited to lead DesKE workshops in mainland Europe, Australia and the USA. For example, after a workshop in Adelaide, probation practitioners in Mobilong Prison rethought the ways that they communicate with people with convictions during one-to-one and group intervention conversations. The Manager of Offender Development for the prison noted that, in stressing the importance of creating an identity alternative to that of 'criminal', McNeill's research greatly assisted workers in framing their conversations with prisoners in new ways [10].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)**Impact on probation professionals**

[1] Statement: Deputy Director of Commissioning and Competitions, NOMS. [Available from HEI]

[2] Sorsby, A., et.al. (2013). *Probation staff views of the SEED project*. [Link](#)

Impact on probation services

[3] Statement: Assistant Chief Officer: Wirral LDU. [Available from HEI]

[4] Statement: Chief Probation Officer, ASPT. [Available from HEI]

[5] *Road from Crime* Event Flyer, Curzon Cinema, Somerset: [Link](#)

[6] *Introducing Desistance: A Guide for VCSE Sector Organisations*, Clink, 2013: [Link](#)

[7] See What Does Desistance Theory Mean To You? Clinks Blog, 5 June 2013: [Link](#)

Impact on prison services Scotland, Northern Ireland, Australia

[8] Letter from Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Kenny MacAskill (MSP). [Available from HEI]

[9] *Review of the Northern Ireland Prison Service: Conditions, management and oversight of all prison*, Prison Review Team Final Report, October 2011 [available from HEI]

[10] Email: Manager Offender Development, Mobilong Prison, South Australia.[Available from HEI]