'I didn't realise how empty I had been 'til learning filled me up': A cross-contextual exploration of the relationship between wellbeing and prison education

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Publications

There is one publication that has emerged through the course of this thesis. Study Two, 'Lockdown Learning,' was published in the Howard League for Penal Reform's Early Career Academics Network Bulletin.

Condirston, E. (2021). Lockdown Learning: Exploring prison learners' experiences of prison education during the COVID-19 lockdown. *Howard League for Penal Reform ECAN Bulletin*, 47, 4-12. Retrieved from https://howardleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ECAN-Bulletin-Themed-Issue-2-March-2021-FINAL.pdf

Author's Declaration

Declaration of Authorship

I .....Erin Condirston............... hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: *[signature]*   Date: _____13-Jul-2023_____

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Abstract

The positive impact of education on health, and increasingly wellbeing, has been well-documented. The wider wellbeing benefits of education would conceivably be of particular importance to prisoners, a group that is comprised of many individuals who have had previous negative or inadequate experiences of education and poor educational attainment upon entering the prison system. Given that the rhetoric surrounding prison education revolves strongly around outcomes and the capacity for engagement with education in prison to lead to employment post-release, thereby reducing rates of reoffending, this research seeks to contribute to an understanding of the benefits of prison education that ostensibly has not received due attention in the literature.

This thesis is the culmination of three qualitatively-driven studies exploring the relationship between prison education and wellbeing in prisons within England and Wales. The theoretical perspectives underscoring the research are eclectic in nature, drawing upon scholarship on wellbeing, education, and capital in order to situate the findings and discussion. The common underpinning that unites the three studies, or 'golden thread,' pertains to the capacity for the impact of prison education to be conceptualised using a framework of wellbeing.

Study One explores the accounts of prison learners who have applied for educational funding through the Prisoners' Education Trust in order to highlight the self-reported prospective benefits of engaging in further and higher-level study in prison.

Study Two investigates the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the learning experiences of currently incarcerated prison learners by analysing letters detailing their experiences of learning during lockdown.

Study Three examines the perspectives of both prison educators and former prison learners with respect to the potential wellbeing impacts, both positive and negative, of prison education.

The thesis makes valuable contributions to the intersection of the fields of prison education and wellbeing. The research concludes by demonstrating the relationship between prison education and wellbeing is dynamic and complex, impacting those who engage with education in prison in diverse ways. A noteworthy element within this relationship is the wellbeing implications for prison learners when a valuable educational experience is removed. The research demonstrates that various aspects of the penal education experience can interact in dynamic ways with an individual's prior life and educational experiences to impact the relationship between education and wellbeing for prison learners.

Chapter One

Introduction: Prison Education and Wellbeing

This thesis is the culmination of three studies exploring the relationship between prison education and wellbeing in prisons within England and Wales. The period in which this thesis was undertaken was such that a large part of the research journey occurred throughout the peak of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic in England and Wales. As will be demonstrated in the forthcoming chapters, this created a challenging but unique and ultimately rewarding opportunity for the researcher to carry out primary research on the mental wellbeing benefits of prison education. The obstacles that were encountered throughout the thesis were ultimately embraced by the researcher for their value in providing insight into the complexity of the relationship between wellbeing and education (applicable both to the researcher herself and those learning in prison), and in requiring the researcher to diversify her outlook and approach to the issue. In progressing throughout this work, it will become evident that many of the circumstances surrounding Covid-19, both within prisons and in the general community, have either changed or are no longer applicable. The research that comprises this thesis should therefore be interpreted as a glimpse into a particular moment in time that has important, wider implications for a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between wellbeing and prison education.

The data collection phase of this research journey began in spring 2019 and was completed in the late months of 2021. The data collection for Studies Two and Three (Chapters Five and Six, respectively) was impacted by the onset and continuation of the Covid-19 pandemic. For the researcher, attempting to establish an understanding of the immediate and enduring effects of Covid-19 initially proved challenging as empirical evidence on the impacts of Covid-19 in prisons and in the general community was not widely available at that time. The period between 2019 and 2022 has been a stark period of adjustment for prisons as a whole and prison education specifically. The new commissioning framework for prison education, which replaced the

Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) contracts, came into effect on April 1, 2019 (House of Commons Education Committee, 2021e). Under the new purchasing system, the Prison Education Framework (PEF) providers (who notably are the same four providers that provided prison education under the OLASS contracts) are contracted to provide the core educational provision in prisons in England and Wales, whilst the Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) allows prison governors increased flexibility to select more bespoke educational provision that they feel is necessary within their prison (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022). Just one short year later, social life across the world came to a grinding halt in the wake of Covid-19, a viral pandemic that continues to impact social interactions and standards of living. Although the contextual foundation of the thesis is complex and multidimensional, it provides a distinct opportunity to further explore the potential impacts to wellbeing as a result of engaging in education whilst incarcerated. In the researcher's own experience, engaging with prison research during this period of uncertainty and change was unprecedented, particularly due to the unique obstacle of restrictions to primary research in prisons that emerged during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The relationship between prison education and wellbeing is at the heart of this thesis. Given that the rhetoric surrounding prison education revolves strongly around outcomes and the capacity for engagement with education in prison to lead to employment post-release, thereby reducing rates of reoffending (Bayliss, 2003; Czerniawski, 2016; Flynn & Higdon, 2022), this research sought to contribute to an understanding of the benefits of prison education that ostensibly has not received due attention in the literature. Although the structure of the research, and indeed questions that guided the research, required flexibility and adaptation throughout the thesis journey due to the contextual circumstances in which it was carried out, the research aim and decisions that were made were guided by the researcher's goal of determining whether the benefits of prison education can be interpreted through a lens of wellbeing. Whilst the three studies that comprise this thesis are individualistic in that they each utilise methods that are best suited to answering the research questions, they are connected through a common 'golden thread' that weaves its way from one study to the next,

interconnecting the research within the parameters of the overall thesis. As such, the three studies are conceptualised as data collection points that connect the research undertaken in each study to the holistic research aim of the thesis. The common underpinning that unites the three studies, or 'golden thread,' pertains to capacity for the impact of prison education to be conceptualised using a framework of wellbeing. Additionally, as this thread weaves its way through the research journey, it will become clear that the relationship between prison education and wellbeing is dynamic and complex, impacting those who engage with education in prison in diverse ways. The theoretical perspectives underpinning the research are likewise dynamic, drawing primarily on scholarship on the wider benefits of education and learning (see for example, the work of Schuller, Preston, Hammond, Brassett-Grundy, and Bynner, 2004), but also on perspectives that acknowledge the complex and subjective nature of wellbeing, those that explore the notion of capital and its relation to education and wellbeing, and Reuss' (1999) 'weaving' theory of learning. The researcher herself made a unique theoretical contribution to the research in the development of a wellbeing operationalisation matrix in Study One (see Appendix B). This matrix drew on wellbeing scholarship in an effort to develop a comprehensive understanding of the concept of wellbeing, with the aim of using the framework to explore the relationship between prison education and wellbeing in subsequent phases of the research journey. This framework proved valuable in its contribution to the understanding of the concept of wellbeing as multidimensional and eclectic, and to the conceptualisation of the wider impacts of prison education using a lens of wellbeing.

Another aim of the research was to contribute an alternative perspective to research on the benefits of prison education, one that is grounded in the intersection between the fields of education and criminology. In their strongly criminology-grounded endeavour to develop a theory of prison education, Szifris, Fox, and Bradbury (2018) emphasise what they perceive as a need to include theoretical grounding from education scholarship in future research on prison education due to a perceived scarcity of attention paid to prison education from education theorists. As said authors state, "Without the assistance of educational theorists, any theory of prison education will remain narrow and incomplete" (p.58). Although the researcher has

written this thesis from a criminological perspective without expertise or training in the field of education theory, the research has arguably demonstrated the significance of using an educational perspective to better understand how participating in prison education can impact the wellbeing of learners.

The influence and intersections of age, gender, ethnicity, and class on the wellbeing experiences of prison education were not explored within the context of the research. Although Studies Two and Three incorporated the perspectives of both male and female participants, any gendered differences between the wellbeing experiences expressed by these participants were not scrutinised in-depth as the dynamics of these differences were not the focal point of the research. However, in the context of the interviews of Study Three, some participants did acknowledge their perspectives on the gendered nature of education provision in prison, and how they perceived this to have impacted upon their wellbeing. The dynamic context in which prison learners engage in prison education, and that which precedes their interaction with education in prison, influences the distinct and individualised nature of wellbeing experiences. As such, it could be argued that the nature of prison learners' lived experiences both prior to and during incarceration, which includes the impact and interactions of sociodemographic elements such as age, gender, ethnicity, and class, could correlate with key differences in the way in which engaging in prison education impacts upon wellbeing. Although the parameters of the present research were such that further exploration of the way in which these dimensions of experience contribute to the relationship between prison education and wellbeing was not possible, the opportunity for subsequent research to investigate this relationship has been facilitated.

Subsequent to this introductory chapter, the thesis contains six remaining chapters comprised of a literature review that explores the scholarship on prisons, education, and wellbeing, an overarching methodology that outlines the methodological process and decisions, three chapters that contain the original research of the thesis, and an overarching discussion and

conclusion that reflects upon the research journey as a whole. A brief summary of each chapter is included below:

Chapter Two provides an in-depth review of the literature pertaining to the fields of prisons, education, and mental health and wellbeing. This chapter lays the groundwork for the thesis, outlining the key theoretical perspectives that underpin the research journey. This chapter also includes a detailed overview of the prison education system in England and Wales and the challenges faced by those learning and working in the sphere of prison education.

Chapter Three provides an overview of the methodological decisions and processes of the three studies. This chapter summarises the multimethod approach and theoretical drive of the thesis as a whole. The predominantly qualitative, interpretivist research uses a "question driven" approach that first identifies the questions the research aims to answer, and subsequently which methodological approach is best suited for addressing those questions (Punch & Oancea, 2014, p.19). Within the context of Chapter Three, it is useful to refer to Appendix D which includes reflections on methodological perspectives and approaches in prison education research. This reflection incorporates the paradigmatic stance and methodological drive of the research, the use of innovative recruitment techniques in research, the importance of collaborations in research, and common methods used by other prison education researchers.

Chapter Four contains the first study that comprises this thesis. This content-analysis study was conducted in collaboration with the charity organisation Prisoners' Education Trust (PET) and explores the prisoner-identified anticipated benefits of engaging with prison education. A wellbeing framework was developed and utilised in this study to analyse and interpret the study findings (see Appendix B). This study contributes to the scholarship that advocates for an understanding of the benefits of prison education to extend beyond discourses concerned chiefly with employability and recidivism (see for example, Hughes, 2012; MacGuinness, 2000; Nichols, 2021).

Chapter Five contains the second study of this thesis. This thematic analysis study was conducted in collaboration with the prison newspaper publication *Inside Time*. Study Two was the first of the three studies to require the researcher to adapt her research to suit the 'new normal' of life within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. The context of the pandemic provided the researcher with a unique opportunity to explore the wellbeing experiences of prison learners whose educational pursuits were significantly hindered when restrictions on purposeful activity were implemented in prisons. After reflecting on the wellbeing experiences of prison learners during this challenging period, Chapter Five incorporates a discussion that considers how the experiences of prison learners may have differed from those of their counterparts in the community during the pandemic. This chapter demonstrates the potential negative wellbeing impact that prison learners can experience when meaningful educational pursuits in prison are halted.

Chapter Six is comprised of the third and final study of this thesis. This interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) study explored prison educators' and former prison learners' perspectives on the relationship between wellbeing and prison education. This chapter outlines how the research journey continued to be impacted by the ongoing pandemic by necessitating innovation in research decisions and techniques. Study Three demonstrates the capacity for the relationship between prison education and wellbeing to be complex, impacting prison learners in diverse ways. In reflecting on the capacity for engagement with prison education to contribute to a differential wellbeing impact for prison learners, the notion of 'capital' is embraced within this chapter.

The final chapter of this thesis brings the exploration of the relationship between prison education and wellbeing to a close. In this chapter, the researcher reviews the research questions that have guided the thesis and revisits the theoretical perspectives that have informed Studies One through Three. Finally, the researcher considers the implications of the research for policy and practice, discussing the capacity for future research to further explore the relationship between wellbeing and prison education.

Chapter Two

Literature Review: Exploring the Scholarship on Prisons, Education, and Wellbeing

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2.0 Introduction

At the very heart of this thesis is the institution of the prison – a punitive environment that restricts the autonomy of its residents, where the potential for violence, harmful behaviours, and mental and physical deterioration is consistent, and where security supersedes healthcare concerns (Crewe, 2011; Crewe, Warr, Bennett, & Smith, 2014; Ginn, 2012; HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2018; Ministry of Justice, 2019a; Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). In 2016, the most recent year for which complete UK data is available from Eurostat (who compiles data on imprisonment rates within European Union countries and all four UK nations), and for which rates are calculated using the whole population, England and Wales imprisoned 144 people for every 100,000 resulting in the highest imprisonment rate in Western Europe (Sturge, 2022). It is thus necessary to outline here the state of the prison system in England and Wales immediately prior to and during the course of the thesis, in order to set the stage for the impending discussion on the state of *education* in the prison system. The prison system in England and Wales has gone through various changes and transformations throughout its history, with challenges abounding. Consequently, telling its story is imperative to the understanding of how these changes and challenges have impacted, and continue to influence, the culture of prison education. This chapter provides a comprehensive exploration of the scholarship on prisons, education, and wellbeing. It begins with an overview of the prison system in England and Wales, exploring the notions of the safety and wellbeing of prisoners. It then moves on to an in-depth review of the scholarship related to mental health and wellbeing, and subsequently to an overview of the prison education system in England and Wales. The chapter concludes with a review of education scholarship and the wider benefits of learning in order to situate the research at the intersections of the fields of wellbeing and education.

2.1 The prison system in England and Wales

The prison population in England and Wales was 82,990 as of March 31, 2020 (Ministry of Justice, 2020c). However, as of November 20, 2020, there were 78,838 prisoners in England and Wales (Ministry of Justice, 2020a). The decrease in the prison population throughout 2020 can be attributed to the backlog of court cases that could not be processed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the ordinary release of prisoners as they reached the end of their custodial sentences, as well as the decrease in crime levels occurring during the pandemic (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2020; Sturge, 2022). Estimating the upward or downward trend in the growth of the prison population in future years is somewhat difficult to determine due to the recruitment target of 20,000 new police officers by March 2023 (which can impact upon the prison population through an increase in rate of charges), as well as the uncertainty surrounding the ways in which the court system will rebound from the impacts of Covid-19 (Ministry of Justice, 2020a; National Audit Office, 2022). Nevertheless, the most recent published prediction from the Ministry of Justice is that prison population numbers will continue to grow, projecting an increase in the prison population in England and Wales to 98,700 by September 2026 (Ministry of Justice, 2020a). These numbers are indicative of a prison system that will remain overcrowded, with the forecast anticipating a general rising trend (Ministry of Justice, 2020a; Sturge, 2022). In their 2017-2018 annual review, HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) found that, although there were some improvements in individual prisons, the overall state of prisons remained one of deterioration (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2018). Indeed, HMIP has stated that, "[2017-2018] documented some of the most disturbing prison conditions we have ever seen – conditions which have no place in an advanced nation in the 21st century" (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2018, p.7). With the exception of some recorded good practices in select prisons that were considered by HMIP to have positive measures in place to help prisoners, concerns remained around declining levels of safety and elevated levels of violence, assaults, self-harm, and substance misuse, and point towards a correctional system that is unable to meet the needs of its prison populations (ibid). Living quarters and conditions for prisoners were documented as being deplorably insufficient in numerous prisons, with

overcrowding conditions forcing many prisoners to share cells meant for single occupancy, and with many prisoners allowed out of their cells for less than two hours a day, far below the HMIP-recommended 10+ hours a day of time outside the cell (ibid).

Other factors observed by HMIP in their 2017-2018 report that contributed to a critical commentary on the current state of prisons in England and Wales included too few purposeful activities for prisoners (particularly in Young Offender Institutions (YOIs)), insufficient risk assessments for prisoners at risk of self-harm, and deficient procedures in place for prisoners upon initial entry which resulted in prisoners who were unable to make a telephone call to family, shower, eat, or access translation or interpreter services during their first night (ibid). The 2019-2020 HMIP Annual Report noted that improvements had been made in some areas, and that, for the first time since 2015-2016, "a slightly higher proportion of our [HMIP] recommendations have been achieved than not" (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2020a, p.13). Health care provision was generally assessed as improving in most of the prisons across the male estate. However, whilst improvements in living conditions had been made in some areas in some prisons, living conditions generally remained poor and overcrowded in adult male prisons. Additionally, insufficient time spent out of cell persisted throughout the male and children's prison estates, and engagement in purposeful activity was deemed to have remained poor, with prisoners still being locked up for too many hours and not engaged in meaningful activities that could be beneficial to their rehabilitation (ibid). Peter Clarke, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons from January 2016 until the end of October 2020 (Clarke, 2021), stated in the 2019-2020 annual report that "Given the obvious linkage between excessive time locked in cells and mental health issues, self-harm and drug abuse, it was concerning to find that the amount of time for which prisoners were unlocked for time out of cell was often unacceptably poor" (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2020a, p.15). Safety also remained a significant concern in the male prison estate, with the HMIP 2019-2020 annual report noting that still too many men in prison reported feeling unsafe, with violence levels continuing to increase in adult male prisons (ibid).

As a result of the lack of purposeful activity and time spent outside the cell, the monotony of daily life without constructive activities or time allowances can result in mental and physical stagnation and deterioration, as well as increased substance abuse in prisoners (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2018). The prison population is an ageing one, resulting from offenders facing longer sentences after being sentenced at an early age (with an increased chance of spending more of their sentence behind bars), older offenders being sentenced for the first time, or offenders who are chronic recidivists bouncing in and out of the prison system (Howse, 2003). It is therefore crucial that prisoners be given opportunities to use their time inside constructively. In a rapid evidence assessment report published by HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) in which studies researching the causes of violent assaults by adult male prisoners were analysed, it was noted that violence was less likely in prisons that had purposeful or value-added activities for prisoners (McGuire, 2018). Staffing cuts, challenges pertaining to staff experience and retention, elevated levels of substance abuse amongst prisoners and the accompanying violence and bullying, a lack of purposeful activity, an enduring shift in the makeup of the prison population, and overpopulation are cited as some of the reasons for the deterioration of prison safety (Beard, 2019). Preece (2014) notes that Andrew Neilson, campaign manager for The Howard League for Penal Reform, has argued that recent cuts in prison budgets and the resulting reduction in staffing levels, coupled with a prison population that has not similarly decreased, has directly contributed to an increase in assaults on staff and prisoners, self-harm, and self-inflicted deaths amongst prisoners. Although the detrimental 26% reduction in active frontline prison staff between 2010-2017 resulted in a hiring blitz in 2018, prisons are still facing issues with retention of recruited staff, resulting in a prison staff that is less experienced (Prison Reform Trust, 2019). Reductions in prison staffing numbers also negatively affect the ability of prisoners to attend purposeful activities, which can subsequently affect the safety of the prison environment (House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee, 2018). Prisons suffering from staff shortages and overcrowded conditions make it difficult for prisoners to attend activities that would be beneficial to their health (ibid).

2.2 Wellbeing in prison

Mental health, substance abuse, and self-harm issues remained a significant problem in the prisons inspected by HMIP in 2017-2018 (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2018). Watson, Stimpson, and Hostick (2004), in their review of the literature on health care in prisons, found that the three main concerns surrounding health in prisons were mental health, substance abuse, and communicable diseases. It has been well-documented in the literature that prisoners, as a group, experience a higher prevalence of mental health afflictions than the general population (Durcan, 2021; Durcan & Zwemstra, 2014; Fazel, Hayes, Bartellas, Clerici, & Trestman, 2016; House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee, 2018; Jordan, 2011; Lester, Hamilton-Kirkwood, & Jones, 2003; Mills & Kendall, 2016; Senior & Shaw, 2007). It has also been established that aspects of the prison environment and experience can contribute adversely to the mental health of prisoners (Blaauw & van Marle, 2007; Durcan & Zwemstra, 2014; House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee, 2018). The propensity for prisoners to exhibit an elevated prevalence of adverse mental health conditions could be attributed to a variety of factors, according to the *Trenčín statement on prisons and mental health* released by the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe (2008). These factors include: prisoners entering prison with pre-existing mental health issues; the mentally damaging characteristics of the prison environment that are inherent by-products of the prison institution itself; vulnerable prisoners entering the system with pre-existing issues related to drug misuse (or previous non-drug users developing these problems for the first time in prison); lack of timely strategies in place to divert those with mental health issues away from the prison system and into health facilities that are better equipped to manage and treat these individuals; and the reliance on prisons as repositories for those who exhibit a prevalence of varied mental health illnesses and issues. Depressive symptoms and "stress-related" physical symptoms are common amongst prison populations, with many prisoners suffering from some degree of these types of mental health afflictions (Blaauw & van Marle, 2007, p.133).

Inherent facets of the prison environment can adversely impact the mental health of prisoners and can either introduce mental health problems that may have not been pre-existing or exacerbate existing mental health conditions and illnesses that may or may not have been diagnosed (Blaauw & van Marle, 2007; Goomany & Dickinson, 2015; HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2007; WHO & International Committee of the Red Cross, 2005). These conditions and deficits include, but are not limited to, overcrowding, lack of autonomy, choice, and privacy, unsanitary living conditions, inadequate diet, availability of prohibited substances, decreased communication with loved ones, scarcity of purposeful activities, lack of access to satisfactory health care services, and negative or violent situations and interactions (Blaauw & van Marle, 2007; Durcan, 2008; WHO & International Committee of the Red Cross, 2005). According to Fazel et al. (2016), "Prisoners are also at increased risk of all-cause mortality, suicide, self-harm, violence, and victimisation" (p.871). Incidents of self-harm are prevalent in prison, particularly amongst the female prison population, and such incidents can act as a risk factor for suicide in prisoners who self-harmed as compared to the general prison population (Hawton, Linsell, Adeniji, Sariaslan, & Fazel, 2014). Depression and feelings of hopelessness have been found to be risk factors associated with prisoners' likelihood of engaging in self-harm and suicide (Favril, Yu, Hawton, & Fazel, 2020; Ivanoff & Jang, 1991; Palmer & Connelly, 2005; Pope, 2018; Prisons and Probation Ombudsman for England and Wales, 2014; World Health Organization & International Association for Suicide Prevention, 2007). The Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), in their 2004 report *Mental Health and Social Exclusion*, note that "...the level of distress in prisons...has been found to be closely correlated with the suicide rate" (p.49). With incidents of self-harm in prisons in England and Wales rising by 25% from 2017 to 2018 (Ministry of Justice, 2019a), and by 14% in the 12 months leading up to December 2019 (Ministry of Justice, 2020b), it is perhaps unsurprising that 2018 figures estimate that, when controlling for the age and gender makeup of the prison population as compared to the general population, the rate of self-inflicted deaths in prison is more than six times likelier than that within the general population in England and Wales (Ministry of Justice, 2019b).

With respect to female offenders, in the 12 months leading up to December 2019, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) reports that the rate of self-harm amongst female prisoners was alarmingly elevated as compared to that of their male counterparts, with 3,130 incidents of self-harm per 1,000 prisoners in the female prison population, and 650 incidents per 1,000 prisoners in the male prison population, despite women only comprising 5% of the total prison population (Ministry of Justice, 2020b; Prison Reform Trust, 2019). Female prisoners comprise a unique population in the context of the challenges that they routinely face in comparison to their male counterparts, and they often struggle to have their diverse needs addressed by the prison system (Corston, 2007; MacDonald, 2013; Moloney, van den Bergh, & Møller, 2009). Many women prisoners have traumatic histories of experiencing domestic, physical, emotional, and sexual abuse (Corston, 2007; van den Bergh, Gatherer, Fraser, & Møller, 2011; Williams, Earle, Litchfield, Castiglione, & Nickolls, 2017). The female prison population often struggles with high levels of alcohol and drug abuse (Corston, 2007; HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2007; MacDonald, 2013; van den Bergh et al., 2011), as well as experiencing mental health difficulties at a higher rate than both male prisoners and women in the general population (Corston, 2007). Women prisoners also struggle with being housed far away from their homes and families, and as many women prisoners are either the primary or sole caregivers for dependent children (Corston, 2007; Rickford, 2003; World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe & United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2009), this separation places strain upon the family unit with families struggling to stay together, which then increases the risk of children being placed in care (Corston, 2007; Rickford, 2003; van den Bergh et al., 2011).

In addition to the aggravating factors that the nature of the prison environment creates for prisoners experiencing mental health problems, the majority of prisoners entering the prison system have experiences with substance abuse (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002), which can contribute to the health difficulties facing said individuals in the penal environment (Stöver & Weilandt, 2007, p.87). The increasing use of new psychoactive substances in prison, such as the synthetic cannabinoid known as "spice," is claimed to be wreaking havoc on prison staff in attempts to manage the impact of these drugs (House of Commons Health and Social Care

Committee, 2018). These substances, and spice in particular, are pervasive in their destruction, affecting both prisoners and staff (ibid). Referencing the seemingly omnipresent access that prisoners have to these types of drugs, the House of Commons, in their 2018 published report on health in prisons, note that "Widespread access to spice and other drugs has increased violence within prisons and contributed to the deterioration in safety" (ibid, p.6). Healthcare staff in prisons as well as prison officers are additionally over-stretched in their abilities to meet the needs of the general prison population due to their focus being redirected from their day-to-day responsibilities to the management of the impact of drug use (House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee, 2018).

Although responses to meeting prisoners' mental health and wellbeing needs have seen some innovative approaches in individual prisons, these approaches are typically not widely shared amongst the prison estate (Morse, 2017). Despite improvements in prison healthcare attributable to the NHS taking over from the prison service in 2005, it remains the case that there are shortcomings within prisons in England and Wales in providing the required level of care to address the mental health needs of prisoners (House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee, 2018; House of Commons Justice Committee, 2021; Morse, 2017). Scholarship on mental health in prisons calls for an integrated, collaborative, whole-prison approach to attending to the mental health of prisoners (Baybutt, Acin, Hayton, & Dooris, 2014; Bradley, 2009; Durcan & Zwemstra, 2014; HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2007; Prisons and Probation Ombudsman, 2016; Till, Exworthy, & Forrester, 2014). Prison-wide responses that address the complex mental health needs of prisoners are required, ensuring that these individuals have access to the variety of resources required to care for their mental health. With respect to the conditions that are vital to the success of prisons' responses to the mental health needs of their prisoners, the WHO Regional Office for Europe (2008) in the *Trenčín statement on prisons and mental health* states, "Promoting mental health and well-being should be central to a prison's health care policy. This will address such matters as the general prison environment, prison routines and levels of prisoner activity, education and work opportunities, and staff-prisoner relationships" (p.6). The notion of the "health-promoting prison" is discussed by Woodall, Dixey,

and South (2013) in the context of a "settings approach" to health promotion in prisons (i.e., one that acknowledges the contextual nature of experiences of health and recognises that settings themselves can shape experiences of health for individuals with diverse needs) (Dooris et al., 2007). Woodall et al. (2013) assert the necessity of embedding essential health promotion values (i.e., choice, empowerment, and control) within the context of prison if a settings-based approach to health promotion in prisons is to be realised.

2.2.1 Purposeful/meaningful activity

Purposeful activity in prisons refers to those activities and interactions which prisoners engage in that constructively contribute to making their prison experience meaningful (Prison Reform Trust, 2014). HM Inspectorate of Prison's (2021a) conceptualisation of 'purposeful activity' includes an expectation for prisoners to be able to spend adequate time out of their cells in order to participate in personally beneficial, constructive activities that support their needs and rehabilitative efforts. Purposeful activity in prisons, according to HMIP, is also expected to include the opportunity for prisoners to take part in skills, work, and educational pursuits that "promote personal development and employability" (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2021c). It is the position of HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2020a) that purposeful activity in prisons is essential for the mental and physical health and wellbeing of prisoners. Prior to the pandemic in the year from April 1, 2019, to March 31, 2020, the HMIP assessment of the state of purposeful activity in prisons varied across the estate. Purposeful activity was deemed to be poor in the adult male estate, with HMIP noting that the assessment of purposeful activity was "overall…the area that has produced the poorest results over the past year" (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2020a, p.19). In the two dedicated prisons holding young adults that were inspected, HMIP note that the outcomes for purposeful activity were not assessed as "good" or "reasonably good" at either institution (ibid). HMIP note that in the five women's prisons inspected in 2019-2020, purposeful activity outcomes were assessed as either "good" or "reasonably good." Acknowledging that improvements could be made in the range of recreational activities available for female prisoners in their free time, HMIP deemed the time spent out of cell in

women's establishments was "reasonably good" in the closed institutions and "very good," in the open ones (ibid).

Purposeful activity is an integral part of life in prison as it contributes to the safety and rehabilitative potential of the prison environment, and impacts prisoners' abilities to develop skills and adequately prepare for release (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2020a). According to the Prison Reform Trust (2014), the meaning of purposeful activity should extend beyond a narrow conceptualisation of the term which focuses primarily on those activities that are provided to prisoners by the prison, to that which includes activities and interactions which prisoners are interested in and find meaningful on a personal level. The following definition of 'purposeful activity,' is provided by the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) (2014) in their publication *Delivering a Strategy for Purposeful Activity in the Scottish Prison Service*:

> Purposeful activity includes any activity or constructive interaction which promotes citizenship; develops learning and employability skills; builds life skills and resilience; addresses well-being; and motivates personal engagement with both prison and community based services. (p.9)

In an organisational review of purposeful activity within the Scottish Prison Service (2014), it was recommended that the vision of the SPS with respect to purposeful activities in prison be holistic in nature, encompassing a wide-ranging view of what can be considered as meaningful for prisoners. In critiquing the description of purposeful activity (which emphasises activities undertaken during the "working day") given by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland to the Scottish Parliament's Justice Committee Inquiry into Purposeful Activity in Prisons Report, the SPS notes that this previous definition of purposeful activity has not necessarily considered those valuable, unstructured, routine activities and interactions that prisoners may find meaningful and beneficial to wellbeing, particularly those interactions between prisoners and staff. The SPS asserts that "There are many examples of staff, (as well as Peer Mentors and Prison Listeners for example), having that one-to-one chat, or sharing a life experience which often act as catalysts for changes in outlook, motivation, engagement and well-being" (p.8). These interactions can encourage and motivate prisoners to change and to start to take

responsibility for their own personal transformation (ibid). The holistic approach to purposeful activity proposed by the SPS consists of five elements fundamental to promoting purposeful activity that is meaningful and rehabilitative in nature, and that considers the needs of all prisoners, including those prisoners serving short sentences. These key elements are as follows: wellbeing; citizenship, volunteering, and reparation; life skills and resilience; offending behaviour; and learning and employability (ibid, p.6). The SPS purposeful activity review recommends that the SPS develop a strategy for finding a balance amongst the key elements of the holistic approach and promote activities that focus on supporting prisoners to develop their strengths and address their shortcomings. The "New Approach" of the SPS to purposeful activity acknowledges prisoners as "...citizens with strengths, assets, potential to grow, develop new skills, self-sufficiency and self-esteem" (p.8). As such, the holistic model recognises the importance of affording prisoners opportunities to engage in activities that are relevant to them and encourage their meaningful contribution to their communities, whether that be the prison community or that outside of prison.

2.3 Mental health and wellbeing defined

The definitions and language used within the sphere of mental health are diverse and inconsistent across individuals, communities and cultures, varying from clinical understandings of both positive mental health and adverse mental health disorders and afflictions, to conceptualisations of positive psychological functioning and subjective assessments of wellbeing (Friedli, 2009; Galderisi, Heinz, Kastrup, Beezhold, & Sartorius, 2015; Manderscheid et al., 2010; Regan, Elliott, & Goldie, 2016; Vaillant, 2012; World Health Organization, 2003). Mechanic (2006) underscores the ambiguity in the term "mental health," noting that "The term "mental health" is one almost everyone uses, but it has no clear or consistent meaning" (p.67). In summarising the key points in Jahoda's (1958) analysis of concepts associated with positive mental health, Ewalt (1958), former director of the Joint Commission on Mental Illness and Health, notes that "No completely acceptable, all-inclusive concept exists for physical health or physical illness, and, likewise, none exists for mental health and mental illness" (p.xi). It is for

this reason that it is necessary to focus on the terms that will be used throughout the course of this thesis, and what exactly is meant by these terms. Regan et al. (2016), writing on behalf of The Faculty of Public Health and The Mental Health Foundation, note that mental health can be conceptualised as a spectrum, ranging from "mental health problems, conditions, illnesses and disorders, through to mental wellbeing or positive mental health" (p.9). Within the context of prisons, both Bradley (2009) and Mills and Kendall (2016) emphasise the parallel variation amongst definitions and uses of terms associated with mental health problems. Lord Bradley notes that, although "mentally disordered offenders" is a term often used to describe individuals coming into contact with the criminal justice system who may be experiencing mental illness afflictions, particularly in the context of the Mental Health Act, this term is not used as liberally by "mainstream health services," and realistically speaking, no universally accepted understanding of "mental disorder" exists (Bradley, 2009, p.16).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (2009), the definition of mental wellbeing is individualistic in nature, and thus cannot be deemed to have consistent meanings across individuals, groups, or cultures. It is worth noting that the following definition has provided the foundational understanding of the concept of wellbeing as it will be utilised within the context of the present research:

> For some, it [mental well-being] may be the notion of happiness or contentment. For others it may be absence of disease. For some it may be economic prosperity. It could be based on the goals and challenges placed on an individual or a culture. It also may mean the absence of negative determinants in the life of an individual or a community. Mental well-being includes cognitive, emotional and behavioural responses at a personal level. Some may also interpret mental well-being as determined by external stimulants and factors, sometimes beyond the control of individuals, such as housing and jobs. Thus mental well-being should be interpreted in the socio-cultural context of the individual. It should be considered as a continuum and as operating within a spectrum, rather than a state that is present or absent. An individual, group or community can be at any given point within this spectrum. (p.23)

The WHO (2022a) identifies that there is an association between mental and psychological wellbeing and positive mental health, and articulates the somewhat blurred distinction between

mental health and mental wellbeing by situating mental wellbeing within the broader, overarching structure of mental health:

> Mental health...is a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community. (WHO, 2022b)

Keyes (2002a) operationalises mental health as "...a syndrome of symptoms of an individual's subjective well-being" and notes that social science scholarship in the field of mental health has sought to utilise conceptualisations of subjective well-being to explore the "measurement structure of mental health" (p.208). Likewise, in their report for the Government Office for Science Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project, Jenkins et al. (2008) acknowledge that positive mental health can be conceptualised as a positive sense of wellbeing. Regan et al. (2016) underscore the importance of mental wellbeing for individuals, families, and communities. These authors state, "Mental wellbeing protects the body from the impact of life's stresses and traumatic events, and enables the adoption of healthy lifestyles and the management of long term illness" (p.9). The Faculty of Public Health (FPH) (2019) notes that feeling good and functioning well are components of mental wellbeing that have been conceptualised within the field of positive psychology. With respect to the notion of functioning well specifically (which the FPH acknowledges pertains to psychological wellbeing), associated traits and competences include a sense of purpose, feelings of confidence and capability, development of one's potential, self-acceptance and self-awareness, agency, autonomy, and positive relations with others. Additional concepts associated with the FPH's conceptualisation of mental wellbeing include, but are not limited to, the ability to live a meaningful, purposeful life and to contribute positively to society, to experience feelings of happiness, joy, peace of mind, and contentment, and the ability to be confident and resilient. It is important to note here that the FPH recognises that mental wellbeing is inherently connected to both physical, emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing, the latter conceptualised as "the basis of social equality, social capital, [and] social trust" (ibid). The FPH deems that social wellbeing is a component of mental wellbeing in the sense that social and income equality, social capital, social trust, social connectedness,

social networks, and positive social relationships at various levels (i.e., one-to-one, group, family) are all essential contributors to the overall mental wellbeing of both individuals and wider society. The Government Office for Science's (2008) Foresight report devotes critical attention to the concept of mental wellbeing in their investigation into the future challenges associated with the development of mental capital and wellbeing over the life course, and the areas in which action and resources are most required. The term 'wellbeing,' which the Government Office for Science notes is representative of 'mental wellbeing,' is defined in the Foresight report as follows:

> …a dynamic state in which the individual is able to develop their potential, work productively and creatively, build strong and positive relationships with others, and contribute to their community. It is enhanced when an individual is able to fulfil their personal and social goals and achieve a sense of purpose in society. (Government Office for Science, 2008, p.45)

The Foresight report also equates the notion of mental wellbeing with the concept of 'positive mental health,' echoing the WHO's definition of mental health by emphasising that mental health is a positive condition not characterised by the mere absence of symptoms of mental ill-health or afflictions.

2.3.1 Conceptualising 'wellbeing'

It is unsurprising that wellbeing is an extremely broad and diverse concept, and although research on the topic has recently been expanding, difficulties in agreed-upon definitions, meanings, and measurements of the concept persist (Dodge, Daly, Huyton, & Sanders, 2012; Forgeard, Jayawickreme, Kern, & Seligman, 2011; Michaelson, Abdallah, Steuer, Thompson, & Marks, 2009; Smith, Fleeson, Geiselmann, Settersten Jr., & Kunzmann, 2001; White, 2010). The concept of wellbeing, according to Ryan and Deci (2001) is one that moves beyond a mere absence of mental illness and denotes "…optimal psychological functioning and experience" (p.142). Forgeard et al. (2011), recognising that the facets of wellbeing are numerous and that some measures have been subject to criticism, note that the primary constructs associated with the subjective measurement of wellbeing in research are as follows: happiness; positive

emotion; engagement ("a psychological state in which individuals report being absorbed by and focused on what they are doing"); meaning and purpose; life satisfaction; relationships and social support; and accomplishments and competence (pp.81-88).

It would be overly ambitious to attempt to focus on all aspects of wellbeing for the purposes of this study. Narrowing in on the concept of wellbeing and defining what is meant by it and how it will be used within this thesis is essential as it will set the groundwork for the theories, methods, analyses, and discussions within the three studies. Defining the concept of wellbeing in precise terms has proved rather difficult given its subjective, individually contextualised nature (White, 2010). Subjective and objective wellbeing have emerged as the primary two "conceptual approaches" used to explore the notion of wellbeing, with approaches to subjective well-being focusing on how individuals subjectively assess their lives, and approaches to objective wellbeing focusing on "objective components of a good life," (Western & Tomaszewski, 2016, p.1). Drawing on the literature which explores the objective and subjective dimensions of wellbeing (i.e., Bellani & D'Ambrosio, 2011; D'Acci, 2011; Diener & Suh, 1997), Western and Tomaszewski (2016) state:

> The objective approach defines wellbeing in terms of quality of life indicators such as material resources (e.g. income, food, housing) and social attributes (education, health, political voice, social networks and connections). The subjective approach emphasises subjective wellbeing, that is people's own evaluations of their lives, especially their life satisfaction (a cognitive evaluation), happiness (a positive emotional state) and unhappiness (a negative emotional state). (p.2)

Within the context of the present research and in keeping with the Government Office for Science's (2008) use of the terms and their acknowledged association between wellbeing and the notion of positive mental health, 'wellbeing' is conceptualised as 'mental wellbeing' (unless otherwise stated), and as such, the terms will be used interchangeably. The interchangeable use of these terms is consistent with Regan et al.'s (2016) contention that they are often used as such, theorising that this is perhaps done to offset "prevailing trends to focus on physical wellbeing" (p.10). Also consistent with the work of Regan et al. is the conceptualisation of

mental wellbeing within the present study as the positive end of a mental health spectrum, and the understanding that mental wellbeing is a concept that "sits outside the medical model" (p.14). The conceptualisation of wellbeing within this thesis is also derivative of the FPH's acknowledgement that mental wellbeing is inherently connected to both physical, emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing. The focus of the present research will be on a subjective understanding of conceptualisations of wellbeing and the qualitative expressions of elements of wellbeing, as the subjective experiences of participants within the three studies that comprise the overall research is at the forefront of the analysis, rather than objective, quantitative measurements of happiness and quality of life. The purpose of the research is not to utilise or empirically test measures of subjective well-being (SWB) that are prevalent within the field of psychology, rather it is to emphasise the subjective, personal nature of the term and to explore participants' experiences of the relationship between wellbeing and education within the prison setting. In addition, it is important to acknowledge that measurements of SWB focus on evaluations of overall satisfaction in life, feelings of happiness, and the absence of feelings of sadness or anger (White, Gaines Jr., & Jha, 2012). Given the difficulties embedded within a prison existence and the incapacitated context in which prisoners live, work, and study, the focus of SWB on measures of overall satisfaction with life as well as an absence of feelings of sadness or anger may represent a challenge to empirically exploring the impact of prison education on the SWB of incarcerated learners. However, in order to situate the scholarship on wellbeing within the overall aims of the research, it is important to briefly explore the literature on the concept of SWB that is firmly embedded within the field of positive psychology so as to ground the research within an understanding that recognises the personal nature of the term. It is important to note here that within differing understandings and indeed spellings of the term 'wellbeing,' the concept of wellbeing within the context of this thesis will be referred to as 'wellbeing' rather than 'well-being,' and the hyphen will only be included when remaining faithful to direct quotations that utilise this spelling, or when referring directly to the concept of SWB (as 'well-being' is the dominant spelling within scholarship of empirical approaches to SWB in the field of psychology). The justification for this decision is that by utilising the term 'wellbeing,' the space is created for qualitative, nuanced understandings and experiences of

wellbeing to be explored beyond the domain of quantitative measurements and empirical considerations of 'subjective well-being.'

2.3.1.1 Subjective well-being

The field of SWB refers to the study of feelings of happiness and life satisfaction and encompasses the empirical exploration of people's evaluations of their lives (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003). Ryan and Deci (2001) identify the three elements of SWB as life-satisfaction, the presence of positive mood, and the absence of negative mood, which, taken together, are frequently conceptualised as happiness. According to Diener (1984), "The literature on SWB is concerned with how and why people experience their lives in positive ways, including both cognitive judgments and affective reactions" (p.542). Diener and Ryan (2009) note that the way in which people evaluate their lives within the context of SWB can be both positive and negative in nature. Diener, Sapyta, and Suh (1998) assert that SWB is an "…indispensable component of positive psychological health…" (p.33), whilst Diener et al. (2003) consider positive SWB to be necessary for "…the good life and good society…," but acknowledge that positive SWB alone is not sufficient to achieve a good life (p.405). Through its inclusion of positive measures of wellbeing, SWB contrasts with typical measures of mental health that focus on the absence of negative indicators (Diener, 1984). Diener (1984) also notes that the emphasis of measures of SWB is usually on an "integrated" assessment of all components of an individual's life (p.544). Self-report surveys where respondents are asked to numerically evaluate their feelings on their levels of happiness and life satisfaction are typically the most common method used to evaluate SWB (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2005). The notion of 'subjectiveness' in SWB denotes an individual's assessment of their quality of life; that is, subjective measures of wellbeing are subjective precisely because they pertain to the sense of wellbeing for the individual who is experiencing it (Campbell, 1976). Likewise, in highlighting the capacity for people to respond to parallel experiences in different ways, Diener, Suh, Lucas, and Smith (1999) emphasise the criticality of the concept of subjectiveness in SWB, noting that "People react differently to the

same circumstances, and they evaluate conditions based on their unique expectations, values, and previous experiences" (p.277).

Deci and Ryan (2008) contend that the conceptualisation of wellbeing, though seemingly dominated by scholarship pertaining to the notion of SWB, can be understood from an alternative perspective, one that considers wellbeing to encompass more than just feelings of happiness. Marks and Shah (2004), in a wellbeing manifesto for the New Economics Foundation, similarly contend that wellbeing extends beyond conceptualisations of happiness, stating that, "Well-being is more than just happiness. As well as feeling satisfied and happy, well-being means developing as a person, being fulfilled, and making a contribution to the community" (p.9). Deci and Ryan (2008) maintain that wellbeing scholarship can be understood as belonging to one of two primary differing but interrelated strands – the hedonic and the eudaimonic. The former approach to wellbeing has generally been associated with subjective well-being and consists of conceptualisations of happiness (which Deci and Ryan note can be defined as the presence and absence of affective dimensions of wellbeing, namely positive affect and negative affect, respectively), whilst the latter pertains to the fulfilment of potential (i.e., self-actualisation), and "living life in a full and deeply satisfying way" (ibid, p.1). Keyes (2006a) notes that mental health within the hedonic tradition is equated with "…avowed happiness in life or the experience of positive emotions" whereas mental health within the eudaimonic tradition is equated with human potential, the actualisation of which leads to positive life functioning (p.396). The eudaimonic perspective of wellbeing views wellbeing more as a process whereby an individual realises their potential and fulfils their purpose, rather than an end state of being (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Notions of happiness and wellbeing within the eudaimonic tradition are considered, in essence, distinct from one another (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Within the eudaimonic approach, wellbeing diverges from the hedonic perspective in its emphasis on the potential for subjective experiences of happiness and pleasurable outcomes (i.e., hedonic desires) to be, at times, inconsistent with experiences of wellness (ibid).

Waterman (1993), in citing Norton (1976), notes that the concept of the daimon is an important aspect of the eudaimonic perspective of wellbeing, essentially referring to living life according to one's "true self." Waterman (1993) notes that the daimon denotes "...those potentialities of each person, the realization of which represents the greatest fulfillment in living of which each is capable" (p.678). These potentialities refer to both those that are common amongst human beings on account of our "shared specieshood," and those distinguishing potentialities that are unique within individuals (ibid). The experience of "eudaimonia," then, derives from attempts to realise potential and live in accordance with one's "true self", consistent with the idealistic nature of the daimon which denotes an ideal of excellence or perfection that is sought after, which Waterman subsequently contends can "...give meaning and direction to one's life" (ibid, p.678). Waterman (1990, as cited in Waterman, 1993) uses the term 'personal expressiveness' to denote the experience of eudaimonia that occurs when a person who is involved in an activity experiences one or more of the following six facets:

> (a) an unusually intense involvement in an undertaking, (b) a feeling of a special fit or meshing with an activity that is not characteristic of most daily tasks, (c) a feeling of intensely being alive, (d) a feeling of being complete or fulfilled while engaged in an activity, (e) an impression that this is what the person was meant to do, and (f) a feeling that this is who one really is. (p.679)

The concepts of self-realisation and personal expressiveness are thus central to the notion of eudaimonia as articulated by Waterman (1993), evidenced by the following excerpt identifying the way in which self-realisation and personal expressiveness are manifest within an eudaimonic tradition:

> In line with eudaimonist philosophy, it is expected that activities giving rise to feelings of personal expressiveness will be those in which an individual experiences self-realization through the fulfillment of personal potentials in the form of the development of one's skills and talents, the advancement of one's purposes in living, or both. (p.679)

Waterman's (1993) research attempted to empirically explore the possibility of distinguishing between personal expressiveness and hedonic enjoyment, two notions of happiness as

conceptualised by Aristotle. Waterman's findings suggest that the two conceptualisations of happiness are representative of experiences that are distinct from one another, although he did conclude that conceptions of personal expressiveness and hedonic enjoyment have a strong positive correlation. Notably, Waterman identified sentiments of competence, assertiveness, possessing clear goals, knowing how well one is doing, and feeling challenged, as being more strongly correlated with personal expressiveness, and sentiments of calmness, excitement, happiness, contentment, losing track of time, forgetting personal problems, and feeling relaxed, as more strongly correlated with hedonic enjoyment. As Ryan and Deci (2001) highlight, personal expressiveness, as per Waterman's study, was more strongly correlated to "activities that afforded personal growth and development" (p.146).

Forgeard et al. (2011) contend that the tendency amongst some researchers to focus on life satisfaction as the sole measure of wellbeing is detrimental in that it overlooks the often complex and versatile ways in which wellbeing is manifest. White (2010) acknowledges the incongruous, perhaps slightly oxymoronic nature of the quantitative research approaches that have dominated the study of a phenomenon that is concerned with subjectiveness, an element of wellbeing that White argues would seem to ostensibly be more appropriately aligned with qualitative approaches (ibid). Within the context of research that quantitatively assesses individuals' self-reports of their levels of happiness and quality of life, White (2010) argues that the focus of research on subjective wellbeing risks losing sight of the "subject" in the "subjective" (p.165). Drawing on her joint research with the Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) Research Group on Wellbeing in Developing Countries (WeD), White notes that the research aimed to maintain the centrality of the person within the conceptualisation of wellbeing. Within this approach to wellbeing, White (2010) suggests that, rather than being understood as a "…state that people do or do not experience," wellbeing should be conceptualised as a process, "…realised through the 'work' people put into making meaning out of their lives" (p.165). Additionally, in the context of the WeD research, White (2008) contends that an objective dimension of wellbeing may be difficult to justify if wellbeing is to be conceptualised as "person-centred" (p.5). White further notes that the WeD Research Group's

approach to wellbeing conceptualises understandings of wellbeing as constructs, derived from the social and cultural context in which they exist (ibid). White does not negate the importance of objective measurements of wellbeing, such as welfare and standards of living, but argues that such objective measures are naturally interconnected with the social and cultural (ibid). The WeD research views wellbeing as being a social process that incorporates material, relational (comprising the subdimensions of the social and the human), and cultural dimensions, and contends that these dimensions of wellbeing exist symbiotically (White, 2010). White asserts that wellbeing is grounded within relationships, and states that "Wellbeing may be assessed at individual and collective levels, but at base is something that happens in relationship [sic] – between individual and collective; between local and global; between people and state" (ibid, p.158). Within the understanding of wellbeing as a process, White recognises the shifting nature of understandings and experiences of wellbeing across time and space (ibid). The way in which people experience wellbeing and evaluate their lives is contextual and can therefore influence people's interpretations of and expectations for their past, present, and future. Crucially, White acknowledges the criticality of the element of space to the way in which people experience wellbeing, noting that "People's understandings of and capacities to achieve wellbeing depend critically on the geography of the space they are in" (ibid, p.166).

Lewis (2019) acknowledges the diverse, multidisciplinary nature of wellbeing and notes its prominence within such fields as philosophy, psychology, and economics. Wellbeing is a multifaceted concept positioned within a broad spectrum of research and as such, it must be conceptualised with consideration for the narrower context in which it will be explored, which, as it pertains here, is within the field of prison education. For the purposes of this thesis, the focus will be on the subjective nature of wellbeing as it is theorised that this approach best conceptualises the aspects of wellbeing that may emerge throughout the course of research on wellbeing and prison education. Particularly, the concepts of physical wellbeing, emotional wellbeing, psychological wellbeing, and social wellbeing have emerged in the literature as being inherently connected to the concept of mental wellbeing (The Faculty of Public Health, 2019). It is thus important to briefly qualify these terms here in order to establish the measures that

have provided the foundation for exploration into the relationship between prison education and wellbeing.

2.3.1.2 Physical, emotional, social, and psychological wellbeing

The Faculty of Public Health (FPH) (2019) recognises the interconnectedness of the concepts of physical and mental wellbeing. The Government Office for Science (2008) Foresight Project on Mental Capital and Wellbeing likewise draws attention to the reciprocal nature of the relationship between mental health, physical health, and wellbeing, identifying physical activity as one of five ways to improve individual wellbeing and noting the physical health repercussions that are associated with poor mental health and a deficiency of mental capital. In their report *No health without mental health: A cross-government mental health outcomes strategy for people of all ages*, the Department of Health (2011) stresses the significant impact of good mental health and wellbeing on a wide array of positive outcomes, including improved physical health.

Keyes (2002b) defines emotional wellbeing as "…individuals' avowed feelings toward, and emotional reactions to, their lives" (p.P518). Westerhof and Keyes (2010) further maintain that emotional wellbeing, (as compared to psychological and social wellbeing) is the dimension most often explored within mental health research. Keyes (2002a) notes that symptoms of emotional wellbeing are generally determined by measurements exploring the presence of positive emotions, feelings, and moods (affect) and absence of negative affect, as well as "perceived satisfaction with life" (p.208). Examples of positive affect as conceptualised by Keyes (2007) are being "regularly cheerful, interested in life, in good spirits, happy, calm and peaceful, full of life" (p.98), and an example of negative affect is not feeling hopeless (Keyes, 2002a). Emotional wellbeing has also been referred to as 'hedonic' wellbeing and focuses on feelings of "happiness, satisfaction, and interest in life" (Keyes, 2006b, p.4; Westerhof & Keyes, 2010, p.111).

From a theoretical perspective, Keyes (2006b), acknowledges the multifaceted nature of social wellbeing, defining it as "individuals' perceptions of the quality of their relationships with other people, their neighborhoods, and their communities" (p.5). In outlining his initial foray into social wellbeing research, Keyes takes a somewhat critical stance towards the eudaimonic tradition of wellbeing whereby he asserts there was a lack of acknowledgement of the social dimensions of functioning in life (ibid). Keyes (1998) maintains that life is comprised of challenges in both the private and public spheres, and despite the emphasis on wellbeing as predominantly belonging to the private sphere, there are equally significant social components of wellbeing that involve the ability to meet social challenges and function positively in society. Keyes' (2006b, 1998) model identifies the following five concepts as being key dimensions of social wellbeing: social coherence (perception that life is meaningful, predictable, reasonable, and understandable); social actualisation (the belief in the potential for social growth, a sense of hope for society's future); social integration (a sense of belonging to society, feeling accepted by society); social acceptance (acceptance of others); and social contribution (a sense of worthiness and being a valued member of society). From his research on social wellbeing, Keyes (2006b) recognises the public and private elements of wellbeing that exist within the eudaimonic tradition. Contrasting the private nature of psychological well-being which emphasises functioning in the private lives of individuals, social wellbeing "…represents a more public experience that is focused on the social tasks encountered by individuals in their social structures and communities" (Keyes, 2005b, p.5). The FPH (2019) acknowledges the correlation that exists between the distinct concepts of mental wellbeing and social wellbeing, and despite noting the confused use of the terms that tends to occur in the literature, the FPH emphasises that mental wellbeing is "inextricably linked, as both cause and effect, with social wellbeing." The FPH further emphasises that the mental wellbeing of individuals as a collective, whether at the group, community, or societal level, impacts upon social wellbeing, as does the quality of government and provision of support and services for vulnerable populations, equality in resource distribution, and social and cultural norms within the context of interpersonal relationships and interactions at the collective level which includes "respect for others and their needs, compassion and empathy, and authentic interaction" (ibid). The FPH's interpretation of

social wellbeing further recognises the importance of positive relationships amongst persons at the individual, small group and family levels as facets of social wellbeing that are also components of mental wellbeing.

According to Huppert (2009), psychological wellbeing generally refers to doing well in life, and encompasses the notions of feeling good and functioning effectively. Thus, sentiments of happiness, capability, life satisfaction, and being "well-supported" are often reported by those with high levels of psychological wellbeing (Winefield, Gill, Taylor, & Pilkington, 2012, p.2). Huppert (2009) further maintains that if negative emotions persist for too long or are overly severe in nature, thus negatively impacting one's ability to function effectively in life, psychological wellbeing can be impeded. In order to fill what she perceived as a theory-based gap in measures of psychological wellbeing, Ryff (1989) incorporated various conceptions of wellbeing and positive functioning from multiple sub-disciplines within the field of psychology to form a distinct theoretical six-dimensional model of psychological wellbeing (or positive functioning). Ryff aimed to establish a model of psychological wellbeing that could be empirically tested, but that also would not negate key factors of psychological human wellness that she argued previous studies failed to address (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Through operationalising and empirically testing the established dimensions, Ryff (1989) was able to determine that there were important indices of positive psychological functioning that were not present in previous theory and empirical research. The six dimensions of psychological wellbeing according to Ryff's (1989) model are as follows: autonomy (e.g., independence, self-regulation, and "an internal locus of evaluation, whereby one does not look to others for approval, but evaluates oneself by personal standards"); environmental mastery (e.g., competence in managing and exerting control over one's circumstances and environment, and the "effective use of surrounding opportunities"); personal growth (e.g., continuous personal development and improvement, self-actualisation, and "changing in ways that reflect more self-knowledge and effectiveness"); positive relations with others (ability to be empathetic and to love, positive interpersonal relationships, and concern for "the welfare of others"); purpose in life (e.g., "one who functions positively has goals, intentions, and a sense of direction, all of

which contribute to the feeling that life is meaningful"); and self-acceptance (e.g., "holding positive attitudes toward oneself') (pp.1071-1072).

2.4 The prison (education) system in England and Wales

2.4.1 The previous state of prison education

The Parliamentary Gaol Act of 1823, implemented by then British Home Secretary, Sir Robert Peel, represented the first "significant" requirement for the provision of education in prisons in England (Forster, 1996, p.101). This initial education provision required that reading and writing be taught in all prisons (ibid). In 1852, in regards to offering education beyond that of basic literacy to prisoners, Reverend Joseph Kingsmill, Pentonville prison's first chaplain (Carey, 2019, p.189) stated "To confer the advantages of a superior education on criminals I hold to be wrong in principle. A superficial one is worse than useless. What such men need is principle, and not mere intellectual development" (McConville, 1981, p.409). This statement reflected the dubious mentality of the times about the benefits of prison education (ibid). Following the Parliamentary Gaol Act, 1877 saw the introduction of The Prison Act, which provided the foundation of the modern prison system as it is today (Forster, 1996). Responsibility for prisons became centralised with the introduction of the Prison Act, and although provision for education in prisons remained, this provision was narrowly-focused and rigid in nature, governed extensively by rules and regulations rather than entrenched in altruistic principles (ibid). Post-World Wars I and II saw the first substantial advancements in prison education, with post-World War I (WWI) moving towards learning that included a range of eclectic activities such as crafts and debates, and post-World War II (WWII) including industrial training with the aim of utilising prisoners in factories upon release (ibid). In the years following the wars, a system was implemented in prisons whereby contracted education providers could deliver education in prisons on a regional basis through the Local Education Authorities (LEAs) (ibid). The funding of prison education by the Home Office and its contracted delivery by LEAs and Further Education (FE) providers remained the status quo in prison education provision until

1993, when a new competitive bidding process was introduced (Forster, 1996; House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005). Prison education services would now be delivered across a more expansive geographical region by external providers who would tender for five-year contracts which were "…based on the number of teaching hours delivered" (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005, p.9). A benefit of this new competitive tendering process was that prison governors could no longer subjectively choose which education programmes to discontinue; however, the loss of both flexible education provision that considered individual learners' needs and the local delivery of education were collateral damage of the change in the delivery of prison education (ibid). In 2001 there was yet another shift in the responsibility for prison education as the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) took over, and subsequently in 2004 the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), under the purview of DfES, became the department at the helm of education in prisons (ibid). The Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS), developed and funded by the LSC with the objective of improving the standards of education in prisons, began delivering education in prisons in England in 2006 (note that the provision of prison education in Wales is devolved and under the purview of the Welsh Government (Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills [DfIUS], 2007; Hanson, 2019; HM Government, 2005). The goal of OLASS was to offer a sole, cohesive educational service that would provide prisoners with the life and work skills (i.e., literacy, language, numeracy, and basic IT) required to meet the needs of potential employers upon release (Czerniawski, 2016; DfIUS, 2007). Indeed, according to the National Audit Office (2008), the principal objective of education provision through OLASS was to reduce recidivism through increasing the employability of offenders. However, Rod Clarke, CEO of the Prisoners' Education Trust, has criticised the OLASS contracts, indicating that the contracts were not "tailored towards the particular circumstances of a prison situation," due to being "set centrally" with minimal attention being paid to the individual needs of prisoners (Dobbs, 2019).

August of 2012 saw OLASS launch their fourth phase (Creese, 2016). In this iteration, prison governors had increased control over the education programme provisions that would be offered in their prisons. In this sense, governors, alongside OLASS, were able to choose

education provisions that were more reflective of the needs of their respective prison populations (ibid). Learning contracts for prison education were bid on by Further Education (FE) and private providers, with the successful bidders being Novus (The Manchester College), Milton Keynes College, Weston College, and PeoplePlus (Creese, 2016; Czerniawski, 2016). Each provider was responsible for providing education to prisoners in a specific area of England (Creese, 2016). The focus of the educational provisions within the OLASS 4 regime were results and employability-oriented, meaning that funding was based on a 'payment by results' model whereby performance was measured against the number of qualifications earned (Czerniawski, 2016, p.204; Prisoner Learning Alliance, 2017). Dame Sally Coates, in her 2016 review of education in prison, notes that, although the goal of OLASS 4 was to have prison governors be an integral part of the decision-making process with respect to the education curriculum in their prisons, it did not seem to be fully adopted by governors due to the lack of flexibility generated by restrictive education contracts (Coates, 2016).

2.4.2 The current state of prison education

Funding for prison education moved from the purview of the Department for Education (DfE) to the Ministry of Justice subsequent to the publication of the Coates Review in 2016 (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022). The contracts from OLASS 4 ended and a new bespoke system of education provision was implemented in April 2019 with the goal of improving the state of prison education (Sanders, 2020). Through the new Prison Education Framework (PEF) system, the four main providers of education in prisons in England remain Novus, Milton Keynes College, Weston College, and PeoplePlus to provide prisons with the core education requirements (ibid). Prison governors can use the PEF to purchase mandatory core educational requirements (of which there are less) through said providers, based on their prison's 'lot' number – lots are based on the location of the prison, and there is a total of 17 lots (Cooney, 2019). Prison governors can then also purchase more specialised education programmes through using the Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS), whereby education programmes can be selected by governors to suit the specific needs of their prison population (ibid). With increased

flexibility in choosing education programmes that suit the needs of their prisoners, prison governors have more control and autonomy with respect to their education budget – they can choose how much to spend on both PEF and DPS in order to best meet the education needs within their prisons (Woodley, 2018). With the implementation of these new changes to prison education, prison governors, should, in theory, also be able to hold PEF and DPS providers accountable for providing a sub-par level of service, if necessary, and to also request that a subsequent "improvement plan" be put in place (Cooney, 2019).

To date, the efficacy of the new prison education commissioning system has yet to be fully realised, as it is still too soon for the effectiveness of the new funding arrangements to be assessed (Prisoner Learning Alliance, 2019). The funding arrangements have, however, been criticised for decreeing autonomy for governors, when in actuality the contracts for the education providers were comprised of groups of prisons and were acquired by the MoJ, not chosen by individual prison governors (House of Commons Education Committee, 2021f). According to Sanders (2020), writing for the Prisoner Learning Alliance (PLA), "Governor autonomy remains more rhetoric than reality" (p.8). Criticisms of several other facets of the new commissioning process have also surfaced, including the bureaucratic nature of the DPS system, the inability of many previously contracted-out voluntary sector organisations to acquire contracts, increased pressure on prison educators and learners to complete courses within a reduced time, and the challenging nature of tendering for PEF contracts due to the potential risks incurred by prospective providers as a result of ambiguity surrounding class attendance figures. The difficulties in bidding and pricing for PEF contracts generated by the uncertainty in class attendance numbers resulted in a more narrowly-defined competition, whereby only those PEF providers who can safeguard against the risks associated with this uncertainty were in the running for contracts (House of Commons Education Committee, 2021f).

2.5 Prison education: impact and implications

Criticism remains regarding the capacity for research to determine the impact of education and other institutional programming on recidivism due to differing definitions of recidivism, variance in length of follow-up periods and the challenges around following research participants over lengthy time periods, inability to assess the impact of additional factors that may contribute to desistance (e.g., other prison programming, police activity), and a tendency to ignore incremental progress with respect to offending behaviour (Andersen & Skardhamar, 2017; Czerniawski, 2016; Gehring, 2000; Vacca, 2004). However, as both Farley and Pike (2016) and Duguid, Hawkey, and Pawson (1996) note, there has been investigative support for the argument that prison education in general can contribute to a reduction in the likelihood of reoffending (see for example, Chappell, 2004 and Davis, Bozick, Steele, Saunders, & Miles, 2013 for meta-analyses of studies exploring the recidivism-reducing impact of prison education).

The chance to participate in education in prison provides a positive opportunity that prisoners may have not had outside prison, perhaps due to previous negative educational experiences. The 2017-2018 HMIP and Youth Justice Board report on children in custody indicates that 89% of children in YOIs have been excluded from school at some point (HM Inspectorate of Prisons & Youth Justice Board, 2019). The prison experience can act as a tool of re-examination, whereby prisoners are able to reflect upon and re-evaluate their educational outlook and past experiences of education within the context of contemplating the future course of their lives (Hughes, 2012). In this sense, prison education can be an instrument of progress, enabling prisoners to play an active role in implementing changes they want to make in their lives and within themselves (Champion & Noble, 2016; Hughes, 2012). Hughes (2012) points to the notion of using education as a mechanism to "do something," in prison, rather than "doing nothing" or squandering the time with meaningless activities, a very realistic possibility within the context of a prison sentence (p.33). In Hughes' (2012) research on studying through distance learning in prisons, she established that prison learners perceive prison education as a means through which they can exert an element of control over their lives, and where

productivity is facilitated. Reuss (1997) conceptualises prison education as one of a varying set of "strategies" employed by prisoners to survive and cope with the experience of imprisonment (p.17), a mechanism that will be discussed further in section 2.5.4.

2.5.1 Basic education in prison

Prisoners in England and Wales suffer from significant levels of both literacy and numeracy deficiencies (Coates, 2016; SEU, 2002). The SEU (2002) has reported on the inadequate levels of basic skills amongst many prisoners, stating that "80 per cent have the writing skills, 65 per cent the numeracy skills and 50 per cent the reading skills at or below the level of an 11-year-old child" (p.6). Recent figures suggest that these levels have not changed considerably since the SEU's (2002) seminal report on reducing recidivism. Ministry of Justice statistics from April 2019 to March 2020 indicate that 61% of Maths and 57% of English initial education assessment results evaluated prisoners at entry levels 1-3 (Ministry of Justice, 2021a), which is equivalent to the literacy skills that someone aged nine to eleven is expected to possess (National Literacy Trust, n.d.). A historic and enduring focus on basic education and skills in the prison system in England and Wales, situated within the context of rehabilitation, has been influenced by a number of factors (Hughes, 2012). Hughes (2012) notes that, circa the 1990s, a reduction in courses pertaining to the arts, higher-level education, and various GCSE subjects was influenced by prison education budget cuts, the introduction of outsourced prison education contracts, and the establishment of nationwide Key Performance Targets (KPTs) that were directed at basic skills. In order to meet the required KPTs for Entry Level, Level 1, and Level 2 prisoner-earned qualifications, prisons had to conserve their budgets for courses at these levels, thus leading to the discontinuation of higher and wider educational offerings (ibid). Indeed, within the OLASS 4 regime, the provision of basic education in prisons in England was directed at entry level, Level 1, and Level 2 literacy and numeracy (Champion, 2015). During the reign of OLASS education contracts, OLASS was responsible for providing the following core education components:

- a mandatory assessment of maths and English attainment on reception to custody;
- basic skills: English, maths and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL);

- vocational qualifications;
- employability skills, which include a wide range of team working [sic], personal, social and other skills. (Coates, 2016, p.11)

Coates (2016) has recommended that prison education be holistic in nature, and that it develop the basic English, maths, and ICT (Information and Communication Technology) skills of learners through "…intensive courses, one-to-one support from other prisoners, or embedded in workshop or other work settings (e.g. kitchens and gardens)" so as to instil within the learner the necessary skills to progress to higher level learning at Level 3 and above (p.3). Bayliss (2003) supports the notion of embedding basic skills education into other forms of activity throughout the prison, and notes that it is not necessary for these skills to be taught in the classroom as the prison workshop, gym, and wings can also be effective places in which these skills can be learned. Bayliss notes that the teaching of basic skills should distance itself from a focus on what people are incapable of. This "deficit model," according to Crowther, Hamilton, and Tett (2001) stems from a typical view of literacy as "a ladder that people have to climb up," with literacy outcomes focused on individuals' skills deficiencies, placing them within the lower echelon of the ladder as they are ranked from low to high (p.2). These authors state "If, however, the emphasis is put on how adults can and want to use literacy, then this focus moves to what people have rather than what they lack, what motivates rather than what they need" (ibid).

Behan (2021) notes that formal primary, secondary, and vocational education is often free for prisoners in many countries. Indeed, with "prison-based" courses free for prisoners, and funding potentially available for distance education, Hughes (2012) notes that the capacity exists for prisoners to engage in education without the "immediate financial and time commitments" that dominate life outside of prison (p.27). This presents a unique opportunity for prisoners to both further their education, and to discover and pursue new areas of educational interest, regardless of experiences of education on the outside (ibid). Braggins and Talbot (2003) reaffirm the financial benefit of engaging in education in prison as compared to education in the wider community, reporting that prisoners in their Prison Reform Trust study

acknowledged the substantial financial impact of outside education, resulting in some participants contemplating that "…it was worth making the most of every opportunity prison had to offer" (p.40).

2.5.2 Further and higher education in prison

The definition of further education (FE) is "…any study after secondary education that's not part of higher education (that is, not taken as part of an undergraduate or graduate degree)" (GOV.UK, n.d.a). This could include A-level (advanced level qualifications) education, which are "…subject-based qualifications that can lead to university, further study, training, or work" (UCAS, 2020), as well as access modules, which give students the ability to sample higher-level education, but do not result in credits towards a degree (Coates, 2016). Higher education in the UK refers to courses typically offered in a post-secondary institution such as university, college, or specialist schools, and that lead to various credentials such as diplomas and degrees (GOV.UK, n.d.b).

The total number of OLASS-funded adult (18+) offender learners in prisons in England in 2017/2018 was 78,000, a decrease of 12.3% from the previous year (Department for Education, 2018). Prisoner-participation in funded Level 3 learning (e.g., A and AS levels, advanced apprenticeships, access to higher education diploma, international Baccalaureate diploma), has dropped off, with Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) (2018) noting that "The number [of prisoners] participating on level 3 courses has been in decline over time, dropping from a peak of 2,400 in 2012/13 to a low of 100 in latest published data [2016/2017]" (p.84). Coates (2016) theorises that the requirement for prison learners to take out student loans to engage in learning at Level 3 and above is a key disincentive to participate in higher education courses. Additional student loan concerns surfaced in Coates' report with respect to prison learners being unable to further their education behind bars once they have taken out a loan due to their transfer to another prison. Prison learning can often be interrupted as a result of prisoner transfers without a guarantee that learning will be able to be

resumed at the new institution (ibid). There are also student loan restrictions for prison learners that may impact their ability to acquire an education loan, as prison learners need to be within six years from their earliest release date to be eligible for a loan, and if they have already received a student loan as a learner outside of prison, they are not eligible to take out a second loan as an incarcerated student (ibid). With respect to the "six-year rule," Coates (2016) states, "This means that prisoners on longer sentences potentially face years of wasted time when, through HE study, they could have been developing skills and attitudes to become valuable members of the prison community" (p.41). Coates' review recommended that the "six-year rule" to be eased on an individual basis if prison governors believed that a prison learner "will benefit from additional time afforded to undertake funded studies towards a degree" (ibid, p.42). Alternatives to student loans for prisoners engaging in FE and HE study in prison are to either self-fund, perhaps with assistance from family or friends on the outside, which may not be an option for many prisoners without access to this type of assistance, or to apply for funding through a prison-education charity, such as PET (ibid). PET is a non-profit charity that provides distance-learning funding for prison learners wishing to undertake courses for subjects or at levels that are not typically available within the traditional prison education curriculum (Prisoners' Education Trust, 2020b).

The Prison Reform Trust (PRT) (2018) notes that the Open University (OU) is the platform by which many prison learners engage in higher education courses, reiterated by Pike and Adams (2012) who indicate that, whilst higher level education courses are delivered by a variety of providers, the OU is the "...largest provider of higher education in prison" (p.365). Distance education learning facilitates progression to higher-level learning in that prison learners benefit from the ability to transfer their course materials with them should they ever be moved to another institution, thus maintaining the continuity of their course progression (Coates, 2016). Students are also able to engage in a variety of subjects in distance learning that may not normally be available with traditional learning due to a lack of students taking the same subject (ibid). However, a significant challenge to distance-based learning is the lack of access prisoners have to digital learning technologies, particularly the internet, that are commonplace in the

wider community and that facilitate the delivery of education (Coates, 2016; Prisoner Learning Alliance, 2020). Calling for the improvement in educational technology in prisons, Coates (2016) argues that "Prison learners are charged the same amount to take OU or other distance-learning courses as non-prisoners, but they work at a disadvantage because of their very limited internet access" (p.42).

Support for higher-level learning in prison needs to be more robust. In Coates' (2016) review of education in prison, many involved in the prison system such as prisoners, officers and staff, educators, and governors lamented the lack of support available in prisons for those learners wishing to access courses at Level 3 and above. Coates states "The barriers to learning at Level 3 and above arise from a lack of leadership, support (funding, teaching, advice and guidance) and encouragement for prisoners to raise their aspirations" (p.39). In Bennallick's (2019) study on the Open Academy, a prisoner-directed initiative in HMP Swaleside which focused on the allocation of a dedicated wing-based learning space for those prisoners engaged in distance-based further and higher-level learning, it was noted that apathetic or openly adverse attitudes of prison officers could impact the educational experiences of prison learners and consequently the learning culture of the wider prison. Hughes (2012) similarly contends that prison learners face barriers to furthering their education with courses beyond the educational offerings at their respective prisons, including a lack of information about distance education opportunities and available funding options, as well as "…actual resistance to their educational plans" (p.64). Coates (2016) theorises that, during the OLASS administration, the needs of longer-term prisoners (those most likely to be able to engage in higher education), were not being met, as funding for OLASS was accreditation and outcome-based, which Coates posits led to a restricted focus on short-term, lower-level courses (i.e., those that would most often lead to qualifications). Coates goes on to say that it was her belief that the OLASS funding scheme effectively excluded prison learners from engaging in learning at a higher level, thereby suppressing their ambition and preventing them from developing both educationally and personally. Bennallick (2019) notes that there are often resource-related barriers to further and higher-level learning in prisons, with prisoners not having access to the materials, technology,

and time needed to engage in higher-level learning. Bennallick, in citing Hughes (2012), Nichols (2016), and Pike (2014), argues that the experiences of prisoners who aspire to engage in further and higher-level learning in prison can meaningfully differ from those of their counterparts in the community, particularly as a result of a lack of support and sense of community for those studying in prison, as well as from the limited access to technology and resources. In this way, Bennallick (2019) argues, there is a stark contrast in the way in which the notion of "studenthood" (referring to the development and presentation of a student identity and the way that student identity is experienced), is presented within the opposing settings of the prison and the community.

2.5.3 Education as rehabilitation

Underscoring the high degree of variance and disagreement over the roles and purposes of education and rehabilitation within the context of prison, Higgins (2021) notes that "There remains no consensus of how education and rehabilitation should be experienced and practised within the prison institution" (p.154). The concept of prison education programmes as a rehabilitative tool has shifted over time, and although in the past it may have been primarily concerned with the personal development of the offender and the reintroduction of prisoners back into society, it is now often grounded within a punitive discourse that equates rehabilitation with reducing recidivism, control, and risk management in order to protect the public (Behan, 2014; Crewe, 2012; Robinson, 2008; Warr, 2016). Indeed, Higgins (2021) contemplates the capacity for rehabilitation to "legitimise imprisonment" through institutional aims that emphasise the rehabilitative goals of public protection and safety, ultimately drawing focus away from support for incarcerated individuals (ibid).

Behan (2014) discusses the notion of "educational integrity" which denotes education grounded in "principles of pedagogy" (p.20). Behan asserts that, if education in prisons is going to have the capacity to bring about authentic personal transformation in prisoners, it needs to move away from the disciplinary goals of the penal institution (ibid). Behan posits that rates of

recidivism should not be used to judge the effectiveness of education, or as an indicator of change within an individual. When the focus of "prison pedagogy" (ibid, p.27) is too narrow, emphasising assessable outcomes or participation rates, the less tangible benefits of education on participating individuals and groups can be overlooked, which ultimately raises the question of the inherent purpose of education. Behan's study on the motivations of male Irish prisoners for participating in education in prison interestingly found that none of the inmates interviewed (n = 50), viewed education as an instrument of rehabilitation, and only one even mentioned the term "rehabilitation." Behan notes that "They [the interviewed prisoners] seemed to have no investment in the concept, considering it rather as a professionalised process, where they follow frameworks set out by the prison system, which immediately made them wary" (p.27). In citing the work of Rotman (1986), Behan (2014) provides commentary on Rotman's dichotomy of rehabilitation models, those being "authoritarian" and "anthropocentric" (p.21). Within the authoritarian model of rehabilitation, a model that is concerned with discipline, conformity, and compliance, rehabilitation is imposed upon individuals and is used as a "technical device to mold the personality of offenders and obtain their compliance with a predesigned pattern of thought and behaviour" (Rotman, 1986, p.1026). In contrast, the anthropocentric or "humanistic" model of rehabilitation sees the capacity for transformation as inhering within the individual, realised only through the process of self-reflection and self-discovery (ibid). Rotman states, "This [the anthropocentric] model does not rely on idealistic preaching to reintegrate offenders to a hostile society. Instead, humanistic rehabilitation offers inmates a sound and trust-worthy opportunity to remake their lives. Thus, this model seeks to awaken in inmates a deep awareness of their relationships with the rest of society, resulting in a genuine sense of social responsibility" (ibid, p.1026). Behan (2014) asserts that the anthropocentric model shares similarities with an approach that is typically espoused in adult education (i.e., one that acknowledges the significance of wider, contextual circumstances in which actions and decisions take place, and where independence, choice, agency, reflection, critical thinking, and personal awareness are emphasised). Likewise, Higgins (2021) notes the inconsistency between conventional, "top-down" models of rehabilitation whereby the prisoner lacks agency in their rehabilitative journey, and an emancipatory approach to education which underscores the

individual as "an expert in their own life" (p.151). Higgins asserts that the effectiveness of rehabilitation depends on its ability to distance itself from medicalised models that emphasise prisoners as passive subjects that need to be treated for their deficits (ibid).

2.5.4 Coping through education

The notion of prisoners using their time in prison to engage in education in order to cope with the day-to-day extreme reality of prison life has been well-documented in the literature. In her book *Understanding the Educational Experiences of Imprisoned Men: (Re)education* (2021), Nichols explores the ways in which adult male prisoners "interpret and give value to their experiences of education" and contemplates the utility of prison education in helping prisoners to cope with the prison experience, to re-evaluate their identities, and to "develop and maintain" relationships (p.ii). Nichols maintains that the ability of prisoners to cope with life in prison can be directly related to the ways in which prisoners choose to use their time in prison, and the pursuits that they choose to engage or disengage with (ibid). Through exploring the ways in which prisoners experience education in prison, Nichols contends that a greater understanding can be gleaned about the role that prison education can play in helping prisoners mentally and physically survive prison life (ibid). Reiterating the claims of both Hughes (2000, 2012) and MacGuinness (2000), Nichols (2021) suggests that the potential for prison education to serve an important coping function seems especially important for those prisoners serving long sentences, for whom the likelihood of utilising employment-related skills gained in prison is a remote prospect. Nichols incorporates a discussion on the pains of imprisonment from both a historical perspective (Sykes, 1958), and a more contemporary view (Crewe, 2011), and notes how education can be a valuable tool in ameliorating some of the negative aspects of prison life. In this sense, Nichols (2021) suggests that prisoners may experience both the 'classic' pains of imprisonment as identified by Sykes (1958) (deprivation of liberty, deprivation of goods and services, deprivation of heterosexual relationships, deprivation of autonomy, and deprivation of security), as well as more contemporary deprivations brought about by updated penal institutional policies and procedures (Crewe, 2011). The more modern pains of imprisonment as

identified by Crewe (2011) are facilitated by contemporary penal practices and include "uncertainty and indeterminacy" (e.g., uncertainty associated with release dates for those whose sentences are indeterminant; unpredictability of inconsistent use of penal power), "self-governance" (e.g., an indirect influence of power that shapes prisoners into compliance through required behavioural self-regulation), and "psychological assessment" (e.g., pains related to the weight and primacy of psychological assessments in prisons whereby prisoners' identities become reconstituted through narratives of risk) (pp.513-520). In addition, Nichols (2021) notes that there is an increasing digital divide between prisoners and those in the general community, as the technology that is present in the outside world that facilitates communication with loved ones is not available for prisoners in the same capacity. This widening divide is especially realised with respect to education in prison whereby the digital tools which could enable prisoners to more easily complete educational courses are limited (ibid).

Nichols (2021) explores the idea that engagement in prison education can assuage some of the above-named pains of imprisonment, a potentiality also acknowledged by Hughes (2012). Prisoners are given the chance to mentally escape by engaging in prison education, as well as the opportunity to use time positively whilst engaging in educational activities that keep them mentally stimulated (Nichols, 2021). Through being given the opportunity to engage in what could be considered a relatively "normal" activity "in an otherwise abnormal environment," prison education can empower prisoners and bestow upon them an increased sense of normality and autonomy when they are given more control over their educational decision-making (ibid, p.129). Through using education in prison as a coping mechanism, prisoners are also given the chance to engage in a valuable process of self-reflection (ibid). The opportunity to re-examine conceptions of their past selves and previous experiences of education can enable the reconstitution of identity in prisoners and the development of self-confidence, positive views of self, and "previously unrealised" skills (ibid, pp.64, 113). According to Nichols,

> The coping skills developed, and the self-confidence achieved from a positive education experience in prison can help those released to maintain a sense that they can be a re-worked version of themselves and that a return to an old identity is not the only choice

they have. The constant renegotiation of identity that forms an embedded aspect of desistance stems from the initial re-conception of self which can be born out of an educational experience." (ibid, p.127)

Hughes (2012) likewise contends that participating in prison education can be a valuable mechanism with which to cope with life in prison by helping prisoners deal with their time productively and to mark the passage of time in a meaningful way. Hughes (2012) highlights Cohen and Taylor's (1972) contention that the ability for prisoners to observe the passage of time through their progression through education in prison becomes especially important for those prisoners serving long sentences. Through providing prisoners with an outlet through which they can combat boredom, education in prison can keep prisoners' minds active, engaged, and stimulated (Hughes, 2012). Hughes further contends that engagement in prison education can positively impact prisoners' capacities to cope with their prison existence by helping them prepare and plan for their futures and by tailoring their educational experiences in prison to suit their interests and goals. Through participation in prison education, prisoners are given the chance to actively engage with a productive activity over which they can exert some personalisation, influence, and control, an arguably rare feat within the characteristically disempowering and deindividualising environment of prison (ibid).

Harvey (2007), in his research exploring the experiences of young men in prison, identifies three ways in which young, imprisoned men were required to adapt to the environment of prison throughout the first month of incarceration: practically; socially; and psychologically. From a practical perspective, these individuals were required to learn the ins and outs of the prison regime, for example, by learning what kinds of things they were permitted to keep in their cells, how to spend their canteen money, where to apply for and how to attend activities within the prison such as work, education, and the gym, and the proper regime procedures to follow. Socially, these men needed to learn how to interact with each other and prison staff. For example, they needed to learn how and when to seek support from staff, how to establish trust and engage with prison staff respectfully, how to appropriately interact and integrate with their fellow prisoners, and how to keep in contact with their loved ones in the community.

Psychologically, young men in prison needed to find a way to manage stressful situations effectively internally and externally, whilst also self-regulating their varying emotional states. Harvey contends that the three ways in which young men in prison adapt to their circumstances interacted with each other at three progressive stages. Prisoners could experience differing adaptive capabilities whilst moving dynamically through the three stages.

Young male prisoners who remained in the 'liminality' stage, the first of Harvey's (2007) identified stages of adaptation, struggled to accept and adjust to the reality of their life in prison, thus their adaptation remained stagnant as they had difficulty coping with the prison environment. Prisoners who remained at this stage had difficulty regulating "their thoughts and emotions" and experienced continuing feelings of uncertainty, a lack of control, and a lack of safety, and therefore struggled to settle into their prison term as they were still working out how to exist and adapt to their new reality where their freedom and autonomy were severely restricted (ibid, p.63). In the second stage of adaptation, which Harvey designates as 'acceptance,' he notes that young male prisoners started to come to terms with the reality of their lives in prison and thus had generally started their practical, social, and psychological adaptation. Individuals within the 'acceptance' stage started to become more "embedded within the social and psychological world of the prison," making the conscious choice to settle into their prison sentence within the institution in which they were housed (ibid, p.65). Prisoners within this stage of adaptation began to exhibit better emotional regulation, although there were still challenges associated with cognitive avoidance of negative or stressful thoughts. According to Harvey, this stage of adaptation denotes the point whereby young male prisoners started to exert some control over their environment and the ways in which they used their time. Within this stage, whereby feelings of safety and security were more pronounced, prisoners began to more easily adapt socially and found it easier to interact with their peers as well as to connect with loved ones outside of prison. Finally, as prisoners moved towards the third stage of adaptation, which Harvey identifies as 'equilibrium,' young men in prison became more accustomed to the prison regime and started to become "active participants" in their environments "in order to make the most of the difficult situation…" (ibid, p.70). In the

'equilibrium' stage, young male prisoners began to exhibit feelings of positivity and optimism more easily and were more adept at self-regulating their thoughts and emotions and managed their distress with increasing ease. Harvey found that whilst consideration of the amount of time an individual prisoner had spent in prison was an important element in the "process of adaptation," the more defining factor in young, imprisoned men's ability to move through the adaptation process related to their ability to "draw on internal and external resources available…," which was subsequently reflected by the fact that prisoners had differing experiences of moving through the three stages of adaptation (ibid, p.59).

2.5.5 The purpose of prison education

At the pinnacle of the discussion around the use of education in prisons is the question of the purpose of prison education; ultimately, why prison education exists and whom it is for (Reuss & Wilson, 2000). Reuss and Wilson (2000) note that in order for prison education to be viewed as meaningful by those that are arguably impacted most, the prisoners, it needs to be conceptualised by prisoners themselves as worthwhile. The rehabilitative potential of prison education then, for Reuss and Wilson, becomes something that needs to go beyond the basic measure of contributing to a reduction in recidivism (ibid). According to MacGuinness (2000), "The strongest contribution to the discussion of factors influencing participation in prison education must ultimately come from inmates themselves" (p.89). Unfortunately, prison learners' desire to learn for no other reason than the aim of seeking to expand one's knowledge, or "learning for learning's sake," does not seem to be embraced within the context of prison education due to the challenge of prison education provision being situated at the juxtaposition of opposing penal and educational principles (Reuss & Wilson, 2000, p.175). Reuss and Wilson (2000) note that "the way forward" in the education of prisoners must consider the following: the experiences and voices of prisoners when assessing the role and future of prison education provision; the capacity for prison education to empower prisoners as individuals from a personal growth and development perspective; and the capacity for engagement in prison

education to enable prisoners to exert an element of choice and control over their futures and how they spend their time in prison.

According to Taylor (2004) in his article *Piecing together a College Education behind Bars*, "The single most important reason for anyone, but especially a prisoner, to pursue a college education is how it will make him or her feel" (p.76). Taylor notes that accessing higher education as a prisoner can lead to increased feelings of self-esteem and confidence, in addition to improving feelings towards and the treatment of others and fostering analytical thinking and reasoning skills (ibid). Similarly, in his study in the United States on 158 male prisoners' perspectives on accessing college education whilst incarcerated, Tootoonchi (1993) notes that the majority of participants indicated that an increase in their feelings of self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-awareness was facilitated by participating in college education in prison. Reuss (1999) introduces the concept of 'weaving' to explore the relationship between education and transformation that she observed occurring amongst learners in the prison classroom during her experience as a prison educator and researcher. Reuss describes outcomes of the learning process as a "synthesis" of the learning experience with prisoners' previous knowledge and experiences, which has the capacity to impact upon learners in meaningful ways (p.118). The 'weaving theory of learning' is conceptualised by Reuss as a social process by which transformation can *potentially* [emphasis added] occur within prison learners through the gradual integration of new knowledge gained through education with the experiences, memories, histories, identities, and knowledge that inheres within individuals beyond their prison existences. Challenging the simplistic conceptualisation of prison education as filling prison learners' 'empty bucket' with new knowledge that occurs only inside the vacuum of the classroom, Reuss acknowledges the complex nature of the social process of learning and highlights the dynamicism present in prison learners' life and educational experiences that 'weave' together with learned information in the social context of the prison classroom to impact a learner's capacity to change their offending behaviour. Reuss stresses that learning experiences become meaningful for learners when they are able to exhibit choice and control over the integration of knowledge within the 'weaving' process; that is, when they are able to

decide for themselves what knowledge to preserve and what to "filter" out rather than the educator or prison dictating what the learner should retain (p.118). It is when these learning experiences are interpreted as meaningful or important that the capacity for transformation emerges. Reuss advocates for an 'empowerment' model of prison education that underscores the capacity for prison learners to exhibit autonomy in their choices and decisions over how they spend their time in prison.

Hughes (2000) lends support to the purpose of education discussion in her Prisoners' Education Trust (PET) study on prison learners' self-reports of how prison education has impacted them. Hughes analysed 71 letters written by prisoners to PET thanking the organisation for being awarded educational funding in the hopes of gaining a better understanding of the prisoner-reported benefits of engaging in education in prison (ibid). Hughes' findings indicate, perhaps unsurprisingly, that a number of the letters analysed iterated a goal of accessing education and gaining qualifications in prison in order to construct a better future, one that, for example, includes better employment opportunities. However, a number of the analysed letters also referred to education as a tool utilised to help prisoners adjust to and cope with the new reality that is prison life (ibid). Hughes states, "…participation in education can provide mental stimulation, personal satisfaction, a boost to self-confidence, a sense of purpose and a way to spend one's time constructively – experiences not typically associated with the serving of a prison sentence" (ibid, p.143). Hughes points out that to prisoners serving lengthy custodial sentences, the prospect of future opportunities is so distant that the benefit of utilising prison education as a coping mechanism becomes especially important. The feelings of increased self-confidence that can be facilitated by participating in prison education, as depicted in Hughes' letter analysis, can seemingly be experienced through various aspects of the educational experience, for example through the realisation of educational goals, by passing a course, by being recognised for an achievement or improvement, or even by helping fellow prisoners (ibid).

MacGuinness (2000) echoes Hughes' depiction of the lengthy-sentenced prisoner as someone who may seek value in learning in prison as a means to survive life in prison. MacGuinness states, "For many people who have had to endure such a prison sentence, keeping their mind active by learning has played an important part in maintaining their ability to live within extreme situations, and to survive all kind of deprivations" (p.85). MacGuinness goes on to note that, through learning and academic achievement, prisoners can experience increased levels of self-esteem and become resilient towards the psychologically volatile nature of imprisonment.

2.5.6 Prison learners' educational motivations

The relationship between motivation and wellbeing is of significance within the context of this thesis. Emmons (2003) notes that "Goals have been identified as key integrative and analytic units in the study of human motivation," and further acknowledges that the accomplishment of goals can be understood as a "major benchmark for the experience of well-being" (p.105-106). With consideration of the potential relationship between motivation for participating in prison education and the wellbeing of prison learners, it is important to briefly explore the literature pertaining to prison learners' educational motivations. The motivations for engaging in education in prison identified in the research synthesised below are not dissimilar in nature. In the varying contexts in which research into prison educational motivations has been employed, comparability in themes is evident.

MacGuinness' (2000) study of the motivations of adult males in a Category A dispersal prison in England to begin a formal educational programme uncovered a diverse range of educational motivations that MacGuinness grouped into four categories. These categories included beginning education to catch up, to stay occupied, to improve future employment opportunities, and to cope with the prison experience and deal with the time they had been given. Utilising questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and group discussions, MacGuinness found that over half (54%) of her participants identified starting formal education in prison to 'catch up' on a deficit in educational attainments prior to prison (which they indicated impacted

negatively on their self-esteem), highlighting the fact that prison learners are attuned to the societal value of educational achievement. None of the nine individuals that participated in the semi-structured interviews identified participating with prison education to improve future employment prospects, which MacGuinness theorised could be explained by the life sentences being served by the majority of the nine interviewees. The narrative within MacGuinness' classification of motivations pertaining to 'catching up' draws on prison learners' lack of achievement in initial education prior to prison, and a subsequent non-participation in further formal educational pursuits. MacGuinness highlights how the context of education in prison, where the provision of education is a component of the institution and where participation in purposeful activity is mandatory, can offer learners an opportunity to engage with education in an environment with similarly situated peers. It is in this context that prison learners, particularly those from working-class communities where unfavourable attitudes towards education may be prevalent, may be able to experience a diminished impact of negative peer attitudes towards formal education and shed the stigma associated with the institution of school that may have been present in their communities prior to prison.

In Braggins and Talbot's (2003) Prison Reform Trust study exploring prison learners' experiences of education, motivations for undertaking education included feeling like there were no other options, exploring educational interests, self-improvement, and bettering employment opportunities. Braggins and Talbot also found that whilst some prison learners spoke of the importance of earning qualifications as a motivational factor in enrolling in prison education, particularly when certificates did not identify that the qualification was earned in prison, others identified the educational "process," the self-esteem improvements, or the new skills offered by education as potentially being more important than the qualification itself.

Hughes' (2012) seminal qualitative work on the role of distance learning in prison education has been influential in highlighting the educational decision-making process of those in prison who engage in education. Contextualising her discussion by exploring the pre-prison life and educational experiences of prison learners, Hughes demonstrates that prisoners' interest in

engaging with distance learning in prison is multifaceted and can be shaped by numerous aspects of life prior to and during incarceration, including the nature of the prison environment and aspects of the wider prison culture in which prison learners make their educational decisions. Hughes acknowledges that the motivations of some study participants to engage in education in prison related to pre-incarceration educational choices and aspirations. Some prison learners expressed motivations associated with having been recently engaged with education prior to entering prison; thus, a desire to continue educational pursuits in prison was a "natural extension of their educational choices" made before imprisonment (p.26). Other learners expressed aspirations of engaging with adult education prior to prison that were not realised due to financial or circumstantial barriers. Further motivations as identified by those undertaking education in Hughes' research related to striving for a better future, including securing better employment opportunities and making positive personal changes. Hughes further highlights the capacity for the prison environment to shape prison learners' decisions to undertake education in order to cope with certain negative elements of a prison existence through biding their time purposefully and constructively. Alternatively, as Hughes asserts, prison can also play an active role in encouraging prisoner-participation in education when the environment is "constructive and dynamic" (p.40), where prisoners are exposed to innovative programming and ideas, and where the attitudes of other prisoners and staff within the prison and educational departments facilitate decisions to participate in education. Additionally, a prison environment that offers opportunities for prisoners to improve self-confidence, for example by seeing other prison learners accomplish educational goals or through engaging with fellow prisoners and prison personnel whose personalities facilitate improved self-confidence, can be valuable motivational tools for prisoners to begin education.

Drawing parallels with both MacGuinness' (2000) and Hughes' (2012) research, Behan (2014) explores the educational motivations of Irish prisoners; however, Behan's discussion is grounded in the relationship between education and rehabilitation, reflecting upon whether the modern prison creates space for the reform and transformation of individuals. Drawing on Rotman (1986), Behan explores the place of prison education within the narrative of rehabilitation, with

specific consideration of the context of adult education (which emphasises transformative learning) as distinct from the prison-centric goals of discipline, conformity, and control that are characteristic of authoritarian rehabilitation (as previously discussed). Behan's findings are indicative of a comparability between the educational motivations of prison learners and those of adult learners in the community; however, Behan identifies key factors that distinguish the motivations of those engaged in education in prison by virtue of their incarcerated existence. These facets include being isolated, feeling lonely, feeling bored, and a desire to create an alternative to the prison-enforced regime. Behan's findings lend themselves to an understanding that the educational motivations of prison learners are complex and multifaceted, with Behan acknowledging that participants often identified a primary and multiple secondary reasons for participating in prison education. Behan identifies four, non-mutually exclusive categories derived from the primary motivation identified by study participants for engaging in education in prison, which he acknowledges echo the categories identified by MacGuinness (2000): preparation for employment post-release and "second-chance" education (the motivation acknowledged by the largest number of respondents in Behan's study); a way to pass the time; a strategy to cope with and escape the prison regime; and personal transformation and capacity to engage in critical thinking. Notably, Behan draws attention to the development of changing views on the role of prison education amongst his participants as time passed. Whereas initial reasons for participation in prison education may have been to simply keep busy, subsequent perceptions of prison education may have reflected an understanding of the transformative potential of education, or the way in which education could help prepare for release. Hughes (2012) similarly emphasises the fluctuating nature of prison learners' decisions to undertake and subsequently continue engaging with prison education, acknowledging the "multi-causal, fluid, and contextualised nature of educational decision-making" (p.25). Behan (2014) ultimately acknowledges the challenging nature of creating space for a learning environment with authentic transformative potential within the coercive correctional context, and asserts that prison education should continue to distance itself from compulsory rehabilitative programming.

As part of their research on the key rehabilitative and desistance-based role sports-based learning in prison can play in the lives of prisoners, particularly in relation to education, desistance, and employment outcomes, Meek, Champion, and Klier (2012) explore the educational motivations of prison learners to engage in sports-based learning in prison. Findings from the *Fit for Release* report (Meek et al., 2012), which employed a content analysis of letters written by prison learners to PET in application for sports-based educational funding, were separated into the categories of pre-release and post-release motivations. With respect to pre-release motivations for undertaking sports-based qualifications in prison, findings indicated that the primary motivation of prison learners related to supporting existing educational attainments, but motivations were also associated with furthering educational goals in prison, helping other prisoners, promotion of physical and mental health, and using time in a meaningful way. With respect to post-release outcomes, Meek et al. found that the motivation for undertaking sports-based learning alluded to by the majority of prison learners in their letters was associated with gaining employment upon release. However, further notable motivations as expressed by prison learner participants included the notion that engaging in sports-based learning in prison would facilitate further educational progression, contribute to healthier lifestyles, promote better mental health and wellbeing, improve management of substance misuse, benefit children and family members, improve levels of self-esteem, confidence, and motivation, alleviate boredom, and aid in desisting from crime upon release from prison. The *Fit for Release* study succeeded in emphasising the way in which sports-based learning can be an important tool in promoting rehabilitation and desistance. As evidenced by Meek et al., sports-based learning in prison can act as valuable alternative for hesitant learners who have experienced challenges engaging in traditional education-based settings or in other resettlement programming within prison, particularly when fundamental learning and employability skills are embedded within sports-based activities.

The evolution of prison education in England and Wales has seen some important changes that have aimed to improve a prison education system that has been inundated with challenges. Overcrowding, staff turnover, resource and time limitations, technology restrictions, lack of educational opportunities for prisoners, short custodial sentences, competing regime demands, physical space restrictions and deficiencies, prisoner transfers between institutions, and unconstructive staff attitudes towards prison education, have all been identified as barriers to prisoners accessing education in prison (Bracken, 2011; Braggins & Talbot, 2003; Hawley, Murphy, & Souto-Otero, 2013; House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005). Ofsted, in their 2017/2018 annual report, note that prisons operating at substandard levels generally experience challenges such as: lockdowns due to staff shortages resulting in education class cancellations; lack of full-time opportunities for skills, education, and work (especially in institutions that are overcrowded); absence of monitoring and quality-control measures with respect to learning activities; diminished range of activities and training which causes deficiencies in preparing prisoners for resettlement upon release; and lack of recording the progress that prisoners participating in work have made with respect to their developed skills, leaving them in the dark with respect to their personal levels of achievement (Ofsted, 2018). The SEU (2002) indicates that the disruption to learning caused by the movement of prisoners between institutions is exacerbated by the education records of prison students not following them to their new institution. It is noted that "In such circumstances, new arrivals will go to the end of any queue for courses and may well waste initial investment by having to repeat a course." (SEU, 2002, p.49). More than ten years on from the SEU report, Coates (2016) observes that the lack of fluidity in prisoners' educational attainments and progress following their movement between prisons remains an issue, indicating that prisoners may have to restart courses if the awarding body used by the education provider at their new prison differs from their previous institution.

In their study on the prisoners' experiences of prison education and perceptions of education quality in Norwegian prisons, Diseth, Eikeland, Manger, and Hetland (2008) found that participants' experiences suggested that quality of education in prison can be negatively affected by education-related barriers facing prison learners. Diseth et al. note that "…inadequate access to computer equipment, security routines, transfer between prisons during education, disturbances in prison, and lack of access to literature interfere with their education in prison" (p.209). Further issues also surfaced for the prisoners in Diseth et al.'s study, such as being released prior to completing their educational course(s) in prison and learning problems in relation to literacy and mathematics. A 2013 European Commission report on the state and challenges of prison education in Europe further reiterates the barriers reported in the study by Diseth et al. (Hawley et al., 2013). Such barriers arise relative to prisoners' previous life and educational challenges, including an underprivileged background, past negative experiences of education, disability, and deficits in self-esteem. Challenges also surface with respect to the education-related institutional logistics of imprisonment, such as prisoners being transferred to another institution mid-study, insufficient levels of staff and resources, lack of variance in the levels and types of educational courses on offer, and "limited availability of places for learners" (Hawley et al., 2013, p.53). Citing the Ministerial Foreword in a 2011 Ministry of Justice *Review of Offender Learning* (Department for Business Innovation & Skills, 2011), Czerniawski (2016) characterises many of the same institutional challenges identified above as "inflexibilities" of the prison education system, noting that critics of the OLASS tenure questioned the ability for OLASS to cater to a prison population with diverse learning needs.

2.5.7.1 Challenges to prison education: perspectives of the prison staff

A number of staff-related challenges present themselves in the context of barriers to prison education. Shortages in officer staffing in prisons is often perceived as a significant obstacle to the delivery of effective prison education programming (Bracken, 2011; Hawley et al., 2013; House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005). A memorandum submitted by the

Prison Reform Trust to the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee's (2005) report on prison education emphasises the impact of staff deficiencies on the ability of prisoners to attend education or training programmes: "Staffing shortages mean that prisoners do not get unlocked and taken to education or training programmes simply because there are not enough staff on the wing to escort them to another part of the prison" (p.79). Prison officers' attitudes towards education in prison can also be seen as a barrier to the successful delivery and development of prison education programmes (Bracken, 2011; Braggins & Talbot, 2005; House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005). Cynical and suspicious mentalities amongst officers are common elements of the professional prison culture (Crawley & Crawley, 2008). Prison officers have used the term "suspicious dinosaurs" to describe themselves (Braggins & Talbot, 2005, p.24), and Pawson (2000) notes that, "By instinct and training, prison officers and officials are suspicious and circumspect" (p.67). Whilst some prison officers assert the importance of education in prison and remain positive about and encouraging of prisoners' ventures into education in prison (Braggins & Talbot, 2005), others remain cynical and unsupportive of prison education and resent the educational opportunities offered to prisoners, for example, in comparison to their own lack of opportunities (Bayliss, 2003; Braggins & Talbot, 2003, 2005; House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005). In referencing a 2010 report by Rachel O'Brien from the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) entitled *The Learning Prison*, Hawley et al. (2013) state, "Where prison officers themselves have low levels of qualifications, there may be some issues regarding their understanding of the value of education for prisoners. They may feel that prisoners are offered more opportunities than they themselves, or others in the 'outside' community, are" (p.46). Nonetheless, prison officers who may be more receptive to the goals of prison education may experience time, work, and security constraints that do not allow them to involve themselves in the promotion and support of prison education (Braggins & Talbot, 2005).

Within the punitive regime of the prison environment, security remains the top priority of prison officers (Bayliss, 2003; Braggins & Talbot, 2005), which can conceivably present difficulties in the capacity for officers to maintain focus on activities such as prison education. In

their 2004-2005 report on prison education, the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee (2005) claims, "It is not surprising that education is hindered by other demands within the prison regime because it holds a very low position of priority" (p.77). Some of the difficulty may lie in reconciling the competing priorities of the security-focused prison officer with the educational focus of prison education staff. The dangerousness and volatility of some prisoners themselves can also create difficulties for prison officers and education staff, as activities such as education can pose threats to the security that prison officers are trying to maintain (Bayliss, 2003).

Prison officers have, at times, expressed frustration at the ways in which the role of the prison educator can hamper the maintenance of security within the prison (Braggins & Talbot, 2005). In their 2005 study *Wings of Learning: The Role of the Prison Officer in Supporting Prison Education*, Braggins and Talbot (2005) note that discussions with most of the prison officer participants indicated that security was their primary responsibility. When officers perceived this operational obligation to not be fully respected by educational staff, trepidations emerged with respect to the ability of officers to maintain their operational responsibilities (ibid). Braggins and Talbot note, "…officers expressed concern about what they saw as inadequate levels of security and/or discipline exercised by education staff, which, if things went wrong, it would be left to the officers to deal with. Officers were highly critical of teachers who did not seem, in their view, to have their wits about them in terms of security" (ibid, p.35). Prison officers may find it difficult to appreciate educators within the prison, as educators are often perceived as "outsiders coming in to do the easy work" (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005, p.79). The competing priorities of prison officers and prison educational staff mirrors the larger context of an inherent discord in the differing policies, practices, and values of the penal and educational systems (Patrie, 2017); that of security, punishment, control, and limitations on autonomy and choice that represent the penal system, and that of personal development, transformative learning, and critical thinking that arguably represent the aims of adult education (Bayliss, 2003; Behan, 2014; Higgins, 2021; Patrie, 2017; UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2016). As Higgins (2021) asserts, "Imprisonment is the manifestation of

control, while adult education can be understood as the practice of freedom" (p.151). Patrie (2017) reiterates the divide between the philosophies of prison and education and notes that "irreconcilable differences" can exist in the goals of the criminal justice and educational systems (i.e., "education, rehabilitation, and successful re-entry"), despite the theoretical commonalities (p.19). Patrie notes that prison educators can encounter difficulties in their attempts to effectively deliver an adult education agenda within prisons, as they endeavour to reconcile the opposing ideologies of the prison and education systems.

2.5.7.2 Challenges to prison education: perspectives of the prison educator

A considerable challenge to the success of education programmes in prison relates to the role of the prison educator. According to Forster (1996, p.102), prison educators do not work "in an institution with a clear-cut 'mission statement.'" Indeed, the cyclical debate about the purpose(s) of prison seems to habitually straddle the lines between punishment, control, incapacitation, deterrence, retribution, reform, and rehabilitation (Bayliss, 2003; Czerniawski, 2016), all converging within the confines of correctional education. The requirement to "keep pace" with evolutions in training and mainstream education practices and provision can create challenges for prison educators (Hawley et al., 2013), particularly when considering that prison educators must often carry out their duties with a lack of appropriate resources (Rogers, Simonot, & Nartey, 2014). For example, prison educators contend with the delivery of education within a context where access to digital technologies is severely inhibited (University and College Union & Prisoner Learning Alliance, 2021). The lack of access that prison learners have to digital learning technologies also acts as a substantial learning barrier in prisons, contributing to a continually increasing "digital divide" between prisoners and the general population (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022, p.5).

Correctional educators may also experience feelings of isolation from their mainstream education counterparts (Hawley et al., 2013; Meek & O'Connor, 2018). This is due in part to educators within the community lacking awareness and understanding of the challenging

nature of working in the prison environment, and to the limited opportunities that exist for prison educators to liaise and network with one another (Hawley et al., 2013). These feelings of discrepancies between prison education staff and educators working in more conventional settings may be further exacerbated by the fact that educators working within the prison system are not typically paid as much as their community further education counterparts (Coates, 2016; Rogers et al., 2014). In their research exploring the experiences of prison educators, Rogers et al. (2014) found that prison educator participants cited an onerous workload as one of the many challenges in their role, with the majority of participants indicating they engaged in unpaid work in surplus of the hours they were contractually obligated to, typically in the form of administrative tasks and lesson preparation (p.22).

Indeed, prison educators face significant challenges, some of which are unique to the prison environment, which include lack of access to required learning technologies, feeling unsafe, managerial bullying, poor working conditions, regime-related constraints, restrictive environments not traditionally meant for education classes, and class interruptions as a result of security concerns (Corcoran, 1985; Hawley et al., 2013; Meek & O'Connor, 2018; Patrie, 2017; Rogers et al., 2014). Prison educators must often deal with various hurdles that impede or challenge their capacity to carry out their duties; these may be attitudinal or behavioural (e.g., learners sceptical about the purpose of the educational course, or learners in the classroom who may have behavioural issues stemming from learning difficulties, substance abuse, or mental health afflictions), organisationally-induced (e.g., lack of classroom space, prisoner transfers, or scheduling conflicts with other prison programming), or security-induced (e.g., "counts" or lockdowns) (Bayliss & Hughes, 2008; Corcoran, 1985; Rogers et al., 2014; Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). Rogers et al. (2014) found that job dissatisfaction was a relatively common sentiment amongst educators, with many expressing a desire to search for a new job, a finding that was echoed in the research of Meek and O'Connor (2018). Indeed, as Pawson (2000) indicates, "By dint of lack of funding and poor conditions, prison educators tend to be thin on the ground and not too long around" (p.67).

2.5.7.3 Challenges to prison education: perspectives of the prison learner

Many prisoners in England and Wales have suffered both social and educational exclusion throughout their lives (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). Prisoners often endure social and educational hardships, such as coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, being brought up in care, poverty, experiencing abuse or witnessing violence in their homes as children, unemployment, behavioural and mental health issues, substance misuse and abuse, temporary and/or permanent school exclusion, and absence of any qualifications (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002; Williams, Papadopoulou, & Booth, 2012). Previous negative experiences of education are pervasive amongst prisoners in England and Wales, with many prisoners exhibiting severe deficiency of basic literacy and numeracy skills (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). Social Exclusion Unit (2002) figures indicate that "prisoners are over twenty times more likely than the general population to have been excluded from school" (p.7). The SEU have reported that 30% of prisoners have "regularly truanted from school," whereas a 2012 publication from the Ministry of Justice that reported the results of research with newly sentenced prisoners (who had received their sentences in 2005 and 2006) indicated that 59% of prisoners reported truanting from school on a regular basis (Williams et al., 2012). Williams et al. (2012) further indicate that 42% of prisoners reported being either permanently excluded from school or expelled. These educational difficulties explicably act as a barrier to effective prisoner education. The SEU (2002) states, "Many prisoners will have been turned off education and training by their experience of school. Others may feel too old to return to the classroom or see education and training as 'not for them'. Many prisoners need persuading of the merits of education and training…" (p.48).

Prisoners' cautious attitudes towards education can act as a barrier to engagement in that they can express a lack of desire to undertake education as a result of previous negative educational experiences (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005; Hughes, 2012; SEU, 2002). A resulting lack of "academic self-confidence" can contribute to prisoners' non-participation in education in prison (Hughes, 2012, p.51). Reuss and Wilson (2000) use the term "cynical plus attitude" to denote an outlook adopted by prisoners whereby they are "profoundly

aware of their situation and the expectations that others have of them," so they comply with any programming that serves to reduce the amount of time left on their sentence, all the while scoffing their participation in said sentence-reducing activities to their peers (p.180). In Braggins and Talbot's 2003 Prison Reform Trust study on prisoners' perceptions of prison education, they note that prison learner frustrations surfaced as a result of the non-committal, avoidant (e.g., participation in education to avoid other prison activities) attitudes of other prison learners towards education, which could act as a "...significant barrier to effective teaching and learning" (p.42). Similarly, Bayliss (2003) reflects that prisoners' negative mindsets over their circumstances can act as barriers to learning and indicates that such attitudes can sometimes take precedence over any positive or motivating influences prisoners might receive, for example, in the form of a supportive education department. In the context of his research on the management of prison education and contextual nature of teaching and learning in prison, Bayliss states, "...even these [positive] efforts by education departments may not be sufficient to overcome the negativity. [An ex-offender] told me that even though he was being encouraged and supported in education while in prison, his own cynicism obstructed his recognition of progress..." (p.166). Disparaging or resentful attitudes towards learning from fellow prisoners can also discourage participation in education, as these attitudes tend to frame education as something that is uncool, "girlie," or snobbish (Hughes, 2012, p.68). In some cases, prisoners may also feel unmotivated to take education courses, for example, in comparison to other prison work, as the pay they receive for education and time spent out of cell engaged in educational activities does not always equal that of other jobs within the prison (Braggins & Talbot, 2003; Gordon, 2000; Hughes, 2012).

Prison learners may also struggle to engage in education whilst enduring the punitive and erratic nature of the prison environment (Corcoran, 1985). Participation in educational activities that might be typical outside the prison walls suddenly becomes atypical when the environment of the prison, both physical and atmospheric, is not conducive to reflective and meaningful learning. Corcoran notes, "Actual and threatened violence by other inmates, as well as shakedowns and lockdowns by staff, can play havoc with the learning process" (ibid, p.54).

Rising tensions within the prison can be felt within the prison classroom resulting in prison learners who are distracted from their learning, as well as heightened friction, irritability, and anxieties (ibid). Prisoners can also experience challenges pertaining to the physical environment of the prison and may struggle to study in the noisy and crowded surroundings, where dedicated physical spaces for education and study are limited (Corcoran, 1985; House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005). The House of Commons Education and Skills Committee highlight the learning challenges represented by the physical limitations of classroom and workspace, stating, "Only a small proportion of prisoners can be learning at any one time because of the physical restrictions of classroom and workshop space. A lack of space for quiet study for prisoners on distance learning and other courses is also a practical barrier to learning. In-cell study is often not easy. Prison wings can also be noisy places" (2005, p. 76). The movement of prisoners presents another challenge to the delivery of effective prison education, as prisoners are often transferred between institutions, or are released prior to the completion of their educational pursuits in prison (Bracken, 2011). In what is known as "churn," prison learners struggle to maintain continuity of study when they are transferred from one prison to another (Bracken, 2011; Braggins & Talbot, 2003; House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005; SEU, 2002). This movement creates an interruption to both the course of study and the prison learner's motivation for study, and both can be difficult to re-establish at the prison learner's new institution where the same course of study may not be offered (Bracken, 2011; Braggins & Talbot, 2003). An equally sizeable barrier to prison education rests in the ability for prisoners on short sentences to engage in an education programme (SEU, 2002). The SEU (2002) highlights the significant challenge of delivering even basic skills programmes to short-sentenced prisoners:

> All the barriers to participation in education and training are magnified in the short-term prison population. Their needs are not always comprehensively assessed and they do not usually get a sentence plan identifying programmes to address offending. There is little provision for this group and many programmes exclude them because their sentence length is too short. Many people have said that short-term prisoners are unable to make sufficient educational progress in the period of time they are in prison. (p.49)

The challenges identified above underscore the disparities between the learning environments of the prison as compared to the general community. For learners who engage in education whilst incarcerated, learning is bound by the restrictive and punitive nature of a prison existence and stark differences can be seen when comparing the experience of education for prison learners to that of learners in the community. For example, Bayliss (2003) contrasts the typically empathetic and personalised approach to teaching basic skills in the community with that of the prison environment whereby tension is rife as the educational shortcomings of prison learners are on display amongst educators and fellow learners. One of the predominant ways in which this disparity is manifest is in the 'digital divide' (Prisoner Learning Alliance, 2020) that characterises the exclusion from digital technologies that prison learners contend with in a greater capacity than their counterparts in the community. Digital literacy has become a necessary component of everyday life, but for those in prison whose access to digital technologies is restricted, the capacity to both use online technologies to facilitate learning and acquire the digital skills necessary to adjust to the increasingly digital world outside of prison (where an increasing number of jobs require digital literacy skills) is likewise limited (ibid).

2.6 An introduction to capital

The notion of capital in the literature will now be briefly explored in order to situate the research within a domain that is of particular relevance to the topics of education and wellbeing.

Definitionally, capital refers to "…sources of profit, advantage and power, as well as net assets and resources" (Côté, 2005, p.225). As a term that initially denotes a pecuniary economic foundation (Reay, 2004), the manifestations of the notion of capital are now pervasive and multidisciplinary (Hodgson, 2014). The designations of capital now take many forms and continue to grow (Schuller, 2001), with notions of human, cultural, and social capital seemingly receiving the most attention in the literature (Côté, 2005), but with a plethora of conceptualisations of the term also emerging such as identity capital (Côté, 2005), mental capital (Government Office for Science, 2008), academic capital (Bourdieu, 1988), justice capital

(Best, Hamilton, Hall, & Bartels, 2021), and recovery capital (Cloud & Granfield, 2008) (see Hodgson, 2014 for an extensive list of forms of capital that have been used across varying disciplines). It is not the purpose of this review or wider thesis to identify and define all conceptualisations of capital, and an attempt to do so would be arguably futile given the expansive nature of the term. However, it does seem prudent to devote attention to the forms of capital that are most prominent within the literature, as well as conceptualisations of capital that are most relevant to the research.

Bourdieu (1986) conceptualises the notion of capital as applicable beyond the realm of economics and identifies economic, social, and cultural capital as the three forms of capital that characterise societal structure (Anheier, Gerhards, & Romo, 1995; Shortt, 2004). Indeed, Preston (2004) notes that Bourdieu's conceptualisation of capital is "a metaphor for the assets of individuals" (p.120). Portes (1998) highlights Bourdieu's assertion that whilst differing forms of capital are interchangeable in nature, the outcomes of varying forms of capital are essentially derivative of economic capital, maintaining that economic capital "is at the root of all the other types of capital" (Bourdieu, 1986, p.250). Economic capital refers to the material and financial assets and resources available for an individual to draw upon, and "finds its institutional expression in property rights" (Anheier et al., 1995, p.862; Christian, Mellow, & Thomas, 2006; Pinxten & Lievens, 2014). Rooted firmly in economism, human capital refers to the resources pertaining to knowledge and skills that dwell within individuals that can be mobilised to improve economic returns, both for the individual and wider community (Bourdieu, 1986; Robison, Schmid, & Siles, 2002; Schuller, 2001, 2004b). Schuller (2004b) highlights that drawing upon human capital allows individuals to "function effectively in economic and social life" (p.14). Cultural capital is acknowledged by Schuller (2001) as encompassing a more academic connotation than human capital and denotes "the credentials and cultural assets embodied in individuals and their families" (p.91). Bourdieu (1986) is recognised as conceptualising the notion of cultural capital (Lareau & Weininger, 2003) which he acknowledges he became interested in as a notion to explain inequality in academic achievement in children from families of different social classes. Reay (2004) notes that Bourdieu considers cultural capital as a

deviation from the notion that the ability to achieve success academically (or indeed to fail) is a result of innate abilities, "such as intelligence and giftedness" (p.74). Bourdieu (1986) identifies three forms of cultural capital: the institutionalised state (i.e., academic qualifications); the embodied state (i.e., competencies and dispositions such as an individual's tastes, knowledge, and skills), and the objectified state (i.e., cultural material goods such as books, pictures, and machines) (Pinxten & Lievens, 2014).

Whereas the focus of human capital is on individuals, that of social capital is on relationships and networks (McNeill, 2009; Robison et al., 2002; Schuller, 2001). On a general level, Schuller (2004b, p.17) referencing Putnam (2000) refers to social capital as the "networks and norms which enable people to contribute effectively to common goals." Schuller (2001, 2004b) emphasises the contested nature of the definition of social capital and acknowledges the significant variability in employment of the concept, noting that the inconsistency in its use exceeds that of the concept of human capital. This view is corroborated by Shortt (2004) who notes that consensus within social capital research is not often found, rendering the task of summarising knowledge and understandings of the term rather challenging. However, Shortt does acknowledge that the proliferating, multi-disciplinary concept of social capital has been increasingly explored within diverse academic fields. Shortt attests to an agreement amongst definitions and interpretations of the term that recognises social capital as "a characteristic of social groups rather than individuals" that can progressively accumulate and contribute in the navigation towards the realisation of goals "that would otherwise be unlikely" (p.18). Portes (1998) likewise concedes that there is increasing agreement within scholarship on social capital that the term denotes "the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures" (p.6).

Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), and Putnam (1995, 2000) have been valuable contributors in defining the concept of social capital. Pinxten and Lievens (2014) acknowledge the similarities in Putnam's and Coleman's conceptualisations of social capital as compared to Bourdieu's interpretation, whereby the former is deemed "a collective feature of society...which cannot be

possessed by individuals" and the latter as a "network-based resource that is available in relationships and consequently accrues to individuals" (p.1098). Bourdieu's (1986) conceptualisation of social capital stresses the importance of group membership as a resource that allows members of that group to benefit by virtue of their participation in a network of relationships. In paralleling the perspectives of Bourdieu and Coleman, Portes (1998) highlights that social capital resources are conceptualised as more intangible in nature as compared to other forms of capital. Coleman (1988) acknowledges social capital exists within the social *relations* (emphasis in original) between people, a feature which Coleman notes distinguishes it from other forms of capital that may exist either within individuals themselves (i.e., the skills and knowledge of human capital) or within tangible, material tools of production (i.e., physical capital). Drawing parallels with other forms of capital, Coleman (1988, p.S98) views capital as productive and notes that social capital is "a resource for persons" that lends itself to rational agents and can facilitate the accomplishment of desired objectives, a feat which Coleman acknowledges would be unfeasible without access to social capital. Putnam (1995), drawing on Coleman's (1988) conceptualisation of social capital, considers social capital as being foundationally similar to physical and human capital (i.e., resources that improve individual productivity). Putnam's (1995) notion of social capital emphasises the concepts of communication, civic engagement, reciprocity, and trust, and he defines the concept as "features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (p.67). Focusing on the function of social capital at the collective level rather than the individual (Pinxten & Lievens, 2014), Putnam (1995) asserts that social capital serves to promote positive functioning within the collective.

With consideration of the focal point of the present research on prison education and wellbeing, it is pragmatic to acknowledge here a conceptualisation of capital identified in the literature that is ostensibly directly relevant to the concept of wellbeing. It has been recognised that forms of capital beyond the economic, human, cultural, and social classifications proliferate in scholarship. One such conceptualisation derives from The Government Office for Science (2008) in their report *Mental Capital and Wellbeing: Making the most of ourselves in the 21st*

century. The report published the findings of the Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing project which sought to explore various impacts on individuals' mental capital and wellbeing throughout the life course, utilising evidence from research within the disciplines of the biological, economic, and social sciences. The aim of the project was to ascertain future challenges to the development of mental capital and mental wellbeing in order to identify the factors, conditions, and resources necessary to promote flourishing and optimal functioning in the lives of individuals in the UK. Acknowledging the inherent connotation of the word 'capital' within the notion of 'financial capital,' the Foresight report defines 'mental capital' as follows:

> Mental capital refers to the totality of an individual's cognitive and emotional resources, including their cognitive capability, flexibility and efficiency of learning, emotional intelligence (e.g. empathy and social cognition), and resilience in the face of stress. The extent of an individual's resources reflects his/her basic endowment (genes and early biological programming), and their experiences and education, which take place throughout the lifecourse [sic]. (Government Office for Science, 2008, p.45)

Mental capital is recognised as being closely associated with mental wellbeing and consequently, the Foresight report concludes that policies and interventions should be developed with consideration of the amalgamated nature of the two concepts. The notion of mental capital is further understood as having an impact on individuals' quality of life and contributions to society.

2.7 The impacts of education

It is important to now look towards scholarship within the field of education in order to gain a broader understanding of the possible impacts that engaging with education can have. Economically, the benefits of education have been widely recognised, with research indicating that higher educational attainment typically leads to an increase in earnings and improved employment opportunities (OECD, 2022; Vila, 2000). On a general, factual level, Vila (2000) notes that increased involvement in education instils change within individuals and groups, and that "more educated individuals and groups differ from those with less education" (p.23). Vila

acknowledges that from an economic perspective, the positive impacts of education extend beyond readily measurable pecuniary aspects such as the labour market productivity of educated communities. Distinguishing between monetary and non-monetary benefits of education, Vila defines non-monetary benefits of education as those that contribute more broadly to economic returns but whose market values are not as easily captured by traditional monetary measurements. Non-monetary benefits include both those pertaining to the personal decisions that individuals make (i.e., related to health, family planning, occupation, consumption, and parental education contributing to the health of children), and those that are in the interests of the public (i.e., benefits that contribute to economic growth and development, reduce inequality, and improve social structure stability).

In their book *The Benefits of Learning: The Impact of Education on Health, Family Life and Social Capital*, authors (and members of the University of London's former Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning) Schuller, Preston, et al. (2004) discuss the wider individual and collective benefits of formal and informal education. Despite the evidence suggesting that education and learning have wide-reaching benefits beyond the economic in spheres such as health and wellbeing (both physical and mental), employment, and social, family, and civic life (see for example, Manninen et al., 2014; Schuller, 2017; Schuller, Preston et al., 2004), Schuller (2004a) emphasises that policies related to education programmes are often focused on participation rates rather than wider outcomes of education for learners. This is partially due to the ease of scrutinising and measuring certain tangible aspects of education programmes, indicators of educational progress which make for an easily disseminatable message (ibid). For example, outcomes related to progress, enrolment numbers, and completion statistics can be swiftly compiled, understood, and circulated (ibid). With consideration of the ways that education research has generally overlooked benefits that occur beyond the realm of results-based outcomes, Schuller (2004a) states, "Far more attention has been paid to why people do or do not participate in learning, and to what happens in the classroom or other setting, than to what happens as a result of that learning" (p.4). Schuller's contention indeed runs parallel to Behan's (2014) argument that policies related to education programmes are misguidedly

focused on participation rates rather than on the transformative experiences of students and personal-development-based outcomes for learners, partially due to the ease of scrutinising and measuring certain tangible aspects of these programmes such as progress, enrolment numbers, and completion statistics.

Within the context of her joint research with Schuller, Preston, Brassett-Grundy, and Bynner exploring the wider impacts of learning, Hammond (2004a) outlines the health-related impacts of education and explores the ways in which learning can positively impact individuals' wellbeing, mental health, and ability to cope with change and hardships (including poor physical health) through the development of mediating psychosocial traits of self-esteem, self-efficacy, sense of identity, sense of purpose and future, communication and competences, and social integration. Hammond states, "…education enhances all health outcomes through enabling individuals to see their lives in a broader context" (p.56). Field (2009b) likewise acknowledges the direct and indirect impacts that education can have on wellbeing both at the individual and community levels, which he argues can augment the economic benefits of participation in education. With respect to the notion that there exists a positive relationship between wellbeing and education, Field indeed attests to the "common-sense" mentality amongst practitioners and learners asked to submit evidence to the *Inquiry into the Future of Lifelong Learning* (IFLL) independent thematic report commissioned by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE). Field further acknowledges the mounting evidence suggesting that participation in adult learning is correlated with positive health, earnings, employability, and subjective well-being outcomes. However, despite the growing volume of research that points to positive impacts of learning, the capacity for education to have a negative impact is a potentiality that is not overlooked by Field. Field (2009b) emphasises that wellbeing can be directly and indirectly impacted by education, the former through "helping people develop capabilities and resources which influence their well-being," and the latter through "leading to outcomes that in turn allow people to thrive and increase their resilience in the face of risk" (p.7). The concept of emotional resilience, as discussed by Hammond (2004a) as an intermediating element within a four-factor typology that connects education and health (the

other components of the typology being economic, access to services, and social capital), is an essential component of one's measure of health in all forms (i.e., physical, psychological, and mental). An individual's ability to face and subsequently surmount challenges that present themselves is paramount to the promotion of health, and Hammond argues that through education and learning, individuals who exhibit qualities related to effective problem-solving, self-confidence, independence, and being future-orientated, and who associate with like-minded peers who value healthy lifestyles, may be positively affected in their propensity for dealing with stress and adversity in healthy ways. Schuller (2004a) acknowledges the impact of his joint research with Preston, Hammond, Brassett-Grundy, and Bynner in demonstrating the enduring impact of initial educational experiences on educational motivations. In the context of this research, Schuller (2004a) and Hammond (2004a) stress the importance of highlighting that the potential exists for the outcomes of learning to be both positive and negative. Hammond (2004a) in particular asserts that in order for the health outcomes of learning to be most fully realised, the context and structure of education provision must align with the interests, strengths, and needs of the learner, which contextually emerge from the learner's historical and current narrative of experiences and circumstances throughout their life course. Insightfully, Hammond (2004b, p.77-78) highlights the "impossibility" of interpreting an individual's experience with learning and education independently from their experiences and life trajectory, as it is this context which shapes the dynamic relationship between learning and its effects. Given that Schuller, Preston, Hammond, Brassett-Grundy, and Bynner employ a more extensive operationalisation of education that considers learning beyond that which occurs within organised or formal contexts (Schuller, 2004a), the scope of the authors' remit is arguably beyond the parameters of the present research. Nevertheless, their findings and conclusions offer invaluable insight into the wider benefits of education and learning that directly pertain to the focus of the research that comprises this thesis.

Schuller (2004b) and his co-authors use a matrix-style analysis to classify the effects of learning according to the extent that it impacts the individual as compared to the broader community, but also according to the extent that it has either a transformative or sustaining effect in the

lives of learners. The latter distinction is of import in the authors' research as Schuller (ibid) notes that emphasising the "conservation effect" of learning sheds lights on the capacity of education to prevent "decay or collapse (at individual or community level) or consolidate a positive state of stability" (p.25). Indeed, the "core-organising principle" of Schuller, Preston, Hammond, Brassett-Grundy, and Bynner's research is the sustaining and transforming effects of learning (Bynner & Hammond, 2004, p.161). Schuller (2004b) stresses the significance of the sustaining effect as a benefit of learning and asserts that it is one that is largely overlooked as it is not always as readily apparent as the transformative effect of education, which is typically manifested as more dramatic occurrences of change that are easily visible. Schuller (ibid) underscores the vulnerability of the sustaining effect of education to the more perceptible transformative effect, warning that "the visibility and profile of such [transformative] examples (whether for researchers or the media) can push to the margins the persistent unspectacular role of learning in enabling people to cope better with daily challenges and turn these challenges to good effect" (pp.32-33).

The conceptual framework used by Schuller, Preston et al. (2004) in their research on the wider benefits of learning is grounded in the notion of capital. The authors conceptualise the broader benefits of learning as a triangular relationship with identity capital, social capital, and human capital forming the three peaks or poles. Schuller (2004b) stresses the importance of conceptualising learning as a process within the context of his research with his co-authors, highlighting the ways in which people consciously or unconsciously accumulate assets that take the form of human, social, or identity capital, "and then benefit from the returns on the investment in the shape of better health, stronger social networks, enhanced family life, and so on" (p.12). Encompassed within this triangular understanding are a multitude of benefits of learning, also conceptualised as "capabilities" (borrowing the term from Sen (1992) who uses the term "capabilities" to refer to the freedom of individuals to achieve various "functionings" in life that are of value), given the reciprocal nature of their relationship to capital (i.e., the outcomes or benefits of learning can also feed back into, activate, and contribute to growth in the forms of capital). Sen (1992) conceptualises valued "functionings" as being varied in nature,

ranging from those that are more basic such as being "well-nourished," and in good health, to those that are more complex such as being happy, "having self-respect" and "being able to take part in the life of the community" (pp.5, 38). Importantly, Schuller notes that "The absence of these capabilities deprives a person of the opportunity to accumulate the assets from which the benefits in turn flow" (pp.12-13). Schuller, Hammond, and Preston (2004, p.186) maintain that the three forms of capital that structure their conceptual framework of the wider benefits of learning represent assets that can be drawn upon, within both an individual and wider community context, to "improve functioning in different domains and ultimately well-being." Schuller (2004b) ultimately underscores that most experiences of learning can be understood as an interaction between human, social, and identity capitals.

Chapter Three

Overarching Methodology

3.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the methodological progression and underpinnings of the thesis. In consideration of the format of the thesis, this chapter aims to situate the research and serves to ground the three studies within reciprocal parameters. The chapter will cover the goals of the research and progression of the research questions, reflexive orientations, contextual barriers and limitations (including the impact of Covid-19), and ethical considerations. Within the context of this chapter, it is useful to refer to Appendix D which includes reflections on methodological perspectives and approaches in prison education research. This reflection incorporates the paradigmatic stance and methodological drive of the present research, the use of innovative recruitment techniques in research, the importance of collaborations in research, and common methods used by other prison education researchers.

3.1 Progression of research questions, hypothesis, and epistemological reflexivity

There are three individual studies within this thesis that are connected through a common thread. Through examining the differing perspectives of those involved in prison education in varying capacities, each of these studies examines the overarching topic of the wellbeing impacts of prison education. A brief summary of each study is outlined below:

Study One explores the accounts of prison learners who have applied for educational funding through the Prisoners' Education Trust in order to highlight the self-reported prospective benefits of engaging in further and higher-level study in prison. Using a predominantly qualitative approach that incorporated an element of quantitative inquiry, a content analysis was carried out on 100 prison learner application letters.

Study Two was carried out in collaboration with the prison newspaper *Inside Time* and investigates the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the learning experiences of currently incarcerated prison learners by analysing letters detailing their experiences of learning during lockdown.

Study Three examines the perspectives of both prison educators and former prison learners with respect to the potential wellbeing impacts, both positive and negative, of prison education. This study was initially intended to be two separate studies, however given the similarity of the research goals, interview questions, and methodological processes, the decision was made to merge the studies.

The justification for this section of this chapter being titled '*Progression* [emphasis added] of research questions and hypothesis,' is that the researcher felt it was important to acknowledge the ways in which the research questions evolved and were shaped by the data that emerged progressively throughout this predominantly qualitative thesis. As Charmaz (2015) acknowledges, "Qualitative methods foster making unanticipated discoveries that shift earlier research questions and designs…" (p.54). Ultimately, a common research goal guided the research in all three studies, although each study approached the research aim using a different lens. The preliminary goal of the wider research was to ascertain the ways in which engagement with *higher education* in prison could potentially *positively* impact the wellbeing of prison learners.

It would be remiss not to acknowledge here that there was potential researcher bias influencing the development of the initial research question. The notion that there would be a *positive* wellbeing impact on prison learners as a result of engaging with higher education in prison was an assumption made that underscored the development of this research goal that was derived from the researcher's own experience. Liebling (1999a) poses the question "Why do people do research in prison?" in her paper detailing some of the difficulties involved in prison research

(p.151). Her answer highlights that curiosity is often the initial motivation behind an individual's interest in engaging in research, but that conscious and/or unconscious elements of the researcher's preceding interests or beliefs guide the researcher to select a particular "world" and topic (ibid). The specific topic of wellbeing and education in prisons in this thesis was selected purposely because of the researcher's own interest and belief in the wellbeing value of education. Given that this thesis takes an interpretive approach, the process of reflexivity is pivotal to the methodological process. Thus, it is important here to address the reflexivity in the research process in order to facilitate transparency in how the research was shaped and the findings interpreted. Willig (2013) differentiates between two types of reflexivity in the research process that the researcher should be cognisant of in order to provide insight into how elements of the researcher's experiences, assumptions, and responses impact the development of the research and understanding of findings. According to Willig, personal reflexivity, which will be discussed further in a forthcoming section, requires the researcher to reflect upon their "own values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life and social identities" and how these elements influence the development of the research (ibid, p.10). Epistemological reflexivity encourages researcher awareness of the "assumptions (about the world, about knowledge) that we have made in the course of the research, and it helps us to think about the implications of such assumptions for the research and its findings" (ibid). Epistemological reflexivity invites the researcher to reflect on the ways in which elements of the research design and structure (e.g., research questions, methodological approach) influence the direction of the research and "construction" and interpretation of the data and results (ibid). Within the present study, the progressive development of the research questions and their influence on the direction that the research took is an important piece in the research journey, particularly from an epistemological reflexive perspective.

At the outset of these studies, it was hypothesised that there would be a relatively universal positive wellbeing impact on prison learners stemming from engagement with education in prison. However, in hindsight, this assumption was perhaps somewhat misguided, fuelled by the researcher's own positive experience of higher education. This line of inquiry neglected to

consider the fact that for many people in prison, past experiences of education prior to incarceration are often negative and unfulfilling (Behan, 2014; Coates, 2016; House of Commons Education Committee, 2022), contributing to possible educational-related trauma that may be imported into prison. Nonetheless, it was with this hypothesis in mind that the following, fairly broad, research question was initially posed by the researcher, prior to comprehensive development of any research on the topic of prison education and wellbeing:

- **How does prisoner-participation in higher education in prison impact wellbeing?**

It was through the lens of this question that the structure of the thesis began to develop and valuable connections with prison education organisations in England and Wales began to be formed (further discussion on the partnerships that were employed throughout the PhD will be addressed below). Through the PhD supervisors, contact was established with the Prisoners' Education Trust (PET), a charity that provides funding for distance learning courses to incarcerated learners, to determine whether there was an interest in co-developing a preliminary study that would aim to provide insight into the topic of wellbeing and higher education in prison. Although its place within the thesis was not yet fully realised, it was determined that a pilot study with an established organisation such as PET would provide valuable data which could both further inform the remainder of the PhD and offer PET useful insight into the potential wellbeing impacts of engaging with education in prison. After establishing the approach and parameters of the research project in partnership with PET, a more defined take on the original research question began to take shape, and aimed to address the following:

- **How do prison learners articulate their perceptions of the anticipated benefits of further and higher education in prison, and what is the association between these benefits and wellbeing?**

At this early point in the PhD, and considering the remit of PET, the research question was amended to include further and higher education as PET is an organisation that offers education funding to prisoners for a wide variety of distance learning courses, including those at a further and higher educational level (Prisoners' Education Trust, 2022) (note that further education is that which exists following post-compulsory school, but which is not considered university-level) (GOV.UK, n.d.a). It is important to note that PET does not directly provide funding for university degrees (i.e., higher level courses) as part of their core provision; rather, they are part of a collaborative partnership with the Longford Trust and Open University (OU) to offer grant funding for prisoners who cannot fund their OU degree modules with loans via the Frank Awards (Jon Collins, personal correspondence, March 23, 2023; The Longford Trust, n.d.). At the time that Study One was being conducted, PET did receive funding to work with the OU to offer a selection of courses that would contribute towards an undergraduate degree (J. Collins, personal communication, April 11, 2023). However, these modules were not part of PET's "core" provision and are no longer offered (ibid).

Study One was carried out in 2019 with the aim of using it as a preliminary stepping-stone that would shape the structure and methodology of the remainder of the PhD. Using conceptualisations of wellbeing that had been derived from the literature as an analytical framework, the predominantly qualitative content-analysis approach to Study One provided an early glimpse into the ways in which prison learners identified the impact that they believed prison education had or (would have) on them. The findings of Study One ultimately provided the foundation for the remaining research, culminating in the realisation that a collection of studies on wellbeing and prison education from a cross-contextual perspective would provide a unique way to further the insight and knowledge gleaned. The benefits of structuring a thesis in this way include the fact that the writing up process occurs throughout the PhD, rather than only at the end once the research has been completed (University of Reading, 2021).

The framework of wellbeing that was developed within Study One seemed to necessitate a revision of the research question. As previously hoped, the data and findings from Study One

carved a valuable path for the researcher in her doctoral journey as it established a unique approach to the overall research goal of exploring the relationship between wellbeing and participation in prison education. Realising the potential of the established framework of wellbeing within the overall research, the research question was amended accordingly:

- **How can the effects of participation in higher education in prison be conceptualised using a wellbeing framework?**

At this point in the research journey the researcher's focus was still very much on the impact that higher education could have on the wellbeing of prison learners, as her positionality remained reflexively embedded within her own experiences of higher education and wellbeing. However, it was at that moment that the doctoral experience began to change quite drastically for the researcher.

Study One concluded in the early months of 2020, and the researcher thus began formulating plans for a second study that would further explore the contextual suitability of the wellbeing matrix conceptualised in the study with PET. The initial stages of a National Research Committee (NRC) application were started in the hope that the methodology of Study Two would incorporate in-person research with current prison learners. Unfortunately, whilst the researcher was developing plans for Study Two, the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic began to surface. The abilities of researchers to conduct primary research with prisoners began to be encumbered by the limitations imposed by Covid-19, and the researcher's NRC application was put on hold indefinitely (a more detailed discussion of the barriers that were encountered in the course of the doctoral research will be explored further in section 3.3). In view of the challenges that Covid-19 represented to researchers and given that whether and when research would be able to resume in prisons was at that moment indeterminable, fundamental changes to Study Two and indeed the progression and aims of the overall research were necessitated. The number of learners in prison participating in courses at Level 3 or above in the year April 2019 to March 2020 was 1,234, a number that pales in comparison to the 67,663 total prisoners

participating in courses aged 18 and over in the same year (Ministry of Justice, 2021a). In the year from April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021, the time in which the researcher was embarking upon Study Two, the numbers of people engaging with education in prison reflect the stark reality of the cessation of education programmes in prisons during the height of the pandemic. In that year there was a total of only 27,926 prison learners, 126 of whom were studying at Level 3 or higher (Ministry of Justice, 2022). As a result, due to the unique circumstances in which the research became situated, the decision was made to broaden the scope of the research to reach a more widespread cohort of people studying in prison, beginning with Study Two. Rather than the narrower (and ultimately unfeasible) approach of recruiting only potential prison learner participants who were engaging with higher level learning, the amended goal of the wider research took shape as a more inclusive exploration of the relationship between wellbeing and participation in prison education. The researcher's interest in employing the framework of wellbeing developed in Study One cross-contextually endured; however, circumstantially, the research became positioned within a quite unprecedented period, one in which little to no systematic exploration of prison learners' experiences of learning during the pandemic had yet been undertaken. The aims of Study Two thus became juxtaposed with the skeletal framework of prison education during the pandemic, and the barren learning conditions prison learners found themselves forced to contend with. It was important that the research aims of Study Two both contributed to the wider research of the thesis, but also reflected these unique circumstances brought about by the pandemic. Inevitably, the research question guiding Study Two was adjusted in order to ground the research within the wider penal and global context of Covid-19:

- **How do current prison learners describe their experiences of learning during lockdown as it relates to their wellbeing?**

Upon the completion of Study Two in the autumn of 2020, it became apparent that research restrictions would continue to impact the researcher in the latter stages of her research. Although she remained hopeful that she would ultimately be able to enter prisons during her

doctoral journey to validate her identity as a 'prison researcher' by engaging with in-person research with prison learners, the omnipresence of Covid-19 impeded the envisioned research in pivotal ways that could not be circumvented. Consequently, and in consideration of the ways in which participants in Study Two discussed the wellbeing impacts of an *absence* of education during the Covid-19 lockdown, Study Three incorporated this understanding in its exploration of the perspectives of prison educators and former prison learners on prison education and wellbeing. Accordingly, the following question directed the research of the concluding study within this thesis:

- **How do current prison educators and former prison learners describe their experiences of the relationship between wellbeing and prison education?**

The development of the research questions within this thesis were thus arrived at somewhat circuitously, and, beyond the overall research goal of exploring the relationship between prison education and wellbeing, were not necessarily wholly apparent to the researcher at the outset of the PhD. However, given the tremendously dynamic and enigmatic nature of the pandemic and its residual impacts to daily life, the researcher's ability to be flexible and resolute throughout the doctoral journey was pivotal in ensuring the progression of the research.

3.2 The researcher role and personal reflexivity

In discussing the role of reflexivity in qualitative research, Palaganas, Sanchez, Molintas, and Caricativo (2017) refer to a "journey of learning," and note:

> Through reflexivity, researchers acknowledge the changes brought about in themselves as a result of the research process and how these changes have affected the research process. The journey of discovering how researchers shaped and how they were shaped by the research process and output is an iterative and empowering process. (p.426)

The researcher's interest in this area of research was born from personal experience with education in general, but particularly further and higher education. Having been engaged with

formal education for almost 30 years, from primary school through to graduate school, education has provided the researcher with tangible and intangible skills that she believes have improved her wellbeing and ability to cope with the hardships of everyday life. This experience has shaped her role as a criminological researcher and influences how she sees the world. Introspectively, it must be acknowledged that the researcher's socio-economic position as a white, middle-class, educated female who attributes significant value to the role of education in contributing to personal positive states of wellbeing, played a central role in the research process, stemming from the initial interest in the potential wellbeing impacts of education. In her book detailing her interpretations as a researcher and prison educator of adult male prison learners' understandings of their experiences of education both prior to and within prison, and their perceptions of the importance of said educational experiences, Nichols (2021) similarly acknowledges her belief in the value of education and the pivotal role it has played throughout her life. From a personal development perspective and aptly employing the phrase "liberal elements of education," Nichols speaks fondly of the way in which education has provided her with valuable skills that extend beyond those necessary to warrant future employability (e.g., "confidence, self-esteem and resilience") (ibid, p.ix). For the researcher, growing up in a family where the importance of education was underscored, both parents having obtained advanced degrees and diplomas in the physical and natural sciences, the juxtaposition of the researcher's vehement interest in education and wellbeing is recognised. The researcher's "journey of learning" indeed began at an early age and continued on well into adulthood, and the ups and downs of this journey have solidified a certain personal sense of the relationship between education and wellbeing. In her view, the enjoyment, excitement, pride, and sense of accomplishment that the researcher's educational journey has forged has enabled her to overcome strains and adversities both independent of and relative to this journey, and has cemented the notion that education can act as a valuable instrument in surmounting mental hardships. The necessity for such mental strength rang particularly true for the researcher during her doctoral studies when the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic created adverse learning and wellbeing circumstances that undeniably challenged her relationship with education. Although the researcher notes that there have previously been times in her "learning journey"

where academic challenges presented strains upon her experience of wellbeing, the wellbeing difficulties that surfaced as a result of Covid-19 and its lateral effects were unprecedented. Whilst the multiple Covid-19 lockdown periods might have presented valuable opportunities for some to redirect focus on work and activities that were previously impacted by routine disruptions to daily life prior to lockdown, (i.e., work and family responsibilities), for others (and the researcher in particular), this period represented uncertainty, stress, and confusion, where concentration on educational tasks was rendered difficult. In addition, the researcher was infected by the Covid-19 virus in June of 2021 which impacted her physical and mental health in significant ways. Reflecting on this period in the researcher's "learning journey," the pandemic and its by-products facilitated a shift in the way she understood her relationship with education.

The researcher acknowledges that she has been privileged in her journey of learning, and overall, she would characterise the relationship between her educational experiences and her wellbeing as positive. The increased confidence and intellectual challenges that education has provided her with have, in her opinion, positively impacted the trajectory of her life and career. However, it would be an oversight to neglect acknowledging that the Covid-19 period of her doctoral studies represented a significant source of stress for the researcher due to the uncertainty in how her educational journey would progress in the face of the new normal that characterised the pandemical world. There were points during this period where the researcher's understanding of the relationship between education and her wellbeing could be characterised as adverse in nature, perhaps more significantly than at other points in her "learning journey." However, quite meaningfully, this period allowed the researcher to tap into a crucial reflexivity throughout the PhD process that enlightened the researcher to prisoners' experiences of the relationship between wellbeing and education, underscored by her own experiences of education and wellbeing during this time. Predominantly, throughout the period that Study Three was developing and interviews were being conducted with prison educators and former prison learners, preliminary results suggested a relationship between prison education and wellbeing that is more complicated than the researcher historically experienced throughout her own journey. The ways in which participants in Study Three suggested their

wellbeing could be both positively and negatively impacted by their experiences of education in prison allowed the researcher to reflexively acknowledge that there were elements of this differentiation in experiences of wellbeing that were present in her own "learning journey," and gave her insight as to why some prison learners might experience adverse impacts to their wellbeing as result of participating in education in prison. This insight also guided the researcher to use a more unencumbered lens of understanding to interpret the results of Study Two where current prison learners articulated the ways in which their wellbeing was impacted when their access to education was removed during the Covid-19 lockdown. Prior to undertaking the research in this thesis, it had not necessarily occurred to the researcher that there may have been times where her educational experiences adversely impacted on her wellbeing throughout her "learning journey." After completing Studies One through Three the researcher can now reflect on her own relationship with education without the rose-coloured lenses that arguably shaped the way she looked back upon her journey. Furthermore, through a revised and renewed consideration of the complex relationship between wellbeing and education and clarity in the understanding that not all educational experiences mimicked her own mostly positive journey, the researcher is able to move forward through her research journey to further explore how education in prison can positively transform the wellbeing of prison learners.

3.3 Contextual barriers and limitations

The four-year doctoral degree of study commenced in January 2019 at RHUL. The original submission date was January 2023; however, due to extenuating circumstances, this submission date was extended to July 2023. The Covid-19 pandemic began in December 2019 and introduced substantial barriers to the fulfilment of this PhD in the way that it was originally imagined. As a result of the pandemic, all primary research in prisons and England and Wales was halted beginning March 2020, and prison-based research remained an impossibility throughout the course of the research phase of the PhD which took place throughout 2020 and 2021 (Ministry of Justice & HM Prison and Probation Service, 2022). Ideally, the research would have been carried out inside prisons with current prisoners who were studying, and the area of

interest was primarily those who were studying further and higher education. However, due to the pandemic, this research goal had to be amended quite substantially. Given the onset of Covid-19, adaptations to the methodological approach of the original studies have been required. The research-related difficulties underscoring this thesis were numerous on account of the pandemic. The encumbrance caused by the pandemic that was initially hoped to only affect daily life throughout 2020 now extended to 2021 and 2022, thus impacting the hope the researcher had to enter prisons to conduct her research in 2021. Thus, the research that was conducted throughout the course of this thesis would, in the researcher's opinion, be considered patchwork, in the sense that multiple and varying methods were applied throughout the four studies depending on what was suitable and accessible at that moment. With that said, the diverse methods used were thorough and rigorous in nature, and great care was taken to ensure that the methods were selected and applied appropriately for the purposes of the three studies.

During the time that Study Two was being completed in the final months of 2020, the realisation set in that Covid-19-related difficulties in conducting research in prisons were likely to remain throughout 2021. As this presented a substantial setback with respect to the objectives of a further cross-contextual prison education and wellbeing study which aimed to engage with current prisoners *in* prisons, the decision was made to conduct interviews with former prison learners in the community, as well as current and/or former prison educators. With the purpose of gaining insight into the potential wellbeing benefits of prison education from those with intimate experiences of learning and teaching in prisons, and in the absence of the ability to enter prisons and speak to current prisoners, prison educators and former prison learners represented invaluable sources of data. Studies Three and Four, the studies that concluded the research for the thesis, were developed concurrently, with Study Three aiming to connect with current and/or former prison educators, and Study Four with former prison learners. Interview schedules were drawn up for the respective studies and potential participants were contacted via Twitter and email using both purposeful and snowball sampling methods. Once the interviews were concluded and transcribed, the decision was made to

combine Studies Three and Four as it was determined that the methods used these two studies were identical, the only difference being which category participants belonged to. Studies Three and Four ultimately became the third and final study, the execution of which presented its own challenges. During the development of Study Three, the researcher contracted Covid-19 and fell very ill. Amongst the other key symptoms of Covid-19, the fatigue that developed was severe and enduring, lingering long after the other symptoms had subsided. This made it difficult at times to maintain momentum in the progression of Study Three. Additional difficulties arose in the recruitment of participants in that although numerous potential participants initially expressed interest through the call-out on Twitter and were subsequently contacted via email with further study information, many never responded back. This led to a faltering of the initial sense of hopefulness in the number of participants that would be obtained for the research. Nevertheless, 10 interviews conducted either via email or online video platform (Zoom and Microsoft Teams) with five prison educators and five former prison learners were completed by the end of 2021. Transcription was carried out personally without the use of a transcription service or equipment which, although a lengthy process due to the careful attention to detail that was paid to the interview dialogue, was an important tool used in order to be fully emerged in and engaged with the data.

The methodology of Study Two was the first feature of the research to be impacted by the Covid-19 restrictions. As Study One had explored the ways in which prison learners who were undertaking further and higher-level learning self-identified the prospective benefits of prison education, the researcher had hoped to be able to continue to explore the experiences of prison learners who were studying higher education in prisons in a subsequent study investigating whether this type or level of education might provide a richer exploration of the potential wellbeing impacts of prison education. However, once it was determined that Covid-19 restrictions would impact the ability of researchers to enter prisons and conduct research for an extended period, this early research aim had to be amended. The decision was made at this point to not distinguish between higher and lower levels of learning to facilitate the recruitment and sampling of potential participants for subsequent studies. It was theorised that it might be

difficult to recruit participants learning at a specific, elevated level, particularly in the context of a viral pandemic. Thus, Studies Two and Three were formulated to explore the relationship between any level of prison education and wellbeing.

Whilst consideration was being given to how the subsequent studies would be structured and executed, pandemic-inducing outbreaks resulting from Covid-19 began to surface at the end of 2019 and in the first few months of 2020, significantly impacting the way in which the research for this PhD would be carried out. The cessation of primary research in prisons in England and Wales due to Covid-19 was disadvantageous and discouraging, particularly for a new PhD student and novice prison researcher whose experience of visiting penal institutions was limited. However, as the ensuing long-lasting, pervasive influence of Covid-19 was yet to be fully realised in its early months, it was with cautious optimism that the researcher hoped to be able to enter prisons in 2021 to conduct research with current prisoners. In the interim, and as England and Wales slowly emerged from the first Covid-19 lockdown in the summer of 2020, the researcher looked to Study Two for the opportunity to further explore the potential wellbeing effects of prison education. Study Two utilised the concepts associated with wellbeing that had been identified in Study One to explore how the wellbeing of prison learners was being impacted by the cessation of in-person education in prisons during the Covid-19 restrictions. In collaboration with the nationally distributed prison newspaper *Inside Time,* an article was published in the June 2020 issue of *Inside Time* which asked current prison learners to write in with their experiences of education during lockdown. Study Two was eventually developed into a stand-alone paper for The Howard League for Penal Reform's Early Career Academic Network (ECAN) themed issue in March 2021. This publication represented the first in the researcher's academic career in prison research and was made possible by developing the PhD as a collection of smaller studies.

Consideration of the nuanced and intangible ways the Covid-19 pandemic may have impacted the expressions of both research participants and the researcher herself is an important element of reflection in the research journey. Primarily applicable to Studies Two and Three (as

Study One was carried out pre-pandemic), recognition of how residual impacts of the pandemic may have subconsciously influenced participants and the researcher to write in certain ways about their feelings and experiences can contribute to a more evolved understanding of how the contextual elements of the research were made manifest. Study Two asked that current prisoners consider the impact of the pandemic on their experience of education during the first Covid-19 lockdown, whilst some of the former prison learner participants of Study Three had been in prison during the pandemic lockdown(s). Respectively, the structures of Studies Two and Three allowed the researcher to either purposefully or laterally explore prison learners' (current and former) and prison educators' experiences of learning and teaching in prison during the pandemic. Contextually, the pandemic inevitably had a palpable and direct influence on the feelings and experiences of study participants. From a more nuanced and reflexive perspective, the ways in which the pandemic impacted participants' expressions of these experiences and feelings contributes to a more profound understanding how the research has been shaped by the circumstances in which it was carried out; that is to say, it was not just the experiences themselves that were impacted by the pandemic, but how participants described them. The process of reflecting on and articulating their understandings of learning during lockdown to an academic researcher who, on account of not having lived or worked in prison, could not wholly comprehend the weight of their pandemic prison experiences, arguably emotively shaped participants' manifestations of their feelings on prison education and wellbeing. With respect to Study Two, the participants within this analysis were writing whilst they were locked down and were not able to access prison education. This context, in comparison to Study Three which was a retrospective account of prison learners' experiences of education and wellbeing, some of whom were imprisoned during lockdown, potentially further heightened the expressive ways in which participants articulated their thoughts. Thus, the analysis of the data that was shaped by these contextually positioned expressions and manifestations required a shrewd awareness of how the emergent understandings of the relationship between wellbeing and prison education were produced.

Additionally, the researcher's own narrative of writing during periods of lockdown about incarcerated learners' experiences of education in the context of the pandemic was also circumstantially impacted. The researcher acknowledges that as an individual who experienced lockdown within the community, endeavouring to write about prison learners' experiences of learning during lockdown (or lack thereof) fundamentally impacted her own views on the relationship between wellbeing and education and the importance of being able to engage with education in order to pass the time in a meaningful way. Short of attempting to draw inadequate and unsuitable parallels between her own experiences and the experiences of prison learners who were locked down during the pandemic in a coercive environment that is already inherently restrictive, the researcher recognises the inevitable ways that writing about prisoners and prison education during lockdown shaped her feelings on the subject. Beyens, Kennes, Snacken, and Tournel (2015) note that there exists a divide in the social positions of researchers and prisoners and that it is important that researchers do not try to compare their experiences to that of people living and working within prisons. The authors state, "There always will be social distance between the research subject and researchers, many of whom have socio-demographic characteristics that are far removed from that of most prisoners" (ibid, p.74). Although the researcher cannot claim that her pandemic doctoral journey and musings on prison education and wellbeing whilst locked down paralleled the experiences of prison learners during this time, she recognises her previous tendency to take the important role education has played in her life for granted.

3.4 Ethical considerations

Within each individual study there is an ethics section that outlines the more specific ethical issues pertaining to the respective research in each study. This section therefore briefly acknowledges the procedural considerations of obtaining ethics approval for the three studies that comprise this thesis.

Each study was subjected to the Royal Holloway, University of London (RHUL) Ethics approval process. One combined ethics application for Studies One and Two was made as these two studies were both letter-based and considered as secondary analysis as they involved an exploration of letters prison learners had written to PET and to *Inside Time*. As Study Three encompassed in-person (virtual) interviews with participants, the ethics application for this study required the researcher to obtain second-stage ethics approval from the RHUL Ethics Committee. Each ethics application outlined the way in which data would be stored securely and the privacy of participants protected. After approval was received for each study from the RHUL College Research Ethics Committee, the research could commence as it was not necessary to gain further ethics approval from the NRC (due to the fact that no primary research was being undertaken in prisons in England and Wales).

3.5 Reflections and conclusion

Given the range of difficulties that come with conducting research with those who are incarcerated (Abbott et al., 2018; Reiter, 2014) such as acquiring entrance to the prison, establishing and sustaining trust and rapport between the researcher and participants, providing results within an appropriate timeframe, and publication of findings (Patenaude, 2004), being denied access is one of the challenges that accompanies the role of prison research (Jewkes & Wright, 2016; Reiter, 2014). Jewkes and Wright (2016) note that prison researchers must often contend with drawn-out gatekeeping processes when they endeavour to engage with prisoner research. It is therefore not altogether unique for prison researchers to have to amend their research when they are not initially granted permission to carry out their research with incarcerated individuals inside the walls of a prison. Watson and van der Meulen (2019), citing relevant literature that acknowledges the capacity for institutional access barriers to impact research outputs, note that prison researchers may have to alter key aspects of their research in order to attempt to gain access to prisons, which can "ultimately affect the production of prison knowledge and may create skewed data results" (p.184). This may include submitting revised research proposals, selecting certain prisons to apply for access that the

researchers believe may be more amenable to approving an application, and modifying their data collection methods (ibid).

In the context of this thesis, the barriers that exist for prison researchers in studying incarcerated populations did not manifest themselves in the ways that have typically characterised research within the physical space of the prison. For example, the researcher did not have to submit an application to the NRC or contend with the dynamic and sometimes difficult interactions and environment that exist within the sphere of research in prisons. However, the process of carrying out the research required the researcher to be tenacious and creative in order to adapt to the pervasive and ongoing challenges that Covid-19 represented. Although the research process was challenging at times due to the difficulties of studying and researching both at the outset and in the midst of the enduring Covid-19 pandemic, the value of the research and indeed the researcher lies within the perseverance that was required to maintain momentum and progression during the course of study.

Chapter Four

Study One - Education and wellbeing: A preliminary look at prisoner-reported prospective benefits of accessing further and higher education in custody

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4.0 Introduction

Education in prisons has been primarily conceptualised as a rehabilitative tool used to reduce recidivism and improve effective reintegration to society upon release through improving prisoners' employability (Bayliss, 2003; Czerniawski, 2016; Nichols, 2021). Although research exploring the impact of prison education has uncovered wider, prisoner-reported benefits of learning such as improved self-esteem and confidence (see for example, Hughes, 2000, 2012; MacGuinness, 2000; Tootoonchi, 1993), the wellbeing impact of education in prison has not been a topic of prominence with respect to prison education research. This study endeavours to take the important findings on the wider benefits of prison education further by analysing the prospective benefits of prison education from prisoners' perspectives within a framework of wellbeing. The aim of this research is to investigate prisoner-reported wellbeing impacts of accessing further and higher education in prison through examining letters written by prison learners in application for educational funding from the Prisoners' Education Trust (PET), a charity organisation that provides funding for a wide range of distance learning courses to prisoners in England, Wales, the Channel Islands, and the Isle of Man (Prisoners' Education Trust, 2022). Mental health and wellbeing are multifaceted concepts with implications and associations varying depending on the discipline and context in which they are used (Galderisi et al., 2015; Stewart-Brown, 2015; The Faculty of Public Health, 2019). However, what is static and omnipresent about this term is its vital necessity, particularly for vulnerable groups such as the incarcerated who must contend with the potential negative impacts of the prison environment on mental health (Durcan & Zwemstra, 2014), and who are prone to higher instances of mental disorders than the general population (Fazel et al., 2016).

In a similar vein to Emma Hughes' (2000) PET thank-you letter-based study of prisoners' experiences of education, the hope is that through examining *prisoner-identified* prospective wellbeing benefits of further and higher education in prison, a more personal and comprehensive gleaning of potential wellbeing benefits will be gained, as these letters represent a rich opportunity for prisoners to individually express how they believe education will impact and benefit them. MacGuinness (2000), in conveying the suggested benefits of researching *prisoner accounts* (emphasis added) of their experiences of prison education, notes that "The strongest contribution to the discussion of factors influencing participating in prison education must ultimately come from inmates themselves. Only they will be able to relate their experience of imprisonment and the effects this had on them" (p.89). The role of further and higher education in prisons is of particular interest to this study. It is suggested here that given the transformative potential of higher education in prison (Darke & Aresti, 2016; O'Brien et al., 2022; O'Grady & Hamilton, 2019), the expressions of prison learners applying for further and higher-level learning may be a rich source of data pertaining to the understanding of wellbeing, as it is conceptualised in this study. The limitations of a focus on a narrow curriculum of basic skills education in prison have been noted (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005; Hughes, 2012), thus lending further justification to researching the impacts of further and higher education on prisoners' wellbeing. Hughes (2012) notes that, with respect to a focus on basic skills education in prison (e.g., literacy and numeracy courses), questions abound with respect to whether this focus poses limitations to "...the potential that education might have within the prison environment not only for improving future employability, but also for encouraging other benefits that may be derived from education" (p.7).

Throughout the course of this paper, the background and justification for studying wellbeing amongst prisoners will be outlined, as will the benefits of undertaking a qualitative content-analysis letter-based study such as this. The methodology will outline the way in which wellbeing is conceptualised for the purposes of this study using a uniquely created operationalisation matrix whereby various concepts associated with wellbeing were extracted

from the literature and used to create a coding scheme (see Appendix B). The findings will summarise the outcome of the analysis and include a relevant discussion, with key quotes selected from prison learner letters to illustrate the wellbeing impact of further and higher education as depicted by prison learners themselves. Finally, the impact and implications for further research will situate this study within the realm of next steps in prison education, and how the results can be used for additional research and policy discussions on how to best address educating prisoners. It is important to note here that, although the letters were written and the research undertaken prior to the onset of the recent global Covid-19 pandemic, the relevance of the findings of this study are likely to be increasingly essential to the discussion of prison education provision within the enduringly restrictive context of the pandemic and its aftermath.

4.1 Background and justification

The positive impact of education on health, and increasingly wellbeing, has been well-documented (see for example, Economic & Social Research Council, 2014; Field, 2009a; Schuller, Preston, et al., 2004; Vila, 2000). In her co-authored study on the wider benefits of learning, Hammond (2004a) explores the ways in which learning can lead to positive health outcomes through the development of communication and competences, a sense of identity, self-esteem and self-efficacy, social integration, and a sense of purpose and future. Hammond notes that these positive "psychosocial" outcomes of learning can contribute to the promotion of mental health, wellbeing, and the ability to effectively cope with stress and hardships (pp.40-41).

The wider wellbeing benefits of education would conceivably be of particular importance to prisoners, a group that is comprised of many individuals who have had previous negative or inadequate experiences of education and poor educational attainment upon entering the prison system (Braggins & Talbot, 2003; Coates, 2016; House of Commons Education Committee, 2022; Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). However, despite the evidence of the health and wellbeing benefits of education, research into the success of education in prison remains primarily focused on

formal achievements and qualifications earned (Bayliss, 2003), which are then compared to rates of reoffending (Reuss, 1999), rather than on the intrinsic positive impact education may have on prisoners.

In their report *Fit for Release: How sports-based learning can help prisoners engage in education, gain employment and desist from crime*, Meek et al. (2012) sought to investigate the wider impacts of prison sports-based learning on prisoners. Using a content analysis of handwritten letters submitted by prisoners in application for funding for education-based sports courses through PET, the authors examined themes that emerged relating to the motivations and benefits of accessing such sports-based educational opportunities. Studies that have used the written word of prisoners can provide insight into the importance of exploring the prisoner experience through the voices of prisoners themselves. For example, in her PhD thesis on songwriting as an outlet of personal expression used by male prisoners in the midwestern United States, Wilson (2013) found that, "songwriting, if facilitated effectively, may possibly provide a positive, personally expressive, safe way of conveying deep and difficult emotions, and help writers deal with the past, as well as navigating issues within the present" (p.210). Wilson notes that the men in her study were able to manifest a sense of personal identity through the original songs they were creating. Through these songs, Wilson notes that some prisoners were able to reflect upon problematic pasts and the impact of their decisions on others, whilst gaining a better understanding of self and relationships. Likewise, in their narrative thematic analysis of prisoners' use of poetry within the emotionally repressive environment of the prison, DeValiant, McGrath, and Kougiali (2018) explore the subjectivity and emotional experiences of prisoners. These authors note that, although prisoner self-reflection and emotional expression are typically stifled within the prison environment, these practices are essential in promoting positive mental health and desistance (ibid). Through examining prisoner poems published online in the prison publication, *Inside Time*, DeValiant et al. concluded that poetry can act as an outlet of emotional expression that promotes self-reflection and hope for a future self beyond prison.

The methods used in the studies above provide evidence that the written words of prisoners can enable a valuable understanding of the prisoner experience. Prisoner accounts can be emotionally expressive outlets of exploration and reflection through which prisoners are able to uniquely convey their thoughts. Additionally, utilising pre-existing prisoner correspondence (i.e., PET letters and *Inside* Time poetry) provides an additional benefit in that the data is ready for analysis without further intrusion into the lives of these prisoners, for example through surveys or interviews. Indeed, the collection of data in DeValiant et al.'s (2018) study provides a relevant precedent for that which is proposed in the current study, in that the data was not created explicitly for the purpose of the research at hand – it exists independently of and externally to the research.

4.2 Benefits

Through analysing letters that have been written by prisoners applying for educational funding, the goal of this study was to gain a preliminary glimpse into the perceived impact of further and higher education on the wellbeing of people in prison. The analysis of these letters would ideally help to identify some of the underlying thoughts, emotions, and feelings that comprise overall wellbeing that can be impacted by engagement with prison education. The suggested benefits of this paper-based project include the collection of preliminary data that could ideally be used to inform a larger dissertation project about the impacts of accessing further and higher education in prison on prisoners' mental health and well-being, in addition to furthering the discussion on the wider benefits of learning in prison.

Below is a statement from the Head of Policy with PET on the benefits of the proposed study from a PET perspective:

> PET have asked Erin to review our applications from prisoner learners for grants to study with the OU. We would like to know more about learners' motivations and expectations about studying at a higher level and the perceived or expected impact on wellbeing. We will use the results from this data to develop our service and improve our provision.
> (F. Cooney, personal communication, February 19, 2019)

4.3 Methodology

Prison learner applicants for funding from PET must meet certain requirements before they submit their applications. PET applicants must be over 18 years of age, serving a sentence (not on remand) in a prison in England, Wales, the Channel Islands, or the Isle of Man, have a minimum of six months left to serve on their sentence (and be within eight years of release for an Open University course), have achieved Level 2 English (with some courses also requiring learners to have gained Level 2 in Maths), and not be studying on another PET course simultaneously (Prisoners' Education Trust, 2022). When prison learner applicants apply for funding from PET, they are required to submit a covering letter that details their reasons for wanting to receive financial assistance. The Prisoners' Education Trust issues a guidance document to applicants that advises them on what to include in their letters (see Appendix A). The prison learner application letters are thus rich sources of data for researchers that are seeking to explore various facets of prison learners' participation in prison education, for example their motivations and the benefits they perceive gaining from such participation. In Hughes' (2000) study of PET thank-you letters, she acknowledges the methodological benefits of using letters written by prison learners to PET. Hughes notes that, in comparison to interview-based methods, analysis of letters avoids researchers' use of leading questions and allows prison learners to freely articulate their current perceptions of prison education in their writing (ibid). As Hughes states, "The significant strength of this source is that the letters provide valuable, unfiltered, insight into the motivations and experiences of a prisoner involved in education" (ibid, p.140).

A content analysis using a unique framework to operationalise the content variables was considered the most appropriate method to conduct the present research. A detailed review of the wellbeing framework and the coding scheme are located in Appendix B. This appendix outlines the various iterations the framework went through, as well as the operationalisation of wellbeing. The wellbeing framework was created from the literature on wellbeing and the

content of an initial subset of prisoner letters (*n* = 22) and was used in order to code the letters according to pertinent wellbeing concepts. The justification behind the decision to use a content analysis is that it provided an unobtrusive way of examining the meanings within data in textual form, in this case, PET application letters. Drisko and Maschi (2016) note that a benefit of content analysis as a technique is that "…it may (though does not always) draw upon data that were not created specifically for research purposes" (p.13). In the present study, although the PET application letters were not written for the purpose of contributing to research into the effects of further and higher education on prisoners' wellbeing, the content of these letters inherently lends itself to the development of research exploring of a wide array of beneficial topics.

Drisko and Maschi (2016), using a broad interpretation of content analysis that incorporates elements of basic, interpretive, and qualitative approaches, define content analysis as "…a family of research techniques for making systematic, credible, or valid and replicable inferences from texts and other forms of communication" (ibid, p.8). The content analysis used here was predominantly qualitative in nature but exhibited aspects of quantitative inquiry. Referencing George (1959), Drisko and Maschi (2016) note that both qualitative and quantitative techniques are often incorporated into content analysis approaches, with the former often utilised to code data, and the latter often used to summarise data. Whilst the focus of the content analysis approach within the present study was decidedly qualitative in nature in that the emphasis was on "summarizing and describing meanings in an interpretive, narrative manner" (Drisko & Maschi, 2016, p.5), there was some quantification of data involved with respect to calculating the number of letters that contained identified concepts associated with wellbeing. The results were input into Excel and then transferred to SPSS to carry out frequency analyses on the data. These findings will be further discussed in the analysis portion of this study.

In order to carry out a thorough content analysis, the reliability and validity of coding are important elements to consider. Drisko and Maschi (2016) note that, despite the use of the predominantly quantitative terms 'reliability' and 'validity' to denote the fact that "consistency

and agreement among coders are sought" within qualitative approaches to content analysis, "…validity and reliability (or their qualitative variants) should both be key factors in establishing rigor of any content analysis" (p.107). In order to demonstrate inter-rater reliability in the present study, a fellow former PhD student and previous PET staff member was granted access to the PET letters within the PET offices in order to conduct an analysis of a small sample of letters (n = 10). A coding guide was made available to this volunteer (see Appendix C) in order to facilitate the coding process. The inter-rater reliability analysis revealed an agreement of 90%, which is promising with respect to the validity and reliability of the coding strategy.

4.3.1 Selection of letters

The methodological approach of this study involved analysing a total of 100 PET application letters for further and higher education courses from a range of adult male prisons and YOIs in England and Wales. All of the applications analysed were for courses that were offered by the Open University, a distance and online-learning post-secondary education institution. It is important to note here that the applications for PET funding that were analysed were not necessarily approved, and some applicants would have been denied funding from PET. It is also significant to address here that although the researcher was initially interested in exploring the wellbeing benefits of post-compulsory education at both the further and higher levels, the core remit of PET does not encompass providing funding for degree-level courses (J. Collins, personal communication, May 23, 2023). However, some of the letters analysed did include applications for higher education courses as although these modules are no longer offered, PET had previously received funding to work with the OU to offer a selection of courses that contribute towards an undergraduate degree (J. Collins, personal communication, April 11, 2023). PET's involvement in degree-level funding is in partnership with and facilitated by The Longford Trust, a charity whose core provision is providing educational funding to prison learners post-release, but who also offer Open University degree-level funding for current prisoners as part of the Frank Awards (ibid; The Longford Trust, n.d.). The parameters of this study were thus bound by the core provision of PET.

A list was generated by the Head of Policy with PET of prison learner OU applications from June 2018 onwards, up to February 2019. There were 489 PET applications on this list, meaning that the percentage of applications assessed for the purpose of this study was 20%. The list contained PET-relevant details including the prison the learner was applying from, course name and supplier, the PET application number, and the application scrutiny date. No prisoner-identifiable information was included on the list, and although the applications themselves contained the names of prisoners and their prisoner numbers, this information was not relevant to the research and was thus not recorded in any way. From the list the researcher was given, a convenience selection of prisons was used for the analysis of the letters, based primarily on prisons that had a considerable number of applications. The justification behind selecting the letters in this way was that, from a convenience perspective, it was somewhat easier to analyse multiple letters from the same prison rather than a small number of letters from a greater number of prisons. However, as a result of this methodological decision, the sample of prisons inadvertently did not include applications from the women's estate. Although the researcher did not make an active decision not to include PET applications from female prisoners, it is recognised that this methodological choice renders the sample not representative of learners across the prison estate.

With respect to the PET applications that were selected for analysis, there were some that were reviewed that included letters previously submitted by learners for funding from PET for other courses - these letters were excluded in order to ensure the sample of applications were all from the same timeframe (i.e., from June 2018 until February 2019). As such, although 119 application letters were reviewed in total, not all letters could be included in the analysis. There was also one letter out of the 119 reviewed which was excluded from the analysis as it was in application for an International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) course, which is not at the further or higher education level. In order to strive for consistency in the analysis, the researcher analysed only those letters that were for modules at the further or higher level of learning.

Table 1.0 below outlines the prisons that the analysed letters came from, their respective HMPPS categories, the number the prison was assigned for analysis purposes, and the number of letters that came from each prison:

Table 1.0 Letter selection and prison categorisation

Prison	Category (Webster, 2019 cross-referenced with HMIP reports)	Categorisation No.	Number of Letters
A	Category C Training	1	3
B	Young Offender's Institution	2	9
C	Category B Local	3	14
D	Category C Training	4	2
E	Category C Training	5	3
F	Young Offender's Institution	6	3
G	Local	7	10
H	Category C Training	8	6
I	Category C Training	9	4
J	Category B Training	10	8
K	Category C Training	11	3
L	Local	12	9
M	Local	13	4
N	Category B Training	14	8
O	Category C Training	15	4
P	Category B Training	16	10
Total			**100**

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) came into effect May 25, 2018, and outlines the regulations and procedures for the proper use and storage of personal data (Wolford, 2020). Within the course of Study One, PET raised concerns about the use of prisoners' data (i.e., their application letters) without their knowledge of the research purpose with which it would be used. When prisoners apply to PET, they are made aware of the ways in which their data can be used for PET purposes, such as for promotional materials and PET website information. The reasonable PET concern was that research on the application letters would be published without prisoners' consent to use their information in this way. Within social research, it is essential that participants are protected from risks and that any potential risks to participants are clearly identified and subsequently minimised, particularly in the context of research with vulnerable groups whereby additional attention must be paid to ensure participants are not being taken advantage of (Matthews & Ross, 2010). With respect to informed consent, transparency in the way participant data will be used is a significant element of maintaining ethical research integrity and ensuring participants understand what their agreement to participate entails (ibid). As such, within the context of this study and with consideration of the concerns raised by PET, the research analysis needed to be quite general in nature, without any prison or prisoner identifiers included in the write-up of the study. If any data extracted directly from the letters was to be used, the purpose of the research would be restricted to PET, that is, no quotations or the like could be used other than to provide PET with the full write-up of the research. However, after the preliminary analysis of a small set of letters, the research team felt that there was indispensable value in the words of prisoners themselves that could not be ignored, therefore the use of quotations from the letters would be imperative to the weight of the study. In order to comply with the GDPR concerns PET raised, two versions of the study were created – one without quotations that could be disseminated outside of the realm of the PhD and PET, and one with quotations that would be published for PET and those internal to the PhD and research team only. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained as the names of the prisons were anonymised, and as previously mentioned, no prisoner-identifying information

was recorded by the researcher. The category of the prisons from which PET applicants were writing was the only classification information reported. Additionally, the applicant letters remained in the PET offices at all times during data collection in order to ensure that no confidential information was being removed from the confines of the organisation. The researcher's engagement with the PET letters was completed exclusively within the PET offices under the supervision of PET staff members.

The ethical approval process for the study required the researcher to submit an ethics approval form to the Royal Holloway, University of London (RHUL) College Research Ethics Committee through the Online Ethics System, as well as a volunteer ethics form to PET, which allowed the researcher access to their database of prison learner application letters. The first stage of the ethics approval process through RHUL is to submit a self-assessment ethics form where it will subsequently be determined if further ethics approval is necessary. In the context of this study whereby an analysis was carried out on pre-existing PET application letters, the ethics self-assessment application outcome determined that no second-stage ethics approval was necessary.

4.4 Findings and discussion

For the purposes of this study, it is important to note that, in the analysis of the letters, the focal point was not how many times a certain concept associated with wellbeing was mentioned within each specific letter, rather the significance was placed on how many letters out of the total number analysed included dimensions of emotional, social, and psychological wellbeing. It could be argued that the number of times each letter mentioned any of the specific associated elements of wellbeing was less relevant for the purposes of this study, as the emphasis of the research was more holistic in nature, focusing on the overall presence of elements of wellbeing and the narrative of prison learners with respect to the perceived benefits of engaging with prison education. Additionally, the variance in the frequency of references to specific concepts of wellbeing in individual letters could potentially be attributed to various extraneous factors

such as the writing style of the applicants, or the unique ways in which learners chose to express themselves. It is also important to keep in mind that prison learners are given a list of guiding instructions when writing their letters of application to PET (see Appendix A for PET guidance letter). The fact that prisoners are attempting to gain something, in this case, funding from PET, creates an underlying partiality within the parameters of this study that must be recognised and addressed. The influence of this guiding document on the content of the letters prisoners have written to PET in application for educational funding must be recognised as creating an inevitable bias in the results. Whilst each learner expresses themselves in their own way, as we all do as unique individuals, the fact that learners have been essentially instructed as to what to include in their letters requires the results of this study to be interpreted with this inherent bias in mind. As such, it comes as no surprise that many learners expressed sentiments related to furthering their employment and educational aspirations, as applicants are encouraged to discuss these possibilities within their letters to PET. The notions of being motivated to study towards a degree, having plans for the future and goals to work towards, or engaging in learning for personal development reasons are also mentioned within the PET guidance letter, resulting in the expected finding that these sentiments came up frequently within the applicant letters. However, whilst the initial sentiments expressed by learners in their letters may be based on suggestions that they have been predisposed to iterating via the letter guidelines, it is perhaps then more important that we look to *how* students' expressions of expected outcomes are manifested, as well as the secondary expressions of these individuals within their letters, as these may be manifestations of their nuanced feelings towards accessing further and higher education within prison; these are the statements in which they are more fully able to express themselves and to elaborate on how further and higher education in prison may prospectively benefit them.

The expressed prospective benefits of pursuing further and higher education in prison by learners were varied and wide-ranging in nature. Figure 1.0 below displays in graph form the frequencies of the concepts associated with wellbeing (see also Table 2.4 in Appendix B) that were coded for in the PET applicant letters:

Figure 1.0 Frequency of associative wellbeing concepts in PET application letters
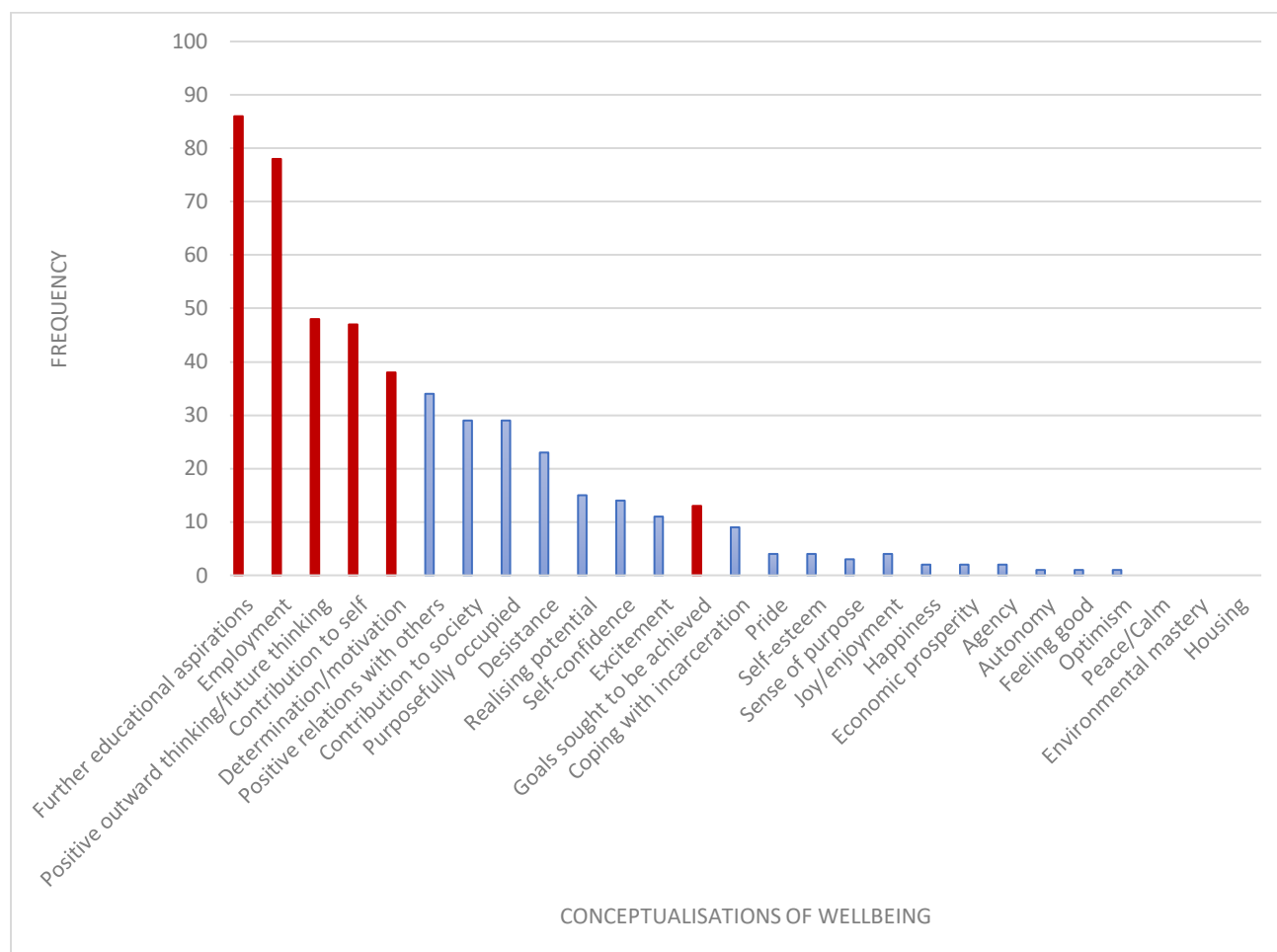
It is evident from Figure 1.0 that there were certain concepts associated with wellbeing that were not mentioned at all within the applicant letters, and those that were mentioned in the majority of the letters. For example, elements of wellbeing associated with housing, peacefulness and calmness, and environmental mastery, were not identified as present within the sample of letters. Contrastingly, 78% of PET applicants mentioned employment as a prospective benefit of further and higher education in prison, and 86% of letters mentioned further educational aspirations. The red highlighted portions of Figure 1.0 indicate those concepts that learners were advised to mention in the PET application guidance document. Unsurprisingly, the graph depicts that the top five conceptualisations of wellbeing were those

that were mentioned within the PET guiding letter. It is therefore important to look to those concepts that learners mentioned of their own accord, or the ways in which they chose to manifest the instructions they were given by PET.

The argument could be made that some of the concepts associated with wellbeing within this study are reasonably subjective or similar in nature, and as such, it may be difficult for a researcher to distinguish between concepts when coding the prison learner letters. For example, the wellbeing elements of 'contribution to society' and 'desistance' might be said to be conceptually adjacent. Likewise, the elements of 'employment' and 'economic prosperity' conceivably have very similar connotations in that both involve earning and maintaining income, and 'goals sought to be achieved' and 'positive, outward focus/future thinking are arguably parallel constructs. Conceivably, even the concepts of 'agency' and 'autonomy' might be considered to have similar foundational meanings, in that each of these concepts might be considered to pertain to the notion of exerting independence over actions and decisions. Consequently, Figure 2.0 depicts a breakdown of the identified concepts associated with wellbeing into broader, more manageable sub-groupings (or sub-dimensions) of terms similar in nature in order to provide a more transparent understanding of the concepts associated with wellbeing and their frequencies within the letters:

Figure 2.0 Frequency of broader sub-groupings of associative wellbeing concepts in PET application letters
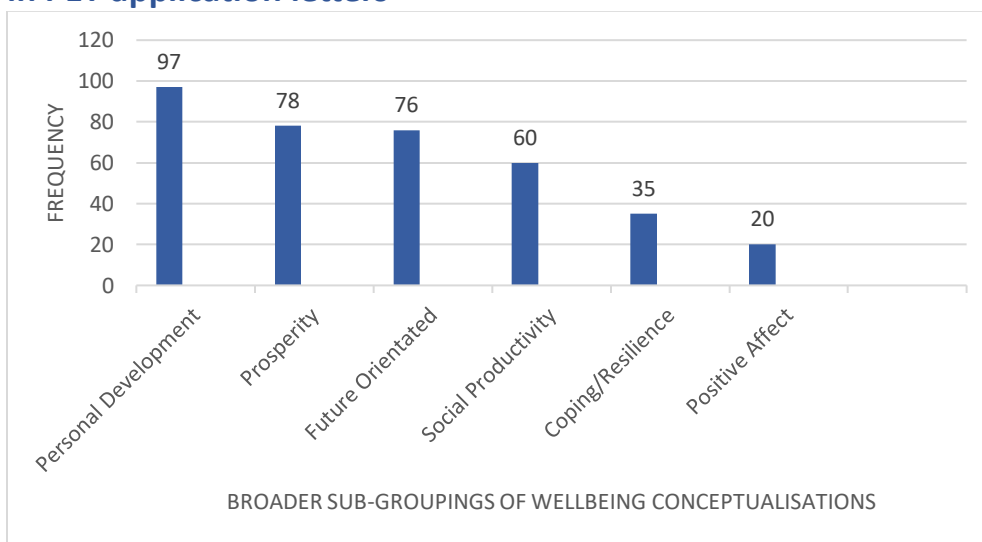
These broader sub-groupings serve to challenge the subjective nature of some of the conceptualisations of wellbeing, thereby contesting the notion that it may be difficult to duplicate this study due to the subjective nature of both the terminology and researchers as individuals. If the concepts associated with wellbeing are clustered more generally according to the associated broader thematic element, it is arguably easier for the study to be replicated, even without the use of a detailed coding guide (as seen in Appendix C).

These sub-groupings add further transparency to the prevalence of the anticipated benefits of participating in further and higher education identified by prison learners in their PET applications. Figure 2.0 indicates that although there were obvious elevated frequencies of those sub-dimensions that contained elements of wellbeing that were mentioned within the PET guiding letter, there were also sub-dimensions that prison learners identified on their own as being potential benefits from accessing further and higher education in prison. The 'social productivity' sub-dimension is of particular interest, as this broader sub-dimension did not contain any concepts associated with wellbeing that were specifically mentioned within the PET guiding letter. The same could be said for the sub-dimensions of 'coping/resilience' and 'positive affect,' but the frequencies were not nearly as high for these sub-dimensions. The fact that prison learners themselves identified concepts associated with social productivity as being potential benefits to accessing further and higher education speaks to the notion that prisoners understand and are attuned to the importance of desistance, contributing to society, and having positive relations with others (the concepts associated with wellbeing that were grouped under the 'social productivity' subdimension), and that they believe accessing further and higher education in prison can contribute positively to these elements.

This finding is echoed by Champion and Noble (2016) in their *Theory of Change* report written for the Prisoners' Education Trust and Prisoner Learning Alliance, a document which aims to underscore the purpose and value of education in prison based on its benefits to prison learners. Champion and Noble identify social capital as one of five themes pertaining to the benefits of prison education (the other four being wellbeing, prison culture, human capital and

knowledge, skills, and employability). In their focus group work with prisoners, Champion and Noble highlight the wider social benefits of education, noting that these benefits "went beyond improving peoples' ability to relate to others, but could empower people to actively participate and contribute to their communities and families, whether in prison or after release" (p.19). Coates (2016) similarly notes that prison education should contribute to the betterment of prisoners' wellbeing and the development of social capital, helping prisoners to "…become assets in their communities" (p.3). Lehtinen et al. (2005), in a WHO report on the promotion of mental health, underscore the significance of social interaction and "mutually satisfying and enduring relationships" on positive mental health (p.49). Lehtinen et al. further highlight the policy-development importance of promoting social capital (e.g., "trust, social support and social networks") and note that "The social capital–mental health relationship should be a key consideration in the promotion of mental health because mental health is a key input to human productivity (ibid, pp.52-53). As the data in the present study suggests, the social productivity benefits of accessing further and higher education in prison need to be realised and extend beyond the narrowly-focused agenda of employment upon release, and should consider the broader implications of improving relationships and social responsibility and awareness through education in prison.

Figure 3.0 below illustrates the frequency of the broader wellbeing dimensions that were established within the learner letters. These dimensions are comprised of the associative concepts identified within the fourth iteration of the operationalisation matrix (see Table 2.4 in Appendix B):

Figure 3.0 Frequency of broader dimensions of wellbeing in PET application letters
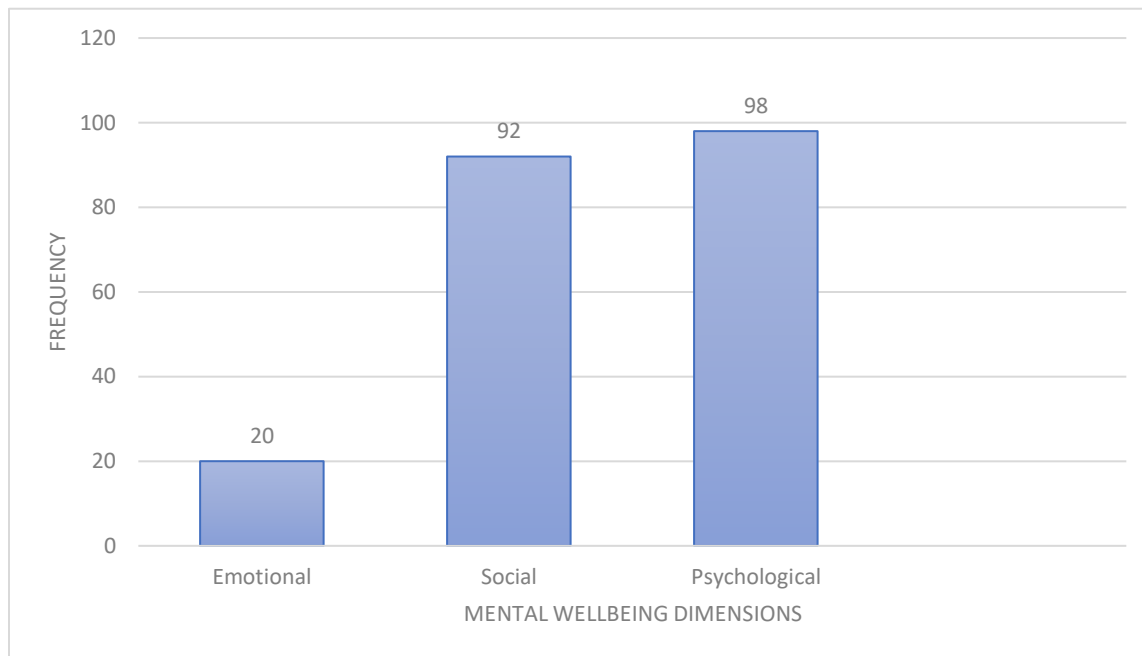
It is of particular interest that the majority of the letters analysed depicted themes related to social and psychological wellbeing, as it speaks to the psychological and social wellbeing benefits and mentally and socially transformative potential of accessing further and higher education in prison. However, in contrast to the elevated levels of psychological and social wellbeing dimensions identified within the applicant letters, there was a relative lack of emergent concepts associated with the emotional wellbeing dimension. It is suggested here that this disparity could potentially be attributed to the fact that male prisoners may feel the need to mute their fragility and emotional expressions in the context of the "overtly masculine environment" (Jewkes, 2002, p.211) where they may feel the need to conform (de Viggiani, 2012). As noted by de Viggiani (2012), "Conforming as a man in prison may involve performing or projecting prison masculinities to ensure emotional, psychological, and social survival, employing strategies to mask self-perceived weaknesses or vulnerability and to attain status and legitimacy" (p.271). Crewe et al. (2014) acknowledge the widespread use of the analogy of "masks" and "fronts" within prison scholarship to describe the tendency of male prisoners to conceal that which may render them vulnerable, and to deter the attention of intimidators in

prison (pp.57, 63). These authors note, however, that there are certain "emotion zones" within prisons set apart from the "main public and residential spaces" (p.65), where prisoners are able more openly display their emotions and vulnerabilities. Crewe et al. note that engaging in educational activities in prison can provide this much-needed respite (ibid). In acknowledging Crewe et al.'s (2014) conceptualisation of "emotion zones" within prison, it is suggested here that whilst the educational environment within prisons may provide an area in which prisoners can be emotionally free (or freer), the analysis of the letters indicate that they are perhaps not yet accustomed to or comfortable with expressing themselves in this way, particularly with respect to a formal application they are making for funding in which they have been guided to write in a certain way for a certain audience. Whilst the reluctance of prison learners to express themselves in this way may not necessarily be a result of a need to conceal their emotional expressions from potential aggressors within the prison, as the letters written by prison learners in application for funding from PET are not made public within the prison, there may be some underlying, residual impacts of feeling self-conscious or inadequate with respect to their educational needs, and thus may feel the need to suppress their emotional connection to education.

Although the letters analysed focused on the *prospective* wellbeing benefits of further and higher education in prison, as the learners were writing the letters in application for funding for courses that had not yet been taken, the importance of the potential impact of further and higher education for prisoners remains evident. Despite the fact that learners were steered in a certain direction by the guidance document with respect to the content of their letters, the multifaceted ways in which prison learners expressed themselves through their letters is a clear indication that there are still emergent themes with respect to the psychological and social wellbeing benefits that prison learners themselves are attuned to and are expressing in ways that are meaningful to them, not just meaningful to those that are approving or denying their PET funding applications. This significant impact is evidenced by the following poignant expression from a prison learner of how he expected the course he was applying for to benefit

him (please note that excerpts from letters have been edited for spelling and grammar only where necessary):

> *I am writing to ask that you consider funding the arts access course that I am hoping to enrol on. I chose this course to give me the skills and confidence to go on to complete a degree course in art…When I found out that I may be able to take part in higher education, here at [anonymous HMP], I saw it as a great opportunity to fulfil a life dream. I am very determined and driven; I am committed to go on to study towards a degree course after completing this access module…I feel that this access course, and then the opportunity to complete a degree course, would be very beneficial to me. Being sentenced to a lengthy prison sentence is a life changing experience. It can leave one feeling hopeless, worthless and the future looking very bleak. Since I decided to apply for the access course, I have felt a sense of optimism and excitement…I feel that this access course would be very beneficial to me, both for expanding my personal knowledge of the subjects and for my own personal development…I believe that completing the access course, and the subsequent degree, will help me get through my experience in prison and hopefully give me employment options upon release.*
>
> (Letter No. 26)

The learner above alluded to the benefits of engaging with education in prison for someone who was serving a lengthy sentence, acknowledging that for someone in their circumstance, prison education could be a valuable lifeline. Wainwright, Harriott, and Saajedi (2019), in their Prison Reform Trust and Prisoner Policy Network report on what prisoners need to make the most of their time in prison, underscore the importance of hope for prisoners, noting that, "People in prison need a reason to be optimistic" (p.v). The potentiality of a brighter future that exists beyond prison can instil within prisoners a sense of positivity (ibid). Murphy (2023) notes that research has found positive relationship between hope and wellbeing, noting that "Hope is a crucial factor for increasing well-being" (p.3).

Having a positive, outward focus/being future-orientated was a significant theme identified within the psychological wellbeing dimension that surfaced in just under half of the applicant letters (*n* = 48). MacLeod and Conway (2007) have noted that, "Positive future thinking (having things to look forward to) is an important element of well-being" (p.1114). Although optimism and having a positive-outward focus/being future-orientated were categorised as separate concepts, it could be argued that these sentiments encapsulate similar sentiments of hope;

hope for oneself and hope for one's future. Whilst there is some evidence in the literature that suggests that people in prison may struggle, at times, with future-orientation (see for example, Fitzalan Howard, 2019; Morris & Zingle, 1977; Trommsdorff & Lamm, 1980), there is also research that indicates that optimism amongst prisoners can have a positive effect on desistance and change (LeBel, Burnett, Maruna, & Bushway, 2008; Maruna, 2001, as cited in Souza, Lösel, Markson, & Lanskey, 2015). It is likewise important to consider the benefits to self-esteem and self-confidence that this hope and optimism can have on those who have engaged or aspire to engage with education in prison. Hammond (2004a) underscores the significance of having a sense of purpose and future on an individual's confidence in what they are capable of. The following excerpt from a PET applicant demonstrates the relationship between hope for the future and self-confidence:

> *Since starting the access module and planning my education path, the working, studying, learning, the hope that I will achieve my goals to better myself and my life has given me so much confidence and I need to carry on the studying if possible…*
>
> (Letter No. 47)

Forty-eight percent of letters in the present study included explicit sentiments related to having a positive, outward-focus/being future-orientated (49% if the concept of 'optimism' is included). That learners expressed sentiments of hoping for their futures in relation to participating in further and higher education echoes Hughes' (2012) finding that preparing for the future was the most common expression of prison learners with respect to their distance learning educational motivations. Implicitly, it is worth considering that the career and further educational aspirations expressed by PET applicants are inherently demonstrative of looking forward to the possibilities the future holds. In this sense, the future-orientated element of wellbeing that was present in the applicant letters emerges as a key aspect in the consideration of how prison education can potentially facilitate a positive wellbeing relationship amongst prison learners. Hammond (2004a) highlights the positive impact that learning can have on having a sense of purpose and future, noting that, in the context of her co-authored research on the wider benefits of learning, older respondents (aged 25+) who had experienced previous difficulties in their lives were the ones who predominantly identified feeling a sense of purpose

and future as an outcome of learning. Hammond states, "Some simply felt that through education their futures looked brighter, that they had more opportunities and were doing something worthwhile with their lives" (ibid, p.49). Although the research of Schuller, Preston, et al. (2004) did not directly pertain to imprisoned learners, their acknowledgement that education has the capacity to effect a sense of future-orientation amongst those with previous life challenges has important implications for those learning in prison, many of whom have previous negative experiences of education and histories of social exclusion.

When considering prison learners' outlook for the future and the benefits they anticipate gaining from participating in prison education, it is also important to consider their beliefs in the capacity for prison education to effect change in themselves as individuals. Learners in the present study underscored how they believed engaging with prison education would assist in their personal, educational, and professional development:

> *I feel by doing this module, working towards my degree will build on my self confidence, as I feel at times I have problems expressing, or finding the rights words to say. I would like to work with the next generation on release, and have the confidence to tackle that task. I feel that this course will help my personal development, and make me grow as an individual, which I feel I've been lacking. I am looking forward to the challenge with great expectation, I have gained quite a few qualifications in custody and in the community, which shows that I've got the determination and grit to see this all the way.*
>
> (Letter No. 113)

> *I am going to continue with the [anonymised further education course], as I need the qualification to coincide with my proposed degree course. Then with the two qualifications, will assist greatly in my future aspirations upon release…Receiving a grant for this Access Module will be highly appreciated as I have no sentence plan, whilst in prison, so I would like to utilise my time to develop my knowledge, professional awareness and recognition, keep my mind focused and commence the journey in setting up a business when I am released, to which my timings and schedule is now spot on.*
>
> (Letter No. 114)

> *I have been in prison for two and a half years and during this time I have completed many educational courses. Education has immensely improved my self-esteem and given me the realisation that I can succeed at something if I put in the time and effort. My long term goal is to start my own business when I am released from custody. Gaining further educational knowledge and insights, will increase my chances of being successful and*

prepare me for many different scenarios, which I may encounter within the business environment and economic climate… I am amazed at how powerful and positive education has been for me. It has completely changed my thinking and provided me something to put my energy into which will benefit me in the long term. Being able to complete the access course is crucial as this is a stepping stone to other courses and perhaps an open degree. Since I plan to do courses in several different subjects, I can add them all together and gain an open degree. My family would be so proud of me and I will feel a huge sense of achievement and empowerment because I will realise my true potential and capabilities.

(Letter No.94)

Personal growth and the development of confidence, self-esteem and knowledge were common sentiments expressed in the PET applicant letters, evidenced through the excerpts above. Schuller (2009) acknowledges the positive mental health and wellbeing effects of lifelong learning, noting that social relationships, a sense of purpose, self-esteem improvement, and the development of knowledge and skills can be fostered through lifelong learning. However, Schuller maintains that the significant mental health challenges of many people in prison can act as a barrier to the realisation of these beneficial impacts. Hammond (2004a) asserts that communication and competences can be effective tools in resiliency and coping with adverse circumstances, but underscores that the relationship between communication, capabilities, and wellbeing is indirect. Interestingly, Hammond (2004a) indicates that the research conducted in collaboration with Schuller, Preston, Brassett-Grundy, and Bynner suggests that establishing a relationship between positive health outcomes and "competence-based education" may be difficult, particularly given that the researchers' quantitative data suggests that "taking courses leading to vocational qualifications, which are by and large competence-based, led to few health and social capital benefits" (p.55). Situating these findings within the context of the present research, whereby prison learners were engaged with education at the further and higher levels, represents a valuable opportunity to explore the relationship between wellbeing and prison education beyond vocational offerings.

As mentioned, the notion of having further educational aspirations was a prominent psychological wellbeing theme identified in the data. Of the 98 letters that were coded as

containing elements of psychological wellbeing, 88% included mentions of further educational aspirations (*n* = 86). Some learners that did not necessarily comment on further educational *aspirations* in their letters still spoke to the importance of education and what it meant to them to be able to access further and higher education courses in prison. For example, there were learners that spoke about their involvement in education in prison out of interest or to expand their knowledge base, and others spoke to owing it to themselves and/or their family members to improve their educational attainment. Improving one's learning and broadening the scope of one's knowledge base is an important tool in the journey of self-improvement, which explains why 'further educational aspirations' was categorised more broadly under the psychological wellbeing sub-dimension of 'personal development.' In turn, the opportunity to improve oneself through learning and occupying the mind with positive educational pursuits becomes a vital component in the ability to endure the prison experience (MacGuinness, 2000). In Wooldredge's (1999) study on the impact of participation in prison programming, visitation frequency, and prison-victimisation on prisoners' psychological wellbeing, one of the factors related to the psychological wellbeing of prisoners being negatively impacted was when they were "engaged less frequently in activities for self-improvement" (p.245).

PET applicants within the present study identified coping with the prison experience as a potential prospective benefit of accessing education in prison - a way to deal with the time given to them and to make the most of this time. The value and necessity of further and higher education as purposeful activity within prison is stressed throughout the letters written to PET by learners, with sentiments of wanting to use prison time productively and constructively, seeking to occupy themselves with "positive pursuits" (Letter No. 2) wanting to get through the "prison experience" (Letter No. 26), and wanting to keep the mind occupied and help the time go by more quickly (Letter No. 13). Learners expressed sentiments such as:

> *I would like to do a distance learning course whilst in prison for a few reasons; the main one being that I would like to think that doing a course like this will keep me busy and help the time go by hopefully faster, another reason is that since being in prison I have found that when sitting in my cell doing nothing I tend to get quite down so again I hope a course will keep my mind occupied.*

Since incarceration I have engaged with any available educational sources that enable me to discover and re-discover my interest in English and particularly creative writing. By the time you read this letter I will have successfully completed the three available levels of creative writing. I find that such ventures into education help to feed my mind and maintain my thought processes, particularly important to someone of my age. Even possibly a defence against age related illnesses such as dementia.

(Letter No. 99)

Letter number 99 above also highlights the applicant's belief that engaging with prison education can sustain or protect against adverse health conditions. This perception resonates with the research of Schuller et al. (2002) who contend that the benefits of learning and education include the capacity to protect against the onset or worsening of mental health conditions.

Reflecting on the social wellbeing dimension, 92% of letters were coded for this element of wellbeing, which included concepts related to career aspirations. It is important to note here that, although instances where prisoners discuss having career aspirations was taken to be indicative of social wellbeing, there is also the possibility that these aspirations are representative of themes of psychological wellbeing in that being future-oriented (i.e., aspiring), has been operationalised, as per the literature, as being an important element of psychological wellbeing (MacLeod, 2017; MacLeod & Conway, 2007). However, as per the literature indicating that social wellbeing involves notions of wanting to contribute to and be a part of one's community and society (Keyes, 1998; Lahtinen et al., 1999), 'career aspirations' was coded as indicative of social wellbeing, in that having a career and contributing financially to both society and one's family is arguably representative of thinking outside the self, and thus contributes to one's sense of belonging to groups of others. Indeed, with respect to concepts associated with social wellbeing, the most common sentiment expressed by learners in their letters was that they wanted to pursue education in prison for the purposes of improving employment opportunities upon release. Given the guidance document issued to PET applicants that encourages them to discuss their career-based aspirations, as well as the rhetoric surrounding

prison education that emphasises a 'reducing recidivism through increasing employment' narrative, it is arguably self-evident that one of the most significant learner-identified prospective benefits of further and higher education in prison would be employment-based. In this sense, this notion is realised in that 86% (n = 78) of letters coded for the social wellbeing dimension mentioned career-related prospective benefits of accessing further and higher education within prison. In a similar vein to career-based prospective benefits of accessing further and higher education in prison, the notion of being rehabilitated, which was classified under the concept of 'desistance' was coded as being a component of social wellbeing and was coded for in 25% of the letters analysed as containing themes related to social wellbeing. The idea of rehabilitation in terms of desistance is arguably a vital element of social wellbeing. Expressing goals of remaining crime-free upon release is indicative of a mentality of the social, with an indirect or perhaps even an unrealised focus on being a positive member of society by living a crime-free life:

> *Studying in my spare time while in prison will help my rehabilitation and help me reduce my risk of reoffending by guaranteeing a higher success rate of me getting a job on release and having a stable life with my wife and family upon release that is free of any crime and allowing me to provide for them and allowing my family to grow at the same time while remaining crime free for the rest of my life.*
>
> (Letter No. 81)

> *If I am able to come out of custody with my qualifications I know it will make life more easy for me in the sense of getting a job a [sic] not having to steer towards a life of crime and in the future I would also like to do a Masters degree after I've got my first qualifications (degree) and know this will reduce the percentage of the risk of re-offending and also I know that I have a big influence on some of the people around me, elder, younger and the same age and will be able to persuade a lot of my friends and peers to try and get educated and steer them away from a life of crime.*
>
> (Letter No. 10)

Rehabilitation and desistance could perhaps also be indicative of a focus on the self, in that by endeavouring to be rehabilitated, prisoners are referencing a desire to facilitate change within themselves in order to remain crime free. However, even if it is the case that learners are more focused on the self than the whole with respect to desistance, which is difficult to discern from

the letters, there conceivably remains a subsequent wider impact on prisoners' communities and society. Individuals who are able to focus on working on the offending behaviours and personality traits that have resulted in engagement in criminal activity and subsequently imprisonment, are those who ultimately are returning to society as more productive members whilst exhibiting more prosocial behaviours, which ultimately benefits society as a whole. Learners also expressed yearnings of proving themselves to others, or aspiring to make others proud, whether that be family, friends, or potential employers. These were important sentiments that were identified under the dimension of social wellbeing, as they are also demonstrative of thinking beyond the self. Anticipating or striving for a stable and healthy relationship with society, one's community, and other individuals is arguably a vital step in the rehabilitation process on the path to desistance. In their letters, learners often spoke of striving to become a useful part of society, mentoring or helping others in prison, being a role model, wanting to provide for their families, or of wanting to help others steer away from negative behaviours upon release:

> *I would like to use my time to restructure my life in a way where I don't have to get myself into trouble. I believe by gaining as much knowledge and educating myself I'm giving myself a second chance at life a healthier less stressful and overall a life I'm happy to live and can be proud of. In obtaining this qualification I would like by [sic] able to support myself and my family and build back some relationships within my social circle & family. This particular course caught my attention because I grew up in care homes & was helped by loads of different social workers & it has always been my dream to work with young children in my situation."*
>
> (Letter No. 109)

> *The Open University access course will open the door for a wide range of courses which are available. I have some in mind such as business, sociology and economics. All of these will benefit me in different ways and help me upon release so I can become a decent and valuable member of society.*
>
> (Letter No. 94)

> *If, as I expect to be, am released at my next parole hearing next year it will be my intention to apply for and attend college, so as that I am able to continue with my studying, as I resettle back into the community. This is something that I will endeavour to do, as I also seek wilful employment in my quest to lead a pro-social lifestyle upon release from custody. I really have made genuine efforts to turn my life around and previous recidivist*

behaviour and I do sincerely feel that being given the privilege and opportunity to study this course, that this can only benefit and enhance my prospects further for the future.

(Letter No. 70)

With respect to emotional wellbeing, 20% of letters included variables associated with this dimension. The leading sentiments that were expressed by learners with respect to emotional wellbeing were feelings of pride, excitement, and enjoyment from the possibility of pursuing a further or higher education course within prison. Learners expressed enthusiasm for being given the opportunity to study and to apply for funding through PET:

This Access course will be another step in my new found enjoyment for learning. I am currently a classroom assistant in ITQ and I am enjoying passing on the skills that I have learnt from completing these courses.

(Letter No.107)

I have many varied interests, but in particular, I am passionate about English literature, history, modern languages and creative writing. I am constantly reading and writing to learn and evolve daily. With this in mind I am over the moon to see the access module…

(Letter No.2)

Coding the letters for this variable proved somewhat difficult in that many aspects of emotional wellbeing could conceivably be said to also be associated with psychological wellbeing, depending on the subjective and varied experiences of the coder. For example, the notion of 'interest' has been conceptualised in scholarship as an emotion (Fredrickson, 2001; Silvia, 2008). However, within the present study, applicants' expressions of interest in developing knowledge and experience were interpreted as indicative of personal development. The impact of positive emotions on optimal functioning and psychological growth has been acknowledged in research (Fredrickson, 2001). Although the empirical scholarship on wellbeing, particularly that related to subjective well-being, generally distinguishes between concepts associated with emotional and psychological wellbeing, Park et al. (2023) acknowledge the fragmented use of the terms subjective well-being, psychological wellbeing, and emotional wellbeing in scholarship. As Keyes (2012) notes, the research on subjective well-being is generally divided into two research domains: the hedonic domain, generally conceptualised as subjective emotional well-being and concerned with hedonic feelings of happiness, satisfaction, and

feeling good; and the eudaimonic domain, generally conceptualised as subjective psychological and social well-being and concerned with individual perceptions of positive functioning in life, both at the individual and community levels. However, in using the term 'emotional well-being' (EWB) as an "umbrella term" starting point to develop a more unified and comprehensive conceptualisation of psychological wellbeing, Park et. al draw on the diverse conceptual and theoretical landscape to demonstrate the semantical confusion in constructs and definitions related to psychological wellbeing. For example, Park et al. acknowledge that the National Institutes of Health (2018) uses the terms subjective well-being and emotional wellbeing interchangeably "…to define how individuals experience their lives emotionally as well as their perceptions of life satisfaction and quality of life" (p.14). In his conceptualisation of "flourishing" on the mental health continuum (where 'flourishing' is considered complete mental health and 'languishing' incomplete mental health), Keyes (2002a) states that "To be flourishing…is to be filled with positive emotions and to be functioning well psychologically and socially" (p.210).

The challenge of coding for the somewhat interconnected concepts and dimensions of wellbeing surfaced again with respect to the notion of pride. In the letters, when a learner would mention that being given the opportunity to participate in his chosen educational course in prison would instil feelings of pride in himself, this was coded as indicative of emotional wellbeing. However, some learners also mentioned feelings of pride with respect to wanting to please others – wanting to make their friends, family, and potential employers proud by pursuing education and making the most out of their time whilst in prison. Sentiments of pride expressed in this way were coded as being representative of social wellbeing in that there is an acknowledgement in the literature on social wellbeing that positive relations with others is a component of this form of wellbeing (The Faculty of Public Health, 2019). It is this notion of having positive relations with others where the blurred lines between various dimensions of wellbeing are seen again, and the convergence of many aspects of wellbeing is evident. For example, Carruthers and Hood (2004) note that positive interpersonal relations are part of what encompasses psychological wellbeing (pp.225, 233), and similarly, Ryff (1989) and Ryff and

Keyes (1995) include "positive relations with others" as one of the six dimensions of psychological wellbeing (p.719).

With consideration of the ways in which elements associated with emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing are ostensibly muddled and intersecting in the literature, it is conceivable that the concepts associated with each facet of wellbeing identified in this study may be subject to idiosyncratic coding decisions. The somewhat clouded state of scholarship regarding dimensions of wellbeing resulted in a coding strategy that was, to a certain degree, subjectively based on the researcher's own interpretation of the letters. The Appendix C coding guide facilitated consistency in the coding process amongst the researcher and independent observer, however it is conceivable that another researcher's interpretations and understandings of wellbeing, even when derived from the literature, might yield different results. However, contextually, the researcher's coding decisions are justified in that they were grounded not only in the literature on wellbeing, but also in the explicit and latent content of the applicant letters.

4.5 Impact and implications

The results of this study stress that the benefits of further and higher education for prison learners extend beyond the traditional education-related outcomes prioritised and focused upon by policy makers. The prison learner self-reported impacts of further and higher-level education in prison, within a framework of wellbeing, indicate that the benefits of education in prison can extend beyond that which prison education policy seems so dutifully married to – that of earned qualifications and outcomes in order to tangibly measure the impact of education on desistance. The status quo of prison education policy unfortunately remains too narrowly focused on lower-level basic education, as these are the skills that are believed to assist with gaining employment upon release (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005). However, whilst it is true that engaging in education in prison can have a positive correlation with reduced recidivism rates (see for example, Davis et al., 2013), a causal relationship is unascertainable. The relationship between prison education and reoffending

remains complex and the impact of basic skills education on rates of recidivism remains unproven (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005).

4.5.1 Education supporting desistance

When delivered in the right way for each prisoner, and for the right reasons, the potential link between prison education and desistance would be an important relationship to explore. However, when education is delivered with a "one size fits all" mantra in mind (Braggins & Talbot, 2003, p.7), or when the provision of an education curriculum is subpar, target-driven, narrowly-focused, irrelevant, and inflexible in nature, it can then become very difficult to discern how education is truly impacting recidivism and rehabilitation. The broader approach to rehabilitation and desistance includes focusing on all aspects of the prisoner as a person, which means that education programming needs to adopt an approach that pushes past the barriers of narrow-based learning that exist within the current context. In the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee 2005 report on prison education, the intrinsic value of education is underscored, and it is recognised that

> ...to provide prison education is important in itself in a civilised society because it is the right thing to do. We should be developing the person as a whole, not just in terms of the qualifications they hold for employment. Education, and the process of engaging in learning, has a value in itself which needs to be recognised. A focus on reducing recidivism without considering the prisoner's right to education more broadly, would not be sufficient. (p.13)

A 2009 report published by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) reiterates the importance of a "whole-person approach" to educating prisoners, noting that "It is pointless attempting to build up someone's human capital if their self-confidence and sense of identity are in fragments" (Schuller, 2009, p.13). The role that wellbeing can play in the desistance process is indeed of interest, as per the results of this study. However, whilst the employability skills prisoners are gaining from education in prison seem to be at the forefront of policy, with respect to the fact that it is believed these are the skills that are paramount in the

desistance process, it is perhaps the unquantifiable wellbeing impacts that they are gaining from education that can truly make a difference.

4.5.2 Wellbeing

Whilst this study focused on further and higher-level learning in prison, it has provided the foundation for investigation into prison learners' perceptions of the wellbeing benefits of education with respect to all forms and levels of learning. The potential wellbeing impacts of learning in general cannot be discounted, raising pertinent questions about whether there are tangible differences in the impacts of different types and levels of learning on the wellbeing of prisoners which could potentially be answered by innovative research in the future. With respect to next steps, research that could tangibly measure the impact of prison education on prisoners' wellbeing would play a decisive role in furthering prison education policy to the point that educational programming could be developed with prisoners' best interests in mind. Equally, due consideration must be paid to the potential relationship between wellbeing and the optimism of prison learners with respect to the expected benefits of engaging with education. Study One raises important questions for future research to explore the potential for the wellbeing of prison learners to be impacted in a negative sense if the benefits they hope to gain from participating in education are not realised.

The findings of this study are key to the understanding of wellbeing as a concept that must remain fluid, adaptable, and subjective in nature. The wellbeing framework that was created and used for the purposes of the research at hand points to a comprehensive understanding of wellbeing as a dynamic experience that is beyond the stringent definitions of mental illness or disease. Whilst definitions of mental health and wellbeing are pervasive within the literature, the true nature of wellbeing is individualistic and subjective. For the purposes of this study, it was essential that prisoners' experiences be included in the operationalisation of wellbeing, thus justifying the progression of the wellbeing matrix through multiple iterations. The multifaceted and diverse ways prison learners manifested their thoughts on the prospective

benefits of accessing further and higher education courses points to the necessity of a holistic approach to prison education that responds to the complex wellbeing needs of prison learners. If desistance is to be tied to developing prisoners as whole persons, then a comprehensive response to prison education must accompany this holistic mentality, which includes the recognition of the potential impact education can have on prisoners' wellbeing. Prison education programming that is directed at only one aspect of prisoners' skills or developmental deficiencies may not result in significant holistic changes to the prisoner. The manifestations of prospective benefits of accessing further and higher education within the prison learner letters indicate that prison learners themselves are aware of the impact education can have on their growth and transformation as individuals, but the prison education system unfortunately has yet to align policy with this mentality.

Study One has emphasised the importance of the relationship between wellbeing and those anticipated benefits of engaging with education in prison identified by prison learners themselves. Importantly, it is suggested here that the findings of the present research point to important holistic wellbeing implications for prison learners when education is developed in accordance with the wider benefits of learning that prison learners associate with engagement in education. Prisons should seek to incorporate the wider benefits of learning and diverse educational needs of the prison population into the promotion of positive mental health and wellbeing.

4.5.3 Informing PET practice

As a preliminary study, one of the goals was to provide PET with information on the wellbeing benefits prison learners anticipated would be gained from accessing further and higher education courses in prison. The prison learner-reported wellbeing benefits provide value to PET with respect to developing and tailoring courses to meet the identified needs of their applicants and learners. The results of this study also provide PET and other organisations supporting prisoner learning with an indication of how the courses they offer are benefitting

prison learners from a wellbeing perspective, which augments justification of the necessity of providing further and higher education to prisoners.

4.6 Limitations

It has been recognised that the primary limitation of the present study lies in the analysis of letters that have been written by prisoners who are attempting to gain funding from PET. This creates an inherent bias within the study that reflects a skewed perception of prison education as being beneficial in some capacity, as applicants essentially need to demonstrate to PET that they understand the value of education. Through advising applicants on what to include in their covering letters, the PET guidance letter that applicants receive helps them to articulate the potential ways they believe education will aid in their betterment. Nonetheless, the present research retains its value in conceptualising these benefits using a lens of wellbeing. Although the results of the study may be somewhat unsurprising given the instructions that prison learners receive prior to applying to PET for funding, the study arguably succeeds in demonstrating that the prisoner-identified prospective benefits of education are elemental mechanisms of wellbeing.

It is further acknowledged here that using letters based on the ease of accessibility renders the sample not representative of the full spectrum of prisons in England and Wales. The results of the analysis are therefore not generalisable to other prisoners or prisons in England and Wales. For example, as mentioned, the entire sample of penal institutions selected for analysis was from the male estate (either adult prisons or YOIs), so the results are not generalisable to incarcerated women in the female estate. However, the purpose of the research within this study was to explore the potential wellbeing benefits of prison education from the perspectives of prison learner applicants to PET. In doing so, a practical framework of wellbeing has been established that may either transcend gendered understandings, or alternatively, be useful in embracing potential gendered differences in the educational wellbeing experiences of women in prison. Theoretically, the wellbeing framework can be used to explore the relationship

between wellbeing and prison education within a variety of contexts, including the experiences of prison learners across the entire estate. The relationship between wellbeing and education may indeed differ for female prison learners, and the wellbeing framework developed in the present study provides a useful starting point to explore these potential differences.

It is also important to note here that the convenience sampling that was used may have created a sampling bias which inadvertently included a sample of prisons and potentially prisoners with certain characteristics. Due to the fact that prisons were selected primarily based on having a moderately substantial number of applications to analyse, the potential surfaces that the sample of prisons may have included those that are more likely to have more PET applicants than others based on various characteristics of these prisons, for example if there was more of a focus on education than in other prisons (e.g., education departments that were more supportive of educational pursuits). A positive and supportive education culture in these prisons could thus influence an influx of prison learner applicants to PET, thereby creating a sample of applicants who have been imparted with the benefits of education by a supportive prison education department or previous positive experiences of prison education, or potentially have been supported in writing their letters to PET in a certain way. Indeed, it is arguable that on a more general level, the present research has been influenced by a pro-education mentality amongst applicants who already see the value in education.

4.7 Conclusion

This paper has set the groundwork for further studies to examine in more detail the purported wellbeing benefits education can have on prison learners, and the impact and implications of the research on further studies of this nature. The wellbeing framework that has been developed in this study has served to establish a situated and nuanced understanding of the of dense and complex nature of wellbeing. This paper serves as justification for expanding the research base on education and desistance, as well as the intrinsic impacts of prison education on learners. It serves as a reminder that further research into the wider link between education,

rehabilitation, and the holistic development of individuals, rather than just the skills that lead to employment, is required. The perceived wellbeing impacts of accessing further and higher education in prison, from the perspective of the ones who matter most – the prisoners, indicates that there is more to be gleaned from education in prison, and that the wider positive wellbeing impacts are yet to be fully realised. So long as prison education is continued to be viewed in terms of the impact it has on society with respect to employment rather than in terms of the effect it has on the prisoner as a person, the effectiveness of prison education remains limited and unfulfilled.

Regardless of the past and present limitations of prison education policy and practice, the results of this study generate optimism about the progression of prison education. Reuss (1999), when questioning the purpose of prison education, notes that prison education can be a tool of empowerment for the prisoner, and as such, an educational focus on the needs of the prisoner is the way forward. In this sense, the foundation of prison education lies in the underlying benefits that can be gained for prisoners as distinct individuals with differing educational needs. Additional studies exploring the unique ways in which prison education (and particularly further and higher education) can promote the personal and social development of prisoners, are required in order to further the discussion on the potential for prison education to impact the wellbeing of prison learners. When it comes to prison education, it is time to consider the extraordinary benefits that can be incurred from a more comprehensive focus on the transformative potential of education.

Chapter Five

Study Two – 'Lockdown Learning'

5.0 Introduction

Given the restrictions to movement and activity that have been implemented in prisons in England and Wales as a result of Covid-19, a greater awareness of the coronavirus-related impacts on prisoner wellbeing is vital. In particular, out-of-cell activities such as education courses that would normally keep minds occupied were suspended under quarantine regulations, raising questions about the impact of the interruption to learning on prisoners. In order to investigate the impact of Covid-19 restrictions on prison learners' wellbeing, a study was undertaken in collaboration with the national prison newsletter, *Inside Time*, to explore learners' views on education during the pandemic. The inaugural study of this thesis (Study One) set the stage for the exploration of the wellbeing benefits of prison education by analysing the prospective benefits of further and higher education identified by applicants to PET. Following Study One, the present study (Study Two) further explores the wellbeing benefits of prison education within a specific and unique point in time, that of the Covid-19 lockdown whereby the provision of in-person education was suspended in prisons in England and Wales (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2020a). Just as Study One used a lens of wellbeing to explore a diverse array of benefits prison learners anticipated gaining from participating in prison education, Study Two will examine the impact of the *absence* of education during the context of a viral pandemic lockdown. The context of the societal restrictions and lockdowns implemented as a result of the Covid-19 virus provided a unique opportunity for the present research to further explore those wellbeing benefits of prison education identified in Study One whilst simultaneously enabling further scrutiny of the framework of wellbeing. There remains a pervasive concern over the mental health of prisoners during lockdown (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2020), amplifying the relevance of Study Two and the very immediate, pressing context in which it was conducted. The findings of this study contribute to an

understanding of the wellbeing impact of the restrictions placed on access to education in prisons during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The following discussion will outline the background and impact of Covid-19 events, both in the wider community and in prisons, in order to provide the benefits of and relevant justification for completing a study such as this during the coronavirus pandemic. The adaptive methodological approach required in the restrictive context of a pandemic will be discussed, and the thematic analysis used will explore the applicability of the operationalisation matrix from Study One to the data collected in Study Two. Within the findings and discussion portion of the study, the presence or absence of associative elements of wellbeing identified within Study One will be considered within the context of the 'Lockdown Learning' letters, as will any novel themes that emerged. Finally, the ways in which the experiences of prison learners during the pandemic arguably differed to that of learners in the community will be highlighted in order to emphasise the significance of education as a mechanism by which prisoners cope with the prison experience. It is important to note here that the time period of interest to this study is the beginning of Covid-19 and subsequent first national UK lockdown, which commenced on March 23, 2020, with restrictions initially relaxing between June and August 2020 in England (Brown & Kirk-Wade, 2021). However, with respect to prisons in England and Wales, as of the time this study was being written in late autumn 2020, tightened lockdown restrictions remained present in some capacity due to the acknowledged need of the MoJ and HMPPS to be adaptable but cautious with the easing of lockdown restrictions in prisons, exercising prudence with respect to the gradual lifting of restrictions, and awareness of the possibility that the timeline of lifting of restrictions may not mirror that of the general community (Ministry of Justice & HM Prison and Probation Service, 2020b). The focal point of scrutiny is the beginning of the lockdown until July 15th, 2020, the deadline for prison learners to submit their responses to the 'Lockdown Learning" article in *Inside Time*, as this provides a finite timeline with which to focus analysis and discussion.

5.1 Background and justification

The justification for Study Two lies in the crucial insight it provides into the accounts of prison learners during the pandemic. The principal accounts of what occurred in prisons during the earlier stages of the pandemic came out of prisons themselves, and as such were primarily official reports (see for example, HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2020d, 2020e, 2020f). The voices of prisoners were largely absent, thus setting the stage for this timely research to consider prisoners' self-reported experiences of the impact of lockdown to learning in prison. Although primary research was suspended in prisons due to the Covid-19 lockdown, the correspondence-based method used in Study Two allowed for an exploration of the views of a small but reasonably representative sample of prison learners during lockdown. The relatively small sample size represents a limitation of the study with respect to generalisability, particularly with respect to YOIs which were not included in the sample. However, the sample size is justified when considering that the themes that arose throughout the 'Lockdown Learning' letters were quite similar in nature across most of the sample, suggesting data saturation had been reached.

The omnipresence of Covid-19 throughout 2020 and onwards resulted in a rapidly changing context that created difficulties in concentrating discussions within the parameters of a finite research project. In order to concisely outline the Covid-19 context in which this study was carried out, the main phases of the pandemic will be summarised, including the initial outbreak, the first nation-wide lockdown, the initial easing of restrictions in the summer of 2020, and the autumnal second wave and subsequent second UK lockdown. For analysis purposes and in order to highlight the impact of the Covid-19 restrictions on prison learners, the focus of the discussion will remain on the first UK lockdown period, as this is when prison learners were asked to submit their experiences of learning during lockdown.

5.1.1 Background of Covid-19 phases and responses

The first death in the UK as a result of a Covid-19 diagnosis was reported by the Chief Medical Officer for England in early March 2020 (Department of Health and Social Care, 2020c). On March 23, a national lockdown was put into effect in the UK, whereby mandatory lockdown and quarantine measures were implemented and citizens were legislated by the Government to stay at home unless they had a 'reasonable excuse' (Brown & Kirk-Wade, 2021). Governmental lockdown orders stated that any non-essential travel, activity, or work was restricted. Pubs and bars in the UK were ordered to close as of the night of March 20th, 2020 (Prime Minister's Office & Johnson, 2020). Outdoor exercise was limited to one activity a day and leaving the house for any reason other than those associated with basic necessities (i.e., food, medication, work - if unable to work from home), was prohibited (British Medical Association, 2022a). Police were granted power to issue varying levels of penalties for those not complying with the lockdown and social distancing regulations, ranging from being instructed to go home or to vacate an area, being issued a fixed penalty notice, to potential arrest (Brown, 2021). Social distancing measures were implemented to reduce contact between people in order to limit the spread of the virus (Cabinet Office, 2021) and became a standard way of life throughout the UK and the world as a result of the pervasive nature of the novel coronavirus (Beall, 2020). The initial government guidance indicated that the advisable distance to maintain between oneself and others was two metres (Cabinet Office, 2021), guidance that was quickly absorbed by many essential services that remained open for business during the pandemic, evidenced by the onset of social distancing measures such as place markers installed to advise people where it was safe to stand and walk (Jones & Wakefield, 2020). Protective barriers were constructed within some essential services where person-to-person interaction was relatively unavoidable, such as pharmacies (Coffey, O'Grady, Head, & Jupp, 2020). The National Health Service (NHS) struggled to cope with the additional pressure from the influx of pandemic patients and corresponding backlog of routine healthcare (British Medical Association, 2022b).

From June to July 2020, lockdown measures and social gathering restrictions in England began to ease, with non-essential businesses reopening and the general public once again allowed to leave their homes for work, travel, and leisure (Brown & Kirk-Wade, 2021). However, signs of a second wave of the virus emerged in the late summer and early autumn of 2020 as Covid-19 cases inevitably began to rise once more, compelling the Government to once again implement measures to try to curb the spread of the virus (British Medical Association, 2020a; Brown & Kirk-Wade, 2021). A three-tiered system of restrictions was put in place as of October 14, 2020, with restrictions in England varying regionally based on the respective rise in Covid-19 cases (Brown & Kirk-Wade, 2021; Scott, 2020). Once it was determined that coronavirus cases were rising with increasing vigour that would put a strain on healthcare services, the UK government ultimately determined that more severe restrictions were again required on a national basis in order to curb the transmission of Covid-19 and implemented a four-week second national lockdown in England on November 5, 2020 (Brown & Kirk-Wade, 2021; Haves, 2020). This lockdown was similar to the first in many ways, particularly with respect to the requirement for people to stay at home as well as the closing of non-essential businesses; however, it was not as stringent as the first, as schools and universities were allowed to remain open which was not the case during the first lockdown, and certain allowances were made with respect to childcare support bubbles (ibid).

The UK government has been criticised for its handling of the Covid-19 crisis at its outset, with critics maintaining that the Government was too slow with the implementation of mandatory protective measures (British Medical Association, 2022a; House of Commons Health and Social Care and Science and Technology Committees, 2021; Ng, 2020). Although the first case of Covid-19 within the UK was confirmed on January 31, 2020 (Department of Health and Social Care, 2020b), and the first Covid-19 transmission within the UK was reported on February 28, 2020 (Department of Health and Social Care, 2020a), the Government did not act straight away with respect to preparatory measures such as compulsory quarantine and restrictions on social activities (British Medical Association, 2022a), as was the case with some countries that quickly adopted comprehensive testing and quarantine measures early on in order to slow the spread

of the virus, and were clear and consistent in their communication on health and safety guidelines to their populations (Clendinin, 2020). First *advising* citizens on March 16, 2020 to stay away from public places, to avoid non-essential contact, to work from home where possible, and to isolate at home when Covid-19 symptoms surfaced (Price, 2020), and then mandating it via imposing a national lockdown one week later, the UK was said to have lagged behind other countries with respect to imposing restrictions on citizens' movements and activities (Perrigo, 2020; Sridhar, 2020). In the prison context, although the implementation of a restrictive Covid-19 regime in prisons subsequent to the national lockdown was viewed as successful insofar as rampant transmission of the virus was contained, the prolonged isolating conditions which prisoners were forced to endure elevated concerns about the long-term consequences of these restrictions (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2020; Prison Reform Trust & Prisoner Policy Network, 2020a).

5.1.2 Prison response to Covid-19

In a similar vein to the wider general population, prisons in England and Wales had measures put in place to contain the spread of Covid-19 and to protect the prisoners, staff, public, and NHS workers. An 'exceptional model of delivery' was implemented in prisons on March 24, 2020 (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2020). Transfers of prisoners between prisons were suspended, as were visitations (Prison Reform Trust & Prisoner Policy Network, 2020a). Various contact-related modifications were introduced to ensure prisoners were able to maintain contact with those outside of prison, such as introducing 900 secure mobile devices into prisons without telephones in cells and adding the capacity for prisoners to make monthly, 30-minute video calls to loved ones via secure laptops (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2020). In order to comply with social distancing measures, the recreational activities of prisoners were temporarily ceased, resulting in an increasing amount of time prisoners were confined to their cells (ibid). Prison gyms, chapels, and libraries that would normally be frequented by prisoners were suddenly off-limits, meaning prisoners were no longer able to participate in the activities that normally provide them with some much-needed respite and mental stimulation and that

might facilitate improved wellbeing (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2017; Nurse et al., 2003). At the outset of the implementation of Covid-19 restrictions, prison education providers indicated that they deemed their services essential, and as such felt they would still be able to operate within the Covid-19 regime (Buckland, 2020). However, upon further review, education staff were ultimately not permitted to operate in prisons (ibid). Learning materials and resources were developed to provide prisoners with in-cell alternatives to the educational activities they had been engaged in prior to the onset of the pandemic (ibid).

The UK government also announced that it would be implementing a phased scheme in prisons in England and Wales to ease the burden of the Covid-19 pandemic on the prison and healthcare systems (Ministry of Justice, 2020i). This plan involved a gradual system of early release on temporary licence for prisoners in England and Wales who had less than two months left on their sentences, and who had been assessed as low-risk and did not pose a danger to public safety (ibid). Prisoners who were pregnant or residing on Mother and Baby Units with their children and who did not pose a risk to public safety were also eligible for temporary release (Ministry of Justice, HM Prison and Probation Service, & Buckland, 2020). One of the goals of these early release plans was to establish single-cell occupancy within prisons in order to reduce the close contact of prisoners in an attempt to curb the spread of the virus (Ministry of Justice, 2020i). The primary view influencing the temporary release scheme was that the longer that prisoners remained in prison unnecessarily, thus keeping the prison population high, the higher the likelihood that the coronavirus would needlessly be spread amongst the prison and general population, taking an immeasurable toll on the NHS and risking the lives of many (ibid). Prisoners who were not eligible for the proposed temporary release schemes included those showing symptoms of Covid-19, those convicted of violent or sexual offenses, offenses against children, or who posed a threat to national security, and those convicted of a Covid-19 related offense (Ministry of Justice, 2020i). Prisoners eligible for temporary release were electronically monitored in the community and could be returned to prison upon "first sign of concern" (ibid).

In light of the Covid-19 social distancing regulations, HMIP was required to adjust the ways in which prison inspections were carried out (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2020g). Prison inspections understandably needed to continue in some respect, as the pandemic would have otherwise provided an unfortunate opportunity for poor practices and procedures to go unchecked for an indeterminate amount of time. HMIP halted all full inspections until the end of May 2020 and implemented a contingency plan in the form of short, one-day visits known as Short Scrutiny Visits (SSVs) (ibid). These visits were used to investigate the state of affairs in small clusters of similarly-grouped prisons (i.e., local prisons, women's prisons, YOIs) within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, with a summary report being published in the weeks following the visits (ibid). Prison inspectors looked at how prisons were adapting to and complying with the imposed coronavirus restrictions in order to ensure that the health, safety, and needs of prisoners and staff were being properly addressed (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2020h). According to Peter Clarke, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, "[SSVs] enable us to tell the story of life in prison during the current crisis and comment on the proportionality of the action being taken (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2020f, p.6). In August 2020, SSVs were replaced by Scrutiny Visits (SVs), which, although not as lengthy or involved as a full inspection, encompassed a more rigorous investigation into the progress of individual prisons with respect to responding to Covid-19 challenges, rather than groupings of the similar categories of prisons (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2020c, 2020i).

Despite the assurances of HMPPS that public safety remained a priority with respect to the early release plan, there were flaws and delays in its implementation early on. The early release scheme was halted on April 18, 2020, due to an "administrative" mistake, resulting in the erroneous release of six prisoners who, though eligible for the early release scheme, were released prior to its implementation (BBC News, 2020). In a similar vein to the critical response it received from the general population with respect to the tardiness of Covid-19 precautionary action, the Government was also criticised for its somewhat leisurely implementation of the temporary early-release scheme, with very few prisoners actually having been released at the outset of the initiative (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2020; The Howard League for

Penal Reform, 2020). From the start of the pandemic until August 7, 2020, only 275 prisoners had been released as per the Government's temporary release schemes (which includes both Compassionate releases and End of Custody Temporary releases) (Ministry of Justice, 2020f, 2020g) despite the estimate that up to 4000 prisoners would be eligible for temporary early release (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2020). The temporary release of pregnant prisoners, mothers with babies, and women with medical vulnerabilities was also found to be slow in its implementation (House of Commons & House of Lords, 2020). As of June 29, 2020, only 23 women prisoners who were either pregnant or residing on Mother and Baby Units had been released as per the UK government's early release plans (ibid). In their SSV carried out in women's prisons, HMIP reported that although the three scrutinised prisons exhibited positive work in release planning, arrangements for adequate accommodation were not in place for those who were released (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2020d). However, despite the drawn-out, partial execution of the temporary release from custody schemes, HMPPS realised their objective of reducing the prison population through a number of avenues, including prisoners being released as per usual as they reached the end of their custodial sentences, and reduced admission of new prisoners into custody as a result of court hearings being delayed due to Covid-19 (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2020). According to the House of Commons Justice Committee's (2020) report on the impact of Covid-19 in prisons, "Most of the reduction resulted from ordinary prison releases as people reached the end of the custodial part of their sentences or were released from remand…Such routine releases, combined with very small numbers of new receptions into prisons as a result of jury trial suspensions explains the reduction in population" (p.19). As of September 30, 2020, the prison population in England and Wales was down approximately 4,600 places from September 30, 2019, a decrease of 5% in the overall prison population (Ministry of Justice, 2020e).

The UK government gradually began easing coronavirus-related lockdown measures in England from May 2020 (British Medical Association, 2022a), but restrictions were not lifted with the same degree of urgency in prisons (Cooney, 2021; Criminal Justice Joint Inspection, 2022). Recognising that the timeline of easing restrictions in prisons would likely not be in line with

that of the general public due to the increased risks associated with housing many vulnerable persons in a closed setting environment, the MoJ and HMPPS released an official recovery framework publication outlining a conditional plan of action with respect to the easing of lockdown restrictions in prisons (Ministry of Justice & HM Prison and Probation Service, 2020b). This framework acknowledged that the health and safety of prisoners, staff, and the public remained the foremost concern, and that the lifting of restrictions in prisons would be dynamic and in accordance with guidance from public health authorities, and dependent upon the Covid-19 circumstances in prisons and in the community. The MoJ and HMPPS also emphasised the need for flexibility in the gradual lifting of lockdown restrictions in incremental stages and noted that target dates would not be set in prisons for downgrading to lower stages of restrictions. Additionally, once approved activities were able to be resumed, they would likely be subject to stringent adaptations and constraints in order to ensure the maintenance of health and safety. The framework outlined guidelines for reinstating certain activities that had been halted during the initial Covid-19 lockdown and noted that the resumption of social visits and other activities would not be standardised across the prison estate and would thus be dependent upon which regime stage within the recovery framework an individual prison was operating at (ibid). The concern over the delay in restrictions being lifted in prisons as compared to the general community was that prisoners were being subjected to prolonged periods of isolation, which led to a subsequent discussion over the worrisome state of prisoners' mental health and wellbeing during the quarantine period (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2021b; Prison Reform Trust & Prisoner Policy Network, 2020a, 2021). It has been noted that the potential for prolonged lockdown in prisons to negatively impact prisoners' mental health could be exacerbated by images of those on the outside enjoying life post-lockdown, with the potential for resentment to fester amongst prisoners seeing depictions of life on the outside seemingly returning to "normal" (Rees, 2020).

5.2 Evidence of the Impact of Covid-19 in Prisons

5.2.1 Covid-19 deaths in prisons

Concerns were prominent about the speed of transmission of Covid-19 within the prison environment, characterised as it is by issues of overcrowding, lack of ventilation, and poor hygienic conditions (Coker, 2020). However, although the situation with respect to Covid-19 in prisons was expected to be quite dire, early numbers suggested that the state of affairs was not quite as bleak as initially anticipated. Through employing social distancing and a combination of protective measures that aimed to compartmentalise prisoners (i.e., significantly reducing prison transfers and separating prisoners into different units depending on their risk of Covid-19 infection, or their risk of infecting others), the number of prisoners infected by the coronavirus was lower than initially estimated (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2020). The compartmentalisation approach involved establishing various isolative groupings - Shielding Units, Protective Isolation Units, and Reverse Cohorting Units - to respectively isolate prisoners with either identified or suspected cases of Covid-19, protect vulnerable prisoners most susceptible to contracting the virus, and contain prisoners newly entering the prison through a 14-day isolation period (O'Moore, 2020). Eamonn O'Moore, National Lead for Health and Justice in Public Health England (PHE), and Director of the UK Collaborating Centre for the WHO Health in Prisons Programme (European Region), noted that the lower numbers of cases and deaths in prisons than originally anticipated could potentially have been attributed to the compartmentalisation and social distancing measures that were implemented (O'Moore, 2020). O'Moore stated "early emerging data collected by PHE suggests that the 'explosive outbreaks' of COVID-19 which were feared at the beginning of the pandemic wave are not being seen. Instead, there is evidence of containment of outbreaks" (p.1). The confirmed number of Covid-19 deaths in prisoners from the start of the pandemic in March 2020 to the end of September 2020 was 23 (Ministry of Justice, 2020h). This contrasts with a late March 2020 report from *The Guardian* which reported an epidemiologist-based approximation of 800 deaths that could have occurred in prisons in England and Wales as a result of Covid-19 if the proper safeguards were

not implemented (Townsend, Savage, & Doward, 2020). The concern around the potential for the number of coronavirus-based deaths in prisons to skyrocket was unsurprising given the bleak Covid-19 prison situation in China where reports emerged in February of at least 500 prisoners being infected by the virus (Kuo & Ratcliffe, 2020). Given the reported effectiveness of the approach taken by prisons in England and Wales to contain the spread of Covid-19, a decision was made by the UK government to temporarily end the early release scheme at the end of August 2020 (Ministry of Justice & HM Prison and Probation Service, 2020a). However, although the Covid-19 trend in prisons was indicative of an initial successful containment strategy, caution was raised by PHE about the ability to sustain the promising scenario of the early stages of outbreak containment (O'Moore, 2020). According to O'Moore, without the appropriate treatment or vaccine to combat the virus, the continuation of restrictive protection measures in prison would likely be required to guard against the continued risk of significant outbreaks that the virus posed, particularly as the Covid-19 restrictions in the general population began to ease and as criminal justice activities resumed, impacting the movement of prisoners in and out of establishments (ibid). Additional trepidations surfaced regarding the ways in which prisoners could return to rehabilitative activities given the concerns that remained about the lingering possibility of large outbreaks (Beard, 2020).

5.2.2 Self-harm

Reports of self-inflicted deaths and self-harm in prisons in England and Wales within the parameters of the Covid-19 lockdown and subsequent restrictions varied across the prison estate. Comparing the immediate pre-Covid-19 annual period, a pertinent timeframe to consider given it reflects the state of affairs in prisons in the year prior to the onset of the pandemic, to that which represents the first year of the pandemic (i.e., the 12 months leading up to March 2021), the Ministry of Justice statistics on safety in custody reflect the "exceptional" period that began with the onset of the pandemic and which saw a decline in criminal justice activity and restrictions in prisons implemented in order to curb the spread of Covid-19 (Ministry of Justice, 2021b, p.2). Ministry of Justice (2020d) figures depict a rising

trend in incidents of self-harm in prisons in the 12 months leading up to March 2020. During

this period, the number of incidents of self-harm reached a "record high" according to the

Ministry of Justice, increasing by 11% as compared to the previous 12 months (ibid). The

number of individuals who had self-harmed increased by 5% for the same period. In comparing

self-harm statistics in the men's and women's estates in the 12 months preceding March 2020,

the figures indicate that the number of incidents of self-harm in the men's and women's estates

both increased by 11% (ibid). However, the *rates* of self-harm for this period in male and female

establishments demonstrate a stark disparity, as there were 661 self-harm incidents per 1,000

prisoners in the men's estate, and 3,207 incidents per 1,000 prisoners in the women's estate

(ibid). In comparison, in the 12 months leading up to March 2021, the number of self-harm

incidents decreased by 19% as compared to the previous 12 months, and there was a 13%

decrease in the number of individuals who had self-harmed during this period (Ministry of

Justice, 2021b). In men's establishments, the number of self-harm incidents decreased by 22%

(ibid). However, the figures on the rate of self-harm in the female estate during this period are

slightly more worrisome than the decrease in the number of incidents of self-harm would

suggest. The Ministry of Justice (2021b) notes that in the 12 months leading to March 2021,

"the *rate* [emphasis in original] of self-harm incidents per 1,000 prisoners, which takes account

of the reduction in the prison population between this and the previous year, decreased 19% in

male establishments but increased 12% in female establishments" (p.1).

Thus, despite the fact that early data suggested that Covid-19 prison circumstances were more

optimistic than predicted, reports nonetheless emerged of the grim secondary effects of the

virus on members of the prison population, particularly in the female prison estate. Increased

restrictions to movement and purposeful activity within women's prisons were acutely felt, with

Peter Clarke noting that the increasingly restrictive regime was of concern to those prisoners at

risk of self-harm due to feelings of isolation and desire for contact with others (HM Inspectorate

of Prisons, 2020d). Clarke, in the May 2020 SSV report on women's prisons, noted that "The

vulnerability of many women in prison is well documented and our findings highlight the

particular impact many of the restrictions implemented to control the spread of the virus has

had on this population…We found that self-harm had increased from the high levels seen prior to the restrictions being implemented" (ibid, p.7). The cessation of visitation was particularly harsh on mothers in prison who were denied in-person access with their children (ibid). In the three women's prisons scrutinised in the SSV, it was found that although prisoners had received increased phone credits and in-cell telephone capabilities were present within all three institutions, the roll-out of video calling was slow, delaying the opportunity for mothers in prison to connect face-to-face with their children (ibid). The inability of mothers in prison to interact in person with their children exacerbated the many frustrations brought about by Covid-19 regime changes, reflecting the particular challenges faced by women in prison who, when compared to the men's estate, are more likely to have been primary caregivers for children prior to incarceration (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2022). However, some positive steps were being taken in certain instances, with the ability for mothers to read their children a bedtime story over the phone or through a voice message implemented in some women's institutions (House of Commons & House of Lords, 2020).

5.2.3 Mental health

As a population that experiences a higher rate of mental disorders and mental health vulnerabilities than the general population (Durcan, 2021; Fazel et al., 2016), prisoners with pre-existing mental health issues may experience an exacerbation of illnesses that they struggled with prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. The existing state of affairs within the prison system in England and Wales is that the care and treatment of prisoners with mental health problems remains a persistent issue that presents many challenges to healthcare services, notwithstanding the consideration of the additional challenges that emerge within the parameters of a global outbreak of a dangerous virus (Liebrenz, Bhugra, Buadze, & Schleifer, 2020). These challenges present themselves for all parties involved in the care of prisoners, including prisoners themselves, prison staff, those providing healthcare, and the general public. In their study on the ways in which prisoners in a YOI preserve their health and wellbeing, Mehay, Ogden, and Meek (2020) note that, even in a world unaffected by a viral pandemic,

prisoners found it difficult to maintain their health in prison. As a result of excessive amounts of time confined to their cells, which at times could be up to 22 hours a day, feelings of boredom surfaced, which often led to the emergence of negative feelings (Mehay et al., 2020). These authors indicate, "Our research found that this boredom often leads to stress and anger, as well as heightened health fears relating to contracting illnesses and the fear of dying alone in a prison cell" (ibid). Mehay et al. go on to highlight the additional struggles of prisoners in their study with respect to being cut off from the outside world, as they found that opportunities for prisoners to contact loved ones were limited. The authors raise logical alarms that, in the context of a Covid-19 socially restrictive world, lack of access to familial contacts that could provide emotional support could be substantially harmful to the health of prisoners. The introduction of video calling in prisons to allow prisoners to contact their families whilst in-person visitations were paused would have been a welcomed alternative to the face-to-face interaction with loved ones that was not possible during the Covid-19 lockdown. However, the implementation of these calls was criticised as being "slow and ineffective," demoralising both prisoners and their families (Prison Reform Trust & Prisoner Policy Network, 2020b). Prisons implemented video calls in prisons in England and Wales by way of Purple Visits, the virtual visiting platform contracted by the Government, yet the introduction of this system was plagued by delays, leading to distress and frustration on the parts of prisoners and their families who were not able to connect face-to-face during lockdown (Inside Time, 2020). The importance of visits from friends and family resonated in HMIP's aggregate SSV report, with Clarke recognising the significant impact that the cessation of visitations had on prisoners across the estate (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2020b). Clarke reported that an increase in prisoners' phone credits and the number of telephones in-cells was a promising step, but that more still needed to be done to ensure that video-calling was being implemented more expansively in order to counteract the loss of face-to-face visits from friends and family (ibid).

Notable positive Covid-19-related mental health management practices for prisoners were observed in the local prisons SSV report published April 28, 2020, and despite the fact that "Primary mental health applications had increased due to prisoners' anxieties about their health

and regime restrictions," prisoners were being provided with in-cell resources such as health information worksheets and assessment forms to resourcefully manage their mental health needs (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2020f, p.13). Clarke noted "Those at high risk of deterioration were identified and managed through one-to-one work and regular welfare checks at all prisons. Psychiatry remained in place and mental health transfers had continued." (ibid). However, in the same SSV report, concerns about the harsh limitations remained evident, and it was noted that, in order to limit the spread of the coronavirus, prisoners were required to withstand "extreme restrictions" such as often being confined to their cells for almost 23.5 hours a day (ibid, p.7). In the aggregate SSV report which published the overall findings of the 35 SSVs that were conducted from April to July 2020, Clarke noted that the restrictions that were placed upon prisons and prisoners in response to Covid-19 facilitated the containment of the virus and contributed to the preservation of health and safety amongst prisoners; however, the increasing levels of stress and frustration amongst prisoners in response to the continual imposition of severe restrictions was of notable concern, as was the resultant deterioration of prisoners' psychological wellbeing (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2020b).

Peter Dawson, director of the Prison Reform Trust, in a submission to the Justice Committee on the Covid-19 situation in prisons, reiterated the gravity of severe restrictions within a Covid-19 environment, noting that feedback from prisoners themselves revealed that the minimal amounts of time spent out of cell were, at times, only permitted a few times a week (Dawson, 2020). Furthermore, Dawson noted that it was troubling that the out-of-cell risks associated with spending time in close proximity to others who were not complying with social distancing regulations, or where social distancing regulations were not being imposed, could potentially overshadow the importance of opportunities to spend minimal time outside of the cell. Clarke noted in the local prisons SSV report that examples of additional, more severe restrictions were uncovered in some cases, and states that "In one prison, a small number of symptomatic prisoners had been isolated in their cells without any opportunity to come out for a shower or exercise for up to 14 days" (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2020f, p.7). In their project that sought to use prisoners' experiences to detail life in prison during the pandemic, parallels were drawn

by the Prison Reform Trust and Prisoner Policy Network (2020a, 2021) between the restrictions on time spent out-of-cell, and conditions similar to that of solitary confinement, using the United Nations' (the Nelson Mandela Rules) definition of the term that denotes 22 hours a day or more where individuals have no "meaningful human contact" (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015, p.14). According to a 2015 report from the National Preventive Mechanism on places of detention, isolation practices within prison, such as solitary confinement, can be used for a number of reasons, one of which is a "regime and/or physical environment that restricts contact with others" (p.21), a situation not unlike that of the restrictive regime that came about as a result of the pandemic. The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (2011) note that regimes in solitary confinement should be "as positive as possible" to mitigate the harmful effect on those subjected to isolation (p.8). Although the justification for isolative conditions during the Covid-19 pandemic is not necessarily tantamount to those instances where solitary confinement is implemented outside the context of Covid-19, as the need to practice social distancing and physical isolation arose as a result of a contagious virus rather than the need to isolate prisoners for administrative, protective, preventive, or disciplinary purposes (National Preventive Mechanism, 2015), recommendations for safeguarding against harms associated with solitary confinement should nonetheless be heeded. Regardless of the ways in which isolation became a necessity, the conditions that prisoners have had to endure during the Covid-19 lockdown have been compared to those of solitary confinement, meaning that the environment and experiences of prisoners during lockdown should be carefully monitored and reviewed in order to ensure prisoners are not being subjected to unnecessary harms. In a letter written by the Prison Reform Trust in collaboration with The Howard League for Penal Reform to Robert Buckland, Secretary of State for Justice, Peter Dawson bemoaned the "inhumane and untenable" situation in prisons during the pandemic, referencing the overcrowded conditions and enduring solitary confinement prisoners were forced to withstand, characterised by a lack of access to rehabilitative activities (Prison Reform Trust & The Howard League for Penal Reform, 2020). Dawson emphasised the mental health damage that solitary confinement can cause and stressed the need for safeguards to be implemented in prisons (ibid).

5.3 Methodology

The aim of Study Two was to explore how prison learners' wellbeing was being affected in the context of a viral pandemic. In order to facilitate the collection of data from prison learners without being able to physically enter prisons, an article was drafted and submitted to *Inside Time* to be published in the June 2020 issue (see Appendix E). The article asked prison learners to make submissions to *Inside Time* outlining how the new coronavirus-related lockdown restrictions impacted their educational pursuits in prison. A deadline of July 15, 2020 was introduced, a date that fell well after the Covid-19 prison lockdown in England and Wales began on March 24, 2020, thus shaping the mid-lockdown context in which the prison learners were composing their responses. Indeed, the context in which prison learners were writing differed to that of the first study, as the prison learner responses to *Inside Time* were written during the ongoing and ever-developing Covid-19 pandemic, resulting in a novel and unique context that shaped the methodological approach of this study and its resulting data.

Due to the small number of responses received in Study Two (*n* = 6), as compared to the 100 letters that were analysed in Study One, it was determined that the wellbeing matrix could not be used in the same way that it was for Study One. Study Two employed a thematic analysis strategy that was decidedly inductive in nature. Although the relatively small number of responses within the present study did not necessitate the parallel use of the wellbeing matrix, what the Study One framework did provide was an organised and methodical approach to conceptualising the benefits of prison education with respect to wellbeing. The wellbeing dimensions and conceptualisations that were identified and developed within the matrix allowed the researcher to identify similar themes that were manifest within the 'Lockdown Learning' letters. Whilst the sample size of Study Two was too small for the matrix to be used in the same way that it was for Study One, meaning coding for and counting the instances that concepts associated with wellbeing emerged was neither practical or feasible, the matrix provided a tested structure for consideration of the relationship between prison learners' reflections on their learning experiences during lockdown and their wellbeing.

Thematic analysis involves "identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79). Clarke, Braun, and Hayfield (2015, p.225) note that that the "hallmark [of thematic analysis] is its flexibility," emphasising that a distinguishing feature of thematic analysis is the diversity that exists in data collection strategies, theoretical frameworks, sample sizes and make-up, research questions, and ways in which meaning is produced (see also Clarke & Braun, 2017). Using the research question as a guide, thematic analysis seeks to interpret patterns of meaning that arise from the data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Although the use of thematic analysis is widespread, Braun and Clarke (2006) note that consensus on the definition and application of the method is difficult to come by. In inductive thematic analysis approaches, the researcher does not use a pre-existing framework to identify themes from the data; rather, the researcher allows the meanings to emerge from the data itself (Willig, 2013). In contrast, a deductive thematic analysis involves a top-down approach to data analysis, whereby a pre-determined coding template is generally used to code the data and extract themes (ibid). An inductive thematic analysis was deemed the most appropriate approach within the context of Study Two as it was determined that such an analysis of the six responses would provide richer, more nuanced understandings about the context in which prison learners were studying during the Covid-19 pandemic than would a deductive thematic analysis that sought to apply the conceptualisations of wellbeing identified in the matrix in Study One to the *Inside Time* letters. The thematic analysis process in the present study incorporated an initial phase of familiarisation with the data whereby the researcher reviewed and read through all six letters, which was followed by subsequent reviews whereby emergent codes and themes began to be identified by the researcher. One limitation of using this method in the present research context concerns the small sample size and the depth of their responses. Although some of the *Inside Time* responses were quite detailed in nature, others were not. The quality of the data indeed varied across the six responses, ranging from one response that was nine pages, to one that was one page. Clarke et al. (2015) note that generally fewer individual data items are needed for a thematic analysis when those data items are robust in detail, but that a larger data set may be beneficial when the level of detail within the set is thinner. However, due to the context in

which this study was carried out, and the fact that there were limited opportunities to conduct research with incarcerated populations in the midst of the pandemic, conducting an analysis on letters that had been submitted to *Inside Time* was one of few options available to obtain a glimpse into the impact of the pandemic on current prison learners. The relatively few responses that were submitted underscored the methodological drawback of the present study as the researcher had to relinquish control over the number of responses. Consideration was given to asking *Inside Time* to republish the article in the following month's publication, but as the researcher was working within a finite timeframe in the context of the wider thesis, this would have delayed the progression of the research.

It is important to note here that Braun and Clarke (2006), referencing Taylor and Ussher (2001) are contentious about the use of the word "emerge" in the context of thematic analysis, as they argue that this terminology neglects to account for the role of the researcher as an active agent in identifying, selecting, and communicating which patterns are of interest. Nevertheless, the terminology "emerge" is used within the context of the present study, with the distinct understanding that any "emergent" themes are a product of the researcher's theoretical assumptions, experience, pre-existing knowledge, and interpretations of and interaction with the data, rather than a sudden discovery of patterns existing passively within the data (Clarke et al., 2015). Braun and Clarke (2006) acknowledge theoretical fluidity as a benefit of thematic analysis, noting that it is not committed to one particular theoretical perspective. However, said authors go on to emphasise that it is for this reason that it is important that researchers are transparent about the theoretical perspective in which their use of thematic analysis is grounded, in order to avoid the assumption that thematic analysis is implicitly embedded within a realist/essentialist perspective, which commonly occurs when researchers neglect to address the theoretical assumptions that underpin the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke et al., 2015). Appendix D of this thesis provides in an-depth look at the overarching qualitative paradigmatic stance of the research, but it is worth reiterating here that both the present study and wider research adopt a decidedly interpretivist approach in the exploration of the relationship between wellbeing and prison education.

Although the present research employed an analysis of secondary data, the use of a correspondence-based method was beneficial in that learners were potentially able to express themselves in ways that might have been more difficult in person or over-the-phone. Maycock (2021), acknowledging the scarcity in use of correspondence-based methods within prison research, notes that correspondence methods can be beneficial when the researcher is interested in the experiences of marginalised populations or when the research pertains to potentially personal or sensitive matters. Conducting research by way of correspondence allows an element of contemplative expression that may or may not be present with data collected verbally, as written communication gives respondents the added benefit of time with which to construct their answers to ensure they are able to say exactly what they want to say in the way they want to say it. Letter-based research can instil a feeling of ownership in research participants, as they can be somewhat selective about those topics they wish to discuss, within the framework of what is being asked about or studied (Burtt, 2021). Through the flexible nature of letter-based research techniques, participants and researchers alike have the time for reflection, with participants able to thoroughly consider their responses prior to submission, and researchers able to carefully contemplate participants' responses (ibid). According to Burtt, the additional time with which research participants are able to consider their responses can be an advantageous element of correspondence-based research, especially when participants may have barriers to literacy, or are asked to express their emotions and discuss potentially sensitive issues. Elizabeth (2008) outlines the notion of writing itself as a form of agency whereby writers can engage in the process of self-reflexivity through chronicling their personal experiences in and on their own terms, which can be particularly useful in navigating and working through distressing experiences. When writing letters, research participants can influence the direction in which information "flows" through answering only those questions that they wish to whilst potentially posing their own enquiries, whilst also being able to articulate their thoughts and feelings in more detail than in a conversational encounter (Bosworth, Campbell, Demby, Ferranti, & Santos, 2005). Bosworth et al. (2005) discuss the familiarity that is associated with letter-writing, in that communicating through letters, in contrast to traditional in-person

interviewing research methods, can perhaps avoid bringing up negative memories or feelings that prison participants may associate with experiences of being interviewed under stressful or negative conditions, such as undergoing police interrogation.

Researchers often face logistical barriers and access limitations in researching the prison population (Bosworth et al., 2005; Burtt, 2021; Reiter, 2014), and with restrictions posed on primary research within prisons as a result of the Covid-19 lockdown, conducting research by way of correspondence becomes a beneficial method of gathering data on a temporarily inaccessible population. The sphere of research is expansive and research travel expenses nil when using a correspondence-based method of data gathering in prison studies, as participants are free to write in from whichever prison they are housed in, meaning the research is not restricted to particular institutions or areas, and researchers do not have to make the journey to the actual prisons to carry out the research (Burtt, 2021). The context of research during the pandemic necessitated innovative approaches to research, and although limitations and challenges surfaced with respect to the capacity for primary research in closed settings during this period, the researcher was able to circumvent some of the access barriers typically encountered by researchers in their endeavours to enter prisons. Alternatively, correspondence-based research is subject to limitations in that the researcher lacks control over the responses of participants (Bosworth et al., 2005). Researchers are dependent upon the ways participants choose to respond to questions, and how much information they choose to divulge (ibid). Additionally, when letters are used by researchers to interact with participants, the participant cannot ensure that the researcher is interpreting their words in the way that was intended when the letter was written (ibid). Researchers and participants cannot clarify the intention or tone behind questions and responses, and neither is able to ask for further explanation or pose follow-up questions in a timely manner. These limitations are further realised within the context of the present study as the researcher used *Inside Time* as an intermediary and conducted a secondary analysis on letters that were not written directly to the researcher herself.

Inside Time is a weekly (online) and monthly (printed) national prison newsletter publication directed at prisoners that is circulated in all British prisons and special hospitals, and produced by the non-profit publishing company, *Inside Time Limited* (Inside Time, n.d.). *Inside Time* began in 1990 and now publishes up to 68 pages per issue in 12 issues per year, a large increase from the four issues per year and eight pages per issue initially published (ibid). With approximately 50,000 people in prisons reading the newspaper per issue, the publication has developed its status over the years as a "…voice for prisoners in British prisons, committed to providing information and comments that seeks [sic] to be informative, interesting and entertaining" (ibid). *Inside Time* includes publications for and by current and former prisoners, with resources to assist prisoners and their families in numerous ways (ibid). Prisoners and prison-adjacent organisations contribute to *Inside Time* in the form of articles, poetry, legal advice and questions, and relevant news updates in order to spread relevant information, express feelings and emotions, discuss hardships and triumphs, and communicate experiences.

Once the deadline had closed for responses to the 'Lockdown Learning' letters, the letters were transcribed for the purpose of analysis. The responses received were from adult women's and men's prisons in England and Wales. The fact that the prisons from which participants responded to the 'Lockdown Learning' article included both men's and women's prisons differs from the sample of prisons in Study One which only included men's prisons.

The names of all respondents were kept confidential within the submissions, only the names of the prisons from which the participants were writing were known to the researcher. Subsequently, in order to further anonymise the results of the study, the names of the prisons in which the letters came from have been omitted, instead replaced with a generic identifier using numbers one through six.

5.3.2 Sample

The six letters in the study came from six different men's and women's prisons in England and
Wales. The chart below outlines the categories of these prisons and the general geographic area
in which they are located:

Prison	Category	Location
1	C– Men's	Midlands
2	B and C – Men's	South East England
3	Closed – Women's	South East England
4	B– Men's	Wales
5	C – Men's	East England
6	A – Men's	North England

5.3.3 Ethical considerations

As was the case for Study One, the Royal Holloway, University of London (RHUL) ethics' approval
form (first stage) was the only ethical approval required to carry out Study Two, which was also
a letter-based study. The letters that were analysed in Study Two were generated by the article
published in *Inside Time* (see Appendix E), and then subjected to a secondary analysis. The
letters that were submitted by prison learners in response to the article were forwarded to the
researcher by the Head of Administration at *Inside Time* who acted as an intermediary between
the researcher and the publication. As in any research study, minimising participant risk should
be of primary concern. In the context of the present study, the researcher aimed to meet this
ethical requirement by asking that the letters be anonymised by the Head of Administration
prior to sending them to the researcher via email. The Head of Administration removed
respondents' personal information from the letters but left the names of the prisons visible for
the researcher (which the researcher anonymised in the study write-up). In order to be
transparent about how responses would be used, the *Inside Time* article indicated that the
researcher would be reviewing the responses as part of a related research project that would be
looking at the impact of prison education on wellbeing. In a similar vein to Maycock's (2021)
correspondence-based participatory action research study of the experiences of prisoners in

Scotland during Covid-19, it is arguable that a key primary ethical consideration within Study Two relates to the content of the letters. Some respondents to the *Inside Time* article detailed the volatile nature of circumstances during the Covid-19 lockdowns in prisons, outlining how the lack of access to education was impacting them negatively. Although there was nothing expressed in any of the letters that indicated the researcher needed to take action on behalf of a learner, the sentiments and emotions expressed within the letters were concerning. As Maycock underscores, future qualitative correspondence-based research should consider "…the duty of care of participants and the extent to which participants were able to get support for whatever reason if they needed it" (p.5).

5.4 Findings and discussion

The operationalisation matrix that was created in Study One provided an exploratory foundation through which the data in this study was initially scrutinised. This matrix was created in order to present a comprehensive framework of wellbeing through which the data extracted from the PET letters could be analysed. Concepts associated with wellbeing were extracted from the relevant literature, as well from the prison learner letters themselves, and subsequently summarised within an operationalisation model that outlined and categorised the key concepts associated with wellbeing according to three broader dimensions of wellbeing: emotional wellbeing; social wellbeing; and psychological wellbeing. As previously noted, although the operationalisation matrix from Study One was used as a guiding tool in the analysis of the 'Lockdown Learning' letters, it was not able to be fully realised within the context of Study Two, and as such, it was methodologically not used in the same way. As mentioned, the six letters that were analysed in Study Two ranged in detail and length, from one page to nine pages. Once the letters were transcribed, they were thematically analysed. The identified themes were then compared to the operationalisation matrix from Study One in order to determine the way in which the elements of the matrix were represented within the data in Study Two. Table 2.4 in Appendix B depicts the full operationalisation matrix that was created and used for analysis in

Study One, and Table 3.0 below highlights the principal elements of the matrix that were identified within the 'Lockdown Learning' letters:

Table 3.0 Associative conceptualisations, determinants, and elements of wellbeing observed in 'Lockdown Learning' letters

Social Wellbeing	**Social Productivity**		
	- Positive relations with others		

Psychological Wellbeing	**Future Orientated**	**Coping/Resilience**	**Personal Development**
	- Goals sought to be achieved - Realising potential - Positive, outward focus/future-thinking - Optimism - Sense of purpose - Determination/motivation	- Purposefully occupied - Coping with imprisonment	- Self-confidence - Contribution to self - Further educational aspirations

The dimension of psychological wellbeing, and more specifically the sub-dimensions of being 'future orientated' and 'coping/resilience' were the primary themes that were identified within the 'Lockdown Learning' letters. This is not to say that the emotional and social wellbeing impact of the removal education was entirely absent within the 'Lockdown Learning' letters, as some learners did allude to feeling saddened by the current state of education during lockdown (arguably a dimension of emotional wellbeing) or discussed how the support networks and social element of learning were absent. Indeed, given the context in which the letters were being written, the focus understandably remained on what had been *taken away* from prison learners during lockdown, rather than on the explicit benefits of prison education. Where the benefits of education were alluded to, the discussion primarily related to concepts within the psychological wellbeing dimension of the operationalisation matrix from Study One. Without the tools to participate in education courses during lockdown, it seems reasonable that the focus of prison learners would be on those internalised benefits that were suddenly lacking, particularly given that during lockdown, prisoners were isolated in-cell for lengthy periods which allowed them an excess of time with which to sit and reflect on their circumstances.

Lack of communication and educational support, loss of hope, and an absence of the ability to use education as a means to cope with life in prison emerged as primary themes within the 'Lockdown Learning' letters. The stability that prison education provided pre-lockdown eluded prisoners during the pandemic, pointing to the way in which the experience of prison learners during lockdown perhaps differed from their counterparts in the community who were also trying to work or study within the context of Covid-19. The sense of normalcy that education can provide in the general community is perhaps not observed with the same level of urgency as it is within prison, or is perhaps taken for granted as a routine or even mandatory part of daily life that is part and parcel of a number of outlets used to bring stability to lives. Prisoners, on the other hand, can rely on purposeful activities, such as education, to cope with life in prison and give their incapacitated existence a sense of routine and purpose, thus the sense of loss that is experienced by the removal of these activities may be felt more severely amongst incarcerated populations.

The following discussion will highlight the results of the 'Lockdown Learning,' study whilst underscoring the key findings with supportive evidence from relevant literature. Key excerpts from the 'Lockdown Learning' letters will be used to highlight the key themes identified.

5.4.1 Communication and educational support

An overall air of concern was present within the letters in Study Two, and one of the most prominent themes within the 'Lockdown Learning' responses was that of lack of communication and ill-preparedness with respect to the lockdown education process and applicable changes to the education regime, leading to frustration and confusion on the part of prison learners. Amongst worries over the wellbeing of friends and family on the outside, prison learners expressed concerns over lack of communication as to how education courses would proceed during lockdown, if or when learning would resume post-lockdown, and lack of educational guidance, tutoring, and support available during lockdown. Frustration surfaced in the midst of the uncertainty surrounding lockdown educational processes and procedures, with both prison

learners and prison education departments alike experiencing confusion over Covid-19 changes to the prison education regime. Prison learners expressed irritation at lockdown-related inefficiencies of the Covid-19-altered prison education system, such as education materials that were either in short supply or not distributed at all, difficulties in completing in-cell education activities due to increased noise levels on the prison wings, and lack of feedback and grading on work completed during lockdown, both from external tutors and the prison education departments. Attempting to "fill the gap" in learning during lockdown, according to one prison learner as expressed in their letter on 'Lockdown Learning,' was something that was left up to prison learners themselves, with the individual learner now responsible and accountable for their own educational progress, leading some learners adrift with respect to the completion of education activities autonomously with no support (Letter No. 1). With a lack of educational support and guidance, combined with feelings of hopelessness and an absence of sense of purpose that accompanied the lockdown and associated loss of education courses and activities, some learners no longer found the drive or motivation to continue learning, and therefore just "gave up" (Letter No. 1).

The absence of educational support during lockdown emerged within the letters as a damaging by-product of the Covid-19 prison restrictions to movement and activity, disheartening prison learners who looked to education as a means of providing hope and guidance in an otherwise demoralising environment. Within the 'Lockdown Learning' responses, prison learners voiced their frustrations at the inconsistency of receiving grading or feedback on assignments submitted during lockdown, not receiving clarification or responses from prison educational departments or tutors when questions were raised, and a dearth of transparency with respect to how and if education courses will resume post-lockdown. The reticence that has been displayed during lockdown was discouraging for prison learners and was aggravated by the fact that an end to lockdown and return to "normality" was yet to be determined. The following excerpts from the 'Lockdown Learning' letters depict the damaging impact of life in lockdown on prison learners, as expressed in their own words:

I think it is fair to say that lockdown has had a devastating impact upon education during the current Covid-19 restrictions. While it may not be the case, it appears that the education department closed and threw away the key…I have seen no evidence whatsoever that there has been any attempt to support education during the lockdown. Something that saddens me greatly. Education has been the one aspect of survival I have felt able to embrace during my sentence.

(Letter No. 5)

I find it extremely difficult having been left in a vacuum for well over 2 months not knowing whether I should be preparing for exams or not.

(Letter No. 6)

I was always taught that communication is fundamental to good practice, continuity and the provision of a stable and functioning business environment. This has not been present during Lockdown. The sudden ending of the education service was the root cause to the problems and anxiety that ensued. Another day or two where matters could have been explained, measures put in place would have gone a long way to settle people. Those on externally supported courses could have had processes explained. These courses are a lifeline to our stability and not everyone is able to cope with change in such a brutal fashion.

(Letter No.1)

The data from the 'Lockdown Learning' letters indicated that prison learners were left in a stagnant state during lockdown, whereby little information regarding current coursework, exams, grading, or feedback could be gleaned from anyone involved in the educational process. The lack of communication regarding prison learners' educational progress only served to aggravate the stressors placed upon prisoners during this uncertain time. The removal of valuable support networks during a time where they may conceivably have been needed more than ever, placed an undue strain upon prisoners who required such guidance in order to sustain themselves. Even though some education courses were specifically designed to be completed in-cell once lockdown began, the feedback from one prison learner indicates that perhaps these courses were structured hastily without consideration of the impact on students (Letter No. 3). In the excerpt below, one learner discusses the fact that education packs were not able to be reproduced after their initial distribution, and also highlights the difficulties in certain educational materials being circulated:

I spoke to the library orderly and he has told me that they have issued over a hundred English or Maths Level 1 & 2 education packs. In fact they sent out so many Level 2's that there are none left & and they are having difficulty reproducing more being unable to access them on the system. Education materials are being used as "distraction packs." There has been a problem over Way2Learn materials. Prisoners are keen to take up the T.V. based education courses e.g. Creating Writing, Graphic Design etc but no materials have been "rolled out." Again the main driver is distraction/combatting boredom. Incidentally we only got the Way2Learn T.V. channel in the week of lock-down, so there was no experience of running these courses.

(Letter No. 2)

Another learner indicates that, although feedback from certain course tutors was timely and constructive, in other courses subsequent study units were being distributed to prison learners without feedback or grading on previous units completed, which made this individual reluctant to continue studies without having received comments or grades on their initial unit:

The business enterprise course, well! I have a good amount of business experience, and after trying to complete the first couple of units supplied to me, had many concerns and questions as to what the supplied information was steering the learner towards, so I probably wrote as many comments and questions to the tutor when I submitted that first work pack, as I answered with the questions set out in the unit. Over 2 months on, and I've had absolutely no feedback, though the other units have been posted under my door. I wrote to inform the tutor, and education department, that I did not feel it appropriate for me to be even attempting these next units, until my first had been marked, feedback given, and questions answered. Over 2 months later, still, I wait.

(Letter No. 3)

Lack of communication from prison educational departments and external tutors regarding educational activities during lockdown, including when and if education would be able to resume, conceivably provided a barrier to prison learners being able to focus on the future. With one respondent to the 'Lockdown Learning' letters indicating that their sense of purpose was absent during lockdown given the suspension of educational activities (Letter No. 5), it is not difficult to ascertain the importance of communicative practices in custodial environments, particularly when the communication pertains to information on beneficial personal development pursuits such as education and work. Prison learners who responded to the

'Lockdown Learning' article communicated that the optimism, or hope, that was once instilled in prisoners by participation in education was absent.

5.4.2 Hope and optimism

It has been acknowledged that hope can be considered a tool of "survival and well-being" (Martin & Stermac, 2010, p.693) through which individuals, either cognitively or emotionally, are driven towards their goals (ibid). From a perspective grounded in the conceptualisation of hope as an emotion, hope is thought to be an important tool in coping with desperate circumstances (Lopez, Snyder, & Pedrotti, 2003, as cited in Martin & Stermac, 2010). Hope can provide prisoners with a means through which they can, in due course, navigate turbulent existences and experiences. Crewe, Hulley and Wright (2020) note, "…even within conditions that restrict choices and actions to an almost unparalleled degree, individuals interpret and reflexively engage with the world in ways that give them some sense of control, meaning, purpose and hope" (p.22). In their research on the experiences of long-term prisoners, Crewe et al. (2020) found that, without the necessary prison-based support, prisoners at the initial stages of their sentences depended on other avenues of support and care, such as direct and indirect feelings of connectedness with family, to instil within them a sense of positivity and hope. Unfortunately, during lockdown, prisoners' familial support networks were severely diminished in their capacity to be outlets of hope. With face-to-face visits suspended, prisoners had to rely solely on telephone and digital technologies to connect with loved ones, which, as previously noted, were not uniformly implemented or distributed within prisons in England and Wales during the lockdown. Crewe et al. also note that engaging with education can be a valuable source of hope for longer-term prisoners, with prisoners in their study who were in the mid and late stages of their sentences identifying family, faith, and education as their "…main sources of hope, purpose and meaning" (p.174).

The wellbeing detriments of lockdown emerged in the letters to *Inside Time*, with prison learners voicing the numerous ways in which they believe lockdown and the interruption of

education had impacted them. Lack of motivation, ambivalence, coping inadequacies, difficulties concentrating and sleeping, forgetfulness, anxiety, and boredom surfaced within the letters as some of the struggles facing prison learners and prisoners in general during lockdown. One such prison learner indicated that the sense of purpose that was once associated with studying was now gone and that there was "no end in sight" (Letter No. 5). Clear communication and effective supportive practices are essential amongst incarcerated populations, as they can impact feelings of hope and optimism amongst prisoners. When institutional communication and support is lacking, Crewe et al. (2020) note that feelings of hopelessness and confusion can be exacerbated. In reference to lengthy-sentenced prisoners who expressed a lack of support from the prison with respect to helping them come to terms with their long-term circumstances, Crewe et al. (2020) state, "Feelings of hopelessness and disorientation were compounded by a lack of institutional support…many reported deficits in information and emotional support that left them feeling confused, alone and unsupported in dealing with their situation…" (p.165). Indeed, the absence of institutional communication regarding educational progress during the pandemic could have potentially contributed to increased feelings of hopelessness amongst prison learners.

Another 'Lockdown Learning' respondent noted that the Covid-19 lockdown removed the ability for learners to improve their lives through prison education, and that the educational opportunities and resources provided during quarantine have failed to measure up to the learning experiences provided pre-lockdown (Letter No. 1). The frustration experienced by prisoners in relation to the struggles of learning during lockdown speak to the importance of the educational aspirations that were identified in the wellbeing framework of Study One. The notion of wanting to participate in prison education to further educational attainments was an important element of psychological wellbeing within the wellbeing framework. The fact that 'Lockdown Learning' respondents also alluded to the importance of education lends weight to the significance of this conceptualisation of wellbeing. The ability for education to factor into prisoners' ability to survive and find hope within the context of their prison existence is supported by Crewe et al.'s (2020) assertation that family, religion, and education were the

primary aspects of life in prison that prisoners in the middle and later stages of their sentences considered most prominent in providing a sense of purpose and hope and influencing goal-oriented thoughts. The forward-thinking and future planning element of wellbeing that is represented by having further educational aspirations was conceivably absent with the removal of educational activities during lockdown. The notion that educational materials were used as "distraction packs" (Letter No. 2) and that the interim materials provided during lockdown were not of the same standard of learning, suggests that Coates' (2016) assertion that engaging and fulfilling learning experiences in prison are a necessary part of supporting the wellbeing of prisoners was not realised in prisons within the context of the pandemic. The inability of prisoners to engage in self-improvement and experience a sense of accomplishment through participation in meaningful educational pursuits during lockdown feasibly exacerbated the stressors placed upon them during a time of confusion and ambiguity.

As expressed in one writer's letter, prison learners' support networks, their sense of achievement, and their confidence that developed from previous engagement in prison education were notably absent during lockdown. Evidenced by the same respondent's testament to the cooperative wellbeing benefits of prison education, the support networks that prison learners develop through participating in education in prison provide more than just tangible educational skills support from peers - these networks also provide valuable wellbeing support with respect to the "companionship of the learning process" (Letter No. 1), that is, the ability to learn to understand and accept others, to learn about equality, other cultures and ways of life. Szifris et al. (2018) emphasise the importance of the social aspect of learning through engaging in prison education, noting that education can provide an element of safety where prison learners can communicate with one another in "pro-social" interactions, allowing them identify as a "learner" and express themselves amongst their peers (p.57). Whilst participating in education, the mutual journey that prison learners experience can enable them to develop important social bonds (ibid).

Prior to lockdown, one respondent detailed what they believed to be a very supportive education department within the prison they were housed (Prison A), which they indicated has provided immeasurable benefit to those who have accessed education:

> *The Education Department, here at [Prison A], is excellent. It provides an environment conducive to learning, self expression in a safe enclave, provides an atmosphere of equality and productivity and is a vital component to the life of the prison…One cannot express too highly the importance of education in prison. I have been shocked at the lack of the individual levels of numeracy and literacy. These are fundamental skills to the very existence. I am almost as amazed at the resourcefulness of those who cannot read and write, their ability to have survived without the basics. Education at [Prison A] has broken down these barriers and provided a learning experience that gives the individual hope, a chance, sense of pride and achievement.*
>
> (Letter No. 1)

However, this same learner later indicated in their letter that the above-named positive experiences provided by the education department in Prison A were non-existent during and as a result of lockdown:

> *Lockdown has removed this* [a learning experience that gives the individual hope, a chance, sense of pride and achievement]. *It has taken away opportunity, a chance to enhance ones life. It has not provided a provision to replace this learning experience. One could say that there are in-cell learning experiences but they do not provide the one-to-one, the motivation, the learning experience or support to create the drivers to learning. These people need the resources to improve their lives, assist in their rehabilitation and put their lives and the lives of their families on a road to stability and achievement. The alternatives have fallen short of the mark and have lacked the support to be fulfilling.*
>
> (Letter No. 1)

In a prison environment that provides a positive educational experience conducive to learning, conceivably the absence of education within a lockdown situation may be felt more acutely than in those prisons where education is not prioritised.

Alternatively, the reflections of one 'Lockdown Learning' respondent contrasted those of most contributors. With respect to being bereft of education and work activities during lockdown, this respondent indicated that not having anything to focus on during lockdown forced the

individual to focus on themselves and reflect upon their life and their future trajectory (Letter No. 4). Another learner indicated that they had been "luckier than most" (Letter No. 5) to have been able to find activities to keep them occupied during lockdown, although this respondent did acknowledge that they were still struggling. Though only one learner expressed sentiments of potential improvements to wellbeing during lockdown, it remains a response to be explored further, both in whether other prison learners would express the same feelings, and if, after prolonged lockdown, whether the learner who expressed this attitude would remain feeling the same way. This learner did, however, acknowledge that whilst lockdown may have provided a positive opportunity to reflect upon their life and potentially improve their wellbeing, it may not be the case for others in prison who may have struggled with lockdown. This potentiality is underscored in the Prison Reform Trust and Prisoner Policy Network's (2021) study that asked prisoners to reflect on their experiences of Covid-19 in prisons, where they found that "Out of 180 prisoner responses on the theme of health, only three (less than 2%) mentioned any personal benefit from the regime of 23 hours isolated in their cell" (p.v).

5.4.3 Coping and boredom relief

Consistent with scholarship that acknowledges the utility of prison education as a coping strategy that enables prisoners to survive a prison existence and mentally escape the monotony of the prison regime (see for example, Behan, 2014; Hughes, 2000, 2012; Nichols, 2021), the capacity for prison education to act as a tool of mental engagement utilised to keep occupied and cope with life in prison likewise was identified within certain 'Lockdown Learning' letters:

> *In my opinion education in the lockdown is basically a boredom relieving activity. Without tutoring, support, marking, or validation, most prisoners realise that it's something they are doing for themselves. And as nobody is getting paid for it, some don't bother.*
> (Letter No. 2)

> *With Lockdown I worry how these students have coped. I know there has been an increase in self harm as direct result. The team here – health care – officers etc. have done a sterling job but there was always going to be a problem as the stability of education, its learning, its exploration of ideas was removed. Did no-one see this? Did no one care?*

The concepts of resiliency and coping with the prison experience were also identified by PET applicants in Study One as being potential prospective benefits of accessing education in prison. In her co-authored study on the wider benefits of learning, Hammond (2004a) identifies effective coping with change and adversity (including coping with poor physical health) as one of three health-related impacts of learning identified by participants, the other two being mental health and subjective well-being. Hammond notes that the thematic analysis of case studies employed in the course of her co-authored research with Schuller, Preston, Brassett-Grundy, and Bynner suggests that five groups of psycho-social elements are promoted through learning and education, which can then contribute to the health outcomes of subjective well-being, mental health, and effective coping (ibid). These psycho-social outcomes of learning are self-esteem and self-efficacy, communication and competences, a sense of identity, a sense of purpose and future, and social integration. Indeed, Hammond acknowledges the positive impact of resilience on all forms of health: physical, mental, and psychological. With respect to physical health, Hammond notes that resilience is an important component in promoting positive physical health, and acknowledges the significance of the relationship between education and learning, physical health, and responses to stress:

> Individuals who (through their education and learning) feel independent and confident, who are good at solving problems, who possess a sense of purpose and future, and who mix with peers who share these characteristics and live healthy lifestyles may respond to stressful conditions in ways which are less damaging to their health and possibly more effective in reducing levels of experiences stress in the longer term. (2004a, p.38)

Education and learning can contribute to an individual's ability to effectively cope with hardships through promoting a sense of purpose and future, facilitating increased levels of esteem and confidence in oneself, improving understanding of self and reclamation of one's sense of identity, the development of competences and communication skills, and facilitating social integration via education classes that allow (or even force) students to interact with one another (Hammond, 2004a). The structure, routine, and focus that are instilled through learning can also positively impact the health-related outcomes of coping and resilience, subjective well-

being, and mental health through enabling individuals to be distracted from their worries (ibid). As Hammond states, the capacity for learning and education to promote positive health outcomes in this way is "particularly relevant to life situations otherwise lacking structure or meaning, or that are otherwise experienced as difficult" (2004a, p.51). Hammond additionally asserts that the focus necessitated by learning promotes mental stimulation thereby inhibiting stagnant time spent sitting around idly. Hammond notes that this element of focus was identified by respondents as being a significant aspect of the health outcomes of mental health, coping, and well-being, and was especially relevant for those suffering from adverse physical health issues.

With prison learners in the present study discussing how education in prison typically provides a way to endure the prison experience, and how they have essentially been devoid of this coping mechanism during lockdown, it reinforces the idea that prison education is a necessary and vital element of surviving the prison experience. The purpose of education during lockdown, according to some prison learners as expressed in their 'Lockdown Learning' letters, has become a method of relieving boredom. With that said, the question is raised of whether this has potentially always been one of the purposes that education has fulfilled within prison given the mundanity and boredom that characterises the prison experience. Perhaps then it is the fact that this boredom is now exacerbated and acutely felt by prisoners within the context of lockdown. It has previously been noted that boredom can be one of the challenging side-effects of life in prison, with Mehay et al. (2020) warning of the negative derivatives of boredom such as feelings of anxiety that can surface when prisoners are forced to spend prolonged periods of time in-cell, and Dixey and Woodall (2012) noting that visitation with friends and family can be an important source of relief from boredom and repetition for prisoners. Engaging in education in prison has been ascertained by academics and researchers as a method used by prisoners to alleviate boredom (Behan, 2014; Hughes, 2012). MacGuinness (2000) notes in her study on reasons influencing prisoners to start education in prison that some prisoners take up education as a way of keeping busy and indicates that it is the challenge of education that prompts some prisoners to participate in education in order to keep purposefully occupied. Indeed, boredom

in prison can be a destructive force, allowing prisoners to agonise over their current and past troubles with the excess of time bestowed upon them (Rocheleau, 2013). As Rocheleau (2013) notes:

> Boredom in prison may result in too much time to dwell on one's current and potential problems, rumination about negative past events, too much time to think about and carry out acts of misbehavior and violence, lack of opportunity to engage in constructive activities that might result in increasing prisoners' self-esteem, and lack of participation in activities that might otherwise improve the lives of prisoners. (pp.366-367)

An excess of time is an aspect of prison life which prisoners cannot escape. Medlicott (1999) discusses the concept of dead time in prison, those periods of time primarily spent in-cell that remain devoid of any activity or interaction with others, where prisoners suffer through an amalgamation of both the spatial and temporal restrictions upon them. The boredom, loneliness, and isolation that prisoners suffer from are some of the factors that can contribute to distressing self-harm and suicidal behaviours (Liebling, 1999b). In her research on suicide in prison, Liebling (1999b), citing Liebling (1992) and Liebling and Krarup (1993), notes that those who attempted suicide in prison "spent significantly more time in their cells and were far more likely to feel bored than were other prisoners. They got more bored as the sentence went on, could think of fewer ways of relieving this, and were more likely to do something negative or destructive as a result" (p.315). Liebling highlights research that has explored the relationship between suicide attempts in prison and time in-cell spent passively and unproductively, and notes how such research can play a vital role in procedures related to the prevention of suicide, as well as to the understanding of how prisoners cope with life behind bars. Liebling ascertains that those who have attempted suicide in prison were consistently (and reported feeling) "…worse off than their fellow prisoners in terms of the availability and desirability of work, education, physical education, and other methods of occupation and distraction" (pp.315-316). These individuals, according to Liebling, were less able to find activities to engage with whilst locked in their cells and were also more despondent about their prospects in prison. HM Inspectorate of Prisons (1999) underscores the negative impact that idleness can have on the mental well-being of those struggling to cope with the experience of prison, noting that

enforced idleness, boredom, uncertainty, and fear are elements that must be considered when exploring the motives for prisoners taking their own lives.

For those who are vulnerable to suicide in prison, a combination of influences such as "isolation in stripped conditions, the boredom and inactivity of a stagnant regime, the removal from sources of support, and the exposure to uncertainty and constraint," contributes to their inability to reimagine their environment, future, or self (Liebling, 1992, as cited in Liebling, 1999b, p.326). Consideration of Liebling's research into suicide in prison is essential during the uncertainty that characterises the Covid-19 pandemic. In the context of Covid-19, although the overall rates of self-harm in prisons were encouragingly much lower than initially expected (acknowledging that this was not the case in prisons across the whole estate), there remained an air of disquiet with respect to the effects of continual isolation of prisoners during the ongoing pandemic (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2020; Prison Reform Trust & Prisoner Policy Network, 2020a). With the daily rates of Covid-19 increasing in the autumn of 2020 (Iacobucci, 2020), and talk of the UK potentially returning to lockdown (Mahase, 2020), which came to fruition in early November with the implementation of the second national lockdown in England, the concern remained about the state of prisoners' wellbeing during prolonged periods of isolation (Prison Reform Trust, 2020). Feelings of loneliness, boredom, and anxiety that can characterise life in prison (Brown & Day, 2008; Liebling, 1999b) were perhaps exacerbated when present within the context of a viral pandemic whereby isolative prison conditions were taken to the extreme for the purposes of health, safety, and containment of the virus. It was particularly worrying then, that during the pandemic, the coping resources that prisoners might have typically turned to to help them survive the experience of prison were removed. Thus, the possibility exists that the ability for prisoners to cope became increasingly difficult, particularly for those vulnerable to suicide who may have diminished coping mechanisms and resources as compared to their fellow prisoners (Liebling, 1999b).

The provision of education during the Covid-19 pandemic fundamentally changed for all types of learners, including those in prison and those in the outside community. For those learners in the general public, education courses and learning resources that could be conducted virtually moved online where it was feasible to do so, and most children in schools, along with further and higher education students, faced the transition towards remote learning in some capacity (Howard, Khan, & Lockyer, 2021; Hubble & Bolton, 2020). The adaptation of in-person tutoring to online learning was in no way seamless and not without its challenges, as students were left to adjust to the new reality of online education whereby schools and universities were closed, face-to-face interaction with teachers and peers was severely diminished, and any on-site learning was subject to social distancing measures (Howard et al., 2021; Hubble & Bolton, 2020; Sharp et al., 2020). The move to online and remote learning also exacerbated the digital exclusion of certain students, with the term "digital divide" being used to represent the widening gap in degrees of access to digital technologies (and the required skills to use these technologies) (Coleman, 2021). For higher-education students, the 'new normal' of digital learning effectively lacked the authenticity of the typical student experience on both the academic and social levels, as various measures were implemented by universities to restructure the delivery of educational services within the parameters of Covid-19 restrictions (Burki, 2020; Burns, Dagnall, & Holt, 2020; McKinlay, May, Dawes, Fancourt, & Burton, 2022). Some of these measures included moving in-person learning either entirely online or a to a hybrid of in-person and online learning, consideration of staggered on-campus attendance and smaller group-based learning, and modifying Fresher's Week activities so that they were either cancelled or conducted virtually (Burki, 2020; Cutler, 2020; Edge Foundation, 2020; Hubble, Bolton, & Lewis, 2021; Martzoukou, 2021; McKinlay et al., 2022; Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies, 2020; The Education Hub, 2021).

The impact of Covid-19 on the mental health and wellbeing of students in the community has been raised in the literature as being a cause for concern (see for example, Appleby et al., 2022; Burns et al., 2020; McKinlay et al., 2022; Office for National Statistics, 2020a; Son, Hegde, Smith,

Wang, & Sasangohar, 2020). The World Universities Network (2020) acknowledged the potential wellbeing impacts of the pandemic on those involved in university-level studies, highlighting that students were responsible for "navigating the threats and pressures of the crisis—such as health threats, financial instability, and the wellbeing impacts of isolation—while also dealing with major disruptions to their education." Anxieties about the future, careers, finances, educational performance and progress, and learning experiences were palpable within the context of uncertainty that characterised Covid-19, and restrictions on social interactions and being physically distanced from family and friends may have placed additional pressure on students (Almossa, 2021; Appleby et al., 2022; Chen & Lucock, 2022; Edge Foundation, 2020; Gogoi, Webb, Pareek, Bayliss, & Gies, 2022; Son et al., 2020; World Universities Network, 2020; Zhai & Du, 2020). In a study on the mental health impacts of Covid-19 on university students in the U.S., participants interviewed identified a range of Covid-19-related stressors, including academic performance concerns and concentration difficulties, sleeping habit disruptions, health-related fears for friends, family, and themselves, and a reduction in social interactions as a result of social distancing (Son et al., 2020). Son et al. (2020, p.10), referencing studies by Martin (2010) and Zuckerman (1989), have noted that "Difficulty in concentrating, frequently expressed by our participants, has previously been shown to adversely affect students' confidence in themselves, which has known correlations to increased stress and mental health." Amongst the academic-related concerns of participants in this study, apprehensions about the move to online learning, grades, class progress, procrastination, and a reduction in motivation were amongst the stressors identified by respondents (ibid). In a study on the stigma surrounding mental health difficulties in university students, Martin (2010) found that participants reported negative physical, psychological, and social impacts on their studies stemming from their mental health afflictions, such as difficulties staying motivated and maintaining focus and concentration, missed assignment submission deadlines, and class attendance and participation difficulties, which were subsequently identified as adversely impacting participants' confidence in their ability to cope with their work.

The call for "clear and regular" communicative procedures from educational institutions to university students in the community who were struggling with the uncertainty that surrounded the Covid-19 pandemic was made, citing the need to "alleviate some of the anxiety created by the pandemic and the rapidly changing trends" (World Universities Network, 2020). Evidence indicates that efforts were made in higher education institutions to develop or adapt virtual and remote self-care tools and wellbeing resources such as online video conferencing with counsellors and teletherapy in order to help students manage the negative wellbeing impacts experienced as a result of the Covid-19 changes to life and education (Anderson, 2020; Celia et al., 2022; World Universities Network, 2020). Evidently, lack of communication with respect to education was a characteristic of the coronavirus pandemic that affected both learners in the general community and those in prison, and the ambiguity and uncertainty that learners in the community faced with respect to their educational paths were perhaps not unlike that which prison learners encountered, as expressed within the 'Lockdown Learning' letters. However, whereas in the outside world, many educational courses previously taught face-to-face moved to remote and online provision, incarcerated learners did not have the same luxury on account of being prohibited from accessing online learning technology in the same capacity as their peers on the outside. Additionally, within the context of incarceration, there was conceivably a heightened sense of loss and absence of support that separated prison learners' experiences from those of the general population during the pandemic. The sense of loss accompanying the disruption to daily life and routines caused by the pandemic unsurprisingly impacted the wellbeing of those in the community (Alradhawi, Shubber, Sheppard, & Ali, 2020; Mental Health Foundation, 2020; Office for National Statistics, 2020b); however, the experience of prisoners during the pandemic can perhaps be said to have differed from that of the general public with respect to the importance of having activities such as education to cope with the prison experience. Additionally, it is suggested here that the lack of educational digital tools available to prison learners created a fundamental disconnect between the experiences of many community-based and prison-based learners, widening the digital gap created by discrepancies in access to technology (House of Commons Education Committee, 2022; Prisoners' Education Trust, 2020a). The "digital divide" between prison learners and learners in the general public

was further entrenched in the potential inability of prison learners to develop the digital literacy skills necessary for the world outside of prison, particularly given that the new reality was a primarily digital world impacted by Covid-19. Prison learners faced additional challenges to studying during the Covid-19 lockdown that those in the community may not have experienced in the same ways, as learning in prisons was confined to in-cell, the conditions of which were not always conducive to remaining concentrated and focused (Whieldon, 2020). Prison learners did not have the ability to move rooms or locations if their studying was impacted by noise or distractions due to being confined to their cells for up to 23.5 hours a day during lockdown (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2020f). According to Francesca Cooney, Head of Policy with the Prisoners' Education Trust, "As we see in the community, there are ways of delivering face-to-face and online education safely, yet prisoners currently have no classes, no access to the internet, and no means to do assessments or take exams. Pushing worksheets through a cell door is not enough: more must be done to support learning and help prisoners progress with their studies" (Prisoners' Education Trust, 2020a).

5.5 Limitations and challenges

The challenges of Study Two were primarily related to the number of responses that were received. Potential participants had approximately one month to send in their experiences of learning during lockdown, and a total of six responses were submitted. Nevertheless, these six responses provided valuable insight into the ways in which prison learners self-identified the impact that the lockdown education interruption had on their wellbeing. As previously noted, the principal limitation to Study Two is its generalisability in that the results of the study are not applicable to all prison learners. It could be the case that individuals who responded to the 'Lockdown Learning' article were those that exhibited certain characteristics, such as being dedicated learners, perhaps even prior to incarceration, or possibly those who had the most to say about how the lockdown impacted them, both negatively and positively. Thus, those who chose to participate in the 'Lockdown Learning' study may have disproportionately represented those prison learners who were the most keen and able to express their experiences of learning

during lockdown. A significant challenge of correspondence-based methods such as letter-writing is that they inherently exclude those prisoners who are not able to read, write, or articulate their thoughts coherently in written form (Burtt, 2021). Although the study at hand was looking to explore the experiences of those learning in prison (thus it could be argued that on the whole, the sample population would have primarily been those who were literate), there could have also been those prison learners who were in the midst of becoming more literate, or those who were not yet comfortable using their literacy skills to respond to the 'Lockdown Learning' article for fear of misrepresenting themselves or their experiences, or fear of being judged or misconstrued. Burtt (2021), in a qualitative letter-based interview study whereby prisoner participants were invited to write-in to prison newsletters with their experiences of maintaining innocence, notes that "The very fact that advertisements to participate were in newspapers prevented the illiterate from taking part while the written nature of the task may have deterred those with only basic literacy skills. Consequently, there was a natural and inevitable self-selection of more educated prisoners and although their experiences were no more or less valuable than others, they were better able to articulate these thoughts and feelings on paper" (p.821). Burtt's testament to the literacy bias of methods carried out via correspondence is accurately represented in the limitations of Study Two. Due to the fact that prison learners were invited to write-in to *Inside Time* through an article posted in the publication, those who could either not read the article or those who could read it but could not articulate their responses in written form were inherently discouraged from participation in the present study. However, the decision to use a letter-based method that incorporated an analysis of secondary data was well-justified considering the restrictive climate of Covid-19 that ultimately required that alternative and innovative research methods be utilised in order to engage with incarcerated populations, particularly during the period in which primary research inside prisons in England and Wales was suspended. In addition, the article that was published in *Inside Time* was written with the general prison population in mind, thus the language that was used was basic in nature, ensuring to capture as wide a participative audience as possible.

5.6 Conclusion

Analysis of the data from this study indicates an overall air of uncertainty and concern amongst prison learners studying during lockdown, with respondents expressing an absence of the optimism that was once instilled in them by participation in education. The lack of educational support during lockdown emerged as a damaging by-product of the Covid-19 prison restrictions, disheartening prison learners who look to education as a means of providing hope and guidance in an otherwise demoralising environment. With learners discussing how education in prison typically provides a way to cope, and how they have been essentially devoid of this coping mechanism during lockdown, the notion that prison education is crucial to enduring the prison experience is reinforced.

The golden thread that is woven throughout the overall thesis pertains to the conceptualisation of the benefits of prison education within a framework of wellbeing. The goal of Study Two was to further contribute to this narrative by applying the conceptualisations of wellbeing that were developed within the first study to a subsequent study within a differing context. The wellbeing framework developed and tested in Study One and the way in which wellbeing was conceptualised within the first study paved the way for this same conceptualisation to be used in other contexts. Specifically, given the rapid onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, a unique opportunity was created to examine the state of prison learners' wellbeing within the context of a virus-related lockdown. Whether or not the operationalisation matrix could be directly applied within the context of Study Two was yet to be realised at the outset of this study; however, its utility with respect to identifying concepts associated with wellbeing as expressed by prison learners renders it an informative and valuable asset for the purposes of the overall thesis, and in extending some of the findings of Study One. The anticipated potential wellbeing benefits of prison education that learners identified in Study One were explored within an unconventional context in Study Two, and it was some of these benefits that learners subsequently identified as absent during the Covid-19 lockdown, thereby underscoring the importance of these concepts. An additional benefit of Study Two is that it can provide valuable insight into prison learners'

experiences of education during the life-altering phenomenon of global significance that is the novel coronavirus. The ways in which the global pandemic and lockdown in prisons in England and Wales have affected the ability of learners in prison to continue with their studies represents a pivotal juncture in the narrative of prison education research. Research into the benefits of prison education could not come at a more crucial time than that in which prison learners are experiencing a deficiency in the potential wellbeing benefits that prison education can provide.

The generalisability limitations of Study Two have been acknowledged in that the six letters received in response to the 'Lockdown Learning' article published in *Inside Time* were not representative of all prison learners. The six responses received represented only a very limited sample of prison learners who saw the article and were inspired to prepare and post their written responses, and thus were illustrative only of the opinions and observations of those that responded. It could be said that even those who submitted responses were those prison learners who had the most critical commentary on the state of learning within the context of a pandemic lockdown. However, it is also recognised that Study Two has laid the groundwork for a study with a more substantial sample size to further explore the concerns and experiences of prisoners who have been unable to access education during the pandemic in the same capacity as prior to lockdown. Study Two has succeeded in raising key issues of concern with respect to the drawbacks experienced by prison learners when denied access to educational activities that had once contributed to a sense of purpose, goal achievement, confidence, hope, self-progression, and educational attainment.

The evolution of the studies within this thesis thus far provides a unique and interesting way to look at the wellbeing benefits of prison education within differing points in time. Furthering the outcomes of Study One which reported the prospective wellbeing benefits of further and higher education in prison as expressed by prison learners themselves, Study Two has provided an exploratory prisoner-grounded commentary on the impact to wellbeing when prison education is removed, set within the specific context of a viral pandemic. The findings of this study have

enabled the exploration of the notion of coping, creating important links with the psychological wellbeing benefit of 'coping/resilience' identified in Study One, whilst also identifying further research directions. The prospective coping benefits of education as reported by prison learners in Study One have been acutely realised and reported by prison learners in Study Two within the restrictive circumstances brought about by Covid-19. Looking forward to Study Three, the questions that remain pertain to the questionable requirement to severely restrict educational activities during the Covid-19 lockdown, and whether such a constraint aggravated the mental health and wellbeing issues plaguing prisoners. That is to say, the question remains of whether the experience of lockdown could have been made more tolerable for prisoners if they had been allowed increased and improved access to educational opportunities during the pandemic.

The key take-home message from Study Two lies in the specific ways in which prisoners have reacted to the pandemic, and the extent to which this reaction and the experience of prisoners is atypical from all persons trying to survive and cope with the extreme stressors induced by Covid-19 and its associated disruptions to life. The findings of the 'Lockdown Learning' study indicate that a difference may lie in the weight prisoners attribute to boredom-relieving and hope-inducing educational pursuits that become a valuable tool of coping with an otherwise deprived existence. The present study does not purport to provide critical commentary or empirical evidence of the experiences of learners in the community during lockdown, as no research was conducted with this group of learners to establish a comparative analysis with the experiences of prison learners. However, that a key feature of participants' *Inside Time* letters was on the wellbeing impact of a loss of education during lockdown does draw attention to the importance of educational pursuits within the environment of the prison and to the potential ways in which the experiences of prison learners during lockdown differed from those of their counterparts in the community, particularly considering that learners in the community also contended with changes to the provision of education. Further research into the differential impact of changes to the provision of education during the pandemic amongst prison learners and non-prison learners could thus serve to substantiate this conversation and underscore that the capacity for education to positively contribute to aspects of wellbeing is potentially

enhanced within the environment of prison. Through the enduring context of the exploration of prison education as a valuable component of wellbeing, Study Three will aim to investigate the retrospective accounts of prison educators and former prison learners in order to further contextualise the exploration of prison education and wellbeing, which includes consideration of the potential wellbeing impact of the removal of education activities in prison.

Chapter Six

Study Three – The Good, the Bad, and the Pointless: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Educational and Wellbeing Experiences of Prison Educators and Former Prison Learners

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6.0 Introduction

The World Health Organization's (WHO) definition of mental health indicates that it is "*a state of mental well-being* [emphasis added] that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community" (WHO, 2022b). There is a departure in this definition from the narrower, clinical focus of conceptualisations of health and wellbeing in research that Keyes (2006a) notes has equated health and wellbeing with an absence of ill-health markers. This departure is an important one to emphasise within the context of both this study and the overarching thesis, whereby wellbeing is operationalised as being dynamic and subjective in nature. Consistent with Diener and Ryan's (2009) conceptualisation of subjective well-being as "an umbrella term used to describe the level of wellbeing people experience according to their subjective evaluations of their lives" (p.391), the focal point of the research is on participants' experiences of wellbeing. Importantly, although Diener and Ryan note that the way in which subjective well-being is manifest within the lives of individuals can be objectively measured despite its emphasis on the subjective meaning (ibid), the research within this study and overarching thesis does not attempt to provide an objective measure of subjective well-being, nor does it purport to be a critical or in-depth analytical synthesis of the notion of subjective well-being that is prominent in the field of psychology. Rather, the research seeks to emphasise the 'subjective' element of the term in its acknowledgement that wellbeing "occurs within a person's experience" (Diener & Ryan, 2009, p.391). Keyes (2006a) in citing Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985), Keyes (1998), and Ryff (1989), notes that evaluating positive mental health was at the forefront of the development of measures of subjective well-being, and states that such measures were

established in order to "assess *positive mental health* [emphasis in original], that is, mental health in terms of the presence of positive feelings toward one's life and the level of functioning well in life" (p.395).

To reiterate, within the present study, wellbeing is conceptualised as subjective in constitution and as being a component of an individual's overall mental health. The focal point of analysis is on participants' experiences of the relationship between wellbeing and prison education and as such, the research does not provide an attempt to systematically categorise these experiences as being part of a particular dimension of wellbeing. This marks a departure from Study One which utilised a qualitative content analysis to categorise prison learners' expressions of the anticipated benefits of prison education within a framework of wellbeing. To clarify, the wellbeing framework that was developed in Study One has been an important tool in the conceptualisation of the potential benefits of prison education through a lens of wellbeing within the entirety of this thesis thus far. The review of the literature on mental health and wellbeing produced a viable analytical construct that facilitated the research decision-making process and interpretation of results utilising a lens of wellbeing. The conceptualisations of wellbeing that comprised the framework provided a comprehensive tool that informed all stages of the research. However, the results of the present study suggest that in order to truly understand the impact of prison education on wellbeing and to emphasise the subjective nature of the wellbeing experiences of those involved in prison education, the organisation of experiences of wellbeing into particular categories is perhaps not practical or essential.

Wellbeing within the prison context is of particular concern given the significant barriers to positive wellbeing that exist within prisons. The World Health Organization and the International Committee of the Red Cross (2005) identify numerous aspects of the prison environment which can impact mental health negatively. These facets include overcrowding, violence, "enforced solitude," lack of privacy, lack of meaningful activity, being alienated from social networks, uncertainty about the future (for example with respect to employment and relationships), and lack of adequate health services (particularly those services that assist

prisoners with mental health issues) (ibid). In the context of increasing numbers of convicted persons being incarcerated, Jewkes (2013) identifies the impact that overcrowding can have on prisoners, which includes risks to safety for incarcerated persons and staff, as well as issues for prisoners related to self-harm, suicide, bullying, and mental health. In its 2021-22 Annual Report, HMIP noted that prisoner survey respondents indicated that an excess of time spent confined to small, often overcrowded cells (as a result of ongoing Covid-19 restrictions and staff shortages) was having a damaging impact on their wellbeing (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2022). Mills and Kendall (2016) also note that both the experience of incarceration and the hostile environment of the prison itself are sources of stress for the prisoner. The context of prisoner incapacitation is such that individuals are housed in an environment where they are alienated from loved ones and forced to spend time with prison peers in close conditions, where productive pursuits are lacking, where prisoners may be fearful, intimidated, and psychologically and physically distressed, and where the likelihood of self-inflicted deaths is substantially higher than in the general population (Mills & Kendall, 2016; Ministry of Justice, 2019b). Mental health afflictions are also of ongoing concern to the wellbeing of prisoners within the context of enduring pandemic restrictions. HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2022) note that approximately half of adult male prisoners surveyed in the 2021-22 Annual Report indicated they were dealing with a mental health issue, as compared to 76% of female prisoners. The Covid-19 pandemic represented an additional period of instability with respect to the wellbeing of incarcerated persons, particularly given that restrictive quarantine measures in prisons saw prisoners being confined to their cells for excessive periods of time, often more than 22 hours a day (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2021b). A thematic report by HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2021b) that investigated the impact of a pandemic on prisoners acknowledged the acute ways in which prisoners felt the restrictions to movements and activities in prison were damaging their mental health and wellbeing. In in-depth interviews with HMIP, prisoners spoke of concerns about a lack of adequate mental health support at a time when it was direly needed, identified anxieties about the exacerbation of existing mental health issues, and some prisoners disclosed the use of harmful mechanisms to cope with the pains of excessive boredom and isolation (ibid).

Succeeding Studies One and Two which sought to utilise a wellbeing framework to explore the wellbeing impact of prison education on prison learners who had applied for funding through the Prisoners' Education Trust (PET), and who were experiencing the repercussions of the removal of education in prison during the Covid-19 pandemic respectively, the present study endeavours to bring the cross-contextual analysis of the relationship between wellbeing and prison education to a close. Importantly, Study Three seeks to further explore the findings of Study Two which highlighted the potential for prison learners' wellbeing to be affected in negative ways when impactful educational opportunities are removed, as they were within the context of Covid-19 lockdowns. In addition to exploring participants' expressions of the positive ways in which they believed prison education can impact learners from a wellbeing perspective, the research within Study Three will also duly address the potential for prison education to impact prison learners' wellbeing negatively. Researchers such as Hammond (2004a) and Field (2009a) acknowledge the potential negative impacts that engaging in education can facilitate. For example, in her co-authored research with Schuller, Preston, Brassett-Grundy, and Bynner on the impact of education on well-being, mental health, and coping for adult learners, Hammond (2004a) notes that results suggest negative outcomes of adult learning for certain participants in a context where expectations of learning are unmet. In attributing these negative outcomes not to learning itself but to a failure to learn, Hammond understands the negative impacts of adult learning as being associated with negative educational experiences that situate individuals within a context "where they expect and are expected to learn (and this includes learning to socialise), but for a combination of reasons fail to do so" (ibid, p.55). Similarly, Field (2009a) notes that data from the Learning Lives project, a four-year research endeavour that sought to explore the meaning and function of learning for adults (Biesta, Field, Hodkinson, Macleod, & Goodson, 2011), suggests potential negative wellbeing outcomes of participation in adult learning, such as anxiety, stress, and frustration.

Utilising an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) that seeks to explore the experiences of five prison educators and five former prison learners in the community, the dynamic

relationship between wellbeing and prison education and the reality of prison learners' experiences of wellbeing in the prison education context will be emphasised. The study will situate the research within the wider literature on the relationship between education and wellbeing, the generation of social capital, and the notion of continuity of care within the prison environment in order to contextualise and situate prison educators' and former prison learners' understandings of their educational experiences within a framework of wellbeing.

6.1 Methodology

In keeping with the analyses that were utilised in Studies One and Two, a qualitative approach was considered the most suitable and beneficial method of exploring the prison education experiences of the participants in Study Three, particularly given the fact that said participants were a non-homogenous group comprised of individuals from widely different backgrounds. The research question that provided the foundation for the present study was 'How do current prison educators and former prison learners describe their experiences of the relationship between wellbeing and prison education?'. Following on from the diversity that characterised the experiences of participants of Study Three, an IPA approach was introduced for consideration as an appealing method of capturing how these individuals engaged with and understood their experiences. IPA is a qualitative approach that aims to analyse and articulate data that emerges through participants' interpretations and perspectives and seeks to allow the lived experiences of these individuals to be at the forefront of the analysis (Coolican, 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2015). An IPA approach seeks to explore "the research participant's experience from his or her perspective…," but is equally cognisant of the influence of the researcher's perspective and the "nature of the interaction between researcher and participant" (Willig, 2013, p.87). The interpretative process in IPA occurs not just from participants' interpretation of their experiences, but also from the researcher in the process of interpreting and articulating participants' understanding of their experiences, which makes the IPA process highly reflexive in nature (Coolican, 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2015; Willig, 2013). This approach is often used with smaller sample sizes (Smith & Osborn, 2015), with some IPA studies being conducted with only

one participant (see for example, Meek, 2007). IPA approaches are characteristic of studies within the discipline of psychology where the approach is foundationally entrenched (Smith, 2011) but also increasingly within the field of healthcare research (Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty, & Hendry, 2011; see also Shaw, Senior, Peel, Cooke, & Donnelly, 2008 for a healthcare-related IPA analysis). The usefulness of IPA approaches has also been documented in research topics as varied as autism (see for example, MacLeod, 2019), entrepreneurialism (see for example, Cope, 2011), sport (see for example, Sandardos & Chambers, 2019), and spirituality (see for example, Wartenweiler, 2022). However, despite the perceived value in utilising IPA approaches in the social sciences, it has been suggested that IPA has not been a common methodological approach within crime-oriented research (Miner-Romanoff, 2012). Miner-Romanoff (2012, p.2) contends that although Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) recognise that "no single design can be applied without sensitivity to the particular sociocultural milieu studied, literature on the topic, and the specific participants," said authors do not discuss IPA applicability in relation to criminological research.

As is often characteristic of IPA studies, purposive sampling was used in order to recruit participants (Coolican, 2014; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2022). Resultingly, and as Smith and Osborn (2015) acknowledge, the sample for Study Three was characterised by potential participants who were willing to take part. This can inadvertently create a sample of participants with certain characteristics, for example those prison educators and former prison learners who had either particularly positive or particularly negative wellbeing experiences of prison education. Twitter was used to recruit potential participants with a tweet indicating that prison educators and former prison learners were sought for a study on the wellbeing impact of prison education. This tweet was posted on Twitter on two separate occasions once it was determined that acquiring additional participants would be beneficial after a relatively small number of participants were gathered from the initial tweet. The initial tweet received 25 replies, was re-tweeted 39 times, and 'liked' by 37 Twitter users. The subsequent tweet that was published four months after the original tweet received three replies, 19 re-tweets, and 16 'likes.' Those who did express an interest by replying to the tweet were then contacted via email with the study

information sheet and consent form. Semi-structured interviews, another common feature of IPA studies (Coolican, 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2015), were conducted throughout the summer and autumn of 2021. A total of ten participants were recruited, five prison educators and five former prison learners. In consideration of the ongoing pandemic and limitations on primary research in prisons that were still in place at the time that the methodology for this study was developing, the decision was made to conduct interviews using online video applications (specifically Zoom and Microsoft Teams). All ten interviews were conducted online, however, due to technical issues, the recording of one interview was not able to be retrieved. The participant in this case agreed to repeat the interview via correspondence and submitted their written answers to the researcher via email.

6.1.1 Ethical Considerations

The pandemic had a significant influence on the selection of participants for this study, given that in-person research access to current prison learners was not an option. Once it was determined that prison educators and former prison learners in the community would be the focus of this study (as they were less problematic populations to access during the pandemic), research approval was not required from HMIP and the National Research Committee (NRC). An initial draft of the NRC application had been prepared before it was determined that primary research in prisons would not be allowed during the height of the pandemic. As HMPPS/NRC authorisation was ultimately unnecessary, ethical approval was only required from Royal Holloway, University of London (RHUL), first via the ethics self-assessment form which indicated further ethical approval was needed, and subsequently through the ethics committee at RHUL. The full ethics application was submitted to the committee at RHUL which would assess any potential research-associated risks to both participants and the researcher, the way(s) in which data would be collected, utilised, and stored, and how the researcher proposed to minimise any potential risks to participants. The interview schedule, consent form, and information sheet for Study Three were submitted to the ethics committee, and ethical approval was subsequently granted with no amendments required. The information sheet detailed that participants' names

and any identifying information would be pseudonymised and anonymised in the write-up of the study so as to keep participants' data confidential. Transcripts were also password-protected and stored digitally on a further password-protected device. Consent forms were kept on a separate electronic device from transcripts and interview video files, and any handwritten notes were shredded after they were scanned electronically to the password-protected device.

Although ethical approval was granted from RHUL, specific ethical considerations relating to the recruitment of participants must be acknowledged here in order for transparency in the methodological process to be realised. Researchers' use of social media throughout the research process is a rapidly growing practice, particularly with respect to participant recruitment (Gelinas et al., 2017). Given the relative ease and speed with which researchers can recruit from a large and diverse pool of participants via social media as compared to more traditional recruitment methods (e.g., print-based and telephone-based advertisements) which can be costly and more tedious, particularly with respect to recruitment in clinical health research, online networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn can represent an attractive mechanism with which to reach out to potential participants (Andrews, 2012; Benedict, Hahn, Diefenbach, & Ford, 2019; Fenner et al., 2012; Gelinas et al., 2017). Webb (2021) acknowledges that in addition to social media recruitment representing a more economical option for researchers than traditional recruitment methods, social media platforms can also create a more "user-friendly," communicative relationship between researchers and potential participants. Social media platforms also provide the additional benefit of contact-free recruitment which, in the context of a study carried out amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, further represented a valuable means of maintaining social distancing in the recruitment process. Additionally, being a relative newcomer to prison research who had not yet established a solid foundational network within the realm of prison education, the use of a social media platform (specifically Twitter), for the purposes of this study enabled the researcher to connect with a broad population of prison educators and former prison learners. It was determined that Twitter was the most appropriate and advantageous social media platform to use in order to facilitate participant recruitment due to the fact that it is considered to be a more public forum

as compared to the more private arena of other social media platforms such as Facebook (Ahmed, Bath, & Demartini, 2017). The recruitment 'tweet' was transparent about the need for participants for the purposes of PhD research and aimed to be inclusive with respect to subsequent modes of participation. The following 'tweet' was used to facilitate communication with potential study participants:

> *Seeking former prison learners & current/past prison educators: PhD study on the mental wellbeing impact of prison education. Please get in touch if you have studied/taught in prison. Participation can be through a call, online meeting or emailed questions, whichever you prefer.*

The 'tweet' was posted by both the researcher and her PhD supervisors (both of whom are well established in the world of prison research) in order to reach as wide a segment of potential participants as possible. Although the opening 'tweet' and initial responses were posted to Twitter and were thus visible within the public domain, any subsequent correspondence between the researcher and potential participants was done via direct message and/or email. However, it must be acknowledged that the publicly visible nature of Twitter and 'tweets' inherently bear potential risks to those individuals wishing to partake in a research study where recruitment has been carried out in an online public sphere. The ethical implication of participants' expressed interest being visible to others on Twitter is such that participants' statuses as either prison educators or former prison learners would be discernible to Twitter users, classifications that might be considered potentially sensitive for some individuals, particularly those who have been incarcerated. However, it is argued here that those prison educators and former prison learners who were comfortable expressing their interest via Twitter were consequentially also comfortable with their statuses being disclosed within the Twitter sphere. Additionally, in order to minimise the personal data that was disclosed over social media, potential participants were not required to disclose their statuses as prison educators or former prison learners in their responses to the recruitment 'tweet,' as expressed initial interest in the study was the only prerequisite to further contact being initiated via the more private avenue of direct messaging. This is not to say that some potential participants did not decide to disclose their identity in their responding 'tweet,' but this was done voluntarily as

they were under no obligation to do so. The recruitment 'tweet' was also quite general and vague in nature with respect to the research on wellbeing and prison education that would be undertaken, so even if potential participants decided to identify themselves as either prison educators or former prison learners, any further specific or personal information about the study or the participants would not be publicly accessible in order to respect potential participants' privacy.

6.1.2 Overview of the participants

Table 4.0 below provides an overview of the study participants and identifies the pseudonyms used for each, whether they were categorised as a prison educator or former prison learner, and the length of time they were in the role of a prison educator or were incarcerated. The following discussion then provides a brief introduction to each of the participants.

Table 4.0 Participant information

Pseudonym	Category	Length of time in prison	Length of time as prison educator
Harrison	Former prison learner	2 years	N/A
Ann	Former prison learner	2.5 years	N/A
Hugh	Former prison learner	6 months	N/A
Owen	Former prison learner	6 months	N/A
Rose	Former prison learner	2 years	N/A
Tim	Prison educator	N/A	2 years (in person since 2019, then some pandemic-style teaching)
Wallace	Prison educator	N/A	Approx. 5 years (since autumn 2016)
Hattie	Prison educator	N/A	Approx. 3.5 years regularly
Beatrice	Prison educator	N/A	16 years
Kelly	Prison educator	N/A	8 years

Beatrice is a prison educator employed by one of the four large prison educator providers in England who has been teaching in prisons for approximately 16 years. The courses Beatrice has taught have all been accredited. Beatrice acknowledges that an opportunity exists for prison education to have a positive impact on the psychological and emotional wellbeing of prison learners, but notes that it is naïve to think that learners will be massively changed in a sudden way by engagement in education alone. Beatrice's experience is that learners will need to work at it and that "*it's the little things that make the difference*." Beatrice uses the example of the "*chit-chat*" conversations learners can have with prison educators that they might not be able to with prison officers due to the lack of resources and time officers must contend with. For Beatrice, the ability for education to positively impact the psychological and emotional health of prisoners is connected to learners' overall health and subsequently their will to engage with education. Beatrice posits that in order for prison learners to get up in the morning for something like education and for them to have an emotional connection to it requires that prisoners feel both healthy and well, which includes the ability to sleep well, and a desire to participate in education.

Hattie is a prison educator who does not identify as a teacher in the traditional sense. Hattie offers theatre-based courses in prisons and acknowledges that her courses are informal in nature and do not lead to any formal accreditation. Hattie's experience of her non-traditional theatre-based classes is that although they are not structured to explicitly cover things like reading and public speaking skills, this type of learning is inherently embedded within her courses. As an informal educator, Hattie understands her role as an inclusive and collaborative one rather than that of an authoritative figure doling out commands to her subjects. Indeed, Hattie acknowledges that her theatre courses do not require prison learners to have any specific level of literacy in order to participate, noting that she will adapt her course accordingly to account for differing ability levels. Hattie notes that she always works alone without a prison officer present and identifies the importance of this in helping learners to feel a bit more comfortable in her classes. Hattie engaged in teaching during the pandemic by creating activity packs for the wider prison population which she acknowledged was somewhat of a challenge

for her. Rather than being able to tailor the activities to the ability levels of her specific students (whom she gets to know very well throughout the course of her programme), the people Hattie was creating the packs for were unfamiliar to her.

Prison educator **Tim** has been teaching in prisons in a volunteer capacity since 2019 (including some worksheet-based pandemic teaching) and has utilised a specialist education programme that embeds critical thinking and problem-solving skills into his science-based lessons. In Tim's opinion, his prison education course has had a positive wellbeing impact on learners, evidenced by the sacrifices he has seen his learners make with respect to giving up workout passes in the gym (which he acknowledges is a big deal in prison) in favour of attending his course. Tim's view is that when learners navigate their way through relevant topics in his course, it instils a sense of both academia as well as collaboration and teamwork. Like Hattie, Tim also created activity packs for prison learners during the pandemic, although he notes that the work was never returned to him on account of Covid-19 restrictions.

Prison educator **Wallace** is a volunteer prison educator (run through a volunteering scheme at the university where he is employed) who teaches an informal, non-qualification-based English Literature course (considered to be approximately undergraduate level) to library book groups within prisons. As a university professor, Wallace maintains that it is more beneficial for his students and that they get "*the best from him*" if he teaches at roughly the same educational level that he would outside of prison, even with the knowledge that many of his students have historically had "*disrupted or discontinued*" educational experiences. Wallace acknowledges that he would consider his students not necessarily representative of the primary types of people within the prisons he teaches at, as he contends the book group members are the "*keenest readers who visit that library*." Thus, in Wallace's experience, he is teaching people that want to be there. Although the prison learners who participate in Wallace's reading group do change over time, Wallace notes that overall, the group membership is "*relatively stable*" due to the length of learners' tariffs. He acknowledges that reading groups with less stable populations might find effectively educating learners in English Literature quite challenging as

individuals may not be around long enough to study a novel. Wallace identifies his prison teaching as the most rewarding but also the most strenuous form of teaching he engages in, noting that because prison learners may have taken non-traditional or non-linear pathways to education, he is compelled to tap into modes of teaching that he would not normally utilise in his job as a university professor. In contrast to Hattie, Wallace notes that he always works with a prison officer present in his classes.

Kelly is a prison educator who, over the course of eight years, has worked in over 40 prisons across the estate. She has experience in both qualification-based and non-qualification-based courses of varying durations. Kelly acknowledges that some of the courses she has taught have been paid for by the core education providers and notes that within this target-driven context, it creates an added level of pressure for her as an educator. She classifies herself as a "*non-pushy*" educator who, even within the restrictive nature of a target-driven educational setting, was able to carry out her work using a more "*person-centred approach*" without being overly concerned about how not meeting targets would fall back on her. She acknowledges that the support of her manager has been instrumental in allowing her to carry out her work as an educator without the added stress of being required to keep people in her course, even if that course was not appropriate for them. In Kelly's view, her experience teaching in prisons is made easier when prison learners are doing things they want to be doing. Kelly is of the view that not all prison learners experience a grandiose transformation from participating in education and that a transformative experience is more discernible in prison learners who might have "*more going on*" (e.g., younger prisoners, quieter prisoners, more troublesome prisoners).

Rose is a former prison learner who acknowledges that she had quite a positive and "*normal*" educational upbringing, with no exclusions, having sat her GCSEs, and achieving her National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 2s post-secondary school. Rose characterises her experience of prison education, on the other hand, as quite negative and "*pointless.*" Rose's experience of being in three different prisons, undergoing an educational assessment in each, and then being told she had to repeat a Level 2 education course when she was transferred to

an open prison (after having completed this course prior to her transfer), was a source of profound frustration for her, and contributed to her disillusionment with the system of education in prison. In Rose's opinion, her experience was that prison education served as an additional stressor within an already stressful environment that highlighted the educational inadequacies of some prison learners, noting that in her opinion, people in prison are perhaps "*fighting other demons that they really didn't need to be reminded that they probably couldn't read or write*..." Rose did not have any educational requirement as part of her sentence plan and identifies that she used education primarily to pass the time in an excessively boring environment. Rose contends that her time spent in prison and prison education did not change her as a person "*in any way, shape, or form,*" even though her family might think otherwise. Rose acknowledges that her familial support system remained intact during her time in prison and notes that she was "*quite lucky*" to have had such a supportive family.

Owen is a former prison learner whose prison educational experience remains almost entirely confined to his time in an open prison where most of his sentence was carried out. Owen spent only three weeks in a Category A/B prison, at which point he was moved to an open prison for the remainder of his six-month sentence. Like former prison learner Rose, Owen characterised his educational experience prior to prison as quite positive, having followed quite a linear educational pathway prior to prison, attending school and subsequently college, and then obtaining his degree at university. Owen acknowledges that he did not have any negative experiences of education until prison, and notes that his being educated to degree-level and having had a "wonderful" school life was the anomaly amongst his fellow prisoners. Owen also identifies himself as an anomaly in prison due to the fact that his life was not put on hold when he entered prison. Owen was able to retain his business (i.e., his employment income was stable) whilst he was incarcerated, with his company operating as per usual in his absence. Thus, for Owen, prison education was not a necessary part of his life in prison given that he already had a higher-level learning qualification, and that he would be able to return to the business he had set up post-release. Owen acknowledges that he engaged in prison education to combat boredom, as like Rose, education was not part of his sentence plan.

Harrison is a former prison learner who considers his history of education prior to prison to be quite negative and unsupportive. Harrison recounts how from a young age he always felt "*one step behind*" with respect to his learning after being perceived as having educational difficulties in school, noting that teachers would refer to him as "*stupid.*" Harrison left school early and although he eventually returned to sit his exams, he left having only achieved one GCSE. During his time in prison, Harrison earned numerous formal accreditations and participated in various levels of study (including an access course with the Open University), but also participated in more informal types of learning. Although Harrison identifies that he was initially scared of going to education in prison due to the security and health-related instability of some learners that would be in the classes, this outlook began to change the more he participated in education and with the support of key people in prison such as a peer mentor and certain educators. Harrison acknowledges that for him, education in prison helped him to resist his self-destructive mindset as he learned to confront himself and the negative behaviours and attitude he had been exhibiting. For Harrison, this ultimately "*led to less conflict in [his] life both physically and mentally within [himself].*"

Hugh is a former prison learner who considers his experience of both grammar-school education prior to prison and his educational time within prison to be quite positive. Hugh was a classroom assistant during his time in prison education which he found he enjoyed. As a fervent advocate for the benefits of prison education, Hugh acknowledges that he believes there is a positive wellbeing from participation in education which he himself has experienced, although he indicates he was surprised by the low levels of participation in prison education classes that he observed during his time in prison. Hugh notes that although he is no longer in prison, he keeps in contact with some of his fellow prison learners who remain incarcerated, many of whom are now continuing their educational pursuits with the Open University. In reference to the purpose of education, in Hugh's view, the rationale behind education extends beyond obtaining employment, and for him, the purpose of education is to "*encourage you to think and adapt.*" Hugh opines that prison education could be improved by "*more people taking*

part, more time, more resources and in-cell technology to allow people to follow it up, [and]
supporting the teachers."

Ann is a former prison learner who categorises herself as well-educated and a lifelong learner. Ann indicates that although she has not yet reached degree-level study, she has studied at a higher level prior to prison, attending a technical college after leaving school, achieving her A-levels and NVQ Level 5. Having left school at 16, Ann classifies her experience at an all-girls' secondary school as negative, in part due to the fact that she considers girls to be intimidating. Ann was required to undertake a specific education course on mental health in prison as part of her sentence plan, but she also engaged with courses that were not part of her sentence plan in order to keep herself busy and stimulated. Ann acknowledges that she used education to cope with the stresses of life, both inside and outside of prison. In Ann's experience, there were certain courses she took in prison that were not "*worth having*," due to their overly basic nature or uselessness outside of prison, and also courses that were not suitable for prison due to the lack of resources available to prison learners.

The cohort of participants provides an interesting contextual frame within which the data analysis sits. The length of time participants who were former prison learners spent incarcerated was relatively short-term in nature, ranging from six months to two and a half years. Irrespective of the somewhat short-lived prison experiences of prison learner participants, they spoke with fervour about their perceptions of the relationship between prison education and their wellbeing. Arguments exist that those with short custodial sentences, typically understood as sentences that are less than 12 months (Brader, 2020; Eaton & Mews, 2019) may be the ones most in need of education initiatives (House of Commons Education Committee, 2020b). This argument is especially relevant when considering the literature that suggests the educational experiences of those serving short prison terms can be particularly inadequate due to the limited educational and offending-behaviour courses on offer for short-sentenced prisoners, the inability to start certain education courses due to lengthy waiting lists, or priority being given to those with longer sentences (Trebilcock, 2011). The educational

experiences of participants in this study were diverse in nature, with engagement with prison education ranging from formal to informal, and roles and responsibilities ranging from prison educator to prison learner, but also including peer mentor and classroom assistant.

6.2 Analysis

Reflexively speaking, the initial hypothesis that informed the present study was that there would be a relatively universal positive wellbeing impact from prison learners accessing education. The researcher acknowledges that this premise was derivative of her own positive experiences of education, a notion that is not unlike Schuller's (2004a) contention that for those who are somehow involved or interested in some aspect of education or a learning culture, "…most people have a strong sense that without education their world would be a poorer place, economically but also intellectually, culturally, socially and even morally" (p.3). However, in hindsight, the researcher's own positive relationship with education may have led to an overly biased premise that did not consider the ways in which negative and unfulfilling experiences of education could imprint upon individuals in ways that followed them throughout life, contributing to possible educational-related trauma that may be imported into prison. As former prison learner Harrison articulates, his experience of education prior to prison was negative in virtually all respects from a very early age. It was one that was characterised by ridicule and shame combined with a chaotic classroom environment where brutality and bullying reigned:

> *I can remember as far back as infant school and my mum sitting with a teacher and they were discussing my abilities. The most vivid memory I have is of the teacher saying that I couldn't read and was unlikely to be able to read like the other students at all. I remember that feeling of shock followed by anger…I would hate school because when I was there I was always playing catch up and looked stupid. It leads to a deep feeling of shame and frustration…I was in the bottom set in class and that class environment was chaotic and often brutal as it was mixed with people who struggled with mental health and behavioural problems as well as ADHD or those who were behind like me. These styles of classroom in secondary school lead to bullying and physical violence where I witnessed punched noses and blood regularly and all the teacher could do was ignore it and nothing ever progressed.*

This past negative educational experience seemed initially to be carried forward into prison with Harrison where he felt he was mistakenly "outed" as a person with learning difficulties:

> *When I went to education with a group off my wing I was loudly told in front of everyone that I should tick special needs boxes. I was mortified and felt that as a new prisoner I had to establish myself yet this made me look worse than I already did. I shouted I was not special needs and no one had ever said that to me before. The woman staff member was part of education and not an officer said I was disruptive and this would not be tolerated. I ticked moderate special needs to meet her halfway. In this prison there were completely different learning opportunities than when I got transferred 23 days later. I had been told there was training opportunities with Max Spielman and Timpsons. When I enquired she told me that I didn't have the right qualities to go for those positions as well as the basic maths and English skills. I was heartbroken and sunk into further despair. All the pain and turmoil I had felt at school came back and I accepted I would not amount to anything.*
>
> (Harrison, former prison learner)

Harrison's reflections of his educational experiences illustrate the emotional toll that previous negative experiences of education can have on prison learners, and thus set the foundation for the researcher to use a revised lens with which to carry out analytical examination of the potential relationship between prison education and wellbeing. The forthcoming analysis seeks to explore the identified emergent themes from the ten interviews conducted with prison educators and former prison learners. The first of these themes is the conceptualisation of education as an element of social capital and the ways in which participants generated this capital by engaging in education in prison. The second theme that was identified throughout the interviews centres on the notion of identity and the relationship between prison education, wellbeing, and a reconstructed self-perception. The focus of the third theme is on the impact of the inflexible nature of the structure, provision, and space of prison education on participants' wellbeing. The fourth theme explores the significance of relatable education and utilising a tailored approach for prisoners who are engaging with education whilst incarcerated. Finally, the fifth theme that surfaced in the analysis considers participants' wellbeing experiences of a deficient continuity of care in the period when an education programme has ended.

6.2.1 Social capital and education

The concept of social capital was identified by the researcher as a common thematic element within participant interviews. Indeed, a prominent theme that emerged in discussions with both prison educators and former prison learners was that of prison education as a unique opportunity for people to interact with others whom they might not normally associate with on the outside. The idea of people from varied backgrounds and walks of life coming together was raised by multiple participants as a benefit of engaging in prison education.

6.2.1.1 Collaboration and connection

Prison educator Wallace acknowledges that in his view, during their time spent in his English Literature class, prison learners have access to social practices (i.e., *"laughing, teasing, polite disagreement"*) that typically would not be at their disposal in prison. Wallace attributes elements of social wellbeing that emerged within his classes to the collaborative nature of his English Literature reading group, noting that the course itself as well as the course material gives participants the opportunity to interact with one another on a common level that extends beyond the classroom (or library, in this case):

> *…the reading group or the text gives these men a network with each other outside of the actual practice for the reading group…the fact that they can talk to each other about the book outside of class, or that they can pass on copies, or they can ask things…*
> (Wallace, prison educator)

Prison educator Beatrice speaks of "*the community of the classroom*," referring to the mutually supportive and engaging environment of the classroom where prison learners can "*share commonalities*" and continually interact with and learn from a diverse group of individuals, some of whom they would have never engaged with outside of prison. The team environment of the classroom and cohort that prison learners build is key to learners experiencing changes in their wellbeing as they progress through a course, according to Beatrice. When asked whether she was able to discern changes in the wellbeing of her students from the point of their initial

participation in her classes to the end, Beatrice responded affirmatively, indicating that changes in confidence and emotional wellbeing were particularly noticeable from her standpoint. Like Beatrice, Tim notes that he also noticed his learners establishing a sense of cohesion and community within the cohort that they formed in his class, noting that there was a "*really strong social connection*" amongst them. This sense of social connectedness that his learners developed, according to Tim, further enabled them to communicate with their friends and family about their experience in Tim's course, which Tim indicates was hugely important for them. Tim also theorises that through learning about current events in the news, which Tim acknowledges he strives to incorporate into his lessons, his learners are potentially able to return to their wings with knowledge that was previously not available to them, enabling them to enter discussions with their peers that they might not have been able to contribute to previously. Although Tim does concede that as he is not on the wings with his students once his classes end, he cannot say definitively if this is the case.

Former prison learner Hugh acknowledges the pleasure he gained from working with and helping many different people during his time in prison education. Additionally, Hugh speaks of his belief that the integrative atmosphere of the classroom where learners were interacting and mingling with one another contributed to his ability, and in his opinion, the ability of his fellow prison learners, to cope with the experience of prison:

> *…prison is a very threatening place, very intimidating, but in the classrooms, you're mixing with people and talking to them so you actually get to know people, you've actually lost the fear of being in prison because they're just people, they really are. When I first walked through the door I was terrified, but once I got to meet people and talk to them, laugh with them, people are people…you're learning, you're progressing, a lot of people it's making up for what school never gave them, school didn't give them this, we were discussing history, we discussed geography, we discussed a whole range of political structures that their education hadn't opened them to…it's people talking about people, and classes helped me get through that, couldn't have coped without it, I couldn't have coped without it, it would have driven me right down.*
>
> (Hugh, former prison learner)

For prison educator Kelly, the positive aspects of her job teaching in prison were very much related to the sense of connectedness and even shared enjoyment that she feels were present in her classes. Kelly notes:

> *...I think for most people, getting in a room and getting in a space where you're like, individuals and you can be a bit silly a lot of the time and play and kind of connect through, we played some really stupid stuff and like there'd be maybe a bit of pushback against it to start with, but being able to kind of, we'd always start with a game and end with a game whatever course I was teaching because either it's fun and you want to get people into that mindset, or it's quite heavy and you want to do something to break the day so they don't have to go back to their cells just thinking, so I think that kind of fun and the ability to connect with people that you might not ordinarily meet and maybe create a space where you can have conversations about you know, a lot of it's about their children or their partners and you know, things that may be quite emotional, so having a structured space...I think just like building those relationships and just like a little bit of connection in a space where there isn't a lot of space for that...*
>
> <div align="right">(Kelly, prison educator)</div>

When asked about whether she perceived an impact on the social wellbeing of her learners as a result of their engagement in education, Kelly describes the sense of care and connection she believes her learners establish with each other as "*the most obvious outcome*" of participating in her courses, stating:

> *...I just have story after story after story of people just helping each other and caring for each other and going out of their way for each other and like listening, you know, just bringing things up like well didn't you say yesterday, or knowing each other's kids' names, yeah I think for me that was the social aspect of these programmes is the best thing...*
>
> <div align="right">(Kelly, prison educator)</div>

Kelly reflexively acknowledges that it was not just her learners that were connecting and interacting with those in the communal space of education that they may not normally encounter, but that she too was experiencing the impact of sharing a space with individuals with life experiences and backgrounds that potentially deviated significantly from her own.

Tim recounts how his students would be eager to share what they were learning in his class with their family members and notes that his learners have provided him with feedback indicating they are very proud of the work they have done in his class. With respect to the impact of prison education on his wellbeing, former prison learner Harrison also articulates that education allowed him to connect with his family on a level that extended beyond the experience of prison. Former prison learner Hugh likewise speaks to the ability for education in prison to instil feelings of pride amongst prison learners, recalling his experience of speaking to a learner who expressed sentiments of pride in themselves for receiving an educational certificate, but notes that for this learner, it was the ability to interact and connect with their children based on the skills that they gained in education that truly led to them feeling proud of themselves. In recalling some of the drama-based courses she teaches which often involve a performance, prison educator Kelly notes that a common sentiment expressed by her learners in their course feedback evaluations is one of confidence-building, noting that some of her learners expressed sentiments of wonder at their capabilities and achievements in the course.

Prison educator Hattie recounts the experience of the mother of one of her students who told Hattie that her son previously had nothing to talk about when he phoned, and since her son's participation in Hattie's theatre-based course, she can share in her son's experience of theatre education as he contacts her multiple times a week to recount what he is doing in the course. Hattie further shares another example of how engaging in theatre education and putting on a production for family at the end allowed one of her students to experience a shared sense of pride with his family:

> *[in his rehearsal diary or the debrief] he wrote about the fact that it's the only thing while he's been in prison that he's ever been able to actually share that he's proud of, and he said if I do a qualification for example, and he is doing education, he's got a long sentence left, he's a life-sentenced prisoner and his minimum tariff is a long time away, but he'd said I can tell them that oh I passed my Spanish GCSE, but they don't actually see that, they*

don't see anything to do with that, but actually I can show them this and we can be proud of it together…

<div align="right">(Hattie, prison educator)</div>

Intriguingly, in recalling discussions he has had with his class on the impact of sleep on mood changes, Tim theorises that there exists a potential ability for empathy to act as a means to cope with the prison experience. In recalling his students' sleep diary exercise and corresponding class debriefs, Tim acknowledges that his students have learned to be attuned to the fact that prison officers may experience similar sleep issues, subsequently coming to the realisation that the behaviour of prison officers towards prisoners may in fact be somewhat influenced by a lack of sleep. Tim articulates that this realisation may create an empathetic coping mechanism of sorts, meaning that by understanding the relatable plights of prison officers, those in prison may begin to comprehend their actions, reactions, and behaviours, perhaps then impacting learners' ability to cope with the prison environment through their understanding of the experiences of others. Prison educator Wallace similarly speaks to the ability for the literary texts he uses in his courses to instil in prison learners a sense of what it is like to understand someone else's experiences:

> *…Keates' term of 'negative culpability,' the idea that the great works of art and I think narratives in particular give you a sense of what it is like to be somebody else or to be in somebody's shoes, and I think for some of these prisoners that is cognitively beneficial…I can see through talking about these texts some of these men…are made more aware of alternative ways of seeing things, scales of values…literature as a medium for the debate of values…that there is a relationship between the questioning of moral orthodoxy and wellbeing perhaps, or that too crippling an adherence to a kind of orthodoxy might have negative effects on your wellbeing and then the exercise of the imagination might be good for you in particular.*

<div align="right">(Wallace, prison educator)</div>

For prison educator Beatrice, the positive wellbeing impact that prison education can have on learners relates to the ability of education to make students feel that they are an active member of society, even if it is in a vague way (Beatrice uses the example of prison learners being able to assist their children with their homework or read their children a story). She acknowledges that the discord in attempting to make prisoners feel a part of society when they are inherently

segregated from it by the peripheral nature of prison to society, is problematic for her. Referencing the importance of prison learners feeling a sense of community connection, Beatrice notes that it is a prison educator's job to *"hook them* [prison learners] *back into it,"* by providing them with an outlet for talking about current events, their feelings, and their families.

Harrison notes that in his view, participating in prison education allowed him to experience a certain parallel learning experience with those engaged in education in the community, albeit without prison learners being supported in the same way or with access to the same resources. The capacity for prison education to provide learners with an experience that mirrors that of their outside counterparts is one that has also been a part of the experience of former prison learner Hugh. Hugh recalls the structured debates his prison education class would participate in against a university team that had been brought into the prison for the debate competition, acknowledging the ways in which the debate process and training instilled, in his opinion, a previously wanting level of confidence in participants to speak up for themselves. The notion of being able to interact with others on an equal level was also part of former prison learner Ann's experience of certain elements of prison education, particularly in those classes that she enjoyed and wanted to be a part of, such as the university-level courses and arts-based classes. Ann also identifies the art class she engaged with as one where emotions were allowed to be expressed. This class was run by a local charity rather than the prison education department, and Ann distinguishes these types of arts-based classes as the most important due to their inclusive nature. The inclusivity of their informal education courses is a feature that has been articulated by prison educators Hattie and Tim. Hattie's educational programme is open to learners of all ability levels, including those with learning difficulties and for whom English is not a first language. In Tim's case, he acknowledges that whilst there is technically an approximate Level 2 prerequisite for his course, he indicates that really anyone can join so long as they are able to read and can articulate their views.

6.2.2 Identity

When asked about the impact prison education had on his wellbeing, former prison learner Harrison notes that prison education gave him a *"purpose and a new identity as a student rather than just a prison number."* Despite the evident security-based challenges experienced by prison educators, Harrison notes that there were educators that would, at times, defy security-imposed restrictions in order to facilitate students' learning out of the classroom. Harrison also speaks of certain educational departments being helpful and supportive of his efforts to succeed in education classes, allowing him leeway with respect to where he could complete his work when classrooms became overly disruptive. For Harrison, this contributed to the feeling that he was perceived as different than his peers with respect to his aptitude, a feeling that seemed to be internalised by Harrison, leading to increased levels of confidence with respect to his educational abilities:

> *I felt that I was seen as intelligent as the general population in prison were anti-social and had little education. The fact that I tried put me a step ahead of everyone. This builds my confidence enough to think I can try and see where I can go with this.*
>
> (Harrison, former prison learner)

This internalisation of being perceived as different from other prisoners endured the longer Harrison remained engaged in education, and the perception of "difference" eventually extended beyond prison educators to include prison officers and fellow prison learners:

> *The more I took part in education the more I was seen differently by the officers over the first year and my peers saw me as someone they could trust and to be given sound advice from. My whole identity changed…I began to analyse and think critically, while questioning myself that led to questioning other people as I no longer took their word for it…Information is power in prison and I was showing the officers I wasn't an idiot and **I** started to feel a level of respect I had never had before. Prison gave me nothing but education gave me the keys to every door that slammed and locked around me. I never felt more free. Never felt more purpose. More whole. I didn't realise how empty I had been till [sic] learning filled me up.*
>
> (Harrison, former prison learner)

Harrison further articulates the fact that prison education allowed him to tap into feelings of normality, of being himself again. Hugh likewise acknowledges that for him, being able to participate in education in prison served to remind him that he was more than what the experience of prison reduces an individual to, noting that *"it* [education classes in prison] *makes you remember who you are and not where you are."* In a similar vein to former prison learner Rose, Hugh's prior experience of education was quite "normal" in nature, free from exclusions and overall, quite positive. However, in contrast to Rose for whom the experience of education in prison could be described as quite negative and abnormal due to its divergence from the relative ordinariness of her experience of education prior to prison, for Hugh, his time spent in prison education evoked those feelings of normality that he acknowledges characterised his positive experience of education prior to prison. For Hugh, being engaged in education epitomises "*normal life,"* and Hugh acknowledges the importance of this sense of normality within an environment perpetually characterised by abnormal circumstances. Hugh's understanding of the irregularity of being confined to a cell with another person, of having recreational time in an outdoor area supervised by authoritative agents, and of restrictions upon free speech contributed to the solace he experienced in the familiar space of education. Hugh recognises that within the environment of prison which strips prisoners of their autonomy and identity, prison education provided him with a crucially important space where he was able to continue to be himself. In acknowledging his perception of the capacity for prison education to inspire an identity beyond that of 'prisoner' in learners, Hugh recalls a conversation with a fellow prison learner who expressed to Hugh the way prison education contributed to his sense of self:

> *…all of a sudden in there [education] you're not just a prisoner, I mean one guy…said to me 'it's the first time, I've been in and out of prison for year in my life,' he was maybe 25, he said 'it's the first time I've actually felt treated like an adult,' he said 'now I'm going to behave like an adult,' and I thought that is his wellbeing, that's his emotional state isn't it, he's not being treated like a worthless thing to be pushed around, he's an adult to be listened to and respected…*

<div align="right">(Hugh, former prison learner)</div>

In prison educator Wallace's view, the intellectual process prison learners occupy, theorised by Wallace as relating to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's psychological concept of "flow," may stimulate a potential shift in status amongst prisoners engaging with education in prison. Flow refers to "the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p.4). Wallace opines that the elevated educational level and intellectually stimulating content of his literature courses can facilitate an immersive experience for learners, which can then contribute to a positive sense of 'otherness' amongst learners in his classes. Wallace notes:

> *...I think that's the real benefit of this particular class is that for the two and a bit hours of these book groups, these men are not prisoners, they're not terrorists or domestic homicides, gangsters, or whatever has brought them in. They are readers, or students, and I don't think that status is conferred by me, I don't think it's the professor comes in and the professor gives them attention, I think what really makes that work is the quality of the text, and I think they are lifted out of that ontology of being a prisoner, that's what they are 24/7 otherwise...*
>
> (Wallace, prison educator)

Wallace further indicates that in his experience, there are times when he can detect a shift occurring in self-perception amongst prison learners who have engaged with formal qualifications alongside his more informal literature course. Wallace articulates that he notices an altered sense of identity in learners who have experienced a sense of achievement both inside and outside of the classroom, using the example of prison learners who have qualified as peer mentors who seem to readily shed their prison-issued attire in favour of t-shirts that signify them as mentors. In conceptualising prison education as a way for prison learners to structure both their time and future, Wallace subsequently speculates that prison education may serve to help learners "*adjust to the temporality of prison life.*"

Former prison learner Ann notes that she experienced three shifts in identity from the time she entered prison. Ann opines that when she entered prison she considered herself a "*monster,*" when she began education in prison she classified herself as a "*learner,*" and it was not until she engaged with the university-level courses that she classified herself as a "*student.*" For prison

educator Beatrice, the notion that prison learners can experience an identity shift in the way they view themselves because of education is not a change that is experienced in isolation, rather it is a more fluid change which she attributes to the sense of community learners develop in the classroom:

> *…what I try and certainly encourage is that actually those identities, they're not operating in a vacuum, you can actually be all those things at the same time…but it's back to kind of what I said earlier about them seeing themselves as a part of that community, albeit behind a wall at the moment but still maintaining that level of contact, that's the key to it really because your own individual identity obviously you can do work on it and we do, but if you can't see it as part of the bigger scheme of things, I think it's quite limited in where you'll go with it.*
>
> (Beatrice, prison educator)

Drawing on the idea of prison learners tapping into the concept of fluid identities, Beatrice posits that it is important for prison educators to share some of themselves with their students to demonstrate that no one is just a singular identity in isolation, that we are all unique, complex individuals who can embody a myriad of identities. For prison educator Kelly, the ability for people in prison to undertake education and subsequently internalise a student identity is tied to the concept of emotional wellbeing and feelings of being part of a cohort of learners. In Kelly's experience, fostering a sense of structure and routine in her classes where expectations and plans for the course are clearly outlined, and students are motivated to work towards a goal, can facilitate this sense of emotional wellbeing and can contribute to prisoners embracing their identities as students. Kelly opines that prison is not a place that commonly allows for prisoners to experience "*proper ownership of something*" and articulates her perception that students in her drama-based courses experience a "*shift in ownership over a project,*" which she contends contributes to a potential shift in identity from student to "*co-creator.*" Prison educator Tim notes that in the process of instilling a critical thinking framework in his students and having them work through various scientific hypotheses, his learners are considered scientists from that point on. In his experience, Tim's students have benefitted in a mentally positive way from the perceptual changes Tim's course inspires. For example, Tim articulates that his reference to learners as students rather than prisoners, and his ability to give

learners a positive experience of education (rather than the overwhelmingly negative experience many prison learners have had) have been instrumental in positively impacting learners' wellbeing through changing their views of themselves and education in general. Tim acknowledges that although he would frame the course as personal development-orientated to prison education departments, he would not do so to prison learners. For learners, Tim indicates he would stress the fact that the course is a science course that aims to build confidence. Tim's informal, non-accredited science course focuses on the application of the scientific method and having learners understand the importance of information analysis in everyday life. As such, Tim characterises his course as confidence-building and advocates for the identity-shifting impact it can have on prison learners. Tim acknowledges that in his experience, as an educator who is affiliated with a university, the fact that learners receive a certificate from him is adequate for learners, and ultimately in Tim's view, the benefits learners gain from the course are "*different, are confidence rather than degrees*." Hugh's opinion regarding prison education certificates is that the certificate itself will not necessarily aid learners in obtaining employment post-prison, but that the knowledge and sense of achievement is what will propel prisoners through their post-prison lives as productive members of society. Similarly, rather than the notion of any wellbeing impact being tied to a tangible credential that can be earned in her courses, Hattie's understanding is that it is the fact that there is something more to be earned on a personal level that draws people in, and the fact that there is no formal accreditation is irrelevant:

> *...when I very first went into the first prison...and I was told if you don't give them like a certificate or whatever, they won't come, that's all that they're bothered about. Now in reality, that could not be further from the truth because they do turn up, every week without fail, they don't miss a class, and actually they know that it's not accredited, and they genuinely don't care because they get something more out of it, and I think in terms of linking to sort of...mental wellbeing, that's actually what attracts a lot of them to the group, because they're not saying oh I want to get my Functional Skills Level 2 or I want to get my GCSE or my A-level or my whatever, they're saying actually this makes me feel better, this makes me feel that I can tackle issues better...*
>
> (Hattie, prison educator)

Prison educator Kelly speaks of a sense of academic achievement and "*being good at stuff*" that she feels her learners appreciate when engaging with education. Kelly subsequently opines that this sense of pride and achievement has potentially impacted her learners' wellbeing in a positive way, especially when considering that the courses she teaches are developed for those who have typically not had previous successful educational experiences, and the significance that learning and achieving can have for prison learners that fall into this category. Kelly attests to the "*buy-in*" she detects from her learners when they realise that their work can be considered quite academic in nature, or at a certain academic level (i.e., "*university-level stuff*"). Kelly further speaks of a sense of ownership of knowledge that prison learners are able to claim from participation in education in prison and notes that for her, the process of her students learning, progressing, taking pride in themselves, and claiming knowledge as their own contributes to what she sees as the positive aspects of her role to the point that she acknowledges it has impacted her own wellbeing in a positive way. In contrast to the marginally reductionist views towards prison certificates that Hattie and Hugh have alluded to, Kelly's understanding is one of import as she speaks to the significance learners attribute to receiving a tangible representation of their achievement, noting that in her experience, prison learners will work especially hard when they know the course is accredited and leads to a qualification. Kelly does however note that she has worked with many prison learners who already have degrees, and it is her understanding that for this group of learners, obtaining a certificate in prison "*doesn't necessarily mean as much to them*." Beatrice echoes Kelly's belief in the importance of certificates for learners and acknowledges that in her experience, although certificates are "*precious gold*" for prison learners, these achievements are often not celebrated enough in prisons. Beatrice further attests to the importance she feels learners place on being issued "*proper*" certificates in prison, referring to credentials that have no distinguishable markers that identify that the qualification was earned from within prison.

6.2.3 A(n) (in)flexible approach

Inflexible education provision emerged as a prominent theme in interviews with both prison educators and former prison learners. Former prison learner participants spoke of being unable to participate in the types of learning they wanted to, whilst prison educators spoke of being unable to offer or embed different types of learning in rigidly structured education courses that were heavily results-focused. Indeed, education-related negative impacts to wellbeing were discussed by multiple participants. Barriers to higher-level learning, provision-related difficulties, and rigid structure were cited as sources of frustration, disappointment, and anger by some participants. Prison educator Beatrice speaks to this in following excerpt, as she articulates her experience of the new education structure in prisons (i.e., the Prison Education Framework) as one that does not allow for alternative learning to be embedded within the rigidity of courses from the core education providers:

> *…so when we were on the OLASS contracts, whilst there was a qualification, you really had a lot of flexibility in terms of what you embedded into that course, so there are absolute gaps in our students' knowledge, and whether my student is 15 or 50, there are gaps, and it's not always the things you think about, so you have to embed other stuff there because if you don't, it's not going to happen…you take the opportunity to shoehorn what you can in. The difficulty we've got now is that's becoming quite a challenge, and I'm talking pre-Covid really, so a functional skills course would be six weeks part-time, so you would have a reasonable amount of time to embed stuff, now courses are cut down to the guided learning hours so you are bound by that curriculum and that criteria, and it's very difficult to do those extra critical thought…"*
>
> (Beatrice, prison educator)

Prison educator Kelly likewise highlights her experience of the target-driven environment and rigidity of the processes she feels educators are required to follow when the educational provision is offered by one of the core prison education providers. Kelly acknowledges her experience of the pressure she feels is exerted upon educators by these providers to "*get learners through*," in comparison to courses she has taught that were brought into the prison by other departments, for example through Safer Custody or wellbeing teams. Part of Kelly's frustration relates to her understanding that some people in prison are not ready for education

or not well-suited for the courses they are being required to engage with, some of which are relationship-oriented and quite personal in nature, in order for education providers to obtain results and meet targets. Kelly states:

> *…the pressure to keep people on the courses can be really really tough because some people just aren't ready to be in education and that should be okay, but it's not…*
>
> (Kelly, prison educator)

In Kelly's experience, although it should ideally be accepted that some people in prison are just not ready to be on an education course, the reality is that the pressure from education providers to keep learners on courses renders this notion unviable. However, in Kelly's view, due to her rank within the prison education system, she was lucky to be able to maintain a relative "*person-centred approach*" with her learners in the recognition that she would not bear the responsibility of potential repercussions of missed targets, as this would be the purview of her manager. Kelly further acknowledges that the nomadic element of her position as a teacher who works in many prisons for varying lengths of time and is not deployed permanently to one specific institution, exacerbates her perceived limited ability to "*do or change things*" as an educator. Kelly notes that her students will often disclose sensitive aspects of their lives to her due to the nature of the courses she teaches, and although she acknowledges times where she is better able to support these learners due to longer periods spent in certain institutions, she confesses that she struggles to maintain confidence that prisoners are being properly supported in those prisons that she '*dips in and out'* of where she passes along information disclosed to her by prison learners in the hope that they will continue to be helped by others.

Lack of flexibility and versatility in the types of courses on offer (particularly in the women's estate) and in the prison education regime itself was a common theme identified by participants when they articulated their experiences of prison education. For example, Ann's experience of the inflexibility of education provision was in relation to the gendered nature of this provision, evidenced by her comment that education courses in the women's estate were often "*pink*" in nature. Harrison also spoke of his frustration with the gendered approach to education that he understood as starkly obvious in prisons, with his experience underscoring his perception of the

lack of offerings and diversity in educational provision in women's prisons as compared to men's.

Prison educator Beatrice's flexibility-related frustration revolved around her perceived inability to "*use my professional judgement*" and the inability of prison educators to provide a flexible level of provision to their students under their obligation to stay within a narrowly defined curriculum. Sentiments of being forced to do certain types of education as part of sentence plans, or of having to stick to rigidly structured arrangements were discussed by former prison learners and prison educators respectively, which participants at times expressed as being a potential setback to wellbeing. Some participants discussed the physical environment of the classroom setting as having a negative impact on their wellbeing and learning, and when classes were held out of the education block, for example in the chapel or library, this created an opportunity for prison learners to mentally free themselves from any negative education classroom connotations they might be harbouring. The following analysis will explore the ways in which participants indicated the environment, structure, and provision of prison education impacted their ability to educate and learn in prison, and ultimately their interpretations of the relationship between the (in)flexible nature of prison education and their wellbeing.

6.2.3.1 The space/learning environment

> *…one* [negative experience] *I didn't like was the classroom scenario, I couldn't stand the classroom because it was just not the classroom scenario that you're used to, there was swearing, there were vaping, I just didn't like it at all. To be quite honest the more I kept away from people the better for me, that was because there wasn't the people that I would normally associate with so therefore going into that classroom with them, it was awful.*
>
> (Rose, former prison learner)

As indicated by the above excerpt, former prison learner Rose's experience of the prison education classroom was, in her opinion, a negative one, and in contrast to the benefits some participants identified of being able to socialise and interact with a diverse cohort of learners, Rose identified this social aspect of the classroom as unnerving for her, contrasting with some participants' positive experiences of developing social capital within the prison education

classroom by mixing and interacting with their student peers. Rose's aversion towards the prison classroom extended to the physical journey to get to education from elsewhere in the prison, a journey that Rose contends did not facilitate her capacity to cope with the environment of prison. Rose compares the walk to the classroom to being shepherded about like children in school, and notes that this journey was fraught with fights and transfers of illicit substances:

> *…to physically go to them kind of classrooms I think just set me back because it is horrendous in those classrooms, and at [anonymised prison] you had a set time you had to go, so then you'd go on this like walkaround if you will, like a walking bus with the kids, you'd go on a trail so at every point you'd have officers, and that, to be quite honest, you're going from A to B with the education is mainly when all the ladies would pass each other drugs, so that's where they could have the fights, that in itself was just horrendous.*
> (Rose, former prison learner)

For Rose, the classroom environment of the prison was atypical and as such, it contributed to her self-identified negative prison education experience. Former prison learner Ann expressed sentiments of stress and anxiety at being in the education classroom where violence would often erupt, evoking memories of the bullying she endured both in secondary school and at home. For Ann, the physical setting and structure of the classroom were panic-inducing, an environment where up to 30 people were ushered into a small room and the gates were shut behind them:

> *…being in that environment with all women again was just awful, that started me going down a rabbit hole if you like, where I found it quite difficult to express emotion at that point, and then when I did get to a point where I could, we weren't allowed to cry.*
> (Ann, former prison learner)

Former prison learners Rose and Owen did not witness the same classroom violence that former prison learners Ann and Harrison spoke of. Nevertheless, Rose characterises the prison classroom environment as an "*uncomfortable situation*" for her, one that was exacerbated by the invalidation of her Level 2 Maths completion when her records did not follow her prison transfer. Owen notes that although there were classroom disruptions, he never experienced or

observed violence in the classroom in prison, as he acknowledges that the few learners that did want to be in education "*wouldn't have stood for somebody who was disrupting the whole class.*" This idea of "*self-policing*" also extended to the treatment of prison educators according to Owen, who asserts that willing learners would keep negative behaviour and attitudes in check and would not tolerate any disrespect towards educators (who were mostly female). However, Owen opines that the lack of violence-based disruption he experienced in the classrooms of a Category D prison might be very different to other categories of prisons, and notes that his experience of classroom disruptions or interruptions were primarily attendance and security-related (e.g., prison lockdowns). Owen also experienced logistical disruptions associated with prison learners not being unlocked from the building they were housed in, indicating that there were times where learners were unable to get to their education classes on time as a result of their housing unit not being unlocked at the proper time in the mornings, resulting in learners who arrived late to classes. Former prison learner Hugh notes that he also was aware of instances of prison learners not being unlocked by officers in time for their education classes but indicates that some learners would experience such worry at their incapacity to attend classes that they would withdraw from the course to avoid disappointment.

In a similar vein to Owen's experience, prison educator Wallace acknowledges the idea of prison learners self-policing any potential disruptions in his English Literature class. In his opinion, his learners look forward to his course and there is a certain amount of pressure from fellow learners to conduct themselves appropriately to ensure Wallace can keep returning to teach the course, and also to not disappoint the librarian whom Wallace identifies as a big supporter of the men in the book group, and very much part of the success of the programme. Prison educator Hattie also experienced a similar element of self-policing in her theatre courses, noting that if anyone seemed to be getting unnecessarily worked up or *"out of line,"* that others in the class would be the ones to nip the behaviour in the bud on their own without prompting or intervention from Hattie. Former prison learner Ann also realised that she experienced a lack of disruption in the university-level courses as compared to other prison education courses she had taken that were not at the same level, or that were mandatory as part of her sentence plan.

When asked about whether the disruptive elements that were present in the lower-level courses she had taken were also present in the university courses, Ann stated:

> *No, no, because the university courses were sort of hand-picked, if you like, the people who were allowed to go in them, and you had to be at a certain level, you had to write an essay before you went so that they could assess that, I think it was 500 words, so you had to be at a certain level, you had to be able to cope with the work and the essays and everything else, so those that were disruptive were sort of filtered out that way.*
>
> (Ann, former prison learner)

As an educator, Beatrice notes that the physical location of the classroom within the prison is an important factor in establishing a relationship with her learners and perhaps also to learners' ability to identify as students. Beatrice notes that the layout of one of the prisons she has taught in, where the education department is in the middle of the wings rather than separate classrooms on the wings as she notes is the case in some newer prisons, can positively impact her ability to initially engage with learners:

> *…there are benefits and there are negatives to* [the education department being in the middle of the wings]*, the negatives can be that there's a lot of mixing so it can be a trigger for trafficking, for violence, however I much prefer it because to me, I'm the person that stands there and welcomes them in, when they come through that door they're a student, simple as that, you're a student, we're an education department…newer prisons, so for example, private prisons, the big you know, super prisons, they have education on the wings, right, so they have a classroom on a wing, now they will say oh it's really good because we can separate the wings, keep it, you know, it's all neat, blah blah blah, yeah it is, but then you've got a student that rolls out of bed, un-showered, haven't eaten, turns up to class in their sleepers, right, they're not ready for learning, then in the middle of your lesson they want to go back to their cell to get something, whereas with us, it's like they're going to a place, and I think that's really important for them to have that…*
>
> (Beatrice, prison educator)

Like Beatrice, prison educator Tim also stresses the importance of the physical learning environment of prison education classes and how the educational space can impact learners' wellbeing. For example, Tim acknowledges that some of his students experienced auditory-related difficulties in that when his classes would get overly loud, some learners would

disengage and withdraw into themselves. In slight contrast to Beatrice, Tim's experience highlights the significance of holding his classes off the education block so as to sever the connection some prison learners might have between formal education classrooms and previous traumatic experiences of education:

> *…we don't do any courses in education block, it's always in a library or somewhere like that, which, because it's not linked to that formal education and any negative experiences, they're learning in a good environment…if you go into a prison library it's like being in a normal library in the UK and that helps. When they're in the course it's an overwhelmingly positive mental space and hopefully that kind of continues on after.*
>
> (Tim, prison educator)

Tim goes so far as to acknowledge the physical limitations of some education classrooms that can deter learners with certain auditory sensitivities from participating in education. Using the example of people who might be on the autism spectrum and who may struggle to learn in education rooms where the floors are wooden rather than carpeted, Tim notes that as an educator, it is important for him to create an optimal physical learning space for all types of prison learners in order to subsequently establish an optimal wellbeing space. Beatrice's experience of the location of the classroom within the prison contributes to her confidence that prison learners having a "space" that they must physically get to that sits apart from the wings is an important piece in creating a social environment for learners where they are able to learn and interact with others that they might not typically have outside of prison:

> *…there was one* [moment] *where I was teaching my [anonymised] class and it was such a raggle taggle of different people, different nationalities, youngest was 21 oldest was 77 right, and I just looked at them and they were all getting on and chatting, and actually one of the older guys and the younger guys got quite pal-y, and without them being in that class they'd have never met in the prison, so it was massive, it was massive for me, and one of the older guys, he was on his first time, he said to me, there's a lot of negatives about prison Beatrice, you know, I miss my wife, my family obviously, the liberty, but I've met people I would have never met in my life, and that was good, that's a good thing to do.*
>
> (Beatrice, prison educator)

Former prison learner Ann notes that she felt more at ease when she could get off the wings and go to study groups in the library where they were allowed to use the computers, stating that "*that was amazing, that just pulled me round completely.*" Hattie, a self-identified non-traditional prison educator, asserts that the prison theatre companies she runs do not resemble traditional "taught" classrooms, acknowledging that prison education is not a pursuit that everyone in prison relishes, and that many people will eschew learning in prison due to past negative educational experiences:

> *…what I tend to find with the people that I work with is that we don't have those same* [negative] *connotations because it's not sitting in a classroom, it's not somebody standing at the front of the room telling them something, it's about us all being equal together and going on that journey together and I think for a lot of people that's a more palatable way of maybe learning, they're choosing to do it as opposed to somebody telling them they have to do it if that makes sense.*
>
> (Hattie, prison educator)

Likewise, prison educator Tim emphasises the importance of creating a safe educational space for learners that focuses on equality and values each learner's voice and opinion in order to facilitate open discussion, although he notes that in his experience, this can be somewhat of a challenge as an educator given the dynamic personalities of prison learners that exist within the same shared space. Nevertheless, Tim acknowledges that he perceives his course has had a positive wellbeing impact on his learners on account of them being free to articulate their views and have someone genuinely listen to them:

> *…it [Tim's course] is positive because you're giving a voice to students on things they've probably never been asked before, and every voice is equal, and they're able to share an opinion and have it heard…and students have told me this, that it's a positive aspect, just being heard, just being listened to on their thoughts, on their opinions, on topics that often (because I've set it up this way) don't have a right or wrong answer. By laying that framework of building up an environment that people can speak in freely and not be ridiculed, or again, not have a right or wrong answer, it's a massive positive impact on their mental health that they can take elsewhere.*
>
> (Tim, prison educator)

Prison educator Wallace similarly reflects on the importance of what he refers to as "*the validity of interpretation*" within Arts and Humanities education classes. Wallace notes that in his view, there are certain subjects such as mathematics that require students to respond to questions correctly in order to benefit positively from the educational experience, whereas literature-based courses leave space for students to respond to literary pedagogical examinations with uncertainty, curiosity, and extended critical analysis:

> *…it's the case that if you have a professor, a librarian, 12 prisoners, you will have 14 responses to the text, and those responses will be different, and those responses might be informed by more reading or by more other forms of cultural capital, but those responses are still valid, so in that sense, in this particular academic discipline, it's easy for them all to feel validated as long as they can get far enough into the text…once they've overcome that first hurdle, once they get something from the text, then they can then put something into the class.*

<div align="right">(Wallace, prison educator)</div>

Prison educator Hattie articulates her experience of working without officers present in her theatre-based classes which she identifies as an important part of creating a comfortable learning environment for her students where they can feel more relaxed and at ease. Hugh echoes Tim's thoughts on the importance of prison learners having an open space for critical discussion and debate in the prison education setting, opining that these types of conversations do not occur in prisoners' cells where *"…you're sharing a cell with one person hour after hour after hour, and you've got nothing to talk about, it's really tedious and so you get ground down into the system…,"* but that meaningful discussions do occur in the prison education classes. Hugh further notes that in his experience, prison educators would decline the presence of prison officers in their classrooms, leaving themselves in potentially vulnerable positions for the sake of their learners and creating an environment more conducive to open and honest discussions, which Hugh acknowledges would not be possible with officers present. Through his experience of prison education, Hugh acknowledges the importance of being able to have relatively uninhibited conversations and debates with fellow prisoners in the mutually supportive environment of the classroom. In recalling the strength and support learners showed for one another in the classroom, Hugh indicates that learners were able to say, "*the most*

outrageous things to each other and nobody takes offence, and in a prison that's very important...". Prison educator Wallace speaks of his experience of penal-related discursive topics that his learners tend to avoid in his classes. In the context of his literature classes, Wallace notes that there is very minimal student discussion on subjects related to prison learners' sentences, trials, cells, and the like, not because they are off-limits per se, but because Wallace notes "*it's just outside the frame of reference…it's in all the rooms of the prison apart from this one...*". Wallace recalls an experience with one learner who wanted to talk about prison-theorist Foucault which was not necessarily welcomed by others in the class, as they "*didn't want that brought into where we were talking about.*"

Tim introduces a compelling thought in his view on the importance of "*reclaiming failure*" and its relationship with critical thinking and psychological wellbeing. In Tim's experience, it is important to stress to his learners the idea that it is okay to get things wrong and that "*failure is just part of life.*" In advocating for the idea of reclaiming failure, Tim strives to instil confidence in his students to be able to acknowledge a gap in knowledge, and advises his learners that in the context of a critical thinking framework, the key to learning is the process of learning itself and the ability to be resourceful in finding information:

> *…we kind of try and reclaim failure as just a part of the learning process and that helps I think, feeling supported and understanding life in general, but that comes in from the critical thinking framework, and we reclaim failure in the fact that it's alright not to know something, it's just the question of how do you learn, how would you need to get the information to learn more about it, so that confidence that comes with being okay with not knowing something, and just having the resources to be able to go and find out that information, or discuss it, that makes the students so tremendously happy, but also confidence, gives them so much confidence, and makes them better in themselves.*
>
> (Tim, prison educator)

6.2.3.2 The provision

For Beatrice, the inflexibility of prison education provision extends to the decisions prison learners must make regarding their educational pathway in the early days of their sentence.

Beatrice notes that in the current employability-centric environment of prison education, prison learners must choose very quickly what their educational journey will look like:

> *…when guys go into prison, they have to decide pretty damn quickly what their pathway is, so in their first days they're bombarded with all this information, they're then told you need to choose a pathway. Now pre-PEF we had much more flexibility, so hospitality and catering is a good example, anybody could put their name down to go on a hospitality and catering course…so you did have people that wanted to do it as a job, but you also had people who just wanted to learn to cook and just learn those basic skills. It's not like that now, it's much more employability-focused, so you tend to go on courses when there's an employability outcome at the end of them…but you've got to make that decision in the first months of your sentence when you're blinded by everything.*
>
> <div align="right">(Beatrice, prison educator)</div>

Within the space of the interview, when Beatrice was asked about whether the changes and lack of flexibility in the curriculum is essentially curbing students' learning, she indicated that it was "*one hundred percent*" restricting learning and noted that, as important and necessary as the qualification is, the space for critical thought is lacking, and that is something that prison learners are in dire need of:

> *…I want them to get the qualification because that's what they need, but it's about challenging their thought. People in prison don't have a lot of space for critical thought, space for debate, they don't have that at all, so I always found it really really important, and I worry about the last…18 months, because yes they've had Covid to contend with and that's a challenge because if you think about yourself, if you were restricted to what was on TV, if that's all your access was, you didn't have the internet, your knowledge of Covid would be quite small, and that's where they're at. But the other thing that concerned me in the last 18 months is the whole Black Lives Matter movement, they were sat in their cells watching the TV, watching George Floyd, watching all that stuff, but nowhere to put it, just nowhere to put it, nowhere to have that conversation…*
>
> <div align="right">(Beatrice, prison educator)</div>

For Beatrice, engagement in an education class can make the difference in a prison learner thinking of what possibilities lie ahead for them in the future. Beatrice notes that prison learners will often bounce around various courses but that once they become engaged in a course, that is where educators can "*hook*" students in and the conversations can start to happen about possible higher-level learning, "*building pathways*," the interests of prison

learners, and how education can be about more than just passing the time. However, Beatrice also acknowledges the barriers to higher-level learning that can exist for prison learners when higher-education providers that deliver courses to prison learners are not based within prisons themselves:

> *…the Prison [sic] Education Trust and the Prisoner Learning Alliance do some fantastic work, but they're not based in prisons, so unless you really know what higher education is, then you don't access it because you don't think it's for you, so they really need somebody to have those conversations that actually drops it into the minds of people that have never thought about it before…I'd really like us to be able to work much more closely with higher education distance-learning providers, much more closely.*
>
> <div align="right">(Beatrice, prison educator)</div>

Ann's understanding of her time in prison education was that emotionally, there were "*up and down*" moments, noting that there were *"some classes that I got quite excited about,"* but equally there were classes where she experienced depression. Ann notes that the reason for this differential response was because the university-level courses provided her with a much-needed challenge and mental stimulation, a standard that was not met by the lower-level courses she had taken in prison:

> *I need to be challenged, once you get to the point where you're comfortable in jail there's no challenge, there's no challenge emotionally, there's no challenge mentally, there's nothing, one day bleeds into the other, but the university ones really challenged me, and they were fun.*
>
> <div align="right">(Ann, former prison learner)</div>

When asked if the education courses she was interested in brought her into a more positive mental space, Ann acknowledges that she found she looked forward to going to these courses and that doing the homework and receiving a "*proper mark*" was satisfying and uplifting. Consequently, Ann's experience of the courses she was forced to take (i.e., part of her sentence plan) or ones that she had no interest in did not elicit the same positive reactions. She states:

> *I found doing the mental health one was just depressing and I hated it, I didn't want to do it, I ploughed through it because I had to, but it dealt with everything from depression and anxiety through to Alzheimer's, and my mother-in-law had died the year before I went to jail from Alzheimer's and that was really difficult, it was really hard to, because I could*

relate to so much, I'd end up in tears doing the homework so I hated it. The other ones that I did, the computer science and stuff, that was alright, it was just a way to pass the time, it broke the boredom up, but I didn't look forward to it like I did the higher education classes.

(Ann, former prison learner)

Prison educator Kelly similarly speaks of her experience teaching people who want to be taught and notes that for her, *"…it's a lot easier when you're doing stuff that people want to do…"*. Formal, accredited education as a barrier to courses that give students the outlet to explore their interests and opinions more readily was expressed by Beatrice as a frustrating part of her role as a prison educator for one of the four large prison education providers in England. However, Beatrice also acknowledges that in her opinion, prison educators' confidence in navigating the challenging role of allowing their students space for questioning and critical thinking in their classes comes with age and experience. Within an organisational culture that does not encourage flexibility, Beatrice speaks of her experience pushing back against the exam board in order to provide the curriculum presentation requirement in a way that fulfilled and challenged her students, particularly when she considers the guidance from the exam board to have students sit in a circle and talk about party-planning "*nonsense*." Unfortunately, Beatrice's experience of prison educators' ability to be flexible in their provision in order to provide an outlet for critical debate suffers due to a lack of professional development training in how to navigate difficult topics within the classroom, resulting in educators that avoid such topics altogether.

The understanding that education is not a safe space for all, that not everyone has had the same experience of education growing up, and that positive outcomes of education are not universal, seems to shape the provision and structure of Hattie's theatre education courses. Hattie's compassionate understanding of the potential off-putting aspects of prison education contributes to her perception that her theatre-based education does not seem to elicit the same fear and anxiety response amongst her students that is so often associated with other prison education courses. In a sense, Hattie's experience is that her courses can combat previous traumatic experiences of education for prison learners. Indeed, Hattie recognises the

potential for her courses to stimulate a sense of capability for further education in her students. Similarly, prison educator Tim's understanding of the confidence-building aspect of his course is that it can contribute to prison learners' aspirations for further, more traditional educational pursuits. Tim classifies his more informal education programme as a "*stepping-stone*" of sorts for prison learners into formal education, and in his opinion, the confidence his students build from participating in his class contributes to a positive wellbeing impact for them.

Ann also acknowledges the positive impact of prison education that challenges its students on the atmosphere in the wider prison, noting that when many people are engaging with education in prison, particularly where they can be challenged, there is a shift in the mood on the wings. In Ann's experience, "*good vibes*" from those engaged in education resulted in a prison wing comprised of people who were calmer and more peaceful as they had something else to occupy their minds with. Prison educator Wallace also acknowledges the benefit of reading to pass the time but notes that in his experience, it is more about *"passing the time while cognitively engaged."* For Wallace, his experience of the positive wellbeing impact his course has on learners relates to a certain degree to being immersed in reading and the literature-based content of his courses, or at the very least, the fact that learners are spending time cognitively engaged:

> *...I think it's in the text and I can imagine parallels in other disciplines as well too...let's say someone has a hitherto untapped talent for mathematics and it is in a prison education class that they realise they understand how calculus works and that they can use it, I can imagine that having a similar effect of flow and change of ontology...I mean literature I would say particularly well because of this aspect of negative culpability, but there is something about high-level cognitive engagement... there is something about the transforming power of the imagination induced by reading literature that I think when the men are doing the reading and they are really immersed in the reading, that has a positive effect on their wellbeing...*

> (Wallace, prison educator)

In some contrast to Wallace's opinion on the value of high-level cognitive engagement in contributing to prison learners' wellbeing and ability to pass the time in prison, former prison learner Hugh notes that in his opinion, basic literacy education in prison can also contribute to

learners' ability to cope with not just the prison experience, but with many aspects of life, as being able to read and write is integral to being able to apply for and find employment after prison. Hugh contends that engaging with education in prison provides learners with a sense of achievement and accomplishment that can contribute to the strength required to face the many challenges and setbacks that exist in the post-prison world.

6.2.3.3 The structure/regime

Setbacks such as prison transfers, lockdowns, and disruptive classrooms with unwilling learners were mentioned by participants as frustrating and potentially mentally debilitating aspects of the prison education experience. Prison educator Kelly also speaks of her experience working with learners who have been "*quite upset*" and frustrated when they are transferred to another prison in the middle of a course and are then unable to begin their educational journey at the new institution. Kelly opines that these frustrations are particularly potent when prison learners are moved to a new prison to complete a mandatory course that is part of their sentence plan. Former prison learner Harrison notes that his transfer to a new prison was a crushing blow, one that saw his sense of self *"crumble back to rubble."* He became unable to prioritise education himself due to the knock-on effects of being transferred to a prison further away from his loved ones, which impacted his visits. The regime of a new prison required adjustment, and Harrison acknowledges that whilst he contended with new rules, interactions, and prisoners, there was no space in his mind to think about educational pursuits. Harrison states:

> *If you can't get issues resolved you are stuck on that issue as the prison seems to only deal with one thing at a time, so for some people they never get to a space where they can engage in education as they can't get the support inside, especially on short sentences that are better dealt with within the community.*
>
> (Harrison, former prison learner)

Recognising the capacity for education in prison to mitigate some of the negative wellbeing impacts of external circumstances, former prison learner Hugh recounts his experience of an administrative setback in his release plan which resulted in him remaining in prison for three months beyond his release date. Hugh acknowledges that his continued participation in

education and his appointment to the role of classroom assistant by the teaching staff boosted his morale and contributed to his wellbeing by helping him get through this very difficult and depressing time in his prison life, providing him with a valuable alternative to the despair that set in when confining himself to his cell.

Hugh recalls his experience of security-related disruptions impacting negatively upon the established educational structure and routine that Hugh acknowledges is so important for those engaging in prison education, particularly for those learning basic literacy skills. It is Hugh's experience that when prison learners experience the negative impacts of setbacks to their educational progress, prison educators are the ones tasked with bringing them back from that negative space. For prison educator Beatrice, a structured regime of education for prison learners is pivotal to their ability to lean on education as a coping mechanism. Not to be confused with Beatrice's frustration at the lack of flexibility within the provision of education in prison, she considers the ability to understand and manage mutual expectations in their environment as a key necessity for prison learners:

> *…it's about understanding what's expected of them and knowing what reactions are going to be, so they need that level of structure, so to have education…to have to be up in the morning, have to be showered, dressed, walk down to education, that's really valuable to have that.*
>
> (Beatrice, prison educator)

Beatrice's experience as a prison educator has influenced her belief in the importance of the physical environment of the prison as it relates to navigating the reciprocal impact of learners' previous classroom experiences. Within the physical carceral setting, Beatrice notes that learners must contend with importation effects of previous negative experiences in the classroom that she as a prison educator must then unpack together with learners. Beatrice contends that the best way to begin the process of navigating through prison learners' previous negative experiences of education is to get to know them before they even start their education courses. However, in Beatrice's experience, this has become more and more difficult to accomplish since the introduction of the new Prison Education Framework (PEF) that replaced

the OLASS contracts in 2019, with funding a consistent issue and educators' classes constantly scheduled "*back-to-back*." In Beatrice's terms, "*pre-PEF*" provided prison educators with the liberty to visit students that would be in their classes on the wings prior to courses beginning so that they could introduce themselves and get to know their future students. When asked how she as an educator combats previous negative experiences that prison learners import into the classroom with them and the barrier that now exists in accomplishing this, Beatrice responded as follows:

> *…it sounds simplistic but you've got to know them, you've got to get to know them, I don't want the first time I meet my student to be the first day in class…so the way you deal with it is you talk to them before you come to your class, you meet them before you come to your class and you unpick all that sort of stuff with them, and that doesn't happen enough and it's not because there's not a will, it's because there isn't space for it to happen…and this is very prison-specific, many prisons, the guys won't find out what they're allocated to until the weekend, so potentially on a weekend when they're banged up, they've got no access to education staff, they'll get a slip put under their door to say right, from Monday you're starting maths, that's no way to do it, it's no way to do it whatsoever. Whereas a teacher or learning support or student support could go and visit that person saying right, we've got you down for math, this is what we expect from you, this is what you expect from us, have those discussions first so consequently, when courses start, the first day of a course is pure chaos, it's pure chaos because you're unpicking that stuff that you should have done weeks before.*
>
> (Beatrice, prison educator)

Being unable to get to know students and have important conversations with students prior to classes beginning is detrimental to the flexibility of education provision, in Beatrice's view. Beatrice notes that students with challenging behaviours stemming from underlying conditions or experiences suffer from educators' inability to provide flexible support when they do not have prior knowledge of what learners might be dealing with. Prison educator Kelly similarly testifies to the importance of being able to do her own recruitment for her courses in order to get to know her learners and prepare them for the potentially sensitive discussions that might be brought up. In Kelly's view, she acknowledges that this type of preparation helps the educational process run more smoothly for her as an educator. Kelly further maintains that in her experience, challenges arise for her as an educator when prison learners have already been selected for her courses without her recruitment input, stating:

…not being able to recruit it just means that if a prison is already understaffed or overstretched then they'll just chuck whoever they want on it and it usually just tends to be people who need to be doing something that week, and if you need to be doing something that week it's very possible it's because you've been kicked off something else…

(Kelly, prison educator)

Part of Beatrice's understanding of the challenging nature of her job relates to the "*gaps left by the pastoral side*" in the roles of prison educators. For example, Beatrice notes that where she might have previously been able to have conversations with learners who were not attending class to see what was going on with them, she is currently unable to do this, partially because of Covid-19 but also because of staffing issues (prior to Covid-19), and she notes that there is currently no recourse for students who do not attend classes. Similarly, in his characterisation of his prison education experience as chaotic, former prison learner Owen observes that there was nothing in place to ensure prison learners were attending classes, which could be frustrating for those learners who were in class. Owen testifies that some learners would return to their quarters to sleep rather than attend class, and notes how this impacted other learners who wanted to use their time in education wisely:

It [the prison education department] was chaotic in the sense that there was no real procedure for getting people to attend, so how a Category D prison works is you've either got to be in education or you have to work, so you have to have a job in the prison, and if you're not working 8 til' 4, you're in education. So guys would leave their workplace…to go to an education class and they'd just go back to bed. So why that bugs people who want to be educated is, a lot of the course that doesn't move on because they've got to wait for this guy who's not coming, or when the guy turns up the next day they've got to recap the bits they've done because the focus is on getting people to pass this Level 2 at all costs really, and the reason for that is it's run by a prison firm called [anonymised], they run the system education in prisons and they get paid when people pass, so the whole thing was, as opposed to it being learning-focused, it was results-focused, and I don't think that works when you're working with unwilling learners, so it needed to be done another way.

(Owen, former prison learner)

Owen's understanding of prison learners as unwilling is an interesting one to explore, and when pressed for more information on what he means by this, it becomes clearer that Owen's perception of the reluctance of prison learners relates to the inflexible nature of prison

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education provision and structure. In Owen's opinion, the rigidity of education schedules amongst a rule-averse population, as well as courses that did not adequately engage learners, influenced learners' disinclination for attending classes. Owen's experience of the structure-related limitations of prison education extended to the prison education departments, indicating that he feels that education departments were not able to fully support learners due to being bound by education provision constraints:

> *I found they were supportive within the limitations of where they can be supportive, so there's no room to move about at all, it has to be English Level 2 and it's English Level 2, and you can't encourage a guy to read more or to do this part of the course and then that will help another part of the course. It was very rigid in the sense that it has to be done this way, they have to progress in a certain timeframe, or they can't progress, and I found it not fluid at all, and it was kind of either fit in this box or there's nothing we can do for you really...*
>
> (Owen, former prison learner)

Prison educator Tim's experience of the supportiveness of the education departments at the various prisons he has worked in has been mixed, with some prisons exhibiting inclusive buy-in to his course more than others. In Tim's view, those education departments that were the most supportive understood the importance of offering a unique course like Tim's in prisons and acknowledged that his course would benefit prison learners in a way that other standard curriculum prison courses might not:

> *It's different in different places...the female estate was just brilliant, they bought into it, they really wanted the course that I was offering to be done at a female prison. The first time they were like this would be great for the people that are here, this is different to what we get, you don't get many science courses in female estates...and were really supportive, they really did everything that could possibly have been done within their limits, limited abilities of a prison setting. Other education departments were not as supportive, the course often is seen as a bit of an afterthought, and that is down to security basically, security's paramount, is number one in prison and that's where everything stems from, and if education doesn't fit into that you get the impression that it's not as important as other aspects. So in some ways they were unsupportive, but in some ways it just wasn't their focus and that's just how it is...*
>
> (Tim, prison educator)

Prison educator Kelly also identifies that the support she has received from prison education departments has been varied, and in her opinion depends on *"the buy-in and the culture of the prison."* In Kelly's experience, the avenue by which educators are granted access to the prison can impact the level of support received from education departments:

> *…if you've been brought in by a governor you know, who has just been like yeah this is a good idea and then told someone else to sort it out, that's just kind of another added thing to their job and now they've got to find you a room in an education building that's already completely full, then you can start to feel a bit like a nuisance. Whereas if the education department have heard about your course or they've really pushed to get you **in** because they think their learners would really engage with arts or their learners could really do with some relationship education, then it's a really different feel.*
>
> <div align="right">(Kelly, prison educator)</div>

Kelly articulates her perception that the educational "*buy-in*" of staff within prison can be impacted by the length of time educators spend within a prison, the relationships educators are able to build with those working within the institution, and the strains that already exist in the day-to-day running of the prison. Kelly iterates her contention that the more stressed the prison is with respect to having to scrounge for educational spaces that are in short supply, or for learners to participate in education who are disinterested from the get-go, the more difficult it can be for educators to establish and build upon those foundational relationships that can impact staff's willingness to accept the presence of a particular education course in the prison. Kelly ascertains that there are perhaps certain courses on offer in prisons that are easier for educators to justify the existence of than others, noting that those courses that are embedded within the prison or those that are more easily identifiable as indispensable for certain groups of prison learners (e.g., relationship courses for those convicted of domestic violence charges), may not require educators to validate their existence as compared to other offerings (e.g., theatre-based courses). According to Kelly, *"…the more you can kind of validate a course and prove its worth, the easier it is to negotiate."* For Kelly, the relationships educators can establish with others working within the prison are key to establishing the trust and support that educators so crucially require. Kelly notes that she has been able to establish some very positive relationships with prison governors that she believes facilitated an increased flexibility within

the prison education regime, noting that the governors with whom she has had positive relationships have welcomed her input and suggestions around establishing pilot programmes within the prison that were liberated from the target-focused mentality of a restrictive education structure:

> *…I think what I was very lucky with is that I had some brilliant relationships with governors where I could come in and be like I want to trial this course, can I pilot this course here, and when you pilot courses it doesn't matter how many people are on it cause' you're just getting a general sense and I think those courses…what they did have was that there was so much input from the people involved because they were pilots, so it was like what did you think about this, what could we do differently here, what do you want to talk about, and there was no pressure on them to achieve this certain outcome or have this many people because it didn't matter, we were just learning, and I think like that idea of everyone learning as they go and prisoners having just as much to kind of say and input actually makes for a lot better education than when you're kind of more restricted.*
>
> (Kelly, prison educator)

Alternatively, Kelly also recounts her experiences in some prisons where "…*people didn't even know I was there…*," and other prisons where she was required to handle some "*hairy*" classroom situations without the support and backup she needed. In recalling her experience in one prison where she acknowledges that certain prisoners "*ran the place,*" Kelly highlights the challenges this dynamic presented to her as an educator (e.g., she recounts receiving overt and covert threats to her physical wellbeing), and the strains it placed upon other prisoners and staff. Kelly articulates that her experience of the lack of support she received in this particular instance meant that she faced challenges in removing disruptive and potentially dangerous students from her course as there was no known recourse or relationship established with staff in prison whom she could turn to for assistance. In recalling her relatively frequent experience of a lack of prison officers in the vicinity of her classrooms, combined with the fact that she has never had a radio with her in any of her teaching roles, Kelly maintains that it can be difficult for her to remove students who may be under the influence of illegal substances, such as spice. Kelly indicates that when students are under the influence in her classes, she typically must leave them to their own devices until she can have a conversation with them after class about

the course not being the right place for them at that time and the fact that it is not fair to them or their classmates for them to be in an educational space.

Former prison learner Hugh's experience of the prison education department in the prison he was in was characterised by positivity and encouragement, noting that those in the education department "*promoted everyone's participation in education.*" Hugh praises the efforts of the education department and notes that they did their best to advise and support prison learners during their time in education. Alternatively, former prison learner Rose's experience with prison education departments is that, on the whole, they were unsupportive and disengaged, which she acknowledges could potentially be attributed to the fact she was in prison in the midst of Covid-19. Rose was particularly vocal about what she perceives as the uselessness of education in open prisons, conveying her displeasure at what she considers the futility of open prisons being a space for a last-ditch educational effort:

> *...certainly [anonymised open prison] which was the one I was in at the end, they [the education department] didn't engage at all, now whether that's because they've just come out of the Covid, they've just come out of lockdown, whether they'd kind of had six months off and they were like, I've just had it easy because I've sat at home for six months, I don't know, but...I just found at [anonymised open prison] there should have been no education there, there were no need, there's other things that building could have been useful for, getting the ladies out to work which would have been more useful, because if you've done your sentence like I had for a year and a half and then to get to open and say right, you've got to do your English and Maths now, but what have I been sat doing for the last year and a half if I hadn't needed to do it and now you're telling me I need to do it, it should have already been done, there should have been no need for it...*
>
> (Rose, former prison learner)

For Rose, her perception of the education department in the open prison she was in was that there was a complete lack of interest in getting prison learners engaged with education and that it was "*just a big ticking box scenario.*" Rose's cynicism is a result of her belief that education staff were more interested in "*taking home their monthly pay*" than anything else. Rose articulates that by the time she arrived at the open prison, she was completely *"messed up"* about education in prison as she had gone through three different educational assessments at

that point and in her view, she had experienced both the residual impact of having her records lost and being told she had to repeat a course, as well as the indifference of prison education staff towards facilitating a positive educational experience for prison learners. When asked if she believes that education is a priority in prisons, Rose indicated that she believes it is, but that this priority does not extend to prison learners. Rose's experience is that the importance of education within prison remains focused on targets and pass rates rather than on the benefit for prison learners. Harrison's view on education as a non-priority in prisons coincides with Rose's experience, with Harrison using the phrase "*education is seen as a luxury to staff and the prison regime does not list it as a priority*."

Beatrice's experience speaks to the inadequacy of both initial educational assessments of prison learners and the transference of educational records when prisoners are moved to different prisons (due in part to the inconsistency of the records systems used by prisons, some of which are outdated and paper-based). Beatrice notes that for her as a prison educator, the requirement to adhere to the initial educational assessments prison learners receive can be equally frustrating, exacerbated by the tight constraints of teaching within the guided learning hours and having to educate students on lower-level concepts when they have not got the foundational knowledge of a previous level. According to Beatrice, the stringent nature of education provision and progression can be a mental stumbling block for prison learners as it links to their ability to make headway in the prison *outside* of the classroom (e.g., advancing through the Incentive and Earned Privileges (IEP) scheme, the ability to complete their sentence plan, the ability to get certain jobs in the prison, moving to a Category D prison, receiving Release on Temporary License). Initial assessments often do not capture the proper educational ability of prison learners, according to Beatrice, with her experience being that this can be a wellbeing setback to learners who can become *"trapped"* at an educational level higher than they are capable of:

> *…the levels in the initial assessments, they're not fit for purpose, they're absolutely not. For one, they haven't changed for absolute years, and we have a lot of returners, the records should follow them from prison to prison, doesn't always happen, so they're doing*

it for the tenth time, it's just click, click, click, can't be bothered...equally, the initial assessments can be problematic in a different way. So you can get an initial assessment and it can say, I don't know, that a student's an Entry Level 3 learner, they're working towards Level 1, so I look at their work and I think yeah, that's what they are, but they've already got an entry Level 3 qualification, right, or they've already got a Level 1 qualification, I've got my own suspicions about how they got the qualification, but they end up trapped and they get dead frustrated because they've got a qualification higher than their ability, but we can't do anything with it so that's problematic to me as well, but that's about prisons, you know, same as schools, target-chasing.

(Beatrice, prison educator)

Former prison learners Harrison, Ann, and Rose also speak of the shortcomings of educational assessments upon induction into prison, noting that assessments should not be done upon immediate entry into prison when prisoners are overwhelmed by the various aspects of their new environment that they must adjust to. Rose highlights her frustration of having to complete her educational assessment more than once, contending that educational records in prison are not treated with the same priority as health records with respect to their continuity:

...that [educational assessment] should be on record all the way through, if I'd have come in and been on suicide watch the night that I came in, that would be on record, so why all of a sudden is my Maths not on there?

(Rose, former prison learner)

Tim articulates the importance of certain staff within the prison as being a pivotal part of the success of education courses, specifically noting that, in his experience, the librarians within the prisons he teaches at have been "*saints*" who have the utmost respect of those prisoners who visit the library. In those of Tim's classes that are held in the library, Tim attests that problems from prison learners are non-existent due to the level of respect they have for the librarians. Tim's experience with prison librarians is that they assist prisoners in many capacities, including education and wellbeing. Likewise, prison educator Wallace attributes the success of the book group he educates to a specific librarian within the prison whom he acknowledges is very supportive of the group and creative in their efforts to help prison learners, whilst also being cognisant of prison learners' mental health. Wallace notes that although this individual is professionally trained as a librarian, in his opinion, this person considers supporting the mental health of prisoners who come to the library to be part of their responsibility. Prison educator

Beatrice contends that, within the punitive confines of the prison and inherent unequal distribution of power between educators and prison learners, small gestures from educators can help to mitigate the impact of previous negative experiences of education for prison learners. Beatrice notes that simple details such as the way educators dress, having learners call educators by their first name, and education departments that do not present as overly corporate so as not to remind prison learners of traditional school experiences prior to prison, can make big differences in demonstrating to learners that whilst prison educators and learners may not truly be equal within prison, there are many ways in which they are alike.

For Tim, the idea of education as an afterthought that cannot supersede prison security concerns created challenges for him as an education provider who had to campaign independently to get his unique course into prisons. Tim indicates that he experienced security-related bureaucratic challenges in certain prisons that made the approval for his course a long and arduous process, acknowledging that he was almost not able to run his course due to the stringent training requirements that were being requested of him and that he believed were unnecessary. Tim notes that he experienced additional frustration with security-related requirements and restrictions as he feels that they were inconsistent due to the continuously changing environment of the prison:

> *…it's just changing systems, one month it was you'd do two days of training, the next month it was you'd do two weeks of training, and that is the different environment that you have to deal with in prison. The challenges are you don't know where you stand in terms of whether you were going to be allowed in or not…it's a totally changing environment and you're the afterthought, you're not the priority, your education course isn't important in the grand scheme of things and the restrictive environment obviously makes it very challenging…so of course you can't bring a laptop in, so you can't teach with a projector, well for me anyway, you couldn't teach with PowerPoint, you can't teach in the way that you would normally teach, which is fair enough, it is fair enough, but then you've got a changing environment all the time in that I used to be able to bring in print-outs, now I couldn't bring in paper, you're not allowed to bring in paper to prison, so then you'd have to find someone in the prison to be able to print it off for you and sometimes that wouldn't happen, sometimes you would just turn up and you would be on your own for two and half hours with nothing, resourceless, and so that changing environment just makes it absolutely challenging, the most difficult place I've ever taught, and it's not*

because of the students, it's because of the restrictions that were placed on you and the fact that it changes.

(Tim, prison educator)

In articulating his experience of the "*very severe security challenges*" that present themselves to prison educators, Wallace echoes Tim's assertion that security concerns supersede education programming in prisons with respect to priorities, but adds that in his opinion, this is the way it should be. However, Wallace does acknowledge that sudden or unexpected disruptions that interrupt education classes serve to demonstrate the lack of agency and power prison learners have as students who are studying within a penal setting:

…I think what these challenges do is disempower them, is remind them that they are subjects rather than agents within this system…I think these unforeseen disruptions, when someone else has been caught with spice in their cell and therefore you're locked down, you are completely a subject of power and you have no agency then and I think perhaps it is the more sensitive sort of prisoner might gravitate towards book group, I think that does have a negative or disruptive effect.

(Wallace, prison educator)

Prison educator Hattie similarly speaks of security-based challenges she faced as an educator, noting that there have been times where she has driven 100 miles to a prison only to find out she would not be allowed in that day due to a lockdown. Former prison learner Ann also speaks of the security-related frustration of prison tutors at having to teach at a certain level even when knowing their students were capable of learning at a higher level:

…they [education staff] did their best, there were a lot of the tutors there were frustrated as well, I mean the guy in the computer room was incredibly frustrated, he left before I finished my sentence because he was teaching at a level that he knew that other people could go above, but he wasn't allowed to teach them to the level above, they always say oh it's down to security, you can't do this, you can't do that, why not, you know?

(Ann, former prison learner)

Former prison learner Harrison contends that prison educators are often bound by "*red tape*" and education-related restrictions and reflects on how this was a source of strain for both students and educators:

In my I.T. class I found the teacher struggled to maintain discipline. He was one of the only male teachers and he didn't know how to handle those with bad mental health problems and he was put under strain by the education rules such as access to printing and people not doing the aligated [sic] work for his class and wanting to do their own thing. I asked if I could do my Open University work or my presentation for (anonymised course), and he said I have to do my I.T. work and I struggled to get anything printed…information is so hard to access as officers think it is a security risk and teachers have red tape to contend with.

(Harrison, former prison learner)

Harrison further notes that when he would be prevented from getting to study groups either by officers, lack of staff, or regime and security-related issues such as lockdowns, this would be a source of deep frustration for him, noting that he felt "*like they had taken away all I had left.*" However, Harrison acknowledges that his experience began to change when a mentor who had overcome trauma in their life and managed to complete Level 1 education sat and talked with him:

We talked on a level I had never had before and it bonded us through learning and overcoming adversity…[they] supported me to complete my first question and I felt so alive…I saw a side to humanity few had been gracious enough to show me at that point and it was the first brick to build my house that wasn't made of straw.

(Harrison, former prison learner)

Hattie acknowledges the struggles of contending with the "*red tape*" and bureaucratic nature of working in the prison system. She identifies cynical attitudes towards prison educators (from both staff and prisoners) who are keen to start an education initiative with prisons but end up leaving and not seeing it through, as a key challenge she initially had to contend with when she started as a prison educator. Tim similarly acknowledges the struggle for him as an independent education provider to contend with prisons' tendencies to move people in and out of education classes, noting that for him to be able to fulfil his role effectively he needs to be able to have the learners that have been allowed to join his course be there consistently, week in and week out. In Tim's view, prisons are unconcerned with who is on an education course and whether they are there consistently, noting that "*so long as they give you some students at some point, they're fine.*" However, Tim acknowledges that for him this does not work within a prison

education environment and only serves to underscore the fact that education is an afterthought in prison, and that both he as an educator, as well as his students, lack control within the prison education regime. Tim's experience of the negative impact of the rigidity of the prison education regime combined with prison transfers on his students is evidenced by the following excerpt:

> *I don't know what happens after* [a prison transfer], *cause' I don't ever see them again, they just go, for me it was terrible, it was really bad because I felt we were making a lot of good progress with a lot of students, that student in particular who came up with the 26 questions was immediately transferred out, and then, it wasn't because of that, it was because they'd signed up for a different course and they didn't want to go into the course, and there was no leeway, and that was a really bad experience, it was probably the worst experience I've had in terms of a student, but I don't get to see them at all, but again if you've got students making sacrifices such as cancelling visits or revoking gym passes to get into the class, and then...being removed from it, it's not going to be positive, and that's kind of the worst part of it, it's why I always try and stress like I need these people here every week, and they can come if they want to obviously, like they need to not have the prison pull them in different directions or take them out.*
>
> <div align="right">(Tim, prison educator)</div>

Likewise, prison educator Beatrice articulates her personal frustration at the lack of logistic consistency in prisons with prison learners being wrenched in opposing directions by the different departments within the prison:

> *...so someone will be put on a Level 2 English, they've asked to go on it because they want to do a Level 3 course, okay that's absolutely fine, but then healthcare will book their appointments in the lesson time, or psychology will, or they'll have to see their personal officer...everything is getting pulled and it's not right because they don't have that level of consistency there.*
>
> <div align="right">(Beatrice, prison educator)</div>

Beatrice acknowledges that, in her experience, the impact of educational interruptions (e.g., prison transfers) on learners is "*horrific, absolutely horrific.*" Beatrice compares the current structure of education to school "*league tables,*" noting that when a prison learner is transferred to another prison before they have finished a course, the "table" standings of the new prison are not impacted by whether or not that learner passes that course:

…so where's the appetite [for the prison learner to finish the course]*? There's no appetite for it. So potentially, it's more beneficial to the receiving prison to enrol them on another course where they can get the success than complete what they've already done, so that's a massive, massive problem for me.*

(Beatrice, prison educator)

6.2.4 Relatable education and a tailored approach

In the process of developing his programme and talking with potential prison learners about what they would like to see in an education course, Tim's experience underscores the importance people in prison place on having education courses that they can relate to. Evidenced in the following transcript excerpt, Tim self-identifies that although his course has a scientific focus, the underlying principles the course has been developed on revolve around making the course relatable to people in prison, and a consideration of the aversion many prison learners have to formal education:

> *…that's one of the things they told me en masse basically, was that people in prison, they take Law and Criminology because it can relate to them, and if you bring something abstract in, they're not going to have that connection with it. It needs to be something that is relatable to them which is a challenge if you're trying to teach a science course and all your students spend all of their time in prison – that's why the course is based on critical thinking cause' that's relatable to everyone…you've got a lot of people who are very timid about formal education, and because you've got a lot of people who need to have something to relate to, the course has been built along them two centre points…*

(Tim, prison educator)

Similarly, prison educator Wallace opines that his prison learners have found solace and common ground in the experiences of the literary figures of the books they read:

> *…I just realised we'd had a run of all the poets we looked at…were all male, said alright, let's do some poems by a female poet…I didn't even kind of really see it coming but the way in which female poets of the 19ᵗʰ century write about being marginalised, disempowered, and for that matter, confined…so I felt that old sore about poetry being what oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed, that sometimes I think they found it consoling to find feelings or experiences that they themselves had held expressed in literary language, so the Tennyson poem that we looked at was Ulysses which is about*

Ulysses Odysseus after he's come home and feeling a bit bored, stuck in a…but one of the prisoners who'd just picked up on two of three lines that he felt really spoke to him, that this was what it was like being a prisoner serving a long tariff…perhaps it is that feeling of, you know, there are other people who have felt this way who are not necessarily 21st century prisoners…

(Wallace, prison educator)

Wallace uses a further example of studying the novel *Alice in Wonderland* with his prison learners and recalls the parallels his learners drew between the indiscriminate power that is exerted over the characters and the lack of agency prisoners have over their own experiences:

…what really captured their imaginations was the moments when the characters are on the receiving end of arbitrary power, one of them described a prison as being like wonderland, because one minute you're this, the next minute you're that, 'Eat me,' and the next minute you're six inches tall, or the red queen goes 'off with his head,' so feeling that power can just turn on a six pence and make you do something and you have no investment or you have no agency in it at all, they really don't like that…

(Wallace, prison educator)

Wallace equally acknowledges the frustration that can set in amongst learners who struggle academically in his courses, recalling an experience with a young man in prison who exhibited frustration and a subsequent wandering attention when he struggled to read the assigned text and was thus not gaining much from Wallace's literature course.

Connecting with prison learners is an important element of Tim's experience as a prison educator as he articulates that in connecting with learners, educators can uncover the reality that many people do want to learn, albeit perhaps via a more "*non-traditional*" route. Making learning relevant is also a key tenet of Tim's experience of teaching in prison. For those who are in prison, the relevancy of their current situation is something that Tim indicates he tries to incorporate into his science course. For example, Tim details how he advises students to keep a sleep diary to reflexively monitor their sleep habits as well as their energy and mood levels. Acknowledging that for people in prison, proper sleep habits can be quite poor, Tim notes that he tries to instil a sense of the importance of sleep in his learners, stating that in his view, sleep is "*basically the pillar of which our…mental wellbeing is stemmed from.*" Tim

contends that prison learners understanding the importance of sleep and how their sleep is impacted in the context of prison is an important aspect of psychological wellbeing with respect to giving learners a solid foundation with which to approach their lives in prison. Tim outlines the impact of his lessons on the science of sleep in the following excerpt:

> *…to be able just to have that reflective nature of this is what I'm doing, this is how I feel, and that, they've said, has been overwhelmingly positive…one of the students has said it's entirely changed their life for the better, they've got more energy, they wake up every morning in a better place, they're still in prison but they're waking up more ready to deal with everything that's around them, and that's just come from changing their sleep patterns, so in some ways it's a confidence-building course, but there's also this kind of mental health aspect of it that we try to build into it, to adapting to sleep and taking stock of your own emotions.*
>
> (Tim, prison educator)

Former prison learner Hugh also contends that in his experience, the noisy environment of prison can make it difficult for those who are incarcerated to sleep properly at night, a symptom of life in prison that can have a knock-on effect for those prisoners who had education classes in the mornings. Hugh notes that although some prison learners would want to sleep during their morning education classes, prison educators would not allow it due to the impact the missed educational time would have on learners' abilities to achieve their goals, and the resultant disappointment learners would have in themselves. In Hugh's opinion, he perceived the disappointment learners would feel when self-established educational tasks were missed as evidence of the importance of educational classes to prison learners. The desire to improve and to achieve something in prison through education classes was, in Hugh's view, hugely important to prison learners.

Beatrice speaks of the need for "*quality-controlled*" unaccredited courses that are meaningful and value-added for prison learners, noting that she would like to see bridging courses for students who, for example, have completed Level 1 but are not quite ready for Level 2 courses, or courses for students who acknowledge that there is something they are interested in and would like to learn more about. In Beatrice's experience, unaccredited courses can run the risk of being futile and "*not worth the paper they're written on*" when there lacks a level of quality

control, and they are only offered in order to meet certain targets. Beatrice posits that bridging courses developed to meet the individual needs of learners would help to ease the inability of prison learners to progress to higher educational levels when they are stuck in a so-called qualification-limbo. For Beatrice, prison learners who are registered in a class that they are scholastically unprepared for "*absolutely affects their mental health and wellbeing*" and can lead to declining attendance and increased behavioural problems. Beatrice's experience of the provision of prison education is that it can contribute to the shame that prison learners might feel when they are registered in a course not tailored to their needs. Using the example of pre-entry learners and English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, Beatrice notes:

> *…realistically there should be two provisions, pre-entry and ESL, but generally, because of the narrow curriculum, the few amount of teachers and the few amount of hours, they often get put together. So you imagine being a 45-year old British person who's struggling and who wants to learn, and you go to the class and you're actually the only person that's not an ESL student, that's a real challenge, a real challenge.*
>
> (Beatrice, prison educator)

Prison educator Tim's view of what should be changed about prison education to meaningfully impact the wellbeing of prison learners somewhat echoes that of Beatrice, with Tim noting that having more stepping-stone types of courses for students to be able to build their confidence and critical thinking would be beneficial:

> *…because of that kind of odd situation in prison of kind of people wanting to learn, but in my opinion, not wanting to take that step into formal education, to have more courses that are confidence-building to get them into education…I would change to have less-formal courses, more less-formal courses, to be able to have confidence-building to get people into it, because if the end goal is people being in education, you need a couple of steps before…but prisons don't do that, they pay education providers to have large blocks and they don't have the structure to be able to do ad hoc courses as easy as what it should be.*
>
> (Tim, prison educator)

Rose acknowledges that for her as a prison learner, her educational experience could have been improved by allowing her to have remote, one-on-one in-cell learning, as she would not have been required to mix with the types of people she characterised as troublesome. In a similar

vein to Ann's acknowledgement that she benefitted more from the courses she was interested in than the ones she was forced to take, and Beatrice's desire to see the provision of prison education amended to incorporate more of what learners are interested in, Rose's experience highlights a comparable mentality:

> *Pushing people through, rather than me coming to them saying I want to do this…it was you are doing this, and I'd rather it be kind of me being interested in it, it felt very much like that. I'm sure they'd have more success if they actually let the ladies say, 'actually I want to do this,' rather than them saying, 'you've scored this on your assessment, you have to do it.' I think they'd get more people doing it cause' they're doing it because they want to do it, whereas I wasn't doing it because I wanted to, I was doing it because you told me I was doing it.*
>
> (Rose, former prison learner)

Rose suggests that, in contrast to her time spent in prison education, her time as a reading mentor in prison was personally rewarding in the sense that she enjoyed interacting with others in that capacity and environment:

> *Talking to the ladies, I love that, just interacting with other people, just people then that I wouldn't even associate with…you mentioned about having that time to come to the assumption that I wanted to do it, I then realised actually these ladies aren't actually as bad or as scary as when you first thought, actually sitting down talking to them, listening to their stories, it was lovely.*
>
> (Rose, former prison learner)

Rose notes that the reason that she enjoyed mentoring was because it was something she was doing because she *wanted* to participate in it, not because she was being made to. Additionally, for Rose, the one-on-one interactions she enjoyed having in her mentoring role were juxtaposed with her frustrating educational experience where learners were congregated together:

> *…that whole journey of actually going to it [education] and just mixing with those other people, because when you're [mentoring] it's one on one but when you get four or five of those ladies together, that's when the trouble begins, and you know what ladies are like, being a bitch, scale that on a higher level, for me it would have been better if they'd done one-on-one remote learning…*
>
> (Rose, former prison learner)

Owen's experience of passing the time with prison education was that it positively impacted his wellbeing insofar as it kept him occupied. Owen found that his job within the prison as a cleaner in the gym was boring and dull and acknowledges that prison education broke up the monotony of his prison work routine. Owen self-identified that he enjoyed "*being in a classroom environment again*" and that participating in prison education enabled him to be purposefully occupied. Although Owen's experience of prison education was positive with respect to its ability to keep his mind busy, he concedes that he was not able to engage with prison education in the way that he envisioned. According to Owen, this was due in part to his own erroneous belief that he would be able to spend his days in prison in the library self-educating given that he had no sentence plan requirement to participate in specific courses in prison, but also partly to the prison's misrepresented goal of rehabilitation:

> *...when I first went in, you go to an induction meeting and they explain it's a working prison, you've either got to be in work or you've got to be in education...there was nothing I could learn in there because I had a university degree. The most I could do was Maths, English, and IT Level 2, actually I think it might have went to Level 3, maybe it did, but there was nothing there for me really. So I said look, I'd love to just, there was a big library full of books, and I said I'd love to just study either myself, or read every day, or take an Open University course because there's nothing really here for me in terms of education, thinking if you didn't want to work you could go into education. What that actually meant was you've got to do English, Maths, and IT, and you're either at work or you're allowed to not work to carry out English, Maths, or IT lessons. That didn't mean you can educate yourself, so they kind of laughed and said 'you think you're just going to go in the library every day and learn your own stuff,' I was like 'yeah,' they went 'no, go and work in the gym'...which to me was crazy, I got nothing out of cleaning the gym for five and a half months, and it flies in the face of the fact that they say it's rehabilitation not punishment. There was nothing in there to rehabilitate me in the sense that...I thought every day I could go and work on my business essentially, reading and learning et cetera, et cetera, but no, that wasn't an option.*
>
> <div align="right">(Owen, former prison learner)</div>

Owen notes that for those in prison who wanted to engage with education but also had to work most days in the week, they would have to find time in the evenings after work to study, often after a very tiring day at their job within the prison. For Owen, the constraints on library access that he experienced because of his inflexible prison work requirements meant that he was

unable to use the library until he finished his workday, which oftentimes meant he did not have much time to utilise the library before it closed for the day. Owen opines that although an open prison would theoretically be the ideal environment for a prison learner to take an Open University course due to the greater degree of freedom of movement and library access prisoners possess as compared to higher security categories of prisons, the stringent Category D requirement for prisoners to work if they are not in compulsory education impacts learners' ability to engage with the types of education they desire:

> *…Category D is the perfect environment for people to do an Open University course because you can walk to the library whenever you like, you can sit and work in the education block whenever you like, you can come and go as you please, so that's the perfect environment to do an Open University degree, but once you get there they go no no, you've now got to work every day, it's like, that doesn't make any sense, but that's how it is.*

> (Owen, former prison learner)

According to Owen, this means that prisoners who are required to work but who might want to learn at a higher level or take courses out of interest do not have the same flexibility to do so that learners in other categories of prisons might. Like other prison educator and former prison learner participants who have commented on the nature of prison education and structure, Owen's experience of education in a Category D prison is characterised by a rigid and inflexible regime, with Owen noting that "*everybody's treated exactly the same*." Owen's opinion of prison education is that it could be improved by a more individualised approach when developing a plan for how a person will best use their time in prison, which includes a consideration of their educational interests.

6.2.5 Continuity of care

Prison learners being left to their own devices once a course ends and not having a certain level of continuity of care to help them process their experience after they leave the educational setting can be detrimental, in the views of some study participants. For prison educator

Beatrice, part of her frustration with the structure of prison education relates to the lack of continuity of care that prison learners are provided:

> *…it's the through the gate stuff that frustrates me if I'm totally honest, so because of the way contracting is, there's only four education providers who've got all the prisons, whereas if my prison the education was provided by the local FE college, we'd have much better links…and that frustrates me that we can't see the stuff through because of the structure of it.*
>
> (Beatrice, prison educator)

In her interview, prison educator Kelly speaks of a "*comedown*" of sorts that her students have expressed to her can occur after an education course finishes, Kelly acknowledges that learners have conveyed to her the feelings of irritability and depression that can arise upon conclusion of an educational pursuit:

> *…those feelings of like just going from a long fun course back to a job as a wing cleaner or no job at all can be quite depressing, can feel a bit like a comedown. I know people have kind of described just feeling a bit shit, feeling more on edge, feeling kind of irritable, which can then lead to some more kind of frustration and arguments and that sort of thing…I think with the sort of work that I was doing, because it was quite intense and quite emotional, and also there was quite like euphoric highs, there's definitely a potential for negative impacts on wellbeing as well...you kind of open up this potential and then you're like okay that's done now, we only have funding for three weeks, bye…*
>
> (Kelly, prison educator)

Kelly ascertains that the *potential* (emphasis added) exists for prison education to have a positive wellbeing impact on learners, particularly as it relates to the opportunity it provides learners to have discussions about topics or issues they are interested in but have not yet been able to explore. However, in Kelly's opinion, educators need to be equally cognisant of the fact that this possible positive impact may be short-lived, and how that reality may impact prison learners' overall prison experiences. In Kelly's view, educators must be particularly mindful of when proper safeguards are not in place to unpack the potentially emotional experience of education in its aftermath, particularly when an educational course is short-term in nature. In acknowledging second-hand accounts of this potential impact, Kelly articulates her understanding that the comedown from education can result in prison learners feeling "*like*

they'd been landed back in jail" when an educational experience is not safely decompressed upon its cessation. Prison educator Wallace, acknowledging that he cannot claim evidence of a negative wellbeing impacts on his learners due to his classes being "*so short*" that it would be unlikely that he would see any negative wellbeing impacts, notes that his experience is that his learners are disappointed when they cannot attend his class. Similarly, in the view of prison educator Tim, there is a negative impact on his students when they are unable to access his course, noting that he has had students who have fought to be reinstated into the course after having been removed. For Tim, the fact that his prison learners will forego valuable gym time in the prison in order to participate in his class is "*the biggest endorsement*" for the positive wellbeing impact his education programme can have.

Former prison learner Ann speaks of a sense of despondency in her experience of the post-prison continuation of her educational pursuits being impeded. Ann indicates that she experienced a depression after leaving prison and not being able to finish the educational course she had been engaged with in prison:

> *The whole experience of being in prison just gave me panic attacks, it was awful, being able to do education did take my mind off things so that I was able to turn things round and get into a more positive mind state, if you like, but then coming out and not being able to finish the course was really depressing, it was horrendous actually.*
>
> (Ann, former prison learner)

As a self-identified lifelong learner, Ann speaks of her experience of a fortnight of lockdown in the prison as an aggravating factor in her ability to cope, particularly as it relates to the lack of educational resources that were available to them during the lockdown. Without access to books or any educational materials, Ann notes that she either cried or was on the verge of tears most days during the lockdown. Ann's experience of using education to cope with the wellbeing difficulties she struggled with was likewise altered once she was released into the community. Education as a coping mechanism can be an important element of the post-release experience, particularly considering the 'new normal' of the outside world that many prisoners have to contend with upon release. It is feasible that former prisoners who are looking for ways to cope

with their new, changed environment (particularly those having been in prison for an extended period of time) may look to continue their educational pursuits beyond the prison walls in order to provide some sense of stability. As Ann puts it:

> *It was so frustrating that I found myself getting stressed about it because of the frustration, when I came out I found there's so much to cope with, even just the noise of traffic and trying to cross the road and stuff like that, it's just overwhelming, so if I could have been able to go and finish the course that I'd started, I think it would have given me a much better platform to lose myself in so that I could immerse myself in it and not have to think about what was going on around me and outside of me and stuff.*
>
> (Ann, former prison learner)

Former prison learner Rose, on the other hand, had no desire to continue her education past prison, noting that her experience of education in prison "*scarred her for life,*" so to participate in a classroom environment again post-release was not something she was remotely interested in. Rose acknowledges that her experience of prison education impacted her in a mentally negative way, noting that she did not have any happy experiences of education in prison and that her engagement in prison education left her feeling "*inadequate:*"

> *…I hated it…I'm not a nasty person…but I found I was kind of, as soon as you get in your back's up. I'll tell you one of the things the teachers do which was really funny, she was like oh God I'm depressed here I've got to go to Tesco get a cupcake at dinnertime. I'm going, and it really made me mad, I'm going, you're in a classroom full of ladies here that have just been given sentences of six years, have lost their kids, and you're telling us you're depressed because you've not been able to book a holiday. I found them [the educators] insensitive, very insensitive, and that then kind of got me back up so I really kind of, the word is not rebel, it cemented my dislike for it even more…*
>
> (Rose, former prison learner)

As highlighted in the above excerpt, Rose's interactions with prison educators contributed to her characterisation of her time spent in prison education as negative, pointing to the influence that prison educators can have in contributing to a wider educational environment that is not conducive to learning. Beyond Rose's perception of the insensitivity of the prison educators she encountered, she also notes that there were inconsistencies in the rules prison educators applied to learners. Rose notes that her contempt for prison education potentially could extend

to education on a broader scale, acknowledging the "*run-on effect*" that her negative prison education experience could potentially have on educational pursuits outside of prison. For Rose, she did not experience any impact on her self-esteem as a result of her participation in prison education, emphasising the lack of control that prison learners have over their prison education experience. Beatrice attributes the disruption and interruption-related frustrations felt by prison learners to the structure of prison education itself, and notes that "*little*" oversights such as learners not receiving certificates when they have completed a course can have knock-on effects that impact learners' future desire to engage with education. Former prison learner Owen indeed notes that two years after he finished his education course in prison, he has still not received his certificate and suggests that he considers this the only negative side effect that he experienced from engaging in education in prison (although he did not speak to whether this influenced his desire to engage in further education).

Hattie speaks of a wellbeing impact to her students when prison education courses end, particularly those courses that are overly short-term in nature, and notes that her students similarly alluded to it being like a "comedown" of sorts. Hattie states:

> *I know lots of people who have gone in and done short term projects and things, and I get that there's some benefits to that and it's wonderful, but I had a conversation with one of my actors who's now on the outside actually, but we'd done a performance, and he's come in on Sunday morning because we rehearsed on Sunday morning at that point, and said 'I felt so, I was so elated on (I think it was the Wednesday we performed)…and then Thursday morning I woke up and I just felt so flat and so fed up,' and he was like 'then I thought but why am I getting like that, cause' it's Hattie so she'll be back on Sunday,' whereas the other projects, we do it for a month or six weeks or whatever and that's it, it's gone, and I think there is a danger to that…*
>
> (Hattie, prison educator)

The importance of continuity of educational care through Covid-19 was recognised by prison educator Hattie as being an integral part of maintaining the wellbeing of her students throughout the pandemic lockdown. Hattie acknowledged the impact that removal of education during the Covid-19 lockdown would have on the wellbeing of her students, thus she persuaded

the prisons she was working in to allow her to correspond with her learners with written
activities and materials:

> *So with my guys obviously they were in their cells 23 hours a day plus, and a lot of them have found it very difficult and a lot of them spoke about how difficult they'd found it to not be doing the theatre work because actually that's their release, that's their three hours a week when they don't feel like they're in prison but again, a lot of them did comment on how important it was that we kept that continuity going…I think having the theatre company and the fact we've managed to keep it alive in some format made a positive impact on them.*
>
> (Hattie, prison educator)

Beatrice notes that periods of holiday for prison educators where prison learners are not
engaged in education for a longer period of time, can be problematic for learners:

> *…they might not admit it, but they don't like the weekends, they don't like bank holidays to be quite honest, Christmas can be problematic because it's quite a long period of time that you've not got that level of interaction…*
>
> (Beatrice, prison educator)

Hattie also acknowledges the lack of "through the gate" care that exists with respect to theatre
education in prisons, as the prison learners that she works with may be unable to continue their
theatre education outside of prison as a result of the nature of their offences. Recalling the
plight of one student who attested to the personal wellbeing benefits of theatre education and
enquired about continuing in theatre upon his release from prison, Hattie acknowledges her
personal struggle in having to tell this individual that it would be difficult for him to do so due to
his offence history. Owen's experience of prison education is also that "through the gate
support" for prison learners was lacking, noting that "*you kind of finish the course and that was
it.*" The ability to provide continuity of educational care can be dependent on a variety of factors
within the prison, including the relationships between educators and the prison governor and
staff. Hattie's experience of having established solid foundational relationships with staff in the
prisons she worked in contributed to her ability to provide that educational stability for her
students during the pandemic. Acknowledging that the correspondence she facilitated with her
prison learners during Covid-19 was likely the anomaly during the pandemic, Hattie attributes

the leeway she was given in supporting her students throughout the Covid-19 restrictions to the prisons being able to see the benefit that her theatre courses had on her students. That the "comedown" after an educational experience in prison is managed appropriately becomes critical to the wellbeing of prison learners when accounting for the fact that there may be an abrupt transition from a potential established zone of safety in their educational space back to the wing where this zone may be non-existent. Hattie's experience of her theatre courses is that she often enters into a *"safe working environment"* with her learners, a space where students have allowed themselves to display sensitive emotions and disclose personal information to Hattie that they would not divulge to other criminal justice practitioners assigned to their files (e.g., probation officer, Prison Offender Manager).

The proceeding discussion will seek to situate the results of this study within the relevant literature in order to seek a more comprehensive understanding of the machineries of prison education as it relates to the wellbeing of prison learners.

6.3 Discussion

The value of this study lies in its contribution to the literature on the intangible benefits of prison learning that go beyond the narrowly focused basic-skills, recidivism-reducing employability agenda that has typically characterised the prison education narrative (Nichols, 2021; Szifris et al., 2018). Prison research on the benefits of varied but somewhat atypical forms of learning in prison, such as informal courses, higher and further education, the use of innovative pedagogical approaches, or the embedding of basic or vocational skills and learning in courses that are more attractive to prisoners (e.g., sports-based learning) serve to highlight the significance of education that seeks to contribute to the holistic development of prison learners as individuals capable of internal progress and transformation (see for example, Irwin, 2008; Meek et al., 2012; Warr, 2016). In the present study, thematically speaking, the semi-structured interviews began to reveal a discernible element of commonality amongst the experiences of the prison educator and former prison learner participants. The common feature

that appeared to entwine participants' experiences was that there exists a *potential* wellbeing benefit from engagement with prison education, but that this potential is neither universal, certain, nor fixed. The environment in which education takes place in prison, which includes the physical space in which education classes are held, the level of support for education that is provided by the education department and prison as a whole, the commitment and support level of prison educators, the past and current life and educational experiences of prison learners which includes imported traumas, continuity of care in the post-educational programme phase, the provision, structure, and regime of education within the prison, can all contribute to the penal educational experiences of prison learners, and subsequently the potential for learners to reap either a positive or negative wellbeing benefit from engaging in prison education. This potential relationship between engagement in prison education and wellbeing is conceptualised within this study as perpetuating a differential wellbeing impact in order to stress the disparity that can exist in the wellbeing experiences of prison learners.

How to best explain such a differential wellbeing impact presented initial difficulties, particularly when considering the preliminary researcher-informed hypothesis that there would exist a relatively widespread positive wellbeing impact for learners in prison. Indeed, this hypothesis was generally supported by the research on the benefits of education in general that suggests that there is, on the whole, a positive mental health and wellbeing impact that can be generated as a result of participation in education (Bynner, Schuller, & Feinstein, 2003; Feinstein & Hammond, 2004; Hammond, 2004a). Field (2009a) notes that in addition to economic outcomes indirectly impacting wellbeing by increasing the economic earning potential of individuals as well as fostering employability, learning can also directly promote wider wellbeing benefits that go beyond the economic sphere. Field states, "A number of these [non-economic benefits] can be seen as directly influencing well-being, since they act as protective influences against poor mental health and low levels of life satisfaction. Examples of such factors include self-efficacy, autonomy, social competences, health maintenance, civic engagement, community resilience and a sense of agency or control over one's own life" (ibid, p.182). Indeed, Field (2009a) notes in his comprehensive review of studies exploring the impacts of adult learning on

mental wellbeing, that the focal point of most research exploring the wellbeing impacts of learning has been concentrated on the potential positive outcomes. However, Field acknowledges that despite the overwhelming focus in the literature on the positive mental wellbeing benefits of learning, it is also important to recognise research that suggests a potential negative wellbeing impact of learning (ibid). Field shrewdly states, "For some people, experiences of learning are deeply unsatisfactory…there is also some evidence that participation in learning can sometimes have negative consequences; far from improving people's well-being, it can actively damage it" (2009a, p.183).

Hammond (2004b) aptly draws attention to the inability of students in school (as compared to adult education) to choose to withdraw due to the mandatory nature of education in the school context, even when experiences of learning are "unpleasant, pointless and psychologically damaging…" (p.78). Negative experiences of schooling can thus influence students' future enduring attitudes towards learning (ibid). There is a widespread understanding within prison research that there are many people in prison who have had previous negative or inadequate experiences of education prior to incarceration (see for example, Coates, 2016; House of Commons Education Committee, 2022; WHO Regional Office for Europe, 1998). Thus, in the field of criminology and prison research, there is a banality to Field's (2009a) acknowledgement that learning experiences are not universally positive. However, where Field's contention resonates is in its recognition that adverse educational experiences can impact upon learners' mental wellbeing in a negative fashion. The data from the present study suggests that the educational culture of the prison combined with past and current life and educational experiences and traumas of prison learners coalesce to impact the capacity for prison education to affect learners' wellbeing either positively or negatively. The diverse prison educational experiences, both teaching and learning, of participants and the distinct ways in which they spoke of their perceptions of the relationship between prison education and wellbeing suggests that education in prison functions to either embed learners with fundamental assets and resources in the promotion of positive wellbeing, or it serves to generate new or further exacerbate past negative educational experiences within the parameters of imported and

institutional trauma, thereby contributing to a potential adverse relationship between prison education and wellbeing.

This differential wellbeing impact was particularly evident in former prison learner Rose's articulation of her experience of prison education. Having had what she considered to be a relatively positive and "normal" educational history prior to her incarceration, the majority of Rose's educational experience within prison was positioned in stark contrast to her prior normative experience of education. Former prison learner Hugh's previous educational history paralleled that of Rose in that he also characterised his educational upbringing as quite positive in nature, but in contrast to Rose, Hugh described his educational experience in prison as quite positive in nature due to the sense of normality it instilled in him. A potential explanation for this discrepancy lies in the differential education experiences Hugh and Rose had during their incarcerations. Whilst Rose characterised the physical journey to the classroom, the mixing with a cohort of learners she would not normally associate with, and some prison educators who were extremely insensitive to the experiences of prisoners as sources of stress for her during her time in prison, Hugh spoke with enthusiasm and positivity about the educational classes he engaged with, supportive prison educators and prison education departments, and the ability to interact with a diverse array of peers in a mutually supportive environment where open and honest discussion was encouraged.

The apparent discrepancy in the prison education experiences of Hugh and Rose serves to highlight the differential impact prison education can have on learners, and the ability of this impact to influence prison learners' wellbeing in a positive or negative way. Ruth McFarlane and Daniel Whyte (House of Commons Education Committee, 2020a), co-directors of Doing What Really Matters (DWRM), a prison education organisation that seeks to increase the provision of further and higher education courses in prisons (DWRM, 2020), argue that the reality of prison education is that it can provide learners with a potentially positive alternative to past experiences of education that may have been inadequate. As McFarlane and Whyte (House of Commons Education Committee, 2020a) attest, unlike previous education experiences that may

have been characterised by feelings of inadequacy and subsequent peer ridicule, learning in prison can allow prisoners the freedom to seek the support and assistance they may need. Indeed, former prison learner Hugh acknowledges that in his experience, prison education represents an opportunity to provide learners with the tools and learning experiences they may not have been provided in school. Nichols (2021) echoes this sentiment, noting in her aptly titled book *Understanding the Educational Experiences of Imprisoned Men: (Re)education* that she uses the prefix "(Re)" in the title of her book to symbolise the notion that education in prison can provide an opportunity for some prison learners to 're'-invent themselves in various ways. This could be through education that offers prison learners "…a second chance following negative or missed schooling experiences," the opportunity to "'re'-interpret their own identities as a result of educational engagement" or to "'re'-discover their own abilities" (ibid, p.x). However, it must be equally acknowledged here that although prison education may represent a valuable opportunity for some learners to reclaim their educational experiences and to wipe clean the slate of their educational histories, the experiences of some former prison learner participants in this study call attention to the ways in which prison education provision can also serve to juxtapose previous positive experiences of education with the harsh reality of education provision within a disruptive and potentially violent penal environment.

It is proposed here that the element of differentiation in the wellbeing impact of prison education that the data suggests exists relates distinctly to the notion of capital in its various forms. Anheier et al. (1995) drawing on Bourdieu's (1986) notion of capital, note that definitionally, capital can be considered a "…generalized 'resource' that can assume monetary and nonmonetary as well as tangible and intangible forms" (p.862). As a term that typically denotes an economic connotation (Reay, 2004), there is now a recognition that the notion of capital extends beyond the realm of economics (see for example, Bourdieu, 1986). Shortt (2004, p.12) notes that Bourdieu (1986) identifies economic, social, and cultural capital as the three forms of capital that "define the character and structure of society." Drawing on Bourdieu's forms of capital, Novisky (2018) summarises the meanings of economic, social, and cultural capital:

Economic capital consists of income, property, and other material items, whereas social capital includes access to relationships that enhance networking and access to opportunities. Another form of capital, cultural capital, involves skills or knowledge a person develops over time such as the ability to speak multiple languages, understand art, or discuss wine competently (Bourdieu, 1986). In general, the more access someone has to these forms of capital, the more power that person will have in establishing and maintaining enhanced life chances in comparison with those who do not. (p.646)

Chapter Two has provided an overview of generally accepted understandings of different forms of capital. The notion of social capital was identified within the context of this study as being particularly relevant to the experiences of participants, although the relevance of other forms of capital, such as human capital, also surfaced. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2001) acknowledges the relationship between social and human capital and wider benefits such as improved health and sense of wellbeing. Referencing the impact of social capital, Putnam (2000) attests to the well-established evidence of the significance of social connectedness on health and wellbeing. Putnam notes that numerous studies demonstrate evidence of the importance of social relationships on self-reported happiness (ibid). Lehtinen, Ozamiz, Underwood, and Weiss (2005) likewise acknowledge the significance of aspects of social capital in impacting individuals' mental health. Summarising evidence on the relationship between social capital and education, Hammond (2004a) notes that "…evidence suggests that the number of years spent in education is positively correlated with individual-level characteristics of social capital…and that greater social capital leads to better health outcomes…" (p.39).

It has been noted that a key difference in the concepts of human and social capital is that the former refers to resources that reside within individuals, and the latter to resources that reside within relationships (Coleman, 1988; McNeill, 2009; OECD, 2001). Although the foundations of the concept of human capital denote a pecuniary function in that its primary conceptualisation often pertains to earnings and its capacity to contribute to increases in productivity and economic returns, the notion of human capital has also been used more broadly (Schuller, 2004b). For example, the OECD's (2001) definition of human capital recognises its broader

meaning beyond that of "acquired cognitive abilities" and "explicit knowledge" (p.18). The OECD defines human capital as follows: "The knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being" (ibid). It is this broader conceptualisation of human capital that resonates within the data of the present study. The data suggests that engaging with prison education can act as a resource for individuals whereby they can develop and accumulate valuable experiences, skills, and knowledge that can ultimately have potential implications for their wellbeing.

With respect to the notion of social capital, Shortt (2004) notes that consensus within social capital research is not often found, rendering the task of summarising knowledge and understandings of the term rather challenging. However, Shortt does acknowledge that the proliferating, multi-disciplinary concept of social capital has been increasingly explored within diverse academic fields. Certain common understandings of elements of social capital exist, with scholars typically agreeing that social capital is "born of shared experience and associational links which foster a sense of mutual trust and reciprocity" (Shortt, 2004, p.18). Shortt further notes that a commonality amongst understandings of the term is the recognition of social capital as "a characteristic of social groups rather than individuals" and a "collective resource" that can progressively accumulate and contribute towards "the accomplishment of objectives that would otherwise be unlikely" (ibid). Lafferty, Chambers, Guthrie, and Butler (2015) stress the thematic commonality of social support that qualifies definitions of social capital and note that "social capital can be used to improve a person or community's quality of life, including improved health and wellbeing" (p.1).

The capacity for engagement with prison education to contribute to the development of social capital amongst prison learners was evident from participants' testimonies and is a facet of prison education that has been supported by the literature (see for example, Champion & Noble, 2016 for a discussion on the role prison education can play in contributing to the individuals' capacity to relate to others and contribute to their communities and families; Lafferty et al., 2015 for a review of the indicators of social capital in prison; and Curtis, Evans, &

Pelletier, 2021 for a discussion on the relationship between post-secondary education in prison and social capital). With relatively consistent frequency, study participants spoke of the wellbeing value embedded in the social sphere of the classroom where reciprocal, open discussion was encouraged, and learners were able to mix with a cohort of learners with whom they may not typically come into contact. In their *Theory of Change* report, Champion and Noble (2016) recognise the importance of prison education in contributing to both social capital and human capital. The notion of human capital is considered by Champion and Noble to encompass an individual's "motivation to change" as well as their ability to establish momentum within this motivation in order to make positive life advancements (ibid). According to Champion and Noble, self-reflection, ownership of the learning process, self-discipline, realising potential and ability, having a sense of control, achieving a new self-perspective, feelings of pride, having goals, a sense of achievement, participation in new experiences, and the development of new or alternative ways of thinking, are some of the ways in which prison education can benefit learners from a human capital perspective (ibid). From a social capital perspective, Champion and Noble note that prison education can facilitate a sense of "belonging and community" amongst prison learners, improving upon their social bonds, relations and connections, as well as inspire them to become actively engaged as positive, contributive, pro-social members of their families, communities, and society (ibid). The development of a genuine interest in learning, prison educators who exhibit kindness and respect for their learners and who demonstrate an interest in them as individuals, collaborative and communal educational experiences with people from varied backgrounds, promotion of engagement with the prison community (e.g., helping others, becoming a mentor), development of life skills, knowledge, resilience, and confidence that can improve daily functioning both in prison and after release, and a better understanding of familial and parental relationships and the behaviours and attitudes that impact upon these relationships, are some of the elements of social capital that the Champion and Noble contend can be generated by engagement with prison education (ibid).

Champion and Noble (2016) further recognise the wellbeing benefits of prison education, providing qualitative evidence of the ways in which prison education can positively impact the wellbeing of prison learners. The wellbeing "change process" that Champion and Noble establish can occur when prisoners engage with prison education relates to its ability to provide prisoners with the ability to spend time out of their cells in a space that is distinctly set apart ("an escape both physically and mentally") from other aspects of the prison environment, engaged in an activity that can be considered mentally stimulating and enjoyable (ibid, p.11). Champion and Noble also note that prison education can provide prison learners with a potential means to cope with prison life in the context of a stressful environment where prisoners are at an increased risk of experiencing substance abuse and mental health issues. However, it is argued here that where this understanding falls short is in its lack of acknowledgement that a positive wellbeing impact from engagement in prison education is not experienced uniformly by all of those participating in prison education. Lafferty et al. (2015) contend that, despite the typically positive connotation of social capital as a beneficial resource, the capacity exists for negative outcomes to be generated by social capital. It is suggested here that the capital that prison learners are able to generate from engagement in prison education and subsequently draw on as a resource, whether it takes the form of social, cultural, human, or any of the many other varieties of capital that permeate the literature, can contribute to differential wellbeing outcomes based on a multiplicity of elements that converge both within and outside the margins of the prison education experience. This accumulation of capital then has the capacity to influence the wellbeing of prison learners and their ultimate perception of prison education. For example, although the importance of relatable prison education was a commonality expressed by some study participants, it is important to acknowledge here that relatable prison education may not be a trait sought out by all prison learners if it serves to emphasise past trauma or hardships, thus reinforcing the argument for the necessity of prison education to be tailored to the individual needs of learners. As was previously discussed in relation to the inflexible nature of the provision of prison education, prison learner Ann did not enjoy the course that she was required to take on mental health as it resonated too closely with her past experiences, given the wellbeing challenges she and members of her family had

experienced throughout her life. Thus, for Ann, this educational experience conceivably did not serve to contribute to her capacity to generate capital or draw on any existing forms of capital she held.

Lafferty et al. (2015) acknowledge the complex and multifaceted ways in which social capital manifests itself for prisoners due to the fact that their experiences exist within an authoritative environment characterised by limitations to autonomy and agency where interactions with loved ones are carefully controlled and supervised. The accumulation of social resources that prisoners can draw upon can be done so collectively through participation in activities that "collectively contribute to the construction of social capital both positively (such as through peer-based self-help groups) and negatively (such as the perpetration of violence)" (ibid, p.10). Lafferty et al. (2015) contend that the social capital of prisoners can be impacted in both positive and negative ways, for example through positive frequent external connections with friends and loved ones via visitation and communication, but alternatively a deficiency of social capital can be experienced by prisoners who may feel forgotten and isolated from their friends, family, communities, and wider society. Indeed, Hall, Allan, Tomlinson, Kelly, and Lindorff (2021) acknowledge that capital can be negative in its nature and its impact. In contrasting the differences between negative and positive capital (which the authors acknowledge is often not identified in the literature as 'positive capital' but merely 'capital' with an assumption that the term denotes an inherent positive connotation), Hall et al. (2021) note:

> Negative capital can be understood as the pressure on an individual or on a group to incur costs based on what they (or others believe them to) know and have at their disposal, what they (or others believe them to) think and believe, how they behave, and who they know (and the visibility of these social connections). Positive capital can be understood as the opportunity for an individual or for a group to secure benefits based on what they (or others believe them to) know and have at their disposal, what they (or others believe them to) think and believe, how they behave, and who they know (and the visibility of these social connections). (p.322)

In recognising the multiplicity that exists in forms of social capital and subsequently denying the element of singularity within the concept, Coleman (1988) maintains that forms of social capital

are not universally beneficial from a contextual point of view. Citing Foley and Edwards (1999, p.141) who argue for a context-dependent model of social capital as "access plus resources" that recognises the inequity in access to resources, Shortt (2004) importantly notes that, "A given form of social capital may be useful in one context, but ineffective in another" (p.12). Portes (1998) discusses the notion of negative social capital and highlights that research identifies a minimum of four ways in which social capital can have negative consequences: restricting 'outsiders' from access to social groups; preventing individual economic success and upward mobility within social networks (i.e., whereby group members appropriate the economic success of individuals within the network for their own advantage); emphasising group solidarity and conformity thereby restricting individual freedoms; and through "downward levelling norms" (i.e., whereby common experiences of adversity within social groups serve to ostracise ambitious individuals within the group who achieve success) (p.15). Coleman (1988) surmises that a distinguishing feature of most forms of social capital is its conceptualisation as a public rather than private benefit, meaning that at times, individuals may lack interest in investing in social capital as most benefits are not primarily realised on an individual level (ibid). As Shortt (2004) adequately submits in reference to Coleman's conceptualisation of social capital, "…those who help to create it [social capital] are not the only beneficiaries from it" (p.12). Coleman (1988) surmises that the benefits generated by the development of social capital primarily impact upon agents other than the individual who contributes to its creation, and as such, it is not necessarily beneficial for the individual to participate in the establishment of social capital. Resultingly, Coleman ascertains that the development or destruction of many forms of social capital occurs derivatively as "by-products of other activities" (ibid, p.S118).

Coleman's (1988) conceptualisation of the development of social capital as "by-products of other activities" (p.S118) may offer an explanation for the way in which the data suggests that circumstances outside of the prison learner's control, such as an inflexible prison education regime and security disruptions, can impact prison learners' wellbeing in a negative capacity. Although the participants in this study who spoke of the capacity for prison education to allow

them to expand their social relationships both within prison and without did so enthusiastically, there exists the possibility that the potential social wellbeing impact of education does not always extend to all relationships. For example, although it was not addressed in this study, as part of the transformative experience of learning, individuals who feel the need to sever ties with unsupportive or anti-social connections once they are engaged with education can potentially impact wellbeing in a negative way (Field, 2009a). If family and friends in the community are not supportive of a prison learner's educational endeavours, a prison learner may feel that it is best to no longer have contact with those who do not encourage their educational process, and although this may be necessary, it may also be emotionally difficult. Field (2009a) states:

> ...although learning can help extend some social networks, it can also disrupt existing ones. This is inseparable from the processes of social mobility and change that learning produces...Social networks are important sources of personal support, but learning more generally involves a process of transformation, in which something is gained while something is left behind. Sometimes this loss can be felt as painful.
>
> (p.186)

The potential wellbeing setbacks from dissociation with external social networks generated by engagement with prison education is an area that warrants further exploration.

Given the acknowledgment in scholarship of the capacity for capital to be negative in "constitution and/or impact" (Hall et al., 2021, p.316), the findings of the present research suggest that it is the contextual experiences of prison learners and the underlying processes at work within the broader delivery and regime of prison education, that contributes to a potential *lack* of available assets and resources for prison learners to draw upon (or 'positive' capital). It is argued here that it is this accumulation of capital, or lack thereof, that can have implications for the wellbeing of prison learners. If capital is to be understood, on a broader level, as a resource that is at an individual's disposal, it is important to consider the resulting impact on wellbeing when there exists a dearth in an individual's available resources or capacity to access accumulated resources, and the underlying mechanisms, experiences, and traits that have

contributed to this deficit. Dodge et al.'s (2012) proposed new definition of wellbeing as "…the balance point between an individual's resource pool and the challenges faced" (p.230) seems to have especially relevant implications within the milieu of prisons, particularly as it relates to the notion of capital (or resources) that prisoners can draw upon to meet the significant challenges they may face within the carceral context. Within the context of prison education and the present research specifically, it is fathomable that the differential prison education experiences of learners can contribute to a discrepancy in the resources possessed and challenges faced, ultimately creating space for the wellbeing of these individuals to be impacted in diverse ways. For example, prison learners may experience positive impacts to their wellbeing by engaging with a committed prison educator who shows compassion towards and investment in their students, thereby facilitating the development of and access to various forms of positive capital in those learners.

What should also be considered in the discussion on capital and education is the capacity for other experiences and interactions within the prison environment to impact upon the development of and access to capital for prison learners, as well as the potential importation of a certain level of capital into prison (and likewise the prison education environment) from the outside. The participants in the present study have underscored the diversity in the prior life and educational experiences of prison learners, conceivably impacting the accumulation of differing levels and types of capital amongst individuals prior to entering prison. Conceivably, the differential experiences of prison learners prior to prison will impact the way in which capital is generated and drawn upon within the environment of prison more generally, and the environment of prison education specifically. For prison learners, these potentially pre-existing levels and forms of capital may thus be augmented or diminished by the experiences of education in prison, possibly further impacting the wellbeing experiences of learners. For example, Lafferty, Treloar, Butler, Guthrie, and Chambers (2016), acknowledging the fact that the transfer of social capital from the general community to prison is not seamless, note that there are dimensions of social capital that do not easily translate into the environment of prison. Lafferty at al. (2016) indicate that "A number of dimensions of social capital transfer to

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the prison environment and contribute to an inmate's overall social capital portfolio" (p.9), but equally acknowledge that the transfer of dimensions of social capital can require "context-specific translation for the prison environment…" (ibid, p.10). It is also necessary to reflect on the capacity for social capital to be either possessed or developed (Curtis et al., 2021). Referencing relevant scholarship, Curtis et al. (2021) argue that this distinction is significant as not all segments of the population have equal opportunities to acquire social capital, with limited educational and employment opportunities disproportionately impacting disadvantaged segments of the population. Perhaps then, for those prisoners with diminished levels of capital prior to incarceration, the capacity to develop capital within the context of prison education becomes especially important, conceivably setting the stage for prison learners to reap positive wellbeing impacts from engaging in prison education in ways that may differ from their counterparts with higher pre-existing levels of capital.

Within the present study, prison educators and former prison learners alike highlighted their perceptions of the inflexible nature of prison education provision and structure within an inflexible regime. In their 2021 contribution to the House of Commons Education Committee's inquiry into prison education, Clinks, an organisation that works on a national level to support those in the Criminal Justice System who work in the voluntary sector, acknowledges the need for flexibility in prison education provision and also the importance of providing a tailored approach, particularly as it relates to women, young people, and prisoners who are part of minority ethnic groups (House of Commons Education Committee, 2021b). It is argued here that the notion that the provision of education in prison would benefit from a tailored, more flexible approach conceivably extends to the contention that not all people in prison are ready for education, as prison educator Kelly attested to. Consequently, forcing people to participate in education before they are ready may not be the most effective approach. In their submission to the House of Commons Education Committee's (2021a) education inquiry, Leese, Goldsack, Bell, and Ferguson, criminologists and prison researchers at Teeside University, underscore the need for *appropriate* (emphasis added) educational experiences for prison learners, and advocate for the implementation of innovative educational approaches for people in prison, using the

examples of higher education and the 'Inside-Out' initiative that integrates prison learners and university students from the community in a communal learning process. Said researchers emphasise that approaches that allow prison learners to work together with learners from the community can "bring a sense of normalcy and mitigate some of the negative aspects of the prison regime whilst building a critical sense of community and belonging" (ibid).

David Breakspear, a former prison learner and champion for the benefits of prison education, also provided evidence to the House of Commons Education Committee (2020b) in order to highlight his stance on the purpose of prison education and the critical changes he believes are necessary within the provision of prison education:

> The purpose of education in prison is to provide the individual with purposeful activity and the opportunity to unlock *their* [emphasis in original] potential by providing *them* [emphasis in original] with the necessary skills, subjective to them as individuals, to lead a life free of offending, addiction, and/or unemployment. Therefore, the purpose of education in prisons should have inclusivity and variety at its very core.

The University and College Union (UCU), in their written evidence to the education inquiry, likewise emphasise that the focus of prison education development needs to shift away from the current PEF framework which is narrowly target-driven, profit-motivated, and grounded in restrictive contractual obligations, and toward prison education provision that is needs-based, innovative, "fit for purpose," and strives to address reoffending (House of Commons Education Committee, 2021c). Behan (2007) asserts that prison pedagogical practices should be flexible and creative in nature and foster "a positive learning space for a unique learner group" (p.162). Behan (2014) further acknowledges that the educational environment of the prison should allow prison learners "to voluntarily engage in different types of learning, at their own pace, at a time of their choosing…," and how doing so can promote critical thought and desistance amongst prison learners (p.20).

The evidence suggests that a potential relationship exists between a state of adverse wellbeing and a lack of continuity of care present within a prison to help prison learners manage the

potentially precarious emotions that can surface in the wake of an educational programme. Study participants spoke of their perceptions of setbacks to wellbeing experiences when there was a dearth of endured educational support upon either the cessation of an educational endeavour, the transfer to a new prison where previous educational programming undertaken was unable to be resumed, or the release from prison whereby continued participation in education was not possible. The notion of continuity of care with respect to prison policy and research is primarily explored with respect to 'through the gate' clinical support for mental health and substance abuse and advocacy for health-based initiatives to follow prisoners from prison to the community upon release (see for example, Forsyth et al., 2015; HM Prison Service, 2006; Jarrett et al., 2012; Public Health England, 2018; Roebuck, Beswick, Cooper, Hughes, & Mummé, 2018; Siva, 2010). For example, acknowledging the barriers that exist to the continuity of treatment care once prisoners are released from prison, Public Health England (2018) notes that "An integrated care pathway from prison to the community is crucial for supporting recovery from substance misuse and reducing reoffending among people leaving custody." The concept of continuing care for prisoners engaged in education, with education at the forefront of analysis, has not readily been explored in the literature. It is argued here that the notion of continuity of care is one that should apply to any prison-based intervention that is either not continued or not followed-up on within the prison or community post-release. Certain prison educators and former prison learners in the present study spoke of the potential emotional harms they believe were incurred when learners were no longer able to access education. In their evidence submission to the recent House of Commons inquiry on prison education, a group of prison educators employed by Milton Keynes College stressed the importance of educational support for prisoners after they have been released from prison, stating that:

> ...consideration should be given to how prisoners can be better supported post release There is, rightly, a great focus on the 'learner journey' but when a prisoner is released that close support suddenly stops. This is at a critical time when that person needs support as they face the cold realities of life on the outside. An idea could be for vocational tutors, say, to have an on-going mentoring role with prisoners after release, discussing any challenges they might be facing in their work situation and generally being a support and guide for them, whilst continuing to teach in prison. It could make the difference between

a prisoner taking a poor, possibly destructive decision in isolation and being guided along a better path by someone they know and trust.

(House of Commons Education Committee, 2021d)

The potential benefits of prison-based learning are widely touted in the literature (see for example, Baranger, Rousseau, Mastrorilli, & Matesanz, 2018; Behan, 2014; Braggins & Talbot, 2003; Coates, 2016; Hawley et al., 2013; Hughes, 2012; Meek et al., 2012; Nichols, 2021); however, what is not typically the focus of research in this area is what happens to prison learners once these beneficial educational outcomes are no longer realisable due to the cessation of an educational initiative. The potential exists that engagement in prison education can create a heightened sense of confidence that does not always translate through the gate, particularly when the learner is faced with judgement and barriers on behalf of education departments in the community (i.e., the stigma associated with being a former prisoner). If prison education can purport to provide prison learners with a learning experience that seeks to fill in the gaps left by the previous negative experiences of education so many people in prison have had, then the way in which prison education initiatives intend to fill a similar gap that is left when prison learners no longer have access to this beneficial programming is a query that requires dire attention from researchers, policy makers, and practitioners. The lack of continuity of educational care that participants in Study Three spoke of echoes the findings of Study Two whereby some participants who wrote in with their experiences of learning during lockdown were finding it difficult to adjust to the lack of educational programming that was available during the Covid-19 pandemic. In their 2016 and 2017 joint thematic investigative reports, HM Inspectorate of Probation and HM Inspectorate of Prisons were highly critical of the 'through the gate' (TTG) care that was being provided for prisoners by Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs), despite being mandated to provide prisoners with resettlement care for education, training, and employment. With respect to education in prison, the 'through the gate' approach remains ostensibly lacking, as attested to by certain study participants. Beatrice, Hattie, and Owen all acknowledged their experiences with and frustration at the lack of 'through the gate' educational care and support present in the transition from prison to community. Former prison learner Ann articulated her frustrating experience with her inability

to use education as a 'through the gate' coping mechanism due to the fact that she was unable to continue her course upon release from prison. Hattie further recognised that the positive relationships she was able to form with staff in the prisons she worked in enabled her to provide a certain level of continuity of care to her specific students during the pandemic, although she reasoned that this was an anomaly in prisons during Covid-19 rather than the norm. It is suggested here that the capital that prison learners can develop and draw upon from engaging in prison education needs to be transferrable and accessible both within and beyond the gates. When opportunities to generate or access capital through prison education are impeded either during a prison term or post-release, the wellbeing of prison learners can be affected adversely.

6.4 Limitations

Due to the small number of participants from both men's and women's prisons in England and Wales, the present study does not claim to be either generalisable or representative of incarcerated individuals and prison educators across the prison estate. A further limitation of this study relates to the ability of prison educators to comment on the ways in which their students had experienced impacts to their wellbeing as a result of participation in prison education. Throughout the course of the interviews with prison educators, there were times when participants noted that they found it difficult to comment on more than just their *opinions* of the wellbeing of their students, as it was challenging for them to directly perceive or follow-up on any changes that may have been occurring in their students. However, it is argued here that the experiences of prison educators are a valuable source of knowledge within the exploration of the relationship between prison education and wellbeing, particularly because the perspectives of those teaching in prison are often overlooked (University and College Union & Prisoner Learning Alliance, 2021). Although educators may not have always been able to explore the impacts on wellbeing that engagement with prison education was potentially affecting in their students, the purpose of an IPA analysis is for the researcher to make sense of participants' understanding of their lived experiences. Thus, each prison educator's perceptions

and experience contributed to the narrative on prison education and wellbeing, regardless of the limitations to direct observability.

There is also the potential that a certain degree of social desirability and interviewer bias may have been present within the interviews. In an effort to ensure the positive aspects of prison education were emphasised (an endeavour that was perhaps fuelled by the conception that negative wellbeing elements of prison education are not socially desirable), participants may have been inclined to portray their understanding of the relationship between wellbeing and prison education as potentially more positive than their true beliefs might reflect. This tendency may have also been impacted by an underlying bias in the structure of the interview questions or the way the researcher posed questions to the participants. It has been acknowledged that the researcher's own positive wellbeing experience with education has been the driving force behind the present research, so it is possible that the researcher conducted interviews in a manner that subconsciously and inadvertently stressed this element of the relationship between wellbeing and prison education. However, this potentiality was mitigated by the researcher's inclusion of items on the interview schedule that asked participants to disclose their understandings of the possible negative wellbeing impact of engaging in prison education. When participants did acknowledge the potential for prison education to impact the wellbeing of prison learners in a negative way, the researcher invited respondents to further explore this potentiality in their answers.

6.5 Conclusion

Ultimately, the data from this study suggests that the capital generated by engagement in prison education can contribute to a differential wellbeing impact for prison learners. Rather than a universal wellbeing benefit that prison learners reap, the relationship between wellbeing and prison education is more complex and thus can affect prison learners in a multitude of ways. Some prison learners may experience positive wellbeing impacts from their time in prison education, but some may have a more complicated prison education experience where the

potential for adverse wellbeing effects is bred. It has been suggested here that the capital generated and available to be accessed through prison learners' participation in prison education can be augmented when prison education provision is appropriate for individual learners' needs, fostering changing identities and relationships within prison and subsequently facilitating the capacity for the wellbeing of prison learners to be impacted in a positive manner. However, the capital possessed by prison learners, generated and accessed through engagement in prison education, can also be negative in nature and diminish the potential for the educational experience to contribute to positive wellbeing outcomes. Various elements of the carceral education experience can influence prison learners' perceptions of an adverse relationship between wellbeing and prison education. These elements include, but are not limited to, previous negative experiences of education that are exacerbated by the educational culture of the prison, prison education experiences that are atypical of previous positive experiences of education, prison environments that are not conducive to learning, rigid and inflexible education provision and structure, educators who are uncommitted or insensitive to the challenges prison learners face, and a lack of support for education within the prison. It is suggested here that the relationship between capital, wellbeing, and prison education is context-dependent and individualised. Whilst one prison learner might generate positive capital by learning basic literacy skills in formal, accredited education class, another learner might produce this capital by engaging with informal learning that engages them cognitively at a higher level. Citing Bourdieu (1986) in her research on prison learners' experiences of distance learning, Hughes (2012) notes that, "Not only does each prisoner in this research brings [sic] to their learning and to their prison environment their own 'positioning' and 'dispositions', but they also differ in respect to their possession of 'social, 'economic' and 'cultural' capital" (p.18).

The key takeaway from this study appears to be in the recognition that the capital prison learners can possess from engaging with prison education can fluctuate and can be negative in nature, serving to detract from the development of a positive wellbeing experience. Alternatively, a prison environment that is conducive to learning, prison educators who have flexibility in education provision and in the regime, and learners who are able to study subjects

that interest them at their own pace, can function to add positively to the capital learners

generate from engaging in prison education, leading to a relationship with wellbeing that differs

from their counterparts who have not had the same positive prison education experience.

Chapter Seven

Overarching Discussion and Concluding Reflection

7.0 Introduction

The term 'golden thread' has been used throughout the studies that comprise this thesis to conceptualise a common framework or lens of understanding that underscores the value in the research and unifies the research goals, findings, and overall journey. The sequential nature of the research serves to interconnect the three individual studies and situate the research within the broader context of the omnipresent research objective, namely the relationship between wellbeing and prison education. The theoretical perspective underscoring the research was eclectic in nature, drawing upon scholarship on wellbeing, education, and capital in order to situate the findings and discussion. Additionally, a conceptual framework of wellbeing was developed within the course of the research as an important theoretical tool that guided the research and contributed to the understanding of the relationship between wellbeing and prison education. A summary of the research and findings, including a return to the research questions, will be addressed here in order to draw attention to the integrated nature of the three studies and the interplay between the individual study findings and collective research goal. The remainder of the concluding discussion will explore the theoretical and practical impacts and implications of the research as whole, with particular attention being paid to the complexity of the relationship between wellbeing and prison education.

7.1 Revisiting the research and findings

The present research sought to explore the potential wellbeing benefits of participation in prison education. Reflexively, the researcher acknowledges that her positive educational trajectory and past experiences of education grounded her research interests and informed her decision-making processes. More specifically, the researcher's interest in higher education and

its potential impact on wellbeing inspired the preliminary research question and directed the early research: **'How does prisoner-participation in higher education in prison impact wellbeing?'** The initial hypothesis derived from the researcher's interest in and wellbeing experiences of education was that a positive wellbeing impact would be relatively universal amongst prison learners. The broad, guiding research question was ultimately amended to fit within the contextual parameters of each study within the research journey. Fundamentally, although the circumstances of the pandemic did generate unprecedented research opportunities, the unanticipated impact of Covid-19 on the research journey dictated, at times, abrupt changes to the research as necessitated by the restrictive nature of Covid-19 limitations. The development of the research questions was thus conceptualised as a progression within the context of the research journey, as the circumstances that enveloped each stage of the journey required that modifications be made to the intended direction of the research. Reflecting upon the conditions under which the research was undertaken, it is necessary to also consider how the experience of the researcher's learning journey was reflected in the experiences of those learning in prison. The despair and frustration expressed by former prison learner participants in Studies Two and Three at being unable to continue valuable educational endeavours in prison (for example, on account of the restrictions to purposeful activity imposed during Covid-19, or as a result of being moved to another prison in the middle of a course) was palpable. Although it would be misguided to imply that the researcher's educational experiences during the pandemic were representative of what was occurring in prisons during this time, at the very least it is crucial to acknowledge the ways in which the researcher's own challenging learning journey informed her understanding of what prison learners experience on a regular basis. Introspective contemplation of the researcher's own state of wellbeing when faced with the learning hurdles that surfaced during Covid-19 generated an element of clarity and an empathic understanding of the plight of those learning within prison, and the corresponding implications for wellbeing.

Study One was an initial foray into the exploration into the wellbeing impacts of prison education that provided the foundation for the remainder of the research journey. Given the

researcher's initial hypothesis that engaging with prison education would be a mentally positive experience for prison learners, the goal of Study One was to conduct preliminary, exploratory research into the prospective wellbeing benefits of prison education from the perspective of prison learners who had applied for funding through PET. The researcher was able to utilise the connections of the research supervisors to establish a relationship with PET, which facilitated the researcher's capacity to conduct the study and access prison learner PET application letters. The core research question that Study One aimed to address was, **'How do prison learners articulate their perceptions of the anticipated benefits of further and higher education in prison, and what is the association between these benefits and wellbeing?'** The focus of the research in Study One was on the *anticipated* benefits of prison education, as the funding that prison learners were applying for through PET was for modules that were yet to be undertaken. The theoretical drive of the study (see Morse, 2003) was inductive and exploratory as it employed a primarily qualitative approach to investigate the relationship between wellbeing and prison education. However, elements of quantitative inquiry were embedded within the research approach, primarily with respect to the content analysis that was employed. In an effort to provide a coherent understanding of the concept of wellbeing that could be used to analyse the data within Study One, a comprehensive conceptual framework of wellbeing was developed that would eventually provide the foundation for the research undertaken in Studies Two and Three. This framework was utilised within Study One to analyse 100 PET applicant letters from prison learners, whereby the self-reported prospective benefits of prison education articulated by prison learners were conceptualised using a wellbeing perspective. The findings of Study One suggested that the prison learner-identified benefits of participating in prison education are representative of elements of emotional, social, and psychological wellbeing. Study One further highlighted that, in the context of research on the benefits of prison education, whilst some of the benefits of further and higher education expressed by prison learners might seem readily apparent to a certain extent, particularly considering that PET provides applicants with a guidance letter that offers suggestions to potential learners on what to include in their letters of application, what was novel about this study was its ability to conceptualise these benefits from a framework of wellbeing. By virtue of the fact that Study

One employed the use of secondary data (in the form of existing PET letters), applicants to PET were not completing their letters in response to a primary research question asking them to discuss the relationship between prison education and wellbeing. The study was thus innovative in its approach to exploring the potential impacts of participation in prison education through utilising a lens of wellbeing to interpret the prospective benefits of prison education that prison learners hope will accrue. The wellbeing framework established within Study One subsequently provided the researcher with a theoretical foundation from which the research could progress. Study One thus underscored the notion that education that promotes and emphasises the benefits disclosed by prison learners themselves can have important implications for a learner's overall wellbeing. Further questions were raised within the context of Study One pertaining to the potential relationship between wellbeing and the expectations and optimism of prison learners with respect to the anticipated benefits of engaging with education. Chiefly, Study One provokes a line of inquiry that questions whether there may be a faltering sense of positive wellbeing if the benefits that prison learners hoped or anticipated gaining from education are not realised.

Study Two built upon the findings of Study One by continuing to qualitatively explore the relationship between wellbeing and prison education within an alternative context. The temporal contexts of Studies One and Two differed; whereas Study One focused on the *prospective* benefits of prison education as identified by applicants to PET who had not yet undertaken the modules they were applying for, Study Two explored the perspectives of current prison learners whose experiences of education in prison were impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Study Two thus provided the researcher with a unique context with which to further investigate the potential wellbeing impact of prison education. Education provision and other meaningful activities in prisons were significantly disrupted by the restrictions to movement and activity that were put in place at the height of the pandemic-induced lockdowns. Excessive periods of isolation were imposed on prisoners during the pandemic and the Covid-19 altered regime saw prisoners being confined to their cells for 23 hours a day, sometimes more (Prison Reform Trust & Prisoner Policy Network, 2020a). Education classrooms, gyms, libraries, and

workshops were all closed in prisons during the quarantine period, visitations were ceased, and social contact amongst prisoners was severely limited (ibid). The Covid-19 limitations imposed within prisons also had implications for researchers, as the capacity for researchers to enter prisons to conduct primary research was put on hold during this period. These limitations posed a substantial barrier to the researcher and curtailed her ability to further explore the relationship between wellbeing and prison education by conducting in-person research with serving prison learners. The original vision for the research question that would guide Study Two was that it would continue to address the impact of higher education on the wellbeing of prison learners. With consideration of the wellbeing matrix that was established in Study One, the envisioned research question for Study Two was, '**How can the effects of participation in higher education in prison be conceptualised using a wellbeing framework?**' However, the situational context that preceded Study Two necessitated innovation and adaptation in order to progress in the research journey, and the realisation emerged that sustaining the focus of the research on higher education specifically would not be feasible. Through the thesis supervisors, the researcher established a relationship with the prison newspaper publication *Inside Time* in order to facilitate a study that was broader in its scope, exploring prison learners' experiences of learning during lockdown. The question that guided the research in Study Two thus became, '**How do current prison learners describe their experiences of learning during lockdown as it relates to their wellbeing?**' Through prison learners' correspondence with *Inside Time* exploring their perceptions of the way that the cessation of education had impacted them and their wellbeing, a thematic analysis on secondary data was conducted on six responses that were submitted to *Inside Time* from prison learners. The objective of Study Two was to underscore the narrative established within Study One by cross-contextually applying the conceptualisations, determinants, and elements of wellbeing that were previously established within the wellbeing framework. Although the realisation of this aim was impacted by the limitations imposed by the sample size of Study Two, the matrix was valuable in identifying many of the concepts associated with wellbeing, and in underscoring the wellbeing impact of the absence of some of the benefits identified by PET applicants in Study One during the Covid-19 lockdown(s). The findings of Study Two provided a preliminary glimpse into the complexity of

the relationship between wellbeing and prison education. The focus of the *Inside Time* letters was predominantly on what had been taken away from prison learners during the time that education provision was disrupted, and the damaging impact this loss had on their wellbeing. The primary themes identified within the letters prison learners had written to *Inside Time* emphasised a lack of communication and educational support for prison learners during Covid, a sense of hope being lost, and an absence of the ability to use education to cope with a prison existence. Study Two sought to address the parallels in the experiences of prison learners as compared to their student counterparts in the community, but also to acknowledge the distinct nature of the challenges faced by prison learners during the Covid-19 period. Study Two served to highlight the ways in which prison learners may have experienced a heightened sense of loss from the removal of valuable educational pursuits during lockdown.

The final study aimed to conclude the cross-contextual exploration of the relationship between wellbeing and prison education. Study Three remained encumbered by the research limitations imposed by Covid-19, continuing to impede the researcher's capacity to enter prisons to conduct primary research with current prison learners. In temporal contrast to Study One which looked at *prospective* benefits of engaging with prison education, and Study Two which explored then-current experiences of learning, Study Three was primarily retrospective in nature, asking participants to recall and reflect upon their experiences of prison education. The final study thus endeavoured to utilise the experiences of prison educators and former prison learners in the community in order to address the final research question, **'How do current prison educators and former prison learners describe their experiences of the relationship between wellbeing and prison education?'** Study three utilised an IPA approach to analyse qualitative semi-structured interviews that were conducted with five prison educators and five former prison learners. Recruitment of study participants was innovative in its approach of utilising Twitter to send out a 'Tweet' to prison educators and former prison learners interested in engaging with a study on the wellbeing impact of prison education. The objective of Study Three was to underscore the subjective element in the wellbeing experiences of those who have had direct engagement with prison education, either as a learner or as an educator, by

ensuring that *participants'* understandings of the relationship between wellbeing and prison education was the focal point of analysis. Paralleling the smaller sample size of Study Two, the final study did not use the wellbeing matrix established in Study One to analyse the data in Study Three; however, the conceptualisations of wellbeing established within the Study One framework served to inform participant interviews and contributed to the understanding that a lens of wellbeing can be used to interpret the experiences of those engaging with prison education. The findings of Study Three acknowledged the complex nature of the relationship between prison education and wellbeing and served to challenge the researcher's initial hypothesis that prison education impacts wellbeing in a wholly positive manner. Participants' understandings of their experiences of wellbeing and prison education emphasised the notion that the wellbeing impact of engaging with prison education is dynamic and differs amongst prison learners based on their contextual experiences of learning both prior to and within prison. The accumulation of capital (or lack thereof) that can be facilitated by engagement in prison education can contribute to a differential wellbeing impact amongst prison learners, ultimately facilitating a relationship between wellbeing and education that could be characterised as negative for some learners. It has been acknowledged that the structure and impact of capital can be negative in nature (Hall et al., 2021). The findings of Study Three highlighted the ways in which prison education experiences can ultimately impact on some learners' wellbeing in potentially negative ways. Prison education experiences that are atypical of previous positive experiences of education, prison environments that are not conducive to learning, rigid and inflexible education provision and structure, educators who are uncommitted or insensitive to the challenges prison learners face, a lack of support for education within the prison, and a lack of proper safeguards in place for learners to safely unpack the potentially emotional experience of education in its aftermath, all surfaced as potential contributors to a negative relationship between prison education and wellbeing. This important finding lies in contrast to the optimism inherent in the hypothesis identified at the outset of the research journey, whereby the researcher anticipated that the wellbeing impact of engaging with prison education would be universally beneficial amongst prison learners. No longer conceptualised by the researcher as merely a benefit, the research findings suggest a more complicated

relationship between participation in education and wellbeing, one that is rendered especially complex within the context of prisons.

7.2 Theoretical perspectives – a "dynamic interaction"

In justifying her selected methodology in her study exploring the issues of ethnicity, disjunction, and integration amongst Black prison learners within a dispersal prison in England, Waller (2000) aptly uses the term "dynamic interaction" to reflect her goal of underscoring the interplay between her research and the social theories that underpinned it (p.117). This phrase fittingly applies to the theoretical process inherent within this research journey whereby the theoretical underpinnings intrinsic to the methodological and analytical processes developed congruently with the research. Waller articulates that her goal of constructing a relationship between her research and the applicable theories grounded in social life is that "each will inform, moderate and amplify the other," subsequently leading to a more coherent and "unified" perspective (ibid).

The literature on the theoretical perspectives underpinning this thesis have been outlined in detail in Chapter Two. It is useful to briefly revisit these theoretical foundations here to properly contextualise the narrative of the research studies. The underlying theoretical perspectives shaping the research approaches of the studies within this thesis influenced the decision-making processes at each point along the research journey. Scholarship on education and wellbeing shaped the initial interest in the topic of this thesis and indeed guided the researcher's interpretation of the findings within each study. In particular, the influential work of Schuller, Preston et al. (2004) on the wider benefits of learning presented itself as a key foundational theoretical perspective for the development of the research questions. The research of the above-named authors, as well as the wider research that has been conducted as part of the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning (see for example, Feinstein, Budge, Vorhaus, & Duckworth, 2008; Feinstein, Hammond, Woods, Preston, & Bynner, 2003; Preston & Hammond, 2002; Schuller et al., 2002) has been influential in education scholarship.

The Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, established by the previously-named Department for Education and Employment and active from 1999-2010 (Feinstein et al., 2008; University College London, n.d.), has been acknowledged by Schuller (2017) as "perhaps the single most fertile source of evidence for the benefits of learning" (p.5). Indeed, research acknowledging the wellbeing benefits of learning was the driving force of the research, as the researcher strove to apply this understanding within the context of prison education. The fieldwork of Schuller et al. (2002), which was subsequently developed into the book *The Benefits of Learning: The impact of education on health, family life and social capital* (Schuller, Preston et al., 2004), was pivotal to the researcher's understanding of the wellbeing benefits of education.

At the individual and collective levels, the research on the benefits of learning and education has underscored the capacity for education to both protect against the development of adverse mental health and aid in the recovery from mental health difficulties. As noted by Schuller et al. (2002), "There is a continuum running from protection against the onset and progression of mental health difficulties to positive psychological health that enables individuals to fulfil their potential both as individuals and as members of society" (p.39). The challenges associated with prison education have been thoroughly explored in Chapter Two. Amongst some of the many challenges associated with delivering education in the carceral context, including the fact that the purpose of prison education varies amongst people working within the realm of penology (Reuss, 1999), prison educators, prison learners, and prison staff all must contend with the uncertain and potentially hazardous nature of teaching, learning, or maintaining safety and security in the prison environment. For prison learners especially, a group whose educational attainments and experiences prior to incarceration are largely negative and who struggle with significant deficiencies in levels of literacy and numeracy as compared to the general public (Hughes, 2012; Social Exclusion Unit, 2002), the notion that engaging in education whilst incarcerated could be impactful from a wellbeing perspective becomes particularly significant.

Following the literature that recognises the wider benefits of learning, Field's (2009a, 2009b) contribution to the Inquiry into the Future of Lifelong Learning (IFLL), which acknowledged the abundance of scholarship on the wellbeing benefits of education but equally the scarcity of attention paid to the potential negative wellbeing impact of learning, emerged as a particularly applicable theoretical understanding within the context of Study Three (and Study Two, retrospectively). As previously noted, Studies Two and Three succeeded in highlighting the potential for prison education to impact upon the wellbeing of prison learners in negative capacities. Field's recognition of the negative wellbeing potentiality that exists within the relationship between wellbeing and education thus serves to ground the findings of the research within an understanding that the relationship between wellbeing and prison education can be adverse. Field (2009a) considers the "clear" positive relationship between wellbeing and learning that the evidence generally points towards as probabilistic in nature, stating that, "…[the existence of a positive relationship between wellbeing and learning] does not mean that everyone who takes a course will feel happier and better about themselves" (p.187). The research of Schuller, Preston et al. (2004) is also of relevance here, as they emphasise the capacity for education to bring about negative impacts to both the individual and wider community as the process of developing through learning can be challenging and can therefore generate risks (Hammond, 2004a). The present research has indeed emphasised the complexity of the relationship between wellbeing and education in prison that stems from the diverse, contextual life course experiences of prison learners. Although Study One focused solely on prospective *benefits* of prison education, Studies Two and Three drew attention to the notion that, from a wellbeing perspective, a narrowly-focused interpretation of the advantages of prison education risks overlooking the potential for engagement with prison education to impact prisoners adversely. In the context of his joint research on the wider benefits of learning, Schuller (2004a) highlights the subjective nature of the term 'benefit,' and advocates for caution in unanimous agreement on the meaning of the word, noting that "…'benefit' is an inherently value-laden term. What appears to one person as an unambiguously positive outcome may be rather more dubious to others" (p.7). The focus of the research thus shifted within the context of this understanding from the wellbeing *benefits* of prison education to the wellbeing *impact* of

prison education. This is evident in the progression of the research questions, from Study One which exclusively explored the benefits of participating in prison education to Studies Two and Three which sought to acknowledge the wider wellbeing impact of prison education.

The scholarship on wellbeing has also underscored the research journey. In Study One, the focus was on the establishment of a well-defined conceptual framework of wellbeing. This study was pivotal to the research journey as it firmly grounded the structure and interpretation of the findings from the subsequent studies and demonstrated that the benefits of learning in prison can be interpreted through the lens of wellbeing. The scholarship that points to the relational nature of the concepts of mental health and wellbeing (see for example, Keyes, 2002a, 2006b; Lehtinen et al., 2005) ultimately provided the foundation for the development of the wellbeing framework. Wellbeing has been conceptualised broadly within the context of the present research, incorporating the World Health Organization's (2013) definition which recognises its subjective nature and emphasises that the sociocultural context of an individual be considered in the understanding of the term. It is this subjective element of wellbeing that grounds the research in the three studies, and it has been explicitly acknowledged that the 'subjective' component of wellbeing has been interpreted broadly, thus distinguishing it from the more empirical notion of subjective well-being that is prominent in the field of psychology, and from objective measures of mental health and wellbeing. Lahtinen et al. (1999), in the *Framework for Promoting Mental Health in Europe* report, acknowledge the difficulty in establishing objective criteria and indices of mental health due to the subjective nature of the term. These scholars note that, "Mental health is closely connected to a person's inner experience of his/her own situation, and to his/her feelings and emotions. Therefore, the objective measures of mental health do not always coincide with the subjective experience of mental well-being" (ibid, p.106).

With respect to the notion of capital, the attention paid to this theoretical understanding emerged primarily within the context of Study Three, but is tied to the literature on the benefits of learning that has provided the primary theoretical foundation guiding the research, as well as

to the theoretical underpinning of notions of wellbeing. The notion of capital, particularly of social capital, indeed acts in a bridging capacity between the theoretical foundations of the impact of education and conceptualisations of wellbeing. It has been established that the conceptual framework used in the research of Schuller, Preston et al. (2004) is grounded in the notion of capital. The authors' conceptual framework is three-fold, with identity capital, social capital, and human capital comprising the three points in a triangular interpretation of the wider benefits of learning. Within the process of learning, the dimensions of human capital, social capital, and identity capital (also referred to by their disciplinary-associations as socio-economic, socio-political, and socio-psychological dimensions, respectively) are conceptualised by the above-named authors as assets that individuals accumulate which generate various outcomes such as improved health, social integration, and family life. These outcomes are subsequently conceptualised as reciprocally contributing back to or even comprising these forms of capital, thereby contributing to the capital's growth and mobilisation. Schuller (2004b) importantly recognises the interplay between the three forms of capital and acknowledges that experiences and outcomes of learning are often an interaction between two or more of the dimensions. Considering the social dimension of capital specifically, Hammond (2004a) notes that the research on the wider benefits of learning suggests that "the social outcomes of learning protect mental health and contribute to well-being, effective coping and the adoption of health behaviours" (p.53). The importance of the social element of learning was identified in all three studies. Chapter Two (the review of the literature) firstly established that social integration and interactions (i.e., social capital) are important elements of social wellbeing. Study One further contributed to the narrative by acknowledging the scholarship on prison education that identifies the importance of social capital (see for example, Champion & Noble, 2016; Coates, 2016) The social dimension of prospective benefits of participating in prison education was identified in the application letters written by prison learners to PET, thus indicating that this an important element of the relationship between prison education and wellbeing. Study Two subsequently contributed uniquely to the narrative of social capital and wellbeing as the Covid-19 parameters of the study were such that the social context of learning was removed and the capacity for prison learners to generate capital through education

severely restricted. The predominant focus of the six 'Lockdown Learning' responses was not on the social dimension of education; however, one particularly expressive respondent did cite an absence of peer-support, friendship, and support networks as elements of education in prison that were impacted by the removal of education during lockdown. Study Two ultimately began to shed light on the significance of hindering prison learners' capacity to generate capital through engaging in prison education, and the resulting potential wellbeing repercussions. Finally, Study Three demonstrated that the capital, both social and otherwise, that prison learners are able to generate from engagement in prison education is context-dependent, thereby contributing to a relationship between wellbeing and prison education that is dynamic and complex. Study Three brought to light a disparity that can exist in the accumulation of capital amongst those engaged with prison education, grounded in the differential experiences that prison learners have both prior to and during incarceration, thereby contributing to a corresponding variance in the wellbeing returns that can be generated by participating in education in prison.

Penultimately, it is important to briefly acknowledge here the theoretically distinct nature of Study Two, as this study can perhaps be interpreted as an outlier with respect to the linear progression of the studies that comprise this thesis. Although Study Two remains connected to Studies One and Three through the 'golden thread' of the relationship between wellbeing and prison education, the contextual circumstances that gave rise to this study required a slight departure from the theoretical underpinnings that unite the three studies. The wider effects of learning and education and the relationship between these impacts and wellbeing remained critical to interpreting the results of Study Two, and indeed this theoretical foundation continues to represent a commonality amongst all three studies. However, the Covid-19 context in which Study Two was carried out necessitated an *almost* independent understanding of the unique circumstances situating the study. Study Two was instrumental in providing a preliminary indication of the potential negative wellbeing impacts that the removal of prison education can necessitate, a discovery that continued to resonate in the findings of Study Three. However, it was central to the understanding of the impact of Covid-19 on prison education and

ultimately prison learners that the findings of the study be situated within the wider context of the pandemic. The theoretical foundation of the research journey is grounded in the relationship between education and wellbeing on a more general level for all types of learners, regardless of whether they are in prison or in the community. The researcher then sought to apply an understanding of this relationship to the experiences of prison learners. Where Study Two then finds its meaning and theoretical significance is in ensuring that the benefits of education for *prison learners* specifically were clearly articulated and emphasised by situating the interpretation of the results both within the literature that acknowledges the ways in which education can benefit those learning whilst incarcerated, and the wider scholarship on the challenges for people in prison when vital avenues of support and hope are removed (see for example, Behan, 2014; Crawley & Sparks, 2005; Crewe et al., 2020; Hughes, 2000; MacGuinness, 2000; Szifris et al., 2018).

Finally, in her conceptualisation of the process by which personal development (and potentially post-release behaviour) can be impacted for those engaged with prison education, Reuss (1999) introduces a "weaving theory of learning," which emphasises the notion of *potentiality* (emphasis in original) in the capacity for prison education to effect an element of 'change' or 'transformation' amongst prison learners. In the ongoing process of 'weaving,' the prison learner's experience of learning in prison is synthesised with their previous life experiences and experiences of learning. As Reuss states:

> The student engages in a process of weaving together commonsense knowledge, newly-minted knowledge, memories, life experiences and classroom practices and interactions, all of which have a potentiality about them which, through time, can shape attitudes and ultimately behaviour. (p.118)

Reuss (1999) contends that the processes of learning are impacted by numerous elements such as interactions between students and teachers, the subject of study, expectations, the environment and regime of the prison, and "the experience of criminality and the criminal justice system" (p.118). The outcome of the process of learning, or what Reuss refers to as the "synthesis" of learning experiences with life experiences that forms the essence of the learning

process, has the potential to impact learners in meaningful ways. It is this meaningful aspect of the learning experience that Reuss argues has important significance in policy and practice with respect to the 'change' amongst prisoners facilitated by prison education that may be sought by legislators and practitioners of prison education.

Reuss' (1999) acknowledgement of the dynamicism present in the learning experiences of prison learners is echoed in the narrative produced in Studies One through Three. Although the research sought to identify common concepts or themes that pertained to the respective research questions that guided each study, the true value of these studies lies in the unique experiences of participants and their subjective expressions and evaluations of the potential relationship between wellbeing and prison education. For example, as discussed within the context of Study One, although applicants to PET may have been guided to include certain prospective benefits of engaging with prison education in their application letters, the subjective nature of wellbeing experiences is highlighted by the unique ways in which learners manifested these anticipated benefits within their submissions. Across all three studies, each participant's reflections and understandings of the way in which prison education contributes to wellbeing is grounded in their individual histories and experiences. This understanding is epitomised by Reuss' (1999) contention that "…individual life experiences play a crucial role in validating the learning process for the individual" (p.120). Accordingly, the penal context and events which occur within it (e.g., regime and penal policies, incidents on the wings, full cell searches leading to learning interruptions, visitations from legal teams and loved ones, differing practices amongst education departments and those who work within the prison) must be taken into consideration when interpreting the learning experiences of incarcerated individuals (ibid). As Reuss states, "All these form the prisoners' current biographies which are layered upon their pasts" (ibid, p.119).

The 'reality' of the learning experience (Reuss, 1999) for the prisoner is indeed a complex process, and the evidence from the present study suggests that this 'reality' extends to the subjective nature of the wellbeing experiences of prisoners as it relates to their involvement in

prison education. To say that Reuss' conceptualisation of 'weaving' provided the theoretical foundation that guided the entirety of the research journey would be inappropriate, as it was within the context of Study Three that the relevance of this particular understanding of the process by which 'change' can occur within prison learners became discernible. Reuss explores the relationship between education and 'change' in the prison context but asserts that the notion of 'change' amongst those who have engaged with prison education is contentious in itself. Reuss argues that use of the term 'change' can facilitate unmet expectations amongst those who work in the field of prison education, thereby contributing to the mentality of "nothing works" in prisons (p.115). Through the process of learning and acquisition of new knowledge, Reuss underscores the capacity for education in any context to contribute to personal growth and development and urges that, within the penal context, outcomes of this aspect of the learning process be emphasised rather than an assumption of 'change' in offending behaviour (ibid). More specifically, Reuss' discussion of the *potentiality* that exists in the capacity for processes of personal development to be generated amongst prison learners represents an analogous understanding of the *potential* that exists for prison education to positively impact learners' wellbeing that has surfaced within the present research. The finding that there is a dynamic relationship between wellbeing and prison education represents the culmination of the research journey and alludes to a contextualised understanding of the differential wellbeing impact of prison education on learners, which resonates with Reuss' notion of 'potentiality.' Study Three in particular has drawn attention to the interaction between diverse factors that can converge to influence the varied wellbeing outcomes of learning for prisoners engaged with prison education. Reuss' recommendation that a prison education model of "prisoner empowerment" that emphasises personal development and self-control be embraced finds particular relevance within the context of the present research. Study One demonstrated that autonomy is an important aspect of psychological wellness and an overall component of wellbeing. The context of Study Two, whereby there was a lack of empowerment and capacity for environmental mastery over the learning experience during Covid-19, demonstrates the capacity for a lack of educational autonomy and choice to contribute to negative experiences of wellbeing as articulated by study participants. Finally, Study Three

highlighted the wellbeing benefits of education when learners have some autonomy, choice, or control over their learning experiences, and the contrasting capacity for prison education to impact the wellbeing of prison learners in a negative manner when these elements are lacking.

7.3 The importance of wellbeing and the Study One matrix

The current research underscores the imperfection inherent in the original wellbeing framework, which the researcher is distinctly cognisant of, but equally embraces in the spirit of the complex nature of wellbeing. Grounded in the conceptualisation of wellbeing as a dynamic process that is situated within the subjective experiences of individuals rather than as a static state of being, the present research emphasises that the wellbeing framework developed in Study One remains enduringly incomplete, but welcomingly so. The framework provided a beneficial starting point with which to conceptualise wellbeing and was crucial in demonstrating that the wider benefits of prison education can be understood in this way. Nevertheless, as the research has progressed, it has become necessary to acquiesce to the density and heterogeneity of wellbeing as a concept. For example, within the context of Study Three, the notion of identity was identified as a thematic element underpinning the experiences of participants. The importance of either developing a new identity as "student," or returning to the normality of a student identity that was once valued, participants in Study Three alluded to the important wellbeing implications of shifting notions of identity in the prison education context. This acknowledgement suggests that the wellbeing framework be revisited to consider additional facets of wellbeing, such as that of the relationship between identity and wellbeing.

The concept of wellbeing has been demonstrated to be definitionally obscure. The multifaceted, multidisciplinary, and at times, ambiguous nature of the term serves to complicate a cohesive and complete understanding of precisely what wellbeing entails. The notions of mental health and wellbeing have been conceptualised within the present research as being inherently entwined. Keyes (2006b) has acknowledged the interconnectedness of mental health and wellbeing, noting that mental health is "…a complete state of subjective well-being (i.e.,

hedonic and eudaimonic well-being) as well as the absence of common mental disorders…" (p.7). Study One proposed a framework of wellbeing grounded in the literature and in an initial review of the data set; however, Studies Two and Three raised questions about the suitability of this model for understanding prison learners' experiences of the relationship between wellbeing and education in prison. Nonetheless, the wellbeing framework was an innovative tool and retains its significance in its capacity to be further developed, built upon, and potentially tailored to address a particular wellbeing line of inquiry. Indeed, within the context of prison education, particularly given the findings of Studies Two and Three, it would be interesting to explore how the framework could be developed to incorporate negative conceptualisations of wellbeing, and how prisoners' experiences of education in prison may generate potential setbacks to wellbeing.

The methodology and data analysis of Study One remained firmly rooted in differentiating between various elements of wellbeing and categorising prison learners' articulations of the anticipated benefits of engaging with prison education according to these elements. Establishing and identifying the presence of emotional, social, and psychological dimensions of wellbeing and their associated concepts within the PET application letters was the focal point of the analysis in Study One. The framework was useful in establishing the dynamic and eclectic nature of the concept of wellbeing. However, beyond this understanding and indeed beyond the scope of Study One, the utility of categorising conceptualisations, elements, and determinants of wellbeing was not evident for the purposes of the remaining research. This is not to say that establishing and utilising a framework of wellbeing that does distinguish between various dimensions and associated conceptualisations of wellbeing would not be valuable within the context of further research, particularly as it relates to the impact of prison education or other meaningful prison programming. However, departing from the categorisations established in the wellbeing framework established in Study One, Studies Two and Three suggested that the wellbeing experiences of prison learners cannot or should not necessarily be definitively compartmentalised according to separate wellbeing classifications, as this may serve to detract from a situated understanding of the broader relationship between prison education and

wellbeing for prison learners. Indeed, the importance of establishing a situated understanding of the wellbeing impact of prison education has been predominantly realised within Studies Two and Three. If prison education is to be conceptualised as holistic in nature, as advocated for by Coates (2016), the question becomes whether it is value-added to determine which "type" or "category" of wellbeing is being impacted. The literature on wellbeing has generally acknowledged certain distinguishing elements of physical, emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing, so the argument here is not that the meanings of these different dimensions of wellbeing are necessarily unclear (although it has been established that uses and understandings of the concept of wellbeing in general can become muddled within literature and research). The key observation within the context of the present research is that it may have been counterproductive to adhere to a strict categorical analysis of the impact of prison education on wellbeing. Admittedly, the questions for consideration in the 'Lockdown Learning' article in Study Two were general in nature, and participants were not asked to write to *Inside Time* with the ways in which different dimensions of their wellbeing were being impacted by the removal of education during the Covid-19 lockdowns. The utility of distinguishing between the impact of prison education on various dimensions of wellbeing may thus be realised within the context of future research where the focus is on particular dimensions of wellbeing, and where the distinguishing elements of those dimensions are clearly defined for both the researcher and participants.

7.4 Implications for policy and research

Schuller (2004a) maintains that systematic, empirical testing of the reality of the impact of education on the experiences of individuals and groups remains scarce. Schuller asserts that the assumption is often made that the outcomes of engaging with learning and education are both positive and generally obvious, at the detriment of a more profound exploration of the initial assumption and of the inner workings of educational endeavours that seek to reform curricula, increase educational resources, and engage more people with education in the hopes of rectifying individual and societal maladies by doing so. As Schuller puts it, what is seldom

explored is "…what actually happens as a result of all these educational efforts, and how?" (2004a, p.5). The effects of learning have been acknowledged as difficult to assess in comparison to "estimating and analysing" participation in education (ibid, p.5). Schuller states, "The number of students is the most obvious single indicator of educational growth, so progress is most easily presented in terms of student enrolments, regardless of the quality of the student experience or what actually happens to the student as a result" (ibid). The mentality alluded to by Schuller is echoed within policy discourse on prison education. Prison education funding arrangements that are outcome-based can exclude learners needing the most assistance academically, discourage 'low ability' learners from engaging with education, and divert attention from the wider benefits of engaging with education in prison (Rogers et al., 2014, p.35-36). Champion (2013) argues that the 'payment by results' model risks perverting the outcomes of education and reducing the culture to one of "bums in seats" or a "tick-box" mentality (p.17). Reuss (1999) addresses the tendency for rates of recidivism to be used as measures of "success" with respect to education initiatives in prison, rather than the lived experiences of prison educators and learners who can speak to the reality of learning and teaching in prison. Behan (2014) includes the notion of rehabilitation in his assertion that measures of success of prison education programming that focus on rates of recidivism and rehabilitation can "corrode the integrity" of prison education programming (p.28). Pedagogical principles should be at the forefront of prison education according to Behan, and as such, if prison education is to embody transformative ideologies, it should aim to distance itself from "authoritarian rehabilitative agendas" and fluctuating penal policies and ideologies that may be at odds with the principles of education (ibid).

Czerniawski (2016) asserts that prison education policy in England and Wales is marred by numerous challenges which position the practice of prison education at odds with international European guidelines that stress the universality of the 'right' to education. Within the context of OLASS Phase 4 specifically, Czerniawski notes that the funding-by-results model appeared to "disincentivise" aspirations towards higher-level learning and longer-term educational pathways for prison learners (p.204). Commenting on the provision of education which, since 1993, has

been structured around competitive tendering for contracts, Czerniawski asserts that the reductionist approach to education in England and Wales has progressively emphasised "short, low-level courses," contributing to a disparity between United Nations (UN) policy that advocates for prisoner access to an eclectic range of informal and formal education in prison that develops the prisoner holistically, and the realisation of this aim in the capacity for prisoners to access this wider form of education (p.205). In a similar vein to Reuss' (1999) acknowledgment of the focus of prison education policy requiring a shift from 'what works' for the prison to that of the prisoner, Czerniawski (2016) states, "Policy, in the case of prison education, is not driven by what works and is not evidenced-based" (p.208). The testaments of participants in Study Three indicate that this discourse prevails. The inflexible and narrowly-structured provision of prison education was a key feature of the interviews in Study Three. Prison educator Beatrice, for example, bemoaned the rigidity of the new Prison Education Framework (PEF) funding arrangements, whilst prison educator Kelly expressed her perception of the additional target-driven pressures prison educators are under when an education programme is offered by one of the four core education providers.

The PEF arrangements covering core education provision in prison came into effect in April 2019. The Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) was implemented alongside the PEF with the aim of facilitating a more bespoke system of education delivery in prisons whereby governors could select contracts from a wider number of smaller education providers and charities who provided more customised offerings. However, although the new system of education provision in prisons was meant to provide prison governors with increased autonomy and flexibility over the provision of education, this objective has seemingly not yet been realised. Several contributors to the House of Commons Education Committee's (2022) report identified challenges in the PEF and DPS delivery system. For example, the "commercial and transactional" nature of the framework that does not allow for curriculum innovation, inflexibility and lack of personalisation in education delivery and provision, contract management inexperience amongst time-strained governors, and a lack of education delivery through local providers were cited as areas that fell short of the envisioned delivery of education through the

implementation of the PEF. With respect to the DPS, a complex bidding process for short-term contracts (which created difficulties for smaller organisations), and a contractual relationship that was once a partnership between the prison and voluntary sector were alluded to as challenges by contributors to the report. Sanders (2020), acknowledging the lack of increase in prison education funding since 2013, laments the apparent reduction in resources brought about by the Prison Education Framework (PEF) arrangements. Coates, giving evidence to the House of Commons Education Committee (2022) in their inquiry into the state of prison education, notes how the awarding of the PEF contracts in groups to the same four providers who had been responsible for the delivery of prison education during the OLASS phases did not align with her vision for prison education as set out in her review of education in prison, whereby individual governors would be able to exercise choice and autonomy in their selection of providers.

Reuss' (1999) empowerment model of prison education that urges emphasis on the personal value of education and 'what works' for the prisoner as opposed to the prison seems to resonate with the 'bespoke' discourse propagated by the new funding arrangements. However, in practice, early concerns seem to pertain to the capacity for a more tailored approach to be realised through the PEF and DPS arrangements. Despite the early challenges in the new prison education funding arrangements, the studies comprising this thesis have demonstrated the potential for a positive relationship between prison education and wellbeing to be facilitated when education provision is flexible and delivered by committed educators, developed around learners' subjective experiences in the context of a supportive learning culture, designed to meet the unique needs of prisoners as individuals, and where an element of choice is given to learners over their educational progression. Coates' (2016, p.34) observation that participation in learning that "interests and absorbs" prison learners can promote the wellbeing of learners and the wellbeing of those in the broader prison community supports the more general contention of Hammond (2004b) that wider benefits of learning are produced when learning "…meets the interests, strengths and needs of the learner," which are grounded in the learner's social context (p.63). The capacity for learning to meet the interests, strengths, and needs of a

learner is likewise contextual, dependent upon "the nature of provision in terms of content, level, pedagogy, student mix and setting" (ibid). Hammond's compelling argument for the dynamic and contextual nature of the outcomes of learning have been realised within the parameters of the three research studies that comprise this thesis. Thus, the relevance of present research represents a crucial juncture within the context of prison education policy. The House of Commons Education Committee 2022 report, *Not just another brick in the wall: why prisoners need an education to climb the ladder of opportunity* acknowledges the benefits to mental health and self-confidence that can be facilitated through engagement in prison education, stressing the importance for prison education policy to be developed according to the intrinsic value of education itself and its capacity to develop the prisoner as a whole. However, the notion that prison education should emphasise its value beyond its contribution to employability post-release and thus be developed according to the wider benefits it instils is not new. More broadly, there has been evidence of the importance of "student-centred learning" outside the context of prison (Hammond, 2004b, p.78). The present research does not seek to be repetitive in this claim with respect to policy relevance, as scholarship on prison education has widely touted the need for prison education policy to be developed with the broader benefits of learning in mind. The contribution of the present research to policy significance lies in its capacity to add another dimension to this conversation. Seven years' on from Coates' (2016) review of education where the significance of a personalised, individual approach to learning opportunities in prison was highlighted, the present research demonstrates that a holistic approach to education must consider the ways in which the wellbeing of prison learners can be impacted in both positive and negative ways by participation in prison education. Given Reuss' (1999) contention that research situated within the context of the prison classroom is lacking, and Pawson's (2000) assertion that there has been a deficit in prison research that provides demonstrable evidence of the rehabilitative effectiveness of prison education, the need for further research that provides evidence of the diverse ways in which prison education can be effective and strengthens the conversation around 'what works' is urgently needed.

The sustaining and transforming effects of education should be an important consideration within the context of prison education policy and programming. In their research exploring the wider impacts of learning, Schuller, Preston et al. (2004) use a matrix-style analysis to classify the effects of learning on a continuum according to the extent that learning impacts the individual as compared to the broader community, but also according to the extent that it promotes either change or stability in the lives of learners. The latter distinction is of import in the authors' research as Schuller (2004b, p.25) notes that emphasising the "conservation effect" of learning sheds lights on the capacity of education to prevent "decay or collapse (at individual or community level) or consolidate a positive state of stability." When this conceptualisation of the wider effects of learning is used to explore the relationship between prison education and wellbeing, it adds to the dialogue on the ways in which prison education can contribute to a differential wellbeing impact for learners. Evidence suggests that learning that meets the interests, strengths, and needs of the learner augments the health outcomes of learning (Hammond, 2004b), and so what should also be considered is the way in which learning in the prison context serves to sustain or transform the wellbeing of prison learners. As previously discussed, the research of Schuller et al. (2002) has applied the sustaining-transformative continuum to the understanding of the mental health benefits of education, asserting that education can both protect against mental health difficulties developing or progressing and aid in the recovery from adverse mental health conditions on the path towards achieving positive psychological health. If the wellbeing benefits of prison education were to be understood as a continuum that ranges from sustaining to transformative at the levels of both the individual and the community, further insight into the complex relationship between wellbeing and prison education could be obtained. For example, this understanding supports prison educator Kelly's view (Study Three) that not all prison learners experience an elaborate transformation from engaging with prison education, suggesting that the sustaining effect of learning can potentially have important implications within the context of the relationship between prison education and wellbeing. Underscoring the significance of interpreting the sustaining and transforming impacts of education from a wider, contextual perspective that considers the life course of an individual and the phase in life at which learning is experienced, Hammond (2004b) utilises a

dichotomous understanding of periods of continuity and discontinuity in the life course to demonstrate when the impacts of learning might be sustaining and when they might be transformative. It is Hammond's contention that during periods of "relative" continuity, learning is more inclined to have a sustaining effect, whereas during periods of "relative" discontinuity, the effect is a more transformative one (p.79). Evidence suggests that the wider impacts of learning are especially visible during periods of change in an individual's life course, whereas during periods that are characterised by more stability, the less-perceptible (but still valuable) sustaining impacts of learning are more prevalent (Hammond, 2004b). Hammond notes, "During periods of chronic stress or adversity these effects are protective, and during periods of more positive stability they are enriching" (ibid). It is this less-visible sustaining impact of learning that Schuller (2004b) contends is typically camouflaged, despite its significance. Schuller asserts that it is the diminished visibility alongside the "taken-for-grantedness" of learning that accounts for the obscurity of the sustaining effect (ibid). However, Schuller urges that the sustaining effects of learning should not be pushed to the background in favour of the more visible and "more dramatic" transformative effects of learning:

> The key conclusion…is that the sustaining effects of learning are very powerful and should not be allowed to be overshadowed by more dramatic instances of transformation. The latter are impressive and welcome (event though transformation at any level may be accompanied by significant costs to others), not least because they can provide positive and empowering models for others…However, the visibility and profile of such examples (whether for researchers or the media) can push to the margins the persistent unspectacular role of learning in enabling people to cope better with daily challenges and turn these challenges to good effect. (2004b, pp.32-33)

The sustaining capacity of education, particularly with respect to wellbeing, becomes especially consequential within the context of Study Two whereby learners were, for the most part, devoid of meaningful learning opportunities and the ability to use these types of opportunities to cope during the Covid-19 lockdowns. Studies One through Three corroborate research that demonstrates that engaging with education in prison is a valuable coping strategy employed by prison learners (see for example Hughes, 2012; MacGuinness, 2000; Nichols, 2021). However, in its unique contribution to scholarship on the impact of prison education, the present research

has also subsequently demonstrated how resilience and the capacity to cope with adversity are elements of wellbeing. As noted, effective coping with adverse circumstances has been identified by the research of Schuller, Preston et al. (2004) as an important health-related outcome of learning. Schuller (2004b) clarifies that the significance of the sustaining impact of education is not that it acts to "shield" people from experiences, but rather it enables people to purposefully *manage* (emphasis added) experiences and, through instilling a sense of purpose amongst individuals, "converts experiences into something more positive than they would otherwise have been" (p.30). It is important to consider and learn from the potential sustaining or protective impact on wellbeing that engaging in education during the turbulent Covid-19 lockdown periods could have had on learners. It seems that Hammond's (2004b) contention that learning during periods of enduring stress or hardship can have protective effects is particularly pertinent within the context of the austere environment of prisons more generally, but also within the educationally-deprived context of Covid-19 in prisons. Study Two demonstrated the lack of communication and preparedness that characterised the educational milieu in prisons during the pandemic, with prison learners lamenting the deficiency in educational support and guidance that was available during this time. Important questions are thus raised about how the relationship between wellbeing and the sustaining impacts of education can be better understood, and further yet, how education can be better used in prisons during future periods of uncertainty and turbulence. Further research could also explore a situated understanding of the wellbeing impacts of prison education utilising the continuum on the wider benefits of learning established by Schuller, Preston et al. (2004). It could be beneficial to gain insight into the capacity of prison education to either sustain or transform the wellbeing of prison learners, and to explore the differing contexts in which these impacts might occur.

The initial aim to focus the research on the wellbeing impact of higher education in prison now seems a distant aspiration. Although future research could aim to explore the potential for different levels of learning within prison to impact upon the wellbeing of prison learners in varying capacities, the present research has broadened the researcher's perspective and

understanding with respect to the relationship between wellbeing and prison education on a more general level. It is suggested here that a strategic avenue for future research on the relationship between wellbeing and prison education is to continue the exploration of the potential for prison education to have both positive and negative wellbeing impacts for prison learners. It would be equally worthwhile for this avenue to explore the ways in which prison educators' personal and pedagogical attitudes, behaviours, and practices can impact upon the wellbeing of their students. Professional development opportunities that underscore the promotion of wellbeing within the context of prison education could provide an additional avenue for prison educators to gain insight into the complexity of wellbeing for prison learners, and to situate their educational approach within a framework of wellbeing (insofar as that is possible within the context of a prison).

Study Two provided a worthwhile indication of some of the ways in which prison learners' wellbeing was impacted by their inability to engage with prison education during the pandemic lockdown(s). Thus, within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic specifically, the utility of follow-up research on the residual impact of the removal of education in prisons during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic would be invaluable. On a more general level, it would be beneficial for future research to continue to explore the dimension of the relationship between prison education and wellbeing that alludes to the possibility of a negative wellbeing impact. Studies Two and Three call attention to the significance of continuity of care within the context of prison education. Participants in Study Three directly alluded to their perceptions of the potentiality for adverse wellbeing outcomes to occur when an educational experience within prison is not properly or safely unpacked, or when prison learners are unable to continue their educational pursuits 'through the gate.' The analysis of the letters written to *Inside Time* in Study Two also exposed the potential for negative wellbeing impacts when a deficiency of care was present in the wake of a lack of access to education classes during Covid-19. In their contribution to the WHO's report *Prisons and Health,* Durcan and Zwemstra (2014) acknowledge the mental health significance of continuity of care within the prison setting, stating "Continuity of care is important for a prisoner, including the continuation of treatment that he/she was receiving

prior to incarceration and the handing over of care to a community-based provider on release" (p.87).

Indeed, the notion of 'continuity of care' (or lack thereof) in the prison education context represents a vacancy in the scholarship on the impact of prison education. A significant opportunity thus exists for future research to explore the relationship between wellbeing and the presence or lack of educational 'continuity of care' both in prison and 'through the gate.' Within the context of Study Three, certain participants spoke of their frustration at the lack of education-based support that exists once incarcerated learners leave prison. It is thus arguable that the challenges of continuing to engage with education post-release that can surface for prisoners in the community can have important wellbeing and desistance implications. The findings of the present research corroborate Nichols' (2021) contention that "…release from prison introduces a new set of challenges essential to the desistance narrative" (p.122). It is suggested here that these challenges may include setbacks to the wellbeing of prison learners post-release due to the inability to access or engage with educational pursuits that facilitated positive wellbeing experiences during incarceration. Consequently, the relationship between desistance, wellbeing, and prison education would indeed be a beneficial one to explore in future research.

Whilst the process of desistance was not at the heart of this thesis, it remains important to consider the ways that the present research contributes to the broader conversation on the process by which people decide to cease offending behaviour. Although desistance is a key issue within discourse on prison education, Nichols (2021) questions the capacity for prison to actually "create opportunities for successful desistance from crime" (p.106). Nevertheless, as Nichols notes, participation in education in prison has emerged as a potential contributor to the process of desistance. The role that prison education can play in this process has been a topic of criminological interest and investigation (see for example, Behan, 2014; Champion & Noble, 2016; Meek et al., 2012; Nichols, 2021; Szifris et al., 2018). Nichols (2021) underscores the capacity for the experience of prison education to impact upon desistance as a conduit of

change, but notes that education does not operate in isolation in the desistance process as numerous factors can converge to impact an individual's decision to cease offending behaviour. Reuss (1999) likewise underscores the complexity in the desistance process, noting that the relationship between prison education and 'change' in offending behaviour is not typically straightforward and is not reducible to a mentality of "Teach an offender this or that and s/he will not reoffend" (p.123). Warr (2016) argues that in order for prison education to achieve its transformative potential and truly serve the interests of the prisoner, prison, and public, it must do the following: challenge prison learners and prioritise critical thinking over "meaningless" basic qualifications; embrace and be designed around the notion of "learning for learning's sake"; be directed towards the individual needs of prison learners; be designed around personal, cognitive, emotional, and educational development rather than enrolment numbers; distance itself from the punitive objectives of the prison and take place in educational environments characterised by care rather than control; and consider the benefits of informal learning processes (p.25). The present research has sought to contribute to this narrative by demonstrating that the capacity for engagement with prison education to positively impact the wellbeing of prison learners is dependent upon a contextual understanding of the prison education experience (e.g., flexibility in provision, a tailored approach, value-added education, educational autonomy and choice, education that interests and challenges learners, supportive and engaged staff both within the education department and the wider prison), as well as various elements of the pre-and-post-carceral education experience. The studies that comprise this thesis have also sought to contribute an additional element to the understanding of the nuanced relationship between prison education and desistance, arguing that not only is desistance an important element of wellbeing, but that desistance scholarship should seek to include prison learners' subjective understandings of how their experiences of wellbeing and education in prison contribute to their desistance journey.

7.5 Limitations of the research

The limitations of the research have been addressed within each study. Each study has been undertaken within a specific and unique context; thus, the limitations to the generalisability and representativeness of the research, both within the respective studies and as a whole, have been acknowledged. It has been recognised that the influence and intersections of age, gender, ethnicity, and class on the wellbeing experiences of prison education were not explored within the context of the research, but that these specific experiences and the potential differences between them represent valuable opportunities for future research. As Reuss (2000) shrewdly notes, "…any studies which are conducted on education in prisons provide only a 'snapshot' of one part of the experience of imprisonment for *some* prisoners *some* of the time" [emphasis in original] (p.26).

The sample of prison learners who had applied to PET in Study One was limited to male prisoners who were over the age of 18. It is thus acknowledged here that a research opportunity exists for the exploration of adult female prison learners' perceptions of the prospective wellbeing benefits of prison education. The potential exists for the ways in which female prison learners express their experiences of prison education and wellbeing to differ from that of male learners. Additionally, the regime-related differences (e.g., provision of different types of education courses) and distinct needs of imprisoned women as compared to men may be correlated with differences in the wellbeing experiences for women who engage with prison education. It is further recognised that the data obtained from the small sample sizes of Studies Two and Three are representative of only the experiences of the individual participants. The potential exists for a wide range of diverse experiences of wellbeing and prison education that could not be explored as a result of the limited sample sizes within these studies. Additionally, with additional consideration of possible sampling bias, it may be the case that the participants within Studies Two and Three were those who were most motivated to discuss their experiences of the relationship between prison education and wellbeing. For example, those individuals who were most critical, or alternatively, most complimentary in their opinions

of the wellbeing impact of prison education, may have been the most inclined to offer their participation. However, the limitations to the generalisability and representativeness of the research do not minimise the significance of the research in underscoring the wellbeing experiences of prison learners. Exploring the individual experiences of the participants in these studies adds value to the argument that wellbeing is a subjective phenomenon that is experienced by different people in different ways.

Although certain commonalities in wellbeing themes have been identified in participants' experiences throughout the research journey, to say that there should be a universal experience of wellbeing amongst prison learners is to ignore the diverse journeys of these individuals, and devalues learners' identities as persons with unique histories, memories, and experiences. To say that the wellbeing impact of prison education on any one participant that has taken part in the present research is not necessarily indicative of the experience of any one other person who has engaged with prison education is true. However, rather than this being acknowledged as a critical shortcoming of the research, it is recognised that this limitation ultimately serves to strengthen the conversation on the need for prison education to be developed according to the needs of individual prisoners based on their distinct experiences. As Studies One and Two used secondary data to conduct analyses on letters written to PET and *Inside Time* respectively, these studies are limited in their capacity to obtain follow-up data on the perspectives of prison learners who were writing to these organisations. With respect to possible avenues for future research, post-participation perceptions of the wellbeing impact of accessing education in prison could illuminate variances in the expected and realised wellbeing benefits of prison education. With respect to Study One that was conducted in collaboration with PET, it would be potentially noteworthy to explore the wellbeing experiences of those applicants who have been denied funding from PET. Given that the research journey has shed light on the capacity for prison education experiences to have a potential negative wellbeing impact on learners, it could be beneficial to utilise this data to inform an understanding of PET applicants' experiences of being denied access to education via funding barriers.

Lastly, a word of caution must also be imparted here with respect to acknowledging the complexity of the relationship between education and wellbeing. The problematic nature of attempting to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between education and various outcomes has been recognised by Behrman, Crawford, and Stacey (1997) in the context of research on the social benefits of education. These authors note that, "Ascertaining the causal impact of education, as opposed to associations of education with various outcomes, is extremely difficult because education is a process in which there are many inputs, some of which reflect choices of individuals, families, and communities" (p.3). Schuller (2004b), acknowledging Behrman et al.'s (1997) position on the difficulties in analysing the causal effects of education, likewise notes that the association between education and various facets of life may be readily demonstrable, but the causal relationships of these associations are likely to be non-linear and difficult to discern. Field (2009a) similarly advises caution in interpreting the relationship between wellbeing and education as one of causation, noting that "While there are some grounds for believing that it is participation in learning that causes improvements in well-being for some people, the possibility remains that unobserved factors might explain both findings" (p.187). It is thus acknowledged here that the relationship between wellbeing and prison education is not one of causality; that is to say, the claim is not being made that engaging with prison education directly causes a positive or negative impact on the wellbeing of prison learners. However, what is being recognised, and what the present research supports, is that the provision of education in prison has the *capacity* to contribute to outcomes associated with wellbeing.

7.6 Concluding reflection

The thesis makes valuable contributions to the intersection of the fields of prison education and wellbeing, a domain that arguably has not received prominent attention from the academic community. Indeed, it would not be possible to underscore the value in the present research on wellbeing without situating it within the context of prison education. The primary research focus on prison education indeed provides the necessary grounding for the associative focus of

wellbeing to gain and maintain significance. Given that research indicates that the prevalence of mental health difficulties that exist amongst prisoners significantly exceeds that within the general community (Durcan & Zwemstra, 2014, Mills & Kendall, 2016), activities within prison that promote the wellbeing of prisoners such as consistent work, exercise, and education can be extremely valuable in improving the lives of incarcerated individuals. Facilitating improved mental health and wellbeing of people in prison is a substantial hurdle to overcome that requires a deeper understanding of the histories and experiences of the imprisoned population. Studies One through Three have highlighted the value that prison learners and educators attach to prison education, and their interpretations of how the relationship between prison education and wellbeing is manifest within their own experiences. From a theoretical perspective, the research has established a framework of wellbeing that situates the many concepts associated with wellbeing within a more concise understanding. As Nichols (2021) has acknowledged, "While the primary aim of education in prison has been to increase employability skills to prevent reoffending, further attention needs to be given to the broader outcomes of educational experiences and the importance of the development of other personal attributes, including self-confidence, empowerment and the ability to engage in positive relationships" (p.ii). The wellbeing framework has sought to situate such personal attributes within an understanding that these attributes are components of wellbeing. The concept of wellbeing is indeed central to the consideration of the impact and implications of the present research.

Reuss' (1999) empowerment model of education in prisons underscores that determining the value of education requires an acknowledgement that 'what works' will not be the same for every prison learner, and that the process of change is dynamic and varied amongst individuals. Reuss and Wilson (2000) highlight that the notion of 'change' amongst prison learners can be a contentious concept, as "'what changes' is all too often linked to issues of what should constitute a correctional programme of education that will stop offending behaviour" (p.177). Reuss (1999) maintains that if 'change' facilitated by engagement with prison education is to be sought by policy makers, the emphasis needs to turn from 'what works' for the prison (which Reuss underscores is preoccupied with the objectives of deterrence, rehabilitation, punishment,

and security), to 'what works' for the individual prison learner. As Reuss (1999) aptly notes, "Education in prisons needs to be thought of in terms of the personal value of learning" (p.125). What the present research has sought to underscore is that the 'personal value of learning' is implicated in notions of wellbeing.

The importance of wellbeing as a lens through which the impact of prison education can be interpreted has been established within all three studies. Study One was primarily concerned with establishing and testing the conceptual wellbeing framework in a preliminary study on the prospective wellbeing benefits of participating in prison education. The goal of utilising this framework in subsequent studies within the context of the thesis could not be realised in its entirety, with circumstances necessitating adaptive measures to the structure and focus of the thesis. However, notwithstanding the revisions that were required to the thesis and the researcher's need to be methodologically flexible and innovative, the three studies remain interconnected by their situated focus on the wellbeing impact of prison education. Whilst Study One focused solely on prospective *benefits* (emphasis added) of accessing education in prison (specifically further and higher education), the exploration of the impacts to wellbeing that were realised by prison learners during the removal of education during the Covid-19 lockdown Study Two paved the way for Study Three to acquire a deeper understanding of the potential adverse wellbeing impacts to prison learners when the provision of prison education is removed, inflexible or not appropriate for the individual learner, or not carefully managed in the post-programme phase. As Field (2009a, p.176) notes, "…participation in learning also has a downside, and there is some evidence that for some people, in some circumstances, learning can be associated with stress and anxiety, and erode factors that have helped people maintain good mental health." In referring to a 'golden-thread' that weaves its way through the three studies that comprise this thesis, it is important to pay heed to the notion of capital and the way in which education in prison can contribute to the development of capital in prison learners, and subsequently the potential negative and positive wellbeing impact this generated capital influences. The policy and research implications of a more profound understanding of the wellbeing impact of engagement with prison education lie within the recognition that prison

education must be fit-for-purpose and delivered to learners with a holistic understanding of their individual needs and past life and educational experiences. Crucially, a wider recognition that the distinct context in which prison education is delivered can impact the educational experiences of prison learners from a wellbeing perspective can only serve to contribute to the conversation that urges for a more expansive understanding of the benefits of prison education.

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Appendices

Appendix A: PET guidance letter

Prisoners' Education Trust

Guidelines for the PET application covering letter

The covering letter provides an opportunity for you to tell us something about yourself and why you want to be funded for the course. We have limited funds and we are not able to award funding to everyone who applies so we need this information in order to decide whether or not to support you.

We normally ask for at least 200-300 words including details of the following:

- Why you want to study the requested course. Tell us about your interest. What do you know about this subject? What do you hope to achieve?

- Please tell us how you decided on this particular course - it is possible that we can suggest an alternative course to you that is more appropriate.

- What are your plans for the future? This course may help you with your career plans or it might just be for your own personal development. You might have a short-term goal and also a long-term goal. This course may just be the first step in a long journey.

- It is often useful if you can tell us something about your past, for example about any work, or studies, or other relevant experiences. We do not ask for information about your conviction, but you can tell us if you feel that it is relevant to the application.

- If you are applying for an Open University Access/Openings course, you will need to show that you have the motivation to go on to study towards a degree, and also express your willingness to take on a student loan to pay for your tuition fees.

June 2013

Appendix B: Study One coding strategy and operationalisation of 'wellbeing'

In order to conduct the proposed research study, it was necessary to provide a clear definition of what does or does not constitute mental health and wellbeing, as well as a coding strategy. Operationalising the mental health and wellbeing variable was important in determining the extent to which themes pertaining to this variable exist within the prisoner PET application letters, and subsequently extracting the relevant data.

In the second edition of his book *Basic Content Analysis,* Weber (1990) indicates that one of the key tenets of content analysis is the classification of an abundance of textual content into smaller content groupings. Weber states, "Each category may consist of one, several, or many words. Words, phrases, or other units of text classified in the same category are presumed to have similar meanings" (p.12). In this study, the coding strategy will involve using a relatively small number of content categories that will each encompass a variety of broader terms/words related to wellbeing. In order to create these categories, it is important to gain a comprehensive understanding of the multitude of definition(s) and determinants of wellbeing.

As outlined in Chapter Two, the World Health Organization (WHO) conceptualises mental health as a state of wellbeing wherein an individual recognises their capabilities, can cope with ordinary life stressors, is capable of productive working, and can contribute to their community. (WHO, 2021). The WHO's (2013) definition of mental wellbeing in their report *Promotion of mental well-being: pursuit of happiness* underscores the contextual and cultural variance in definitions of the term:

> No single interpretation can be considered superior to another when talking of 'mental well-being'. Therefore, the concept is interpreted in the sociocultural context of individuals, families and communities. Further, for all practical purposes, it should be considered as a continuum or spectrum, rather than a state, which is either present or absent. (p.8)

It has been established in Chapter Two that the conceptualisation of wellbeing throughout the course of this thesis aligns with Regan et al.'s (2016) definition of mental wellbeing as the positive end of mental health spectrum that sits outside clinical understandings. In emphasising the subjective nature of the concept, the WHO (2013) acknowledges the lack of agreement in accepted definitions of mental wellbeing in the literature. Dodge et al. (2012) likewise assert that wellbeing is a complex term that researchers have faced challenges in defining. Dodge et al. (2012) have indeed criticised the tendency of wellbeing scholarship to focus on dimensions of wellbeing rather than on definitions of the term, which has led the authors to suggest a unique definition of wellbeing that recognises it as "…the balance point between an individual's resource pool and the challenges faced" (p.230). Although Dodge et al.'s proposed definition of wellbeing may arguably have particular relevance within the context of prisons where there is conceivably a stark imbalance between the challenges individuals encounter and the resources at their disposal to face those challenges, the aim of this research, and indeed, overall thesis, is not to attempt to theorise a universal definition of wellbeing. Rather, a core objective within this exploratory study is to establish a conceptual framework that incorporates the many facets and determinants of wellbeing in order to investigate whether the impact of prison education can be understood from a wellbeing perspective. This is not to say that the work of Dodge et al. may not provide a valuable theoretical understanding of wellbeing that can inform future research with prisoners, particularly as it relates to the balance (or imbalance) of resources and challenges for prisoners and how this can impact their wellbeing in prison.

Operationalisation matrices

At the outset of this study, after a brief review of the literature which recognises the complex and definitionally diverse nature of wellbeing (see for example, Dodge et al., 2012; The Faculty of Public Health, 2019; Forgeard et al., 2011; Michaelson et al., 2009), an initial iteration of an operationalisation matrix was created using the following four broad dimensions of wellbeing: physical wellbeing, emotional wellbeing, social wellbeing, and psychological wellbeing (see Table 2.0). Utilising Keyes' (2005a) contention that mental health is state whereby individuals

experience elevated levels of emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing, the decision was made to include these dimensions of wellbeing in the initial iteration of the matrix. This decision was also influenced by the nature of the research that was being undertaken, in that the prison environment presents significant challenges to the physical, emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing of prisoners (de Viggiani, 2007; Douglas, Plugge, & Fitzpatrick, 2009; Durcan & Zwemstra, 2014; Ireland & Qualter, 2008; Lindquist, 2000; Nurse, Woodcock, & Ormsby, 2003; Todts, 2014). It is important to recognise that these dimensions of wellbeing are not exhaustive and can include several additional categories that pertain to diverse areas of an individual's life, such as the spiritual and economic domains (CDC, 2018; Larson, 1996; OECD, 2013). As Keyes and Waterman (2003) highlight, "Multiple influences determine well-being and mental health. They include education, employment, social relationships, leisure and volunteer activities, religion, and personality traits" (p.493). It is essential to the integrity of the present research to emphasise that the researcher is cognisant that the dimensions of mental health and wellbeing below are necessarily distinct concepts, despite their association with one another and with the broader notion of mental health and wellbeing.

Table 2.0 First iteration of operationalisation matrix

Mental Health and Wellbeing			
Physical Wellbeing	Emotional Wellbeing	Psychological Wellbeing	Social Wellbeing

Subsequent to the initial iteration, it was determined that a more sophisticated analysis was likely to be required for the purposes of this study due to the varied and subjective ways in which learners were expected to express themselves within the PET application letters. Thus, after a secondary review of the literature, conducted in order to gain a better understanding of how mental health and wellbeing are conceptualised, a comprehensive list was created of the many terms and concepts deemed to be associated with positive mental health and wellbeing, and therefore indicative of characteristics, elements, or determinants of wellbeing (see Table 2.1 and Figure 4.0 within this appendix). It has been acknowledged in Chapter Two that the concept of subjective well-being and its measurement that is dominant within psychology

scholarship is not the focus of the research at hand. As such, there may be certain characteristics that research indicates influence subjective well-being, such as demographic factors and personality traits (e.g., neuroticism, extroversion, introversion) (see for example, Emmons & Diener, 1985), that are not covered in the list below. Likewise, the six-dimensional model of psychological wellbeing developed by Ryff (1989) is not the crux of the present research on the potential wellbeing benefits of prison education. Although some of the facets identified in the list below are associated with subjective well-being and psychological wellbeing, the aim is to establish a more holistic and inclusive conceptualisation of wellbeing in order to determine the potential relationship between wellbeing and prison education. Given this understanding, it is conceivable that there is research on specific domains and conceptualisations of wellbeing that will not be addressed below. The scope of the research is such that identifying all facets associated with all dimensions of wellbeing would not be feasible. Accordingly, the list below is the researcher's attempt at developing a broad approach to the understanding of wellbeing, insofar as it is possible. Nevertheless, in acknowledging this wider approach, the space is created for future, more specialised research to examine the impact of prison education on specific elements or dimensions of wellbeing.

A key component in the multifaceted understanding of wellbeing as set-out below is derived from the Government Office for Science's (2008) report *Mental Capital and Wellbeing: Making the most of ourselves in the 21st century*. Recognising the variance in an individual's mental wellbeing throughout life as a result of both positive and adverse experiences, mental wellbeing is conceptualised in this report as a dynamic process rather than a static "construct" (p.62). Within this dynamic process, external circumstances (i.e., spheres of an individual's life, for example, family, home, health, work), and psychological resources (i.e., factors related to an individual's "general approach to life" for example resilience, optimism, self-esteem) function to "either support or detract from the fulfilment of needs, and can thus lead to good functioning. In turn, good functioning and fulfilment of needs lead to positive feelings and thus to a further increase in psychological resources" (ibid). Importantly, it is not suggested here that any single concept identified below is necessarily synonymous with positive wellbeing; that is, it is not to

say that an individual who is experiencing happiness, or alternatively who is experiencing economic prosperity (for example), is tantamount to positive mental wellbeing in that individual. The researcher is likewise not claiming a causal relationship between any of the concepts in Table 2.1 and wellbeing, nor is she intimating that any individual concept in Table 2.1 is associated with wellbeing in isolation. Rather, in underscoring the dynamic relationship between mental health, wellbeing, and the concepts identified below, the researcher seeks to contribute to a comprehensive conceptualisation of wellbeing situated within the understanding that the wellbeing of any individual is complex, multifaceted, subjective, and changes over time. The researcher is correspondingly aware that this list is not exhaustive as the concept of wellbeing, as it has been demonstrated, is widely interpreted. With this understanding, the review of the literature eventually reached a sufficient level of saturation whereby associative conceptualisations, determinants, and components of wellbeing began to surface repetitively. Table 2.1 below provides an itemised overview of the many concepts associated with wellbeing and the scholarly foundations of these concepts, and Figure 4.0 provides a visual overview.

Table 2.1 Associative conceptualisations, determinants, & elements of wellbeing

Concepts Associated with Wellbeing	*Select Literature*
Coping; resilience	Jenkins et al., 2008; Lahtinen, Lehtinen, Riikonen, & Ahonen, 1999; Lavikainen, Lahtinen, & Lehtinen, 2000; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2022; Regan, et al., 2016; Stephens, Dulberg, & Joubert, 1999; WHO, 2021
Working productively/productivity	CDC, 2018; WHO, 2021
Self-esteem	Jahoda, 1958; Jenkins et al., 2008; Lahtinen et al., 1999; Lavikainen et al., 2000; Stephens et al., 1999
Self-confidence	Jahoda, 1958; The Faculty of Public Health, 2019
Goals; aspirations	Diener et al., 1999; Emmons, 1986; Government Office for Science, 2008; Ryff, 1989; Warr, 1990
Realising/recognising abilities/potential; self-actualisation; self-efficacy	Deci & Ryan, 2008; Government Office for Science, 2008; Jahoda, 1958; Ryff, 1989; WHO, 2021
Contribution to community/society; pro-social behaviour	Government Office for Science, 2008; Marks & Shah, 2004; WHO, 2022b
Sense of calmness/peacefulness/peace of mind	Diener et al., 2003; Keyes, 2007; The Faculty of Public Health, 2019

Contentment	Diener et al., 1999; Government Office for Science, 2008; The Faculty of Public Health, 2019, WHO, 2013
Economic prosperity	WHO, 2013
Physical health; absence of disease	Edmunds, Biggs, & Goldie, 2013; Herrman, Saxena, Moodie, & Walker, 2005; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2022; Regan et al., 2016; WHO, 2013)
Meaningful activity/keeping purposefully occupied	Department of Health, 2011; Harflett, Jennings & Linsky, 2017
Housing	CDC, 2018; Guite, Clark, & Ackrill, 2006; Holding, Blank, Crowder, Ferrari, & Goyder, 2020
Positive relations with others	Government Office for Science, 2008; Jenkins et al., 2008; Keyes, 2007; Lavikainen et al., 2000; Regan et al., 2016; Ryff, 1989; The Faculty of Public Health, 2019
Feeling good	Keyes, 2012; The Faculty of Public Health, 2019
Forward thinking/future-oriented	MacLeod & Conway, 2007; MacLeod, 2017
Agency/having control over one's life	Friedli, 2009; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2022; The Faculty of Public Health, 2019
Sense of purpose	Keyes, 2012; Ryff, 1989; The Faculty of Public Health, 2019
Positive affect (positive emotions)	Government Office for Science, 2008; Keyes, 2002a, 2012
Contribution to self; personal growth and development	Jahoda, 1958; Keyes, 2012; Marks & Shah, 2004; Ryff, 1989
Environmental mastery; sense of mastery	Jahoda, 1958; Jenkins et al., 2008; Lavikainen et al., 2000; Ryff, 1989; Stephens et al., 1999
Autonomy	Jahoda, 1958;; Ryff, 1989
Happiness; elation; joy; ecstasy; life satisfaction	Diener et al., 2003; Diener et al., 1999; Government Office for Science, 2008; Keyes, 2012; Marks & Shah, 2004; Ryff, 1989; Stephens et al., 1999; The Faculty of Public Health, 2019; WHO, 2013
Pride	Diener et al., 1999
Optimism	Government Office for Science, 2008; Jenkins et al., 2008; Lavikainen et al., 2000; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2022; Regan et al., 2016; The Faculty of Public Health, 2019
Employment	Harnois & Gabriel, 2000; Department of Health, 2010)
Social dimensions of wellbeing *(social contribution, social integration, social acceptance, social actualisation, social coherence)*	Keyes, 1998
Community contribution and sense of belonging; social capital	CDC, 2018; Forsman, Herberts, Nyqvist, Wahlbeck, & Schierenbeck, 2013, p.804; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2022; WHO, 2013, 2021

Figure 4.0 Visual Representation of associative conceptualisations, determinants, and elements of wellbeing
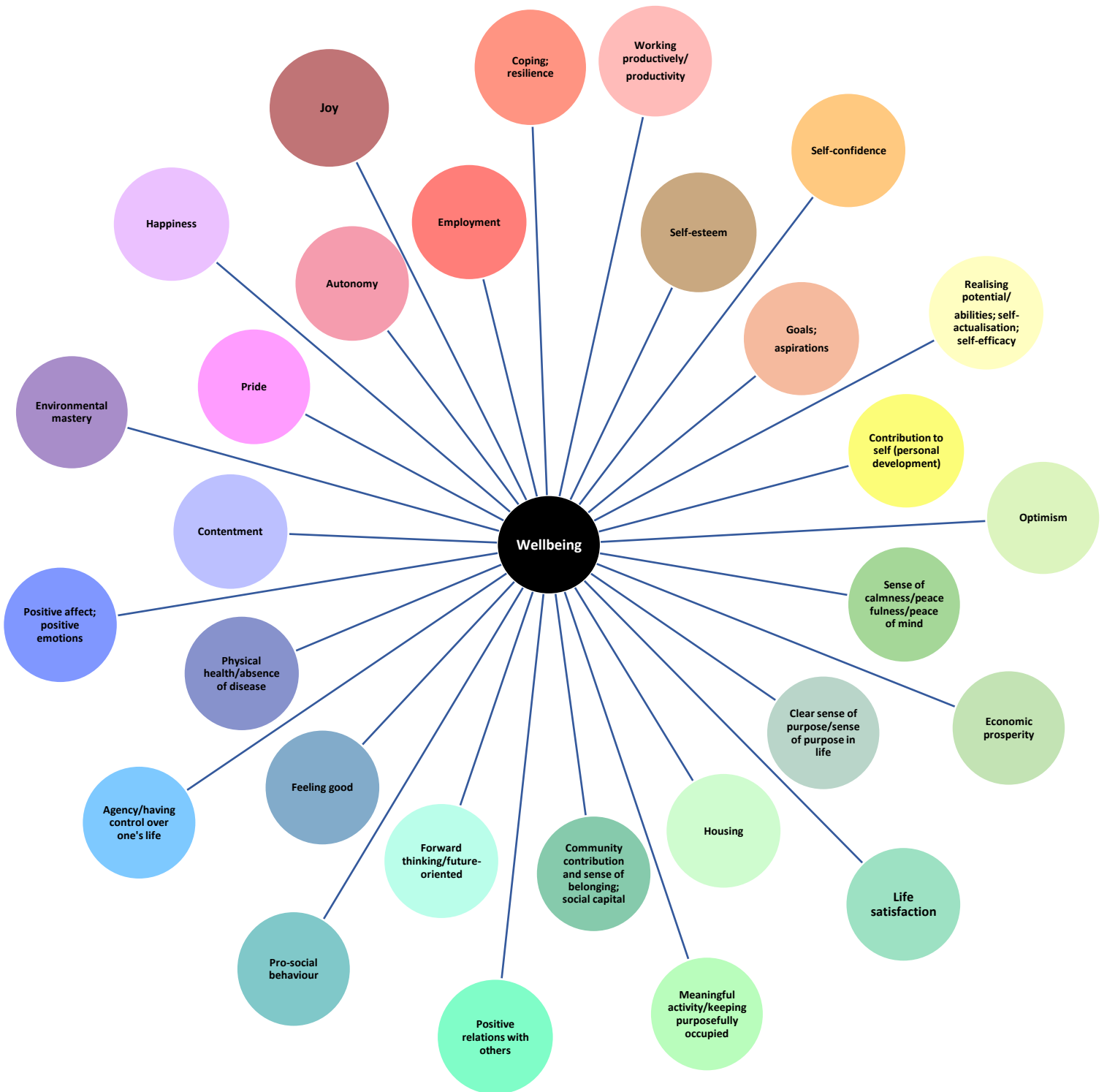
These identified concepts were then associatively grouped into the aforementioned four dimensions of wellbeing, which resulted in the second iteration of the operationalisation matrix (Table 2.2 below):

Table 2.2 Second iteration of operationalisation matrix

Physical Wellbeing	Physical health		
	Absence of disease		

Emotional Wellbeing	Happiness	Pride	Positive affect
	Contentment	Feeling good	Life satisfaction
	Calmness/peacefulness/peace of mind	Joy	

Social Wellbeing	Housing	Contribution to community/society	Positive relations with others
	Employment	Working productively/productivity	
	Economic Prosperity	Pro-social behaviour	

Psychological Wellbeing	Goals sought to be achieved	Positive, outward focus/future-thinking	Sense of purpose	Environmental Mastery	Coping/ resilience
	Realising potential	Autonomy	Self-confidence	Optimism	
	Contribution to self (personal growth and development)	Keeping purposefully occupied	Agency	Self-esteem	

The second iteration of the matrix was developed to generate a more organised and coherent understanding of the identified concepts associated with mental health and wellbeing. This iteration was essentially a rudimentary conceptualisation of the final framework that was to be developed (see Table 2.4). In the context of this second iteration, the concepts that were identified in scholarship as being associated with wellbeing were grouped under the larger

wellbeing dimensions that were initially identified (i.e., physical, emotional, social, and psychological wellbeing). It was at this point in the research process that the researcher was required to make certain subjective decisions regarding which concepts fell under which dimensions of wellbeing. Although the literature, for the most part, identified most of the concepts as being associated with certain dimensions of wellbeing (for example, Ryff's (1989, 1995) contention that 'personal growth and development' and 'autonomy' are dimensions of psychological wellbeing), this was not true of every concept. For example, the notion of 'working productively' has been acknowledged by the World Health Organization (2021) as being a component of a state of wellbeing and could perhaps be more appropriately deemed an outcome of wellbeing (Herrman et al., 2005). The researcher's decision to include 'working productively' under the social wellbeing domain was based on the capacity for productive working to arguably be a component of an individual's contribution to society.

The reality of the categorisation of conceptualisations of wellbeing is that dimensions of wellbeing are not mutually exclusive, and concepts may "lie at the intersection" of multiple domains (VanderWeele & Lomas, 2023, p.38). Based on the context of the present research, the researcher diverged from the literature on the categorisation of certain concepts. Consequently, although the literature may have delineated certain aspects of wellbeing to certain dimensions, the researcher's categorisation decisions did not always align with the literature. For example, Keyes (2007) and Ryff (1989) assert that 'positive relations with others' is a component of healthy psychological functioning (i.e., psychological wellbeing). Although this may be true, within the context of this research, 'positive relations with others' is interpreted more broadly to incorporate how these positive relationships may impact upon one's sense of belonging and connectedness at the family, community, and societal levels. It was for this reason that this concept was allocated to the social wellbeing dimension rather than psychological wellbeing. Additionally, the concept of 'life satisfaction' was removed from the matrix at this point in that this concept is considered a "long-term assessment of one's life" in contrast to "happiness" which is grounded more in "…spontaneous reflections of pleasant and unpleasant affects in one's immediate experience…" (Keyes, 2012, p.7). The present study was structured to assess

participants' "immediate experiences" and understandings of the potential benefits of engaging in prison education. Consequently, despite the association between wellbeing and life satisfaction (Diener & Suh, 1997), long-term subjective life evaluations could not be explored within the scope of the present study.

Subsequent to the development of the second iteration of the matrix, the researcher sought to add a further degree of organisation to the wellbeing framework by including subthemes under the dimensions of wellbeing. The third version of the matrix (Table 2.3 below) was thus adapted from the second iteration to include subthemes that the concepts associated with wellbeing could be grouped under. In some cases, the subthemes were derived from the literature, and in others, the researcher identified thematic commonalities in concepts associated with wellbeing in order to develop a subtheme. For example, 'positive affect' essentially refers to positive emotions (Keyes, 2007). In Keyes' (2007) conceptualisation of mental health as flourishing, his definitions of the dimension of 'positive affect' include "Regularly cheerful, interested in life, in good spirits, happy, calm and peaceful, full of life" (p.98). 'Positive affect' thus became a subheading where concepts associated with emotional wellbeing could be grouped.

Table 2.3 Third iteration of operationalisation matrix

Physical Wellbeing	- Physical health - Absence of disease	

Emotional Wellbeing	**Positive Affect** - Happiness - Joy - Feeling good - Pride - Calmness/peacefulness/peace of mind	

Social Wellbeing	**Prosperity** - Employment - Economic prosperity - Housing - Working productively/productivity	**Social Productivity** - Contribution to community/society - Positive relations with others

	Future Orientated	Coping/Resilience	Personal Development
Psychological Wellbeing	- Goals sought to be achieved - Realising potential - Positive, outward focus/future-thinking - Optimism - Sense of purpose	- Coping with life stresses - Resilience - Keeping purposefully occupied	- Environmental Mastery - Autonomy - Self-esteem - Self-confidence - Agency - Contribution to self

Subsequent to the development of the third iteration of the matrix, the researcher sought to amend the framework so that it was tailored more to the specific context of the present research. After both a debrief with the project's supervisors to determine whether the matrix was an effective coding tool, and an initial analysis of the letters (n = 22) according to the themes outlined in the third iteration of the operationalisation matrix, a fourth iteration of the operationalisation matrix was developed (Table 2.4 below). The fourth iteration was the final version that was used to code the 100 PET letters. It was based on both the literature on wellbeing and on a preliminary analysis of the content of the letters to determine the emerging themes. At this stage of the framework development process, there were certain concepts associated with wellbeing that were amended or removed from the matrix due to a perceived lack of relevance to the research, grounded in the analysis of the preliminary subset of letters. Namely, 'working productively/productivity' was removed at this stage. Additionally, certain concepts emerged within the letters that were not initially part of the first three versions of the matrix, namely 'desistance' (amended from the concept of 'pro-social behaviour'), 'further educational aspirations,' 'enjoyment' (incorporated with the concept of 'joy'), 'excitement,' 'determination/motivation' and 'coping with imprisonment.' The wellbeing concepts in the 'Coping/Resilience' sub-category were also amended to reflect the context of engaging with education in prison. The concepts of 'Coping with life stresses' and 'Resilience' were changed to the more specific concept of 'Coping with imprisonment.' The new conceptual additions to the matrix did not necessarily emerge within the reviewed literature but were nonetheless identified as important concepts to include based on the fact that applicants themselves were identifying them as prospective benefits of further and higher education in prison. Although prison learner applicants were not necessarily identifying these benefits within the context of wellbeing, the researcher felt that it was important to include these conceptualisations in the wellbeing matrix in order to underscore that the nature of wellbeing is individualistic and open

to interpretation. It is also possible that a further review of the literature may have yielded these additional concepts associated with wellbeing that materialised within the letters.

It should also be noted here that the physical wellbeing dimension was removed at this stage, as none of the initial set of 22 letters contained any mention of concepts associated with physical wellbeing. During the analysis stage, it was discovered that there was one letter (Letter No. 99) that alluded to an element of physical wellbeing (i.e., absence of illness), in that the learner indicated that participating in prison education could be a "…defence against age-related illnesses such as dementia." However, given the nature of this particular affliction and its impact on an individual's mental state, the researcher made the decision to include this element under the dimension of psychological wellbeing. The lack of discussion on the potential physical wellbeing benefits of prison education could potentially be attributed to the fact that none of the letters analysed were in application for physical education courses. Unlike the *Fit for Release* report (Meek et al., 2012), which specifically analysed PET applications for educational courses involving health and fitness, this study analysed a strategic sample of PET applications from a wide variety of further and higher educational courses, none of which pertained to physical health or fitness. The lack of discussion of physical wellbeing within the PET letters perhaps also speaks to a potential weak direct relationship between education and physical health, as Schuller, Brassett-Grundy, Green, Hammond, and Preston (2002) have noted in their research that, with the exception of some older respondents, they found "little evidence of education directly improving physical health" but strong evidence of the effects of education on mental health (p.v). The physical wellbeing dimension was removed to retain the focus of the analysis on those categories that were predominant within the letters, thereby ensuring the emphasis remained on the prospective benefits of further and higher education that were expressed by prison learners as being most important to them.

Table 2.4 Fourth iteration of operationalisation matrix

Emotional Wellbeing	**Positive Affect**
	- Happiness - Joy/enjoyment - Feeling good - Excitement - Pride - Calmness/peacefulness/peace of mind

Social Wellbeing	**Prosperity**	**Social Productivity**
	- Employment - Economic prosperity - Housing	- Contribution to society - Positive relations with others - Desistance

Psychological Wellbeing	**Future Orientated**	**Coping/Resilience**	**Personal Development**
	- Goals sought to be achieved - Realising potential - Positive, outward focus/future-thinking - Optimism - Sense of purpose - Determination/motivation	- Keeping purposefully occupied - Coping with imprisonment	- Environmental Mastery - Autonomy - Self-esteem - Self-confidence - Agency - Contribution to self - Further educational aspirations

Appendix C: Study One coding guide

Examples	Codes
• Pleased of accomplishments in prison, which includes educational attainments	Happiness
• Enjoyment for learning • Passion for learning	Joy/Enjoyment
• Looking forward • Eager/keen • Enthusiastic • His enthusiasm and commitment have provided him his roadmap to success	Excitement
• Believes course will enable him to feel proud of the time he spent in prison • Proud of accomplishments in prison, which includes educational attainments • Feelings of pride if he is able to help people	Pride
• Feels good about the prospect of studying again	Feeling good
	Sense of peacefulness/peace of mind
	Sense of calmness
• Career aspirations • Employment goals • Wants to utilise his time in prison commence the journey in setting up a business when he is released	Employment
	Housing
• Provide for family financially • When he leaves prison he wants a legitimate income	Economic prosperity
• Wants to help people • Reintegrate himself into society • Comprehends the nature of his social identity • Wants to better the community • Put back into community/give back to society • Repay debt to society • Wants to educate others • Pro-social aspirations in order to resettle into community • Wants to become a useful person in society and help himself and others get out of poverty in an ethical way • He is interested in developing counselling skills and doing some youth work when he leaves custody • Wants to make a difference in someone's life	Contribution to society

• Believes OU course will help him become a decent and valuable member of society upon release • Wants to help people struggling with mental health issues	
• Rehabilitation • Law-abiding member of society • Believes education is pathway out of prison • Wants to stay out of prison upon release • Would like to use his time to restructure his life in a way where he doesn't have to get himself into trouble • When he leaves prison he needs to turn his life around and he wants a legitimate income so that he can provide for his children and be a good role model for them • Wants to become a useful person in society and help himself and others get out of poverty in an ethical way • Reduce risk of reoffending • Life free from crime • Wants to redeem himself • He wants to be able to provide for his son and having qualification and running a business will allow him to do that honestly	Desistance
• Provide family with better life • Has mentored people/mentors other prisoners/peer advisor in prison • Make family proud • Wants to support family • Show future employers his effort and drive • Positive role model • Supports others • Believes course will give him a better understanding of others • Believes the course will allow others to take him seriously and not see him as a waste of time • Stable life with family • Believes family will be proud of him if he can obtain a degree • He isn't doing this just for him - he wants to be able to provide for his son • He believes it will help him whilst in custody by keeping him interested and out of trouble	Positive relations with others

• Through this course, he will understand more about people and society in general • When he leaves prison he needs to turn his life around so that he can provide for his children and be a good role model for them	
• Wants to achieve great things in life • Short/long-term goals • Hope that he will achieve goals • Wants to work towards something whilst in prison • Beneficial to goals • It will give him a goal to achieve as he has just over six years left and he can't think of anything worse than walking out of the gates having no direction to go in • Has real aims and focus • Believes degree, along with second qualification he is currently working towards, will assist him greatly with his future aspirations upon release	Goals sought to be achieved
• Believes further education is key to building success of his release • Degree aspirations • Wants to take further courses • Wants to improve educational attainments	Further educational aspirations
• Wants to prove to himself that he can do it and not let himself down • Wants to prove himself • Believes he has exceeded all expectations he had of himself prior to coming into custody (when he first came into custody he believed he was a lost cause • Believes he is capable of achieving qualification • Belief he has ability • Sense of achievement • Believes course will help him to know that he can do this • Given him the realisation that he can succeed at something if he puts in the time and effort • He knows he can more than manage this task – worked at Level 3 previously and passed with good grades • He believes he can do it	Realising potential
• Positive advances • New chapter in life • Broaden horizons	Positive, outward focus/future-thinking

• Hopes for future • Wants to benefit his future and take himself further in life • Bright future • Brighter future upon release • Life-changing journey • Believes that this course will benefit and enhance his prospects for the future • Wants to make something positive out of his negative life experiences • Wants to enhance opportunities in the future • Strong, happy, positive future, personally and professionally • Wants to start looking towards future and planning for his release • He is halfway through his sentence and feels that he has done nothing constructive that will have a positive effect on his future and has now realised that he needs to change this as soon as possible • Believes by gaining as much knowledge and educating himself he's giving himself a second chance at life a healthier, less stressful and overall a life he is happy to live and can be proud of • He can be successful later in life, especially with his degree behind him • Move on with his life • Wants to prove capabilities with this course	
• Since applying for course, feels sense of optimism	Optimism
• Has a purpose • Believes education has been powerful and positive for him - it has completely changed his thinking and provided him with something to put his energy into which will benefit him in the long term	Sense of purpose
• Does not want to waste time in prison • Needs to do this for himself to feel like he's achieved something worthwhile in prison • Wants to fill excess of time in prison • Improve use of time in prison/being kept busy • Make use of time in prison in more effective way/keep his mind occupied • Good use of time in prison/gives himself something to focus on upon release	Purposefully occupied

• Wants to positively turn his life around whilst in custody and believes this course will help him do that • Wants to make the most out of his situation by studying with the OU • He believes it will help him whilst in custody by keeping him interested and out of trouble	
• Get through prison experience • Keep mind occupied • Believes his ventured into education whilst in prison help to feed his mind and maintain his thought processes – perhaps even a defence against age-related illnesses such as dementia • Wants to utilise his time in prison to keep his mind focused	Coping with incarceration
• Can remain dependent on himself	Autonomy
	Environmental mastery
• Gain self-esteem • Sense of worth • Improved self-esteem	Self-esteem
• Confidence to settle down • Gain confidence • Believes completing course will help him push his boundaries to gain confidence in the field he wants to work in	Self-confidence
• Determined to take responsibility for himself • He will feel a huge sense of achievement and empowerment because he will realise his true potential and capabilities	Agency
• Improve/expand knowledge • Do something for himself • Provide himself with better life • Better himself, better his life • Personal development • Needs to do this for himself to feel like he's achieved something worthwhile in prison • Wants to better himself as a person • Believes completing course will lead him to more stimulating and complex challenges in the future • Wants to challenge himself with course and start to think outside the box • Believes course will give him life and communication skills	Contribution to self

• Challenge himself • Teach himself different things • Believes completing course will help him push his boundaries • Gaining knowledge will increase his chances of being successful • Wants to take the next step in securing a chance of personal growth and future stability by taking this course • He would like to improve his knowledge in "People, Work, and Society • Believes he can flourish with this course • Sense of wisdom • Wants to utilise his time in prison to develop his knowledge • Wants to take course to have something to show for the work he's done • Believes course will benefit his future plans and give him knowledge/insight into the problems he struggles with • Believes course will give him a better understanding of himself • Believes course will help him gain new skills and help him with better opportunities and a better understanding of himself	
• Determined to overcome barriers to achieve best in life • Believes he is motivated • Highly motivated to change • Degree will provide motivation • Driven to pursue degree • Wants to prove to everyone and himself that he has the motivation and dedication to study towards a degree • Believes he is a hard and committed worker who strives to overcome the tasks and challenges he is presented with • He has the determination and grit to see this all the way as he has completed a few qualifications in custody and in the community • Determined to prove it to himself and others • Committed to task at hand	Determination/motivation

• Feels he is ready for the level of commitment a degree requires • Believes he represents dedication • Believes he is persistent, hard-working, and focused • Strong ambition and desire to do better	

Appendix D: Reflections on methodological perspectives and approaches in prison education research

A paradigm can be considered a "particular conceptual framework" (Willig, 2013, p.6) that incorporates a researcher's ontological (the nature of reality), epistemological (how the researcher comes to know that reality), and methodological stance (the research methods used to explore and understand reality) (Punch & Oancea, 2014). McChesney and Aldridge (2019) note that Kuhn (1970) established the definition of 'paradigm' in research, and it has since been widely incorporated into academic scholarship. According to McChesney and Aldridge (2019), Kuhn (1970) conceptualised a paradigm as "an epistemological stance that determines the types of questions that are asked and then understood" (p.227). Morgan (2007) states that although Kuhn was criticised for what was perceived as an overabundance of variations of the term 'paradigm,' his development of the concept gained favour as a way to "summarize researchers' beliefs about their efforts to create knowledge" (p.50). Although the use of the term 'paradigm' has become commonplace within academia, researchers have expanded understandings of the concept which has contributed to wide variation in conceptual meanings (McChesney & Aldridge, 2019; Morgan, 2007; Shannon-Baker, 2016). For example, Guba and Lincoln (1994, p.107) note that a research paradigm incorporates the belief system or "worldview" of the researcher, and Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) similarly note that a paradigm can be understood as "the lens through which a researcher looks at the world" (p.26). Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) use the term "research culture" to contextualise the concept of a research paradigm and note that a paradigm refers to a shared set of beliefs amongst researchers that underpin the "nature and conduct of research" (p.24). Shannon-Baker (2016) embraces an understanding of paradigms as fluid and flexible in nature, eschewing the notion of paradigms as inflexible constructs "that restrict all aspects of the research process" (p.321). Morgan (2007) identifies four basic conceptual understandings of a paradigm (as worldviews, as epistemological perspectives, as shared beliefs amongst researchers within common disciplines, and as paragons of how to conduct research), noting that these understandings are grounded in a common view of paradigms as a basic set of shared beliefs that have implications for the search for knowledge and the interpretation of data. Ultimately, paradigms are grounded in a

researcher's conceptual interpretations of the world in which they live, and as such they shape how the researcher engages with the research and guide the decision-making process (ibid, Denzin & Lincoln, 2018a; Shannon-Baker, 2016).

There are generally four dominant paradigms recognised within social research: positivist/postpositivist, constructivist/interpretivist, critical/transformative, and pragmatic (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006; McChesney & Aldridge, 2019). The positivist paradigmatic approach, which has been succeeded by the postpositivist worldview, is grounded in the scientific method (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017) and is underpinned by the assumption that "the social world can be studied in the same way as the natural world" (Mertens, 1998, p.7). Objective reasoning and exploring causal relationships are principal features of the positivist paradigm, accompanying the ontological view that "one reality exists" (Mertens, 1998, p.8) and the theoretical notion that research can ascertain the "true" nature of reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The postpositivist paradigmatic view concurs with the ontological positivist assumption that reality exists but contends that limitations exist in the ability to know this reality due to the fallible nature of the human condition (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Mertens, 1998). Researcher objectivity remains of import within the postpositivist paradigm, but it is acknowledged that observations cannot be free from the influence of the researcher's "preexisting knowledge" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.107).

In sharp contrast to the positivist/postpositivist view, the interpretivist/constructivist paradigm considers reality to be socially constructed (Mertens, 1998). The lived experiences of social actors are central to the interpretivist/constructivist perspective as it seeks to provide insight into subjective meanings and "the actor's definition of a situation" by drawing on the perspectives of those who have lived it (Schwandt, 1994, p.118). McChesney and Aldridge (2019) conceptualise interpretivist research as follows:

> The knowledge arising from interpretivist research is integrally linked to the participants and the context of the research, meaning that the products of interpretivist research are

not universally applicable theories or laws but, rather, rich and contextually situated understandings. (p.227)

With the understanding that the both the researcher and research participants influence one another in the research process, the epistemological perspective within the interpretivist/constructivist view considers the relationship between the researcher and the researched to be dynamic and interactive in nature (Mertens, 1998).

The critical/transformative paradigm considers matters of social justice and power imbalances to be central to the research process (Mertens, 2007). Formerly referred to as the emancipatory paradigm, Mertens (1998, 2009) indicates that she eschewed Guba and Lincoln's (1994) labelling of the paradigm as 'critical theory' (due to its over-alignment with Marxist theory) and began using the term transformative rather than emancipatory in order to highlight the role that those active in the research process have in coming together to achieve change on a personal and social level. For the researcher who adopts a critical/ transformative paradigmatic stance, the ontological belief is that reality is socially constructed (Mertens, 2007). However, the emphasis within this paradigmatic perspective is that there is a need to be cognisant of the ways in which multiple, constructed realities are shaped by societal values and privilege and how power imbalances can influence the exclusion of certain individuals or groups from decisions about the research process. Mertens (2009) notes that the transformative paradigm surfaced "in response to individuals who have been pushed to the societal margins throughout history and who are finding a means to bring their voices into the world of research" (p.3). In order to come to know the nature of reality within the critical/transformative paradigmatic view, the researcher and the researched enter into an interactive relationship with one another, and collaborative relationships with the community that are culturally cognisant and emphasise the importance of building trust are key to the production of knowledge (Mertens, 2007).

The pragmatic paradigmatic stance can be characterised as solution-oriented in that it emphasises the research problem rather than a strict adherence to a specific method of inquiry (Creswell, 2009; Shannon-Baker, 2016). From an ontological and epistemological perspective,

Creswell (2009) notes that pragmatism "is not committed to any one system of philosophy and reality" (p.10). Diverging from the paradigmatic "purists" who argue that the philosophical assumptions and methods associated with positivism (quantitative) and constructivism/interpretivism (qualitative) are fundamentally incompatible and therefore should not be used simultaneously (Johnson & Onwuebuzie, 2004), pragmatism moves past reliance on "metaphysical assumptions about ontology and epistemology" and embraces the practicality of methodological integration (Morgan, 2014a, p.1049; Morgan, 2007). Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003) note that, "'Pragmatist researchers consider the research question to be more important than either the method they use or the paradigm that underlies the method" (p.21). Due to the pragmatic emphasis on the research question and making purposeful research decisions according to what will work to best address the research needs (Creswell, 2009), pragmatism approach is often closely associated with mixed methods research (Morgan, 2014a). It is important to note, however, that pragmatism is more than simply a practical, problem-solving approach that is linked with mixed methods research, and Morgan (2014a) and Denzin (2012) highlight the problematic nature of the reductionist view of condensing the essence of pragmatism to the question of "what works." Drawing on the foundational workings of classical pragmatism scholars Dewey, James, Mead, and Peirce, Denzin (2012) articulates the importance of researcher reflection on consequences and meanings of actions within pragmatism, and notes that "[pragmatism] rests on the argument that the meaning of an event cannot be given in advance of experience" (p.82). For Denzin, the essence of pragmatism is not the integration of methods but its emphasis on "consequences of actions" (ibid, p.83). According to Morgan (2014b), the pragmatic view underscores the nature of experience over the nature of reality. From a paradigmatic standpoint, researchers positioned within the pragmatic paradigm oppose the singularity of truth, meaning, and knowledge (Creswell, 2009; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Punch and Oancea (2014) note that as research methods are grounded within paradigms, the paradigmatic stance that a researcher assumes aligns with particular methods. However, it has been acknowledged that the tendency for paradigmatic stances to emphasise particular

research methods has created a historical dichotomy between researchers within the quantitative and qualitative domains, a debate that has fittingly been referred to as the "paradigm wars" (ibid). The disagreements within the "paradigm wars" were positioned within polarised opinions on the superiority of either positivist or interpretivist/constructivist paradigms and the respective quantitative and qualitative methods that characterise each perspective (Bryman, 2006; Punch & Oancea, 2014). The mentality within the dispute over which paradigmatic stance was more ideal for research emphasised a preferential "either-or" stance (Punch & Oancea, 2014), and an assumption that quantitative and qualitative methods were fundamentally incompatible (Bryman, 2006). In more recent times, although arguments persist that elements of the paradigm battle endure within the rigid paradigmatic justifications researchers and students can be required to give when applying for job promotions, grant funding, or submitting papers for publication (Given, 2017), the dichotomy of the quantitative-qualitative dispute is decidedly less pronounced as researchers have increasingly realised that both quantitative and qualitative approaches to research can exist harmoniously and indeed be incorporated within one another (Bryman, 2006; Mingers, 2004). Bryman (2006) refers to this post-paradigmatic battle period as "paradigm peace" (p.113).

The methodological perspective in this thesis adopts a "question-driven approach" that seeks to firstly establish the questions that the research seeks to address and subsequently the research methods that are most appropriate for exploring the research problem (Punch & Oancea, 2014, p.19). Consequently, this approach does not seek to establish the paradigm under which the researcher is operating prior to the development of the research questions. This approach is congruent with mixed-methods research (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) note that a fundamental element of mixed methods research is that "…research methods should follow research questions in a way that offers the best chance to obtain useful answers" (pp.17-18). However, there is a lack of agreement as to what constitutes mixed-methods research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018b; Morse, 2010). Definitions range from a research study that incorporates both quantitative and qualitative methods (Charmaz, 2014; Clark, Foster, Sloan, & Bryman, 2021; Punch & Oancea, 2014; Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007), to a

study that incorporates either multiple qualitative or multiple quantitative strategies within one paradigmatic perspective (Morse, 2009, 2010). In contrast, Morse (2003) notes that *multimethod* (emphasis added) research is characterised by the incorporation of multiple "relatively complete" qualitative and quantitative projects in order to address an overarching research problem (p.191). Multimethod research designs utilise multiple "interrelated" studies, each designed to address a research question that is derivative of the main research problem (ibid, p.199). The results of each individual study are then used to provide the researcher with a more comprehensive conceptual understanding of the broader research problem (ibid). For Morse, this marks the fundamental difference between multimethod and mixed methods research, the former comprised of multiple, complete research projects, and the latter defined by its incorporation of multiple qualitative and/or quantitative approaches within a single research study (ibid).

The justification for conceptualising the methodology of the wider thesis as a *multimethod*, predominantly qualitative study that incorporates an element of quantitative inquiry is twofold. Firstly, that the thesis is comprised of three small-scale studies (each utilising distinct methods) formulated to holistically explore and provide narrative to the wider goal of the research, aligns with conceptualisations of a multimethod approach. The approaches used within the three studies incorporate a qualitative content analysis (Study One), reflexive thematic analysis (Study Two), and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Study Three). A more in-depth exploration of the respective methods used and methodological choices made in each study are included in the chapters pertaining to each study (Chapters Four, Five, and Six). Secondly, Study One utilised a predominantly qualitative approach with embedded elements of quantitative inquiry. The quantification of data was incorporated within Study One to ascertain the percentage of prison learner letters that included discussion on a particular element of wellbeing, and a qualitative perspective was used to explore the narrative within PET applicant letters. The quantification of data within Study One represented a slight deviation from the otherwise wholly qualitative methods used throughout the research journey; however, the motivation for including an element of quantitative analysis remained grounded in the distinctly

qualitative perspective that guided the research. Hesse-Biber (2010) notes that when adopting a qualitatively-centred approach within a mixed-methods research project, the researcher must reflexively contemplate whether the "qualitative understanding" of the research would be enriched by incorporating an additional method (p.467). Although the research in the thesis does not claim to be mixed-methods, where Hesse-Biber's argument resonates is in the researcher's decision to incorporate the quantification of data within Study One. This element of analysis was considered to be beneficial in that it provided the researcher with a clearer representation of prison learners' perceptions of the potential wellbeing benefits of prison education, which could then be analysed through a qualitative lens.

Notably, the thesis research is situated within a predominantly qualitative perspective. Given the researcher's emphasis on exploring the relationship between wellbeing and prison education as understood by the relevant actors themselves, a qualitative focus was deemed the most appropriate. Rather than attempting to establish a causal relationship between prison education and wellbeing, the focus of the overall thesis is on the "quality and texture of experience," a feature that is characteristic of qualitative research (Willig, 2013, p.8), and that distinguishes it from quantitative research. Qualitative approaches are characterised by their naturalistic and interpretivist focus (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), and in keeping with the notion that qualitative research "aims to elicit rich data across a range of perspectives as opposed to seeking congruence of views…" (Awenat et al., 2018, p.106), the theoretical underpinnings of the doctoral research remain collectively grounded in the ways in which participants in all three studies make sense of their contextual worlds. The lived experiences of the participants in each study that comprises this thesis and the ways in which they attributed meaning to these experiences forms the nucleus from which the methodological choices have stemmed.

Due to the eclectic nature of the methodological approaches that make up this thesis, identifying one overarching paradigm with which to approach the research proved problematic. The underpinning paradigmatic stance is decidedly interpretivist in nature. However, the applicability of the pragmatic approach of doing 'what works' to explore a given phenomenon is

readily apparent within this thesis. Indeed, the conceptualisation of the overall thesis as methodologically pluralistic is partially consistent with a paradigmatic approach that is pragmatic in nature. Nonetheless, given the identified concerns with reducing the essence of pragmatism to issues of methodological practicality, and simultaneously considering the importance that is placed within this thesis on exploring the topic of wellbeing and prison education from the perspectives of those with direct experience, the interpretivist paradigmatic stance is the decisive lens with which the relationship between wellbeing and prison education is conceptualised.

Innovative recruitment techniques

Utilising literature search databases oriented towards the field of health research, Abbott, DiGiacomo, Magin, and Hu (2018) conducted a comprehensive review of the range of research methods used in qualitative interview- and focus group-based prisoner research. Said authors note that in the 126 studies they analysed, common recruitment methods were typically advertisement-based (e.g., "posters, flyers, and letters"), with potential participants advised to declare their interest by responding to the advert (ibid, p.3). However, it is also acknowledged that staff in prisons, both healthcare and non-healthcare personnel, acted as recruitment sources in many of the reviewed studies. The researchers note that prison staff and healthcare workers in prison could assist study recruitment either directly or indirectly. For example, in some of the studies analysed, the authors note that staff supported researchers by directly recruiting participants themselves. In others, advertisements about the study were circulated within the prison by staff, or staff would utilise networks of prisoners who were known to them to ascertain participant eligibility and subsequently identify potential prisoner participants (ibid). Alternative recruitment techniques also included researchers directly contacting potential prisoner participants (which could include letter-based contact), addressing groups of prisoners to present the research study, or reaching out to all prisoners who were part of a specific programme within the prison that was of interest to the researcher(s). Within the ethnographic

studies that were reviewed, the authors note that recruitment methods involved "seeking volunteers, selecting from custodial records, and convenience sampling" (ibid, p.4).

Reiter (2014) highlights the benefits of using "methodological creativity" (e.g., comprehensive networking across various institutions, collaborative, cross-disciplinary, mixed-methodological approaches), to overcome some of the challenges prison researchers often face gaining access to prisons (p.423). Although the researcher faced significant access barriers throughout the doctoral journey that were ultimately insurmountable, the "methodological creativity" that Reiter alludes to was perhaps more imperative than ever given the unique context in which this thesis was carried out. Given the research limitations that were imposed on account of the pandemic, the collaborative and innovative nature of the recruitment techniques utilised by the researcher allowed her to continue her research on prison education throughout a very challenging time. The use of Twitter as a recruitment technique in Study Three is of particular relevance to this discussion given its innovative nature as a method of approaching potential study participants. Researchers acknowledge that the use of social media in research and recruitment is becoming of growing interest to researchers (Gelinas et al., 2017; Lafferty & Manca, 2015). Gundur (2019) posits that "The shift in social interactions via the Internet means that researchers may no longer need to occupy a natural physical setting to recruit or to interview respondents" (p.1742). In their book on online social science research, Hooley, Marriott, and Wellens (2012) note that online mediums of recruitment allow researchers to recruit potential participants expeditiously from a substantially large internet-based population of potential participants, and do not require that researchers have "personal access to participants or traditional gatekeepers" (p.66). Social media recruitment in particular can be beneficial in a number of ways, including being more cost-effective and less time-consuming than its traditionally-oriented counterparts, and being able to generate a participant sample that is more heterogenous in nature (O'Connor, Jackson, Goldsmith, & Skirton, 2014; Yuan, Bare, Johnson, & Saberi, 2014). However, the use of online recruitment methods in research is subject to limitations, including a lack of sustained participant engagement (Hooley et al., 2012; McRobert, Hill, Smale, Hay, & Van der Windt, 2018) and potential challenges around

maintaining the confidentiality of participants who are sharing personal information online. A principal limitation of online recruitment is that it precludes those with literacy difficulties (Gundur, 2019) and those without access to the internet (Leonard, Hutchesson, Patterson, Chalmers, & Collins, 2014) or the technical know-how from participation. This limitation is considered particularly applicable to research with former prisoners who may experience certain technology- and literacy-related challenges. As previously incarcerated individuals, former prisoners have had limited access to the internet whilst in prison which could make it difficult for them develop the technological literacy skills that are essentially ubiquitous in the outside world (Coates, 2016). People in prison are also a population with significantly lower levels of literacy as compared to people in the community (Ofsted & HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2022). Thus, the implications of this key limitation of online recruitment are such that the perspectives of individuals within marginalised populations like former prisoners may be excluded.

Citing Forgie, Duff, and Ross (2013), Wasilewski, Stinson, Webster, and Cameron (2019), in their secondary analysis of a healthcare study that used Twitter as a recruitment technique, note that due to the conversational nature of Twitter as an online forum for opinion and knowledge sharing, Twitter provides researchers with an attractive online mechanism for recruitment as they can reach a potentially larger audience than on other social media platforms such as Facebook, where users may be more likely to have employed more restrictive privacy settings. Lafferty and Manca (2015) acknowledge the particularly public nature of Twitter and note that, unless a user's profile has been set to protect the privacy of their tweets (in which case only the people that follow them can view their content), there is no requirement to own a Twitter account in order to view tweets. Through allowing users to forward an online post to others (i.e., 'retweet'), Twitter can be a useful snowball sampling tool for researchers endeavouring to recruit typically hard-to-reach populations (O'Connor et al., 2014). Acknowledging Lafferty and Manca's (2015) research on the role of social media in and as research, Wasilewski et al. (2019) note that the public domain of Twitter facilitates the potential for recruitment tweets to be shared widely within the Twitter sphere as users are able to mention other users in their

retweets, which can lead to a more specific audience viewing the tweets. The authors aptly use the term 'tweet reach' to refer to the potential for a single tweet to spread vastly to potential participants (Wasilewski et al., 2019).

Research employing the use of Twitter and other social media as a method of recruiting participants seems thus far to be heavily oriented towards the medical and healthcare fields as compared to other disciplines (see for example, Wasilewski et al., 2019; Close, Smaldone, Fennoy, Reame, & Grey, 2013; O'Connor et al., 2014; Yuan et al., 2014; Parsons, Breckons, & Durham, 2015). The review of the literature suggests that the use of social media as a recruitment technique is not yet prevalent amongst research within the social sciences (Gundur, 2019). One notable exception particularly relevant within the field of criminology is Gundur's (2019) study on the illicit drug trade in the Unites States (an area of research which is typically comprised of hard-to-reach populations) in which he uses Twitter and Craigslist to recruit participants when traditional recruitment methods proved somewhat inefficient. Two further exceptions include Middleton, Bragin, and Parker's (2014) assessment of the effectiveness of social media recruitment techniques as part of a wider social sciences study exploring stakeholders' views on genome testing, and Fileborn's (2017) use of Facebook and Twitter as partial recruitment techniques in her exploration of street harassment victims' experiences of sharing their accounts of victimisation online.

The methods employed within the three studies that comprise this thesis were demonstrative of the adaptive and innovative nature of the structure of the thesis. The use of prison learner PET applications in Study One to preliminarily assess the relationship between wellbeing and prison education provided a strong foundational precedent within the present research of using alternative data sources that existed or were generated without the researcher entering the physical environment of the prison. The use of letters written in response to an article in *Inside Time* in Study Two and the use of prison educator and former prison learner participants in the community further emphasises the capacity for valuable data on critical prison-centric issues to be mined during periods that prevent researcher access to prisons, thus warranting the use of

inventive research techniques. Although the use of social media as a recruitment technique within Study Three was arguably born of necessitated circumstance rather than systematic review of a multiplicity of available recruitment methods, the use of Twitter was an innovative approach within the research journey. The ability to be inventive with research techniques was essential for the progression of the research and it is posited here that methodological innovation and creative recruitment techniques may become increasingly necessary components of research development within the global parameters of Covid-19.

Collaborations

Brown and Brady (2020, p.2) in their collaborative approach to research on "land-based" prison interventions (i.e., those that are in some way connected to "nature and/or the built environment"), highlight the benefits of collaborative working, and note that the potential exists for "partnership working that supports 'change'" (ibid, p.1). Said authors further note that evidence on collaborative working suggests that benefits exist when partners involved in the collaboration can form positive relationships (Brown & Brady, 2020). These positive relationships are "characterised by openness, trust, good channels of communication and a preparedness to develop an understanding of each other's culture" (ibid, p.3). Collaborative relationships with staff, practitioners, and policy makers within the penal system can be necessary components of a prison researcher's toolkit, particularly for those qualitative academics whose research requires them to enter prisons (Patenaude, 2004). Patenaude (2004) argues that qualitative prison researchers, in comparison to their quantitatively-oriented counterparts, require closer collaborative relationships due to "degree of intrusion into the prison environment, contact with inmates and staff, and the potential for disruption or harm to the prison regime" (p.87S). Although the parameters of the Covid-19 did not allow the researcher to enter prisons to conduct the research within this thesis, collaborative efforts were still very much an important and necessary part of the research experience. Arguably, this is perhaps even more so the case due to the restrictions to primary research in prisons that the researcher had to navigate. As a novice prison researcher who was studying in England as an

international student, it was evident that connections would need to be established with established prison education organisations in order to facilitate the research that would be undertaken. The PhD supervisors were indispensable assets in establishing preliminary liaisons with a select few of such organisations on behalf of the researcher. Two prison organisations that expressed interest in collaborating on prison education research projects were Prisoners' Education Trust (PET), a charity that provides educational funding to prison learners, and *Inside Time*, a prison-based newspaper publication. PET supplied access to letters written by prisoners in application for funding from PET, and *Inside Time* coordinated the publication of the researcher's article in the *Inside Time* monthly publication and ensured that the anonymised letters written by prisoners in response to the article were distributed to the researcher. It must be acknowledged here that the researcher's collaboration with PET and *Inside Time* were crucial parts of her doctoral journey, and the research she conducted in Studies One and Two respectively would not have been possible without their support and assistance. Representatives from both PET and *Inside Time* provided the researcher with intimate insight and knowledge into the prison education system in England and Wales and due to their well-established networks and presence within the sphere of prison education, they were vital assets in providing and resourcing the data sets for the researcher to conduct analyses. Importantly, the collaboration with *Inside Time* allowed the researcher to continue her research during the 2020 phase of the pandemic, a crucial time in the researcher's doctoral journey that was significantly impacted by the restrictions to primary research in prisons. It is further important to acknowledge that the collaboration with PET has extended beyond the end of Study One in early 2020, as this organisation has been instrumental in helping the researcher disseminate the findings of her research by inviting her to present the findings of Study One as well as her wider research to members of PET.

Common methods used by other prison education researchers

The lived experiences of prisoners are invaluable for prison researchers. Thus, those research methodologies that seek to explore these experiences and emphasise the voices of individuals

within this marginalised population are critical to understandings of the penal experience, and subsequently to support for penal reforms. Citing Liebling's (2014) assertion of the importance of prison research in drawing awareness to and making "intelligible" that which occurs within prisons and those who reside therewithin, Beyens, Kennes, Snacken, and Tournel (2015) acknowledge the significance of qualitative approaches in contributing to this "intelligibility."

From a quantitative perspective, research on the effectiveness of prison education is an important component in exploring the relationship between prison education and recidivism. For example, Pelletier and Evans (2019), citing Karpowitz and Kenner (1995), Gaes (2008), Gray (2010), and Davis et al. (2013), note that the literature on higher education in prisons remains predominantly interested in quantitatively exploring the relationship between prison education and recidivism, with many studies acknowledging a correlation between participation in higher education in prison and reduced rates of reoffending. However, Behan (2014) acknowledges the problematic nature of using recidivism rates as evidence of the effectiveness of educational programming in prisons. In addition to recognising the extreme difficulty in using reoffending rates to evaluate the relationship between desistance and rehabilitative and educational programming, Behan notes that "it is inappropriate to judge success or otherwise by a methodology unsuited to the complex development of human change" (p.28). Bayliss (2003) similarly contends that the personal and social benefits of prison education are overlooked by measuring the effectiveness prison education against its impact on recidivism rates. In their Rapid Evidence Assessment and meta-analysis of the impact of prison-based educational programming on recidivism and employment, Ellison, Szifris, Horan, and Fox (2017) note that despite evidence suggesting that prison education has a positive impact on both employment post-release and rates of recidivism, the correlation between engagement in prison education and positive post-release outcomes is difficult to ascertain across studies that utilise differing measurements and definitions of recidivism and employment. Hughes (2012) further notes that studies that explore the impact of prison education on recidivism have also been methodologically criticised for the inclusion of control and treatment groups that are too dissimilar on key characteristics that could influence an offender's likelihood of recidivating. This

could lead to an inherent selection bias in recidivism studies that seek to explore the influence of educational programming on rates of reoffending, as those who are inclined to engage in education may already possess certain characteristics that make them more disposed to desist from further offending, irrespective of the educational intervention (ibid).

At least one notable departure within the field of quantitative prison education research seems to concern research efforts to quantitatively measure prison learners' motivations for prison education participation. One such early and seminal example is Parsons and Langenbach's (1993) use of Boshier's (1983) Prison Education Participation Scale (PEPS), which was developed to quantitatively measure the reasons prison learners give for participating in prison education. Parsons and Langenbach (1993) employed Boshier's scale in a study with 350 male GED (a high school equivalency diploma) prison learners housed in minimum- and maximum-security prisons in the United States. Whilst aiming to provide further quantitative exploration of prison learners' motivations for undertaking education in prison, Parsons and Langenbach also endeavoured to measure the consistency of those factors that Boshier found influenced prisoners' reasons for participating in prison education, and their applicability to the typology of adult learning motivations developed by Houle (1961). This was done in order to ascertain generalisability between the motivations of prison learners and their counterparts in the general community (ibid). Boshier's PEPS instrument and Parsons and Langenbach's revised version have been widely cited across the quantitative literature on motivations and attitudes towards prison education (see for example, Halimi, Brosens, De Donder, & Engels, 2017; Panitsides & Moussiou, 2019; Winters, 1995). Subsequent studies have used the motivational scale to explore the reasons prison learners give for undertaking prison education in varying contexts. For example, Delaere, De Caluwé, and Clarebout (2013) used Parsons and Langenbach's (1993) version of the PEPS to explore the reasons prisoners in Belgium give for participating in prison education. However, with researchers in the field of prison education commonly advocating for a broader, more holistic understanding of the benefits of prison education (see for example, Coates, 2016) which acknowledges the elements of personal growth and development that prison education can facilitate, qualitative prison education

research can be instrumental in allowing this narrative to be heard. Qualitative approaches seek to provide prison education researchers with a more in-depth, contextually nuanced understanding of the educational experiences of prison learners. The methodologies that inform qualitative research which explores the motivations for engaging with prison education and experiences of learning whilst incarcerated will be the focal point of the following discussion.

MacGuinness (2000) and Hughes (2012) attest to the value of bringing prison learners' voices to the forefront of research on prison education. In her study *Dealing With Time: Factors that Influence Prisoners to Participate in Prison Education Programmes,* MacGuinness (2000) employed a mixed-methodology approach to explore factors that prompt prison learners to engage with prison education within a men's high security prison in England. MacGuinness utilised questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and group discussions in her naturalistic approach to her research. The participants in MacGuinness' study were full-time learners who were studying within the prison's education department. MacGuinness acknowledges that variety was key in her methodological approach to studying the reasons prison learners gave for taking up education in prison, given the complexities that comprise the contexts in which prison learners study (e.g., the individualistic carceral impact of the prison experience, the varied cultural milieus of students as individuals, and the policies and models of formal education for prisoners that previously have been and currently are established). Hughes (2012), an established prison researcher, conducted a notable qualitative study with prison learners in England who were studying through distance learning in order to discern their motivations for engaging with prison education. Drawing from a population of prison learners who had received educational funding through PET, Hughes utilised questionnaires to recruit potential study participants, and then conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews with a cohort of prison learners who had expressed participatory interest (and who had not been transferred or released) via the questionnaires. Hughes acknowledges that the narrative of prison learners was a focal point of her study, and as such, she sought to explore the educational experiences of prison learners studying through distance learning as expressed and understood by the learners

themselves. Braggins and Talbot (2003) developed a comprehensive report for the Prison Reform Trust (PRT) which articulated the results of their qualitative exploratory study on prisoners' (both learners and prisoners not engaged in education) views of the provision of prison education and the changes they felt were required to meet prisoners' needs. The methodology employed by Braggins and Talbot involved semi-structured group interviews with 153 male and female prisoners aged 18 and over from 12 prisons in England and Wales. Reuss (2000) recounts the research she undertook for her PhD in which she explored the process by which education, and higher education in particular, can facilitate changes in offending behaviour amongst prison learners. Reuss relied on data that she had gathered through fieldnotes in her time as a prison educator in her qualitative "classroom ethnography" approach (Reuss, 2000, p.25). The participants in Reuss' study were male prison learners in a dispersal prison engaged in degree-level sociology and social policy studies within prison, with Reuss noting that participants were learning at a level that was approximately the university equivalent of a first-year bachelor's degree (Reuss, 1999). Reuss' research was reciprocal and participatory in nature in that her prison learner research participants were actively involved in the research journey.

Nichols (2021), in conjunction with the qualitative interviews she has conducted with prison staff and current and former prisoners throughout her research career, also incorporated an analysis of 80 PET letters from prison learners into her commentary on how prison learners make sense of and attribute value to their educational experiences. In acknowledging the value in letters prison learners have written to PET in application for funding and as acknowledgement of progress combined with sentiments of gratitude, Nichols states that "prisoners' letters to PET therefore provide a valuable written source that addresses both motivations to study and reflections on educational experiences" (p.26). Meek et al. (2012) further demonstrated the capacity for PET letters to provide valuable insight into the educational motivations of prison learners in their content analysis of 314 prison learner letters accompanying PET applications for sports-based courses. Additionally, Hughes (2000) conducted a PET letter-based analysis of 71 letters prison learners had written to PET expressing thanks for receiving grant funding from PET

to undertake an education course in prison. This qualitative study explores the views of prison learners with respect to the value they attribute to prison education. Hughes (2000) acknowledges that there may be methodological limitations to utilising PET prison learner letters as data sources in criminological research. Such limitations include: the notion that thank-you letters to PET may not be as likely to highlight critical aspects of education in prison or the specific course they participated in; the ability to determine to what extent education departments influenced prison learners to write letters is indiscernible; and that those students who chose to submit letters to PET may represent a certain category of prison learners who are more amenable to writing positively about their progress and experiences of prison education, having made a successful application for funding from PET. However, Hughes equally notes that these limitations do not detract from the value of the content of these letters which are rich sources that allow prison learners to freely, openly, and instinctively write about what prison education means to them, and that are free from the influence researchers may insert into interview-based studies. Pike and Hopkins (2019, p.4), in their qualitative ethnographic study exploring the transformative impacts of higher-level distance learning in ten prisons in England and Wales, utilised semi-structured interviews with 51 male and female adult prison learners and 10 former prison learners in the community, participant observation, and informal conversations with "relevant others" (i.e., families and friends of participants, prison staff and teachers), to collect their data.

In the international context, Moreira, Monteiro, and Machado (2017) used an interpretative, interview-based qualitative approach to explore the experiences of prison learners engaging with higher education through distance learning and e-learning within a male prison in Portugal. The researchers acknowledge the importance of the user voice in their research, noting that they utilised "direct speech…to contextualise and explain the views of respondents, aiming to understand the perspectives of inmates regarding their motivations, expectations and learning conditions" (p.41). Addae (2020) utilised a qualitative case study approach whereby he conducted focus group interviews with 30 young adult males to explore the barriers to learning and educational motivations of learners in a Ghanaian prison. Pelletier and Evans (2019)

conducted qualitative research with former prison learners in New York State who had engaged with higher education whilst incarcerated. The authors sought to explore participants' perspectives on the impact participating in higher education has had on them both in prison and post-release. The authors utilised a focus group and semi-structured, in-depth interviews in order to "give respondents the space" to articulate their perspectives, experiences, and feelings (Pelletier & Evans, 2019, p.53). Hall and Killacky (2008) endeavoured to fill what they identified as a large gap in research on the perspectives of prison learners on their experiences of correctional education. The authors aimed to explore the following: the ways in which pre-incarceration educational and employment experiences influenced prison learners to make certain educational choices whilst in prison; the perceptions of prison learners with respect to the prison education environment, programme offerings and educators; and the relationship between educational experiences, both prior to and within prison, and successful societal reintegration upon release (ibid). Hall and Killacky utilised qualitative, open-ended interviews with ten prison learners and two prison administrators in a United States penitentiary, and field notes recorded during short observational sessions of prison education classes, to give due consideration to what they refer to as the "unheard perspective" of the prison learner (ibid, p.303). In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the educational experiences of their participants, Hall and Killacky note that collecting data in a way that highlighted the voices of the prison learners and prison administrators themselves was fundamental. In his exploration of incarcerated learners' experiences of and motivations for engaging with education as part of a larger project on the civic engagement of prisoners, Behan (2014) analysed semi-structured interviews with 50 prison learners in one adult male prison in Ireland. Behan notes that the use of open-ended questions within the interviews gave participants the chance to elaborate on the motivations behind their decisions to engage or not engage with education in prison. Brosens, Croux, and De Donder (2018) used a mixed-methods approach to explore the barriers to male and female prisoners' engagement with formal prison education in a Belgian remand prison. The study employed qualitative interviews with 86 focus group participants (both prisoners and prison staff), the findings of which informed the development of a structured questionnaire that

was subsequently completed by 486 participants, the results of which were analysed quantitatively (ibid).

The purpose of this brief review of common methods used within prison education research is not to advocate for qualitative superiority in methodological perspectives, but rather to contextually situate the methodology of the thesis within the wider research, and to highlight the significance of qualitative perspectives within the field of prison education. With respect to ensuring that the experiences of prison learners are heard beyond the abundance of research that focuses on the effectiveness of education programmes as measured by post-release recidivism outcomes (Reuss & Wilson, 2000), the holistic approach within this thesis is qualitative in nature. Whilst quantitative methodologies in prison research can be beneficial to researchers who are attempting to descriptively convey certain objective, factual accounts of the prison experience, scholars have emphasised the ability for qualitative research to intelligibly clarify the "cultural, hierarchical, social and emotional dimensions of life and work in prison" in ways that quantitative methodologies cannot (Beyens et al., 2015, p.73). Consistent with this mentality, the research questions are derived from a qualitative interest in exploring prison learners' narratives of their prison education experiences. Although the qualitative content analysis used in Study One does incorporate an element of quantitative inquiry through the quantification of data, the decision to incorporate this perspective was in aid of facilitating a wider understanding of prison education and wellbeing that could be interpreted through a qualitative lens.

Appendix E: 'Lockdown Learning' article in *Inside Time*

Lockdown Learning

We explore your experiences of prison education during the Covid-19 lockdown.

Given the new restrictions that have been implemented in prisons as a result of the coronavirus, a greater awareness of the impact of the virus on education and wellbeing is important. In particular, out-of-cell education courses that would normally keep minds occupied are currently not allowed under the quarantine regulations, raising questions about the interruption of learning. In order to investigate the impact of Covid-19 restrictions on prison learners, we would like to hear learners' views on education during the coronavirus pandemic. We invite learners to write to *Inside Time* about their personal experiences of how the Covid-19 restrictions on educational activities (for example, no longer being able to attend out-of-cell education courses, in-cell learning changes, delays in course materials, tutoring assistance, peer support, etc.) have impacted you, specifically in relation to your wellbeing. For example, what has changed in the way you are learning? Have these changes impacted your wellbeing in any way? For the better or worse?

Some guiding questions for prison learners to consider:

- *What are your personal experiences of the education-related lockdown restrictions?*
- *How has your learning been impacted by the coronavirus lockdown?*
- *Have you experienced delays or interruptions to your learning? If so, would you say this has impacted your wellbeing during the coronavirus lockdown?*
- *Are you experiencing any differences in the type or quality of learning now that the coronavirus lockdown is in place in comparison to before the lockdown? If so, please explain.*
- *For those in access and university-level courses, are you still able to engage in further and higher learning (i.e. access and university-level) courses during the Covid-19 lockdown, or has your learning been restricted to lower-level activities?*
- *Can you give any examples of how prisons have continued to support education during the lockdown?*

Your submissions will help inform a future article for *Inside Time* and will also be reviewed by PhD student, Erin Condirston, as part of a related research project that looks at the impact of prison education on wellbeing.

Please send correspondence to:

Inside Time
(Lockdown Learning)
Botley Mills
Botley
Southampton
Hampshire
SO30 2GB

(Feel free to combine responses in the same envelope to reduce postage costs)

* Please note that the closing date for responses is the 15th of July, 2020