

Institution: University of Glasgow (UofG)		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 20 Social Work and Social Policy		
Title of case study: Rethinking Punishment and Reintegration		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2001–2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): (1) Fergus McNeill (2) Marguerite Schinkel	Role(s) (e.g. job title): (1) Professor of Criminology & Social Work; (2) Lecturer	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: (1) 1998–present (2) 2013–present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2013–2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>There are approximately 30,000 people subject to imprisonment or supervision in Scotland, and over 3 million in Europe. UofG research explains how and why people cease and refrain from offending through a process known as ‘desistance’, and how they sometimes secure reintegration after punishment. Through sustained dialogue with policymakers, practitioners and activists, the research has: (i) influenced Parliamentary inquiries and legislative changes in Scotland; (ii) reframed and reformed justice strategies, services and practices in Scotland, England, Wales, Belgium and the Netherlands; (iii) shaped professional education (e.g. via Scottish Prison Service training and a new assessment tool in Norway). Evidence is now emerging of how these ‘desistance-informed’ developments are contributing to safer societies through more effective approaches to criminal justice.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
2.1. Towards a ‘desistance paradigm’		
<p>McNeill’s research on desistance and reintegration dates to 2001. Initially, he focused on synthesising previous empirical studies, elaborating their implications for criminal justice policy and practice. Later, he secured funding for projects that focused on redesigning probation and parole (e.g. the ESRC-funded Desistance Knowledge Exchange, 2011–2012). Schinkel’s ESRC Future Leaders Fellowship (mentored by McNeill at Glasgow from 2013–2017) examined how repeated short-term imprisonment affects desistance and reintegration (building on her doctoral work on long-term imprisonment). McNeill’s influential 2006 paper advancing the case for ‘a desistance paradigm’ [3.1] argued that ‘offender management’ had become too narrowly focused on managing reoffending risk via standardised assessment tools and offending behaviour programmes. He argued forcefully for policies and practices to be informed by studies of desistance that help us understand not just ‘what [intervention] works’ but also how and why people desist and can be best supported to do so.</p>		
2.2. Beyond ‘offender management’		
<p>In his 2010 paper [3.2], commissioned by the National Offender Management Service for England and Wales, McNeill and Weaver (University of Strathclyde) summarised this research and more fully articulated key elements of a desistance-supporting approach to probation and parole practice. They argued that such an approach would need to recognise and accommodate the ‘zig-zag’ and highly individualised nature of the process; to work with and through professional and social relationships; to encourage hope, self-determination and a sense of agency; to recognise and reward incremental change; to avoid negative labelling and pathologising language; and to develop people’s opportunities and social capital.</p>		
2.3. Four forms of rehabilitation and reintegration		
<p>While leading the Desistance Knowledge Exchange project (2011–2012), McNeill produced the 2012 paper on four forms of rehabilitation [3.3], arguing that a narrow focus only on supporting ‘psychological or correctional rehabilitation’ risked neglecting the importance of restoring the status as citizens of those who had been punished; of moral reparation between offender, victim and community; and of the social reintegration of the returning citizen. He argued that all four forms of rehabilitation and reintegration are inter-dependent; and that laws, policies and</p>		

practices need to recognise this if we are to avoid wasting resources and frustrating desistance—undermining positive changes secured in one area by our neglect of another. Schinkel’s findings reinforced these arguments, particularly in relation to the impact of prison sentences on desistance and reintegration. Her post-doctoral research found that repeated short-term sentences are meaningless or come to be seen as a waste of life, and that these disruptive sentences interact with trauma and high levels of surveillance and suspicion from the criminal justice system to produce fragmented, disintegrated lives [3.4, 3.5, 3.6]. This fine-grained articulation of formal and informal barriers to desistance and reintegration helped to clarify the scale of the challenges involved, and to support the case for combining the four forms of rehabilitation. Output [3.4] was written with Nugent (University of Salford) and output [3.6] with Atkinson and Anderson (both University of West of Scotland).

2.4. Underpinning research networks

McNeill and Schinkel’s research has contributed to and benefitted from the impact of wider bodies of scholarship, often linked to research networks, which they have played a key role in establishing and leading. These include CREDOS (an international Collaboration of Researchers for the Effective Development of Offender Supervision, McNeill, est. 2007), the European Society of Criminology Working Group on Community Sanctions and Measures (McNeill, est. 2008), the European Society of Criminology Working Group on Prison Life and Effects of Imprisonment (Schinkel, est. 2014) and COST Action on Offender Supervision in Europe (led by McNeill, 2012–2016).

As noted above, researchers from other institutions and non-academic partners have been involved in specific studies over the years. McNeill and Schinkel have worked consistently to lead and participate in these collaborations, and have played key roles not only in developing this body of research over several decades, but also in developing it into policy and practice-relevant proposals (as outlined in section 4 below).

3. References to the research

3.1. McNeill, F. (2006) [A desistance paradigm for offender management](#). *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 6(1), pp. 39–62. (doi: [10.1177/1748895806060666](https://doi.org/10.1177/1748895806060666))

3.2. McNeill, F. and Weaver, B. (2010) [Changing Lives? Desistance Research and Offender Management](#). Project Report. Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research, University of Glasgow, Glasgow.

3.3. McNeill, F. (2012) [Four forms of 'offender' rehabilitation: Towards an interdisciplinary perspective](#). *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 17(1), pp. 18–36. (doi: [10.1111/j.2044-8333.2011.02039.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8333.2011.02039.x))

3.4. Nugent, B. and Schinkel, M. (2016) [The pains of desistance](#). *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 16(5), pp. 568–584. (doi: [10.1177/1748895816634812](https://doi.org/10.1177/1748895816634812))

3.5. Schinkel, M. (2014) [Being Imprisoned: Punishment, Adaptation and Desistance](#). Series: Palgrave studies in prisons and penology. Palgrave MacMillan: Basingstoke. ISBN 9781137440822 (doi: [10.1057/9781137440839](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137440839))

3.6. Schinkel, M. , Atkinson, C. and Anderson, S. (2019) ['Well-kent faces': policing persistent offenders and the possibilities for desistance](#). *British Journal of Criminology*, 59(3), pp. 634–652. (doi: [10.1093/bjc/azy050](https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azy050))

This body of research meets the 2* quality threshold because outputs [3.1], [3.3], [3.4] and [3.6] were published in high-ranking, peer-reviewed criminology journals. Output [3.5] was published in a prestigious book series. Citation metrics are exceptionally strong in all cases, except output [3.6] which was published very recently. The research was supported by three awards from the ESRC and one from the European Union.

4. Details of the impact

4.1. Pathways to impact

Through their projects, publications and networks, McNeill and Schinkel's work has become well known in many jurisdictions where they have developed strong and sustained relationships with policymakers, practitioners and activists. The [ESRC Impact in Public Policy award-winning DesKE](#) project was particularly important in this process. It used a specially commissioned film, a project blog, and a series of dialogue workshops to develop 'provocative propositions' for criminal justice reform. Subsequent projects, like the [COST Action](#) and [Lives Sentenced](#), similarly relied upon innovative and creative outputs to communicate the research findings to key stakeholders. These activities have generated impacts of three main kinds:

4.2. Influencing Parliament and legislation

McNeill and Schinkel's work has influenced Parliamentary Committees, debates and legislation in Scotland. For example, McNeill drew on the research to argue successfully *against* the original provisions of the [Prisoners \(Control of Release\) Bill \(2015\)](#), leading to amendments that ensured that all long-term prisoners would be released no later than six months before full sentence expiry and with support and supervision. His evidence to the Justice Committee was referred to on six occasions in the Stage 3 debate (as confirmed by report [\[5A\]](#)). McNeill's oral evidence to the Scottish Parliament's Equalities and Human Rights Committee also played a key role in informing its [Report on Prisoner Voting in Scotland \[5B\]](#) (McNeill's research-based evidence is directly cited on five occasions). This led, via a Scottish Government Consultation, to provisions in the [Scottish Elections \(Franchise and Representation\) Bill](#) to extend the franchise to prisoners serving 12 months or less. The Bill was enacted into law on 1 April 2020.

4.3. Changes in justice strategies, services and practices

In Scotland, McNeill was invited by Ministerial appointment to join and then lead the Scottish Advisory Panel on Offender Rehabilitation (2013–2016), changing its approach to supporting effective rehabilitation in line with the underpinning research (as outlined in section 2 above). The former Cabinet Secretary for Justice, who appointed him, wrote: *'the role of academia was [...] pivotal in policy change and structural redesign. I met with Prof McNeill on many occasions before and during my tenure and feel that it was invaluable [...] It allowed me to widen my perspective and to find out what was happening and what was working [...] The practical outcomes of that were manifold'* (confirmed by statement [\[5C\]](#)).

Building upon the DesKE project, McNeill provided advice to the Scottish Prison Service's Organisational Review, which produced the radical report ['Unlocking Potential: Transforming Lives'](#) in December 2013. The Chief Executive of the Scottish Prison Service wrote: *'the research and evidence-based advice tendered by Prof McNeill and Dr Schinkel helped us understand the most effective ways in which we can support social integration and desistance for those leaving custody and in doing so, promote the Scottish Government's commitment to a "Safer, Stronger, Fairer" Scotland'* (confirmed by statement [\[5D\]](#)).

McNeill has also developed the reach of DesKE by helping to establish two third sector organisations, serving as founding Chair of their Boards. Between 2012–2019, 'Positive Prison? Positive Futures...' brought the experiences of people with convictions powerfully to bear in subsequent Scottish justice reforms, notably influencing 2015 legislation in relation to prisoner release arrangements (as confirmed by statement [\[5E\]](#)). Since 2013, [Vox Luminis](#) has used innovative and creative practices in an effort to spark individual, cultural and institutional changes in criminal justice. To that end, Vox is now the host of and key practice partner in the ongoing ESRC-funded 'Distant Voices – Coming Home' project (2017–November 2021).

In England and Wales, Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) has also been strongly influenced by the research, which has fundamentally changed how they understand the nature of rehabilitation. As a result, they have tried to make 'offending behaviour programmes' less formulaic by introducing a greater focus on the co-production of desistance, emphasising the importance of helping people to find their own unique strengths and talents. The former Rehabilitative Culture Lead at HMPPS wrote: *'through conversations with Professor McNeill and through reading his work, I have become more open-minded about how I understand the nature of rehabilitation and the role of statutory and voluntary agencies.'* Her Majesty's Inspectorate of

Probation has since used McNeill's work in reviewing and redeveloping its 2018 inspection standards for probation and youth justice (as confirmed by statement [5F]).

In Europe, McNeill's work has led to invitations to provide keynote addresses at international conferences organised by the Confederation of European Probation and then to his co-optation as a Board Member (2016–2022). As a result, several national services have re-designed aspects of their approaches to rehabilitation. For example, in Belgium between 2015–2016, McNeill provided consultancy support to senior managers in the *Maisons de Justice* to help them integrate desistance principles in their redesign of probation services; a change that is now explicitly reflected in their service agreement with the Belgian Government. The Director General wrote: *"the work of Fergus McNeill is more than relevant for our organisation to help us moving from static models of people as 'offenders', 'criminals' or 'prisoners' to a new understanding of change(s) in personal identities"*. This process and its impacts have recently been articulated in a journal article by the Director General's staff (confirmed by collated evidence [5G]). From 2016–2018, McNeill also worked in a similar way with the Willem Schrikker Institute in supporting Dutch municipalities in the design and implementation of a new approach to probation with young people called 'Signs of Success' (confirmed by statement [5H]).

In each of these cases, the research has been used to re-design policy and practice such that a more future-focused, individualised, relational and socially-situated mode of support for desistance and reintegration is provided. In several jurisdictions, research is underway to assess the impacts of these reforms. In one published paper, Norwegian practitioner-researchers described and evaluated the use of a new assessment tool informed by the research. Their evaluation found that it significantly improved the process for both practitioners and service users, improving the prospects of reintegration (confirmed by paper [5I]). The evaluation of the 'Signs of Success' project [5H], which has been implemented in four Dutch regions, has also produced promising early findings, yet it remains too early to draw firm conclusions on the success of the project.

4.4. Informing professional education and development

From 2014 onwards, McNeill and Schinkel's research has informed training for 1,204 new and existing staff of the Scottish Prison Service (SPS), as part of a wider initiative to support their professionalisation. For context, the SPS employs approximately 4,477 staff, so around one quarter of the current staff have received the training, and plans are in place for others to receive it. The SPS Learning and Development Researcher wrote: *'Desistance training is now integrated into our Officer Foundation Programme (OFP), which means that all new staff being trained at the SPS College are aware of this theory and how it relates to their role within the SPS.'* Filmed interviews with McNeill about desistance form the core of that training (confirmed by statement [5J]). Several of the European examples (above) have also involved contributions to professional education. For example, McNeill played a key role in training Dutch juvenile probation officers in the Signs of Success project (confirmed by collated evidence [5H]).

4.5. Beneficiaries

The examples above are illustrative rather than exhaustive. They indicate how the research-based reframing of dialogue and debate about punishment and rehabilitation (an 'enlightenment' impact) has supported concrete changes in law, policy, practice and professional education ('engineering' impacts). The evidence is now beginning to emerge of the final step in the impact chain: where these changes produce better outcomes for justice-affected people, thus contributing to the development of fairer and safer societies.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[5A] Prisoners (Control of Release) Bill 2015, Stage 3 Debate (McNeill's evidence is referred to on six occasions) [PDF available].

[5B] Report on Prisoner Voting in Scotland (McNeill's evidence is directly cited on five occasions) [PDF available].

[5C] Statement from the former Cabinet Secretary for Justice (7 August 2018) (confirms changes to the Scottish Advisory Panel on Offender Rehabilitation approach to supporting effective rehabilitation in line with the underpinning research) [PDF available].

[5D] Statement from the Chief Executive of Scottish Prison Service (19 July 2018) (confirms the impact of the underpinning research on the Scottish Prison Service's Organisational Review) **[PDF available]**.

[5E] Statement from the Chief Executive of Positive Prisons? Positive Futures... (1 August 2018) **[PDF available]**.

[5F] Statement from the Rehabilitative Culture lead, HMPPS (25 October 2018) (confirms that the underpinning research changed how HMPPS understand the nature of rehabilitation) **[PDF available]**.

[5G] Collated evidence: (i) Statement from the Director General of *Maisons de Justice*, Belgium, (confirms McNeill's role in the Service Agreement 'Déclaration de Politique, Fédération Wallonie Bruxelles, 2014–2019'); (ii) journal article 'Désistance et maisons de justice: construction d'un modèle par et pour l'administration'. *Revue de Droit Penal et Criminologie*, 2019 – No 11-12 [*in French*] **[PDFs available]**.

[5H] Collated evidence: (i) Statement from the Project Team Program Manager, William Schrikker Stichting, Netherlands (November 2017); (ii) Signs of Success Evaluation [*In Dutch*] **[PDFs available]**.

[5I] Hansen, G, V. and Samuelson, F. (2016) Assessment of Offenders: new trends in Norway (2016) (confirms that an assessment tool informed by the research significantly improved the process for practitioners and service users) **[PDF available]**.

[5J] Collated evidence: (i) Statement from the Learning and Development Researcher, Scottish Prison Service College (11 October 2018); (ii) email confirming training numbers from Learning and Development Researcher, Scottish Prison Service College (21 Aug 2020) **[PDFs available]**.