



HM Prison &  
Probation Service

# **Developing prison culture: Participatory Action Research (PAR) as an approach to achieve culture change**

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## **The authors**

The authors were all Chartered Psychologists in the Evidence-Based Practice Team, Insights Group, in HM Prison and Probation Service, at the time of the study.

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# 1. Summary

## Introduction and study aims

Definitions of organisational culture commonly include: the shared beliefs, attitudes, norms, and behaviours of people working in the organisation; this has been previously summed up as “the way we do things around here” (Balogun & Johnson, 2004). The current study aimed to explore whether Participatory Action Research (PAR) methods could be used to better understand, and hopefully improve, the cultural experiences of staff and prisoners.

PAR is best regarded as an approach rather than a methodology (Meyer, 2010). It utilises a reflective and cyclical process to support those involved in a social issue to explore, understand, and take action to address the issues they are experiencing (Haverkate, Meyers, Telep & Wright, 2020). Actions and decisions to address the issue being tackled are determined by a research group, comprising people who are affected by or who are ‘closest to’ it.

Staff and prisoners at two English prisons took part in the study over an 18–24-month period. The study aimed to explore:

- Whether a PAR approach could be used to better understand the cultural experiences of the staff and prisoners at each site,
- The conditions under which a PAR approach may lead to perceived change in local prison culture,
- Barriers to implementing the PAR approach, and
- The perceived impact of the project for those involved.

## Methodological approach and interpreting findings

Each prison took a slightly different approach to how they established and ran their culture change projects, and what roles individuals took. However, the staff and prisoners at both prisons were active collaborators (‘co-researchers’) in the research process, meeting monthly (in the main), with one, two, or all of the lead researchers (report authors) who were external to the prison. The project ran for approximately

17 months at one prison (April 2022 to September 2023) and 22 months at the other (June 2022 to March 2024).

Data were gathered via reflection logs, detailed case notes made by the lead researchers, reflective discussions throughout the duration of the project, feedback from other staff and prisoners in both sites, meeting notes, lead researcher reflections and observations, and focus groups held at each prison at the end of the project. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2021) and triangulated across the range of sources available and, at all stages, themes identified were discussed with the co-researchers to check and refine their accuracy, clarity, and meaning.

The primary limitation of this study was the self-selecting nature of the participant group. Further, there was the lack of diversity within the research teams, with all those involved being of white ethnicity. All the prisoners involved were also sentenced, with the majority serving longer sentences. There were difficulties with staff members consistently attending meetings due to competing responsibilities, meaning that the focus of discussions (and actions taken) were, at times, focused more on issues impacting prisoners rather than everyone at the prisons. There were also challenges quantifying the impact of the projects on the wider prison communities. Finally, it is important to note that the vast majority of the prison estate is for adult males and as the study did not explore the use of PAR across all prison environments / regimes, the findings may not be generalisable to all prisons.

## **Key findings**

There were consistent themes identified across both prisons regarding the cultural issues that were impacting both staff and prisoners (communication, consistency of decision-making and processes, reward and recognition, community, and opportunity). Both groups undertook work to address and develop these areas, although quantifying the impact of this was, at times, difficult, due to the complexity of definition and measurement of 'culture' (Fitzalan Howard, Gibson, & Wakeling, 2023).

The findings indicated, strikingly, how valuable those involved felt that the project had been for them. When reflecting on their experiences, both project groups described

the positive impact of having a voice and the collaborative equitable working relationships that had developed. For many of the prisoners especially, being involved had held great personal value, helping them to develop their confidence, their ability to advocate for themselves, and changing how they communicated with others (including staff) outside of the project. There was also improved understanding within the groups of the challenges each other faced. Both groups were unanimous about the value of PAR as an approach to culture change within prison settings, and how having people external to the prison involved had been helpful. The passion and drive of many of those involved at one of the prisons was particularly impressive.

Both projects experienced challenges. For example, both groups struggled to make progress in certain areas and identified issues that they could have little influence over. The lack of empowerment and autonomy experienced by those involved also appeared to negatively impact on some people being able to proactively generate actions they could take. Having members of the senior leadership team involved, or actively supportive of the project, appeared to mitigate some of these issues. A further consistent challenge was staff members being able to regularly attend meetings and take forward work to address the issues identified.

A number of pointers for future consideration are made for those wishing to use co-production and engagement methodologies, such as PAR, in culture change efforts within prisons. This study adds to the existing evidence bases for prison culture change, co-production, and engagement, and outlines some of the conditions which need to be in place for such approaches to have the greatest impact.



## 2. Introduction

### 2.1 Culture change within prisons

Definitions of organisational culture commonly include: the shared beliefs, attitudes, norms, and behaviours of people working in the organisation; this has been previously summed up as “the way we do things around here” (Balogun & Johnson, 2004). The evidence base suggests that organisational culture may influence the experiences of those who are part of them, and an organisation’s ability to achieve its objectives. In prisons this includes, for example, outcomes such as safety and order, rehabilitation and reoffending, and people’s conduct and well-being (Fitzalan Howard, Gibson, & Wakeling, 2023).

There is currently a good evidence-base regarding what constitutes a ‘good’ prison for those living and working within them, i.e., the features or aspects of prisons that can positively impact the aforementioned outcomes (Fitzalan Howard, Gibson & Wakeling, 2023). There is also some evidence supporting the use of specific measures to understand some of those features (such as, in HM prisons, official MoJ performance indicators and the Measuring Quality of Prison Life survey<sup>1</sup>). What is not well understood however, in prisons or in other organisations, is how to **improve** an organisation’s culture overall – i.e., what works to effectively move from a poorer state to a better one in relation to the shared local beliefs, attitudes, norms, and behaviours. Given the challenges that many prisons are facing, such as in relation to staffing levels and retention rates, rates of violence, self-harm, and substance misuse, culture improvement is something that warrants attention.

Culture change is poorly understood in part because of a lack of an agreed definition of organisational ‘culture’, the complexity of the concept (and the large number of potential influencing variables), the absence of an agreed way of measuring or exploring the concept as a whole, and because little research has sought to understand how to change this (see, for example, Barends & Rousseau, 2022; Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2019; Gifford & Wietrak, 2022;

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<sup>1</sup> For further information on MoJ prison performance indicators, which includes Measuring Quality of Prison Life Survey data, see: [Annual Prison Performance Ratings Guide 2023/24 - GOV.UK](#)

Ouellette, Goodman, Martinsez-Pedraza, Moses, Cromer, Zhao, Pierre & Frazier, 2020; Parmelli, Flodgren, Schaafsma, Baillie, Beyer & Eccles, 2011). A recently published research study went some way to begin to develop the evidence base on how to improve/develop culture within prisons (Fitzalan Howard, Gibson & Wakeling, 2023). This study explored how culture change in prisons is achieved, and provided a preliminary model of the conditions that enable, and the mechanisms that bring about, change in this setting. Some of the mechanisms of culture development identified included; clarity of vision and priorities; empowerment and fostering autonomy; recognising and valuing people and progress; maximising and using people's potential; and encouraging voice and engagement. Included within the recommendations made by those authors, is that culture development work within prisons should utilise collaborative, multi-disciplinary, and co-productive ways of working.

## **2.2 Participatory Action Research (PAR) as an approach for culture change**

The use of engagement and co-production within criminal justice settings has increased in recent years (Cunningham & Wakeling, 2022), with staff and prisoners being in a good position to generate solutions to any cultural issues within their own prisons, and to put these into action, given their experiences of living and working within them (e.g., Ross & Naylor, 2017).

PAR, which is best regarded as an approach rather than a methodology (Meyer, 2010), involves being responsive to the emerging needs of the situation, taking a cyclical approach (planning, acting, observing, and reacting), involving critical reflection by everyone involved. Within PAR, the actions and decisions made reflect the experiences, goals, and aspirations of those involved, meaning that they are context specific. The involvement of staff, service-users, stakeholders, etc., as active participants in the research process is a different approach to traditional research methodologies. In traditional approaches the dynamic is hierarchical, with researchers determining the majority of what happens, how and when (e.g., research aims and activities, sample selection criteria, interpretation of findings and so on). In contrast, within PAR, the dynamic is more democratic and collaborative, illustrated by

terms such as 'lead researchers' and 'co-researchers' being used, rather than 'researchers' and 'participants' respectively.

Interest in PAR methods within forensic settings has been gaining momentum recently (e.g., Haarmans, PAR team, Perkins & Jellicoe-Jones, 2021; Haverkate, Meyers, Telep & Wright, 2020). In their literature review, Cunningham and Wakeling (2022) concluded that, despite its somewhat limited use to date, PAR can lead to new knowledge and personal change among those involved. There are examples of the approach being utilised to support culture change and development, and PAR has been used to mitigate some of the barriers to culture change efforts within juvenile justice settings and adult prisons (e.g., Brogan, McPhee, Gale-Bentz, Rudd & Goldstein, 2020; Esthappan, Laco, Zweig & Young, 2020). For example, Haarmans and colleagues (2021) reflect on their experiences of using PAR with a group of men living on a prison-based personality assessment and treatment unit to co-produce new knowledge and improve their community. While they describe several challenges they experienced, and suggest means of mitigating these, they also describe the personal value group members took from their engagement in the project (e.g., improved agency), and suggest that the use of PAR approaches within criminal justice settings helps to ensure services are responsive.

### **2.3 The current study**

This was not a typical research study, in that it used PAR to assess and improve the culture of two prisons and at the same time considered the value of using this type of methodology to achieve this overarching purpose. The study aimed to describe the process over an 18–24-month period and explore:

- Whether a PAR approach could be used to better understand the cultural experiences of the staff and prisoners at each site,
- The conditions under which PAR may lead to perceived change in local culture,
- Whether there are any barriers to PAR, and
- The perceived impact of the project for those involved.

## 3. Method

### 3.1 Study sites

Information regarding the research aims was initially shared with Prison Group Directors (PGDs) in HMPPS, who were asked to nominate sites within their regions who may be suitable and interested to take part. Initial selection criteria included:

- No other major programmes of work/trials operating or due to start after the commencement of the research.
- Governor and senior leadership team (SLT) commitment to the project and long-term culture change.
- Sufficient resource availability, including the site identifying a single point of contact (SPOC) to coordinate and drive forward the project, arrange monthly meetings, and take on identified actions.

Five sites were initially nominated and entered into discussion with the lead researchers. Given the aims of the research, the lead researchers chose to work with two very different types of prisons in an attempt to mirror the diversity of HMPPS prison establishments, operational demands, prison populations, staff, and geography. Governor and senior management commitment were also assessed as part of this selection process. The two prisons selected are described in Appendix A. In summary, both prisons identified problems in relation to their culture that they hoped to address in areas such as:

- Issues embedding a rehabilitative culture (Mann, Fitzalan Howard & Tew, 2018; Mann, 2019).
- The need to improve engagement with staff and prisoners, and build a greater sense of community.
- A lack of employment opportunities for prisoners.
- Better support for staff.
- Issues with trust between different staffing groups.

### 3.2 Researchers

The lead researchers (who were employed by HMPPS at the time of the study and are also the authors of this report) were external to the prison but took an active role

in the groups at both prisons. The staff and prisoners at both sites were active collaborators and participants in the research process, and therefore the term 'co-researchers' was used for them (Haverkate et al., 2020).<sup>2</sup>

Posters were used at both sites to invite people to take part in the project, and those interested then attended an information session with either the lead researchers (prison A) or the site Single Points of Contact (SPOC, prison B). During these sessions, the aims and methodology of the project were described, attendees had an opportunity to ask questions, and some attendees started thinking about potential areas the group could address (prison A). At prison A, prisoners and staff put themselves forward or were approached by the local SPOC (a Custodial Manager), to take part. This process resulted in the selection of six prisoners for the group and seven staff members (included representatives from Psychology Services, Offender Management, Operational staff, Probation staff, site SPOCs). At prison B, expressions of interest were requested from prisoners, with interested parties meeting with the SPOCs (Head of Offender Management Services and a Forensic Psychologist) to describe one problem at the prison and what they thought the solution might be. Staff put themselves forward for involvement, and this resulted in the selection of six prisoners and eight staff for the group (included representatives from Industries, Psychology Services, Offender Management, Operational staff, site SPOCs). All co-researchers were of white ethnicity.

In the first meetings, a group contract was developed at both sites. At prison A, 12 meetings were held and at prison B, 20 meetings were held. The group at prison A chose not to chair meetings, preferring the lead researchers to take on this role. There were occasions when members of the group at prison B chaired the meeting.

Attendance from staff at both sites fluctuated throughout the project, while attendance from prisoners was more consistent at both sites. At prison B, the prisoners organised sessions amongst themselves between the formal monthly meetings, which (when they took place) were particularly helpful for them progressing

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<sup>2</sup> While the term 'co-researcher' will be used throughout the report, the terms 'staff' and 'prisoners' are used for clarity when describing different roles and experiences of the people involved.

actions, determining information to share with other prisoners, and collating the wider prisoner voice about particular issues/topics.

The majority of prisoners in the groups had been in prison for a number of years and were serving lengthy sentences (including indeterminate sentences). When some new prisoners joined at prison A, they provided a new and different perspective, given their recent experience of arrival at the prison, location on different units, and shorter sentences. At prison B, the prisoners made efforts to speak to other prisoners between meetings, to ensure that other perspectives and voices were reflected in discussions and actions taken.

### **3.3 Design**

In line with the PAR methodology, staff and prisoners in both sites were directly participative in the research design. In addition to examining one of the primary study aims of whether PAR is a helpful approach to create culture change (see section 2.3 for further details), the approach was also appropriate given the exploratory nature of the research, and as knowledge is best produced by teams of people directly impacted by the social issue (in this case, prison culture), working in collaboration and by 'doing'. It was also hoped that the use of PAR would provide those involved with the opportunity to take responsibility for improving systems that impact upon them, test new systems, and share learning, which would provide them with development opportunities and ultimately improve local outcomes.

Each prison took a slightly different approach to how they established their group, how these were run, and what roles individuals took (please see Appendix B for further details). This provided an opportunity to reflect on the impact of these differences, which will be reflected upon where relevant throughout the report and is described below. The project ran for approximately 17 months at one prison (April 2022 to September 2023) and 22 months at the other (June 2022 to March 2024). One, two, or all of the lead researchers attended each meeting, which took place on a monthly basis (apart from some exceptions, described below). The researchers wrote detailed notes following each meeting including the agreed actions and

emailed these to all attendees (via Email a Prisoner,<sup>3</sup> or the internal HMPPS email system). Group members at both prisons were offered the opportunity to chair the meetings.

### 3.4 Data collection and analysis

With PAR methodology an iterative approach to data collection and analysis is taken. Data were gathered via reflective logs,<sup>4</sup> 167 pages of detailed case notes made by the lead researchers,<sup>5</sup> reflective discussions throughout the duration of the project, feedback from other staff and prisoners, meeting notes, and lead researcher reflections and observations. Co-researchers at prison B were more consistent in completing reflective logs after meetings than co-researchers at prison A.

Three focus groups were also held with each prison at the end of the projects by two of the lead researchers. Staff and prisoners who were available attended,<sup>6</sup> and were asked to reflect on their experiences of their involvement and whether they thought a PAR approach can be used to achieve culture change in prison (full details of the questions used to guide the focus groups can be found in Appendix F). One of the lead researchers led the focus group, while the other took detailed notes. Some staff members at prison A were not available to attend the focus group and were offered the opportunity to take part in a focus group online.

Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis by the lead researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2021), and took place at several time intervals. Data from the two prisons was initially analysed separately. At six monthly points from project initiation: first, each data source (e.g., focus group notes and transcripts, reflection logs, case notes, etc.) was analysed in turn, combining the reflections and experiences of both staff and prisoners within each group. Second, the themes identified from each source at each site were considered collectively and triangulated together into major themes. Third, the major themes were discussed and shared with

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<sup>3</sup> EMaP: [Email a Prisoner - the hassle free way to keep in touch](#)

<sup>4</sup> Prison A: 0 staff reflection logs and 6 prisoner reflection logs; Prison B: 8 staff reflection logs and 54 prisoner reflection logs.

<sup>5</sup> Times New Roman font, size 12, 1.5 line spaced.

<sup>6</sup> Prison A: n = 7 (3 staff and 4 prisoners); Prison B: n = 9 (2 staff and 7 prisoners).

the co-researchers at each site via draft interim reports and in-person meetings, to obtain their views on their accuracy, clarity, and meaning; this allowed further refinement and adjustment of the emerging findings. These reports and discussions helped to structure and focus the work by the project groups for the subsequent period, by capturing achievements and struggles to-date, and generating the next phase of actions. Themes from the end of project focus groups were initially identified by the lead researchers. These were then shared with the groups at both prisons to obtain their views on their accuracy, clarity, and meaning in the final in-person meetings, allowing for further refinement and adjustment. Finally, once both projects had come to an end and all data had been analysed as described above, the major themes from both sites were considered in parallel, and similarities and differences identified and clarified. These themes are described in section 4.

### **3.5 Limitations and interpretation of findings**

The primary limitation of this study was the self-selecting nature of the participant group. Further, both project groups lacked diversity (see section 3.3) and so were not fully representative of the wider staff and prison populations within the sites. Efforts were made by both groups to remedy this over time, including making deliberate and considered approaches to potential new members to bring more diverse characteristics and experiences into the projects, and making concerted efforts (especially by prisoners in prison B) to speak with as many prisoners between meetings, to ensure their voices could then be represented. Whilst these actions were helpful, both groups acknowledged that the actions they were taking to develop their cultures may not reflect the experiences and preferences of everyone.

Linked with the above, there was more regular and consistent attendance at both sites from prisoners than staff.<sup>7</sup> Both sites discussed the impact of this which included; actions needing staff input being allocated to the same staff members (which led to staff members feeling overwhelmed and at times unable to progress with allocated actions); meetings being primarily focused on issues impacting upon prisoners rather than everyone at the prisons; and regular attendees becoming

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<sup>7</sup> This was a result of staffing shortages, the competing demands placed on staff, staff being allocated to other duties, etc.



frustrated with the lack of attendance from staff members (despite the fact that it was acknowledged that many staff members wanted to attend).

Throughout the project, it has been difficult to 'measure' the impact of the project / actions taken. While the group at prison B made some attempts to mitigate this by seeking feedback from other staff and prisoners about the impact of the project (see section 4.4 for further details), this issue reflects some of the wider challenges of the definition and measurement of culture, which has hampered research within this area more widely (Fitzalan Howard, Gibson & Wakeling, 2023).

Given the nature of this research, the lead researchers spent a considerable amount of time at both sites and with the co-researchers. While the knowledge acquired about each site and the relationships developed are likely to have helped facilitate the reflective and cyclical process of PAR, the lead researchers were also aware of the potential for researcher investment bias (also as a result of their employment by HMPPS). Additionally, the researchers' active role in the project, and the fact that their reflections of the impact were included, meant that objectivity was difficult. In order to mitigate against this, the lead researchers rotated attendance at each site, with no more than two lead researchers attending each meeting (apart from the initial and final meetings). They also engaged in regular reflective discussions with researchers who have experience of collaborative and co-productive research methodologies (including PAR) who were external to HMPPS, and engaged external reviewers for the peer review process. The lead researchers working together to check analyses, thematic coding, and interpretation also served to mitigate this risk.

Finally, the two study sites were selected in order to explore the use of PAR across different prison environments. However, it is important to note that the vast majority of the prison estate is for adult males and as the study did not explore the use of PAR across all prison environments / regimes, the findings may not be generalisable to all prisons.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Themes of issues identified

Despite the different approaches taken at the prisons to identify issues they wanted to work on, there were consistent themes identified across both groups in relation to what impacted on the culture for staff and prisoners. These were communication, consistency, reward and recognition, community, and opportunity (see Appendix D for further information). Additional themes identified at prison A included food, mental health support and healthcare, relationships between staff and prisoners, wellbeing and support, induction processes, and access to basic items. Additional themes identified at prison B related to rehabilitation and safety.

### 4.2 Actions and research activities

It is not possible to reflect on all of the actions and research activities of the groups throughout the duration of the project. However, examples of actions taken by the groups include: using newsletters to share information about the project and updates (both sites, and for both prisoners and staff); reinstatement of a 'thank you card' system (prison A, for staff); encouraging staff to record, and print positive comments about prisoners (prison B); promoting the use of WayOutTV<sup>8</sup> for the sharing of information (prison B). At prison B, the group engaged in research activities to better understand what people living and working at the prison thought the group should focus upon, whether they felt any progress had been made, and how staff support rehabilitation. This included distributing a survey, asking staff how they have contributed to someone's rehabilitation, and asking prisoners how staff have made a difference. Further examples and details of these actions and activities can be found in Appendix E.

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<sup>8</sup> WayOut TV is a channel available at some prisons as a means of communication, education, and the promotion of prison services for in-cell viewing. The channel also allows prison staff to communicate with prisoners directly in their cells.

### 4.3 Experiences and reflections<sup>9</sup>

Co-researchers at both prisons reflected on how the projects, and their involvement, had been worthwhile. These were captured by four main themes across both sites; having a voice and collaborative equitable working relationships; personal value of engagement in the project; value of PAR as an approach to culture change; and the role of the lead researchers. At prison B, an additional theme reflecting the groups' passion and drive was also identified.

#### **Having a voice and collaborative equitable working relationships**

Across both groups, the prisoners involved reflected how they had valued the opportunity to have their voice heard and to work closely with a group of staff within a "mutual platform" (prisoner, prison B). They spoke about how the process of "prisoners and staff talking to each other is unheard of in some prisons" (prisoner, prison B) and this had felt different to other listening activities or forums, as they were more involved in generating solutions, ideas, and actions:

"I can't make the prison a better place on my own, but working in a group with staff members and other residents who all want to make a difference, can." (prisoner, prison B)

Both staff and prisoners alike spoke of the particular benefit of the joint, collaborative approach, as it had helped them to "...better understand the perspective of staff and other prisoners" (prisoner, prison A) which, in turn, supported the development of relationships within the group, as they had "... put myself in the prisoners position ... if it was me, I would feel the same" (staff member, prison A.) The co-researchers at prison B also reflected on the benefit of having staff from both operational and non-operational roles take part, as this enhanced the perspectives shared. Group members talked of the project providing them with "common goals" (staff member, prison B), collective purpose, meaning, and value, and the benefit of being able to help others. Knowing that there were a number of people who really wanted to make a difference was important for some.

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<sup>9</sup> All quotes are from focus groups and reflection logs.

For the prisoners, the equality of relationships, "... you speak to us all the same ... communication has been wonderful ... treated us with respect" (prisoner, prison A) within the group was highlighted as particularly important to the project, and for them as individuals. Getting to know each other and feeling comfortable as a group, deciding together on goals, and communicating well within sessions, with equality of relationships, were all raised as points of advice that the groups would give to other prisons looking to conduct a similar initiative:

"Been wonderful, mainly cause of people with the same common goal coming together. You speak to us as human beings." (prisoner, prison A)

"It makes me feel encouraged that prisoners are able to discuss important issues as equals with staff and officers and our views are listened to with respect." (prisoner, prison B)

### **Personal value of engagement in the project**

For many of the prisoners, being involved in the project had brought significant personal benefit. This included in relation to developing themselves (e.g., "I've learnt to speak out ... it has developed my confidence", prisoner, prison A), feeling encouraged to advocate for themselves, facilitating "a welcome boost to my wellbeing" (prisoner, prison B), and had felt like "an honour and privilege" (prisoner, prison B) to be involved. For others, the group helped them get to know people around the prison better, break down barriers between groups, and improve communication and relationships. The group at prison B were particularly proud that they had "been able to claim and demonstrate successes, evidence is everything, we've genuinely got presence, most people know we are here and what we are about." (prisoner, prison B).

One prisoner reflected on how this had helped them not to see staff as the 'enemy' and that many "go above and beyond" (prisoner, prison B), and another prisoner reflected on the impact that this improved understanding had had on their behaviour: "If I hadn't been in these meetings, I would have behaved differently. I hear now how it is for staff, so I didn't go nuclear" (prisoner, prison A).

Some staff also reflected on how prisoners were “very responsive” to the PAR approach as they “felt listened to and ... comfortable” (staff member, prison A).

### **Value of PAR as an approach to culture change**

Both groups reported they were unanimous that there was real merit in having such projects in prisons. Whilst they reflected that “this is something that people working in a prison would never normally experience” (staff member, prison B), the groups felt that it was extremely beneficial. One group member described it as “breaking down walls” (staff member, prison A) and both groups identified a number of areas in which they felt their input had led to positive changes at their prisons (see section 4.2).

At both sites, there was a clear consensus from the co-researchers that they wanted the project to continue in some form when the current study was brought to a close (“...if the prison wanted to do something similar, I would go to it”, prisoner, prison A), and the group at prison B had made plans for this to happen. While the staff members at prison A agreed, they felt less sure about whether this would be feasible given local staffing and resourcing issues.

The reflective nature of the methodology was considered helpful by both project groups. The time taken at the beginning to explore the range of issues impacting upon them, and to listen to each other and develop an understanding of each other’s experiences, were seen as having helped to guide the groups’ later actions and decisions. Reflecting on the projects’ progress at various points was helpful in resetting the agenda for the group and future meetings. At prison B, the group were able to reflect on ways to improve how the group sessions were facilitated and how better to further actions, which was particularly impressive. As such, the structure of the meetings changed over time, becoming more action-driven and time bound (e.g. spending less time going through actions from the last meeting, setting time limits for various conversations, having small subgroup discussions, and structuring sessions around the culture framework), which resulted in greater productivity. The consistent completion of reflection logs by the prisoners at prison B also helped with changing the structure of the sessions and resolving issues as they arose.

## **Role of the lead researchers**

The co-researchers at both sites reflected on the advantages of having people external to the prison involved in the project as this helped to maintain momentum, to provide the structure, and to give the project greater prominence and merit locally. Some also reflected on how they found the materials shared by the lead researchers as part of the project helpful (e.g. infographics about procedural justice, rehabilitative culture etc.). The group at prison A described the benefits of the lead researchers being external from the prison.

At both sites, the lead researchers took responsibility for sending notes from the meetings to all attendees. The use of the EMaP scheme as a means of communicating directly with the prisoner group members was considered particularly helpful. It not only reduced the workload of staff at the prisons, but also enabled a direct two-way communication channel between the lead researchers and the prisoner co-researchers, and modelled that all group members were considered equal. This was used by some prisoner co-researchers to inform the lead researchers about issues they/others were experiencing and to give feedback on interim reports.

## **Passion and drive (prison B)**

Although there were notable periods of reported low morale within both project groups in relation to the lack of progress made with some of the identified cultural issues, there continued to be a real dedication, energy, and focus among the co-researchers at prison B. They were the driving force, as they “wanted to engage, and make a difference” (prisoner). The group were highly active in their project membership, offering suggestions, taking on actions, and generating new ideas throughout. They also reflected about how they were spurred on by the passion and drive of others in the group, which acted as a cumulative reinforcing process for them. For example, prisoner co-researchers noted the significant drive demonstrated by a few key staff members (including the SPOCs), and staff co-researchers also noted the motivation and commitment of the prisoners which they felt motivated them further to push forward and continue:

“The core members of staff have been brilliant. We’ve had complete commitment from them.” (prisoner)

“The contribution and commitment of the culture reps work in between meetings. When we’ve felt frustrated (staff), the reps’ commitment has helped us.” (staff member)

## 4.4 Challenges

Both sites involved in the study experienced challenges throughout the duration of the project. Early on at both sites there was some reported concern shown by staff members about prisoners having an active voice in decision making, and of staff openly discussing issues they were experiencing at work in front of prisoners. There was also some indication from reflection logs completed at prison B that prisoner co-researchers were not always voicing their concerns and frustrations at the in-person meetings. This was perhaps as a result of this way of working being new to all involved, and of the nature of a prison setting which inevitably includes complex power dynamics. However, over time, as relationships within the group developed, this did not appear to be a barrier to staff or prisoner openness to discussing issues.

There were times when both groups struggled to make progress with certain issues, due to the limited influence over these that was possible (e.g., the wages for prisoners). While both groups found this frustrating (and one prisoner at prison B left the project early on as they felt that little progress was being made), as the project continued the group at prison B seemed more able to redirect their attentions to issues that they could influence. This seemed more challenging for the prisoner co-researchers at prison A and there were times when the group became ‘stuck’ discussing the same issues across multiple meetings (e.g., food). However, the fact that the prisoners frequently raised these issues suggests that they were having an ongoing impact on their lives, which staff acknowledged. Being heard, and sincerely listened to, appeared to be of value during these discussions, even if change seemed unlikely to be possible.

At both prisons, it took time for the groups to establish what they wanted to focus on, what was possible to achieve, how they wanted to work together, and for relationships to develop. As a result, some of the initial aspirations of the project were, perhaps, unrealistic to achieve within the timescales. There were also times when co-researchers struggled to generate, and take on, actions to address identified issues. At prison A, this appeared to reflect a lack of empowerment and autonomy experienced by the group, who often sought direction from the lead researchers to generate potential ideas and solutions. The group at prison B appeared to benefit from having members who were also part of the SLT, which enabled decision-making in the moment. The limited autonomy afforded to prisoners appeared to result in both groups struggling to share out the actions equally between members, and the majority were consequently taken on by staff. However, there was a “danger that the day job will get in the way” (prisoner, prison B) and there were times when staff members were unable to take on actions, resulting in a few key members of staff taking on most of the work.

The challenge to understand the impact of the projects was something that both groups reflected on. The co-researchers at prison B made attempts to explore this by developing a survey for all staff and prisoners at the site, which gathered information about the features outlined within their culture framework (see Appendix C). Overall, around a third of those who completed the survey (self-selection, not necessarily representative) said they had noticed a difference in the prison in the areas of ‘recognition’, ‘communication’, and ‘safety’. Around a quarter said they had noticed a difference in ‘rehabilitation’, ‘community’, and ‘opportunity’. Apart from ‘safety’, the survey responses corresponded with where the group had focused most actions (‘recognition’ and ‘communication’), suggesting that the group’s efforts had made a start in bringing about change, although there was more work to be done. The group at prison B also reflected that everyone at the prison had a responsibility for its culture and could commit to developing it through their day-to-day decisions and actions. To reinforce this, the group asked for and obtained personal commitments from some SLT members and the wider prison about how they would do this. Future plans of the group included returning to these commitments to check progress made.



Both project groups recognised that the responsibility for culture development work could not sit with them alone and needed to be owned by the ‘whole prison’. As noted above, the involvement and commitment of senior managers at prison B was positive and something that the prisoners, in particular, reflected on. The prisoners at prison B also described being confident about the Governor’s commitment to the project (for example, through their occasional attendance at meetings), and how this helped to motivate them. However, the staff co-researchers at prison B also talked about the lack of wider staff ‘buy in’, hostility from a minority of the staffing population, and a lack of support from the wider SLT as disheartening. The group reflected that culture change requires more concerted effort as “people think culture is someone else’s business” (staff member, prison B). This was similar to the reported experiences at prison A, who felt that additional establishment support would have led to the project having a greater impact. Despite this, focusing on smaller, procedural things, that the groups felt impacted on their cultures, helped them to stay motivated and committed to the project. Furthermore, the fact that culture was being discussed more routinely and widely as the project progressed at prison B, suggested that focusing on smaller procedures and processes can, over time, still make a difference:

“It’s like a ripple effect, you throw in a pebble and make a small splash, then you throw in another one, and it has a knock-on effect. It is a small stepping stone. A small cog in a big machine.” (prisoner, prison B)

One of the most frequently raised issues at both sites was frustration at the lack of consistent staff attendance at meetings (other than the SPOCs). At prison B, this was a particular issue in relation to the attendance of operational staff and both groups often felt that meetings were too “prisoner-led”, and when there was good representation from a range of staff, this was clearly beneficial.

While the use of EMaP aided communication between the lead researchers and prisoner group members, the prisoners at prison B found it frustrating that communication with staff group members outside of the monthly meetings was difficult (e.g., issues had to wait to be raised in the next meeting which hampered progress), and on reflection clarity of expectations of progressing work in complex organisations would have been helpful. Further, when progress had been made in

some areas, there were times when group members at both sites noted that changes were then not sustained. This suggests that continued effort is needed to sustain progress until they become embedded into practice.

## 5. Conclusions and Implications

### 5.1 Summary and findings in the wider context

The challenge to identify effective approaches to support culture change efforts has hampered attempts to engage in this work across organisations, including in prisons. Exploring PAR as one approach to develop and improve the cultural experiences of staff and prisoners has been particularly timely, given HMPPS' recent commitment to being 'a great place to work' (HMPPS, 2023), developing positive cultures, and promoting professional standards and behaviours, as well as the drive to adopt greater levels of engagement and co-production.

As noted above, the current study supports previous experiences that culture change work takes time, commitment, drive, effort, patience, and perseverance among those involved. While long-term culture change will be the ultimate goal, focusing on smaller, more tangible changes to processes and procedures appears to be more realistic and achievable as a stepping stone to that end (e.g., Alderwick et al., 2015; Ouellette et al, 2020). Jabbal's (2017) reference to "keeping the faith" (p.23) when engaging in culture change efforts appears particularly relevant for culture change work within a prison context, in particular given the lack of certainty about the impact of the project on the wider prison culture at both prisons.

The evidence to suggest that PAR approaches can lead to new knowledge, personal change, improved agency among those involved, and create more responsive services, is supported by the current study. What has also emerged is evidence to suggest that joint staff and prisoner PAR activities can help to break down barriers between groups, develop working relationships, and create a greater understanding of the challenges experienced by both parties. Some participants also self-reported that their involvement resulted in behaviour change.

For some of the prisoners involved, their descriptions of the changes they experienced also suggest some shifts in their identity (for example, being part of a community, doing good for others, delivering something of value). Barnett, Boduszek, and Willmott (2021) conducted a rapid evidence assessment of interventions to

identify what factors are important to change identity and found that the lack of good quality evaluations limits our understanding. However, they point to qualitative research which suggests identity shift may be more likely when interventions support the development of social networks and a shared identity (Haslam, Holme, Haslam, Iyer, Jetten & Williams, 2008; Jetten, Haslam & Haslam, 2014). The use of PAR within prisons may be one method for achieving such shifts.

One challenge of using PAR as a method for culture change is likely to be reflective of wider issues in prisons, including high workloads, strict rules and regimes, competing priorities, and also those relating to the lack of autonomy and empowerment among people in prison. Interestingly, this latter point appeared to be particularly evident among the prisoners at the women's prison, which may be reflective of a passive-inducing prison environment within this type of setting (Bosworth, 1999). A further contributing factor may be that many of the prisoners involved in the project were serving long sentences and a lack of power, autonomy, and control have been identified as 'pains of imprisonment', particularly among women in prison (Crewe, Hulley & Wright, 2017). Haarmans and colleagues (2021) highlight the need to ensure that issues of power and relationship dynamics are openly discussed as part of PAR and the current study provides further evidence of the need to pay close attention to such issues. A lack of autonomy and empowerment was also observed among some staff co-researchers, in particular among those who were not in senior management positions. In order for approaches such as PAR to be effective, consideration needs to be given as to how those involved can be empowered, and supported, to create the changes that they believe are needed. Senior leadership support and commitment to the work, and approach, is likely to be key.

## **5.2 Pointers for future consideration**

Utilising the findings of the current study, the following pointers for operational consideration are made for those wishing to use PAR approaches within prisons to develop culture:

1. **People need time and space** to think about the issues that are impacting on them, prior to being able to think about what can be done about them, and this

work **takes time**. Competing demands and priorities (and when safety and maintaining order will be prioritised) can mean that larger ambitions for such projects may be, at times, unrealistic. Focusing on smaller, procedural things (that impact positively on the culture of prisons), may help groups to remain motivated as they can see actions and impact in the shorter-term. Smaller goals can also help to build momentum, and belief, to tackle larger issues when opportunities arise.

2. **Be realistic about what can be achieved and manage expectations.** There are some things that prisoners and staff can have little influence over but have an impact on the culture of prisons and their experiences. While this can be frustrating for groups, it is important for people to have the space to discuss, share, and reflect on these issues. Groups should also be supported to recognise when they cannot have an impact on all issues.
3. **Clarity of direction.** Working together to consider what the group wants to work towards, and how, will help to provide focus, structure, and a narrative that can be shared with others. The creation of a **group identity** can help the group to come together and focus on their shared goals and aspirations. This will help to maintain momentum and engagement and ensure that everyone in the group feels connected to the shared goals and equally contributes.
4. **Visible sponsorship and commitment to the project by senior leaders, so that people can consistently and regularly attend meetings and be given time to do work in between meetings.** Getting SLT buy-in and support is critical to the success of such projects, particularly if prisoners are going to be able to make progress as part of the group and given time to engage in the work. Support also ensures that staff are able to attend meetings, and both staff and prisoners are able to take forward ideas and suggestions. Having senior leaders as regular attendees of the group can help with this.
5. **Ensure that the aims of the group, what issues are being focused on, and what is achieved is communicated across the prison.** This could include surveys, meetings, briefings, and newsletters to communicate to the wider community. Ensuring that such communications are done in a procedurally just way will be important for buy-in. There also needs to be **effective communication channels between all members of the group** to facilitate progress in between main meetings.

6. **There needs to be representation of as many views / perspectives in the group as possible** (without having too many people physically attending). While true representation of all can be difficult, it is important that groups consider what they can do to ensure that all views are represented (e.g., through gathering feedback, sharing updates through newsletters, etc.). This should include both staff and prisoners who have been working at or living in the prison for different amounts of time and who have diverse backgrounds. The co-researchers in the current study emphasised the particular importance of ensuring that operational staff are part of such groups. And **creating a group environment where people feel safe** to be honest, provides a safe space for all, and allows time to listen to everyone's perspectives.
7. **Recognise the value of coproduction and engagement, and staff and prisoners working together collaboratively.** One of the main findings from this study was how valuable such an exercise can be for all, and how the presence of a group like this itself can spark culture change. Also **consider how staff can be supported and provided with autonomy to take on this sort of work.** This way of working can be a challenge for people when they are given little autonomy in their roles.
8. To consider if anyone **external from the prison** can support with the facilitation of meetings. However, **active involvement of co-researchers** in the organising and chairing of meeting can help the group to take ownership of the project.
9. **Creating space and opportunity for regular reflection.** This can help to identify what is working well in the group and what has not been working so well, which can be used to help shape future meetings and decisions made, etc. **Building in regular times to review what the group has achieved** will also be important, as it can be difficult to remember everything that has been discussed and done. Have protected time to regularly take notice of the achievements, progress made, and what the next steps should be.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

The current study has identified a number of potential benefits to the use of PAR methods as an approach to culture change in prison, particularly highlighting the reported positive impact on those involved. A number of conditions which need to be in place to support the approach have been identified, along with a range of barriers which can hamper potential outcomes. The recommendations outlined will help others wishing to utilise similar co-production and engagement methodologies in culture change efforts. This study adds to the existing evidence base for prison culture change, co-production, and engagement.

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# Appendix A

## Study sites

### Prison A

Prison A is a prison and young offender institution for women aged 18 and over, with an operational capacity of 344. It operates as both a local and resettlement prison, looking after women who have been remanded into custody, sentenced or unconvicted, and those convicted of a range of offences. It has eight wings, one of which is a psychologically planned environment, and one for long-term, indeterminate sentenced, and restricted status<sup>10</sup> women. The prison also has a healthcare unit, which provides in-patient and palliative care for up to 12 people.

The most recent HMI Prison Inspection (when the study commenced) assessed the prison's performance as:

- Safety – outcomes for prisoners are good.
- Respect / care – outcome for prisoners are good.
- Purposeful activity – outcomes for prisoners are not sufficiently good.
- Preparation for release / resettlement – outcomes for prisoners are reasonably good.

Performance metrics for the prison (March 2021 – March 2022) suggested that in the 12 months prior to the study commencing, the prison had lower levels of serious assaults, prisoner complaints, discrimination incident reports, self-harm incidents, and higher levels of drugs found (per 1000 prisoners) and staff in post compared to the average rate among women's prisons.

### Prison B

Prison B is a category C training prison for adult men convicted of sexual offences, with an operational capacity of 1240. It has 13 wings which serve various functions, including a dedicated wing for those serving indeterminate sentences for public

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<sup>10</sup> Restricted status prisoners are children/young people and women who are believed to pose the greatest risk of harm to the public if they were to escape. They can only be held in closed conditions.

protection, an accredited enabling environment wing,<sup>11</sup> and two wings housing elderly men.

The most recent HMI Prison Inspection (when the study commenced) assessed the prison's performance as:

- Safety – outcomes for prisoners are good.
- Respect / care – outcome for prisoners are good.
- Purposeful activity – outcomes for prisoners are reasonably good.
- Preparation for release / resettlement – outcomes for prisoners are not sufficiently good.

Performance metrics for the prison (March 2021 – March 2022) suggested that in the 12 months prior to the study commencing, the prison had lower levels of serious assaults, drugs found (per 1000 prisoners) and staff in post, and higher levels of prisoner complaints, discrimination incident reports, and self-harm incidents compared to the average rate within adult male category C prisons.

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<sup>11</sup> Enabling environments are places where there is a focus on creating a positive and effective social environment and where healthy relationships are seen as key (Royal College of Psychiatrists [www.rcpsych.ac.uk](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk))

# Appendix B

## Methodology: Additional information

### Approach taken

Meetings at prison A were suspended for a period of three months when it became unclear whether the prison could continue to support the project, and the decision was made, in collaboration with the site and group, to bring the project to a close within two further meetings.

The co-researchers at prison B defined themselves as 'the culture group' and generated a logo to represent the project and group membership. Meetings were held monthly for the duration of the project (apart from one month, where the meeting had to be cancelled).

Attendance from staff at both sites fluctuated throughout the project. At the beginning of the project at prison A, there was good attendance with between four and seven staff attending each meeting. This reduced as the project went on, with around three staff regularly attending in the latter stages of the project. This included consistent attendance from the SPOC and one or two other staff members, who tended to be operational staff. Different officers escorting restricted status prisoners at prison A also attended the meetings and were invited to take part in the meeting and provide their feedback. Other staff within particular roles were invited to attend meetings at prison A, to provide updates / feedback on specific issues raised by the group (and therefore did not take the role as co-researchers). At prison B, between two and five staff members attended each meeting. Whilst the consistency of the staff attending the meetings was an issue, there was good representation from some staff members (particularly SPOCs, the Head of Operations (latterly became Head of Security), and a Senior Psychologist). In the last six months of the project at prison B very few staff, apart from the core group mentioned above, attended the meetings.

Attendance from prisoners was more consistent at both sites. At prison A, between three and five prisoners attended each meeting and one prisoner attended every meeting, and another attended all but two. A total of 12 prisoners engaged with the

project at prison A, with five members leaving the project either because they were released or to take on other commitments, and six new members being introduced part way through. One group member left and returned to the group following their readmission to prison A (their reflections of their experiences of readmission were particularly insightful). A total of 11 prisoners (all sentenced) engaged with the project at prison B, with four members leaving the project either because they were released or to take on other commitments, and five new members joining part way through. All new prisoners to the groups were recruited in the same way as when the groups were established, and settled in well. The groups at both sites discussed and agreed that they needed to ensure that the group was representative of as many people at the prison as possible.

At prison A, the lead researchers supported the group to identify themes of issues which they felt were important to develop the culture for staff and prisoners (e.g., communication, food, consistency across the units, reward and recognition for staff and prisoners, community activities, etc). There were times when the group returned to discuss these issues (some of which the group acknowledged they had limited influence over), which caused frustration for some group members, in particular the staff. The group at prison A were keen for the lead researchers to take an active role in chairing, facilitating, and identifying actions for the group to take forward. During some meetings, the group invited staff from other areas of the prison to attend the meetings, to hear the group's thoughts/feedback, and to answer their questions. The group found this particularly useful, and tried to ensure that they included updates from these discussions within the Culture Newsletter produced (see below for further details).

At prison B, the group developed their own culture framework which described what they felt a good prison culture should look like (see Appendix C). This created focus for the group, and in turn helped to foster ownership, drive for the project, and structure the direction taken over the course of the project. The group formed their own positive identity through the development of this framework as well as through designing a logo and producing t-shirts for members. The prisoners also met in between the monthly meetings and visited other wings to progress actions, spread messages, and support change. Group members were vocal with ideas and

suggestions throughout the duration of the project and were particularly action oriented. There were mixed views on the involvement of group members in the organising and chairing of meetings. However, when group members took the opportunity to do this, they did it very well and it added to their sense of ownership of the project.



# Appendix C

## Prison B culture framework

**Creating a culture where “positive change is possible and actually happens”**

### **Communication**

Prisoners and staff to be made aware of key information to ensure the smooth running of the prison

- Meaningful communication that is relevant and conveys worthwhile messages
- Communication that is accessible for all intended recipients of the message
- Timely communication that ensures relevant information is received in time
- Reliable communication that is accurate with ‘one version of the truth’
- Rumour & myths are minimised
- Language used in the communication is appropriate, easy to understand and translated where appropriate
- Feedback / two-way communication is encouraged where appropriate
- There should be a balance of positive / negative communication – it should not be all stick and no carrot

### **Consistency**

A consistent approach to ensure people know processes and procedures are correctly followed

- Individuality – flexible approach that recognises people as individuals
- One rule for all – everyone should be treated according to the same rules with no favouritism “it’s who you know not what you know” should be avoided
- There is an expectation that processes should be fair and just to everyone

### **Recognition**

People are recognised for the efforts they make and the contributions they have made to prison B

- Recognition should be balanced and fair

- The value that people add should be recognised and acknowledged
- Constructive feedback should be given as appropriate

## **Rehabilitation**

There is a focus on rehabilitation to reduce reoffending and to give prisoners tools to ensure they are able to make an effective contribution to the wider community when released

- Rehabilitation should be supportive and constructive
- Everyone's rehabilitation activities should be tailored to the individual's needs
- Activities aimed at rehabilitation should be wide ranging and not just concentrate on programmes
- Rehabilitation should aim to create a positive change in the person
- There should be meaningful interactions between staff and prisoners – not just paper exercise

## **Safety**

Everyone who lives and works at prison B feels safe

- An individual's physical / psychological / mental safety should be paramount
- Everyone should be protected (incl. Prisoners, Staff and Officers)
- Safety should be proactive not reactive – it is easier to prevent than cure
- Not just tick box (Safety checks)

## **Community / Unity**

Everyone at prison B feels part of a community "Putting the unity in community"

- Interactions should be meaningful – not just a paper or 'tick box exercise'
- Personal boundaries need to be recognised and respected
- The needs of everyone should be recognised
- We should aim for attitudes of all to be proactive and positive
- All at prison B should feel included in the community
- Compassion should be shown as appropriate
- There should be a degree of trust (recognising this is earned)

## **Opportunity**

Everyone at prison B is able to achieve their best potential irrespective of background, race, age, gender, religion (etc.)

- Potential opportunities are open to all prisoners and staff (subject to relevant selection criteria)
- Selection processes for jobs, courses and positions are transparent
- The culture at prison B encourages and celebrates diversity and inclusion amongst prisoners and staff

## Appendix D

### Common themes of issues identified

Theme	Examples
Communication	Lack of, and poor, communication. Poor communications resulting in frustration among both staff and prisoners and, on occasion, impacting on relationships.
Consistency	Consistency of decision making. Consistency of how rules are applied across units/wings. Consistency in how regimes are run.
Reward and recognition	Positive work / progress made by prisoners and staff needing better acknowledgment and recognition. Better recognition for the challenging work staff undertake as part of their roles (including prisoners having a means of doing this). More opportunities to recognise positive behaviour / effort / achievements made by prisoners.
Community	Creating a sense of community to improve the culture for those living and working at each site.
Opportunity	More opportunities for development, employment, and activities for prisoners.

## Appendix E

### Examples of actions and research activities at each site

#### Prison A

Issue identified	Actions
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Co-production of a newsletter for staff and prisoners to share information about the project, and updates gained.<sup>12</sup></li><li>• Liaising with senior managers about how key staff briefings on wings were for communication, helping to ensure that these were reinstated when re-profiling<sup>13</sup> activity took place.</li></ul>
Reward and recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reinstatement of the 'thank you' card system for people to recognise the positive work of staff.</li></ul>
Induction process for new prisoners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Emergency canteen packs being made available for new receptions into the prison, to support wellbeing and avoid people getting into debt.</li></ul>
Consistency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Liaising with relevant managers to ensure that extra deliveries of basic items (such as toilet roll, cleaning items, sanitary products, etc.) were made to all wings prior to each weekend.</li></ul>
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One staff member commenced Spanish lessons on their wing.</li></ul>

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<sup>12</sup> Some issues arose regarding sharing information with staff and prisoners within the same newsletter. This meant that the group found it difficult to use the newsletter as a means of consistently communicating about the project with the wider prison community.

<sup>13</sup> Re-profiling involves a review of the prison regime. This tends to involve reviewing all activities (staff and prisoner) that are required and ensuring that staff are in place to facilitate all regime activities.

## Prison B

Issue identified	Actions and research activities
Recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving staffs' recording of positive prison-NOMIS entries and printing these to give to prisoners.<sup>14</sup></li> <li>Promoting a new PRIDE nomination form (used for recognising staff).</li> </ul>
Rehabilitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Full staff briefing when staff were asked to think about how and when they have contributed to someone's rehabilitation, where around 160 responses were gathered.</li> </ul>
Community / unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitating and collating over 80 stories of how staff have made a difference to people.</li> <li>Engaging in prison community events and asking people to make personal pledges of things they will do to contribute to a positive culture at the prison.</li> </ul>
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Producing a community newsletter to share information about the project, 'who's who' section describing individual functions and roles, myth busting, etc.</li> <li>Promoting the use of WayOut TV to share information with prisoners.</li> <li>Surveys distributed to staff and prisoners to understand what the group should focus on to improve the culture, and what progress people felt had been made. Responses were received from 99 prisoners and 46 staff and this information was used by the group to prioritise actions taken.</li> </ul>
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sharing information in the community newsletter about what checks take place with those who are vulnerable, why, and how prisoners can discuss the frequency of these with their Key Worker.<sup>15</sup></li> </ul>

<sup>14</sup> Prison-NOMIS (Prison National Offender Management Information System) is a centralised system database of prisoner information.

<sup>15</sup> Prison Officers also take the role 'Key Worker'. This entails working with prisoners to develop constructive and motivational relationships, supporting prisoners to make appropriate choices, and giving prisoners hope and responsibility for their own development through one-to-one sessions. Prison Officers receive training to enable them to take on this role.

# Appendix F

## End of project focus group questions

1. How have you found participating in this culture group project?
  - a. Feelings
  - b. Thoughts
2. What learning has been made, and what will you do this with learning in the future?
  - a. You personally
  - b. The group as a whole
3. What have you personally contributed to the culture group in the past year?
4. What has worked well or has got in the way/been less good for the culture group?
  - a. Staff and prisoners working together / the dynamics between staff and prisoners
  - b. Topics that have been focussed on (consistency, relationships, communication)
  - c. Membership of the group
  - d. Attendance at the meetings
  - e. Getting 'guests' in from different departments
  - f. Actions being progressed in between meetings
  - g. Other....
5. To what extent do you believe that this project has had an impact on the culture at Low Newton? What? Why?
  - a. Were the right things focussed on?
  - b. To what extent has this group been able to address these issues?
  - c. What are the ongoing culture issues at Low Newton/what has not been achieved?
  - d. Main achievements
  - e. Barriers to achieving change

6. What could have been done differently to improve your experience of the project and its impact on Low Newton?
  - a. The way the group is run/delivered
  - b. Attendance and membership
  - c. Topics focussed on
  - d. Other...
  
7. How would you like to see the work of this group taken forward by Low Newton prison?
  - a. How can we best use the learning from this group?
  - b. What further work needs to be done at Low Newton? And how do you think change can be best achieved?
  - c. What advice would you give other prisons who are attempting to change their culture?
  
8. Do you think this sort of approach can achieve change? Do you think it's worthwhile trying this approach at other prisons? Why?
  
9. Our role within the project was to guide, advice and support you in the process. How did you think that worked? Was there anything that we could have done differently to support the group?
  
10. If another prison was going to set up a similar group to try and develop their culture, what would your three top tips be in order for the group to be a success?