



EVALUATION OF LEEDS
BECKETT UNIVERSITY
PRISON:LEARNING TOGETHER
PROGRAMME 2017

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FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This was an independent evaluation undertaken on behalf of the Leeds Beckett University Prison: Learning Together programme in 2017. The evaluation commenced whilst I was employed at Leeds Beckett University, but I was not involved in the design, delivery or management of the Learning Together Programme.

I would like to acknowledge the support of the National Offender management Service for the approval of this evaluation to be undertaken with students at HMP Full Sutton. I would like to thank all the students who agreed to be interviewed for the evaluation. I would also like to thank the staff at HMP Full Sutton, especially Shaun Williamson, for their support and accommodation that enabled this evaluation to be undertaken. Finally, many thanks to Dr Linda Asquith and Thomas Shaw who assisted in the data collection and transcription.

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i. Background to the evaluation

- This evaluation aimed to explore students' experiences of the 2017 Leeds Beckett Prison: Learning Together module. The module consisted of 11 3rd year undergraduate criminology students studying alongside 12 men residing in HMP Full Sutton.
- The evaluation explored students' rationales for undertaking the module, their feedback on the module and the impacts the module has had.
- The evaluation was undertaken using individual semi-structured interviews with 10 of the Full Sutton students and all the Leeds Beckett students at the end of the module.

ii. Key Findings

- There were various motivations for undertaking the Prison: Learning Together module. The main motivating factors for Leeds Beckett students were; skills enhancement, employability and the unique opportunity to learn alongside people in prison. For the Full Sutton students, it was the chance to undertake higher education and the topic of criminology that interested them.
- There were preconceptions held by the Full Sutton and Leeds Beckett students prior to the module commencing. The Leeds Beckett students held some negative stereotypes about people in prison. The Full Sutton students were concerned about the motivations of students and worried about their own ability to undertake higher education.
- The taught sessions received very positive feedback. Students enjoyed the guest lecturers and working in their peer groups. Students recommended longer sessions to allow more time to get to know their peers. Full Sutton students benefited from the learning environment and found the content important to understanding their position in the prison. The Full Sutton students would like to see a range of subjects delivered in this format. The three most popular subject areas are politics, sociology and economics.
- The students reported positive relationships with each other. The groups all worked well together, and all students were able to learn from each other.
- Overall the relationships between students and staff was positive. The Full Sutton students reported that some prison officers were less accommodating than others but had support from the prison governor and senior management.
- The students faced various challenges on the module. The most frequent difficulties for the Leeds Beckett students were leaving the module and challenging their own beliefs. Confidence was the main challenge reported by the Full Sutton students.

iii. Impact and overall experience

- All the students (except for 2 Full Sutton students) reported that the Prison: Learning Together module had a powerful impact on them. An increase in confidence was the most frequently discussed impact by Full Sutton students. All the Leeds Beckett students reported that the module had made them more open minded and had helped to break down social barriers.
- The module had a humanising effect for some of the Full Sutton students, which was reported as an important impact. Other impacts for Full Sutton students included an appetite for more higher education and an improvement in communication skills.
- The Leeds Beckett students reported that the module had enhanced their academic skills. It also enabled them to be more informed about careers working with people with criminal convictions.

iv. Considerations and recommendations

- The evaluation makes 7 recommendations that should be considered by the module leaders. These recommendations are to enhance the module based on the suggestions made by students.
- The key recommendation is overcoming the emotive challenges students faced at the end of the module. The Leeds Beckett students found it difficult to leave their peers in Full Sutton. The Full Sutton students were dissatisfied that there were no follow-on opportunities at the end of the Prison: Learning Together module.

v. Conclusion

- The Prison: Learning Together module achieved the outcomes of creating an inclusive and transformative learning community. The module leaders should be commended for the positive feedback received from all students.
- For the Leeds Beckett students the experience was transformational in their views on imprisonment and prisoners.
- There were clearly important impacts resulting from this module. However, caution must be made that it is beyond the scope of this evaluation to determine the longevity of these impacts. It is also impossible at this stage to determine whether the social impacts extend beyond the Prison Learning Together module.
- The evaluation concludes that more research ought to be undertaken to understand the humanising impact and that ongoing evaluations should be undertaken to understand the longevity of the impacts.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND TO LEEDS BECKETT PRISON: LEARNING TOGETHER

In 2015 the University of Cambridge delivered the first Learning Together programme in HMP Grendon and since then several Higher Education Institutions across the UK have developed their own Learning Together Programmes in partnership with prisons. The vision of Learning Together is as follows:

Learning Together uses learning as a means to connect people who otherwise may be unlikely to meet. It aims to do this through co-creating learning spaces within prison whereby students who are currently imprisoned study alongside students from a local university. It prioritises the interactive and engaging delivery of academically rigorous educational content (Ludlow and Armstrong 2016:9¹).

In 2016 Leeds Beckett University set up their Prison: Learning Together module in partnership with HMP Full Sutton, a category A prison in Yorkshire, and in 2017 the programme ran for the first time. Prison: Learning Together is an accredited module delivered by Leeds Beckett University to students from both outside and inside the prison. The module was delivered at HMP Full Sutton and was taught to a group containing serving prisoners (N= 12) and Leeds Beckett University students (N=11). The module was called Prisons and Penology, designed and coordinated by two Senior Lecturers in Criminology from Leeds Beckett University, Dr Helen Nichols and Dr Bill Davies.

All students accessing the module were required to go through a formal written application and interview process. The questions asked in the application and interview process centred on students' reasons for wanting to take part in the module and they were required to demonstrate a desire to learn; either through evidence of prior learning and achievement or through further explanation of their motivations to study on the module. Although a third-year university module, no formal prior attainment was required. Applicants only needed to have competent reading and writing skills. Applications were shortlisted and interviews conducted by a panel of representatives from both the prison and the university. The same interview questions were adopted for all applicants.

Risk assessments were carried out locally by the prison security team. In addition, the university's lead for Health and Safety conducted a risk assessment concerning the university-based students entering the prison to study. Both were approved prior to the module being delivered. Students entering prison from the outside were required to go through the CTC (Counter Terrorist Check) security process before being eligible to study on the module due to the High Security prison category. Vulnerable Prisoners (VPs) were able to apply for the course as well as those from the main population which resulted in a 'mixed' prisoner classroom environment. Prisoners selected for the module were screened by the prison security team to ensure that there were no safety risks to the full student cohort.

¹ Armstrong, R. and Ludlow, A. (2016) 'Educational Partnerships Between Universities and Prisons: How Learning Together can be Individually, Socially and Institutionally Transformative', *Prison Service Journal* 225: 9-17.

The module ran for 12 weeks and consisted of fortnightly classroom sessions (7 in total including an introductory lecture) that were held in HMP Full Sutton's educational department. The classroom session lasted 2.5 hours and consisted of a lecture, a short break and seminar activities. In each session a guest lecturer, who had written about prisons and punishment, would deliver a lecture on their subject area. This was followed by small group discussions, based on the reading they had been allocated. The small groups consisted of two students from Leeds Beckett University, two students from HMP Full Sutton and one facilitator (whom were experienced teaching assistants from Leeds Beckett University and the University of Leeds).

All the students were provided with a printed out reading pack with the readings for each of the classroom sessions. These readings were either written by the guest lecturers or directly relevant to the guest lecturers' sessions. There was no access to any technology during the taught sessions at HMP Full Sutton.

Every other week, in between the classroom sessions, students were expected to undertake independent study. This consisted of reading the provided journal articles and book chapters in their reading packs and preparing for their assignment. The Full Sutton students were provided with study space with access to a computer within the education department and the same was provided to Leeds Beckett students on the Leeds Beckett campus.

The module was concluded with an end of module graduation, whereby all students received their certificates as confirmation for completing the accredited module.

1.2. AIMS OF THE EVALUATION

This evaluation was undertaken at the end of the module in May and June 2017. The research team were able to learn valuable information regarding the strengths and potential weaknesses of the programme from the perspective of learners. This evaluation highlights the importance of higher education in the prison environment and makes recommendations for future research and education considerations.

This evaluation explored student's experiences and feedback on the Prison: Learning Together module. The key aims of the evaluation were:

- To understand motivations for enrolling on Prison: Learning Together
- To gain feedback on the taught sessions and learning resources provided on the module
- To uncover any challenges or difficulties on the module.
- To investigate any impacts of the module on the learners.

The Prison: Learning Together module is one of over thirty learning together modules delivered in the UK. This evaluation only aimed to evaluate the Leeds Beckett module and is not an evaluation of the wider Learning Together communities. The evaluation was undertaken by researchers who were not part of the design, delivery or assessment on the module to minimise researcher bias. This evaluation offers an impartial report on the module by discussing the strengths, weaknesses and challenges.

This report commences with a discussion of the methodological approach before moving on to discuss the findings of the evaluation. The report concludes with recommendations for the module leaders and suggestions for future modules of this kind.

ACRONYMS USED IN THE EVALUATION

FS: Full Sutton

LB: Leeds Beckett

NOMS: National Offender Management Service

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

The researchers designed this evaluation as a qualitative research project to understand the experiences of the students who had undertaken the Prison: Learning Together module. Qualitative methods were deemed the most appropriate to enable the researchers to uncover the underlying rationales for undertaking the modules and discuss their experiences in depth. The preferred method for the evaluation was individual semi-structured interviews, whereby the key research questions could be addressed. Individual interviews were chosen over focus groups to ensure all students could speak open and honestly about their experiences.

2.2. SAMPLE

All students who studied on the module were invited to take part in the evaluation. 10 out of the 12 HMP Full Sutton students were able to participate in the interviews. 1 HMP Full Sutton student was unable to participate due to his other commitments when the interviews were taking place, and another student had been released. All 11 of the Leeds Beckett students participated in an interview.

2.3. METHOD

An interview schedule was drawn up prior to the interviews, one specifically for Full Sutton students and one for Leeds Beckett students. The interviews with the HMP Full Sutton students took place at Full Sutton over a period of 2 days and were carried out by Dr Young and Dr Asquith from Leeds Beckett University. The interviews lasted 60 minutes on average and were recorded using an approved voice recording device. The interviews took place in a private room in the education department to ensure the confidentiality for all participants.

The interviews with the Leeds Beckett students took place over a one-month period, again conducted by Dr Young and Dr Asquith. 8 of the interviews took place in meeting rooms at Leeds Beckett University and the remainder were conducted using video conferencing software. All interviews were audio recorded.

The interviews were fully transcribed, with all names (staff and students) excluded from the transcription. Once all the interviews were transcribed, they were imported into NVivo 10, where they were coded against the research questions and aims of objectives of the evaluation. The findings in this report summary were generated using thematic analysis of the interviews.

2.4. ETHICS

Ethical approval was granted from School of Social Science Ethics Committee at Leeds Beckett University. Approval to undertake the research at HMP Full Sutton was granted from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). All students were provided with a participant consent form and information sheet explaining their role in the evaluation. Each student was ascribed a numbered pseudonym to abide by the Leeds Beckett Ethical Code of Conduct regarding anonymity. For the

purposes of this evaluation all names of the students have been changed to abide with the Leeds Beckett University code of conduct regarding anonymity.

2.5. THE FINDINGS

The remainder of this evaluation reports back on the findings from the interviews. The findings provide extracts from the interviews to enable the student voice to be heard. The findings are structured as follows:

- Motivations for applying for Prison: Learning Together
- Pre-conceptions prior to the module
- Feedback on the taught sessions
- Relationships between staff and students
- Difficulties encountered during the module
- Main impact of the module and overall experiences

The evaluation makes recommendation for future Prison: Learning Together modules based on the feedback from the students.

3. FINDINGS

3.1. REASONS FOR APPLYING FOR LEARNING TOGETHER

The interviews commenced with an exploration of the students' motivations for applying to undertake the Prison: Learning Together module. The students differed in their motivations, with a particularly noticeable difference between the Leeds Beckett students and Full Sutton students. Some students had more than one reason for applying, whereas others were particularly motivated by one aspect. Figure 1 provides an illustration of the main motivations for students applying.

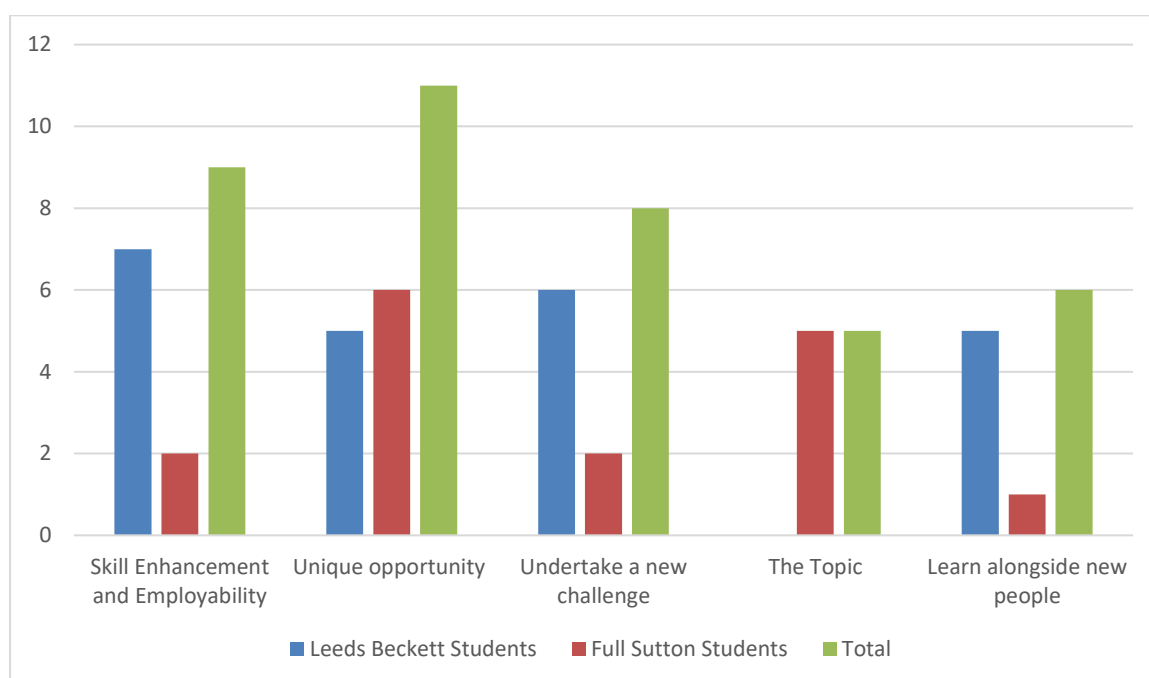


Figure 1 Motivations for applying for Learning Together

The data indicates that skill enhancement and motivation were more motivational for LB students than FS students. There were 2 FS students who stated that the programme offered them an opportunity to enhance their skills, which they hoped would be beneficial for when they are released from HMP Full Sutton, as indicated by Paul: *One of the reasons, obviously I think I'm going to struggle getting employment when I'm released, so any aid and anything, that was the reason why.*

There were 7 LB students who discussed their career choice as their motivation for taking part in the module. Three of these students were particularly interested in careers as prison officers, 2 were considering applying to train to be probation officers and 2 were interested in a criminal justice role that would involve working with ex-prisoners. This following quote from Carly demonstrates the beneficial role the Prison: Learning Together module had:

I think my main reason was I wanted to go into the prison service but I am quite sensitive. I didn't know if I would be able to handle it emotionally. I thought it would be an ideal time for me to know if I can. For me, that made me realise I can. I am dead chuffed that I think I could deal with that kind

of environment and those types of people and obviously it is not very often you get a chance to do something like that.

Eleven students in total discussed Prison: Learning Together as an opportunity to engage in higher education in a new format. This was particularly attractive for FS students who discussed the unique prospect to be able to access higher education in this way:

Well, since I came to prison... well, since I came here, I've been doing education and it's limited. You've got English, maths, I.T., but it's not really a lot considering all the things that we could be doing or could be having. So, I thought it was interesting. It allowed me to learn that bit more, educate myself. (Matthew, FS student)

It gets you up to a certain level, and a lot of people are already at that level, so there's no point in it. It was like, gets you to level two, Maths and English. Yeah, you can do further education, I use X University and that. But, you, unless you go, unless you got money yourself like, you've got to ask for the money from prisoner's education trust and you can only do one course at a time so, you're stuffed there. You can't do seven courses in you know, running side by side. (Scott, FS student)

This seemed like a brilliant opportunity because of the length of time I'm doing, it's hard for me to start an undergraduate course at the moment. They say I have to have less than six years left or whatever and other stipulations and whatever. But, this just seemed like a perfect opportunity for me to do something, to test myself, to be involved in a classroom environment again and yeah, that was basically it really. (Derek, FS student)

The LB students discussed the opportunity to learn from people residing in a high security prison. They were interested in sharing experiences and learning from one another. Having the opportunity to learn about imprisonment from those living inside a prison was deemed very valuable, as demonstrated in the interview extracts below:

So, to be fair, it was more just the experience of being able to learn in an environment with other prisoners. Well, not other prisoners, I wasn't a prisoner, but with prisoners and just sharing knowledge and learning from them, their experiences and equally sharing ours at the same time... I think, when you do the theory stuff in the classroom, or in uni, the lecturers and the seminars, you have trouble transferring it into reality if you've never gone down the route of crime. So, for me, I don't have a criminal record, I've never been convicted, I've never even been arrested so, when I was reading it, I was just like, I wanted to put it into, I wanted to hear it from somebody who has done that. It's kind of to match it up and see if the theory matched the reality, if that makes sense. (Melissa, LB student)

Although this is probably more reflective rather than thinking about how I felt first-hand, there is no better way to educate yourself about something until you are in that environment, mingling with people that are living that life rather than just reading a textbook and reading an academic's point-of-view on it. I think it was a unique way to get first-hand accounts of imprisonment and the issues with imprisonment from their point-of-view rather than just from an outsider point-of-view. (Tracey, LB student)

Six LB students and 2 FS students viewed Prison: Learning Together as a personal challenge that they wanted to undertake. For some LB students it was about *taking them out of their comfort zone* (Jane, LB student) and for others it was about challenging their own preconceptions:

I can kind of push myself out of a group if I don't feel confident enough, so I was hoping that it would maybe help me with that and help me talk to people maybe I'm a bit unsure with. Maybe, I don't know, help talk to people that I'm not used to talking to, working in groups of people I'm not used to working in, because you tend to sit with your friends and who you know. So kind of push me away from all that and get to know new people really. (Lucy, LB student)

I think the main thing was working with people that you wouldn't normally work with in university, so they're not like university students and obviously, I've never, I said in one of my interviews, I've never known anyone that's been in prison, no family members have, like nobody, so like it was more sort of trying to get rid of stereotypes that I might have had because I've never met a criminal, about criminals so I thought if I could maybe work with some of them it'll make me see things differently. (Kirsty, LB student)

Five FS students were particularly motivated to apply due to the topic itself. This was the main motivator for students like Ross, who said, *I'm passionately interested in criminology and everything else and my past experience is relevant to the course*. For Adrian, the topic was a draw because he wanted to use the module to help him make sense of his situation:

I've studied prison law for the time that I've been in here, eight and a half years I've been in. I just thought, it ties in with it. It gives me a bit of an insight to the other side, the way the prison service works. Obviously, I know PSI and prison law, but looking at the statistics and all that, it's given me a lot more insight in to how does it work.

The final main motivator identified from the interviews was the opportunity to learn alongside new people, which was of importance to the LB students. LB student Carly highlighted the desire to learn from others who had "life experience". Similarly, for Olivia it was the chance to work with others; *I think the main reason [for applying for the module] was working with people that you wouldn't normally work with in university*. One FS student Derek also discussed the opportunity to learn alongside university students and learn from them, instead of learning alongside the same people all the time: *The diversity of being able to interact with different people, different conversations, different things and so on. I was looking forward to it. I was quite excited by it.*

It is worth noting that for two FS students, the decision to apply for the module was a means of having something new to do. When asked why he had applied, Tom responded with *To do something. Something to do*. Similarly, Liam, an older FS student stated it just *looked like a good thing to do*.

Overall, there were various motivations for why students applied for the Prison: Learning Together module. For FS students it is aligned with the opportunity to study higher education and develop new skills. For LB students the motivations were closely linked with the unique opportunity to learn alongside people in prison and use it as an opportunity to help them decide on their career path.

3.2. STUDENT PRECONCEPTIONS

All students were provided with a module induction by the module leaders prior to it commencing to help prepare students for the experience. This evaluation explored whether students held any preconceptions about the module, the learning environment or the fellow peers before the module began. The evaluation data shows that there were preconceptions held by LB and FS students, particularly in relation to stereotypical and sceptical views, which is illustrated in Figure 2.

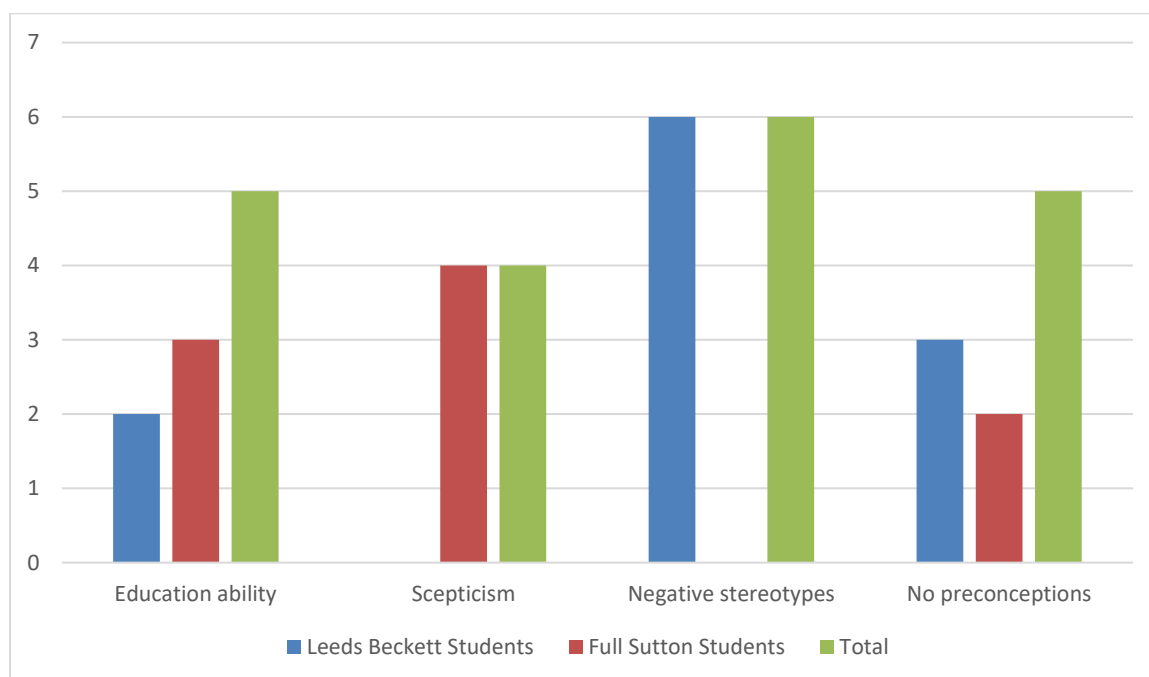


Figure 2 Student preconceptions prior to the module

Three of the FS students had concerns at the start of the module that they would not be academically able to contribute fully to the sessions. Derek, Scott and Tom all expressed concerns about studying alongside third year undergraduates and whether they would be able to understand the material and contribute in a meaningful way:

I suppose, for me, it was just about me being confident enough to keep up with the work, to keep up with the learning environment, keep up with them, because obviously they've been in university learning and I haven't. So, being able to actually contribute something positive, constructive to the class and the environment. (Derek, FS student)

I suppose I was a bit anxious about it. Because I lack in self-confidence, I don't feel bright enough to do something like this and I was worried that it would come through, you know? Or I'd be made to look like a complete idiot... I didn't think that I would be able to contribute in all honesty. And I was a bit concerned that I wouldn't understand what they were trying to explain. (Scott, FS student)

Two of the LB students also expressed concerns that the difference in academic ability would hinder the experience. For Kirsty, she was unsure whether the FS students would be able to contribute equally or whether she would have needed to provide extra support. Ella's main concern was whether their undergraduate student status would disadvantage them during the sessions:

I thought they were going to be really dismissive of our opinions because who are we to tell them what a prison's like? I've never been to prison myself. I'm 21 years old and I've just studied for three years straight from school, how am I meant to sit and tell you, someone who's been in prison for 30 years, what prison's like? I don't have a clue. You know everything. There's no point me talking.

Four of the FS students were sceptical of university students and lecturers coming into the prison and questioned their motivations. Adrian expected students to be “hippy-types” and thought the academics were coming in to “poke the monkeys”. Nick questioned the motivations of students, unable to figure out why they wanted to study in a prison based on his stereotyped views: *I was very sceptical at the beginning of this. I was thinking why do these people want to come to a prison and learn, like why would you want to do that.* The interviews demonstrated that by the end of the first meeting of all students together the FS student's scepticism and concerns disappeared. Derek spoke in depth about his concerns prior to the module and how he managed to drive out his anxiety:

[B]eing in prison for the amount of time that I've been in prison, you kind of develop a prison mentality and it's not necessarily a mentality you'll have outside, you wouldn't be able to function with it outside and be productive. But, it helps you to survive in prison so, you'll have an attitude, and not necessarily a negative attitude but you'll have an attitude that helps you to not get attached to people, not to understand your role within the prison authority and prisoner dynamic, you know? You have all this kind of, you adjust your approach, with regards to dealing with people, you know? People, invariably, I found in prison, look at you or view you with suspicion so you don't necessarily have a defensive complex, you just sort of accept it for what it is...You just see it as the way that prison functions, do you know what I mean? So, you develop your mindset accordingly. Now, I didn't realise this until I actually got onto the course and I met the students coming in from the outside. They may or may not have been students within the group that were ultimately suspicious about everybody in the group, but that wasn't my experience in my group...So, it was kind of a culture shock to an extent. I'd kind of been, you know, programmed myself to function a certain way and then all of a sudden, I'm confronted with a bunch of people that I don't know, but they're not looking at me with this immediate suspicion. And it was like oh, well, I've got to adjust my attitude now because I've kind of, was looking at things from a prison point of view - you're going to be suspicious of me, I'm not even thinking about it consciously, I'm just taking that for granted, so, I'm just going to be how I would be normally be. But, that wouldn't be conducive to a Learning Together environment. So, now I've got to, you know, adjust my mindset, change my approach and function more like I would if I was outside, in a university or a college. So, it was that kind of thing and I was anxious at first, with regards to meeting these people. Once I met the students, I realised that there wasn't really anything to be apprehensive about and furthermore, I needed to sort out my attitude so that I could function in the group.

The LB students held more stereotypical views of their peers than the FS students. Six of the LB students admitted to stereotyping the FS students before commencing the Learning Together course. These were all negative stereotypes about what the FS students would be like, with Tracey, and Jane all expressive concerns that the FS students would be “scary”, “aggressive” and “intimidating”. Despite some LB students not wanting to stereotype the FS students, they did find this difficult in the beginning, highlighted nicely here by Ella:

I think, because as students, obviously we do criminology so for the last three years all we've learnt is to not judge a book by its cover, we've always learnt about the other, and I think it's hard to counter, it's both, obviously all the media influence we have in our lives about offenders and stuff like that and then all the educational influence we have from uni where we're taught don't stereotype people, don't judge people on that, like you need to see beyond that. It was like a constant battle between trying to find out what I actually thought, because I've got the general public opinion and then I've got the opinion of like academics and where's my opinion? I didn't really know.

LB student Kirsty noted her concerns, but like all the other LB students these stereotypical views quickly diminished after meeting the FS students:

From the course and media and films and like family influences, definitely think I did hold stereotypes, but I think as soon, literally soon as we walked into that classroom and saw them, you were literally like, they're just so normal, it's sounds so bad to say, but there's just nothing that makes them think, like if you could walk past them in the street and you wouldn't bat an eyelid. They're not like, because I expected like tattooed faces, like scars everywhere and they just, they're dead normal.

Five of the students interviewed did not express any preconceptions, rather they were open minded about the Learning Together experience. FS students Liam and Jack both had previous experience of non-prisoners being brought into prison environment to deliver education and were careful not to stereotype:

It's a bit like, running a training course, we used to run quite a few residential a week, well, four or five days. And you always got a completely different bunch of people. You never really delved into what they were about. And you learnt as you went along, and it's the same with any course, you know. If you come with preconceptions, you might well find they're true or you might make them true. So no, I didn't have any problems with that at all. (Liam, FS student)

Two of the LB students were more open minded and noted the problems that pre-conceptions can have, as highlighted here:

I didn't have any preconceptions because I am quite open minded. I was like they are just people, you just go in, I know they've done bad things but otherwise if you go in with an idea of they've done bad things then it is going to affect the way that you take in the information and handle yourself in that environment. I just went in with an open mind. (Carly, LB student)

It was evident from the evaluation that there were a variety of preconceptions about each other and the nature of the course. All the preconceptions disappeared throughout the module, which is discussed in more depth in [section 3.7](#) of the evaluation.

3.3. FEEDBACK ON THE TAUGHT SESSIONS

This section discusses the feedback from students in the taught sessions, discussing the learning environment, the guest lecturers, the facilitators and their suggestions for improving the sessions.

THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The learning environment was deemed to be very beneficial to the LB students, who stated that learning about prisons whilst in a prison was *the best environment that we could have wished to have done it in* (Melissa, LB student). Six of the LB students specially discussed the benefit of being able to experience the inside of a prison rather than merely reading about it. Locating the Prison: Learning Together module in the education department was viewed as a comfortable space for all the students. The LB students discussed the normality of the education department, with Carly *stating I didn't feel like I was inside a prison at all, apart from that room being a bit small and really hot, I felt like I was in a school*. Tracey also discussed how the environment, despite being in a prison, felt very much like a place to learn:

I think, because it just looked like a normal classroom, and I think because the nature of what we do being at Uni, when you are in a classroom you learn, and I think... I mean, I don't want to speak for the guys but I think because it is their education room as well, I think it helped them as well, being in that environment. I think if we were in the chapel all the time or you know, somewhere else... I don't think we would have worked as well as what we did. I think because it was a classroom we were all aware that we were there to learn. I think that helped. I think, from my point-of-view, being an outsider coming in, because of how secure it was, even though maximum security sounds scary the term maximum security means that you are secure and I never felt like I was in a prison when we were inside the classroom. Obviously, walking around, going through 17 gates just to get from the entrance to the classroom, that feels like a prison but once we sat down and the slides came on it was bang, you are in a learning room.

Authenticity was also discussed by some FS Students, for instance Nick spoke about the difference between Prison: Learning Together and other education programmes in the prison:

It was a different dynamic of learning for me. I kind of really enjoyed, you know, the guest lecturers coming in and actually giving, you know, that the first time listening to them give lectures about things, and then also not just giving lectures, but giving lectures about things that were kind of... that were resonating with me personally. The whole thing was... what made it a classroom environment was that there was no prison officers, the teachers were outside teachers. They were, because remember the teachers here, they're also a kind of an extension of prison officers. So it was kind of... that was... it gave it a real... it gave an authentic classroom kind of atmosphere. And that was because the teachers were actual teachers from outside. Their main aim is to educate and that's it. But these guys [internal prison educators], theirs is to educate and also to police us in a sense so one minute they go from educator to policeman in a heartbeat. You know, they'll be quick to all right, you don't, because you know we'll get you thrown out. We'll get you a few warnings, where as you guys that wouldn't be a thing that you would say.

GUEST LECTURERS AND FACILITATORS

The inclusion of university lecturers on the module, as opposed to exiting educational staff, was received positively by all the students, but in different ways. Figure 3 illustrates why the students enjoyed the guest lecturers and it is clear that they offered something different to the LB and FS students.

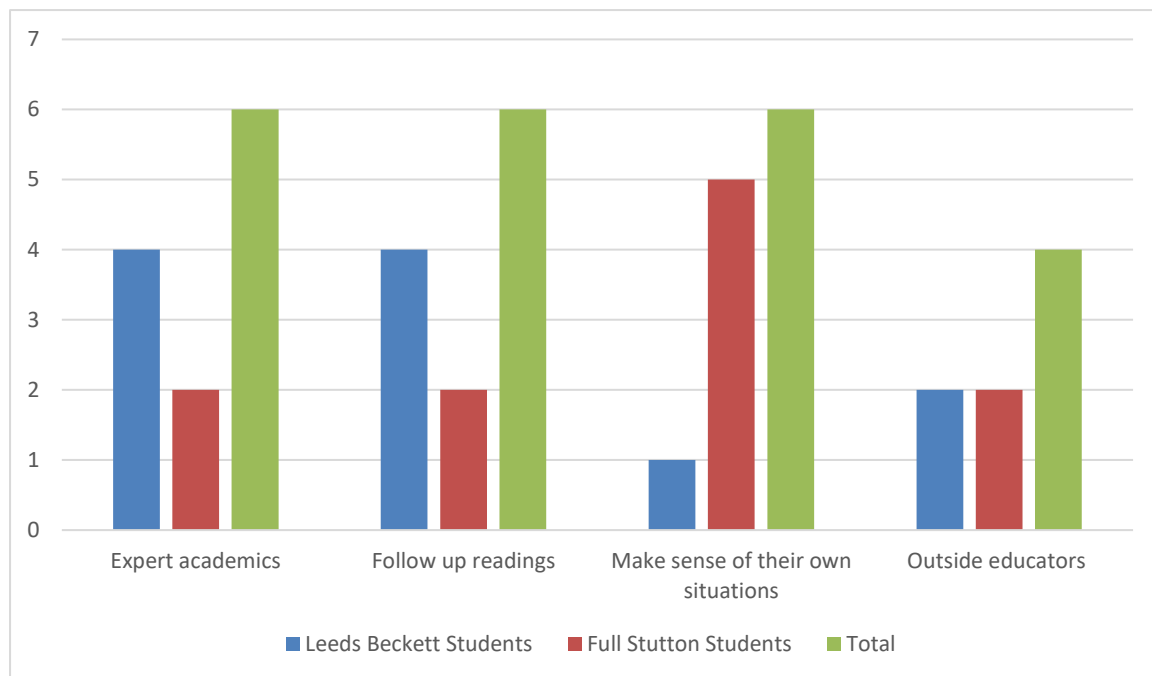


Figure 3 Feedback on the guest lecturers

All the students were grateful for the opportunity to have leading penology experts discuss their work with them. It gave students the opportunity to hear first-hand research and follow up any questions about the readings with the authors who wrote the texts. All students were provided with a reading pack that had all the required reading for each session. The reading packs were regarded as beneficial by all the students on the module. They found it particularly useful that the readings provided were either written, or directly related to, the guest lecturers delivering the sessions. The following feedback from Deborah and Tom highlight the success of these lecturers:

It was really good, we had professors from X come in, teach us, and having read certain articles or books from them in previous modules it was like a mini-celebrity coming in. We found it quite cool and like telling other people on our course about the teachers coming in for it as well... I found that really good. I think it was a nice touch to it and it shows how important this module is across not just our Uni, just across the country really. (Deborah, LB student)

What I found really helpful and what I really looked forward to, I loved when the readers/lecturers came, because it's really unusual to have an author of a book in front of you... To have the author in front of you to be able to question them and find out where they got to, I thought it was unique and extremely helpful. (Tom, FS student)

When he came in [referring to one of the guest lecturers], and the way he explained it, I mean I read some of his book, before he turned up and yeah, it really helped me to have read some of his

book, that he didn't actually speak about in the lesson, because when he came in and I spoke to him about some of the things, it helped me to understand the angle that he was coming from, with a bit more competence. (Scott, FS student)

FS students particularly liked having academic experts on imprisonment present empirical research findings, which they (the FS students) said helped them make sense of their own situation:

They all had an effect on me. Obviously, all of them I could relate my experiences to and from the very first one, intelligent trust, right through to the last one, the redemption one. Me rather naively thought, that's me, I'm out of prison, I've served my time. But no... that really affected me. It gave me... flipping heck, I really had to think about it, and the contrast in views between the Full Sutton students and the Leeds Beckett students, and how you go about redemption afterwards, that was very interesting... But yes, it's just... it brought more to my attention, how decisions are made, why prisons are run, how they're run and I don't agree with it all. (Paul, FS student)

I enjoyed them all...A lot of things that I read, I could relate to, and I was very... at times I thought, am I writing about myself? Is this more of a course... is it a study rather than a course that I thought I'm participating in? Because there's so much I can relate to that it can be so personal. There are things that articulated what I felt, but I hadn't even come to that stage of articulating it myself. One of the things, it says, somebody was talking about their existence in prison. They live in their head, and I never ever thought that, but you do. As soon as he said that, I thought that's so true. (Matthew, FS student)

The feedback from the students indicate that bringing in external lecturers, who were experts in the field was beneficial to all students and enhanced their ability to engage with the reading materials.

The use of facilitators during the sessions received mixed feedback from the students depending on who the facilitator was. Whilst some students found the facilitators to be supportive and helpful, others found them to be less helpful. On the one hand Tracey discussed the necessity of the facilitators to help ensure everyone was included in the group discussions:

I felt like my facilitator played a massive role in what we were doing. She was very supportive and she wasn't overbearing. She wasn't like no, no, don't talk about this, talk about that. There were a couple of times where we kind of went off track and she brought us back in again but not in a domineering way or anything. She supported me through what I wanted to do with my topic. She actually mentioned that in the letter of recommendation that we got after the graduation. It was nice of her to pick up on that. I thought it was just me who had noticed that but yeah, I felt like they definitely needed to be there. Another one of the girls who I spoke to, the two guys in her group were always going at it with each other, just because they had very, very different opinions, and because she is probably not as confident as what some of us are, I think she felt a little bit uncomfortable at times and having her facilitator there I know that made a massive difference to her. She even said to me that she would not have felt comfortable if her facilitator had not been there. In my view, absolutely they needed to be there and I think they played a really good role. (Tracey, LB student)

Other students had less positive experiences, and were dissatisfied with their facilitators, as indicated by Lucy and Deborah:

I don't know, I feel very, our facilitators weren't very good. I felt like they didn't really know what they were there for, and I guess they wouldn't have done because it had never been done before, so they were guinea pigs as well like we were. But I felt like they didn't help in any aspect, like there were two overpowering people in our group and they just talked, our facilitator just talked to them two. He didn't really try to get anyone else involved and he was more interested in talking to the prisoners with what he had to say rather than what we had to say. I get it, it was good for them as well, but I just didn't really, don't think they knew what they were supposed to be there for. (Lucy, LB student)

In ways... my facilitator, she was lovely and I don't want to badmouth her but I felt it wasn't enough help. I felt like it was as guided as it could have been. I kind of felt like they were there but she didn't help as much as she could have done. I just felt that, like they included in class discussion which was really good but I just, when we weren't really too sure about our group poster we would kind of ask her and she would just say yeah, but I don't know, it wasn't as helpful, the guidance wasn't as I had hoped it would have been. (Deborah, LB student)

Nine of the students interviewed gave very positive feedback on the facilitators and 3 students were less happy with their facilitator(s). The data suggests that the role of the facilitator ought to be made clear to the facilitators and to the students. When discussing the facilitators with the students it appeared as though facilitators were offering different levels of support to students. Whilst some were facilitating discussions, ensuring everyone got involved, others were offering emotional support to students and helping them with assignments.

IMPROVEMENTS TO THE TAUGHT SESSIONS

The students were asked to provide suggestions for improving the learning environment and the two main improvements suggested were the room and the time spent learning together. All the students discussed the impractical room that was deemed too small, too hot and too noisy. Whilst it did not have any detrimental impact on the learning, it was an uncomfortable space and often made it difficult for students to hear each other in discussions. A learning space that was more of a replica of a university seminar room would have been beneficial².

The second improvement, suggested by nine students, was to enable students to have more time during the learning together sessions. Students suggested that the limited time every fortnight meant they were unable to get to know students outside of their allocated group.:

I felt... the sessions weren't short, they were 3 hours but we would get in there and we would have 10 minutes to sit and chat and then we would be straight into it and then we would have a tea break and maybe that would only be 15 – 20 minutes, we wouldn't really get to speak to everyone. There were still some people, the X students, that I hadn't spoken to. I think that is maybe me holding back slightly but I would have wanted to have spoken to everyone and more. In that sense, I wish I could have seen them more, just chatted to them in general as opposed to just being there. (Carly, LB student)

² HMP Full Sutton have since renovated a larger classroom in the education department, which was used for the 2018 delivery of Prison: Learning Together.

Well, I would have liked to... because I would have liked to have heard other stories from other people. We met them and talked to them here and there, but obviously our little group was doing all our work, so you didn't have much time to interact with the other groups as well. Obviously we knew ourselves, inmates, and obviously they knew themselves. But we didn't know the other people from the other groups. (Adrian, FS student)

The only problem with the prison students is the fact that because we had to sit in our groups quite a lot, but apart from a couple that I managed to speak quite a bit too in break, I don't actually... I didn't actually form friendships with a few of them. We didn't mix where we were sitting, so I didn't get a chance to speak to everyone. (Mandy, LB student)

Furthermore, the FS students reported that it would have been beneficial to have extra time at the end of sessions to enable them to speak to the module leaders about the module and the coursework. A further suggestion was to have the sessions in FS delivered every week as opposed to every fortnight to enable more contact time.

OTHER SUBJECT AREAS

The FS Students were asked what other subjects they would be interested in undertaking on future learning together programmes. Figure 4 demonstrates the topics the FS students would most like to study on future modules.

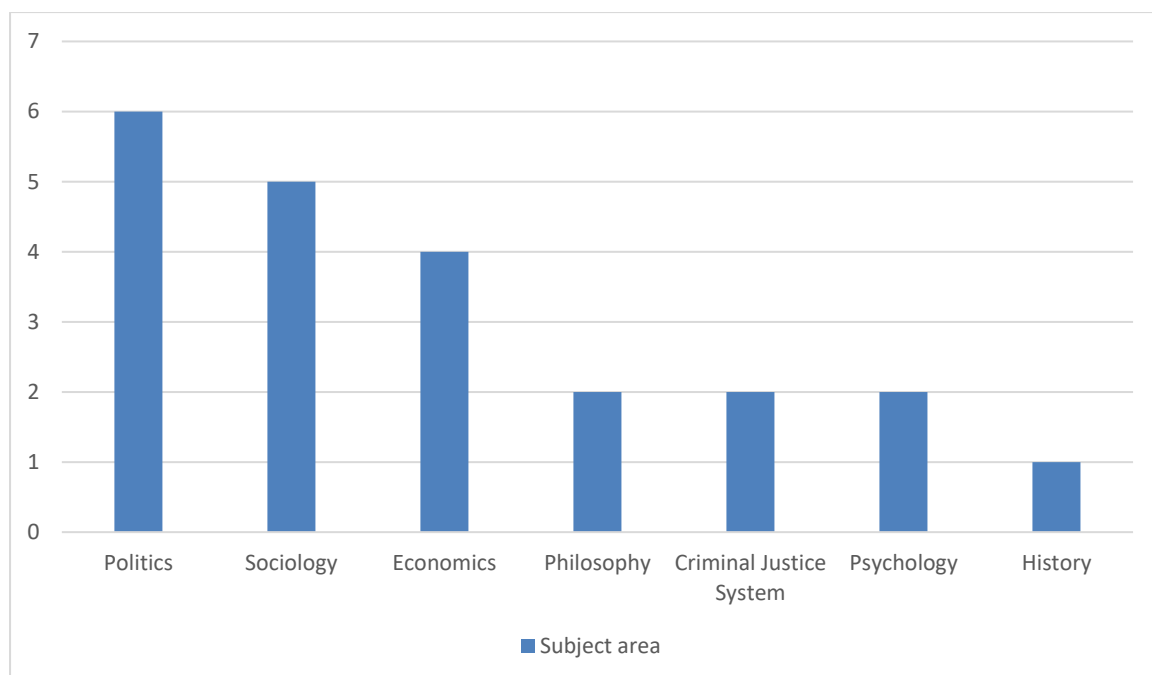


Figure 4 Future topics for Learning Together

The topics chosen were based on their appetite to engage with more critical thinking at higher education level. The topics of politics, economics and sociology were deemed particularly relevant to the FS students' lives to understanding social inequalities, economic reasons for crime and politics of crime and justice.

Yeah, sociology, political theory but also philosophy, you know? It's good to think about, I don't know, I like to critically analyse things, you know? Something you can get your teeth into really. I don't want to do something like, doing English A level, that's got to be the worse course in the world, don't get me wrong, it's useful and beneficial but you don't critically, English language, not literature, you don't critically analyse anything, you just have to do, you know? So, these kind of things, they interest me. (Derek, FS student)

I would still have interest in criminology, but I think the causes of how people end up in prison is very much important for the reason that sometimes prison is the end for a lot of people's lives. Even though you come to prison, no matter how long you've got, they talk about you getting released, probation officer, you might have a license. I suppose, that's why I take a bit of interest in economics as well, because of how much these things play in to people's choices, their capabilities and money and the influences of money, how an area is... how well it's doing or not doing. We always hear in the elections at the moment about coal mines, industry shut down areas that might present people some problems financially, which could turn to crime or turn to situations where they end up in prison. Vibrant areas like London which maybe... crime is even more rife because there's more money to be gained and more opportunities, and the diversity of life. (Matthew, FS student)

3.4. PEER AND STAFF RELATIONSHIPS

STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

The evaluation found that the students all developed positive working relationships with each other. The data indicates that all the students worked well together in the groups and for most students they were able to have a voice in their groups. However, this was not the case for all students. Tracey was very open about her tendency to hold back during group discussion, in fear of offending the FS Students. When discussing this she said:

I almost felt like I had no place in talking about imprisonment because I am not in prison. When you are talking to people who have been in prison for a long time, I was almost... I wasn't scared of them but I didn't want to upset them and I didn't want to offend them...I don't think I raised my hand once during lectures or anything because I felt like anything I would say they would kind of judge. I spoke to my facilitator about it actually, I just feel like... I can't remember how I put it. I felt like I was a closed book, inside the prison.

The FS students acknowledged this by reporting that they dominated the discussions because they could draw more on their own experiences. The interviews revealed that a key feature of the student relationships was mutual respect. There was a sense of reliance on one another, whereby the LB students relied on the FS students for their lived experiences and the FS students relied on the LB students for their academic knowledge. This is illustrated in the discussions with Ella and Carly:

I think it's the sense of they're relying on us and we're relying on them and I think that came through quite a lot in the assessment, like when we did the whole poster and stuff like that.. But yes, it was more a sense of they were counting on us and when it come to the group presentation, we felt like we were counting on them and I think that balanced it out quite well. We all needed each other and we cared about each other. It was a really group environment, group mentality and we all

knew that we had to do it all for each other, it wasn't just for our own grades, we knew that we wanted the best for them as well. (Ella, LB student)

Because they've lived it, it was just sort of a really interesting discussion and we said quite a bit in our presentations that we're sort of doing the more academic side whereas they were doing the lived experience side. So I think, they kind of even out quite nicely, we had academic and then like real life experience. They were quite even because obviously there was two and two in a group, so I did think that was quite nice like I say, because otherwise you wouldn't know about that lived experience. (Carly, LB student)

Although the student relationships were generally positive, there was an issue regarding the relationships between the FS students. The module consisted of a mixture of men in the main wings of the prison and men residing in the VP (vulnerable prisoners) wings. This caused some unease in the module for some of the mains prisoners, who did not want to be associated with the VP prisoners. Six of the FS students and 4 of the LB students discussed this during the interviews. Matthew highlighted that there was a divide between the VP and mains prisoners and the passage below indicated that some main prison students did not want to be associated with the VP prison students:

I think one of the things that should have been sorted out prior to anyone coming, was whether or not the difference between the VPs and the mains was going to be discussed, because it did get discussed but it was discussed once the students were here. Generally, it was agreed on, it made a few people feel quite uncomfortable, because, not that I would try to justify my criminal behaviour, but regardless of how anybody wants to take this, I do not consider myself to be anywhere near the same level of some of these VPs. Whether or not that's acceptable I don't care, because it's my opinion. But that didn't, I never used that as a prejudice against anyone on the course, but I thought it was something that was held against them, right from the very beginning. I clearly identified after somebody had brought it up in a meeting, straight away, that I'm from the mains. I wanted people to know that I'm from the mains and I don't have a problem in discussing who I am and what my criminal thing is. Because although it's not to everybody's taste, it's certainly not as bad as some of these. They are, it doesn't matter how anyone wants to discuss it, some of these are absolutely heinous people. So, I think that should have got dealt with before. (Liam, FS student)

The LB students suggested that this is something that could have been addressed before the module commenced, enabling the FS students to decide whether they still wanted to undertake the module. Despite the divide between the main and VP FS students, all the groups worked well together and the learning experience enabled the main FS students to put their prejudices aside for the purpose of the module.

STAFF AND STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

All of the students were very positive in their feedback about the support offered by the module leaders. The students stated that they were on hand to support the learning journey and offered help and guidance whenever possible.

They were really good. They made themselves available at any time, if you needed to talk. Within the classrooms, especially when there were guest speakers in, you know, they came around and

they came to each table and said is there anything that you need any help with or, they were just really good at everything. (Melissa, LB student)

Tom and Derek were very complimentary of the HMP Full Sutton Governor and senior management who helped accommodate their requests to spend more time in the education department. The FS students stated they received less support from some prison officers, but this varied and was certainly not the case for every prison officer. Paul and Adrian had positive experiences with staff working in the education department and prison officers on their wing, who had conversations about the module and offered help when they could. When asked if he had felt supported throughout the module, Paul discussed his positive experiences:

Int: Did you feel supported throughout the module?

P: *Module leaders, yes. Prison staff, they're looking at you like... well one time I came out of the classroom and I'm just queuing up to go out and we're all coming around. One of the prison officers goes, flipping heck, you're old enough to be their father and I just... I were going out. I should have turned around, and the relevance of that is what? I should have said. Two or three steps on, I would have said it and turned around and said it. But I didn't. So, but there again on my work, I included some of the officers. After the first session, I went back and I interviewed some of them and they were more than willing and helpful with me and they gave me their insight on it. So, it's, there's a lot of good officers. A lot more good officers than what there is bad. They were willing to help and take their time out, spend some time with me talking about what... you know, asking them questions. Also, the support from the module leaders, both of them, very helpful, do you know what I mean? They didn't make you feel like you were the poor relation, you know? In fact, not to this extent as such, but if you weren't here, then this group wouldn't be kind of thing, so you are definitely integral to the whole Learning Together experience. It made you feel necessary, you know?*

Overall there were positive working relationships between students and between staff and students. All the groups worked well together despite some initial divides between the VP and Mains prisoners. The module leaders and the staff at HMP Full Sutton were spoken very highly of by the LB and the FS students.

3.5. DIFFICULTIES EXPERIENCED BY STUDENTS

The students discussed difficulties they faced at various stages of the module and these are illustrated in Figure 5. Each of the difficulties are discussed in turn in this section.

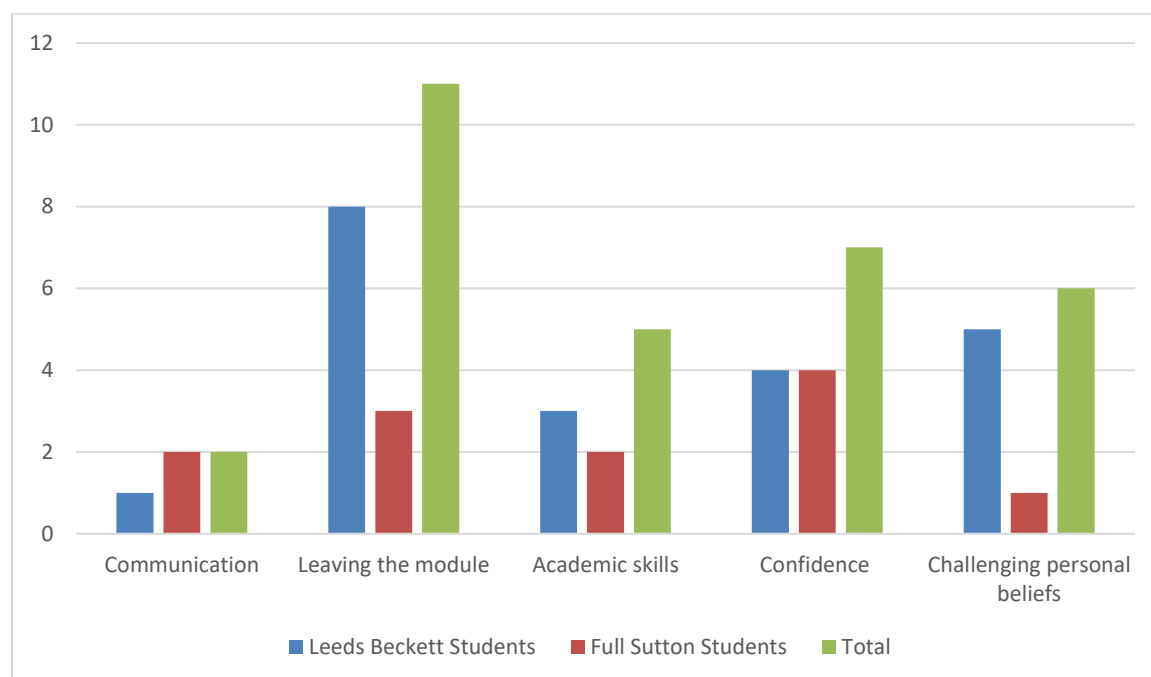


Figure 5 Difficulties experienced on the module

LEAVING THE MODULE

The main difficulty faced by the LB students was leaving the module and this was also mentioned by three FS students. For the LB students, the realisation that they would be unlikely to ever have contact with the FS students was difficult for them to comprehend, especially given the close relationships they had built up studying alongside each other, expressed here by Mandy:

Saying goodbye was really hard, because obviously although like I said, I didn't speak to everybody, we still found a group. Even though I may not have spoken to a couple of X students as much as I spoke to others, I'm still sad because it's a general group. Obviously you can't just keep in contact in the same manner. So, in that sense it's really sad because you form a friendship with people in your group, and then you know that after that time, that's it. So, that is really hard. (Mandy, LB student)

For the FS students, the end of the module was difficult because there was nothing else to follow on from what they had accomplished. As Liam pointed out: *The frustrating part of it is that you end up with your little bit of paper and all that stuff and you go right, what is next? And there's nothing.* This was discussed by other FS students and, to some, the end of the module was the reminder of their current situations. The following extract from Ross' interview shows how the end of the module had a demoralising consequence for a fellow FS student:

Do you know, I was talking to a colleague and they said they were left really angry, they probably won't write that, but they were left really angry with this course because it gave the university a lot

of things, and it gave a lot of things to the prison, so, say people came in and did this, and all this kind of integration and rehabilitation. It kind of fits in with that, but it didn't give anything to us. I'm saying "do you not think so", and we had a talk about it and it turned out that he was angry because he was given an opportunity not to feel like a prisoner and now he's got to feel like a prisoner again. So, he's angry at the course for making him feel like a prisoner.

The evaluation data indicates that the intense environment and the close working relationships developed between the students made it a difficult process to leave. LB student Kirsty suggested a group session on completion of the module to discuss how they are feeling and how they move on in a positive way. The FS students also found the end of the module difficult and it may be worth considering how a follow-on process can be put in place for the university and prison students.

CONFIDENCE

A further difficulty experience by both LB and FS students was confidence at the start of the module. Eight of the students were anxious about starting the module due to feeling insecure about the unknown situation. For the FS students they were nervous about their ability to understand and engage in a higher education module, as expressed by Scott and Matthew here:

I didn't think that I would be able to contribute in all honesty. And I was a bit concerned that I wouldn't understand what they were trying to explain. But I think they, the lecturers, they were really engaging. I was really interested actually, in listening to what they had to say. I felt I had loads of questions. I'm glad I put those fears aside because it was fear, basically. I was just fearful that I'd be made to look a right idiot. (Scott, FS student)

I suppose, for me, it was just about me being confident enough to keep up with the work, to keep up with the learning environment, keep up with them, because obviously they've been in university learning and I haven't. So, being able to actually contribute something positive, constructive to the class and the environment. (Matthew, FS student)

For the LB students, the nerves were related to the unfamiliar environment and not knowing who they would be learning with:

I was nervous, I was really nervous because again, fear of the unknown. You don't know... because obviously we had been in before, that was really, really exciting and I was excited to start but I didn't know the people that I was going to be studying with. That is what I was scared of and that first session that we had was quite nerve-wracking meeting everyone because I am quite quiet in comparison to some of the other girls. (Carly, LB student)

It was evident that difficulties prior to the module commencing were evident among both sets of students due to fear of the unknown (either the environment or the work tasks) and lacking in self-confidence. The outcomes of the module in relation to student confidence are discussed in section 3.6 of this evaluation report.

COMMUNICATION

The FS students found that they faced additional challenges gaining support due to the nature on high security imprisonment. Liam and Matthew discussed how the lack of ability to communicate with the module leaders was a challenge:

You cannot email anything apart from an e-mail, a basic e-mail, and that has to be passed through them. Fair enough, but it just didn't work. And we found that out after about week three. So, there were no means of corresponding with module leaders in an effective way. So, every time we had to wait until they turned up again, and obviously their demands were, we've got to run this session, we've got all sorts of other issues going on. You know, it wasn't their priority. Although they made it so. But it was difficult. I think in the future if you did have prisoner mentors, then they can take that roll on, and that would be a great help to the students. Because we didn't really, we had couple of tutorial sessions, I didn't think I need them because I was, I was so enthusiastic, I was writing more than I should of done, more than everybody else. But who cares. But equally there were a lot of people that were struggling at times, they don't know what the quality was in the end but, I suspect it wasn't too good in certain places. I don't mind, because there was a lot of people helping other people. (Liam, FS student)

Well, what it is in prison... I know this course is something that's come in to prison and operates within prison, and is its own thing that is happening, but for people who is in prison, it's just part of prison. It's something that's different and new and may bring some new life... maybe even change the way education works within prison, but when I leave here, and I go back to the wing, for me to access a computer, I have to make it back down here. That's going to work on the days of education. So, if I wanted to talk to someone about something, I'm going to have to get to education, and that's not going to happen on the wing. There's still prison... prison has still got an operation going. If I'm on the wing and I'm in the cell, I want to write about something, and there's something I don't know about, I can't press the bell and say yes, what does that mean? Or I need to talk to a teacher. The only thing, what's going to make it easier is if I needed to get in contact with... let's say I needed someone to get in touch with (module leader), maybe I could make that happen. But that's not so hard anyway. If I needed to ask someone, I'd contact (module leader) because I don't know what this is or I don't know what that means. But as for facilitating my learning, and making sure everything is perfect from my learning experience, well, I doubt they could do that. It's just the environment of prison. I have to make sure I turn up on Tuesday, the day I'm meant to turn up. That's going to be the reality. Every two weeks I have to make sure I'm here. If I don't work with what has already been set up, then I doubt there can be anything else that they can cater for me. (Matthew, FS student)

The FS students were realistic about the support they could expect and noted that the prison regime itself put many obstacles in the way, such as access to resources like computers and library books. The evaluation found that there were inconsistencies in the communication arrangements, whereby the LB students appeared to have more opportunities to contact the module leaders than the FS students. This was partly due to the LB students being on the university campus and having a WhatsApp group that the module leaders were a part of. It is suggested that module leaders consider ways to ensure equal modes of communication are offered to FS and LB students to ensure one group does not feel disadvantaged.

CHALLENGING BELIEFS

Section 3.2 demonstrated that a number of the students held pre-conceptions about each other prior to the module. Challenging their own beliefs was a difficulty for some students, and for some of them this never fully disappeared. Five of the LB students found it difficult to separate the FS students from the crimes they were convicted of and this was challenging throughout the module:

Emotionally it was hard because for me, you make these relationships with people and you feel sorry for them and then you are questioning yourself, why do I feel sorry for them when they've done bad things, that they deserve to be in here. For me that was really hard to get your head around. (Carly, LB student)

My main worry was obviously the type of offenders. And it wasn't even a worry, it was a preconception of, especially with like child sex offenders. That was, that played on my mind a bit. Not because I have any negative stereotypes about sex offenders. It was just, I think, being a parent, it made it that little bit closer to home, if you know what I mean? There were points in the week when you know what offence someone's done because they've kind of disclosed it to you and you know, you're kind of sat there and thought if circumstances would have been right then that could have been my son or daughter and yet, I'm sat here talking to you like you haven't done anything. It was at first, just adjusting, because they're not somebody, well, I probably would come across them in normal life but I wouldn't know and it was, I mean, in a typical environment or in society, if someone came over to you and said he's a child sex offender, like, the normal response would be to not speak to them because it's socially inappropriate and you just can't do that in front of people? So, it was kind of fighting against what you've been conditioned to do and doing it without prejudice and being a blank canvas to everything. So, that was, it was challenging, I have to admit but I did it, I think. (Melissa, LB student)

The difficulties expressed by these students indicate that there may be challenges involved in learning environments when university-based students have knowledge of the crimes committed by prison-based students. This is something for the module leaders to consider in future Prison: Learning Together programmes.

3.6. IMPACT AND OVERALL EXPERIENCE

A key component of the evaluation was to determine what the main outcomes of the Learning Together experience were for the students who took part. All the students on the 2017 cohort passed the module with a grade of 2:1 or above evidencing that all the students met the learning outcomes on the module. This section discusses the wider impacts the module had on students. Figure 6 illustrates the main impacts discussed by students. It is evident that the largest impact for the LB students was the breaking down of social barriers and the largest impacts for the FS students were confidence and feeling normal. Each of the impacts will be discussed in turn.

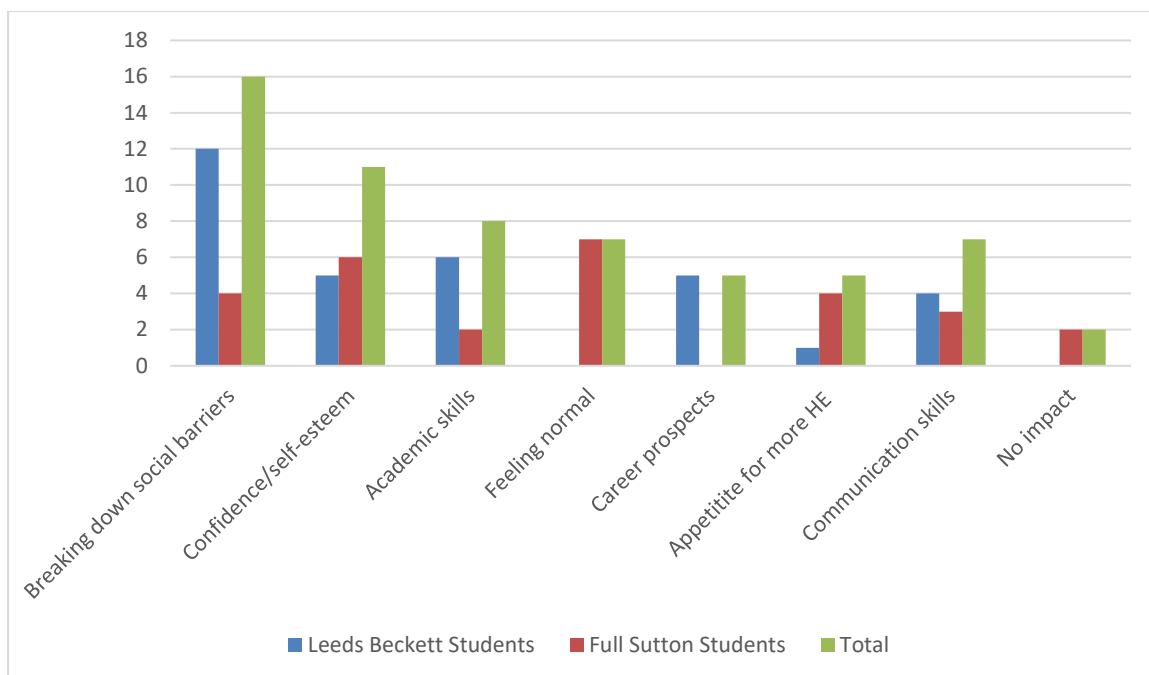


Figure 6 Impact of the Learning Together module

BREAKING DOWN SOCIAL BARRIERS

The experience of Prison: Learning Together had a profound impact on breaking down social barriers for all the LB students. The LB students discussed at length how the experience had led to them being more open minded about the use of prisons, less judgemental about people who were in prison and more appreciative of the views of others. A positive impact from the module was the ability of LB students to see beyond the crimes that their peers were imprisoned for. Melissa discussed how she had experienced difficulties negotiating learning alongside students who had committed specific types of crime, however the Prison: Learning Together module enabled her to see beyond the crimes people had been imprisoned for:

I still don't agree with the offence, but it did teach me, it doesn't matter what somebody's offences are, everybody has got something to offer. You can learn something from someone, anyone, everyone's got something that you don't know about. It really opened my eyes to the complexity of society and how we have this, kind of, one scheme fits all and actually it doesn't work like that. Everybody in that prison, from students to prisoners, all had different lives and different life experiences and it was quite clear to see that you can't take a one approach fits all with everybody. Whereas in my previous jobs or even during uni, that's a kind of one approach fits all. But, you don't question it, you kind of just go along with it because you think that's all it is. Whereas it brought into reality, when I was in there, you can't go through life that blinkered because it just won't work for anyone. (Melissa, LB student)

Similarly, Ella found the whole experience eye opening and stated that, for her, the Prison: Learning Together module was about being able to *see people for more than their crime*. This breaking down of stereotypes and diminishment of preconceptions was evident in all the interviews with the LB students and a nice example of this was discussed by Claire on how her views had changed:

I: What are you going to take away from this module?

You have an assumption that they're going to be really scary people, but they're not. They're just, you just realise they're just normal people but they have done something bad. I'm trying to think, really. Maybe like – not give everyone like the same chance but I feel like working with people inside has made me more accepting, not of what they've done but more of a rounded person as such that I can go in and talk to people, that sometimes people might find difficult, so I think that's given me that kind of edge. (Claire, LB student)

LB students also discussed how they were more open minded about the prison system itself after having the opportunity to study in a high security prison. The extract from the interview with Kirsty demonstrates this well:

I: So what are you going to take away from the course do you think?

Yeah, definitely not to judge people on sort of maybe past circumstances or past actions, because they're probably not that person anymore. Actually seeing a prison, because we had a tour of Full Sutton before we even went in to do the module, so actually seeing a prison like in real life rather than just in a film or on them documentaries on the TV or from the newspaper where they say it's like a hotel and they get free, just to actually go into a prison, we all said that we'd actually like more people to go into a prison, but obviously you've got, it's a not a zoo it's a prison sort of thing, but just for people to get a feel of what it's actually like in there, because then they would agree it's not a hotel and it's not like an easy life, and I think that would change a lot of people's ideas... We've had the whole discussion of how they're an offender and when they get released they're an ex-offender so they're not even just a normal, they're still an ex-offender, so that, I think just to sort of get rid of them ideas in people's heads so if they have gone into prison or spoke to a prisoner or actually sort of met somebody like that, they would be thinking the same as us and think, well actually they're not actually that bad, and prisons are a bad place to be and they don't really work that well, but the guys in there are doing everything possible to make themselves a better person. (Kirsty, LB student)

Four of the FS students also discussed how the module had challenged their preconceptions about people outside of prison. These students found the experience of learning alongside university students highly beneficial to this process.

I suppose I learnt that people are out there that do care about people's lives, which I know... I come to prison at 28, I know there's people out there that care about people's lives, and I know there's doctors. But I suppose there are people out there who are interested and care about other people's existence and the detrimental effects that have happened within their life and trying to bring a positivity to it. I learnt that from the lecturers, the teachers and the people that created it. (Matthew, FS student)

But when you see them they have different ideas, different concepts and you saw them change. You saw people talking to people and recognising the humanity behind the crime. You know it's kind of something someone's done, or accused of doing, has become who they are? Well if you look back on your life and you think something that you've done wrong, to be known as that is very limiting. And the students taught us actually that it doesn't have to be like that. If you create dialog, you create understanding. (Ross, FS student)

Nick discussed how his preconceptions were challenged by the LB students, who taught him to be more open minded of others.

So it was... you didn't find... I didn't find that... like I have this preconception that all people... not all people basically, but most people outside believe there are the prisoners... they should just be left to their own, you know, bread and water and stuff. And they [the LB students] didn't... a lot of them didn't have that kind of opinion and actually had a more, they were kind of more open minded about things than maybe I was. You know, it sounded like say, for example, we had the VP prisoners and the mains, but they were more open minded about everyone, you know, getting another chance, you know. Whereas, we kind of, maybe, we only deserve a chance and they don't. You know what I mean? So that was kind of... they were maybe more open minded than us that, you know, for people to have that opportunity. (Nick, LB student)

The evaluation data demonstrates that the Leeds Beckett Prison: Learning Together module achieved its objective of creating a transformative learning community. The students transformed their understanding of imprisonment, demonstrated in the high-quality assessments, and transformed their views of others, which led to an inclusive learning environment. It must be noted that some LB students admitted that whilst they were able to put preconceptions aside and see beyond the crime for the purposes of Learning Together, their views of people who commit certain crimes haven't been "totally eradicated" (Tracey, LB student). Thus, the evaluation found that the students were able to break down social barriers between themselves, but further research would need to be undertaken to determine whether this extends beyond the Learning Together community.

FEELING NORMAL

Seven of the FS students stated that one of the biggest outcomes of the Learning Together module was feeling normal or human again, rather than feeling like a prisoner. This was a very personal impact for each of the FS students and occurred due to the nature of having non-prison staff and students deliver and engage in the module. The following quotes come from 3 of the 7 FS students who discussed the normalising effect of Learning Together.

I think, for me personally, it was brilliant because once we got over the initial how are we going to react to each other kind of thing, once they walked through the door, it was only a couple of minutes and we were all chatting away as though we've known each other for ages. And I actually felt like a human being for the first time in a long time. I was really sad actually, well, back in my cell in the evening, I lay thinking about it, I just burst into tears like. I hadn't felt like that for a long time, you know, like a human. So, it was really nice to have that and it was lovely, for me, my personal view is that it was really nice to have the students coming in. I wished they could have come in more often in all honesty because it was just so normal, you know? For a change, some normality kind of thing, in your life. So, for me, it was brilliant. (Scott, FS student)

It was like, they weren't looking me with the same kind of eyes that the prison or the people who work in a prison do. So, it was kind of a culture shock to an extent. I'd kind of been, you know, programmed myself to function a certain way and then all of a sudden, I'm confronted with a bunch of people that I don't know, but they're not looking at me with this immediate suspicion.. Like a man said, what we were all thinking, like, it had a humanising effect, for the periods that we were in the classroom and a little bit after, you forgot that you were in prison, you know? And you were

just a person learning a subject with other people who were also learning a subject, and we were just normal. And that was it. There was no sort of extra, you know, or underlying, you know, suspicions or anything like that. You were all just people for a moment and that was a really enjoyable thing. (Derek, FS student)

I just found that it was a real like, a kind of like, you know, somewhat I think they've used it quite a few times, like a humanising. You know, it just really felt for a little while that kind of normal kind of... we don't get normal and maybe it's just, you know, for me impresses a lot because I've been in for a really long time. It just is kind of... it shows you that you are still normal even though you were in an abnormal environment, you know, interacting with people, students from outside. We live in like some like real extreme circumstances with people and just this, the whole setup of thing. So, then to just be interacting with people that, you know, are just normal students or, you know, like facilitators that are coming in or the teachers, whatever, and in a real kind of positive way as well it just, it's refreshing also. So it's kind of, it's optimistic for the future, you know, for education, and just in generally. (Nick, FS student)

These findings indicate that the Prison: Learning Together module can have a powerful impact on those studying on it and it is an impact that goes beyond knowledge or skills. The humanising effect as indicated by the FS students is an area that would warrant further research.

CONFIDENCE

The second most prevalent outcome for students was an increase in confidence and self-esteem. For the LB students the confidence was in relation them communicating and participating in group work.

I think I need to voice my opinion a little bit more because I do rely on other people to do it for me and then I will elaborate on it a little bit. I do think I need to, but it has boosted my confidence a little bit. (Carly, LB student)

Lucy and Claire admitted that they often found it difficult to have a voice around people they did not know, but they hope that the experience of Prison: Learning Together will help them overcome these nerves in the future:

I think because I am confident in a group of people I know, like with my friends I'm probably like the most outspoken person you'll ever meet but then it's with people I don't know, so I think so. Like I say, I'll have to see how time goes and put me in a situation and I'm doing my Postgraduate study in September and going in schools with people I've never met, so I hope it has and I hope it just makes me realise that I can be a bit more outspoken, I don't just have to sit back and listen to everyone else. Maybe like get involved a bit more because what I have to say maybe is good, people do want to listen to it and I think that's, I just think it doesn't matter like, they don't need to know what I need to think, so I think maybe getting myself involved a bit more. (Lucy, LB student).

Increase in confidence was discussed by 6 of the FS students in relation to their ability to undertake academic study. The students discussed their surprise that they were able to engage with the level of reading and their ability to pass a level 6 higher education module. For some FS students this has had an important impact on their belief in themselves, for instance Paul stated: *It's given me the ability to think, flipping heck, yes I can do it. It's given me more of an, I can do attitude and I know I can.* The

interview with Scott conveys the journey of discovering confidence that occurred during Learning Together:

I: What were your thoughts at the start of the module?

I didn't think that I would be able to contribute in all honesty. And I was a bit concerned that I wouldn't understand what they were trying to explain. But I think they, the lecturers, they were really engaging. I was really interested actually, in listening to what they had to say. I felt I had loads of questions.

I: Has your concern about that in the beginning changed?

Yeah. It did change a lot. I'm glad I put those fears aside because it was fear, basically. I don't like my statement then, because it's like, I was just fearful that I'd be made to look a right idiot.

I: What do you think you'll take away from the overall experience?

For me, the sense of pride I suppose. For achieving what I've managed to achieve as I didn't think, in all honesty that I'd be able to achieve that.

The pedagogical approach of Prison: Learning Together that groups diverse students together in a process of learning has been beneficial to both the university and prison students. 11 of the students have left the module feeling more confident in their abilities and belief in themselves to achieve future goals.

ACADEMIC SKILLS

Eight of the students discussed how they had developed their academic skills by undertaking Prison: Learning Together. Critical thinking was a skill that was reported by students, whereby the experience has led to them thinking about imprisonment and prisoners in a more critical way. This was largely due to the students sharing their own knowledge and experiences, enabling them to challenge their own perspectives:

I've got my own opinion, but I did take on everybody else's opinions on board. I absorbed a lot and surprisingly... they have got a point, and maybe... not just the lecturers, the other students. I took their points of view on board which the more you absorb, the more enlightened you become. Some I agreed with. Yes, I can see that, do that. Then there's my own views as well, and put them together. The groups, yes they were alright. I was quite surprised how much I did listen to other people. It was good. I think we all pretty much worked together when we were in that big group. (Paul, FS student)

I feel like I've taken more of a critical approach on the legitimacy of prison. I feel understanding it from the prisoner aspect, that it's completely different than what you read and what you see in the media and stuff so I feel like it's given me a different outlook on how our punishment system is within the UK. (Claire, LB student)

Students developed other academic skills, including the ability to use the Harvard referencing system, advancing their reading skills and undertaking group assessments. The confidence gained by students and the academic skills learnt led to 5 students (1 Lb and 4 FS) deciding to pursue more higher

education courses. Prison: Learning Together has provided these students with an appetite for further higher education, which indicates the module has had a positive impact on those FS students' view of education as demonstrated in the two examples below:

I want to learn more about criminology and the process of the university environment, the closest I've ever been to it anyway. Hopefully, the encouragement to go on learning. The confidence that maybe if I had the funding, I was given the opportunity. If I have to do 35 years in prison, I will be 62. Now what am I going to use this for at 62? So, to find that energy to want to add to what I know, you've really got to want it, because when you think about what you're going to use it for, and what does it add up to, it might not add up to much, as in what we would use these things for in the normal walk of life. This is just to keep my brain... it's for me to learn, because I might be a person who wants to learn, rather than finding a use for this. So, at times it can be hard work, and at times it's exciting, but it's such a positive. (Matthew, FS student)

I think this course has confirmed the belief that I have in myself, that I am able to study at a high level. It's confirmed that for one. And two, it's given me a lot more knowledge, by taking on the course, and doing the course, reading from academics, I understood what I knew and it helped to articulate them, the knowledge I had. But also, it made me think to myself, yeah, I want to do a sociology degree because, obviously, in criminology there's a lot of sociological aspects in here. So, I want to do a sociology degree. I want to do something that helps me critically analyse situations, like a political theorist or something like that. (Derek, FS student)

CAREER PROSPECTS

Seven of the students found the Prison: Learning Together module helpful for thinking about their future careers. Two of the students (1 LB student and 1 FS) students stated that the module had encouraged them to apply for a postgraduate course to continue their study. Five of the LB students decided to pursue careers working with prisoners or ex-prisoners. Mandy discussed her ambition to join the probation service and Carly highlighted how the experience gave her confidence to apply to join the prison service:

It's definitely made me 100% sure that I want to work with something to do with prisons. It was education in prisons or probation, and probation is the way I'm leaning at the moment, simply because it's a lot easier to get in to, and that way, once I'm in getting work experience, I can then look at possibly trying to go to other sections. So, it's solidified what I want to do. (Mandy, LB student)

I went in to know if I could deal with an environment like that and for me to know that I can made me really happy because I thought, oh God, what if I can't, what do I do after that, do I think of a completely different career path or what do I do. I was really, really pleased that I feel like I can, I am positive that I can. I found it really, really good. (Carly, LB student)

The authentic learning environment and ability to learn alongside people in prison has been beneficial to the LB students in considering their future career prospects. For the FS students their appetite for more higher education and applying for postgraduate study was driven by their motivation to further their learning whilst in Full Sutton.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Seven of the students (4 LB and 3 FS) improved their communication skills because of the Prison: Learning Together module. The LB students' communication skills were largely improved due to the lack of technology in the prison environment. Ella discussed how they relied on face-to-face communication to undertake the discussions and assignments. Jane also noted how the lack of a virtual learning environment (VLE) forced her to develop more effective communication skills with the module leaders. Communication was also deemed an important skill in helping to break down the social barriers, highlighted here by Melissa:

The main thing I learnt was my communication interpersonal skills, they really developed. Especially being submerged in an environment that's particularly hostile anyway. Obviously, prisons aren't the nicest of places. But, how to speak to people individually, when you're out in the open world, I refer to it, you kind of gravitate towards people who you naturally can communicate with anyway. You don't really have to breakdown any barriers and if you did, you probably just wouldn't speak to them, you probably wouldn't make friends with them, you'd find somebody else who you found it quite easy to speak to. But in there, you have to speak to everyone. You have to adapt your own communication skills and even in some points, your language. So, that was the main thing that I learnt, was how to deal with people that I wouldn't normally. (Melissa, LB student)

Tom grew in confidence being able to communicate with the guest lecturers and module leaders and it helped him develop skills to communicate with people when he did not understand something. Derek and Paul also discussed how they learnt to listen to others and communicate with people who, in their view, were not there to "police them". The inclusive design on the Prison: Learning Together programme has enabled these students to develop important transferable communication skills.

OVERALL IMPACT

There were two students from Full Sutton who said that the module had no impact on them, beyond teaching them the core content. They enjoyed the module but said that it hasn't changed anything for them. All the other students had at least one thing to take away from the module, whether that was the social impact of breaking down barriers, the individual skill sets or the confidence to undertake more study or career applications.

From these findings the Prison: Learning Together achieved the goal of transformative learning and it is clear from the data that the module has had a profound emotive impact on some of the students involved. The biggest impact on the LB students is clearly the breaking down of preconceived stereotypes and critical thinking skills. For the FS students the impact relates closely with their self-confidence, academic skills and break away from the prisoner identity.

The longevity of these impacts cannot be determined from this evaluation alone and would require a longitudinal study of all the students from this cohort. Similarly, it is not possible to determine whether the impacts such as breaking down social barriers and challenging stereotypes occurred outside the Prison: Learning Together environment.

All the students were asked to describe their overall experience in five words or less and these words are illustrated in Figure 7. It is clear from the feedback that this experience is overwhelmingly positive.

4. CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMMES

This section pulls together all the suggestions for future Prison: Learning Together modules from the evaluation:

- It is recommended that the module leaders consider how they communicate with the LB students to ensure the modes of communication and level of support equates to the communication and support provided to FS students.
- Consideration should be given as to whether Leeds Beckett and Full Sutton students discuss the convictions. There was evidence that some Leeds Beckett students in the 2017 cohort found it more challenging when they knew the crimes committed by the Full Sutton students.
- Future Prison: Learning Together modules could consider methods of enabling students to work with people beyond their own group. This could be achieved by varying groups or having opportunities for cross group working.
- A challenging aspect of the module was the group presentation due to the limited time students had to work on it collaboratively. It is recommended that the group assessment be re-considered or that more time is provided to enable students to collaborate efficiently.
- A notable difficulty experienced by students was leaving the module. It is recommended that the module leaders put measures in place to facilitate this transition. The Leeds Beckett students suggested a post-module session to discuss the transition and how best to manage their feelings.
- There was a sense of disappointment among the Full Sutton students that there were no further opportunities to undertake learning at this level. The Full Sutton students would benefit from a post-module session to enable them to discuss their options should they wish to continue with higher education. The Full Sutton students would like to see higher education embedded into the everyday life of prison, rather than singular modules.
- The learning environment during this cohort was inadequate due to the limited space. It is recommended that a more appropriate learning space be developed for future modules in Full Sutton².

5. CONCLUDING POINTS

- The aim of the Leeds Beckett Prison: Learning Together module was to create an inclusive and transformative learning community whereby people study together and learn with and from each other through dialogue and the sharing of experience. The evaluation concludes that these objectives have been achieved as demonstrated from the findings discussed.
- The findings from the evaluation have demonstrated that this module had great impact on breaking down social barriers. Over half of the Leeds Beckett students openly admitting they held stereotypical views of prisoners at the start of the module and these preconceptions were diminished by the end of the module. Similarly, the pre-conceptions about students and academic staff held by the Full Sutton students were reduced because of this learning experience. This is shown to have an enormous social impact for the Leeds Beckett students who state they are now more open minded.
- For the Full Sutton students, they viewed the learning experience as having a humanising effect on them, whereby they felt equal to the Leeds Beckett students and their participation in group discussions was deemed as valuable. The learning experience also increased confidence among the Full Sutton students, especially in relation to their ability to undertake higher education.
- The module did impact on students' forward thinking, particularly in relation to career choices for the Leeds Beckett students. During the evaluation the Leeds Beckett students strongly emphasised how it had either confirmed that they wanted to work in prisons and probation or that the experienced had changed their career goals. For the Full Sutton students, there was an increased appetite for learning and particularly higher education as a means of purposeful activity whilst serving their sentence. The students suggested a variety of disciplines they would like to study including, but not limited to, sociology, economics and politics.
- The broader implications suggest that this form of learning has direct benefits to all students in terms of their personal development. For those in prison the learning experience can increase confidence and offer the opportunity to enhance skills in writing, presenting and communicating effectively. Thus, this mode of higher education enabled Full Sutton students to develop transferable skills beyond the subject area. For the students on the outside of prison, the experience to learn alongside prisoners provides an insight into prison life and an appreciation for the challenges faced within the prison. Similarly, the students from Leeds Beckett developed effective transferrable skills by studying alongside people outside mainstream higher education.
- The success of this Learning Together module is demonstrated in the number of FS students who have an appetite for more higher education. The challenge will be to develop partnerships whereby higher education is not simply one module delivered annually but

embedding higher education into the prison education departments.

- There are some considerations for future Prison: Learning Together modules, outlined in section 4. These recommendations are made to enhance what is already a very successful module.
- The longevity of the impacts and the scale of the impacts beyond the Prison: Learning Together module are beyond the scope of this evaluation. To determine whether there are long-lasting impacts it is recommended that follow-up evaluations with students be undertaken over a longer term.

