

Training new prison officers in restorative practices: The Irish experience

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Restorative practices are a set of values and skills that professionals can use during their day-to-day interactions with the people for whom they deliver services.² They can be applied across the 'human services',³ including in criminal justice agencies such as policing and prisons, social work, schools and universities, among other settings. Professionals working in these services have significant discretion to decide how to allocate benefits and sanctions on behalf of the State, and how they interact with the people over whom they have authority, and for whose welfare they are responsible.⁴ Advocates argue that restorative values and skills can help professionals orient their practices towards building and maintaining positive relationships, ensuring people feel treated fairly and involved in decisions, and addressing and repairing harm and resolving conflict constructively.

This article is concerned with the prisons context, specifically with recent work in the Republic of Ireland to incorporate restorative practices into Recruit Prison Officers' (RPOs) training. RPO training in Ireland is undertaken in collaboration between the Irish Prison Service College (IPSC) and South East Technological University (SETU). Over two years, RPOs study a programme called the Higher Certificate in Custodial Care (HCCC): a Level 6 certificate on the National Framework of Qualifications,⁵ delivered to those who successfully apply to the Irish Prison Service (IPS) as an RPO.⁶ The HCCC is composed of four semesters.

Semester 1 is delivered residentially at the IPSC, lasting 12 weeks and largely delivered by IPSC Tutors, who are prison officers seconded to the College as trainers. Semesters 2-4 are delivered through online (80 per cent) and in-person (20 per cent) learning by lecturers at SETU, during which time RPOs work in Dublin prisons on normal shifts. Previous experience of higher education is not required to study on the HCCC; SETU lecturers also deliver a 'Learning to Learn' module in semester 1.

The first author is a criminologist who studies restorative practices and supported the IPSC and SETU to develop restorative practices training and to implement restorative practices more widely. The remaining authors all teach, or have taught, restorative practices content on the HCCC, with the second and third authors doing so in semester 1 at the IPSC, and the fourth and fifth authors doing so in later semesters at SETU. This paper aims to explore and reflect on these elements of RPO training — including the content of the restorative practices training, and the manner in which it is delivered.

The paper outlines the meaning of restorative practices in prisons, the support in the European legal framework, and the research on practices studied or reported upon to date in the UK and Ireland. It then outlines how restorative practices were integrated into different semesters of the HCCC — both as content and as a pedagogical approach — before considering the implications for prison cultures and services, and for prison officer training providers in Ireland and beyond.

1. Corresponding author: ian.marder@mu.ie.
2. O'Dwyer, K. (2021). *Aspiring to high quality restorative practices: The RPI quality assurance framework*. Restorative Practices Ireland. <https://www.restorativepracticesireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CDI-RPI-QA-Framework-web-2-1.pdf>.
3. Burford, G., Braithwaite, J., & Braithwaite, V. (Eds.). (2019). *Restorative and Responsive Human Services*. Routledge.
4. Lipsky, M. (2010). *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*. Russel Sage Foundation; Vaandering, D. (2013). A window on relationships: Reflecting critically on a current restorative justice theory. *Restorative Justice*, 1(3), 311-333.
5. The Leaving Certificate, equivalent to English A-Levels, is Level 5 on this framework. Higher education begins at Level 6. A three- or four-year, Honours-level Bachelor's Degree is Level 8; non-Honours is Level 7.
6. South East Technological University. (2023). *Higher Certificate in Custodial Care*. South East Technological University. <https://www.wit.ie/courses/higher-certificate-in-custodial-care>.

Restorative practices in prison settings

To understand restorative practices, we can consider the syllabus of a typical training course.⁷ If one were to obtain full restorative practices training from a specialist provider, it might last four days. In the first two days, trainees explore restorative values and how to apply them with individuals in their day-to-day work. For example, if a prison officer wanted to give either positive or critical feedback in a way that meant they were experienced as fair and respectful and that they clearly communicated their expectations and needs, they might do so using 'restorative language'. The broader goal would be for the interaction also to build, maintain, or strengthen their relationship. This is pertinent to the prisons setting and the prison officer profession, research on which consistently identifies the relationship that frontline officers have with people in custody as paramount to the legitimacy, safety, and social climate within prisons.⁸ At the same time, relationships between prison officers and people in custody require careful management due to their potentially intimate and emotionally charged nature,⁹ and given the 'conflict-generating' features of prison environments more broadly.¹⁰ Restorative practice training also incorporates theoretical input on restorative values, opportunities for trainees to reflect on how they feel when they are treated restoratively or not, and discussions about research on the implementation of restorative practices in different settings.

This culminates in practicing the 'restorative questions', namely: What happened? What were you thinking at the time? What have you thought about since? Who has been affected and how? What needs to happen to put things right? Their application in one-

Trainees also learn about 'circle processes', facilitated with groups to build positive relationships, ensure all voices are heard in a discussion, and collectively make fair decisions and solve problems.

to-one work seeks to facilitate someone to identify and express their needs after experiencing a problem, or to reflect on their behaviour during a 'restorative conversation'. Trainees will return to these questions on the third and fourth days as they underpin restorative responses to harm and conflict. Skills taught are to facilitate 'restorative meetings' (where two or more persons are facilitated to come together, or indirectly to have a relatively informal discussion underpinned by these questions) and (for more serious situations, requiring more formality and preparation) 'restorative conferences'. Trainees also learn about 'circle processes', facilitated with groups to build positive relationships, ensure all voices are heard in a discussion, and collectively make fair decisions and solve problems. Models include sequential circles, which ensure all voices are heard in a conversation, and problem-solving circles, a multi-stage process through which groups can explore problems and seek to identify potential solutions collaboratively and creatively.

The European legal framework supports the training and use of these approaches in criminal justice, and in prison services specifically. In 2018, the Council of Europe adopted its Recommendation concerning restorative justice in criminal matters.¹¹ This is a non-binding legal framework, which has the same status in Council of Europe Member States (including the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom) as the European Prison Rules and the European Probation Rules. One of its core goals is to broaden the scope of restorative justice to recognise that restorative values can support culture change in criminal justice systems, professions, and agencies if they are implemented proactively as restorative practices. The Recommendation outlines the restorative values,¹² and

7. The training programme which most informed that now delivered on the HCCC was developed by Childhood Development Initiative. It has been delivered in basic, advanced and 'train the trainer' forms to professionals in various sectors and across criminal justice settings, including to many trainers on the HCCC. For an outline and evaluation of this training, see: O'Dwyer, K. (2021). *Training into practice: An evaluation of the Childhood Development Initiative's training in restorative practices – usage and impact*. Childhood Development Initiative. <https://www.lenus.ie/bitstream/handle/10147/635860/Evaluation-of-Restorative-Practices-Training-2021-Usage-and-Impact.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.
8. See, for example: Liebling, A., Price, D., & Shefer, G. (2011). *The Prison Officer*. Routledge.
9. Crawley, E. (2004). *Doing Prison Work: The Public and Private Lives of Prison Officers*. Willan.
10. Edgar, K. (2018). *Ensuring a safe environment: a conflict centred strategy*. Prison Reform Trust. <https://prisonreformtrust.org.uk/publication/ensuring-a-safe-environment-a-conflict-centred-strategy/>.
11. Council of Europe. (2018). *Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)8 Concerning Restorative Justice in Criminal Matters*. Council of Europe. https://www.coe.int/en/web/prison/home/-/asset_publisher/ky2olXXXogcx/content/recommendation-cm-rec-2018-8.
12. The Recommendation emphasises stakeholder participation and repairing harm (Rule 13). Further provisions reflect on the values of voluntariness, dialogue, equal concern and procedural fairness (Rule 14), among others.

provides that all criminal justice managers and practitioners may be trained in these and in the corresponding skills. As we argue above, the Recommendation provides that restorative values and skills can be applied in their day-to-day roles to help professionals resolve conflict and address harm beyond the criminal procedure (in response to conflicts and rule breaking in prisons, for example) and build positive relationships on prison landings. That is, the Recommendation explicitly supports both 'proactive' (relationship building) and 'reactive' (conflict resolution) applications of restorative practices within prisons.

Implementing restorative practices in UK and Irish prisons

Some countries already utilised restorative practices in prisons before 2018. Several European jurisdictions have undertaken some work on this subject. Responses to a question submitted through the EUROPRIS Knowledge Management System indicate that several small-scale projects exist around Europe, albeit with limited information available in English.¹³ Focusing on research and other forms of public documentation from places that are likely of most interest to PSJ readers, this section considers projects in England, Northern Ireland, and the Republic of Ireland that preceded the Recommendation.

In England and Wales, a 2016 Ministry of Justice White Paper provided that the Ministry would address prison violence by 'encouraging governors to take a restorative approach to low-level violence where appropriate'.¹⁴ This cited two pilots in HMP Featherstone and HMP Buckley Hall that were due to finish in 2017. The Restorative Justice Council published a report supporting this, noting significant reductions (a 91 per cent decrease) in staff use of restraint following the introduction of restorative practices in Atkinson Secure Children's Home.¹⁵

A process evaluation at Featherstone and Buckley Hall identified a focus on addressing conflict (that is, on restorative practices that are reactive in nature, as opposed to those applied proactively to build

relationships). A third prison, HMP Peterborough, joined the pilot later upon its discontinuation at Featherstone, which suffered from staff shortages. Across the three prisons, 122 staff and 48 people in custody received at least some level of training, from 'foundation' to 'facilitator' level. The evaluators reviewed trainees' feedback forms completed following the training, concluding that the training had been 'extremely well-received' by staff and by people in custody. They also conducted interviews and group discussions with managers, staff and people in custody who experienced, delivered, or managed restorative practices. These respondents felt there was significant potential for restorative practices to be used to respond effectively to conflict in prison settings.¹⁶

The training of people in custody and the flexibility of the skills learned meant that at least 21 formal and 44 informal meetings occurred in Buckley Hall and Peterborough — likely an underestimate, according to the evaluators. The evaluators expressed optimism about the pilot, especially considering the difficult conditions in which it was implemented, including staff shortages and a limited awareness among wider staff. The pilot, they conclude, 'proved that, with commitment, leadership and clear lines of accountability, it is possible to use [restorative approaches] to deal, both formally and informally, with a wide variety of conflicts' in prison settings.¹⁷ Around that time, HMP Dartmoor used restorative practices to underpin a project it called the 'Dialogue Road Map', which sought to resolve and prevent conflict by combining new dispute resolution processes and training in communication skills. A study using interviews and ethnographic observations found some optimism among people in custody about the potential of the project to achieve these goals, but that the challenges included a lack of trust and power imbalances within the prison.¹⁸

More recently, Calkin's research explored the meaning and impact of implementing restorative practices in three prisons in England, interviewing 29 people in custody or who worked in the prisons.¹⁹ Calkin also undertook observations in each prison. Her

13. EUROPRIS. (2021). *Restorative programs in prison systems*. EUROPRIS. <https://www.euopris.org/epis/kms/?detail=404>.

14. Ministry of Justice. (2016). *Prison Safety and Reform* (p. 50). Ministry of Justice. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a80aa1040f0b62302694ceb/cm-9350-prison-safety-and-reform-_web_.pdf.

15. Restorative Justice Council. (2017). *Restorative justice and prison – a report for governors*. Restorative Justice Council. http://www.antonioacasella.eu/restorative/Olliver_feb17.pdf.

16. Fair, H., & Jacobson, J. (2018). *Process evaluation of the Restorative Prisons project*, p. vi. Institute for Criminal Policy and Research. <https://www.restorativesolutions.org.uk/assets/Restorative-Prisons—Process-Evaluation,-ICPR.pdf>. p.34; see also, Butler, M., & Maruna, S. (2016). Rethinking prison disciplinary processes: A potential future for restorative justice. *Victims & Offenders*, 11(1), 126-148.

17. Fair, H., & Jacobson, J. (2018). *Process evaluation of the Restorative Prisons project*, p. vi. Institute for Criminal Policy and Research. <https://www.restorativesolutions.org.uk/assets/Restorative-Prisons—Process-Evaluation,-ICPR.pdf>. p.35.

18. Gray, P., Santos, G., Idrissi, A., & Kennedy, C. (2020). *Dartmoor Dialogues: An exploration of HMP Dartmoor's journal towards becoming an integrated prison underpinned by restorative practices*. University of Plymouth. <https://eprints.staffs.ac.uk/6613/1/DartmoorDialoguesResearchReport.pdf>.

19. Calkin, C. (2021). An exploratory study of understandings and experiences of implementing restorative practices in three UK prisons. *British Journal of Community Justice*, 17(1), 92-111.

findings suggest that restorative practices were used widely, and to an extent not captured by previous literature. The benefits emerging included that restorative practices increased the perceived fairness of the prison adjudication process and improved relationships between staff and people in custody, and between people in custody and their families, when used in these contexts. Calkin also identified confusion over terminology (such as the difference between restorative practices and restorative justice)²⁰ and further barriers relating to the disconnect with other elements of the institutional culture and with existing concepts and programmes.

In Northern Ireland, a recent article by the (now retired) Deputy Director of the Northern Irish Prison Service outlined his experience of implementing restorative practices in prisons.²¹ He notes that, as Deputy Governor of Magilligan Prison, he oversaw work involving: offering restorative meetings and conferences to resolve prison conflict; the establishment of a new 'restorative landing' on which it was intended that a 'restorative ethos' would prosper; using restorative circles on landings to build a sense of community, structure staff-prisoner discussions and resolve issues collectively; and resolving longer-standing conflicts between people who were being kept apart. A primary outcome was that the use of restorative practices reduced the number of people on the prison's 'keep apart' list by 27 per cent. Restorative approaches to disciplinary processes were also felt to have been successful. However, the status of this work following the author's retirement is unclear, and a full evaluation has not been published.

In the Republic of Ireland, before 2018 a substantial project in two prisons had come and gone. In 2022, prison managers who previously led the development of restorative practices published case studies on projects undertaken several years earlier in Wheatfield Prison,²² a large men's prison in West

Dublin, and the Dóchas Centre,²³ a much smaller women's prison in the heart of Dublin City.

Following the IPS 2012-2015 Strategic Plan featuring an action to pilot restorative approaches, a large-scale training programme took place in both institutions, focused on restorative approaches to conflict, discipline, and community reparation. At least 49 people were trained in conferencing across the two institutions, and 12 trained as trainers in Wheatfield. This led to various practices over the two years to resolve conflict, including when one person in custody put his mother under pressure to bring in drugs, an assault involving two women in custody, and a conflict between a person in custody and a member of staff. These case studies indicate that the experiences of those who led these projects were positive, revealing a variety of situations in which the authors felt restorative

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practices had been used to positive effect. Wheatfield sought to collect some data on its use in disciplinary processes by tracking whether the 42 persons who were referred to a restorative disciplinary process 'reoffended'. The case study states that this identified 'a 68 per cent non-reoffending rate from all restoratively resolved disciplinary cases, rising to 83 per cent when juvenile cases were excluded',²⁴ as well as claiming 100 per cent satisfaction among

participants — albeit we do not know how many of the 42 referrals were resolved successfully using a restorative process, how reoffending was measured, or how many people completed the survey which assessed satisfaction. We do know, however, that both projects were discontinued by the time of the next strategic plan in 2016 — the reasons for which do not appear to have been published.

Studies and documentation of prison-based restorative practices usually suggest it has positive effects and conclude with optimism about the potential of restorative practices to prevent and resolve conflict in prison settings. This research is limited, mostly providing a snapshot of specific programmes shortly following

20. Restorative justice refers to efforts to use restorative values and skills to enable people involved in or affected by a crime to participate actively in repairing harm. In prison settings, this can involve dialogue between people in custody and the victim, or others harmed by, their offences (e.g. 'restorative conferencing'). It can be defined more broadly to incorporate forms of victim awareness work or community reparation. In contrast, restorative practices involve applying restorative values and skills in the context of the day-to-day prison environment.

21. Eagleston, D. (2022). Old keys do not open new doors: Twenty years of restorative justice in Northern Ireland prisons: An insight into making it happen. *Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*, 62(2), 220-241.

22. Stack, A. (2022). *Restorative practices in prisons – Wheatfield Prison*. Restorative Justice: Strategies for Change. <https://restorativejustice.ie/restorative-practices-in-prisons-wheatfield-prison/>.

23. Kelleher, T. (2022). *Restorative practices in prisons – the Dóchas Centre*. Restorative Justice: Strategies for Change. <https://restorativejustice.ie/restorative-practices-in-prisons-the-dochas-centre/>.

24. At this time, Wheatfield held people as young as 17 years of age.

implementation. Often, either clarity is lacking as to these programme's sustainability and scalability or, worse still, the documentation illustrates the discontinuation of seemingly promising projects. Notably, each project mentioned focuses on individual prisons. We are yet to see researched or documented efforts at restorative practices implementation that take a whole-of-service approach.

Recent training developments in Ireland

Due to its non-binding nature, the 2018 Recommendation requires partnership working with stakeholders across and beyond the criminal justice sector for it to be implemented. This prompted the first author, upon moving to Ireland in 2018 to lecture in criminology, to contact IPSC management to discuss potential partnership working.

Consequently, the 2019-2022 IPS Strategy committed to 'exploring and examining mechanisms for incorporating restorative justice principles throughout the Irish Prison Service', as well as to 'include restorative justice principles in the training of staff including all new recruits'.²⁵ In the first action after this statement, the first and second authors collaborated to organise an IPSC workshop in January 2020 with Tutors, IPSC managers, and restorative practitioners (including several persons who were involved in the Dóchas and Wheatfield pilots) to explore including restorative practices in RPO training.²⁶

There, it was agreed that IPSC Tutors would develop a half-day restorative training programme, aligning approximately with the first day of the four-day restorative practice training, to deliver to RPOs in the first semester of the HCCC. They would also build restorative skills into other modules delivered in

Semester 1. At a second workshop in August 2020,²⁷ slightly delayed by COVID-19, the second author delivered the training package to Tutors and discussed its implementation. The training included videos recorded to illustrate the differences between restorative and punitive responses to conflict in prisons. The group also considered how the College might adopt restorative practices internally to build a sense of community, enable RPOs and Tutors to have a voice in the College's work, and respond to conflict.

Since then, the College has taken a range of actions.²⁸ The half-day training package has been delivered to all RPOs learning at the College since August 2020, during their second training week. RPOs

are introduced to restorative values and skills, including the language and questions. Sessions focus on the values to encourage RPOs to prioritise building relationships with colleagues and people in custody, and to address conflict in a healthy manner. Tutors use discussions, group exercises and role-plays to help RPOs understand and practice restorative skills, considering examples from their personal lives and new working environments. Videos are used to illustrate restorative and punitive responses to the same situations in prisons to help RPOs evaluate the merits of each approach and the implications for relationships. One of the videos shows an interaction between a prison

officer and a person in custody; another focuses on an interaction between two officers. They both show how the restorative questions move the conversation from the past to the future, separate people from their behaviour, encourage empathy, and achieve accountability without blame. Tutors have integrated restorative practice skills into additional first-semester modules on communication and de-escalation. Several IPSC Tutors have since undertaken restorative practices

Often, either clarity is lacking as to these programme's sustainability and scalability or, worse still, the documentation illustrates the discontinuation of seemingly promising projects.

25. Irish Prison Service. (2019). *Irish Prison Service Strategic Plan 2019-2022*, p. 18. Irish Prison Service. https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/Document-5_IPS-Strategy-2019_2022.pdf.

26. Marder, I. (2020). *Restorative Justice: Strategies for Change co-organises workshop with the Irish Prison Service College on restorative practices*. Restorative Justice: Strategies for Change. <https://restorativejustice.ie/2020/01/24/restorative-justice-strategies-for-change-co-organises-workshop-with-the-irish-prison-service-college-on-restorative-practices/>.

27. Marder, I. (2020). *Socially-distanced restorative practices day held at IPS College*. Restorative Justice: Strategies for Change. <https://restorativejustice.ie/2020/08/31/socially-distanced-restorative-practices-day-held-at-ips-college/>.

28. Sections of this explanation draw on these case studies. See: Murphy, A. (2022). *Irish Prison Service College – training and internal use of RP*. Restorative Justice: Strategies for Change. <https://restorativejustice.ie/irish-prison-service-college-training-and-internal-use/>; Brennan, F., Hogan, C., & Rooney, P. (2023). *South East Technological University and Irish Prison Service College – restorative practices training and pedagogical use with Recruit Prison Officers (Higher Certificate in Custodial Care, Semester 2-4)*. Restorative Justice: Strategies for Change. <https://restorativejustice.ie/south-east-technological-university-and-irish-prison-service-college-training-and-pedagogical-use-higher-certificate-in-custodial-care-semester-2-4/>.

training, either the half-day course delivered in the IPSC, or the longer programme described earlier, delivered by Childhood Development Initiative. This training took into account the mixed context of their work, insofar as Tutors work in both an educational institution and a prison service. The third author also trained as a trainer with Childhood Development Initiative after the second author, previously trained by as a trainer by the same provider, transferred out of the IPSC to an operational position.

The IPSC, as an educational institution, has also sought to use restorative practices internally. First, Tutors use circles to facilitate discussions in class. For example, after RPOs spend three days in an assigned prison during their 12-week induction, Tutors facilitate reflective circles so that each RPO can share their reflections with the group, uninterrupted. They are asked how they were feeling before the day started and after it finished, and to share their positive, negative, or surprising observations, among other questions designed to help them reflect as a group on the experience.

Second, a new IPSC 'Learning Climate for Newly Recruited Staff' includes restorative practices in several places, and elsewhere indicates an underpinning by restorative values. It says that the IPSC is:

committed to cultivating and nurturing a learning climate in which inductees are actively encouraged to: share their experiences and reflections; listen to, discuss and challenge different perspectives; ask questions; make and learn from mistakes; acknowledge a lack of understanding or weakness; participate in exercises; provide peer feedback; etc. without fear of ridicule, shame or insult and with the confidence that they will be provided with a positive, genuine, and supportive response.

The Learning Climate also states that Tutors:

take a restorative approach through the demonstration of an understanding of how people feel, by building, maintaining and repairing relationships and in helping RPOs understand the impact of their actions on others.

RPOs receive regular feedback during the semester, and formally at weeks 2, 4, 8 and 12. The Learning Climate guides Tutors in providing feedback, stating that they should:

provide an opportunity for self-assessment in the first instance for example what were you

thinking while you were undertaking that exercise? How did it make you feel? What could you have done differently? What have you learned?

It also provides that low-level misconduct 'should be dealt with sensitively, privately, in a restorative manner'. This suggests an integration of restorative values and skills into the College, beyond delivering restorative practices training. Tutors reported that RPOs' reflective pieces, written in week 10, indicate a good level of understanding of restorative practices, and that RPOs recognise when Tutors and prison officers use restorative practices around them.

RPOs continue developing their restorative practices understanding and skills with SETU in the later semesters of the HCCC, including as part of workplace reflective practice. SETU seeks to underpin the HCCC by two philosophies which go hand in hand: reflective practice and restorative practice. One objective is to engender an ability to reach out for support and admit making mistakes. It is hoped that valuing an openness to learning and vulnerability in classrooms will develop a culture that recruits can bring into prisons. Most lecturers were trained in restorative practices in recent years and use opening circles to build relationships during classes. Students are invited to share their mood and energy levels on a scale of one to ten, and to respond to a prompt question designed to share personal stories (e.g., 'tell us a holiday memory'). Closing circles to end each class enable students to share their thoughts on the day's activities and reflect on learning. Students often express that they feel reassured hearing that they are not the only ones feeling daunted by assignments, promoting peer support.

In relation to the additional training in restorative practices, in semester 2 in a module entitled 'Workplace Reflective Practice Project I', students engage with resources outlining restorative practices in custodial settings and reflect together using online group chats. Next, they participate in restorative role-plays. Students and lecturers co-create the scenarios using real examples of challenging situations they encountered. Online (and synchronously), students role-play restorative conversations in pairs, taking turns in different roles and scenarios. They submit a video and written reflection for assessment. To-date, their reflections suggest that the exercise helps build self-awareness and empathy.

In semester 4 in the module 'Workplace Reflective Practice Project II', students are given group work to explore restorative practices further. In teams, they summarise, evaluate, and review an article, and present their findings to their class. They are asked to use restorative practices to facilitate their groupwork. Each

student writes an individual reflective piece about this. The project encourages them to use a restorative mindset in planning, preparation, and engaging with each other in the team. In our (Brennan and Hogan's) experience, using restorative practices helps students to work together, listen to each other, understand different perspectives, and make groupwork decisions together.

Importance and implications for prison cultures, services, and training providers

The situation in Ireland should be of interest to those in other jurisdictions for several reasons. Firstly, it is indicative of what can happen through open collaboration between universities and prison officer training providers. The authors developed positive, trusting relationships over time, and worked closely together on training development and other activities, including writing this paper and the case studies on which the paper is partly based. The quality and openness of the collaboration between the IPSC and higher education institutions in this regard is notable — especially given the relative nascency of research collaborations in the criminal justice sector in Ireland.²⁹

Secondly, it does not seem that any other jurisdictions embed restorative practices training to such a degree when training new recruits, nor that other training providers have embraced restorative approaches to pedagogy to the extent that the IPSC and SETU have in Ireland. Between using circles in classes to build relationships and enable reflection, to using restorative practices to provide feedback and respond to problems (including with plagiarism at SETU), the HCCC itself has moved towards being restoratively delivered. The training and training approaches were recently shared with partners from nine countries through the European Penitentiaries Training Academies Network.³⁰ This is also

worthy of empirical exploration given the growing literature on restorative pedagogies in tertiary education,³¹ the limited research on prison officer training, and the potential impact that this could have on prison officer occupational cultures. The research outlined earlier seems to indicate that restorative practices projects that focus on specific prisons are difficult to sustain and scale up. Integrating restorative values and skills into recruits' training (and training pedagogies) could help normalise and embed them across the workforce over time. Notwithstanding the reality that this can change, the current approach means that restorative practices are not tied to a specific in-prison pilot that can easily be discontinued.

Significant barriers remain to assessing the impact of this work on prison practices and culture. For example, baseline data were not collected in such a way that would permit any impact in attitudes or practices to be captured over time. Equally, restorative practices are only one small element of the two-year programme, and it may be difficult for any dataset to capture its impact, especially given that participation was not randomised. Prison officer attitudes, practices, and occupational cultures emerge from a wide range of factors beyond training,³² including the fundamentally coercive nature of prisons, with which restorative practices are often in direct tension. Any shift can be tough to detect and would likely be caused by a confluence of factors. That said, it is significant that RPOs receive this training and experience restorative practices for themselves via restorative pedagogy. It would also be possible to conduct new research to explore whether restorative practices are being used across the prison estate, which is not something that is recorded as a matter of course.

The introduction of this training has also coincided with other developments. Importantly, the years since 2019 have seen a glut of recruitment, corresponding with a cluster of officer retirements.

The limited research on prison officer training, and the potential impact that this could have on prison officer occupational cultures.

29. Hamilton, C. (2022). Crime, justice and criminology in the Republic of Ireland. *European Journal of Criminology*, 20(5), 1597-1620.

30. EUROPRIS. (2023). EPTA: Cross border training in Ireland on restorative practices. EUROPRIS. <https://www.europris.org/news/epta-cross-border-training-in-ireland-on-restorative-practices-2023/>.

31. See, for example: Marder, I., Vaughn, T., Kenny, C., Dempsey, S., Savage, E., Weiner, R., Duffy, K., & Hughes, G. (2022). Enabling student participation in course review and redesign: Piloting restorative practices and design thinking in an undergraduate criminology programme. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, 33(4), 526-547; Karp, D. (2023). Becoming a restorative university: The role of restorative justice in higher education. *International Journal of Restorative Justice*, 6(1), 1-28.

32. For research from Ireland see: Garrihy, J. (2020). 'There are fourteen grey areas': 'Jailing', professionalism and legitimacy in prison officers' occupational cultures. *Irish Probation Journal*, 17, 128-150; Garrihy, J. (2022). 'That doesn't leave you': Psychological dirt and taint in prison officers' occupational cultures and identities. *British Journal of Criminology*, 62(4), 982-999.

Therefore, a significant and growing proportion of prison officers in Ireland have received this training, in the manner outlined. Additionally, although it is beyond the scope of this paper, this work is part of a wider project to implement restorative practices in the IPS. The first and second authors undertook a series of focus groups, meetings, and presentations from 2020-2022 to raise awareness of restorative practices and develop a draft strategy for the Service. The strategy proposed that the first action should be for senior leaders to receive training. This commenced in January 2023,³³ when 35 prison governors, senior leaders at IPS Headquarters, and other senior managers received two days' restorative practices training, 27 of whom also attended a half-day workshop on its implementation. At the time of writing, this is being evaluated: the trainings and workshop were observed, and 22 trainees were interviewed between three and five

months after the training to explore its impact on their understandings, views, and practices. Early indications are that the training influenced how at least some trainees approached certain harms by people in custody and problems between colleagues, with many describing applying the restorative skills more or less formally in their day-to-day work. A further two-day training was held in Spring 2023 for persons who could not attend in January and for additional managers. This approach aligns with research on restorative practice implementation: managers, too, must understand and act in accordance with restorative practices if they are to be implemented sustainably.³⁴

The hope is that restorative practices will improve the safety and experiences of all those living or working in Ireland's prisons, and that the Irish example will be illustrative for prison services globally.

33. Irish Prison Service (2023). Annual Report 2022. Irish Prison Service. https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/IPS-Annual-Report-22_Print.pdf.

34. Norris, H. (2022). Is a whole-school approach necessary? The potential for alternative models of restorative justice in education. *International Journal of Restorative Justice*, 5(1), 55-75.