

Welcome to Curious Minds

Welcome to the Global Freedom Scholars Network (GFSN) UK Chapter Newsletter, created in partnership with Doing What Really Matters (DWRM).

Our goal is to inspire and connect prison-based students with the Higher Education (HE) community and wider society.

At the first GFSN in-person UK meeting in London in May 2024, one of the next steps agreed was to create a newsletter to support Learning Communities in prisons and this is the result.

We want to share your stories, your successes, advice, and experiences as prison-based or ex-prisoner students. If you've left prison, tell us how your studies impacted your life and what it's like continuing your HE journey in the community. We will also include practical advice, study tips and best practice.

Curious Minds: from isolation to inspiration will be published in March, June, September and December each year. We will send digital copies to every prison's learning provider along with some printed copies to members of our community.

The editorial team for *Curious Minds* consists of serving prisoners, ex-prisoners, academics, and DWRM staff. We look forward to creating this Learning Community with you.

Curious Minds' Editorial Team

Chris, James, Louis, Myra, Nathan, Ruth, Sean

The theme of the next edition (March 2025) will be **Collaborations**. We'd love to receive articles and stories of 100 words or more about any collaborations you've taken part in as part of your studies. We will also welcome submissions to celebrate **World Poetry Day** on 21st March. The deadline for submission is end of February 7th 2025.

Send to DWRM, PO Box 6219, Sheffield, S2 9JQ or to info@dwrm.org.uk through your Education Department marking it **Curious Minds Submission**. Work should be your own and clearly written or typed, with your name, prison and prison number on the document. 600 words maximum.

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Congratulations to

Fernando
HMP Garth

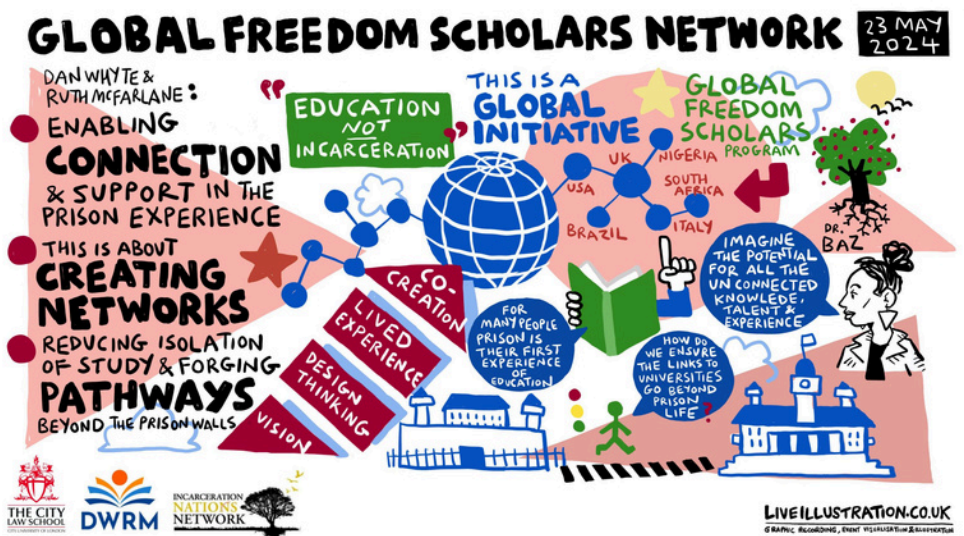
Glenn
HMP Fosse Way

For completing all 6 modules of the Social Sciences Foundation year with Westminster University.

CURIOUS MINDS

FROM ISOLATION TO INSPIRATION

Issue 1 Winter 2024



Introducing the Global Freedom Scholars

The Incarceration Nations Network (INN) is a global network that supports and promotes innovative prison reform and justice reimagining efforts around the world. Members of the INN are known as Global Freedom Scholars and they champion the cause of Higher Education in prisons. DWRM runs the UK Chapter of Incarceration Nations Network, and works with the UK Global Freedom Scholars.

INN has also created the Global Freedom Fellowship, an annual programme of events held in South Africa to which people can apply to be a 'fellow' which means they can be invited to go to South Africa for 2 weeks to meet with other scholars from other networks around the world.

The Fellowship has a comprehensive charter which is co-authored by formerly incarcerated leaders worldwide. It includes statements to the world in general, to policy makers, to non-profits and charities, to employers and people who work in the criminal justice system. The charter is robust and daring, recognising and confronting the challenges and issues that affect incarcerated scholars. Their conclusion is that prisons should not be the answer to social problems. Holistic, human-centred solutions can break the cycles of harm and build stronger communities. The formerly incarcerated are not only survivors of these systems but also leaders who can drive global change. The full text of the charter can be found on the Incarceration Nations Network website.

We need a logo

Our newsletter needs a logo! We're looking for creative designs that capture the spirit of *Curious Minds: from isolation to inspiration*.

The design must be compact and suitable for printing.

Submit your artwork to your Education Department to reach us by end of February 7th 2025. The winning design will be selected by the editorial team and will feature on all 2025 newsletters.

Distribution

We will send paper copies to all students registered with DWRM as well as the list of people who responded to our article in Inside Time about Learning Communities.

We will also email it to all the Prison Education departments. If you would like to be a named person to distribute copies, please let us know and we'll send you a batch of printed copies to distribute.

We need your help getting the message out: if you can, speak to your distance learning facilitator in your prison and work with them to ensure that your fellow students get to be a part of our community and receive a copy of our newsletter.

If you would like to receive your own copy by post, please contact us by post to DWRM, PO Box 6219, Sheffield, S2 9JQ, phone on 0800 987 5953 or through your Prison Education department as usual.



INCARCERATION
NATIONS
NETWORK



Prison education and Global Freedom

Scholars

Twenty years ago, I graduated from university with a BA honours degree and my life ahead of me. I knew little about prison and even less about prisoner education. It didn't occur to me until I was inside and I suddenly had to re-evaluate my own options; that going back to university was even a possibility. Three years on and I have found that finding accurate information, positive reinforcement, and dependable advice incredibly hard at times.

Prisons vary on how well they support distance learners, with some having spaces and staff dedicated to higher education, while others focus on in-house educational courses and lack resources to fully support students completing courses remotely. I have completed several courses 'inside', including an A-Level in Sociology, a creative writing and critical thinking course via the University of Hull, and several social science modules with the University of Westminster. My best results have come when I've been able to work and collaborate with peers, along with seeking guidance and support from tutors and university staff.

This is why I believe that the UK Global Freedom Scholars (GFS) network is so vital for learners in prison. Its formation can bring together experienced learners, those just starting out or considering higher education, as well as the many who don't even know what possibilities lie within their reach. This is important, because it allows us to support each other by sharing in victories and finding solutions collectively to the many obstacles that we will undoubtedly face. At the core of GFS is knowing that you aren't alone in your journey, that peers and education professionals are out there to support you and give considered advice on whatever you are trying to overcome or achieve. In addition to personnel, GFS aims to link those inside with universities and organisations on the outside to form long-lasting partnerships, establishing learning communities in prisons throughout the UK. Such partnerships will open doors in the future that we do not even know exist yet.

It is the establishing of dedicated learning communities that I find most exciting. Much of my own learning journey has been somewhat solitary, with only a few peers in the prison to speak to. Successes have not been celebrated as they should have been, and it is through determination and the support of family that I've encountered the opportunities that I have. The best experiences that I've had so far is when I have interacted with course tutors at the University of Westminster while completing modules in their foundation year. Having the opportunity to speak on a weekly basis with a tutor has been a huge positive, especially as I've completed the modules alongside fellow learners at my prison. Learning communities created through GFS will greatly enhance such experiences, bringing about meaningful change that will ensure people have access to support regardless of their location. Access to education professionals and those with their own prison experience will allow learners to seek guidance and feel valued and supported.

Through my work as an education mentor, I have seen what can be accomplished when prisoners are given the right tools and environment to succeed. This should not be the exception, this should be the norm. Prisoner releases and rehabilitation have featured heavily in the news recently, and I was pleased to see that some commentators brought up the value and need for skills and qualifications. The UK Global Freedom Scholars network can be at the forefront of facilitating meaningful change and championing the rights of prisoners to not only learn from their past, but allow learning to shape their futures.

Chris (HMP Rye Hill)



Prison-based HE study no longer a lonely endeavour

I am really excited to be contributing to the Incarcerated Scholars, UK Chapter's Newsletter because in the past I have found studying in prison quite lonely. Anything that challenges the norms around the solitary nature of prison-based higher education has to be a good thing!

I know for some, distance learning is a way to escape prison life; something to do in the quiet hours of the night behind the door. HE study was this to me for several years as I handwrote my undergraduate assignments with very little support and certainly no fellow students to discuss my frustrations and challenges with.

However, towards the end of my degree I moved to Rye Hill where there was a large number of distance learning students, access to IT resources, a leadership team who encouraged prisoners to create opportunities to improve life for those living there and more importantly, as yet, unutilised links to two local universities. Because I felt that the solitary nature of prison based HE study was one of the biggest challenges facing students, I worked with the prison to set up a F&HE Campus.

The Campus was not about a geographical location, although that was one of our aims. It was about bringing together all the elements of the prison that supported to distance learning, and more importantly providing opportunities for students to meet and support each other. Our mission was to bridge the gap between university and prison.

We organised events such as Model United Nations, TEDx and a World Climate Negotiations Simulation Game, and we invited students from local universities to join us. We worked with Arden and Coventry universities to deliver monthly seminars, based on an eclectic range of topics but with each covering a study or employability skill. We had weekly Study Support Coffee Mornings, celebrated our successes and held regular forums where we would support each other and identify our needs as students and present these to the prison.

Over time, distance learning no longer felt lonely. I had, by then, moved onto postgraduate study, and whilst no one was doing my exact course, I felt I had peers I could turn to when I was struggling. Or indeed to celebrate my little wins with. I felt like a student. I felt connected to the world of academia. I identified no longer just as a prisoner, but as a graduate and a student.

I have just finished my MA Crime and Justice, and it is time to move onto a PhD. I have chosen to research the concept of learning communities in the context of prison based HE students. I could do with some help from those with experience of prison-based HE studies.

I really benefited from all the stuff we did with the F&HE Campus, but I wonder if others feel the same; that distance learning in prison can be lonely? I wonder how others have coped with or ameliorated this loneliness? I wonder if others identify as students or graduates and if so, what enabled this? Was it just the act of signing up for, and studying the course? Or was it like me, feeling part of a community of students? I wonder how others have supported each other through their studies and what kind of events others are putting on? Or what events/support would fellow students like to see in their establishment.

Above all I am excited by the prospect that this newsletter will provide answers to some of these questions. And, I am sure, by reading it, and contributing to it, my identity as a scholar will only strengthen.

Nathan (HMP Haverigg)

Terms of Publication

Handwritten contributions will be typed unless the author requests to have a scan of the original text in the journal. Curious Minds reserves the right to edit contributions for grammar, length, clarity, and to excise any stigmatising language. Please advise us if you are not open to your contribution being edited.

Copyright for art and writing is retained by the contributor. Contributors are free to have any work that is published in Curious Minds republished elsewhere at a later date. However, please advise us if submitted contributions have previously been published elsewhere.

Please be aware that due to limited printing space and other logistical concerns, accepted contributions may not necessarily appear in the next issue of Curious Minds and may be held on file for subsequent issues.

We will not publish any contributions that are perceived to contain racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, nationalism, xenophobia, ableism, evangelism, or other forms of oppressive language, or any material that encourages violence or violates the privacy of others.

We would love to hear your feedback, please contact us via DWRM, PO Box 6219, Sheffield, S2 9JQ or to info@dwrm.org.uk through your Education Department marking it *Curious Minds Feedback*.

Curious Minds Practical Guide: Referencing

Writing essays in prison means managing references with just paper and pen. This system could work for you.

Start by dedicating a notebook specifically for references, divided into three sections:

1. Master Reference List
2. Quote Collection
3. Essay-Specific Citations.

1) **The Master Reference List** is your bibliography in progress. Assign each source a simple code – for example, 'WIL1' for Wilson's first book, 'WIL2' for his second. Write the full reference once at the front of your notebook, formatted in your required style. For instance: Wilson, J. (2019) *Understanding Criminology*. London: Thames Press.

2) **The Quote Collection** is where you record important information from your reading. Each entry should include your source code, page number, and either a direct quote or your paraphrase. Add a brief note about why this information might be useful. "This quote perfectly shows Wilson's stance on rehabilitation" is more helpful than just copying the quote alone.

Each entry needs:

- Your source code
- Page number
- The quote or your paraphrase
- A note about why it's useful

For example: WIL1:45 - "Rehabilitation programs show 60% success rate"

Use for: Evidence in the rehabilitation section

3) **Essay Specific Citations** is where these elements come together. As you write your essay draft, use simple placeholders like [WIL1:45] for your citations. This system makes it easy to find your sources again while keeping your writing flow going. For direct quotes, add a 'Q': [WIL1:45Q].

Time management becomes crucial without computer access. Many students fall into the trap of not recording page numbers, thinking they'll find the information again easily. Trust me – you won't. Always note page numbers immediately. It's far harder to go back and find information than it is to write down a number.

Common problems have simple solutions:

- Can't find a page number? Mark it with [?] and add it to a 'to verify' list
- Different editions? Include the year: [WIL1:2019:45]
- Limited library access? Copy full references during library sessions
- Lost a reference? Check course materials as backup

Practical tips that work:

- Write on one side of paper only
- Number all notebook pages
- Keep a running list of themes
- Use margins for citation notes
- Review references daily while writing

Remember, good reference management isn't about perfection – it's about being systematic and consistent. Your references prove your academic integrity and strengthen your arguments. With practice, this system becomes second nature, allowing you to focus on what really matters – developing your ideas and crafting compelling arguments.

James

Curious Minds FAQs

Who are the team?

The editorial team is made up of Chris, James, Louis, Myra, Nathan, Ruth, & Sean. They are a mix of serving prisoners, prison leavers, academics and DWRM staff.

How do I get a copy?

We send copies to students registered with DWRM, and to education departments in prisons. If you'd like your own copy, or would like to help distribute copies within your prison, please get in touch with us via DWRM, PO Box 6219, Sheffield, S2 9JQ or to info@dwrm.org.uk through your Education Department marking it Curious Minds Distribution.

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When is the next edition?

March 2025

Is there a theme?

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