

A summary report based  
on an evaluation of The  
Conservation Foundation's  
Unlocking Nature Programme  
delivered at HMP Wandsworth

# UNLOCKING NATURE

Greening our prison spaces

THE  
CONSERVATION  
FOUNDATION



## Acknowledgement

We would like to thank the team at HMP Wandsworth for taking the time to support us with the study. We are especially grateful to all the participants and staff for generously sharing their time, views and experiences with us. Without your contribution, we would have been unable to carry out this work.

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## Preface

**In 2016 funding was made available to the Governor of Wandsworth Prison for new initiatives and his ideas included the ‘greening’ of his prison. The Conservation Foundation’s Tools Shed project had been recycling garden tools in Wandsworth for over 10 years and it was suggested that the Foundation should submit a project proposal to extend our activities there.**

The application was successful and work began to visualise Unlocking Nature. After all, we had seen a number of green prison projects enter our Gardening Against the Odds awards and we had seen prisons and prisoners involved in a number of flower shows, including Chelsea. Our research showed that 40 years ago, thousands of prisoners served time on the UK’s third largest farming operation, HM Prisons Farms and Gardens, which proved therapeutic, making prisoners healthy whilst providing valuable social and professional skills.

So why was Unlocking Nature such a challenge and why did so many of our ideas prove easier said than done? This report lists the problems, but I am delighted to say, the successes too and I prefer to dwell on these as I reflect on the project as a whole and on those involved and those who benefitted. Unlocking Nature was positive and worthwhile. We know men and staff who gained much from the project and for whom Unlocking Nature will have been very special, if not life changing.

The Prison Authorities have a difficult task and it is easy for us outsiders to complain and get frustrated at the hurdles in our way which can seem so petty and unreasonable at the time. I would like to thank all those who worked on the project and all the Wandsworth staff who were involved.

Many people have been involved. In particular, we should acknowledge the initial role of Ian Bickers and Sarah Fitzgerald and the continued support and involvement of the designer Adolfo Harrison, the Foundation’s James Coleman and of one member of the staff for whom this project became a personal challenge. He knows who he is and I would like to dedicate this report to him. It is an honest report which shows the ups and downs.

We may not have achieved all we had initially hoped to do, but those ideas remain and can always be dusted and used at Wandsworth or elsewhere.

If this report gives you an idea which could make a difference, you know where we are.

**David Shreeve,**  
Director, The Conservation Foundation



## Introduction

This report presents key findings from a study examining the experiences of key stakeholders (practitioners, prison staff, and prisoners) involved in The Conservation Foundation’s<sup>1</sup> (CF) Unlocking Nature Programme, a Gardening Against the Odds project delivered at HMP Wandsworth. This programme came about in response to a July 2016 call by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) that invited proposals from voluntary sector organisations, including charities and social enterprises, to make an application for a one-off grant to support the prison reform agenda and to jointly work on reducing reoffending. These grants were only available for activities taking place in the (then existing) six early adopter reform prisons, all of which were adult male prisons (Clinks, 2016). Unlocking Nature was The Conservation Foundation’s response to this opportunity.

The Unlocking Nature programme evaluated here set out to increase skills, employability and wellbeing through horticulture and to improve the prison environment and its relationships with the wider community. Originally proposed activities included weekly gardening and food growing sessions for offenders with a horticultural leader, the setting up of a tree nursery as part of horticultural training, and bi-monthly lectures for offenders and the wider community on environmental topics. The programme was further extended to also focus on a transformation, a ‘greening’ of the built environment, and to introduce new nature and gardening areas (The Conservation Foundation, 2016). Given Unlocking Nature’s focus on the improvement of HMP Wandsworth’s prison environment and the use of land-based and gardening interventions to improve health and wellbeing, to educate and to help people back to work, this report first starts with an overview of existing academic research in this field. It then provides a summary of the policy and prison context at the time the study was undertaken, providing a background to better understand the challenging environment in which this programme took place. Then, HMP Wandsworth is introduced, followed by a description of our methodological approach for this research and a detailed results section presenting key findings. These key findings are organised around the following themes:

- **Initiating Unlocking Nature: the emergence of the vision to ‘green’ HMP Wandsworth**
- **Transforming outdoor spaces**
- **Horticultural activities**
- **Positive responses and challenges**
- **Greening the prison environment and land-based activities**
- **Health and Wellbeing**
- **Learning and Development**
- **Engaging in meaningful activities**
- **Building relationships between prisoners and prison staff**

The project evaluation concludes with a summary and reflection section which includes key learning points.

<sup>1</sup>The Conservation Foundation is a UK charity that was formed in 1982. Its goal is to strengthen communities to bring people together to understand and support the natural world (<https://www.conservationfoundation.co.uk/>).

## Section 1: Research background and context to the study

The Unlocking Nature programme aimed to target two areas, an improvement of the built prison environment and the introduction of land-based interventions<sup>2</sup>. Both activities have been acknowledged as influencing physical and mental health and well-being of incarcerated offenders. Aiming to provide a background to this evaluation, the following two sections set out to answer the questions ‘What does research tell us about the prison environment?’ and ‘What is known about land-based activities in prison settings?’

### Prison design and space

Research examining prison architecture and design is relatively sparse, and the little research that has been conducted has mostly focused on the historical context of the prisons (Johnston, 2000, cited in Moran, Jewkes & Turner, 2016)<sup>3</sup>. According to Moran et al. (2016):

*“The evolution of prison architecture has at various points been intended to communicate a message about the nature of the imprisoning state and the legitimacy of its power to imprison, with the ‘audience’ for the various messages of this architecture being the inmate who receives the punishment handed down by the state, and society at large to whom imprisonment as punishment must be legitimated” (p6).*

When exploring the history of UK prison architecture, it is evident there is no ‘typical’ prison (Moran et al., 2016). In the 19th century, prisons were designed to resemble medieval castles and gothic monasteries, with the aim of dissuading offending and encouraging the retributive power of the state (Dunbar & Fairweather, 2013; Moran et al., 2016). Prisons became more enclosed and cells were incorporated into the designs, and thus abandoning the need for air and ventilation (Jewkes & Johnston, 2007). Nineteenth-century prisons are still in use today, though they are often considered the least desirable prison environments due to the restricted space, light and colour (Hancock & Jewkes, 2011; Moran & Jewkes, 2015). Such prisons within the UK include HMP Birmingham, HMP Durham, HMP Leeds, HMP Lincoln, and HMP Wandsworth (see Figure 4, p.16), to name but a few. Subsequently, the 20th Century saw a change in the

design of prisons, with prisons becoming increasingly invisible and more utilitarian (Hancock & Jewkes, 2011). For instance, post-war prisons were converted from country houses, army camps and military hospitals (Jewkes & Johnston, 2007), such as HMP Ranby (Nottinghamshire). Moreover, in the 1930s the new concept of ‘open prisons’ was introduced, removing the need for high walls. Having expansive buildings allowed the prisoners to have unrestricted movement around the prison, and the surrounding land could be utilised for gardening and farming purposes (Jewkes & Johnston, 2007). Thus, especially in the case of open prisons, links between prisons and communities were developed and strengthened (Dunbar & Fairweather, 2013).

By the end of the 20th century, however, UK prison architecture again shifted towards higher walls and increased security and surveillance, in response to prison riots and security breaches (Moran & Jewkes, 2015). More recently, prisons are being designed to encourage positive relationships between the staff and the prisoners (e.g. facilitating discourse, therapy, and rehabilitation), as well as maintaining security and compliance (Drake, 2012; Fairweather, 2013; Stevens, 2012), and promoting a healthy quality of life (Liebling, 2002). Undeniably, spatial organisation is a key factor, and new prisons should seek to include features of situational crime prevention (Jewkes & Johnston, 2007). As such, prison design should support the production of more informal procedures within the prison, encouraging the development of staff-prisoner relationships whilst also maintaining surveillance and security.

It is worth emphasising that architecture not only has an impact on the physical wellbeing of individuals, but can also negatively influence their mental health (Ghaffarianhoseini et al., 2018; Kamaruzzaman & Sabrani, 2011). Studies have suggested that prisoners experience high levels of mental illness (Fazel & Bailargeon, 2011; Fazel & Seewald, 2012), including increased levels of depression and stress (Fairweather, 2013; Fraser et al., 2009), and anxiety disorders (Curtin et al., 2009). Certain design and environmental features of prisons can further develop and exacerbate poor mental health. For instance, Lopez and Maiello-Reidy (2017) reported that prison designs featuring bad acoustics, a lack of natural light, unregulated temperatures, lack of privacy, and long, dark and narrow corridors (i.e. such conditions that can be experienced in 19th Century prisons like HMP Wandsworth) can have a negative impact on the therapeutic environment of prisons, particularly when coupled with (for example) overcrowded conditions, periods of solitude, and violence. However, research examining the effects of the physical architecture of prisons and the mental health of prisoners remains relatively unexplored (Söderlund & Newman, 2017).

### Gardening interventions in prison settings

Research has linked the positive effects of nature on the mental wellbeing of individuals (Maller et al., 2006; Ward Thompson et al., 2012; Velarde et al., 2007). Nanda et al. (2013) postulated that environments lacking nature can not only deteriorate psychological wellbeing, but can also encourage physical responses; human ‘flight or fight’ responses are increased when subjected to “hard-edged architecture”, and can be further heightened when in stressful environments (such as a prison).

In Söderlund and Newman’s (2017) exploration as to whether biophilia<sup>4</sup> can be applied to prison design and could hence improve prisoners’ mental health, it was noted that there are a variety of benefits to the exposure to nature, particularly for physical health and mental wellbeing. It has been found that having contact with nature can reduce blood pressure, decrease variability in heart rate, lower cortisol and increase parasympathetic nervous system activity, whilst decreasing sympathetic nervous system activity, leading to improved cognitive functioning (Söderlund & Newman, 2017). Moreover, several reports have highlighted the success of gardening and community-based interventions for improving mental health, including reducing pain and anxiety, treating depression and stress (Thompson et al., 2012), and improving altruistic behaviours (Söderlund & Newman, 2017).

Findings reveal that gardening-based interventions, and having contact with green spaces, can reduce violent and antisocial behaviours (Kuo & Sullivan, 2001), and can increase self-efficacy, self-confidence, and empowerment (Brandt-Meyer & Butler, 1999; Pearce & Seals, 2006). Studies evaluating such garden-based projects have focused on a variety of communities, including offenders, the homeless, refugees, and drug and alcohol users, with such interventions being tested in numerous countries including the United States, UK, Australia, and Korea (Chisholm & Goodyear, 2012; Grabbe et al., 2015; Hale et al., 2005; Lee et al., 2014). For example, when examining the effect of a garden project on a group of homeless women, it was reported that the project “interrupted the participants’ negative ruminations, offering stress relief and elements of social interaction and self-actualization” (Grabbe et al., 2015, p258). Not only are the benefits seen on an individual level, but also on a collective-level based on ‘interactional meanings’, ‘group experience’, and ‘personal and emotional meanings’ (Brandt-Meyer & Butler, 1999).

Research has also been conducted on horticultural interventions within secure facilities (Brown et al., 2015; Chisholm & Goodyear, 2012; Lee et al., 2004; Grimshaw & King, 2002). For instance, Grimshaw and King (2002) investigated the problems faced by horticultural projects that were operating within 104 prisons and secure psychiatric facilities within the UK. The findings demonstrated the importance of horticulture for the participants in creating a sense of ownership and the development of life skills, as well as having occupational, rehabilitative, and educational benefits. Moreover, there was an added benefit of improving the relationships between the participants of the project and the wider community, as well as improving physical health.

More recently, Brown et al. (2015) evaluated Garden Organic’s Master Gardener project at HMP Rye Hill which focused specifically on substance misusing offenders. The overall aim of the programme was to “provide local support and advice for growing food” (p.4), whilst educating the prisoners in a variety of areas, including skills development and employment; community; health and wellbeing; eating and buying food; and the importance of food recycling and composting (<http://mastergardeners.org.uk/>). The evaluation found that the project created a supportive environment for the substance misusing offenders to recover. It promoted wider health and wellbeing; supported offenders to consider making wider behavioural changes both inside and outside of prison; encouraged participants to work as part of a team towards a shared goal, which built a sense of community both among the offenders and between the offenders and staff; and provided opportunities for learning, skill development, and peer support. Overall, horticultural interventions have been found to have the potential to have a positive impact on offenders and staff in prison settings.

In order to paint a picture as to the circumstances in which the Unlocking Nature programme was delivered in HMP Wandsworth, it is useful to consider the policy context which formed the background for the introduction of the programme.

<sup>2</sup> Land-based intervention is used to encapsulate activities working with the land (see Bos, et al 2016)

<sup>3</sup> For more information/research into prison architecture, see the body of literature by Yvonne Jewkes and Dominique Moran.

<sup>4</sup> Proposed by Fromm (1964) and a term used by Wilson (1984). Biophilia is the notion that humans have an innate tendency to find connections with nature and other life forms (Britannica, 2018).

# Wider Prison context at the time of the study

## Prison demographics

In order to understand the conditions under which Unlocking Nature operated, it is also useful to consider the wider context of prisons in the UK during the duration of the project. The following information has been sourced from the UK Prison Population Statistics (2017), Ministry of Justice prison population statistics, Safe in Custody reports, and HM Chief Inspectorate of Prisons reports. It gives some insight into some of the challenges that have been faced by prisons at the time of the study, and that continue to dominate current prison debates.

According to the 2017 UK Prison Population Statistics (published by the House of Commons; Allen & Watson, 2017), the average prison population more than quadrupled between 1900 and 2018, from 17,400 to over 83,000 incarcerated people. This trend can partially be attributed to the rise in the general population. However, from 1993 to 2013, England and Wales' prison population grew by 90% (versus a 15% increase in the general population), resulting in the highest incarceration rates in Western Europe (BBC News, 2016). More recently, the average prison population has remained fairly stable. By December 2006, the prison population had surpassed 80,000 for the first time, and in November 2011, it reached its highest level of over 88,000. According to the most recent annual Offender Management Statistics (April, 2018), the total prison population has decreased by 3% over the previous year, and was at just over 83,000 in September 2018 (Government of the UK, 2018, see also Table 1 for a breakdown of recent numbers).

**Table 1: Prison population: Population and Capacity Briefing June 2018<sup>5</sup>**

	Total	Prisons	NOMS Operated IRCs
<b>Population</b>	83,254	<b>82,930</b>	324
Male population	79,361	79,037	324
Female population	3,893	3,893	0
<b>Useable Operational Capacity</b>	<b>86,549</b>	<b>86,157</b>	<b>392</b>
<b>Home Detention Curfew caseload</b>	<b>3,251</b>		

Notwithstanding this recent slight reduction in numbers, the earlier rapid near-doubling of prisoners has led to persisting conditions of overcrowding despite several new prisons being built around the late 20th, early 21st century (Sturge, 2018). As of May 2018, 58% (67 of 116) of prison establishments were overcrowded, housing 8,600 more prisoners than the total in use CNA.

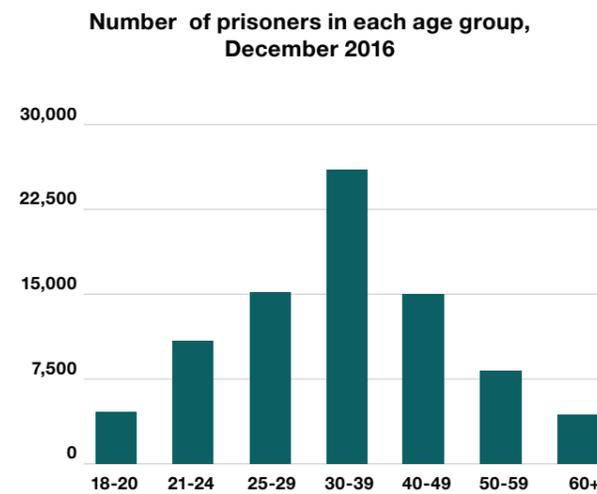
Looking at some of the demographic details of England and Wales' prisoner population, the vast majority of people incarcerated in Britain are men, with only 5% of prisoners women. In regards to ethnicity, there is a clear over-representation of minority groups when compared to the general population. At the end of 2016, just over a quarter of the prison population was from a non-white ethnic group (including mixed, Asian or Asian British, Black or Black

<sup>5</sup> Statistics correct as of the 1st June 2018.

**Definitions:**  
 1 - The Operational Capacity of a Prison / Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) is the total number of prisoners that an establishment can hold taking into account control, security and the proper operation of the planned regime. It is determined by Deputy Directors of Custody on the basis of operational judgement and experience.  
 2 - Useable Operational Capacity of the estate is the sum of all establishments' operational capacity less 2,000 places. This is known as the operating margin and reflects the constraints imposed by the need to provide separate accommodation for different classes of prisoner i.e. by sex, age, security category, conviction status, single cell risk assessment and also due to geographical distribution.

British, and 'other') compared to 12% from the general population (Allen & Watson, 2017).

**Figure 1: Prison population by age, December 2016** (Source: Allen & Watson, 2017)



Regarding the age of prisoners (see Figure 1), offenders aged 21-29 accounted for 31% of the prison population in 2016, a decrease from 36% in 2011. The number of prisoners aged 30-39 has increased to 30% since 2010, and at the end of 2016, is the most represented age group (note the different age brackets of groups) with over 25,000. The number of those aged over 40 has increased from 22% in 2005 to 33% in 2016 (Allen & Watson, 2017).

## Education, work and reoffending

In 2006, 47% of prisoners reported having no qualifications, compared to 15% of the general population of working age in the UK (Ministry of Justice, 2012a). 21% of prisoners reported needing help with basic skills like reading, writing or numerical literacy, 41% with education, and 40% with improving work-related skills (Ministry of Justice, 2012a). However, in the 2016-17 HM Chief Inspectorate Report, it was assessed that half of prisons were judged as less than good in their overall effectiveness for delivering learning and work skills. Educational and training offers have been reduced in many prisons and Czerniawski (2015) ascribes this 'race-to-the-bottom in the standards of educational provision' to 'financial cutbacks and a moral panic about

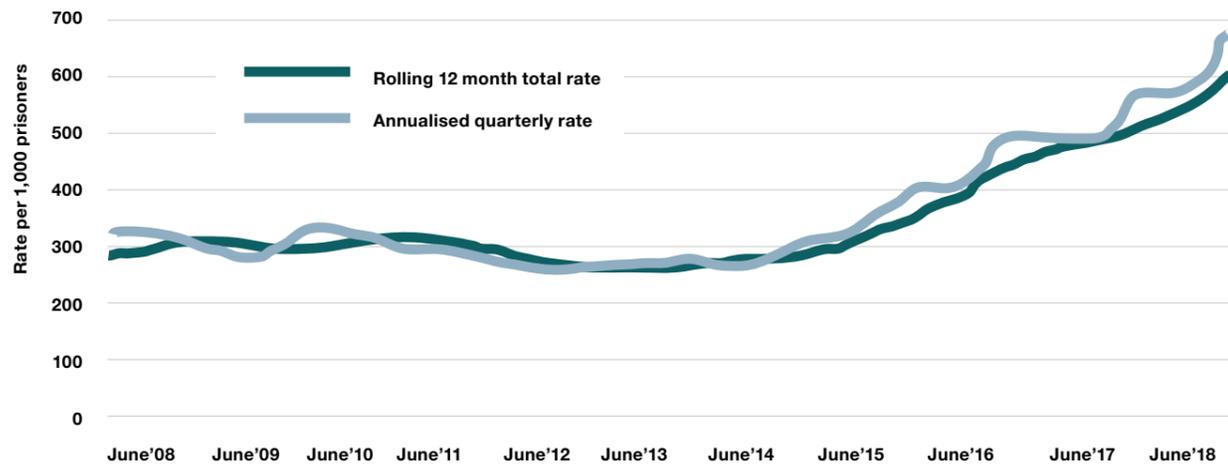
crime' in England and Wales. Cut-backs in educational offers are perceived as being problematic for a number of reasons, including a potential negative impact on the rate of reoffending (Davis et al., 2013). The rate of proven reoffending is currently about 30% (The Ministry of Justice, 2016). In addition, Farley and Pike (2016) emphasise the role that in-prison training and education can have not only in reducing re-offending but also reducing crime rates within prisons.

## Mental health and self-harming

Mental health problems are more common in prisons than in the community; factors such as boredom, being away from family and friends, and loss of autonomy all contribute to the exacerbation of mental health problems within prison (National Audit Office, 2017). According to the Prison Reform Trust (2017), 46% of women and 21% of men in prison have attempted suicide at some point (compared to 6% in the general population), 25% of women and 15% of men in prison have symptoms indicative of psychosis (compared to 4% in the general population), and 49% of women and 23% of men in prison suffer from both depression and anxiety (compared to 15% in the general population). Moreover, the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (2016) found that 70% of prisoners, who had committed suicide between 2012 and 2014, had mental health issues.

It is unclear just how many prisoners experience a mental illness, or the total number who need treatment; this was highlighted in the National Audit Office (2017) report, which stated that despite the high prevalence of mental illness in the prison population, the exact number of prisoners with a mental health issue is not known, and the government is unable to identify the amount being spent on mental healthcare (The Guardian, 2017). However, in the 12 months up to June 2018, the number of self-harming individuals has risen by 10%, reaching a new high of 12,142. Those who self-harmed did so, on average, 4.1 times (Ministry of Justice, 2018b). However, the majority of self-harming individuals in prison only self-harm once a year. According to the Safety in Custody Bulletin (Ministry of Justice, 2018b), 49,565 individual acts of self-harm meant that these continue to rise, showing an increase of 20% from the previous year. This increase is not only reflected in the absolute numbers but also in the self-harming rate per 1,000 prisoners (see Figure 2). Moreover, the number of self-harm incidents that required hospital treatment also increased by 11% to 3,151. In addition to the above described self-harm incidents, there were also 87 self-inflicted deaths in the 12 months up to September 2018, compared to 78 in the previous year (Ministry of Justice, 2018b).

**Figure 2: Quarterly 12-month rolling rate of self-harm incidents per 1,000 prisoners, 12 months ending June 2008 to 12 months ending June 2018, with annualised quarterly rates** (Source: Ministry of Justice, 2018b)



**Staffing and assaults**

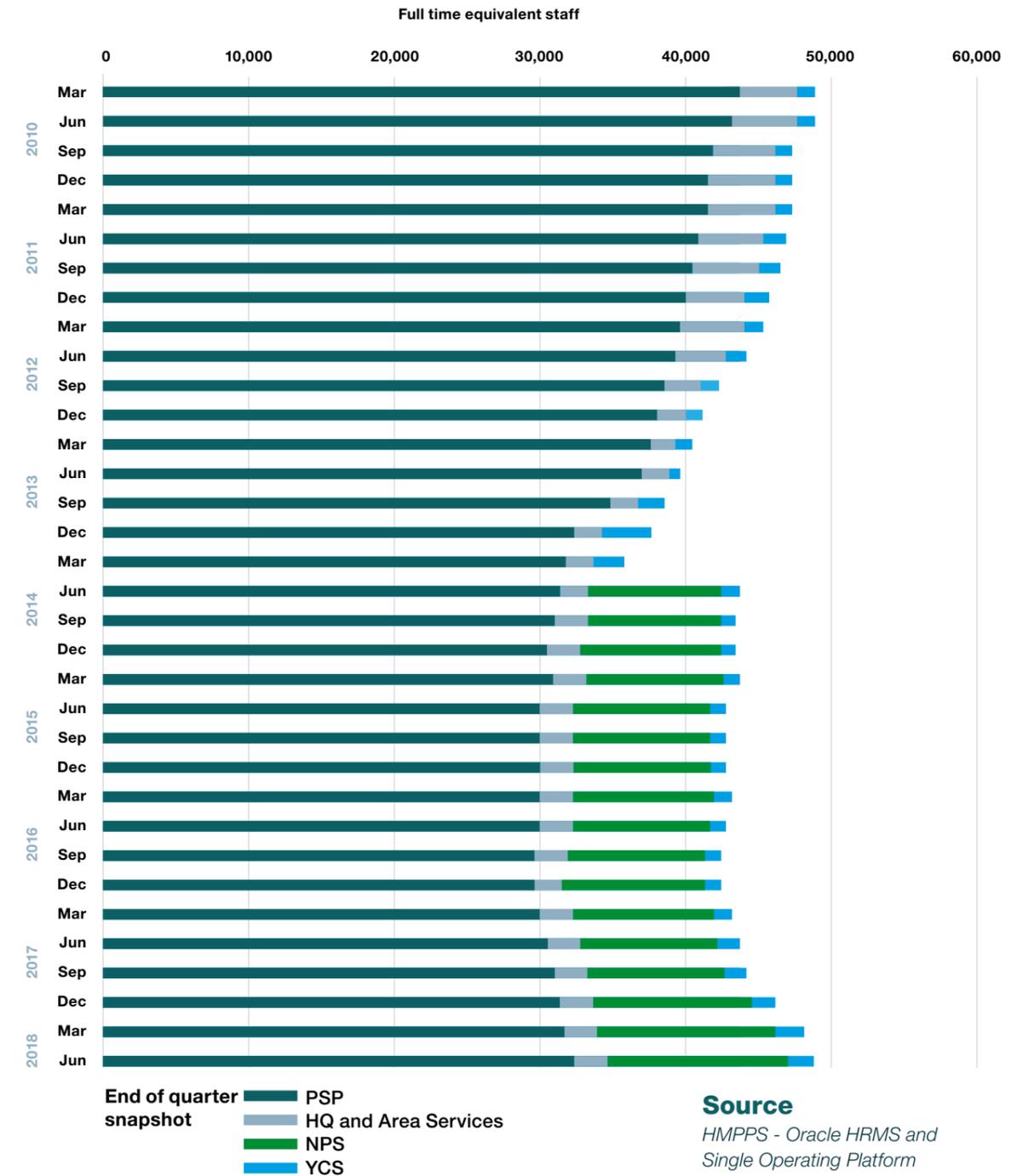
Prison safety in England and Wales has suffered in recent years from a dramatic increase in assaults, both prisoner-on-prisoners as well as on staff. A possible explanation for the increase in the number of violent encounters is the rapid decline in staff numbers. Alongside a small increase in the prison population, it is estimated that cuts to the prison service have resulted in an increase of the prisoner to staff ratio from 1.7 in 2008 to 2.2 in 2013 (Fulton, 2016). From 2010 to 2016, 7,000 prison staff (such as prison officers, supervising officers, and custodial managers) was lost from prison services (Ministry of Justice, 2016, see Figure 3). This rapid decrease in staff by more than a quarter has had a significant impact on the decline of prison safety and conditions (The Howard League, 2017), as illustrated by the incidents numbers detailed below.

According to Ministry of Justice (2018b) statistics on safety in custody published on October 25th 2018, assaults have continued to increase, reaching a record high of 32,559 incidents in the 12 months to June 2018, up 20% from the previous year. Of these, 3,951 (12%) were serious assaults, up 7% from the previous year. Between June 2017 and June 2018, there were 23,448 prisoner-on-prisoner assaults (up 19%) of which 3,063 (13%) were serious assaults. Both these figures are record highs. In the same period, serious assaults on staff reached 9,485, up 27% from the previous year. 947 (10%) of these were serious assaults, a 19% increase in such attacks on staff.

This dramatic rise in several areas might be partially explained by changes in how such incidents are recorded, however, they continue a trend that was already observed prior to these changes.

According to the most recent HMPPS Workforce statistics from June 30th 2018 (Ministry of Justice, 2018a), the number of full time band 3-5 prison officers has increased by 2,853 (15.3%) compared to June 30th 2017 (and by 570 (2.7%) since March 31st 2018). Reaching a total of 21,608 FTE prison officers means this was the highest number of officers in post since January 2013 (see Figure 3). More specifically, there was an increase of 5,625 (89.5%) of band 3 officers being newly appointed during the 12 months up to June 30th 2018, compared to 2,930 during the previous year and 1,483 the year before that (June 2016 to June 2017) (Ministry of Justice, 2017). However, the gains made through these new appointments were reduced by 2,089 band 3 to 5 officers who left the prison services in the same time period (an increase of 204 (10.8%) compared to the same figures the year before). Of those who left, nearly 6 out of 10 had resigned from their role (an increase from 5 in 10 in the previous year), 14.3% were dismissed, and 13.5% retired (Ministry of Justice, 2018a). It is worth noting that while prison staff numbers are increasing again, recent fluctuations in prisons' Human Resources mean that there has been a major loss in experience within prison staff.

**Figure 3: Number of HMPPS staff in post on a full time equivalent basis, 31 March 2010 to 30 June 2018 (Source: Ministry of Justice, 2018a)** Note: Figures for the YCS up until March 2017 shown in the chart above refer to staff who worked in the Youth Custody Estate in NOMS.





According to The Howard League's 2017 study in which private sector officers were interviewed, reasons for staff leaving the prison services included feeling undervalued and powerless, feeling unable to make a difference, threats to safety, and a lack of sufficient training. Moreover, a lack of resources, drugs, and overcrowding are just some of the challenges that prison officers face in their job role. It is also worth noting that from the average 9.3 working days per year lost by HMPPS Staff due to sickness; a third was lost for mental and behavioural disorders which include absences due to stress (Ministry of Justice, 2018a)

### Drugs in Prison

Over recent years, there has been a pattern change in illicit drug use within the prison system (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2016). Traditionally, prisoners have favored depressants (such as heroin and cannabis) to help combat the boredom and stresses that come with prison regimes, over stimulants (such as cocaine and ecstasy). However, there has now been a shift away from the use of Class A drugs and cannabis, with prisoners increasingly using New Psychoactive Substances (NPS), particularly synthetic cannabis such as 'Spice' and 'Black Mamba' (Centre for Social Justice, 2015; Prison and Probation Ombudsman, 2017), and 'diverted' medication, namely benzodiazepines and other anti-depressants (Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, 2016).

Unlocking Nature needs to be considered against this complex backdrop. The programme was introduced at a time of Austerity characterised by reduction in prison staff and an increasing prison population.

Furthermore, prior to the start of the evaluation, the research team were informed that HMP Wandsworth had lost its Reform Status, creating additional challenges for Unlocking Nature that became evident in the narratives of both staff and participants. This emphasises how such wider environmental factors cannot be divorced from the experiences reported here.

### Study site: HMP Wandsworth

HMP Wandsworth is a local male prison and one of the largest prisons in Western Europe, housing over 1450 male prisoners in very overcrowded conditions (International Monitoring Boards (IMB) report 2017/18). The Certified Normal Accommodation (see Footnote 6, p.10) was lowered from 943 to 841 men in December 2017 while the much higher Operational Capacity (see Footnote 5, p.9) was lowered from 1,596 to 1,492 prisoners. Nonetheless, more than half of the prisoners shared cells that were intended for individual occupation and by September 2018, HMP Wandsworth remained one of England's most overcrowded prisons with the proportion of recommended accommodation level (CNA) at 150% (down from June 2017). In addition, the IMB report 2016/17 noted that the prison had a very high annual turnover of prisoners, exceeding 12,000 per annum. This high level of fluctuation also has major implications for any programmes provided to prisoners. At the end of the reporting year 2017/18, there were 14 indeterminate sentence prisoners, 15 lifers and 82 registered sex offenders. 40% of the population were foreign national prisoners, of whom some were due for extradition and some were immigration detainees (Government of the UK, 2018).

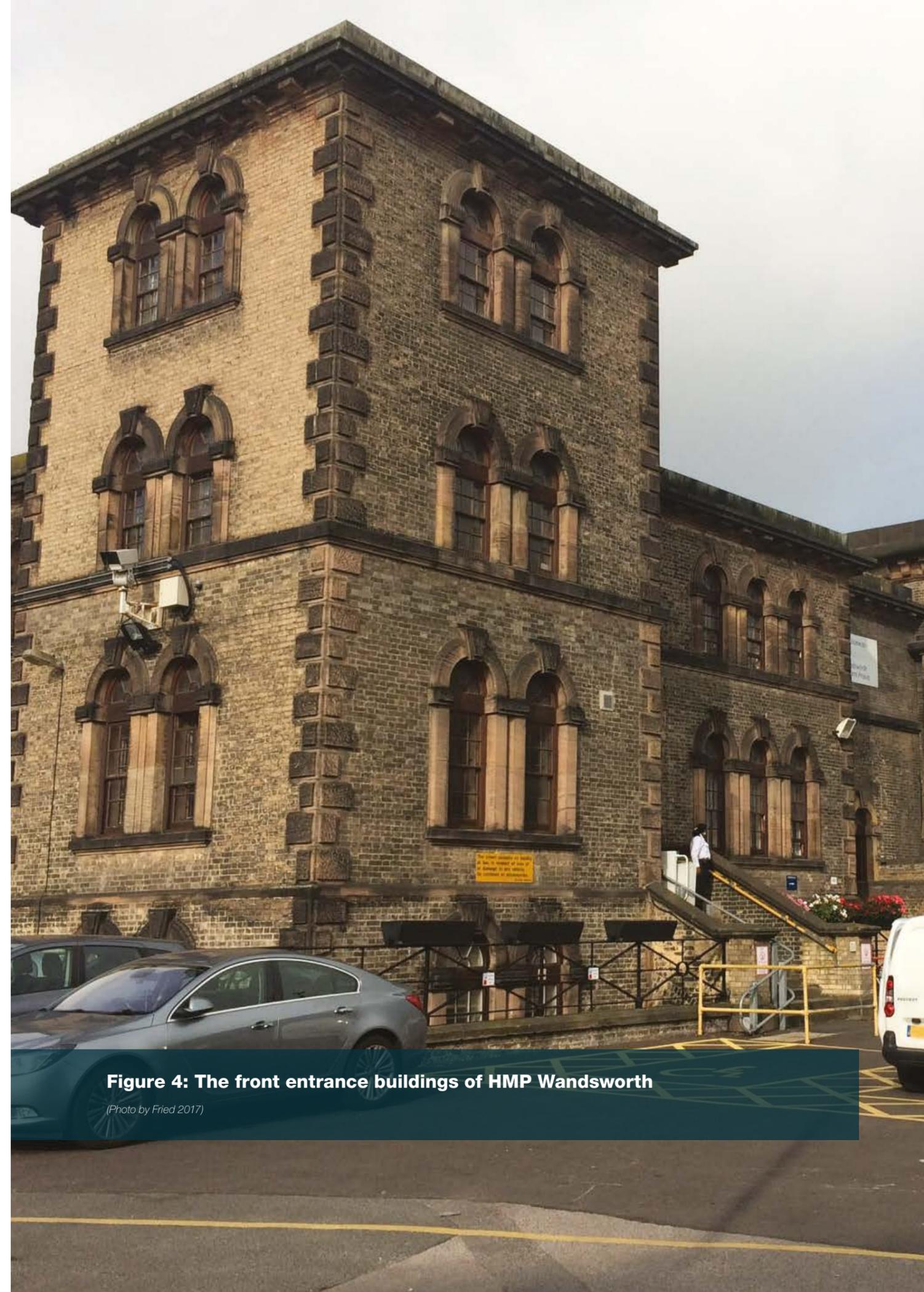


Figure 4: The front entrance buildings of HMP Wandsworth

(Photo by Fried 2017)

The IMB report states that the prison was built in 1851, and the residential areas are still housed within the original buildings. The main prison, known as Heathfield, houses up to 1,200 prisoners on five wings. In addition, the Trinity Unit housed around 375 Category C (the lowest security category in a closed prison) prisoners in a separate building of three wings. Vulnerable Prisoners are housed in a separated section on one of the Heathfield wings (Independent Monitoring Boards, 2018, p.8).

Renovations have taken place over recent years to modernise the wings, by adding in-cell sanitation and electricity, and building privacy screens for cells occupied by more than one person (Ministry of Justice, 2018). However, no such upgrades had been made to the outdoor environment, and as such, this has remained more or less the same for over 160 years. Therefore, considering the vast benefits of horticultural interventions, the Unlocking Nature project sought to bring green spaces into HMP Wandsworth (The Conservation Foundation, 2017). Unlocking Nature was introduced following the Prisons and Courts Reform Bill which set out a range of initiatives (see <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/2016-2017/0170/17170.pdf>). However, of particular relevance to this study was the introduction of a new Reform Prison status, that entailed greater independence for such prisons, including the transferral of new powers to often newly appointed Governors in the following areas:

- Control over budgets, enabling prison-specific decisions about rehabilitation and education services, changes to the prison regime and about the rules regulating family visits
- Permission to enter into contracts and to generate and retain income
- Increased direct accountability through “a new regime of transparency”

A key idea was that prisons would become learning environments. The increased autonomy would allow for decisions by prison reform teams about which education and rehabilitation services to use and for the introduction of a “bespoke learning plan” for each prisoner. In May 2016, HMP Wandsworth was one of six prisons that were initially selected as receiving this Reform Prison status, the other five being Holme House (Stockton-On-Tees, County Durham), Ranby (Nottinghamshire), Coldingley (Woking, Surrey), Kirklevington Grange (Cleveland, North Yorkshire), and High Down (Sutton, Surrey).

Whilst these changes were welcomed by some prison reformers, this is not to suggest that they were considered as a panacea to major concerns that have characterised the prison system over a number of years (Cuffe 2017). However, the Bill was viewed as positive in terms of a perception that giving greater freedom to governors would be instrumental in providing them with an incentive to improve performance and would potentially help in reducing recidivism levels and as a result, would ultimately reduce the overall prison population (Independent Monitoring 2017). In Wandsworth, with its new status as Reform Prison, the Governor had independent control over an estimated £35m budget and made tackling staff shortages his main priority. Phrasing this as a means to an end, the then Governor stated in 2016:

*If we can recruit more prison officers, we have more boots on the landing. We could be more proactive around drones and drugs, mobile phones coming into the establishment – we would get prisoners out for more time, engaging them in work and education, making sure the gym is open every day, that they can go to the library every day (Ian Bickers cited in Gentleman, 2016).*

As part of its reform programme, in autumn 2016, the senior management team launched ‘HMP Wandsworth - Our vision’, a set of Education, Training and Employment recommendations designed to put education at the heart of every prison activity. The framework for the programme, in the form of business plans for fourteen Centres of Excellence, was signed off by the Governor in January 2017. The first of these Centres, the Business Hub, began operating in December but the Independent Monitoring Report identified that the implementation was delayed due to having to deal with existing construction demands that were necessary to transform Wandsworth into a reception prison (Independent Monitoring Boards, 2017).

The Reform status led to external partners taking on a key role in the introduction of initiatives such as In Cell Work Out, Waves Plan B Mindfulness, Sound Training, the St Giles Purple Army Peer Mentoring Programme, StandOut courses for employability and employer engagement skills as well as the Unlocking Nature project from The Conservation Foundation (IMB, 2017). The IMB report identifies a willingness of HMP Wandsworth to embrace the potential opportunities garnered from being selected as reform prison. This is also evident from the data presented in section 4 of this project evaluation report.

However, the Board’s report simultaneously detailed a range of challenges at HMP Wandsworth, which posed significant obstacles to the Reform Prison agenda. These included:

- Severely restricted free-flow (i.e., the periods of time in which cells are unlocked), late lunchtime rolls and frequent failure to unlock that all resulted in ongoing problems throughout the reporting year.
- Only being able to offer purposeful activity and education to a very limited number of prisoners on Heathfield.
- Efforts made to house all prisoners wishing to work and/or attend education/employment classes on B wing were not always successful and work opportunities on other Heathfield wings were very limited.
- Trinity prisoners had more access to off-wing work places but by year end, full-time work was only available to prisoners in one of the three Trinity wings.
- A lack of staff to escort prisoners to and from their place of work.
- Low recruitment and poor retention of staff resulted in serious staff shortages which had a major impact on prisoners.
- High levels of staff sickness.
- A restricted regime was implemented during the summer and early autumn during which time prisoners did not go to work or education classes at all (Independent Monitoring Boards, 2017).

In May 2016, when Wandsworth had just received its reform prison status, its then Governor acknowledged that ‘about one-third of his prisoners are routinely held in their cells for 23 hours a day and levels of frustrations are running high’ (Gentleman, 2016). This is not to suggest that HMP Wandsworth is unique, but to illustrate the challenging environment in which the delivery of Unlocking Nature took place. More importantly, it provides some insight into the wider challenging prison environment as detailed below. Furthermore, all activities set out above were potentially influenced by the fact that the Prisons and Courts Reform Bill (that had originally received broad cross-party support) fell with the dissolution of Parliament in May 2017, reducing the political support for the proposed prison reform strategies (Government of the UK, 2017; Bulman, 2017).



## Section 2: Methodology: our approach

In February 2017, the team of authors were tasked by The Conservation Foundation to evaluate its Unlocking Nature programme at HMP Wandsworth. Based on consultation with the Foundation and their plans for the programme and on previous research conducted by the authors elsewhere (e.g. Brown et al., 2015), a number of specific objectives were developed for this evaluation project. We set out, among others,

- To explore prisoners personal experiences of accessing and engaging in the Unlocking Nature programme,
- To capture perception in relation to the programme's impact on health and well-being,
- To consider the extent to which the engagement with the programme lends itself to learning and developing work-related skills,
- To consider the extent to which the engagement in the programme fosters positive relationships between offenders and staff,
- To capture variation in experiences of participating in the programme,
- To understand the process and mechanisms used by The Conservation Foundation,
- To identify the potential benefits and challenges for key stakeholders,
- To consider the sustainability of the programme,
- To evaluate offenders' experiences through the framework of desistance,
- To identify areas of 'good' and 'ineffectual' practice.

The planned research project was anticipated to consist of four distinct but interrelated tasks. Task One, induction and baseline data collection, was aimed at creating a set of baseline data related to e.g. the initial motivations of project participants and prison staff as well as participants' demographic information. Here, our initial project design was to adopt a framework that allowed the research team to capture data associated with a range of benefits, including health and wellbeing,

and social and work-related impacts. This baseline data would have provided a starting point for a quantitative analysis of data derived both from those routinely collected as part of the prison regime for all offenders on the programme, and from primary data collected by the researchers using the Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) survey. However, changes in the prison including loss of its Reform status in 2017, various complications leading to delays, and a large fluctuation in programme participants had implications for both the project and its evaluation (this is discussed further below), including an adjusted research focus on Tasks Two, Three and Four and an extension of the total evaluation period to 18 months.

Task Two consisted of preparatory work, including a detailed literature review and the applications for ethical approval both by Coventry University and by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS), and for the NOMS vetting process. The ethics applications were submitted in February, with NOMS permission granted at the end of May 2017, somewhat delaying the start of the evaluation activities.

Results from the literature review informed some of the themes explored during Task Three, our data collection phase. Data collection included six field trips to HMP Wandsworth and one to The Conservation Foundation and was conducted over a longer than originally anticipated period of 12 months, from June 2017 to July 2018. This extension was partly due to the delay in the starting date and two visit cancellations, but also because it provided a valuable opportunity to observe the project over a longer period that also included a longer part of the growing season. This extended research period also was in part a response to the extension of The Conservation Foundation's activities within HMP Wandsworth by six months. In addition, in October 2017, the research team invited key stakeholders from The Conservation Foundation and Wandsworth Prison to attend an impact day organised by Coventry University, where they were able to share ideas and learning with other organisations delivering prison based interventions and visit a horticultural intervention being delivered at HMP Rye Hill.

Previous research by the authors evaluating prison-based interventions supports the importance of capturing factors such as the relationship between participants, the role of the weather in determining the activities delivered, and the potential for the programme to facilitate learning work-related skills, to have therapeutic benefits, and to encourage consideration of change (Brown et al., 2016).

As such, data collection focused on qualitative methods;



it consisted of participant observation, semi-structured interviews with key informants, and focus groups.

One of the main approaches used for learning about the project was passive and moderate participant observation. On average, we spent one day each month for the duration of the project carrying out such observations. However, the research team adopted a degree of flexibility in order to meet the needs of the prison (i.e. having someone available to ensure security measures were met and when needed, there was someone to accompany the research team around the prison). Six full-day visits to HMP Wandsworth and the Unlocking Nature programme offered an important opportunity for the research team (between 1-3 researchers) to spend time with the participants and staff, and to familiarise themselves with the environment at HMP Wandsworth. During the visits, the research team captured data about the delivery of the Unlocking Nature programmes and captured first hand participants' views, behaviour and interactions through observation and informal conversations. Active participant observation was limited due to the nature of a prison setting (long-term immersion would have been beyond the scope of this evaluation), but moderate participation was possible by partaking in some of the class activities (e.g. beekeeping). During these visits, researchers captured detailed field notes that became part of the rich data set collected for this evaluation.

In addition to the observations, further important components of the qualitative data collection were semi-structured interviews and focus groups. In line with established research practices and our ethical approval documents, prior to data collection, participants (prison staff, prisoners, and staff of The Conservation Foundation) were provided with a participant information sheet and were advised about the nature of the research itself, that they could question the researcher about any aspects of the research and its process. They were informed that information would both be anonymised and

confidential, and notified that they could withdraw from the evaluation at any time without giving a reason. The provided information sheets offered a summary of the research project and contact details of the lead researcher if they would have any concerns or for further information. Written consent was obtained from all evaluation participants that engaged in semi-structured interviews and/or focus groups.

Semi structured interviews were carried out with key stakeholders including offenders that took part in some of the programme activities, prison officers, programme staff, prison management, and members of The Conservation Foundation. These interviews allowed the research team to gain additional insight about issues uncovered and questions arising during the participant observations. The 35 interviews (some of which were digitally recorded and transcribed, for others, detailed notes were taken during the interviews) were supplemented by a focus group with 5 prisoners that shared their views about the changes taking place on K-Wing's exercise yard.

Task Four started partially already in parallel to the data collection phase, allowing us to adapt some of our data collection approach to the reality of the programme. The substantive amount of data collected was analysed using a system of codes informed by the key aims of the project. This focused analysis was complemented by open coding that involved sorting data into analytical categories and themes. This approach enabled us to understand the data, to gain a logical perspective, with an emphasis on individuals' own perceptions and subjective appraisals of the Unlocking Nature programme. We believe the methods used allowed the research team to capture the experiences of those involved, allowing for detailed insight that illuminates the key aspects of the journey of those being affected by or participating in the intervention, both as prisoner participants or participating in the programme's implementation.

Observation	Approximately 30 hours
<b>Semi structured interviews:</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
<i>With Staff</i>	
Conservation Foundation	5
Prison Staff	10
<i>With Prisoners</i>	
Men engaged in the building work and gardening activities	5
More informal conversations with men on the yard (including beekeeping, horticultural and building activities)	6
More informal conversation with men on the wing	4
<b>Focus group</b> participants on K wing (Trinity)	5
<b>Total number of participants</b>	<b>35</b>

## Section 3: Key findings: Unlocking Nature

The following chapter is divided into two main parts: The first will focus on the project implementation process itself, emphasising the evolving context of this process and the successes and challenges that were experienced throughout. The second part will then focus on the views and experiences of key stakeholders; those directly involved in Unlocking Nature and those not directly involved but identified as potential beneficiaries.

### Initiating Unlocking Nature

#### The emergence of the vision to 'green' HMP Wandsworth

As previously discussed, Unlocking Nature emerged in response to the opportunity provided by the former Reform Prison status of HMP Wandsworth and the Governor's then ability to allocate funding to areas identified internally as being specifically fund-worthy. One of the prison staff recalled this process:

I was not personally involved with going through the sorting of proposals, or bids by all the providers. It was actually (a prison staff member) who was actually commissioned in as the director of learning by (the governor) following the announcement of prison reform. She had to review all our learnings. So, she and (another prison staff member) who was obviously part of the reform team, they went through all the bids and then they sort of, you know, ended up awarding those contracts to different providers. This was one of those contracts.

However, the then Governor also had a particular interest in horticultural projects in prisons. A prison staff member recalls:

*I then had the opportunity to speak to (the Governor) because to find out exactly what the thinking was behind this project itself. And he explained to me that he attended a conference organised through the University of Surrey, I think. There he met one of the professors, and she explained to him the therapeutic impact of gardening and on the lives of people, especially in a custodial setting. And that was his thinking behind it, so the idea was that we will at the same time as we will be introducing greener spaces in the prison, we look to get men involved and try and see if that has a positive impact on their actual lives.*

From conversations between the Governor and The Conservation Foundation, a particular project idea emerged that was then submitted as a proposal to the call. The Conservation Foundation had a clear idea of what they hoped to do with Unlocking Nature in Wandsworth prison; it was not their first prison project nor the first project located in Wandsworth prison. This is captured in an interview of a manager who stated:

*...we believe very much that nature and the environment can play a very powerful part in bringing people together into healing them and to making things better and more bearable, particularly in prisons. So that was our idea. We wanted to add onto that the opportunity for people to learn skills which would make them employable, to improve the physical appearance of the prison, and really kind of create a bridge between prison life and the world outside because these men are not there for very long. And I believe very strongly that that's an incredibly important part of one's role as a person (CF).*

Unlocking Nature was envisioned to create new green spaces within three exercise yards and other central areas within the prison, by bringing together the prisoners, staff members, and members of the local community and leading horticultural and environmental groups (The Conservation Foundation, 2017). Underpinning the project was an aim to improve relationships amongst the men in prison, and between men in prison and staff. The project was also a vehicle for teaching work related skills including communication and land-based skills, and, where possible, for offering a route for taking up a recognised qualification. It was also perceived as offering a means of building an individual's confidence, self-esteem and familial relationships.

### Developing Partnership

Unlocking Nature officially started with a partnership meeting on February 27<sup>th</sup> 2017 that provided the first opportunity for the research team to observe the relationship building process between several key participants and stakeholders involved in this project. During this partnership meeting, The Conservation Foundation set out their vision for Unlocking Nature and provided an opportunity for key stakeholders and implementers (e.g. prison management, prison staff, designers, other Third sector representatives with experience in horticultural programmes in prison settings, journalists) to feed into the process.

The meeting was attended by 20 representatives from a range of organisations across the voluntary, public and private sector, including several key prison staff members that were expected to act as key liaison partners for The Conservation Foundation's work within HMP Wandsworth. People presenting their vision and hopes for Unlocking Nature were for example Adolfo Harrison (a leading garden and landscape designer based in London) and Chris Collins (Garden Organic's Head of Organic Horticulture, and former Blue Peter gardener), both key role players in the implementation of some of the project activities. This partnership meeting also highlighted the intention of The Conservation Foundation to work in close collaboration with all key stakeholders; and indeed the project was characterised by intense consultation in its initiation phase but also throughout its entire duration.

Initial interest in the project was strong by all in attendance and this was evidenced by the positive opinions expressed at the partnership meeting and by the positive promotion the programme received across social media platforms such as Twitter. The Conservation Foundation embraced the opportunity for partnership working and to challenge the negative discourse in which prisons are often viewed. The Conservation Foundation welcomed the chance to be involved with the novel opportunities stemming from HMP Wandsworth being selected as a Reform prison and from the outset wanted to share and promote their plans:

*We felt very much that this was an opportunity to talk about something positive that was coming from prisons. And at that time, it was very negative and so we wanted to say 'Look, it's not all bad, and these guys aren't all bad and there are good stories that come from there as well'. (CF)*

At the time of the project development and initiation, there was enthusiastic support from the Governor and senior staff and The Conservation Foundation achieved considerable positive publicity and had more in the pipeline, including national press, an ITV series and Gardeners Question Time. But with the departure of key people, this situation changed and permission for publicity was withheld by the Ministry of Justice. This highlights the challenges that can emerge in fluctuating organisational contexts and emphasises the importance not only of key champions but of broad consultation and investment in an idea throughout the lifetime of a project in prison.

*You have to understand that particularly in prisons, things change, you go in with one expectation and you have to do another (CF).*

Adaptation to major changes in the prison context was one of the key challenges Unlocking Nature and its implementers both within the prison and the foundation had to grapple with. By July 2017, when the evaluation of this project started, HMP Wandsworth had lost its reform prison status (Allison, 2017); there was a new Minister of Justice, a change in Governor, and further changes in roles that originally were meant to support collaboration with organisations like The Conservation Foundation. There were also a number of security concerns (see section above on HMP Wandsworth) that e.g. led to a number of lock-downs throughout the summer of 2017. However, there remained support for the project from the leadership team, a prison-internal facilitator for Unlocking Nature activities, and a number of other key prison staff who remained very supportive and engaged throughout the programme.

*And at the same time, we had wall art on the walls. And again, introducing that to prisons can be slightly controversial. (...) I've always been quite open to and embraced change. If it is gonna benefit the prisoners, if it is gonna make them feel better. If it is gonna reduce their anxiety of being in a prison, in a prison environment. And so that's why we went ahead with this project (Prison staff)*

The continuing support for the project despite major changes in the prison's leadership is indicative of the intense consultation work The Conservation Foundation had been undertaking within the different management units of HMP Wandsworth. The positive approach by The Conservation Foundation in conducting this important consultation process was highlighted throughout our conversations with prison staff members. Consultation and collaboration build on existing relationships,

*I got involved with it more so because of my existing relationship with The Conservation Foundation through Tools Shed project itself, so, because there was already that linkage there. It only made natural sense for me to start working with them so we can shape this project (Prison staff)*

but also went far beyond by engaging both with staff and with prisoners:

*Hundred percent, yeah. They were spot on with the consultation with us. We had them in. They engaged well with us. So they said, what's the best way to consult with the staff. And so we said, come to the morning briefings and afternoon briefings and show your plans to the staff. Give them an opportunity to answer questions. You won't always get all the staff, so some staff felt they weren't (consulted) with.*

*But it is not easy to get all the staff you know. So we did emails, provided information to the staff that way. But you will always have some staff that don't like change, who won't like something like this.*

### Setting up and delivering Unlocking Nature

The Unlocking Nature project consisted of several elements delivered by The Conservation Foundation in collaboration with various key stakeholders linked to HMP Wandsworth. The most visible part was a transformation of a number of key outdoor areas. This was complemented by an introduction of a chicken coop in the healthcare yard and ongoing horticultural and beekeeping training activities that involved participants from the wider prisoner population. The consultation on these additional activities was described by one prison staff:

*And then we also went through what else we could do besides actually building and that sort of the introduction of horticultural workshops, looking at the chicken keeping and the beekeeping workshops that were also part of their proposal. So, I facilitated those sessions by organising them in this training centre.*

For each of these four activities, a key person was employed by The Conservation Foundation or identified among prison staff. Below, the different elements will be described separately.



## Transforming outdoor spaces

### Designing the space – ongoing consultation

At the beginning of the project, a successful and well respected designer was engaged to work with the prison staff and the men in prison to make best use of the available space. The designer, Adolfo Harrison, found it to be ‘an amazing project from day one’. He had a strong belief in the benefits of horticulture:

*Horticulture is really successful at stimulating people and people can and people find their own way by. Some people, it's such a wide ranging area, some people are more stimulated by the building side, or by the flowers, the breeding of flowers or the maintenance or the design. People can find an area where they're stimulated by it. And hopefully the stimulation then leads on to [...] be motivated and responsible (Designer)*

He enjoyed the challenge of being creative with the space and working with the men to create. Considerations involved being inclusive, consulting, taking forward ideas, designing something that was aesthetically pleasing, practical and also sustainable.

*What's very clear to me from designing gardens for private gardens, public gardens is, it's got nothing to do with the gardens, and it's all about the people. We're creating spaces for people and your motivation is to create something that goes kind of beyond fashion. That goes beyond trying to look pretty in a magazine, kind of thing. Why do people really want to be in that space and enjoy that space, and then what can that space do for them? (Designer)*

Consultation about this creative process was also seen as important since it was something new to Wandsworth prison itself. And setting up gardening spaces in an atypical location was also perceived as remarkable:

*We have some open prisons with huge (areas). But, in a setting like Wandsworth where it used to be gardening pots with some elements of ground maintenance, this was obviously a major shift in the way it's been done. In the sense that it's been built right from scratch and that we are looking to take over the exercise yards which is quite a cultural shift actually, I think, for the prison itself. So, that's how I got involved. From the beginning, prisoners were invited to make suggestions as to what they would like to see from their cells and in the exercise areas, which then influenced the development of the design plans for greening the prison environment (CF).*



This approach was also corroborated by prison staff:

*So we discussed it at consultative rep meetings. The feedback was always positive. I didn't have lots of prisoners saying 'No you can't do this.' 'cause you know, the main local built establishments are predominantly just concrete. So actually adding greenery and, you know, you'll see when you enter Wandsworth through the main gate, you see lovely gardens on the left-hand side. And if you were to take that out, it would really make the place feel more oppressive.*

Similarly, talking about the response by prisoners, a manager stated:

*From prisoners mainly positive. (...) I think they wanted an area where they could sit. So the fact that they can just sit on the side of the beds, I think that is quite a positive. But the designs, the original designs, didn't really specify that. It didn't, you couldn't really tell clearly if you could sit. So this was stuff we fed back to The Conservation Foundation and they took it on board.*

There were occasions when the designer was challenged by the men and prison staff and a compromise was needed, e.g.

*Then we went into planning stages and design. The Conservation Foundation brought plans to us as to what it would look like. We did make some tweaks. I think the original plans had a lot more flower beds and it appeared, on the plans, as if the prisoners wouldn't have a lot of area to walk about. As you can see now at Trinity, there is a good amount of space around there. But it looks nice. I think it is really positive. And I haven't heard too many negative comments. (Prison Staff)*

Reaching and convincing everyone was not without challenges, particularly given the size of the prison and the number and fluctuation in staff and prisoners. Other challenges were linked to concerns raised in relation to the proposed changes; particularly that they might impact on established routines and potentially on prison safety:

*The issues would potentially be hiding unauthorized items within flower beds, the usual stuff you know. (...) Taking more time to search. Because the exercise yard has to be searched. It should be searched before an exercise period and after to make sure there are no unauthorized items either left there for someone to collect or then to leave anything for the next exercise. So I suppose the concerns staff will have is that having flower beds will delay exercise. (...) I don't think it's necessarily serious because if two prisoners wanna exchange*

*items, I think they can do that on the wing if they really wanted to (Prison Staff).*

Interview participants also commented that within the prison there was sometimes a negative or defeatist attitude to introducing new ideas, to maintaining the status quo:

*You know a lot of people like prisons to stay and remain the way they are. Maybe say for forty, fifty years. (Prison Staff)*

*But there's also this thing about 'Oh, it won't work here'. Everyone always says, 'It won't work here'. Like with the bees, they were like 'Oh, we can't have bees, its Health and Safety'. We asked the Health and Safety person, they said it's fine. There's always this thing, 'I won't, you won't, you can't do it' (CF).*

However, there was optimism that these concerns were surmountable:

*There were some issues. I will say there was some staff that were slightly reluctant. And so it was a case of trying to sell this to them as an idea. Over time, as we communicated to staff, they were won over and then took it on board.*

As an example of how communication with the prison was not always effective, one man from the wing adjacent to the yard mentioned that he hadn't know about the project until they started working one day, blocking off areas of the exercise yard. This, and other similar anecdotes, emphasised the communication challenges that arise in prisons, particularly in those with such transient prisoner populations as HMP Wandsworth. Nonetheless, relationships and encounters of those directly involved in the project were described as very positive.

*[...] it's just been wonderful from the very first day, how open they have been to it. There's always, you know, equal respect to me as the designer to try and make these things possible. And then when they're giving the feedback everyone feels quite comfortable (Designer)*

This positive feedback came also from within the prison:

*I think we've been open you know. As far as I've been concerned, I think I've been open with (other prison staff member), you know. (A particular staff member) knows I'm in favour of this initiative. We've got good trust with each other. I trust The Conservation Foundation because they've done the work. Now you can see. The proof's in the pudding. (...) But yeah they do engage really well though (Prison Staff)*



Consultations were needed and ongoing both for the design phase and also during the actual implementation of the building of horticultural spaces. This required close collaboration between The Conservation Foundation and prison staff:

*Initially, the involvement went so far as facilitating the meetings but then it increased over time. It has increased to trying to work with the foundation in terms of resourcing the team and trying to come up with the plan, the design during the consultation. So, I facilitated the discussions with people at different levels, in different teams and different functions. That included health and safety, security, wing managers, the deputy governor, the governing governor, getting London Fire Brigade in to actually have a look at their access on the yards to make it secure, as when we do all the work we make sure that we keep out of their way and they are actually able to access the site (Prison Staff).*

### Construction workshops - adjustment to reality of 'building in a prison setting'

The original idea for the building of the new, green spaces was to make them part of building training workshops, in which prisoners could learn new building skills which they could then practice by constructing the new infrastructure. However, it soon became apparent that there were a number of constraints that would not allow for such an approach. This included the security concerns within the prison that both affected the possibility of men from certain wings to access any type of work or training activity (see above) and the need to get men security cleared at a relatively high level (since the work involved tools and also accessing areas outside designated as high security risk). In the end, only two officers and a small number of men were involved in the building activities. This was later supplemented by additional staff paid by The Conservation Foundation. Asked about the appropriateness of the number of men undertaking the building work, a manager responded:

*Probably right. Because trying to security clear prisoners to do this kind of role, not everyone will be eligible due to their offence or the risk of escape, let's say, or access to this type of tools. So I think that's probably the right mix. Yes, it probably delays the build, having less people. But we have to remember, it's still a prison and therefore security is paramount and managing risk.*

In addition, it was soon identified that it was necessary to rely on people who already brought some level of expertise for the required type of building work.

*Well, he wanted about 15, 12-15 guys on there. It would have been ideal, there would be no problem with that as long as there was 12-15 guys who I knew for a fact that they wouldn't know what they were doing. For me now, not that I don't want to spend time, that's the wrong thing for me to say, I haven't got time to spend time with them because of the start and finish date of the build. If it was a start on this date and finish as and when you do, I've got no problem there at all. This is build, a static, and then you move onto the next one. This was never a training program, there was never enough time for a training program... (Prison Staff)*

Interestingly, prisoners themselves really appreciated working in a smaller group. Asked about his interest in sharing information about the building project with fellow prisoners, one participant said:

*I would tell them but the thing is if you have too many people we may not have enough work (Participant).*

Another member of the building team concurred:

*If there are loads of people out there, then it could be too much. Everyone would be doing this and then ... So, having smaller groups is better (Building Works Participant).*

All involved in the building team emphasised the positive relationships that developed within the core team which included The Conservation Foundation, prison staff and prisoners (see below). The collegial atmosphere was partially attributed to the small size and relative stability of the team.

One of the concerns that was raised in relation to the green infrastructure building activities was linked to the long time it took for the building to be completed:

*We've also got to bear in mind that this would be, this was the only project that would be impacted by weather. Because all the other projects that were awarded as part of the reform, they were being instructed, led in a classroom environment or a limited work outside involved. But we were seriously impacted by the weather itself and the accessibility of the yard for example. Obviously (prison officer) will tell you when you speak to him. That, you know, I asked (two prison officers) to spend a bit of time on painting up one of the flower beds to see how it goes. Because we were so limited by time and we had to finish it by the end of March. We were already at the end of our 6 month extension. It didn't work out. And look out there, it looks horrible, because it was so cold it just wouldn't stay on. So we have decided to stop doing that and come back to it in spring itself (CF).*



There had, of course, been external determinants to the length of the originally proposed project but the quote above does contain a noteworthy point for any similar future activity within a prison setting. The prison routine, the available resources (physical, staff and time) but also the weather can substantially delay such activities.

### Horticultural activities

The horticultural training activities were implemented through two main approaches initiated by The Conservation Foundation. The first was a short-term response to kick-start gardening activities at HMP Wandsworth, the second was aimed at achieving longer-term sustainability of horticultural training and education. In the first instance, The Conservation Foundation employed well-known gardening expert Chris Collins to conduct a series of weekly horticultural workshops in the existing workshop gardens at HMP Wandsworth (TC3 gardens). These workshops, 13 in total, ran from March 22nd to July 12th and were attended by 91 men of which four attended regularly. However, due to the delay in the start of the evaluation of the Unlocking Nature project, it is unfortunately not possible to comment on the success of these workshops in this report.

Due to the fluctuating nature of prison population at HMP Wandsworth, we were unable to track men who had attended these horticultural activities.

The second approach was linked to the longer-term employment of a horticulturalist who was employed by Novus to provide horticultural training at the prison.

### Beekeeping activities

Beekeeping workshops were led by a professional beekeeper Sharon Bassey, a member of the London Beekeeper's Association. These workshops started in April 2017 and were intended to run once a week for a period of five months; however, due to their great success and available funding, they were extended to continue until May 2018. Gardening workshops were run both in- and outdoors and were conducted inside Training Centre 3 and outside in Trinity G Wing's yard.

*Well-known gardening expert Chris Collins conducted a series of weekly workshops*



*Safety gear was available and during the observed workshops, up to four prisoners at a time were taking part.*



## The Chickens

The ideas underpinning this aspect of the project were led by Francine Raymond and a member of the health team and viewed as providing an opportunity to support greening a further area in the prison. So it would support changing the existing space. The perception was that looking after the chickens would also introduce a purposeful, therapeutic activity in the prison, which would have a range of well-being benefits such as reduced levels of anxiety, alongside offering an opportunity for those involved to develop new skills.

## Positive responses and challenges

Overall, there were many positive observations that were made regarding the programme. There was a lot of support and enthusiasm for the basic idea behind the project:

*I can't remember precisely when I was approached by (prison staff), one of the (...) managers, around having an organisation called The Conservation Foundation who were looking to make changes to exercise yards, sterile areas, adding more greenery shall we say? Changing the facade, changing the feel and the look of the prison. I was absolutely in favour. Having worked in other prisons (...) where there is a lot more greenery, I always felt wherever there is a lot more greenery and garden spaces and flower pots etcetera, it makes prisoners feel better. It normalises the environment. It makes it feel less of a prison. So, I was always really positive about the initiative and embraced it (Prison Staff).*

This enthusiasm also extended throughout the evolving project:

*Because I loved that from day 1, you could see what it was gonna be. And now it's 90% finished apart from the painting side of it. I think it looks absolutely fabulous and I think it's great for the staff and it's in the correct position to be, the one round the back is in completely the wrong position. Umm, people have come out there and eat sandwiches. Yeah, I think it's brilliant (Participant).*

*I think it's very cool. It's, you know, I think it's a very negative environment. The physical layout, it's not artistic, it's not full of pictures. It's very grey, very bleak. And I think by doing something like this, it makes for a better environment for all, staff, you know. It breaks the barriers in a funny kind of way. You know. We are not trying to make it look like a playground; we are not trying to make it look like the countryside. We are just trying to make it a bit more*

*pleasurable. And I think they do get something out of it (Prison staff).*

There were numerous other positive responses to the project, and participants, staff and other interview partners commented on the values attached to meaningful activities that were conducted throughout the project, and on the value of learning new skills, including personal and interpersonal, and of receiving some training on technical aspects related to building, beekeeping and gardening.

Participants also commented on the relationships that were being built and the positive experience between prisoners working on an activity but especially between the men and the staff involved. This was explicitly mentioned by the people involved in the gardening, the beekeeping and in the building activities. We did not have an opportunity to talk to men benefitting from the chickens' presence though we were told by prison staff involved that some prisoners had been very excited about their presence.

Research participants also highlighted the importance of improving the prison environment and the positive effect that can have on prisoners but also staff (here, especially the improved staff area was highlighted). Improving the outdoor prison environment and providing more nature spaces was perceived to be beneficial for the men. However, such health and well-being benefits were not only mentioned as likely to be caused by environmental improvements, but were emphasised as experienced by those men engaged in Unlocking Nature activities.

These positive outcomes are further unpacked in Section 4 below.

## Working to Change the prison environment:

The Unlocking Nature programme starting with a goal to improve the atmosphere in HMP Wandsworth for both prisoners and staff. CF staff commented that within prison there was sometimes a negative or defeatist attitude to introducing new ideas:

*“ And I think by doing something like this, it makes for a better environment for all, staff, you know. It breaks the barriers in a funny kind of way. You know. We are not trying to make it look like a playground; we are not trying to make it look like the countryside. We are just trying to make it a bit more pleasurable (Prison Staff) ”*

As mentioned, there were several positive outcomes resulting from the Unlocking Nature project, both for the prison environment but also for the individuals involved in the project. However, there were also many challenges, some of which could be mitigated through actions by The Conservation Foundation and involved prison staff, others had a negative impact on the effectiveness and scale of the programme.

A key challenge, as mentioned, arose from the fluctuation in staff, particularly the main proponents. However, the leaving of the reform team partners was mitigated through an intense consultation process that brought on board a number of prison managers that were supportive of the project. A more difficult challenge were the above described staff shortages that had an impact on the every-day running of Wandsworth prison, severely affecting prisoners' times out of cell and their ability to regularly engage with any of Unlocking Nature's activities or other work or training activities. In addition, there were notable difficulties for prisoners to receive the necessary clearance to work both on the building as well as the beekeeping activities. This also affected prisoners from some wings more than from others.

Linked to the nature of HMP Wandsworth with a relatively transient prison population, there was also a fairly large fluctuation of participants in gardening and beekeeping activities. Frequently men started engaging with some of the activities but after a few sessions were moved to another prison, or released, and hence could not complete a specific training. Another challenge related to the time available had less to do with a prisoner's length of stay at Wandsworth but more with the daily regime and a sometimes apparent lack of communication across this large organisation. One man commented on the challenges encountered to work on the newly created high-raised beds in one of the exercise yards:

*So far we've only been able to get twice onto the yard since our timetable clashes with exercise groups; the yard has been used at the same time.*

Another major challenge affecting successful course participation appeared to be communication about Unlocking Nature's project activities as part of a selection of work and training activities men should be informed about during their induction, and could subsequently sign up for. Despite The Conservation Foundation using several routes of information dissemination, this nonetheless seemed to have only resulted in limited awareness of the actual project activities and of the routes to follow for participation. Two men described their frustration with learning about and accessing Unlocking Nature.

*But there's been a lack of information about this activity. The activity reps need to understand better the courses themselves (observant of one of the activities). It's really difficult to get into the beekeeping course unless someone's lobbying for you (participant).*

These challenges related to communicating information about the project for wider promotion within the prison was also acknowledged by different staff involved in the project:

*I'm still not sure which forms we're on and which forms we're not because there's so many different versions. There must be different files on the system that they print out. And they print out different notes, because sometimes we're on it, sometimes we're not.*

*And now there's posters up all over, although it doesn't mention specifically where to go to. There're these pathways, seven reps and stuff, and I've met them. It's only at Trinity, which is where the men are coming from mostly; I've met the people there. But even if they ask to go on it, if the staff member doesn't know about it and it's not on the form, then they've got no luck.*

Pointing to a perhaps bigger challenge of a large organisation like HMP Wandsworth:

*I think people don't communicate, or are they operating in silos? I don't know.*

As mentioned above, some of the concerns both staff and prisoners raised were linked to the newly built infrastructure itself. Some apprehensions were raised and addressed in the consultation process of the design phase (e.g. fire access), others were concerns that remained and were mainly linked to the sustainability and the maintenance of the infrastructure provided through Unlocking Nature. Concerns included the difficulties in accessing water and that the beds might become a breeding ground for rats. There was also a fundamental worry about long-term maintenance:

*The maintaining it and it not just been forgotten about. I do think about it, yeah, because obviously it will be the prisoners that will have to look after it.*

However, some staff was also quite optimistic about the project outcomes' longer term sustainability:

*I would like to think maintenance would be done by prisoners. (...) I would like to see maybe a bigger party, gardens party to maintain. Not necessarily The Conservation Foundation.*

And an overall appreciation for the complexities in a prison setting was apparent in our conversations:

*Wandsworth is a bit tricky but I wouldn't want to be too negative about it because I do admire the work that people are doing and trying to do (CF).*

## Section 4: Views and experiences of Unlocking Nature

In this section, we present data related to the views and experiences expressed by key stakeholders; this includes data collected from men involved in Unlocking Nature and men with no direct involvement but that are beneficiaries due to being housed in one of the two residential wings with access to the outdoor spaces developed as part of Unlocking Nature. Additionally, data were collected from interviews with representatives from The Conservation Foundation, prison staff directly involved in Unlocking Nature, and prison staff working in areas in the prison such as catering, health care, drug recovery wing, multi skills, education and environment. The data are organised under the following themes:

- Greening the prison environment and land-based activities
- Health and Wellbeing
- Learning and Development
- Engaging in meaningful activities
- Building relationships between prisoners and prison staff

### Greening the prison environment and land-based activities

When questioned about their views about increasing green spaces at HMP Wandsworth, the data was positive. There was a general agreement that transforming the prison environment was a laudable goal; during interviews and more informal conversations, participants and staff spoke about the significance of the 'outdoor space,' the benefits of introducing land-based activities, plants, and the general need for improvements to the prison outdoor environment.

Participants directly involved in the programme shared their enthusiasms for creating greener spaces:

*We have just put in the bulbs; it will be good to see the plants coming up in spring...*

*The environment looks nicer now since they started Plants coming up in spring - The environment looks nicer now since they started...*

*I think so. It has definitely improved the prison and exercise yard... Yes I think they need more things like this in prison. Some nice areas to walk around; seats and plants and things instead of it just being tarmac.*

For those not directly involved, the changed environment and having access to green spaces was welcomed. During the focus group, one participant shared that he did not want to be directly involved in the Unlocking Nature programme, but understood the potential benefits. He shared his experience in a Welsh prison and previous involvement in a gardening project, detailing how he had enjoyed the physical activity, as well as being outside in green spaces. The interviewed prison staff also acknowledged the potential benefits of Unlocking Nature and attempt to create a greener prison environment:



*I think without realising the prison environment is playing a bigger part in places like this. You can imagine, before the greening process started, there were very little plants or in any of the areas. I always felt wherever there is a lot more greenery and garden spaces and flower pots etcetera, it makes prisoners feel better. It normalises the environment. It makes it feel less of a prison. So, I was always really positive about the initiative and embraced it. They were some issues. I will say there were.*

*The Conservation Foundation brought plans to us as to what it would look like. We did make some tweaks. I think the original plans had a lot more flower beds and it appeared, on the plans, as if the prisoners wouldn't have a lot of area to walk about. As you can see now at Trinity, there is a good amount of space around there. But it looks nice. I think it is really positive. And I haven't heard too many negative comments.*

Staff also welcomed that a part of Unlocking Nature included building and greening an outdoor space with seating and a barbeque facility specifically for staff:

*When we initially started the build didn't [...] what we were building [we told them what we were building [...] and we showed them the drawings, they just did not believe it, they did not believe [...] like that and stuff, and as it's progressed they've gone 'God, this is nice, innit' [...] oh, I can't wait for this. So I think that with time and stuff [...] everyone is flabbergasted to be perfectly honest [...]*

Hence, a reoccurring theme in the data was a positive perception associated with Unlocking Nature and in line with previous research, an indication that the outside environment is of importance to individuals in prison and prison staff (Brown et al., 2015, 2018; Grimshaw, 2002). At the same time, the data also captured how the perception of Unlocking Nature was impacted by what was perceived as other immediate concerns which were also deemed a priority for the men in prison and by staff. For instance, whilst the participants were supportive of developing the outside area and providing opportunities for the men to engage in land-based activities (such as hen and bee keeping), Unlocking Nature was discussed in relation to the wider challenges encountered by individuals (men and prison staff). For example, the age of the prison, the fact that HMP Wandsworth is a local prison, capacity issues (i.e. overcrowding), and staffing and security related issues, were all mentioned when answering questions concerning the programme. During interviews and informal conversations, participants raised questions and highlighted issues with regards to the

delivery of Unlocking Nature in the current climate.

*The men don't have enough time in the yard only about 30 minutes each day. This means they spend more time in their cells than outside (Prison Staff).*

*There is nothing green in London but it looks nice. But there's nothing especially useful in it. Improvements start with a little seed, but the question is 'What are the major problems'? Everyone resents the concrete blocks (Focus group participant).*

*I understand about the green because it is fucking good energy and all that shit. I understand that, don't get me wrong because it is good what you've done and I am not taking away from it, but as a prisoner there is other things that could be done as well. My cell ain't got a toilet seat for months, my cell ain't got a fucking one of those windows for months (Focus group participant).*

*The course on motorbike mechanics was better since it was more useful. And larger communities can get involved. Invest into courses that help people with their job qualifications. The training needs to have a qualification attached to it; everything needs to be formalized. If it doesn't give formal qualifications, it's not useful (Focus group participant).*

Such factors indicate a perception that there were other pressing priorities to address within the prison, such as improving general prison conditions, accessing meaningful activities and education, and the length of time the men were confined in their cell. For staff, concerns related to factors such as tight project timescales, staffing, security, and the sustainability of the programme:

*It's getting the timescale basically, because I think 6-8 months, or 10 months or 12 months' timescale for a project like this was never going to be realistic.*

*I think that the biggest criticism we had to this project when we were doing all the consultation was the life beyond the project itself and some of the people who had been gardening here before they basically said, we've had the chickens out you know, we've had the plants out, and we've grown vegetables but no-one looks after them as they should be. What are you actually going to do about maintaining them and that's where we have been trying to plan what actually?*

As detailed in section 4, communication was identified by those with responsibility for managing and delivering the

project in relation to communicating information about the project in order to promote it within the prison and also in knowing the process to follow. Frustration around communication was also a factor during the delivery stage of the project. Not only was communication identified in relation to keeping men on the wing informed about the work being undertaken and how they could get involved but issues were also raised about the lack of communication and feedback from senior management about the work being undertaken:

*The prisoner didn't know about the project until they started working one day, blocking off areas of the exercise yard (Prison Staff).*

This was also noted by the designer:

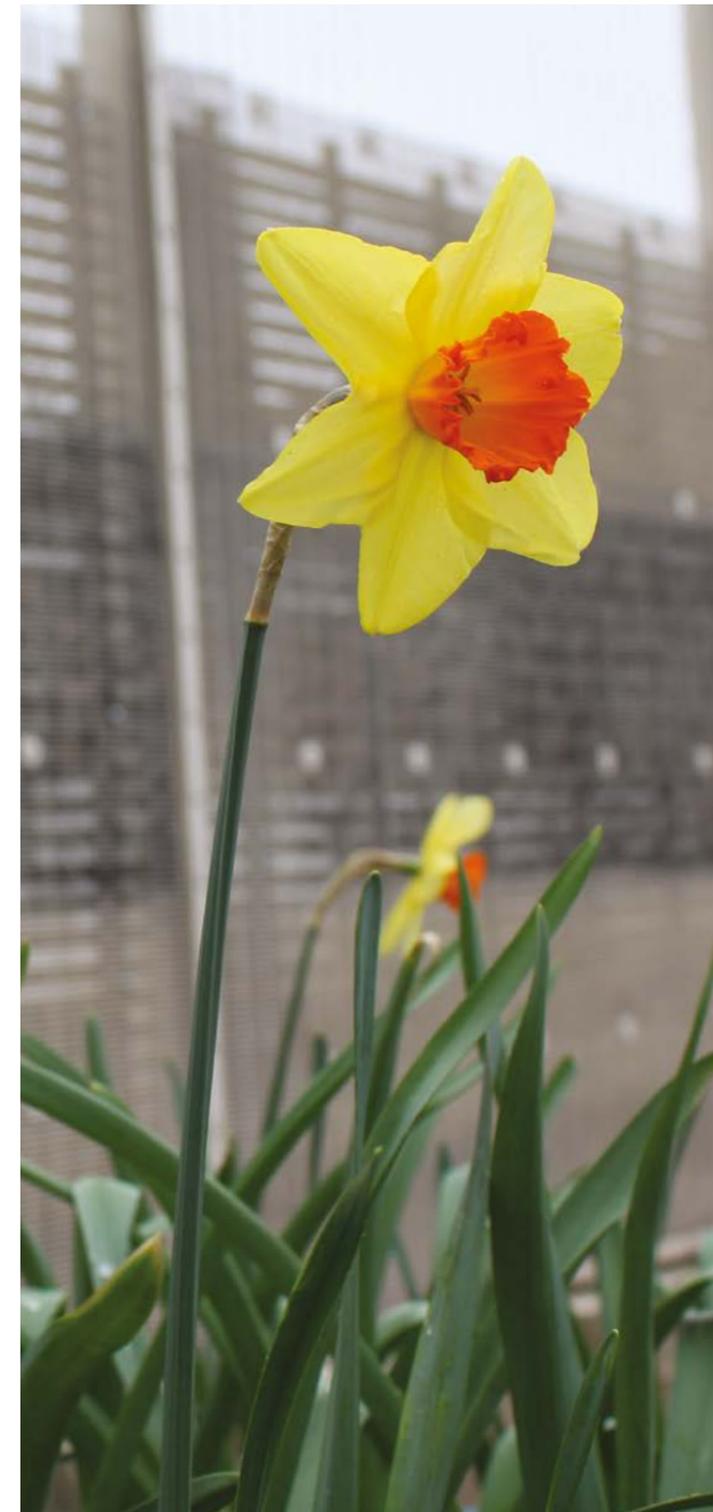
*There's a new person in charge of Trinity and he's getting a bit of trouble there, 'cause obviously they want their space back but they're not really understanding the value to Trinity once it's completed (Designer).*

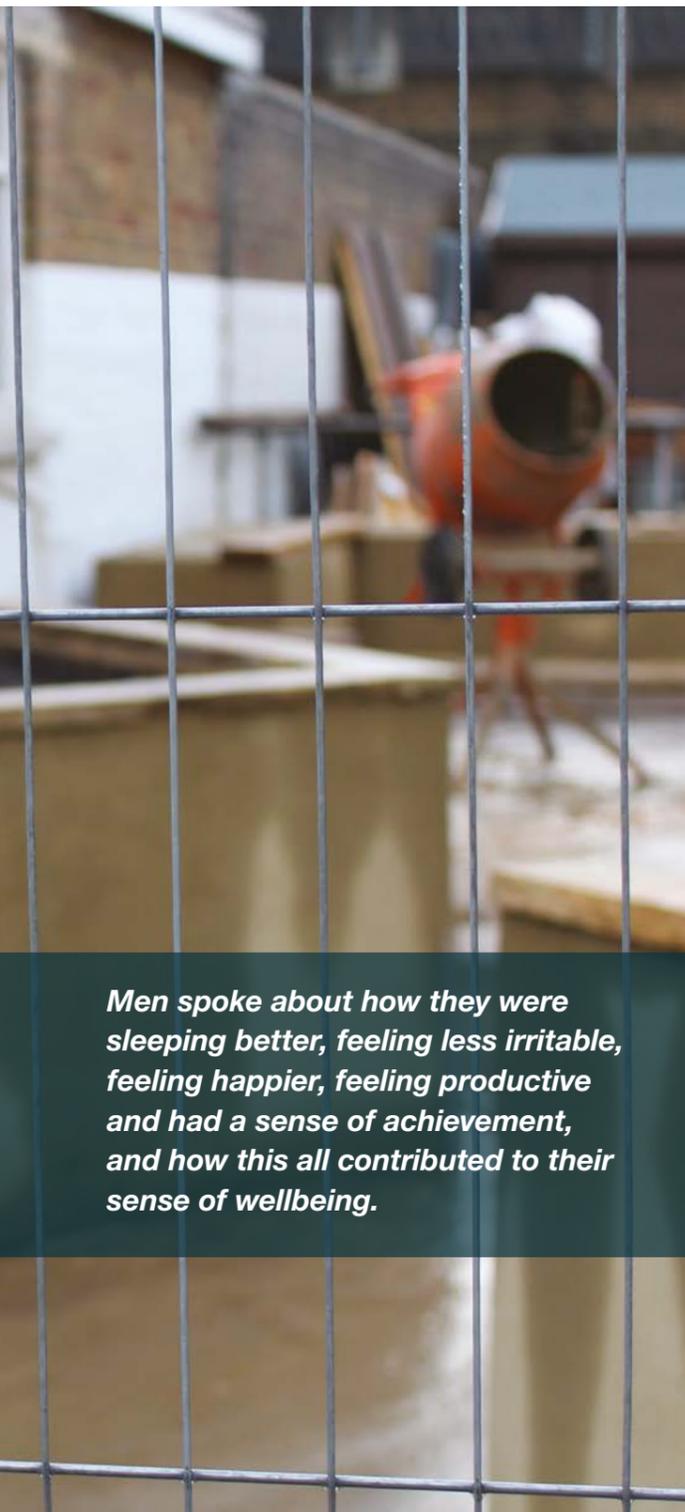
*I've never seen, and I've got to disagree with [another prison staff member] on this one, all the time I've spent out there, which is every single day, I've never had a single manager come over to that build and speak to us. I've never had a single manager come over to the build and say thank you to the guys for working out there. Not at all (Prison Staff).*

In sum, the data associated with the introduction of Unlocking Nature illuminated support for greening the outdoor environment and introducing land-based activities, but this was tempered by a range of wider concerns.

## Health and Wellbeing

In line with our previous study (Bos et al., 2016) which demonstrated a range of positive outcomes that arise from the opportunities of working outside and being involved in land-based activities (such as growing plants and food outside), the data from this evaluation also highlighted the potential benefits on the wellbeing of the men in prison when engaged with land-based activities. Land-based type activities, such as developing a garden, can support individuals in prison by increasing self-efficacy and self-esteem (see Bos et al., 2015). In the interviews, men spoke about how engaging in activities (e.g. building and beekeeping) gave them a sense of freedom, autonomy and purpose. Our data also showed that working as part of the Unlocking Nature team was beneficial not only on an individual basis but also on a collective level, in terms of the 'interactional meanings' or 'group experience' and 'personal' and emotional meaning.





**Men spoke about how they were sleeping better, feeling less irritable, feeling happier, feeling productive and had a sense of achievement, and how this all contributed to their sense of wellbeing.**

During interviews, the men shared how engaging in a physical activity and going outside to work mirrored their experience of work on the outside, and also was helpful in providing some structure to their day. Men spoke about how they were sleeping better, feeling less irritable, feeling happier, feeling productive and had a sense of achievement, and how this all contributed to their sense of wellbeing:

*Yeah! I am tired at night; I'm getting into my cell lying down, and watch a bit a telly and go to sleep. I have a shower and think like that and just [makes a snoring sound]... Definitely it has made me feel better. ... I knew a few people because I had been in the prison ... but it definitely did help (Participant).*

*It helps your head and you're feeling good. I find that anyway. The doing is good. The actually seeing that you are doing well helps, you understand? (Participant).*

*Definitely makes you feel a lot better and are less irritable, more optimistic (Participant).*

These potential benefits were also noted by those not involved in the programme. However, it was acknowledged that such projects can also be at the mercy of the British weather:

*It's a good class. It's outdoors but sometimes the weather is challenging. It's really hard work, very physical. But it's good to get out of your room, to have the fresh air and to be able to work (Participant).*

Moreover, Unlocking Nature provides the men an opportunity to get outside, engage in physical activity and work alongside others, which has an impact on their sense of wellbeing. For example:

*If you don't work you can be locked up in your cell for twenty two and a half hours and only let out for dinner and exercise. (Project Participant)*

*Guys who have been in for years and dead in their body, not working out, could find it useful (Focus Group Participant).*

One participant, who was in prison for the first time, stated that:

*I was on a wing, 23 hours locked up and then you get an hour out basically. ...It is not good. You're arguing with cell mates because there is nothing to do... (Participant).*

*More freedom. When you're on 'A' wing you feel as if you're locked up and forgotten about. This gives you more freedom and you can actually go and do stuff and educate yourself (Participant).*

Working outside, having something to do and an opportunity to develop and learn skills was a great incentive for engagement. Staff from The Conservation Foundation recognised the importance of this too, and drew attention to the benefits of the improvements to the space being symbolic as well as actual:

*...And it will improve the way, the view from the cell window for some of them and I hope for more than that. And it shows that somebody cares, too, and, I think, somebody's trying to make things better and taking positive steps (Prison Staff).*

An example of this related to the bee keeping activity in which men spoke about the significance of working outside and their engagement with nature:

*Hopefully - I've forgotten what, it's a psychological effect of the plants or something, and it's supposed to have some sort of calming effect, almost like a pacifying effect. And of course, that's what this place wants and is looking for. So yes, I think it's very positive. Could they do more? I don't know. Is there more to go? Probably, yes (Participant).*

Staff were also keen to introduce and develop such initiatives in the prison:

*The chickens, yeah. I was part of that project with the chickens. Again, you know, the feedback I received from the beginning was really positive. A lot of the mental health patients really took to the chickens. Mmh, it was something different I suppose. (...) And there were good interactions and intrigue as to what the chickens were doing there. Yeah, I've always been pro having animals. You know, trying to get pet dogs onto the health ward. That's probably a project that the new health care governor will take on. But yeah, the chickens were brilliant. That was The Conservation Foundation as well. We worked well with getting that introduced (Prison Staff).*

Another member of prison staff explained:

*So having flowers, and the prisons I've worked in, you know I worked at (prison A) that's got lovely gardens surrounding the inmates. And (prison B) certainly also had amazing gardens. And (prison C) got really lovely gardens. I think it is important. And being sort of a keen gardener myself, I know the value of having green spaces and lawn and flowerbeds. It just makes the place feel better (Prison Staff).*

The data identified a range of potential wellbeing benefits for those involved. The findings indicated a positive role for facilitating land-based activities and its potential impact on health and wellbeing.



**“ And it shows that somebody cares, too, and, I think, somebody's trying to make things better and taking positive steps (Prison Staff). ”**

## Learning and or developing skills

A key driver for the Unlocking Nature Programme was the opportunity it would provide the men for learning and developing work-related skills. Whilst only a small number of participants engaged in the programme, participants interviewed spoke positively about the learning and development opportunities the programme afforded them. They also spoke about the importance of the programme being delivered in a flexible and supportive way and how the approach used created both formal and informal learning opportunities. One participant shared what the flexibility and delivery approach meant to his experience. He has previously struggled to commit to a programme, so for him the opportunity to get involved in Unlocking Nature meant a great deal:

*They took a risk with me really. They don't know what they have done for me if I'm honest with you (Participant).*

As previously noted, working outside had security implications in terms of the number of participants that were able to engage in Unlocking Nature. Whilst it was anticipated that a larger number of men would be recruited on the project, this was hampered by the security clearance needed to work in the designated areas and the required number of staff needed to supervise the men on the programme. Additionally, participants' engagement was variable; this was primarily due to being transferred or released when having come to the end of their sentence, the categorisation process which led to men being moved to a 'D' category prison, and also due to having other commitments (e.g. meetings with their legal team, accessing health care services, or visits from family and/or friends). Engagement in the building component of the programme and caring for the chicken was scheduled to take place on a daily basis and the bee keeping activity once a week. However, this was negatively impacted by the time of year and weather conditions. Nonetheless, irrespective of the level of engagement across the data, the men reported a range of positive feelings about their involvement and the opportunity to develop or learn new skills:

*Just that it is not the same thing. You know it is all different work, every day it is different that is pretty much it (Participant).*

*[names participant] outside he didn't know anything, he was doing a bit of plumbing but he didn't know how to lay blocks or anything, render and know he knows it all (Participant).*

*I do landscape gardening on the out....I like it all doing patios and doing a bit of planting (Participant).*

*Since I moved to Trinity I have not really seen my time. We are in April already and I came in December, it has just flown. When I was in 'A' wing, time dragged but now .....I can (Participant).*

Three of the men that had been regularly working on the bee course were not only really enthusiastic about learning about bees, but all had very specific ideas about how they would use their new skills after being released from prison. One of the prisoners wanted to start producing honey on the land his family owns in Wales, another to work with a friend to import honey from France, and a third wanted to use his links to the African continent to start a honey-related business there. All were absolutely fascinated with bees, bee-keeping and honey-making and were proud to share what they had learnt, but also saw an attractive business opportunity in this area. Participants involved in the bee keeping activity were overwhelmingly positive about the learning opportunity it provided:

*This is big fun. It's really interesting and completely new to me.*

*I am absolutely enjoying it, it's really brilliant. It's the only course where you completely forget where you are.*

*Working with the bees tells you that you have so many fears of things that you shouldn't be fearful of.*

Following a session in November, the facilitator shared the following reflection with the research team about a bee keeping session:

*[Names participant] has been given details of the 'Welsh Pollinator Strategy' with a possible view of utilising family land. He asks pertinent questions regarding available forage and siting apiaries. We discussed how other groups can also get involved, like local farmers, and agricultural colleges to help clear the land of bracken.*

*[Names participant] is keen on beekeeping in the Sudan so I have given him details of 'Bees for Development' which has been running a start-up project in this area. I believe there is a co-op now running which gets the beekeepers better money for their products and also works with surrounding countries [names participant] was going to ask his family to follow this up. I have contact details of a beekeeper in Uganda but not sure if this could be helpful yet.*

*[Names participant] is quiet but listens intently. When questions asked by a member of the gardening group – [participant] told him why we did*

*not do that because of cross contamination. Apiary Hygiene was a lesson we did in week one and a very important part of beekeeping. I think [participant] just enjoys beekeeping and this group, but he is able to offer sound advice and is a valued member.*

*The bees seem to bring out the best in people, there is laughter but an unspoken knowledge of when to be serious and pay attention and I believe that is because the men are fascinated by how clever this insect is and they are so keen to learn. If one person asks a question, they all listen and learn from each other and that's the beauty of working in a group such as this.*

*The men have some Bee Craft magazines to read and one has an article about The Conservation Foundation.*

The extract below, from our observational data, was recorded after spending time with the men engaged in the bee keeping activity; it provides another example of the scope provided by Unlocking Nature for men to engage in an activity that was informative, engaging and purposeful:

*There were two prisoners working together measuring and laying the decking and openly taking on board advice given. In a conversation with the prisoners one explained that this was the first time he had laid decking and he had learnt skills that he may be able to use on the outside. He spoke about previous employment and explained that he was a trained boiler engineer. He also shared that he enjoyed being outside, getting out of his cell, and how this made the time go faster. In a conversation with the second prisoner who I had previously met, he took my through the work he had completed since my previous visit and some of the challenges encountered, the primary being the weather.*

*The interaction was positive and there appeared to be a clear order to the activity being carried out. The environment appeared very relaxed and men proud of their achievement. Despite the area being worked on being allocated for staff use, the men spoke about feeling a sense of achievement regarding their involvement. They felt it was a great idea (observational notes, 7th February).*

The Conservation Foundation staff were so committed to the development of skills that it positively influenced their decision-making when planning the building work as they were keen to give the men the opportunity to contribute their skills:

*I'm not sure exactly when we decided about using the men instead but it was more talking about it and being 'Oh, we should use the men'. I think it was partly speaking to mainly [Name] about it, trying to get the men involved in it because there's lots of builders within the population. And it being a chance for them to be more skilled. And that went more back to the original proposal which was about developing skills and the qualities, just turning up on time and all that for when they'd be released ... but obviously that slowed it down in terms of that. If they'd got contractors in, it'd be done within a couple of weeks, and so maybe we should've done that, maybe we shouldn't have used the men (CF).*

They explained that as well as utilising existing skills, they anticipated that this would be a way of really involving the men and encouraging them to value their environment:

*Part of getting the men involved was to get buy-in from the men because they're the ones who are going to use it. I'm quite worried about when it is open that people are just going to kick them, and we've been thinking about the materials used and that's why they're blockwork and not wooden, more fragile things. So if they've got some buy-in, then I figured that they might respect it more.*

It was recognised that participants had existing skills at the start of the programme, further developed their skills during their participation, and on release or move to another prison, took their skills with them and continued to develop. Their skills were then shared with peers through mentoring other participants:

*...he's gone off to another prison, but in the design stage he was involved, and he'd come back with these incredible plans all drawn very neat and very accurate on graph paper and just with whatever he could find really. He gave them notebooks and pens to take away and come up with ideas, and it was incredible, he could have done anything that we asked. Anything we want that needs to be done. And he was in the bee group for a while; he was going on to that just to learn, and there the mentoring has worked really well, because there's some men who are coming quite regularly but also a lot of people are starting afresh each week, or every couple of weeks. And there's a lot of, you can see then when they've been there, they tell the men what to do, how to teach, so it definitely does work (CF).*

More generally, participants learning about gardening saw value in this experience and appreciated what they had learnt. One participant commented:

*This is my first job at the prison. I'm totally new to gardening. I've learnt how to plant and how to make a distinction between weeds and the rest of the plants. I don't really like the heavy lifting, but I would be very interested in learning how to prune. (Name) is a really good teacher, a very good teacher.*

In regards to taking part in this course having an effect on their future choices once released, one commented:

*Now I know what I would be doing with planting. If I were getting into business, then it would be really useful (Participant).*

*I had a little general experiences in building but it tops up a little things like the mixes and that and I can do them all the same colour, the rendering I have took to that proper. I have learnt a trade (Participant).*

Members of the prison staff were also aware of the potential learning opportunities Unlocking Nature afforded those involved:

*The other side of it is, you are letting prisoners develop a skill, you know. Gardening doesn't come by luck. Learning to become a good gardener you know. I used to do gardening with my granddad when I was a child. And actually you learn those skills. And now I love on the weekend to spend a couple of hours doing a bit of gardening. Gardening is quite relaxing and quite soothing. So I like to think, prisoners who are doing the gardening get a lot of satisfaction out of you know starting off with seeds and seeing flowers grow. Almost sort of a message for life, isn't it?*

*It's linked, isn't it, I mean education. You know whether you are part of a gardeners' party learning how to make beautiful gardens or whether it's measuring flower bed, constructing the actual outlining bricks you know around these areas, it's all educational really. You have to learn these things. It just doesn't happen just like that. So there's a strong link between the construction that's happened on the exercising yards, and they are learning something that they can potentially do on the outside.*

*(...) Yeah. Little things like teambuilding. You know, working as a team to put something together. You can't underestimate that. Communication skills, talking to each other, given the instructions, listening to instruction. There is a lot more to it.*

Alongside this, staff also found it to be a valuable learning experience in terms of identifying what works and what is more challenging when delivering the programme. The Unlocking Nature provided staff with an opportunity to consider new ways of working:

*And if were to do it again, it would be great to have twice the amount of time. And then we could bring these guys (those who would still have to learn some skills) in and help them out a lot more. Because it is the guys more so, it is like more skills for them. You know, they get a house and things like that. Stuff they're gonna need to know how to do. And we're just lucky enough we had (participant) here who was a builder, I mean I learnt a lot of stuff from (Participant), I'm alright with him. But (Participant) was a lot more advanced than when I was in it, and I learnt a lot from him. His work ethic, he's basically second to none, it's brilliant.*

So the data shows that Unlocking Nature provided a learning opportunity for both participants and prison staff too.

*It's kind of on several occasions where we've got to some discussions. I've done backing before, and [names participant] is very good at blockwork. He's done a lot of blockwork. So his knowledge of blockwork is far superior than mine. But he's never done backing. So, you know, again it's great. Because everyone brings something to the table. That's really important.*

It was also felt that Unlocking Nature had the potential to leave a legacy in terms of providing future opportunities for others to engage in maintaining the flowerbeds and painting work, thus fostering a sense of ownership:

*I think my biggest challenge would be, and I've said this to you before, is the sustainability side of it and only time will tell how much we're able to sustain. And obviously we're not able to do it without support from wing managers and wing staff. If that happens, and that happens properly, then I think it's a project worthwhile.*

*It'd be nice to get a team together from Trinity to take care and look after those bits on there because they are going to need touching up. Eventually the [...] the beds need touching up and stuff like that, so it would be nice to get a small group together from there.*

## Engaging in meaningful activities

Overwhelmingly for those involved, Unlocking Nature provided them with an opportunity to be involved with something they found meaningful:

*I had been on D wing here for a year and a half before I moved over here [Trinity]. I was in charge of the server and I moved over there and found out there was building work and jumped straight on it. They said it was block laying and building flower beds and when that job came up, the decking well that is what I like doing ...I take pride in my work ...It has been enjoyable actually I have quite liked it. It is like I said; I enjoy that kind of work anyway... (Participant).*

*The main problem is the rendering because we only get a couple of hours each day to get it on the wall and get it rubbed out. If it doesn't dry on time, it is going to be hard to get it nice (Participant).*

*I think they should do brick laying courses in prison that will help, then they could build more flower beds and achieve something inside (Participant) I like doing it; it is nice to make the prison look a bit better (Participant).*

*I think they should give more men the opportunities to do jobs like that. They are on about clearance and things; I know. If you've been really bad in jail,*

*then you don't deserve it, but they should give more people a chance here (Participant).*

Participants appeared to welcome the opportunity to work, learn and simultaneously be actively involved in the process:

*Yes, they let me change a few things on some of the work we done. I put my touch to it... yeah I like to think that I helped with the overall project of it all. I have had a little input into that ... (Participant).*

Feeling productive and involved was important for instilling self-esteem and pride:

*He is quite high up in a lot of roof gardens Chelsea and Kensington, it made me feel good. I have pride in my work anyway (Participant).*

*It has definitely improved the area, what we've done. All the work (Participant).*

*The engine sand stone...we changed that because that was going to be like decking path... He said to go ahead and I stated laying it and he said he liked it so we carried on (Participant).*

*...they get looked after and painted every year and looked after and things like that if they get chips and that. The maintenance side of it is important because we've built them we would like to see them stay there, you know? (Participant).*





*Yes it gives you pride, doesn't it. You're walking past it and thinking, 'we done that' and when it is planted up it will look nice. The flower pots are made in the staff area and we have a couple more to make (Participant).*

*If you put your mind to something you can do it (Participant).*

For those engaged in developing the exercise and staff areas, it was widely felt that they were using their time in prison constructively, and that being involved in work-related activities and having something to do impacted time too:

*Yes, it's made the time go a lot faster definite, definite yeah (Participant).*

*...it is a good paid job. I think it is one of the best paid job and you stay out over lunch. The time flies, it flies. You get up, what matter about a job like this when you it is going to work and you go home. It is not half your day; it is three quarters of your day that is done. You go back have a little bit of much, have a shower and your day is done. That is great (Participant).*

*I go to work at 8 in the morning and normally we work through until 2 o'clock and go back so our cell a lot more ... More freedom and you can actually go and do stuff and educate yourself (Participant).*

When asked about the various motivations for participating in one of the activities, the staff described

*Usually, it's just that they are interested. On a fine day. What I do say, you can come to just get out your cell, that's fine. You don't have to feel like you are sitting ... But don't make a nuisance of yourself. If that's the case...*

*... I moved over there and found out there was building work and jumped straight on it. They said it was block laying and building flower beds and when that job came up, the decking, well, that is what I like doing ... I take pride in my work. I am quite a hands on person, I like to build things and get involved in building and that.*

Conservation Foundation staff gave an example of how meaningful the garden had become to the participants:

*The enthusiasm of the men that are taking part in things, so whether it's, like with the garden for example, there was, I remember [Name] was coming on and I think we went along after one of the bee sessions and all the bee stuff was stored back at the gardens.*

*We came back to the garden area and it had been a really hot day, it was in the summer or something, and the men were really keen, they were like, [Named officer] was out there, one of the prison officers, with [Name] and they were like oh, [Participant], he's gone now, but he was this big guy, someone you wouldn't expect would be into gardening at all, very sort of, quite fierce, but he was really keen to water the gardens and in the end, I think it was the thing about when you're doing as much as you should in the building because like they're supposed to stop at 4:30, were stopping at four, and there's always been this sort of thing, but she was like 'oh we don't have time, we don't have time', but the men just went off and got some watering cans, filled them up with water and went off watering all the garden, and the whole group ended up doing it, watering the garden, whilst others were putting the bee seats away. And I mean they were really good, they were like come on [Name], the plants are dying, we need to water it, and they were really keen actually just to save it, because they were worried and they were like [Name] is going to come back next Tuesday and we won't be able to grow anything, and stuff like that (CF).*

In a further example of the meaning of the activities to the participants, a Conservation Foundation staff member comments on the sense of responsibility that was evident:

*When we were in the design phase and we were asking them for designs, and [Name] who's the chicken keeper was helping us set it up there, she came in and spoke to them about the chickens and she gave them books, and then the next week we came back to discuss, and we were like okay, what sort of plans have you got for the books, and the men were like no we don't want chickens because we can't look after them properly, and they knew they had a responsibility, a responsibility of keeping the chickens there and they didn't want, they were worried that it was going to, they were going to not be looked after properly. They were specifically saying about the weekends because they know not much happens at the weekends and they were worried about the chickens at that point, so they said we don't want chickens, because although they wanted them in terms, they were keen on them at first in terms of having them in the yard, they were worried they wouldn't be looked after properly because they felt responsibility over it (CF).*

Participants also spoke about the possibility of being able to use their skills on release:



Designer Adolfo Harrison, left, with one of the prison's project management team.

*So when I get out I can crack right on with work (Participant).*

*If you can educate yourself in here that gives you a chance to get job out there (Participant).*

*It would be good if you can get a certificate out of it. I think it would be good because you've got it and its proof that you've done it! (Participant).*

Staff members also tried to encourage participants to think about how they could use what they learnt on release:

*[Names participant] understands the concept of marketing and his questions are on producing his own honey from his garden and bringing it to market. His label designs show careful consideration. The legal aspects of labelling were discussed and [names participant] understood why 'organic' cannot be used to label honey but words like Pure, Raw and Natural could. He asked if we could run a food hygiene course.*

## Building relationships between prisoners and prison staff

Across the data, there was evidence of how working together and engaging in an activity that was purposeful was a positive means of building positive relationships amongst the participants, and between the participants and prison staff:

*All of them really like [prison officer] and [prison officer] and [participant], they were helping me, pushing me to do more things and that is a good thing about [Prison Officer] and [Prison Officer]*

*'ah come on, don't worry. Try again, don't worry.' They had confidence in me and then the guy came from outside and he showed me. I had a little of experience but know I've smashed it (Participant).*

*Plenty fucking laughs, [names officer] is wicked ... And the outside, he has taught me a lot that (names*

*CF worker). That mix has worked perfect and I think we have also got along as prisoners and staff. Because they is only a few of us out there. I don't think it would have worked if they were more people all dedicated to this job. We work well together (Participant).*

*Yeah, you build a relationship with them more so in the job you do now than the job you did on the wing as an officer, because on the wing as an officer, don't get me wrong it is still the same as out there, there is a line that you don't cross and they know that line and as an officer you should know that line as well and stuff. But you do, 'cause you're with these guys from say nine in the morning 'til two in the afternoon and you're talking to them, you're talking to them about anything. Anything and everything, although with the time we've got, you know, with security and everything else you don't sort of ... when you leave or when you get out although some of them ask. I personally don't think that they're trying to find any information about you like they would do on the wings but you just say 'yeah' and you change the subject... on the car ride, and that's it. ...well it depends on what the traffic's like, you leave it at that so they know sort of that you don't want to talk about. But they'll openly talk about... but you wouldn't discuss that on the wing. You do get to know them a little bit more, you know, and I think that builds a good working relationship outside which is what you need (Prison Staff).*

Working with a small number of men who were interested in the various activities also facilitated a positive working relationship between participants and staff:

*It's fun. They are two characters, yes. They are good characters to work with (Participant).*

*It's been good. It's been different because obviously I just chat to them like they are normally people; they are normal people they don't tell you off. They are just helping you with work. And that... (Participant).*



## Opportunity for peer support

Participants in Unlocking Nature provided a sense of shared purpose and working together opportunities for them to learn from and support each other:

*Yeah we all get along definitely. No point coming to work and we don't get along as it makes the day drag and it just makes life hard (Participant).*

*.. has a lot of good skills and been like the teacher out there, has it been useful having someone like [names participant] out there on the programme. I think it is like having someone like [Prison Staff] and [Prison Staff] out there more like teachers to help you or let you know if there is a better way to do it (Participant).*

*The bee group worked so well yesterday. This time of year the bees are very defensive and came pouring out to greet us when putting on the mouth guards. The whole group worked quickly and efficiently, talking and guiding each other through the process - this for me was really rewarding because this group have not had a lot of bee keeping time and I have seen more experienced beekeepers not manage this as well as they did! The bees have been given the extracted frames to clean. I would have left this until next week but the men undaunted, wanted to carry on ...so we did (Beekeeping Facilitator).*

The designer commented on the importance of positive relationships to achieving the aims of the project:

*So if we find a way, I suppose, of everyone being happy that this is kind of spreading, you just have this wonderful moment where it's the horticulture and the build happening together, the more that's happening and the less we're involved, the less they see that we're needed.*

*I mean [name] and [name] were really good at - at listening to the prisoners. So I think there's a real - there's a lot of respect there (Designer).*

It was useful that those working in partnership with the prison had an understanding of the sensitivities involved in selecting the most appropriate participants for the project:

*[...] the skill is the staff matching prisoners there and finding out about prisoners and finding out oh, maybe that'll motivate them. And then well actually if those are quite similar maybe they can between that kind of work- that's really time consuming because it's not just the skill of getting to know the prisoners, but it's then having to deal with all the*

*other staff who are looking after that prisoner and all that- and- so there has to be all this- there has to be people- there has to be enough staff that you can actually- there's really good communication across the suits s with all the staff and then all the prisoners. And that requires quite high staff members (Designer).*

The positive relations characterising the building works were also noted in observations made during a visit on 10<sup>th</sup> April 2018:

*This is the first visit in which I was able to see the work taking place on D wing. A lot of progress had been made with the build on D wing. The majority of work carried out by 3 prisoners, [prison staff] and [prison staff] and 2 men appointed by The Conservation Foundation to help with the project. The men explained that lessons learnt from the work carried out on Trinity wing in relation to concerns about the shape and health and safety risks posed by the planters (men were concerned about the sharp edges due to planters' triangular design) The planters in D wing are a cuboid shape. Eleven planters have been building and the men at the time of visit were carrying out rendering of the brick work. I observed the men and prisoners working well together and during interviews with prisoners they described having a very positive working relationship.*

*During the visit, I observed [Conservation Foundation staff] speaking with the men about the work being carried out and encouraging the men to share their idea about the work outstanding on the project. It appeared to be a joint endeavour, the men demonstrating ownership of the project and pride in what they had achieved.*

Conservation Foundation staff commented on the ways that engaging with the project could relieve isolation for participants and encourage communication:

*It's all the opportunities to interact with the men which we hadn't really done a lot of, and there's all these men there who often don't interact with anyone and I think that's been very positive. When we tell people about it, they think it's great, and it's connecting with the outside community (Prison Staff).*

Staff observations about learning, through engaging with nature, were not limited to the learning of the participants:

*I think giving people the opportunity to interact with nature is hugely important, hugely valuable. I find it absolutely fascinating. And all the things you learn, too, about people as you go along. All kinds of people you learn all kinds of different things about (Prison Staff).*

## Summary of Key Findings

Our previously published research by Brown et al. (2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018) has highlighted the important role rehabilitative programmes can play in supporting health and well-being, in learning and developing of work related skills and in supporting men and women in prison on their desistance journey. There is growing evidence that land-based rehabilitative programmes have an impact within secure settings. Such programmes can comprise a range of activities and often allow for a person-centred approach and access to the outside spaces which research has identified as having physical, emotional and other therapeutic benefits (Annerstedt and Wahrborg, 2011; York and Wiseman, 2012; Elsey et al., 2014; and Bos et al., 2016). Participants in the Unlocking Nature project also reported such positive outcomes from their engagement with some of the project's different activities. However, this study also highlights the challenges encountered in delivering land-based interventions in prisons.

## Setting up and delivering a land-based prison intervention

As described above, Unlocking Nature originally set out to deliver a series of activities that ranged from the improvement of HMP Wandsworth's prison environment and the use of land-based and gardening interventions to improve health and wellbeing, to educating and helping people back to work. In order to achieve these goals, the project, whilst having to be adaptable to working within a secure setting, needed to be undertaken collaboratively through all its stages of design, development and delivery through partnership working between prisoners, prison staff and a third sector organisation. Whilst there was evidence of this, for example in the positive working relationships observed between the lead prison officer, prison and outside staff delivering the programme, the Conservation Foundation and programme participants, substantial changes in senior management and the loss of the prison's Reform Prison status created challenges and in some circumstances a real barrier to the delivery of the programme. In addition to the substantial structural and personal changes the complex administration of England's largest prison was undergoing throughout the duration of Unlocking Nature, project challenges were linked to the additional complexities that come with the outsourcing of some services (e.g. education), to HMP Wandsworth's fast turnover rate in prisoners and to limitations on prisoners' participation opportunities due to security concerns (lock-downs, high levels of required security clearance). All this led to delays, changes in the delivery approach and the involvement of fewer

participants than being anticipated. Brown et al. (2015, 2018) highlight that an effective working relationship between all partners is essential.

Moreover, land-based programmes that require changes in physical spaces or infrastructure add an additional dimension, so having good channels of communication, an understanding of each other's organisational culture, opportunities for shared learning and a willingness to respond to practicalities are essential to meeting a programme's outcomes.

## Engaging in a land-based intervention.

The data shows a range of potential benefits associated with the Unlocking Nature programme.

Overwhelmingly, the data highlights positive experiences of engagement with the programme, for participants directly involved, for some men housed on the units in which Unlocking Nature was being delivered and for all staff directly involved.

Among participating staff and prisoners, there was a general acceptance that their prison environment was important, resulting in support for this type of programme. There is also evidence that engaging with the project encouraged learning, provided purpose and a meaningful activity. It helped develop new skills, relieved isolation, supported health and wellbeing and contributed to relationship building.

The Conservation Foundation took an inclusive approach by consulting with staff and the men for ideas for the spaces that were transformed, and, although they met some resistance, those consulted men were generally keen. Positive relationships began to be built between all those involved throughout the different phases of consultation on design and also on implementation. Though the number of prisoners who participated regularly was limited, there was some evidence that engagement with Unlocking Nature increased men's skills, and well-being and some improvement to the prison environment. Furthermore, physical improvements in the prison environment were beneficial to staff as well as prisoners beyond the project participants. Alongside this, there is evidence of the programme building positive relationships between men and staff and offering opportunities for peer support.

## Key learning points

- There is a need to understand the parameters/ limitations of land-based prison interventions
- Relationships:
  - There is a need to have strong links and partnership at all levels
  - There is a need to share knowledge about the project with potential participants and staff
  - The importance of feeling included in the decisions about the project;
- the opportunity to share their knowledge about what will work and will not work
  - Consider the number of people that can/should be engaged in the project (both on the staff and participant side)
- Time-constraints:
  - Time needs to be built into introducing land-based prison interventions: setting up, advertising, recruitment and delivery can all be time consuming
  - Land-based programmes have additional complexities, due to e.g. the impact of weather constraints, security (lock-downs, high-level clearance) and infrastructure requirements (e.g. emergency access)
- Contingency plans / risks:
  - It is important to have an inclusive approach to land-based programmes, hence a willingness to adapt is paramount. It is essential that these programmes are flexible and open to change at each stage
  - Careful consideration needs to be given to staffing such projects
  - It is important to ensure the continuing buy-in of senior management, even if there are changes at those levels.
- Expectations:
  - Consideration needs to be given to other priorities associated with being in prison, which can make it sometimes difficult to prioritise improvements to the prison environment
  - At the early stages of developing land-based programmes, consideration needs to be given to the long-term maintenance of areas developed
  - Consideration of the sustainability of such programmes (physical spaces, staff, other costs)



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