

ERC Advanced Grant 2024 Rehabilitation and Reintegration in Europe (RaRiE)

[N.B. This document comprises extracts from the grant application chosen to help applicants for the PhD researcher positions understand the project design and their role within it].

Proposal summary

Until recently, the study of penal systems has focused mainly on their most severe or repressive features, but these systems often do great harm when aiming to do good, not least by expanding the scale, reach and intensity of penal control. For example, recent research suggests that ‘rehabilitation’ has become focused on managing risks rather than enabling reintegration and that, in consequence, it often hurts and harms those that it claims to help.

By examining evidence from three countries that are often considered ‘progressive’ (the Netherlands, Norway and Scotland), the RaRiE project will help us better understand whether and where rehabilitation lives up to its ideals, and to creatively, critically and comparatively interrogate its development and prospects, its coherences and contradictions, its rhetoric and its realities, its pitfalls and its possibilities.

Through a new approach that I call Dialogical Comparative Penology (DCP), building on the interdisciplinary approaches that I have used in a series of innovative, high-impact research projects, RaRiE will provide a uniquely comprehensive analysis of the nature and impact of rehabilitation in these three nations. It will also develop new tools and metrics for critically assessing rehabilitative systems and practices, to better direct their future development. In and through dialogue with policymakers, senior leaders in prison and probation systems, practitioners, activists and people with lived experience of rehabilitation, RaRiE will help to improve the fairness and effectiveness of European penal systems.

RaRiE’s ambition -- the ‘step-change’ it offers – lies both in developing a new approach to comparative penology, and in using that new approach to reshape how rehabilitation is understood and developed in Europe.

RaRiE project objectives and innovation

This project aims to produce a uniquely comprehensive, critical and comparative analysis of the nature and impact of rehabilitation in three European nations: the Netherlands, Norway and Scotland. By so doing, **it aims to drive forward both the study of rehabilitation and the development of Dialogical Comparative Penology (DCP), as well as reshaping academic, policy and practice debates about how rehabilitation should be defined and understood, and whether and how it should be further developed.**

The conceptual framework of the project (reflected in Fig.1 below) represents a refinement of one that I employed from my award-winning book (McNeill, 2018) which examined not rehabilitation but rather ‘mass supervision’ in terms of its scale and social distribution, its legitimation in and through penal-political discourses, and its forms, intensity and effects. The methodological approach has been informed both by the comparative work of the COST Action IS1106 (2012-16) and by the creative methods developed in and through the ‘Distant Voices: Coming Home’ (2017-21) project. Both these cutting-edge projects established the importance of constructing research as a dialogical endeavour, not just between the researchers involved, or between researchers and participants, but also *between participants themselves*; and both projects showed how the use of creative methods can enhance the quality and impact of these dialogues (McNeill 2018, ch6;

McNeill and Urie, 2020; Urie, et al., 2019). **The development of the creative DCP approach is a key methodological innovation that the RaRiE project will bring both to the study of rehabilitation and to comparative penology; one that will enhance both the quality of its analyses and its impacts within the academy and in the public and policy spheres.**

RaRiE's ambition then -- the 'step-change' it offers -- lies *both* in developing a new approach to comparative penology *and* in using that new approach to reshape how rehabilitation is understood and developed in Europe. The specific objectives for each work package, and for the overarching DCP approach are as follows:

Work Package 1: The Rehabilitative Ideal

- **Objective 1:** To synthesise existing literature in order to explain how the rehabilitative ideal has been understood, constructed, contested and represented in each country.

Work Package 2: The Scale and Shape of Rehabilitation

- **Objective 2:** To map and measure what forms of rehabilitation (material, personal, legal, civic-political, moral and social) exist and are pursued in each country, at what scale, and at what cost.

Work Package 3: Rehabilitative Technologies

- **Objective 3:** To examine and assess how, in which forms, and to what extent, rehabilitation is operationalised via technologies (including tools and techniques) in each country.

Work Package 4: Practices and Experiences of Rehabilitation

- **Objective 4:** To understand how rehabilitation is understood and experienced by those directly involved in its everyday practices (i.e. those practising and those undergoing rehabilitation) in each country.

Dialogical Comparative Penology (DCP):

- **Objective 5:** Working dialogically with project participants *within countries*, to assess the vertical coherence of rehabilitation within each across the 4 work packages (e.g. by assessing to what extent rationalities, technologies, practices and experiences of rehabilitation align, and to what extent do they aim at or produce different effects).
- **Objective 6:** Working dialogically with project participants *across countries*, to explore 'horizontal' similarities and differences revealed in the 4 work package areas, and to critically assess their significance.
- **Objective 7:** Working dialogically with project participants *within and across countries*, to examine whether and in what ways rehabilitation should be developed in each country, between countries and more broadly.

Methodology

Proposed methodology

To achieve these 7 objectives requires using the team of expert and emerging researchers that I will assemble to blend my interdisciplinary, creative and cutting-edge work on rehabilitation and reintegration with recent advances in comparative penology (to which all three named team members have contributed significantly), using the six-forms model as a framework for comparative analysis of the nature and impact of rehabilitation in these three states, and opening up possibilities of still broader comparative analysis within Europe.

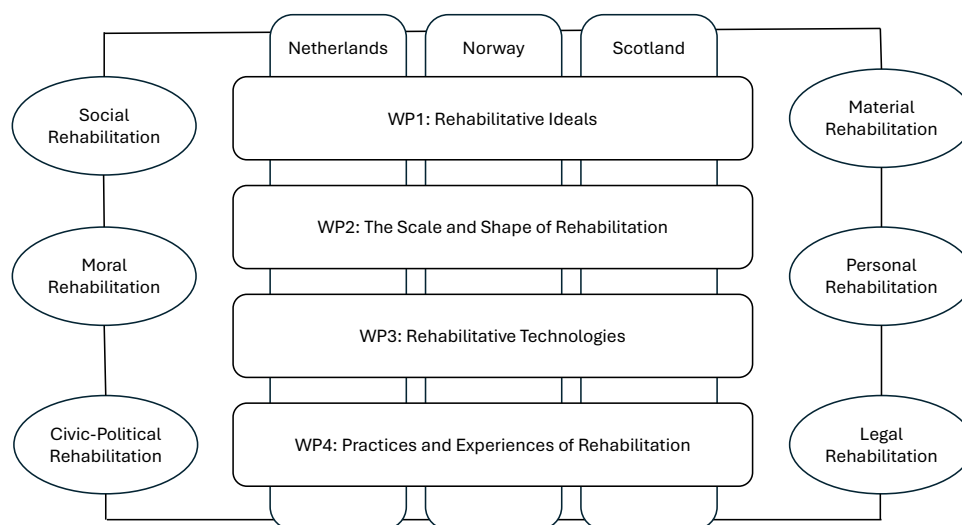


Figure 1: RaRiE Research Design

Work Package and Research Question 1: How has the rehabilitative ideal been understood, constructed, contested and represented in each country?

WP1 is literature- and desk-based. Early in the life of the project, I will work with the senior members of the team, [Prof Boone \(in Leiden\)](#) and [Prof Ugelvik \(in Oslo\)](#), to produce a comprehensive synthesis of existing academic work and, where relevant, grey literature that discusses how the rehabilitative ideal has been understood and constructed in each country, and how these versions of the rehabilitative ideal differ. This review will be, essentially, a much-extended elaboration of the ‘state-of-the-art’ review above. Each of us will write a similarly structured synthesis for our own country, and we will then co-write a comparative analysis of the literature as a whole. While we will focus on the 21st century, necessary attention will be paid to the histories of rehabilitation in each country.

Work Package and Research Question 2: What types of rehabilitation exist, at what scale, and at what cost?

WP2 will involve sourcing and analysing official governmental and criminal justice system data, for example, about the size and socio-demographic profiles of prison and probation populations and their rehabilitative needs, but also about the staffing of their correctional services, their spending on correctional services in general, and, crucially, their spending on rehabilitative services and practices within these services. Some such data is already available via existing European and international projects (SPACE I and II statistics; World Prison Brief; Probation in Europe handbook). However, a key part of this project’s innovation (and legacy) will be the development of new metrics for measuring and profiling rehabilitation in each country using the six forms model. All these metrics will be compared across countries, to the extent that comparable data allows this. [Associate Prof Wermink](#) will co-supervise this project with me.

In relation to **personal rehabilitation**, WP2 will analyse correctional systems data, for example, about levels of prisoner/probationer participation in rehabilitative programmes and services, other ‘purposeful activities’ (including for example, prison-based arts projects), and about associated costs. Some of this data is already in the public domain, for example, via inspection reports. Some outcome data is also available. In relation to **moral rehabilitation**, it will explore levels and types of participation in related mediation and restorative justice activities in each country, their costs and, if possible, their outcomes. On **civic and political rehabilitation**, it will seek and examine data about participation in voting (and other forms of political engagement) by justice-involved people, and whether, how and at what cost this is facilitated. Regarding

legal rehabilitation, it will explore the nature, reach and outcomes of criminal records checks and the expenditure on related systems. Regarding **material rehabilitation**, it will seek and, where available, examine data about the financial and living circumstances of people serving community sentences or released from custody, and about state investment in their reintegration (e.g., release grants, public assistance, housing provision). In relation to **social rehabilitation**, it will review existing survey data about public attitudes to punishment and reintegration in each country and explore the scale of third sector/NGO activity and investment in reintegration.

Work Package and Research Question 3: How and in what forms is rehabilitation operationalised via new and old technologies?

Within correctional systems, the process of rehabilitation typically involves assessment of risks and needs to inform the development of case-plans or action-plans at the individual level. Increasingly, these tasks have been structured via instruments (i.e., risk-need assessment tools) that are commissioned by correctional services and administered by their staff. At the organisational level, such data is sometimes aggregated to inform service design and delivery. Interventions have also become increasingly structured, for example via accredited, manualised groupwork programmes or specific approaches to 1-1 work and/or via the commissioning of rehabilitative services from outside bodies (whether for-profit or not-for-profit).

Digital technologies have enabled new kinds of intervention; for example, supporting changes in behaviour (or compliance with court orders) via smart-phone apps and/or remote electronic monitoring not just of location but also, via biometrics, of alcohol or drug use. Evaluation tools are also sometimes commissioned and employed, as are independent evaluations of new rehabilitative initiatives. Through examination of the public records about service commissioning of rehabilitative technologies, products and services, and through interviews and focus groups with their commissioners, designers and providers (n=10 in each country), WP3 will explore what forms of rehabilitation these technologies pursue, and at what scale and cost.

Work Package and Research Question 4: How is rehabilitation understood and experienced by those directly involved in its everyday practices (i.e., those designing, those practising, and those undergoing rehabilitation)?

Work packages 1-3 focus mainly on different aspects of *formal* accounts of and approaches to rehabilitation in each country. As such, they will clarify ‘official’ understandings of the rehabilitative ideal (WP1) and how it is being pursued (WP2 and WP3). However, as the ‘state-of-the-art’ review made clear, ‘bottom-up’ exploration of the micro-level, informal and *lived experience* of punishment is also crucial to complement and (perhaps) challenge such accounts.

To that end, WP4 will involve direct research with three different kinds of human participants in rehabilitation. We will conduct individual or (if appropriate) group interviews with relevant justice leaders (politicians, civil servants, senior managers of prison and probation services, third sector leaders, prominent activists)(n=15), with frontline practitioners (n=25) and with people receiving (or who have recently received) rehabilitative services (n=25) in each country. In total therefore, and including the small number of WP3 interviews, this means that the project will involve about 225 participants across the three countries.

The project’s three PhDs will be focused primarily on the conduct and analysis of the interviews with frontline practitioners and those receiving rehabilitative services.

The sub-sample sizes and the sampling approach aim not for statistical representativeness but rather to span important dimensions of diversity within these three sub-populations (including for example, age, experience, gender, ethnicity and nationality), and to allow for the kind of well-contextualised and deep dialogical engagement with them that generates ‘thick description’ and analytical generalisability. The

conduct of the interviews will also involve visits to primary sites of rehabilitation (prison and probation settings, and government and correctional service HQs) which, subject to permission and ethical clearance, could add useful observational data about environmental, architectural, and organisational-cultural contexts in which rehabilitation is pursued.

Subsequently, WP4 will also involve 2-day-long creative workshops with 15-20 self-selected participants from across three sub-groups of WP4 participants mentioned above. One such workshop is planned within each country. These workshops will employ and develop the creative methods used so successfully in my previous work. Co-facilitated by me with at least one arts practitioner (from the country in question), the workshops will allow participants a different way to reflect upon, relate and represent their own experiences of realising rehabilitation (whether as leaders, practitioners, or people in prison or on probation), by co-creating artworks. The creative methods to be employed will be chosen in dialogue with the research team and the workshop participants, but my experience includes the use of photovoice methods (Fitzgibbon, Gräbsch and McNeill, 2017), of creative writing (McNeill 2018), and of collaborative song-writing (McNeill and Urie, 2020, Urie, et al., 2019). With their permission, again drawing on my previous experience, I also intend to use the artworks that they create both in the process of dialogical comparative analysis (see next section) and in within- and between-country engagement activities with policymakers, professionals and wider publics.

Developing Dialogical Comparative Penology (DCP)

The study deploys a multi-methods design across three jurisdictions and across the specified 5-year timeframe. Deploying a ‘constant comparison inquiry’ approach (Maxwell, 2012) to data analysis will ensure that different kinds of data generated from our multi-methods approach across different sites are interpreted iteratively. As Fig.1 (above) suggests, the project will build our datasets and employ software (SPSS, NVivo) to allow analysis of **vertical consistency and coherence** (i.e., to what extent is the rehabilitative ideal in each country consistent with how it is designed, delivered and experienced there?) and to analyse **horizontal similarity and difference** in each work package. The integration of the different methods at each stage will require an interactive and iterative approach, so that initial insights from the WP1 literature synthesis, the WP2 secondary analysis of datasets metrics, and the WP3 interviews and documentary analyses, will inform and shape the approach to WP4 (for example, including the sampling strategy and the interview and workshop designs). Inter-country dialogue engagement activities will be timed so that they can draw successively from each of the work packages, but particularly from WP4.

Drawing on my previous work, and as already noted in relation to WP4, the project will periodically involve research participants in creative workshops aimed at deepening our within-country analyses. In addition, shorter online **Dialogical Comparative Penology (DCP) workshops** will also be convened, most likely lasting about 2-3 hours (including breaks). These will involve all three types of WP4 participants from all three countries. This will be an innovation in comparative penological research, intended to engage participants (15-20 in each workshop) directly in the process of making comparisons between the different countries. These DCP workshops will be facilitated by me and my two senior colleagues (Profs Boone and Ugelvik), with support from the post-doc RF. **The PhD researchers will also be important contributors.**

The DCP approach is designed to address existing critiques of comparative penological research discussed above (e.g., predominance of the formal systems and structures of the nation state as the unit of analysis, as well as tendencies towards ethnocentrism and relativism [cf. Nelken, 2009; Brangan, 2020], and an insufficient focus on how systems and practices are enacted and experienced in practice [cf. Crewe et al., 2023]). Our interpretative policy-practice-experience analysis frame places emphasis on the meaning and value that participants at various levels place on their experiences and practices (cf. Annison, 2018). The dialogical approach accords with our insistence on examining both formal and informal, official and unofficial, accounts of rehabilitation.

Engagement Activities

In our dissemination and engagement processes, we will also work with Ministries of Justice, correctional services, trade unions, professional associations, penal reform and/or abolitionist groups and ‘user voice’ organisations to share the findings and discuss their implications. These **day-long symposia** events will focus on the practical (i.e. non-academic) implications of our analyses and on enhancing the project’s impact. By so doing I hope and expect to clarify what kinds of changes are required to improve (or indeed, replace) rehabilitation in of the three countries (and further afield). To extend the direct inter-country dialogue enabled via the DCP workshops, we will invite 6 participants from the other two countries (2 leaders, 2 practitioners and 2 people with lived experience) to travel between countries to attend these symposia.

Project Timeline and Milestones

The project timeline in Fig.2 (below) outlines the sequencing of activities, quarter-by-quarter, across the 5-year timespan. The milestones for each year are as follows:

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16	Q17	Q18	Q19	Q20
Project set-up																				
Work Package 1																				
Work Package 2																				
Work Package 3																				
Work Package 4																				
Dialogical Comparative Analysis																				
Engagement & Dissemination Activities																				

Figure 2: RaRiE Project Timeline

Project management and roles

The project team will comprise 8 researchers and, importantly, one part-time administrator. The interactions of the primary roles of each member are illustrated in Fig.3 (below). The administrator, based at Glasgow will play a key role in helping me (and other researchers) in managing the complex logistics of all the research activities (including travel, workshops and events), communications, and in relation to project-related IT, data protection and data management. The post-doctoral fellow, also based at Glasgow, will be supervised by me, but will also work closely with Associate Prof Wermink (on WP2) and with Profs. Boone and Ugelvik for the duration of the project. The PhD researchers will all be co-supervised by me, with Prof Boone taking the lead role for the Leiden-based PhD and Prof Ugelvik for the Oslo-based PhD. Each of us will also be assisted by other co-supervisors in our own institutions, who will bring added value and expertise (at no additional cost). To develop as a team, and to ensure effective teamwork, we will meet as a full team on a quarterly basis, alternating online and in-person meetings (across the 3 sites).

- **McNeill's** role is to lead and manage the whole project. This includes supervisory responsibilities for the administrator, the RF and the three PhDs. I will also lead on negotiation and liaison with external partners, particularly in Scotland. I will undertake WP1 with Boone and Ugelvik, will undertake the Scottish 'justice leader' interviews in WP4 and will lead both the 3 WP4 creative workshops and the 3 DCP workshops. I will also lead the comparative analysis of WP3 and WP4 and of the project overall, as well as the engagement activities. I will also be responsible for planning and ensuring delivery of the academic and non-academic outputs.
- **Boone's** and **Ugelvik's** roles are to lead and manage all elements of the project in their countries, including by supervising the PhDs in Leiden and Oslo respectively. They will also co-supervise one of the other PhDs. They will lead on negotiation and liaison with external partners in their countries, undertake WP1 with me, conduct the 'justice leader' interviews in WP4 and co-lead with me the WP4 creative workshops in their countries, and the 3 DCP workshops. Boone and Ugelvik will co-lead (with me) engagement activities in their countries, as well as contributing to academic and non-academic outputs. Boone will co-lead with me the comparative analysis of WP3 and WP4 and of the project overall (hence her greater time commitment).
- **Wermink's** role is to bring her expertise on working with and integrating large administrative datasets for criminological projects (focused on different dimensions of reintegration) to support the post-doc RF in the successful delivery of WP2. She will remain involved with the project to support the 'vertical' integration of WP2 analyses with the other WPs within each country, as well as in the overall comparative analysis.
- The post-doc **RF** will be based in Glasgow. Their key role will be to take overall responsibility for delivering all aspects of WP2 (with Associate Prof Wermink and me) and to contribute to all comparative analytical activities across the work packages. Towards the end of the project, they will also have responsibility for preparing datasets for archiving.

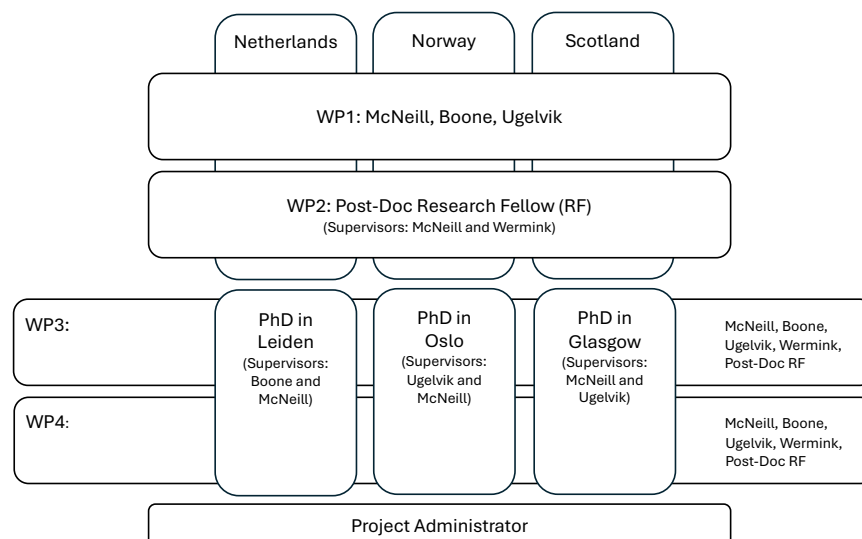


Figure 3: Project Roles

- The **Glasgow PhD's** main role is to undertake a PhD which addresses the Scottish elements of WP3 and WP4 (excluding the 'justice leader' interviews and the creative workshop). They will also contribute to DCP workshops and engagement activities and will have opportunities to engage – as far as they are able -- with the comparative aspects of the project. The **Leiden and Oslo PhDs** fulfil the same role in the Netherlands and in Norway that the Glasgow PhD fulfils in Scotland.
- The **Project Administrator** will be based at Glasgow and will play a key role in helping me (and other researchers) in managing the complex logistics of all the research activities (including travel, workshops

and events), communications, and in relation to project-related IT (including a project website/blog, data protection, data management and will contribute to preparing datasets for archiving.

Publication and exploitation of results

The inter-disciplinary nature of our subject affords us many potential avenues for publication. I expect the team (or members of the team) to publish 10-12 journal articles or book chapters in high-impact peer-reviewed journals such as *Punishment and Society*, the *European Journal of Criminology*, the *British Journal of Criminology*, *Criminology and Criminal Justice* and/or *Theoretical Criminology*. In determining authorship or co-authorship of outputs, we will adhere to the latest (2024) version of the Vancouver Recommendations (which are also reflected in the University of Glasgow's Code of Good Practice in Research).¹ The 3 PhD students will produce their theses as standalone, sole-authored works that relate only to the data they will collect and analyse. I will encourage and support them in sole-authored publications arising from their PhDs and will ensure they are listed appropriately as co-authors on all comparative papers to which they contribute. The RF will lead on WP2 related publications and, unless others contribute more significantly to co-authored outputs, will be their lead author. I will lead the production of a co-authored book (involving the whole team), provisionally entitled '*Comparing Rehabilitation: Doing good, doing harm, doing better*', providing an overview of the project's methods, findings and analyses, to be published by a prestigious academic publisher.

In addition, the project will produce significant outputs aimed primarily at professional and public audiences. I expect that the project (particularly WP2) will enable us to develop tools that can help both researchers, policymakers, professionals and activists to critically assess the scale, shape and quality of rehabilitative activity and investment within their countries, helping to identify both areas of good practice and areas in need of development.

I will use 'knowledge exchange' and 'impact' funding in the participating universities to support the cost of creating a virtual (online) exhibition of the artefacts created in the workshops and will use existing podcast series (for example, within the Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research: <https://www.sccjr.ac.uk/news-events/podcast/>) to further promote our work.

¹ The Vancouver recommendations can be accessed here: <https://www.icmje.org/icmje-recommendations.pdf>. The University of Glasgow's Code of Good Practice in Research can be accessed here: <https://www.gla.ac.uk/research/strategy/ourpolicies/codeofgoodpracticeinresearch/>