

## Module specification

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|                             |                                                                         |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Module Code</b>          | SOC736                                                                  |
| <b>Module Title</b>         | Penal Power, Policy and Practice: Critical Perspectives on Imprisonment |
| <b>Level</b>                | 7                                                                       |
| <b>Credit value</b>         | 30 Credits                                                              |
| <b>Faculty</b>              | FSLS                                                                    |
| <b>HECoS Code</b>           | 100484                                                                  |
| <b>Cost Code</b>            | GACJ                                                                    |
| <b>Pre-requisite module</b> | NA                                                                      |

### Programmes in which module to be offered

| <b>Programme title</b> | <b>Core/Optional/Standalone</b> |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| MA Criminology         | Optional                        |

### Breakdown of module hours

|                                                             |                |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| Learning and teaching hours                                 | 21 hrs         |
| Placement tutor support hours                               | 0 hrs          |
| Supervised learning hours e.g. practical classes, workshops | 0 hrs          |
| Project supervision hours                                   | 0 hrs          |
| <b>Active learning and teaching hours total</b>             | <b>21 hrs</b>  |
| Placement hours                                             | 0 hrs          |
| Guided independent study hours                              | 279 hrs        |
| <b>Module duration (Total hours)</b>                        | <b>300 hrs</b> |

### Module aims

This module aims to:

- Critically examine the nature, function and evolution of penal power within contemporary criminal justice systems
- Analyse the relationship between imprisonment, state authority and social control within a UK and comparative context
- Interrogate the development, implementation and impact of prison policy and practice
- Explore competing theoretical perspectives on punishment, including abolitionist, reformist and managerial approaches

- Develop students' ability to critically evaluate the lived realities of imprisonment alongside institutional and policy frameworks
- Enhance students' capacity to apply advanced criminological theory to real-world penal issues and debates

## Module Learning Outcomes

At the end of this module, students will be able to:

|   |                                                                                                                                             |
|---|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Critically analyse key theoretical perspectives on penal power and their application to contemporary imprisonment.                          |
| 2 | Evaluate the impact of prison policy within the UK, situating it within broader political, social and historical contexts.                  |
| 3 | Critically assess the relationship between penal practice, governance and the exercise of state power.                                      |
| 4 | Explore the lived experience of imprisonment through engagement with empirical research and critical scholarship.                           |
| 5 | Synthesise and apply theoretical and policy insights to contemporary debates on the future of imprisonment, including reform and abolition. |

## Assessment

Indicative Assessment Tasks:

This module uses a research-informed and applied assessment approach appropriate to Level 7 study. Students will be required to demonstrate advanced critical analysis, evaluate contemporary policy and engage with and apply existing research to real-world penal issues.

### Assessment 1: Critical Policy Essay

Students will produce a critical essay that examines a contemporary issue in imprisonment, selected from topics covered within the module (e.g. rehabilitation, risk, overcrowding, inequality, abolition, prison alternatives or the future of prisons).

The assessment will require students to:

- Critically apply relevant theoretical perspectives
- Evaluate current prison policy and practice within the UK context
- Engage with contemporary academic research, practice and lived experience insight
- Develop and justify a clear, evidence-based argument regarding the issue

| Assessment number | Learning Outcomes to be met | Type of assessment | Duration/Word Count | Weighting (%) | Alternative assessment, if applicable |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1                 | 1-5                         | Written Assignment | 4,000 words         | 100%          | N/A                                   |

## Derogations

None.

## Learning and Teaching Strategies

This module will be delivered through a combination of pre-recorded online lectures and guided independent study, aligned with the Active Learning Framework.

### Teaching approaches will include:

- Lectures to introduce key theoretical frameworks (e.g. penal power, governmentality, late modern penalty)
- Case-based learning, using real-world prison policy and practice scenarios
- Research-led teaching, drawing on contemporary academic literature and staff expertise
- Practice and lived experience-informed insights, including potential guest input (e.g. practitioners, researchers, lived experience insight and third-sector organisations linked to imprisonment)
- Structured independent learning, including directed reading, policy analysis and assessment preparation

The module emphasises critical dialogue, debate and reflexive thinking and encourages students to challenge dominant assumptions about imprisonment.

## Welsh Elements

Students will be able to engage with this module in line with institutional Welsh language provision. This includes the ability to:

- Submit assessments in Welsh
- Access learning materials and support bilingually where available

Where appropriate, the module will also encourage consideration of Welsh-specific criminal justice policy and practice, including devolved contexts and prison provision in Wales.

## Indicative Syllabus Outline

- Foundations of punishment and penal theory (classical to contemporary perspectives)
- The concept of penal power: state authority, legitimacy and social control
- Michel Foucault and the governance of punishment (discipline, surveillance, governmentality)
- Late modern penalty and the “punitive turn” (risk, security, populism)
- The political economy of imprisonment (austerity, privatisation, managerialism)
- Prison policy in the UK: development, drivers and contemporary challenges
- The prison as institution: power, control, legitimacy and resistance
- Lived experiences of imprisonment (race, gender, class and inequality)
- Rehabilitation, desistance and the limits of reform

- Alternatives to imprisonment: community sanctions, decarceration
- Abolitionist perspectives and critiques of the prison system
- The future of imprisonment: crisis, reform or transformation?

### Indicative Bibliography

Please note the essential reads and other indicative reading are subject to annual review and update.

#### Essential Reads:

Foucault, M. (1977) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. London: Penguin.

Jewkes, Y., Bennett, J. and Crewe, B. (2016) *The Handbook on Prisons: Prisons and Punishment*.  
Foucault, M. (1977) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. London: Penguin.

Jewkes, Y., Bennett, J. and Crewe, B. (2016) *The Handbook on Prisons: Prisons and Punishment*.  
3rd edn. London: Routledge.

Scott, D. and Flynn, N. (2014) *The Prison and the Penal System*. London: Sage.

Sykes, G.M. (1958) *The Society of Captives: A Study of a Maximum Security Prison*. Princeton,  
NJ: Princeton University Press.

Wooldredge, J. and Smith, P. (eds) (2018) *The Oxford Handbook of Prisons and Imprisonment*.  
Oxford: Oxford University Press.

#### Other indicative reading:

Crewe, B. (2011) 'Depth, weight, tightness: Revisiting the pains of imprisonment', *Punishment & Society*, 13(5), pp. 509–529.

Crewe, B. (2021) *Life Imprisonment from Young Adulthood: Adaptation, Identity and Time*.  
London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Garland, D. (2001) *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society*.  
Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jewkes, Y. (2015) *Prisons and Punishment*. 2nd edn. London: Routledge.

Liebling, A. (2004) *Prisons and Their Moral Performance: A Study of Values, Quality, and Prison Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Liebling, A., Arnold, H. and Straub, C. (2011) *The Prison Officer*. 2nd edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ministry of Justice (various years) *Statistics and research reports*. Available at:  
<https://www.gov.uk>

Prison Reform Trust (various years) *Reports on prison conditions and policy*. Available at:  
<https://prisonreformtrust.org.uk>

Wacquant, L. (2009) *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity*.  
Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

### Administrative Information

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|------------------------------|----------------|
| Initial approval date        | June 2026      |
| With effect from date        | September 2026 |
| Date and details of revision |                |
| Version number               | 1              |