Summit Report

European Justice Education & Leadership Summit
17 - 18 September 2026
VHS PAHO, Vienna, Austria

Introduction

The European Justice Education and Leadership Summit brought together a diverse range of international experts, practitioners, and leaders to address the evolving landscape of correctional services and leadership development. Organised by Richtungswechsel and co-hosted by Grow Transform Belong (GTB), and Smart Corrections, the founding organisations behind the Champions Community, the Summit served as a collaborative platform dedicated to advancing humane, growth-oriented, and resilient prison cultures across Europe.
Over the course of the Summit, participants engaged with pressing structural challenges facing modern justice systems, including resource constraints, technological shifts, and complex staff retention dynamics. By connecting senior leadership, middle management, civil society, and international bodies such as the UNODC and the Council of Europe, the event highlighted the critical importance of values-anchored leadership, continuous professional development, and cross-border knowledge exchange. Central to these discussions was the shared recognition that correctional staff represents the cornerstone of sustainable reform, and that meaningful cultural change relies on collective strength, psychological safety, and small, human-centered interactions.

Presentations of the Summit

This section outlines the core content and contributions of the European Justice Education and Leadership Summit, setting the stage for the in-depth summaries that follow.
The event brought together a wide range of experts and stakeholders from across Europe and beyond, including representatives from correctional services, ministries of justice, academic institutions, non-governmental organisations, probation services, and international governing bodies. Through a combination of keynote addresses, panel discussions, and interactive Dialogue Islands, speakers shared key insights on leadership development, human rights integration, and organisational transformation.

The following pages provide a summary of each presentation and panel session, including selected quotes, key arguments, and recurring themes that defined the Summit.

Day 1 - 17th of September 2026

Welcome and Opening Speeches:

- **Tamara Höfer** (Founder and CEO of Richtungswechsel)
- **Dr. Sarah Lewis** (Founder and Director of Grow, Transform, Belong)
- **Steven Van de Steene** (Founder of Smart Corrections)

The European Justice Education and Leadership Summit was opened by Tamara Höfer, founder and CEO of Richtungswechsel, an Austrian non-profit organisation dedicated to staff professionalisation, leadership development and culture change in prison services; Dr Sarah Lewis, founder and director of Grow Transform Belong (GTB), a non-profit community interest company that strives to serve the community by providing services that empower people and organisations, to grow and connect, and Steven Van de Steene, founder of Smart Corrections, a consultancy specialising designing and governing the digital ecosystems that make real change possible within correctional services. The three organisations jointly run the Champions Community, building an international community of professionals committed to growth-oriented prison cultures. The Champions Community strives to empower prison leaders to act with vision, compassion & accountability with the ambition to grow a movement of Champions driving lasting cultural change in prison services.
The Champions Community started by piloting their one-year leadership project that empowers middle managers to lead with vision, empathy, and accountability inside detention facilities. Participants from Germany, Malta, and the Czech Republic benefited from leadership training, peer collaboration and mentoring. The programme is steered by Richtungswechsel, rooted in the growth methodology by GTB, while Smart Corrections contributes to the digital environment for knowledge access and continued exchange between participants and alumni.

Presentation Summary: Philipp Meissner, Interregional Advisor at the Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Section, UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

Philipp Meissner, a representative of UNODC who has served the organisation for nearly 20 years, delivered the Summit's opening speech and welcomed participants to Vienna, one of the United Nations' four headquarters. Mr. Meissner further described the city as the origin of internationally recognised minimum standards for the management of correctional facilities and the treatment of incarcerated individuals. In his speech, Mr. Meissner noted a shift from punitive towards rehabilitative approaches, while pointing out that justice systems continues to face considerable structural challenges, including:

- **Persistent overcrowding** in a majority of member states.
- **Inadequate staffing and infrastructure,** and environments that do not provide sufficient safety and security.
- **New developments** such as the use of technology in corrections, climate change disruptions, armed conflict, and prison-based organised crime.

Mr. Meissner explained that, as an international organisation, UNODC works within a changing international landscape. Evidence and statistics increasingly meet perceived realities, complex analyses meet simple solutions, consistent demands meet shrinking resources, and long-standing parameters are openly questioned. Against this background, he introduced the concept of resilient leadership with its core elements:

- Stability under pressure
- Adaptive capacity
- Values-anchored action
- Collective strength

Particular emphasis was placed on **adaptation** and on **values-anchored action**. Adaptation includes adjusting how the sector communicates its work to gain support from policymakers and the public.

"Resilient leadership [is] an ability to absorb pressure without losing clarity [and] to adapt without losing direction"

In conclusion, Mr. Meissner emphasised the importance of collective strength, with the Summit itself serving as a prime example. Staff were identified as the most valuable resource in any prison system. Detention facilities and probation services must receive support from other government entities, civil society, the private sector, and academia.

Presentation Summary: Gustav Tallving, Executive Director of EuroPris

What Difficult Experiences Can Teach Us That Success Never Will

Gustav Tallving opened his keynote with a deeply personal reflection on his career. After 17 years in Swedish correctional facilities and the probation service, where he held operational, research, and development roles, he joined EuroPris. Tracing his path from his first summer job in a Stockholm remand prison to senior leadership, he explored what moments of failure and vulnerability can teach leaders that success alone cannot.

"Acting as an authentic leader will support the resilience of your team."

Mr. Tallving drew several lessons from his experiences:

- Employees should have the real and effective **possibility to highlight concerns to higher management**, including concerns about senior management
- Strong professional performance can conceal personal difficulties and should not be taken as an indicator of well-being
- Effective intervention may require **leaders to move beyond their personal comfort zone**
- Staff reports about irregularities, whether personal or organisational, should be taken seriously
- **Success and failure are not opposites** but complementary sources of information

Mr. Tallving concluded that his patterns are more deeply rooted than he had previously believed: Leadership development includes broadening his understanding of success. He now regards acknowledging vulnerability and personal trauma as a strength rather than a deficit. Whilst his commitment to fairness and integrity remains unchanged, success now encompasses more than control and visible outcomes. It also involves recognising fragility, ambiguity, and the limits of what we can do.
In the subsequent discussion, Mr. Tallving attributed the strong emphasis on performance indicators to New Public Management, noting that current staffing shortages are prompting organisations to focus increasingly on retention and care, and that leaders must raise these issues proactively to create cultural change.

Presentation Summary: Olivia Rope, Executive Director, Penal Reform International

The Human Rights Imperative

Olivia Rope, a human rights lawyer and leader of Penal Reform International (PRI), opened her keynote by outlining the organisation's work on the rights of people in contact with the justice system. PRI combines policy development, practical projects in various countries, and advocacy. Ms. Rope explained that the organisation was founded in 1989 by Ahmed Otmani, who had been incarcerated and tortured in Tunisia for his political activism. Following his release, he worked with Amnesty International, where the organisation's focus at the time was on people detained for political reasons. He concluded that the rights of all people in detention must be protected, irrespective of the reason for their detention. This principle remains the foundation of PRI's work.

"[The] right to dignity needs to be central to leadership, for it to be effective and humane."

Ms. Rope emphasised that protecting human rights is a legal responsibility of justice leaders, owed to every person, and is neither optional nor merely a matter of good practice. She presented the following key points:

- The prohibition of torture and ill-treatment (Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights) is a **central reference point** for standards on issues such as solitary confinement.
- **Security and human rights are not opposites**, as any restriction must be legal, necessary, and proportionate.
- Openness to external scrutiny, civil society, and people with lived experience, as well as less rigid hierarchies, is a **precondition for change.**
- Derogatory terms should be replaced, as **language affects dignity**.
- **International and regional standards provide clarity and a safety net** for leaders and can help secure political and budgetary support.

Ms. Rope also noted that justice systems are currently under considerable pressure from armed conflicts, increasingly stringent criminal justice policies, staff shortages, and funding cuts. She added that human rights standards are being questioned with increasing frequency, noting that these circumstances make adherence to such standards increasingly important. Ms. Rope concluded by emphasising the value of open exchange among professionals from different fields and countries.

Presentation Summary: Petra Mifsud Scicluna, Forensic psychologist at the Correctional Services Agency, Malta & Malta Champion

The Champions of Change

Petra Scicluna, a forensic psychologist and middle manager at the Correctional Services Agency, Malta, shared her experience as a Malta Champion in the Champions Community Programme. After years of academic study and working directly with individuals in detention, she transitioned into a middle-management role that required her to consider the needs of people in prison, correctional officers, professional staff, and the broader custodial environment simultaneously. She described feeling disoriented and uncertain in this new role, as well as isolated as a female, non-custodial professional in middle management.
When Ms. Scicluna joined the programme, she was sceptical that a community spanning different countries, roles, and backgrounds could function effectively.

Over time, however, she discovered that experiences and frustrations she had considered unique to her were, in fact, shared by others, despite differences in their workplaces and prison cultures. Gradually, the group developed into a genuine community:

"What initially felt like a group of guarded individuals has become a space where we feel connected, supported, and united by a shared belief that change is possible across countries, cultures, languages, roles, and backgrounds."

The one-year programme extended beyond twelve months and combined online learning modules with three one-week residential periods, one in each partner country, namely Germany, Czechia, and Malta. Although the online learning modules introduced the frameworks and theories underpinning cultural change, Ms. Scicluna found that theory alone was insufficient to transform a culture. The residential programmes provided the essential link: Through formal instruction, group work, prison visits, and informal exchanges, participants shared practical solutions in an open, empowering, and compassionate environment.
Upon returning to her institution, Ms. Scicluna brought together correctional officers and other professionals to develop proposals for change. This collaboration led to initiatives that created new opportunities for those incarcerated. For Ms. Scicluna, these moments made cultural change tangible, as the boundaries between staff and their different roles began to soften.

She highlighted the following insights:

- **Cultural change builds on repeated small interactions** rather than just on major institutional reforms.
- "Growth groups" of correctional officers and professional staff led to **initiatives in which staff and incarcerated individuals interacted differently**.
- Her roles as psychologist and manager should **reinforce rather than compete**.
- Sustainable **change depends on the confidence and ownership of many people**, not on a single person or initiative.
- Setbacks are part of the process and **do not indicate that change is impossible.**

Ms. Scicluna concluded that, although she may not be able to change a system on her own, she can initiate a conversation, create an opportunity, and influence a relationship. In her view, cultural change begins not with one person transforming everything, but with *people choosing to change something & doing so together.*

Videopremiere, Boo Xinying

Boo Xinying, a Singaporean filmmaker and game designer based in London, produced the Champions Community Film. This 10-minute short film explains the project's rationale to foster a community of cultural leaders in prisons across Germany, Czechia, and Malta, and to share the stories and testimonies of the Champions. In the film, Victor Galea reflects on the project:

"At the end of the day, it's a win-win situation. It's not just us officers. It's connecting and understanding ways to better prison. And if you better prison, you're bettering it for staff and people residing inside of it."

Xinying explained their goal as a storyteller: Doing justice to the thoughtfulness, authenticity, and compassion of the Champions, and to inspire others to join the mission.

Panel Discussion: Journey of Change

The first panel of the Summit brought together three operational leaders whose work is closely connected to mentoring and professional development in correctional facilities to discuss the elements required to create lasting change for correctional staff and incarcerated individuals. The panel comprised:

- **Kat Gartland** (Ambassador Network Manager at Unlocked Graduates)
- **Charlie Abbott** (Head of Performance and Assurance at His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service and Growth Champion)
- **Lukáš** (Deputy Head of the Penitentiary Department at Pardubice Prison at the Czech Prison Service and Czech Champion)

Panellists described how their perspectives have evolved through their work as operational leaders. Explaining why change in prisons is challenging, owing to high staff turnover, change fatigue, fear of the unknown, and political and media pressure, they also shared how understanding, compassion, and leading by example may engage sceptical colleagues. All panellists emphasised the importance of understanding the lived experiences of people in custody, as well as the value of coaching, mentoring, and study visits to other correctional facilities for staff development and inspiration. Finally, the panellists urged senior leaders to provide passionate staff with the time, support, and investment needed to sustain change over the long term.

Panel Discussion: Leadership on the Senior Level

The panel convened senior leaders from the correctional field and change management to examine how leadership can support cultural change within correctional services. Panellists included:

- **Beverley Wall** (Director General of the Northern Ireland Prison Service)
- **Torben Adams** (Head of Division at the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, Bremen, Germany)
- **Bella Atkinson** (Associate Director of the ChangeMakers programme at Unlocked Graduates)

The central themes included the shift towards people-centred, visible leadership, the importance of understanding frontline realities and consulting staff, and the decisive role of middle managers, whose development, support, and recognition are essential to achieving lasting change. The discussion underscored the need for psychological safety, including scope for error except in cases involving human rights violations or security-critical matters, as well as the need to foster ownership rather than mere compliance while balancing high standards with innovation.
Panellists also addressed partnerships with community services, civil society, and international networks, the involvement of people with lived experience, and the importance of providing candid advice when managing political expectations. Examples of cultural change included small-scale interventions (such as staff forums) and legislative support mechanisms (such as Bremen's rehabilitation-oriented prison legislation). In closing, the panellists identified the capabilities they would prioritise in leadership development, namely a sense of possibility, humility, integrity, and adaptability.

Panel Discussion: The Training of Leadership

The final panel discussion of the day brought together experts in correctional services and training to examine how future prison leaders can be prepared to navigate complex and evolving work environments. The panellists included:

- **Marc Cerón Riera** (Director General of the Centre for Legal Studies and Specialised Training, Catalonia, Spain)
- **Kim Ekhaugen** (Director of International Cooperation in the Correctional Service, Norway)
- **Nim Gill** (Consultant and Keynote Speaker with lived experience)

The central themes included the role of international learning and the adaptation, rather than mere replication, of practices from other countries, the importance of trust-based management, and the significance of staff well-being for safety and motivation. Panellists emphasised that staff are the most important resource in any correctional system, as only motivated staff can motivate those in their care. The discussion also highlighted the value of small, relationship-building interactions between staff and incarcerated individuals, the integration of lived experience into training curricula, and the need to prepare leaders for pressures at the operational, human, and institutional levels. Panellists concluded leadership development as a continuous process that combines classroom learning, practical experience, and reflection.

Closing: Reflection and Outlook

- **Steven van de Steene** (Founder of Smart Corrections)
- **Dr. Sarah Lewis** (Founder and Director of Grow, Transform, Belong)

The first day of the Summit concluded with a reflection on the insights and lessons gained. Key takeaways included the importance of collective strength and collaboration, the motivating impact of personal testimonies, the experiences of the Champions Community, and discussions on leadership at various levels. The speakers noted that the day began with challenges, including feelings of powerlessness, work-related pressures, and staff retention concerns, but gradually shifted its focus toward strengths and achievements. They concluded by encouraging participants to continue the conversations on the second day, step beyond their comfort zones, and share their experiences for continuous growth as a community of changemakers.

Day 2 - 18th of September 2026

Dialogue Islands

The Dialogue Islands provided an interactive, conversation-based format on the morning of Day 2. Twelve initiatives, including EU-funded projects such as RESIZE and PROMOTE, hosted individual stations. At each station hosts briefly introduced their initiative before inviting questions and open discussion in a small-group setting.
The initiatives included:

ENABLE is a workforce transformation programme informed by psychological and operational insights, run by His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). Its goal is to reshape how HMPPS trains, develops, leads and supports prison staff to create a safer, more supportive working environment where staff feel valued and empowered.
Hosts: Giles McKathie and Ariane Hanman, HMPPS

Champions Community Leadership Programme, a one-year international leadership programme within the Champions Community developed in 2025 by Richtungswechsel (Austria), Grow Transform Belong CIC (UK) and Smart Corrections (France).
Hosts: Dan Reynolds, GTB, and Gabriela Hendlová, Rubikon Centrum

BOA is a Viennese counselling and support programme run by the Wiener Volkshochschulen (VHS), targeting individuals aged 25 and above who have come in contact with the law and require guidance in reentering the labour market or education system.
Host: Kathrin Niedermoser , VHS

RESIZE is a European partnership running from 2025 to 2029, led by the Centre for Promoting Lifelong Learning (CPIP) Romania and co-funded by the European Union under the Erasmus programme. RESIZE aims to reshape how correctional professionals across Europe are trained and recognised. Building on the RESIZE concept of small-scale, community-integrated detention, the project responds to a broader shift in European corrections.
Host: Laura Verstraete, RESCALED

LiberateSkills is a European Pact for Skills founded in 2020, hosted by CPIP in Timisoara, Romania. The Pact brings together educational institutions, correctional facilities and community organisations with a shared commitment to placing pedagogy at the forefront of correctional practice.
Hosts: Daiana Huber, CPIP, and Raluca Coc, Romanian Prison Service

AusbildungsFit BOK (A-fit/BOK) is a programme run by the VHS Vienna for young people in need of support to find their place in the labour market. It targets individuals up to the age of 21 and, under specific conditions, up to 25. The programme comprises four components: practical training, a knowledge workshop, coaching services & sport elements promoting teamwork & health.
Host: Martina Schneider & Jessica Königsberger, VHS

PROMOTE (Promoting Integrated Professional Development for Prison Practitioners in Vocational Excellence for Offender Reintegration) is a four-year European project running from March 2024 to March 2028. The project is led by the National Administration of Penitentiaries Romania. Their goal is to achieve four main objectives: enhancing the professional skills and competencies of correctional staff, implementing innovative educational and training practices, improving staff well-being and promoting inclusive educational practices for correctional staff.
Host: Rhianon Williams, Interchange

PICTURES is a European Erasmus partnership project addressing the professionalisation of practitioners who support emerging adults in correction settings. The project aims to build a shared professional framework and common understanding among practitioners across fields, including education, social work, psychology and judiciary services, centered on the specific developmental needs of this age group.
Host: Cătălin Chiritoiu, Romanian Prison Service

NOWNI uses the proprietary empathy card method sharing prompts that spark open discussion about perspective-taking, grounded directly in the day-to-day leadership challenges participants face. The method shows participants why empathy functions as a leadership tool and as a learnable skill rather than an innate ability.
Host: Antonia Zoe Reiter, NOWNI

De Kansenfabriek is a Belgian NGO founded to support the recovery and (re-)integration of vulnerable groups into society. The organisation manages two small-scale transition houses in which 12 to 17 residents live together and work actively toward reintegration. It operates as a network organisation, placing strong emphasis on local and supra-local partnerships to make reintegration a truly shared and community-embedded endeavour.
Host: Leen Muylkens, de Kansenfabriek

Violent Prevention Network/INDEX works within correctional facilities in the training and professional development of prison staff. Through this work, they share knowledge, democratic values and practical tools to safely address radicalisation and extremism in the daily realities of detention. International networks such as INDEX establish global standards, enable early recognition of emerging threats and create safe spaces for collegial feedback and professional casework.
Host: Alexander Sievers, VPN

Growth Project Training (GPT) developed and delivered by Grow Transform Belong (GTB), is a practical culture-change programme designed to help prisons create safer, more respectful and more effective environments for both staff and individuals in prison. Through interactive training, reflection, peer learning and local implementation, the programme equips staff and leaders to become active agents of change, creating cultures in which people can grow, contribute and belong.
Hosts: Justine MSc, GTB, and Charlie Abbott, HMPPS

Presentation Summary: Donche Boshkovski, Head of Unit, Co-operation in Police and Deprivation of Liberty Division (CPDL), Council of Europe

Introduction to the Council of Europe's Role in the Correctional Leadership Landscape

Donche Boshkovski, Director of the Police and Deprivation of Liberty Division at the Council of Europe, outlined the role of correctional leadership in the Council's cooperation projects with member states. The division supports prison, probation, and law enforcement reforms in accordance with European standards, with a particular focus on developments in the Western Balkans, Turkey, and the Eastern Partnership countries.

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Mr. Boshkovski characterised correctional leadership as the link between formal standards and daily practice, while emphasising that leadership encompasses not only security and order but also responsibility for human rights, the rule of law, and rehabilitation efforts. Drawing on the Council of Europe's project cycle, the following elements were presented:

- Piloting new approaches in selected prisons as a leadership task including **the willingness to learn from a pilot and adjust the approach.**
- **Supervision as a way of maintaining professional and ethical standards**, for example, through case reviews, team meetings and feedback from staff and incarcerated individuals.
- **Sustainability and institutional ownership** to ensure reforms are anchored in procedures, job descriptions and training programmes, thereby becoming the institution's own way of working.

Mr. Boshkovski concluded that whilst piloting, supervision and mentoring create the conditions for change, sustainability & institutional ownership **make the change last**.

Presentation Summary: Leen Muylkens, Founder of De Kansenfabriek Foundation and Director of Transitiehuis Leuven & Hamme, Belgium

Leadership in (small-scale) detention: It's all about culture.

Leen Muylkens, a clinical psychologist and psychotherapist, discussed culture-driven leadership in small-scale detention houses. She helped establish Belgium's first small-scale detention house model and founded Kansenfabriek, a non-profit organisation, in 2023, which runs two transition houses in Belgium. These residential facilities accommodate up to 17 individuals nearing the end of long prison sentences. The so-called participants are supported in their personal development and (re-)integration through four pillars:

- Self-determination
- Connection with others in the community
- Recovery
- Positive identity development

"Sustainable leadership is not about authority. It's not about control. It's not about enforcing compliance. It's about creating a culture that empowers people to grow."

Ms. Muylkens argued that leadership in correctional settings should focus not only on staff but also on guiding incarcerated individuals toward sustained behavioural change. She outlined five principles through which the Kansenfabriek translates its vision and values into practice:

- **Involving everyone, including participants**, in the vision and values, with a focus on values rather than rules.
- Practising **care and professional proximity** through small, personal gestures within safe boundaries.
- Building **a sense of community**, including through shared activities, as staples for building trust and safety.
- Creating **transparency and honesty**, for example by letting participants read reports about them and asking them how to rebuild damaged trust.
- **Remaining true to the vision during setbacks.**

Ms. Muylkens concluded that trust fosters greater change than control, community promotes greater growth than isolation, culture exerts a greater influence than rules. The central question is not whether incarcerated individuals are capable of change, but ***whether the system is willing to establish the conditions necessary to make such change possible.***

Presentation Summary: Hofrätin Mag[a] Seada Killinger, Governor of Münnichplatz Youth Detention Facility, Austrian Prison Service

Cultivating a Growth Culture - Insights from a Governor's Office

Seada Killinger has served in the Austrian prison service for approximately 25 years, including in several leadership positions, and teaches at the Prison Service Academy. She leads the newly established juvenile detention facility Wien-Münnichplatz, Austria's only facility specifically designed for young people aged 14 to 18. When she assumed responsibility for the facility in April 2025, construction of the building was still underway, although the first incarcerated juveniles had already been transferred there. Ms. Killinger thus described how a culture was and is being developed from the ground up under these conditions.

"That is our greatest leadership challenge as we help build an organisation like this: to provide direction, demonstrate integrity and remain reliable even under pressure" [translated from German]

In her statement, Ms. Killinger summarised her approach to leadership. Together with her deputy, she established the facility's values before its first staff members were appointed. With a strong emphasis on education, employment, and social integration, the following elements within the facility's culture are highlighted:

- **Closeness instead of distance** towards the incarcerated juveniles.

- Encouraging staff to submit proposals, supported by a **constructive approach to mistakes.**
- **Transparent decisions** and the involvement of the incarcerated individuals in developing educational measures.
- Regular **communication structures.**
- **Consistent and transparent responses** to complex or challenging behaviour among both staff and juveniles.

Ms. Killlinger noted that the facility collaborates with partners, including courses delivered by Richtungswechsel.

Panel Discussion: Deconstructing Leadership Pedagogy

This panel brought together practitioners who support correctional leaders through ongoing education and training. Panellists included:

- **Mag.ª MA. Martina Schneider** (Project Manager at the VHS, Austria)
- **Pascale Pug** (Training Officer at École Nationale d'Administration Pénitentiaire (ENAP), France)
- **Khalil Chait** (Founder of Stichting Sileo, Netherlands)

It examined the competencies that should be incorporated into leadership development and the training of leaders to facilitate change in European correctional facilities. The panellists identified **courage** as the most important competency for leaders and noted that challenging the status quo can foster the courage necessary to effect change. They also advocated for drawing on lived experience to inform future action and fostering cooperation among people with diverse experiences and multidisciplinary expertise:

"When someone's incarcerated, in order to change, we use a metaphor that someone is an empty bucket, and it needs to be filled up with water. Each and every one who's working in the system and interacts with someone who's incarcerated is a drop in that water. [...] You never know if you are the first or the last drop that makes someone change. But you know that you are needed because every last drop is needed to make the bucket spill over."

This quotation encapsulates the panellists' mission for shared responsibility among diverse professional groups working toward a common goal. They discussed the challenges of educating thousands of correctional officers in ways that inform their daily practice. To address these challenges, they focused on relational security and the role relationships can play in motivating individuals to change their mindsets.

Presentation Summary: Dr. Sinéad Meade, Lecturer in Applied Psychology at Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT)

Champions Community Evaluation and Vision Session

Dr. Sinéad Meade presented her preliminary external evaluation of the Champions Community programme. Based on ten semi-structured interviews, five primary themes in the Champions' experiences of the programme were identified.

Personal growth and transformation: The programme offers Champions a valuable opportunity to step away from their day-to-day responsibilities and reflect actively on leadership, workplace culture, and their own roles in shaping these areas. From the Champions' perspective, this has provided space for personal growth and transformation. They described developing a new understanding of themselves as leaders, their workplace culture, and their capacity to influence change.

"The things I have learned, I'm going to practice them. They've put a seed inside me. It's still growing inside of me."

Navigating challenges and creating possibilities: In their efforts to apply their learning and establish initiatives in their workplaces, the Champions encountered several challenges, including heavy workloads, limited time and resources, aspects of the occupational culture in their settings, hierarchical structures, and competing operational demands. Although these barriers remained, the programme appears to have helped the Champions perceive and navigate them in new ways, while supporting them to adapt and collaborate with others to create new opportunities for change within the constraints of their workplaces.

Leading growth and building a momentum of change: The Champions described their learning as a vehicle for change for themselves, their colleagues, and people in detention. Rather than expecting immediate transformation or everyone to get on board straight away, they recognised that meaningful, sustainable growth requires hard work and that small changes are also wins. At the same time, their understanding of leadership shifted: Rather than having all the answers, they increasingly saw leadership as enabling, developing, and supporting other people.

Humanising prison work: The Champions began to view the pursuit of order and security, alongside the provision of care and integration, as interconnected aspects of their role rather than competing priorities. This perspective prompted valuable discussions about establishing boundaries with which they felt comfortable and responding appropriately to different situations to positively affect their relationships with people in detention, the meaningfulness of their work, their sense of personal accomplishment, and the quality of prison life and overall well-being.

Community and collaboration: All Champions found the programme engaging and felt that it broadened their horizons while creating new possibilities and experiences. They described the sense of community and belonging fostered both in person and online as foundational to their personal growth. The residentials were particularly valuable, enabling them to step outside their own workplaces and gain insight into another prison system. In this respect, the programme appears to support Champions in translating their learning into collective change & building momentum.

Dr. Meade concluded that, although the evaluation is based on a relatively small group of people from diverse cultural contexts, the preliminary findings suggest that **"something special is happening here"**. Evidence indicates a shift in cultural thinking and behaviour within this cohort, and the programme appears to be progressing towards its intended outcomes. Its value seems to extend beyond the acquisition of knowledge: They are developing, applying their learning and growth principles in practice, and beginning to engage others.
After Dr. Meade's evaluation presentation, Tamara Höfer, Dr. Sarah Lewis, and Steven van de Steene presented the future of the Champions Community, including its leadership programme, alumni network, and digital community.

Panel: Leadership Voices - Shaping the Culture of Justice

The concluding panel convened prominent leaders in criminology and criminal justice reform from across Europe to reflect on the Summit's impact and key insights.
Panelists included:

- **Prof. Alison Liebling** (Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the Cambridge Institute of Criminology)
- **Gustav Tallving** (Executive Director, EuroPris)
- **Olivia Rope** (Executive Director, Penal Reform International)
- **Torben Adams** (Head of Division at the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs Bremen)

The panellists observed that the Summit enabled leaders to identify supportive partners and build a strong network, which Professor Liebling described as **"building a between"**. They also described the sense of possibility they felt after learning about the Champions Community programme, the new ideas and models proposed by speakers and attendees, and the paradigm shifts taking place in correctional facilities across Europe.

The panellists reflected on the leadership lessons they would take away:

- Maintaining moral conviction and courage
- Demonstrating empathy
- Expressing uncertainty with authenticity and confidence to build trust
- Pursuing a mission that fosters a sense of dignity among staff and incarcerated individuals
- Developing the resilience to persevere through hardship.

Ultimately, the panellists felt that the Summit had also created an honest and safe space in which to mobilise collective energy towards a brighter future, united by a common goal.

"We are all in criminal justice because it's so profoundly human."

With this sentence, Professor Alison Liebling eloquently captured the unifying purpose of the Summit. Over the two days, practitioners, prison officers, educators, people with lived experience, researchers, NGOs, policymakers, and leaders came together to build connections, learn from one another, and develop ideas for the future, all with the shared goal of shaping a system that recognises the profound humanity of every person.

Closing: Remarks and Acknowledgments

After two engaging and insightful days, the European Justice Education and Leadership Summit concluded with closing remarks by the organisers, who thanked the speakers and participants for their contributions. Furthermore, they encouraged participants to carry the lessons and inspirations of the past two days back into their own institutions and organisations. In closing they invited participants to keep the exchange within the community going, so that they can continue to benefit from one another's perspective and support each other in the shared goal of improving leadership in correctional services.