

Editorial Comment

This special edition of the Prison Service Journal is dedicated to the research undertaken by participants on the Unlocked Graduates Leadership Development Programme as part of their Masters studies, and importantly focuses on the often-forgotten voice of the Prison Officer. These officers are not policy makers or academics, but they do have a unique perspective and insight from having lived and breathed the reality of prisons from the lens of a frontline member of staff.

Unlocked Graduates is an award-winning two-year Leadership Development Programme which recruits outstanding graduates and career changers to work as Prison Officers, whilst also undertaking a part-time Masters in Applied Custodial Leadership at Leeds Trinity University. Since the programme was founded in 2016 by CEO Natasha Porter OBE, over 600 recruits have spent at least two years as frontline Prison Officers in 38 prisons across England and Wales. It is these experiences that have formed the research papers that you are about to read.

The officers who authored these papers started on the landings in September 2020, as the world was still getting to grips with the COVID pandemic, whilst prisoners spent unprecedented time behind their cell door, and access to family visits, education, and other purposeful activity was either suspended or severely reduced. The role of the frontline Prison Officer had never been more important, when interactions with prison officers were often the only connection prisoners would have in a day. The authors all completed the programme in Summer 2022, and a significant proportion remain operational within HMPPS. Many have been promoted or taken on additional responsibilities, and some have moved into policy roles within the Ministry of Justice or gone to work for third sector organisations within the Criminal Justice sector.

Whilst these experiences have undoubtedly shaped their experiences on the frontline, you will see a variety of topics and areas covered. The first paper, written by Ayeisha Vaze, explores the impact architecture has on prisoner wellbeing. It offers insight from a prisoner perspective and presents several recommendations for the male prison estate. The second paper, written by Elizabeth Davison, is a literature review which offers some solutions for prison staff working with neurodiverse prisoners in the male estate, whilst Beth Sutherland undertakes a consultative review of the gaps in provision for female prisoners with learning disabilities and makes recommendations to improve the support provided for this vulnerable and marginalised group. We then move onto a paper written by Iona Warren, exploring the five principles of Trauma Informed Practice

in a women's prison, followed by a paper written by Scarlett Thomas, who created two Trauma-Informed spaces in her establishment. Moving onto thinking about leading change, Galina Ignatova and Amy Viner interviewed staff about their perceptions of the key worker scheme and its implementation, making recommendations for practice, whilst Beth Kendle looked more broadly at the barriers to effective communication in a custodial environment. Finally, Max Baker explored the link between use of force and rehabilitative culture, finding an inextricable link.

We believe these papers have the ability to make a deep and lasting impact. They ask vital and challenging questions, offering solutions, and providing suggestions for change. Reoffending continues to cost the UK £18.1 billion per year. Not only does this result in a huge waste of human talent, reoffending ex-prisoners also commit crime in our communities. This makes us all less safe, and we will continue to work tirelessly to reduce reoffending.

All these papers were co-edited by some of the Prisons and Custody team at Leeds Trinity University — Professor Danielle McDermott, Associate Professor Claire Vilarrubi and Dr Sarah Waite, as well as Gemma Buckland, Director of Do It Justice. Unlocked Graduates are grateful for the partnership with Leeds Trinity University, in particular the expertise of the team in operational prison roles which has ensured that research remains relevant and practical.

None of this work would have been possible without the constant support and partnership of Unlocked Graduates' colleagues within His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and the Ministry of Justice. We seek to bring prison officers into the system who will offer challenge and positive disruption, so our work depends on the support and engagement of those who work within the system already. Their ongoing support for our work — from the Secretary of State, Ministers and CEO, through to the myriad of frontline Governors and Prison Officers who support our work — has always been incredible and we could not exist without it. We are honoured that 100 per cent of governors recently surveyed would recommend a cohort of Unlocked Graduates to another prison. You have our deep gratitude and appreciation for all that you do.

Should you wish to read any of the full papers or learn more about the work of Unlocked Graduates and the bespoke Masters delivered by Leeds Trinity University, please do get in touch. Our final thanks, of course, go to all at the Prison Service Journal for collaborating on this special edition. We hope you find it stimulating, enjoyable, and most of all, inspiring.