

Editorial

This special edition of the Prison Service Journal is dedicated to the subject of Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) in criminal justice settings. EBP involves the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of the best available evidence when making decisions. This involves integrating multiple sources of evidence in a structured approach, combining research evidence, clinical expertise, and operational insights in the context of user characteristics, culture, and preferences.

We start the edition with a passionate call to arms by Jon Yates, Executive Director of the Youth Endowment Fund, discussing the importance of EBP in tackling knife crime. The article provides a clear reminder for us all in the criminal justice sector to remember that our work is about people, not statistics, and that we have a duty to ensure that what we implement is based on more than strong belief or unflawed arguments. We follow this with an article by the Editor, Flora Fitzalan Howard, synthesising the evidence on implementing EBP. Despite EBP being an eminently sensible approach to take, the absence of this is common in many sectors of society. One complicating factor is that although EBP is simple in theory, there is currently a troubling lack of hard evidence about how to actually implement this effectively. The author summarises the approaches and interventions that appear promising for doing EBP.

The next few articles provide case studies of implementing EBP in His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). In the first of these, Georgia Barnett, Dr Helen Wakeling, and Lisa Short utilise the stages of EBP (outlined in the previous article) to illustrate how they have brought evidence about young adults into real-world practice. Their work demonstrates the significant time and resource that this has required and highlights the next steps for this work within the Service. In the next article Jo Voisey, Prototyping Lead in the Evaluation and Prototyping Hub of the Ministry of Justice, discusses the importance of prototyping — a way of developing, testing, and improving ideas at an early stage which is low cost and low risk, prior to traditional piloting or evaluation. Utilising several real-world examples, she illustrates how this approach has been used in practice on several different issues — improving attendance of prisoners for education, skills, and work

activities, improving safety in prisons (focussing on sleep quality), and embedding procedural justice in responses to prisoner complaints. Following this, Nicole Webster, Lucinda Bolger, and Dr Carine Lewis, from the Offender Personality Disorder Pathway Data and Evaluation Team in HMPPS, discuss the evidence base which has informed the Service's Psychologically Informed Planned Environments (PIPEs), and their more recent work developing a Theory of Change for PIPEs within custody, which itself will be used to inform future evaluations and further development of EBP in this area.

The final two articles describe different ways of bringing evidence to end-users, so that it can be understood and utilised in their own practice. Based on a collaboration between several teams in HMPPS and the Prison Radio Association, Dr Rachel Gibson, Kate Netten, Thomas Bonser, Andrew Wilkie, and James Adamson, present recent and innovative approaches taken to use Prison Radio to communicate evidence-based tips and suggestions to people in prison, focused on promoting positive psychological wellbeing. Following this, Dr Jo Wilkinson from the College of Policing, outlines the work and approaches taken by the What Works Centre for Crime Reduction to synthesise the best-available evaluation evidence, generate more of this evidence, and encourage and enable its use in others' policy and practice decision-making.

We then include four interviews in this special edition, all with leaders who strive to develop EBP in criminal justice. First, with Dr Rosie Travers, who leads HMPPS' Evidence-Based Practice Team; second, with Dr Robin Moore, Head of Research for HM Inspectorate of Probation; third, with Dr Hannah Collyer, Head of Evidence and Insights at the Youth Justice Board; and fourth, with Ian Bickers, who at the time of the interview was Prison Group Director for the London prison group, and Rob Briner, Professor of Organisational Psychology.

We end this edition with the announcement of the 2023 winner of The Bennett Award for Outstanding Article, which was awarded to Scarlett Thomas for her article 'Feeling Safe in an Unsafe Place. Improving wellbeing through the use of Trauma-Informed spaces', which was published in edition 266.