

# editorial

## youth justice

Editors Peter Francis and Una Padel set the issue in context.

It is over three years since New Labour came to power committed to reshaping youth justice philosophy and policy by developing and implementing a system based upon the theory and practice of prevention, early and speedy intervention and making young people responsible for their actions. Much has happened within the ensuing timeframe, from the auditing of youth issues across local areas and the implementation of joint partnership working in the form of Youth Offending Teams, through the introduction of intervention programmes such as final warning and bail support schemes, to the development of reparation and mediation programmes. There has also been a re-emphasis on balancing the needs of welfare with a more *punishment-orientated approach* for serious and persistent youth offenders, an example of which can be seen in the introduction of the Detention and Training Order (DTO). Alongside such developments and interventions, an arsenal of national and local monitoring and evaluation arrangements have been set up, the purpose of which is the collection and analysis of data around youth and youth justice with a view to identifying good and effective practice. And, lest we forget, New Labour's policy intention was further to embed such changes within a broader social policy agenda promoting social inclusion, political participation and community involvement, and local urban

regeneration.

It is also approximately three years since the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies devoted an issue of *Criminal Justice Matters* to 'Young People and Crime'. However, awareness of the nature and speed of change under the new government administration around youth justice, coupled with the knowledge that the two most popular CJMs published to date have been the two that took youth issues as their primary focus, convinced us that it was about time for a further review of youth and youth justice. The general theme this time around is youth justice as developed and implemented under New Labour, and in order to focus the current issue a number of core question areas were identified which various contributors were asked to address. Questions asked included: What is the philosophy and practice of youth justice under New Labour? How has the system changed from that which went before? Are these developments youth friendly and youth inspired? Are the rights of young people addressed? Do measures address the causes of youth offending as well as the immediate signs of youth crime? What works, for which young people, and under what circumstances? What does citizenship mean in the context of youth justice? Can any unintended consequences of the system be identified at the time of writing?

In addressing these questions a number of contributors review

the nature of change under New Labour (Allen, Desborough, Ravenscroft), and offer evidence of the development and implementation of good and effective practice, both in terms of joint agency working and in terms of particular programmes of intervention (Davison, O'Sullivan, Watson). However a number of those contributing also highlight complexities and tensions affecting the development and implementation of effective youth justice provision under New Labour (Allen, Brown, Pitts). Various contributors detail tensions and conflicts affecting good partnership working (Williams, Goldson, Watson); pinpoint the need to look beyond traditional youth justice provision to wider social policy interventions addressing poverty, exclusion and education (Martin and Hayden); identify the importance of social inclusion and community involvement and empowerment (Booth and Eccles); and amongst other things draw attention to the value of independent research and evaluation in determining the effectiveness of measures and training gaps (Hagell, Kelly and Williamson).

Arguably two of the most telling criticisms directed at New Labour's approach to youth justice within this issue of *Criminal Justice Matters* can be found in the contribution by Sheila Brown. First, she berates New Labour for failing to deliver an accessible and open framework through which young people's voices can be aired and can be fed into the policy process (see also the work of Anderson et al 1995; Brown 1999). Secondly Brown also draws attention to the failure of policy to address youth victimisation. This is especially important given that it also relates to victimisation by the state resulting from inadequate policy and service provision, and in some cases downright neglect and abuse (Muncie in this issue and forthcoming 2001).

Factors responsible for these failures are not hard to come by. They can be found in media representations of persistent and serious youthful offenders as a violent majority intent on causing havoc and mayhem, in the realms of a political discourse intent on reinforcing a societal fear of youth crime, and from a government responsible for identifying a performance culture within criminal justice alongside the collation and the

promotion of a 'what works' portfolio for tackling the crime (for all intents and purposes read youth) 'problem'. Combined, these factors serve to reinforce the view that youth is the problem, the consequence of which is that any attempt to promote a culture in which youth victimisation, young people's representation and the promotion of tolerance and youth victim support is dropped in favour of the continued promotion of a framework of criminality (Pitts in this issue and Carlen (1996) more generally).

New Labour may promote its youth justice philosophy and policy as representing a shift in emphasis from that of the previous Conservative administration. New Labour may indeed offer a joined up policy approach to youth justice that operates on various levels and across different government departments. Certainly, as some of the contributors to this issue of CJM identify, such developments have the potential to promote a more positive and humane approach to addressing youth issues than experienced under the previous administrative regime. What New Labour's approach fails to achieve is representation of youth as participants (contributing to the process of policy development), and acknowledgement of youth as victims (of crime and of the system itself). In doing so it continues to render the notion of youth 'justice' partial, it reinforces the promotion of a framework of criminality, and it works against the development of positive and humane intervention for all.

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Anderson, S. et al (1994) *Cautionary Tales* (Avebury: Ashgate)

Brown, S. (1999) *Understanding Youth and Crime* (Buckingham: Open University Press)

Carlen, P. (1996) *Jigsaw: A Political Criminology of Youth Homelessness* (Buckingham: Open University Press)

Muncie, J. (Forthcoming 2001) 'Youth, Risk and Victimisation', in P. Davies, P. Francis, V. Jupp (eds.) *Understanding Victimization: Theory, Research and Practice Second Edition* (Basingstoke: Macmillan)

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