

Reviews

BOOKS

Review of 'Prison Magazines - a Survey and Guide'

A Prison Reform Trust Publication

About a year ago the Prison Reform Trust invited all prisons in England and Wales to give details of any in-house magazines or newsletters produced by staff and/or prisoners. It has just published its findings: 'Prison Magazines - a Survey and Guide' - a glossy 24 page A4 write-up.

Although one suspects that in setting up the investigation, the PRT were already greatly in favour of prison magazines (backed by the Woolf Report and Judge Stephen Tumim), their analysis of information received is strongly supportive of in-house publications.

The preparation of a prison magazine offers "real-life" experience and encourages team-work between prisoners and prisoners and staff, problem-solving and self-expression. A worthy magazine "voices opinions, raises questions, digs into issues,

satirises, provides information and generally throws light on the peculiar community that makes up a prison."

Expected difficulties, like antagonism towards officers, racism, censorship and low standards of contents, were not major problems. Greater stumbling blocks were funding ("500 magazines cost £280 to produce") and the moving on of those actively engaged in the magazine's production.

Success, i.e. the regular production of a magazine, seems to be linked with a production team rather than one keen individual being in charge.

Much of the survey is taken up with comments on the 29 magazines sent to PRT in response to the initial enquiry, from which one can glean the common contents, innovations, standard of production, etc. From this list it would be possible to send for copies of the best magazines, before an establishment embarked on its own journal.

Mention is made of a monthly newsletter produced at

Full Sutton which aims to keep prisoners informed about what is happening in the prison. "This is a very welcome way of keeping prisoners informed - in line with the recommendations of the Woolf Report - and is an example which could and should be followed in many other goals."

Perhaps future prison magazines will be a blend of newsletter and magazine, jointly produced by officers and prisoners (called "Pipe Dream?") when the absolute freedom of expression by all concerned in its production would be unquestioned and funded, of course, by the Home Office.

Copies of "Prison Magazines - A Survey and Guide" are available from Prison Reform Trust, 59, Caledonian Road, London N1 9BU.

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EVERYTHING YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT MARKET TESTING BUT WERE TOO AFRAID TO ASK

PRIVATISATION and MARKET TESTING in the PRISON SERVICE

PRISON REFORM TRUST (1994) 72pp £4.95

This is a thought-provoking collection of five papers: four of the contributions to some seminars on privatisation that the PRT held late last year, and a prize-winning entry in their annual essay competition. The writers range from the free marketeering Stephen Twinn to the anti-market testing campaigner Kate Foley, and this diversity of views makes for an interesting read.

The first and last papers in the collection look at some of the more theoretical issues around privatisation, particularly the arguments about the ethics of private prisons, as well as providing some historical background on their introduction (or rather re-introduction, for as both writers point out, we have had them before). Professor Mick Ryan is concerned in his opening essay to point out the complexity of the debate between public and

private provision, and in particular that the debate is not about the existence of private provision of punishment - many community punishments have always been supervised by non-Governmental organisations - but the level at which it operates. He also raises the important question of the extent to which the existence of privatised prisons, and in particular the comparative ease of building more (no Treasury constraints, as private capital is to be used), will allow the prison population to expand in a way that would simply not have been possible without them. In closing the collection Anne van de Graaf compares the different processes by which public and private prisons are made accountable. She concludes that the privatisation exercise has not undermined accountability, and in fact it has demonstrated the "sheer possibility of increased standards in the public sector."

This case is put more strongly by Stephen Twinn (of Group 4 Prison and Escort Services) in his provocatively titled article 'Contracting Out is Here