

# 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.

**Leslie A. Richardson**  
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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

to Stay', which brims with evangelistic zeal for the merits of the privatisation process. He claims that the existence of The Wolds and Blakenhurst has already produced remarkable progress at Manchester, and will force up standards in the rest of the service. His main topic is the development of links between private and public sectors and this affords an example of the extent of his enthusiasm for a free market approach: arguing that mutual support for operational emergencies should be extended to involve the private prisons, he advocates a free market "network of informal agreements between governors" in preference to an official system. It seems clear to me that even if the necessary mutual trust existed (which it does not), this informality would be a recipe for the worst kind of operational disaster. Anyway, it is revealing that he appears to want the support of public sector staff in these situations, and interesting that he appeals for the development of some sort of trade association to facilitate co-operation between public and private sectors in training and standardisation schemes. Is this because it's cold out there, and he wants to come back in?

This enthusiasm for privatisation is strongly counterbalanced by Kate Foley whose experience with NATFHE allows her to give a sobering account of the market testing of prison education. Criticising the secrecy that surrounded the process and examining in some detail the TUPE regulations which protect existing staff, she poses the central question of whether the quality of the service has really been improved by the market testing process.

The most practical contribution comes from

Robin Halward, the governor of Manchester prison, who tells the story of the inhouse bid at Manchester, giving a number of important insights into this process for anyone (un)fortunate enough to become involved in it. He emphasises the importance of keeping staff (and unions) informed and involved in the process and of assembling a strong and representative team to put together the bid. In this connection he raises a number of important questions about just how the process will work in existing prisons: for instance, who will manage the bid? Plans are for it to be the current governor of the establishment, but if the reason for the market test is poor performance, can the existing management really put together a credible bid? Also, what level of access should competitors be afforded to a prison that is already functioning? While I cannot agree that "the successful in-house bid for Manchester prison has raised the morale of the whole public sector Prison Service", it is good to hear that he sees his responsibility to inform developments in the rest of the service, and this article is certainly an important contribution to that process.

A very useful mixture of general information, theoretical discussion, and practical tips, this is an excellent book which raises the question of why it is the Prison Reform Trust and not the Prison Service that is encouraging this sort of debate and discussion.

**Chris Barnett-Page**  
**Lifer Management Unit.**



## Dear Sir

Ian Benson's article "Education in Prisons" is well timed, well presented and clearly focuses upon the many positive developments the competitive tendering process has produced.

The tendering, and the subsequent contracting out was, by the secretive nature in which it was conducted, destructive. The Staff College's recommendations and report were, for 'commercial' reasons, never made public. This caused existing staff working in Prison Education to, rightly or wrongly,

mistrust the process and more so the originators of the process.

No information or just a little information breeds disinformation.

The Consortium has been given the consultancy reporting on the Core Education Curriculum, Ian Benson highlights this in his article. This initiative is long overdue and will be welcomed by practitioners.

I hope the Consultant's report will be published. If not the mistrust which sullied the tendering process will continue with a deleterious effect upon the

teaching staff and the curriculum they deliver to inmates.

I hope, as both a taxpayer and an employee working in Prison Education, I will be allowed to know what influences decisions concerning my professional work and how decisions are reached - open government and good information produces a trusting and loyal work force - secrecy by policy makers breeds distrust.

Yours faithfully

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# Letters