

# Editorial

## Roger Grimshaw introduces this issue of *cjm*

*Classically, we think of criminal justice as open justice and therefore open to enquiry, scrutiny and argument. This issue brings all three together, with the different aspects intertwined. We do not normally think of prisons as 'open'; indeed they often seem to present a 'closed' sign on the door. Yet if the prison puts up barriers to enquiry and scrutiny it loses the legitimacy we associate with the claim to openness elsewhere in the system. The fruits of prison research which tests the openness of the prison system are centrally featured in this issue.*

Similarly other parts of the system such as the courts will decline in esteem if their workings are left opaque and impenetrable. The importance of visibility is not always about sudden events or individual cases; it can be about slower, creeping changes that occur behind our backs while our attention is distracted. Faced with government policy announcements and party political manifestos, we may be tempted to switch off our attention and wait for the implementation, 'in due course' – if at all – but we should be alert to the 'vision' they portray and what this says about their long term intentions and the kind of society they want to create. Recognising how the terminology of criminal justice betrays deeply questionable social assumptions becomes essential when a 'rehabilitation revolution' is being loudly announced.

The crucial contribution of ethnography in exposing the otherwise closed prison to more open scrutiny is highlighted in the themed section of this issue edited by **Deborah Drake** and **Rod Earle**. In keeping with the magazine's aim, this one reports from a gathering of academics keen to extend their discussions to the wider audience *cjm* provides. 'Resisting The Eclipse: An International Symposium on Prison Ethnography' brought together over 100 researchers interested in the routine life of prisons. The carefully detailed approach that characterises ethnography has the potential to reveal the internal workings of an institution many of

us know too little about, despite the fact that it remains problematically central to criminal justice.

In the topical section, authors scrutinise developments in policy and practice, beginning with a robust critique of current policies on research access by **Peter Squires**: we should ask how the next generation of ethnographers will survive under restrictive access regimes. He argues that official policy will permit research explicitly at the service of existing policies, agencies and priorities, and is biased against research which would solely or mainly benefit the people whom agencies work with.

**Gavin Dingwall** reminds us that in an emerging era of coalitions the criminal justice policies of minority parties should not be neglected. The views of the UK Independence Party, the Green Party and Plaid Cymru may not be particularly influential as of now but their fortunes could change as the electoral arithmetic shifts.

**Rod Morgan** draws attention to evidence of decline in the lay magistracy and a growing reliance on the professional judges. Noting the creeping changes, he calls for an open, public debate on the future of local and lay justice. The government wants to achieve 'swift and sure' justice by measures such as earlier guilty pleas, improved technology and longer court opening times but **David Wood** argues that as a vision of justice this 'consumer' model of efficiency is flawed.

In her Eve Saville lecture **Pat Carlen** takes issue with the concept of rehabilitation in an unequal society and argues instead for a reparative vision of justice that seeks to give back what has been socially denied to the majority of people routinely processed by prison and probation.

In their different contributions the authors featured in this issue insist that we keep our eyes wide open and tirelessly focused on developments in criminal justice: from the rhetoric of high policy to the mundane grind of prison life, it is all one system. ■

---

**Roger Grimshaw** is Research Director at the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies

---

Want to know more about the  
Centre for Crime and Justice Studies?  
visit: [www.crimeandjustice.org.uk](http://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk)