

PRISON SERVICE JOURNAL

May 2011 No 195



Focus on Disability

Editorial Comment

Over recent editions, *Prison Service Journal* has set out to explore the issues surrounding current proposed and actual reforms of the criminal justice system. This discussion is continued in this edition through three articles. The opening article is a theoretical piece by Mhairi Aylott and Anton Shelupanov of The Young Foundation, discussing social impact bonds and payment by results. The work of the Young Foundation informed the development of Government policy in this area and this article explains the economic case for this approach, describes the main technical features and critically reflects upon the strengths and weaknesses. This article is essential reading for those involved in the criminal justice system. Complimenting this article is an interview with Rob Owen, Chief Executive of the St Giles Trust. An investment banker turned social entrepreneur, Owen represents a new breed of voluntary and charitable sector leader. In this interview he discusses the work of St Giles Trust, including their involvement in the social impact bond and payment by results pilot at HMP Peterborough. The third piece under this theme is Professor Hans Toch's more critical work in which he discusses the risks of economically focussed reforms leading to deteriorating conditions. However, consistent with his long history of optimistic argument for progressive reform, Toch argues that economic benefits can be gained from reforms that reduce the weight of imprisonment and increase participation and engagement of staff, prisoners and volunteers. In this work he is arguing for internal reform of prison administration that has both economic and social benefits. These three pieces are intended to navigate the reader to a more reflective perspective on the current discussion regarding the reform of prisons and punishment.

The bulk of this edition is dedicated to a special focus on the issue of disability in prisons. This draws on contributions from inside the prison system, from interest groups and academia. This is intended to raise awareness of this area as well as suggesting practical approaches to improve the quality of services. It is therefore aimed at encouraging practitioners in their endeavours to think about their work and make positive change. This section opens with two articles that take a broad perspective and set the agenda for the following discussion. Claire Cooper, Head of Equalities Group at the National Offender Management Service and Samantha Booth of HM Inspectorate of Prisons both set out the current state of play and highlight the shortfalls in practice as well as highlighting possible solutions and examples of good practice. Their work draws upon the reality of the lived

experience of imprisonment for prisoners with disabilities and both articles provide broad but humane accounts of the issues.

The discussion continues with four articles looking at specific issues. Jenny Talbot of the Prison Reform Trust has for many years worked towards highlighting the problem of prisoners with learning difficulties and learning disabilities. She has attempted to ensure that their voice is heard and that services are improved in order that they can receive the support that they need. Her work draws heavily upon testimonies of those prisoners and therefore offers an intimate insight. This article also draws upon her expertise in the field in order to direct practitioners towards those steps that they can take in order to make a difference. Steve Foster offers a legal analysis, exploring how the judiciary in UK and Europe have pushed the boundaries of equality through their decision-making. Warren Stewart looks at prisoners themselves and argues that they are a valuable source of peer advice and support. This can be linked with Hans Toch's argument that communities are a resource that can be drawn upon to provide voluntary service that is both sensitive and cost-efficient. Finally, Robert Steadman, Chair of the Disability Network, discusses the role of a staff support organisation representing and advocating on behalf of individual members of staff with disabilities and attempting to influence organisational policy, culture and build capability in managing the issues. Although these articles do not provide a definitive or comprehensive analysis of the issues of disability in prisons, they do provide an insight and a source for further reflection, discussion and action.

This edition closes with an interview with Bettina von Kameke, whose exhibition of photographs taken at Wormwood Scrubs received wide media attention in February and March 2011. To those working in prisons, the images captured a familiar institution but they also give a distance which encourages reflection about how individuals adapt and maintain their identity in a closed, total institution like a prison. Her work penetrates both the public and the private spaces of the prison and the prisoner.

Prison Service Journal continues to provide a distinctive approach that draws from inside the prison, revealing practice and exploring the lived experience, whilst also drawing from outside, offering analysis, criticism and alternative perspectives. It is by engaging with a range of perspectives that *PSJ* aims to encourage and facilitate not only thoughtful reflection but also progressive action.