

JOURNAL

PRISON SERVICE

January 2018 No 235



REHABILITATIVE
CULTURE

Editorial Comment

The aims of imprisonment have always been contested and complex. Prisons are expected to be a form of punishment, inflicting harm and suffering upon those who have transgressed against the rules of society. They are also expected to be places of transformation in which those imprisoned are offered the opportunity to change their lives by altering their thinking and behaviour, gaining skills and becoming productive members of society. In addition, prisons are expected to operate in an efficient and effective way, marshalling the public resources allocated to them appropriately and for maximum value. Balancing these competing values—punitiveness, liberal-humanity and managerialism—is a daunting task, one that is in a constant state of flux, contested from all directions and subject to constant shifts and changes.

This contest of values is very much at the forefront of current prison practice. Responding to prison violence, substance misuse and criminality involves an aspect of punishment, including the use of adjudications, prosecutions, and segregation. The demands of public service also mean that there is attention to management, including delivering efficiency through contracting services, and having tightly controlled systems for monitoring prisons and holding them to account. There is, however, also a continuing concern with the humanity of prisons. In recent years, this has come to be expressed and codified in the notion of 'rehabilitative cultures'. This is addressed in the lead article in this edition, written by Dr Ruth Mann, Flora Fitzalan Howard and Jenny Tew. 'Rehabilitative cultures' attempts to encapsulate the notion that rehabilitation cannot be achieved by having positive pockets of practice in classrooms, workshops, drug treatment services, or psychology group rooms. Instead, the focus should be on creating a culture across the prison that supports and reinforces opportunities for people to change their lives. This approach encompasses everyday interactions, administrative processes and responses to transgressions, as well as providing work, education, training and other interventions. Many prisons are now adopting this approach and this article attempts to reinforce that commitment and offer concrete ideas about how this can be turned into reality. The article closes with hope and optimism, asserting that a 'cultural revolution' is taking place that can transform prisons into places of rehabilitation.

Other articles in this edition focus on the impact of imprisonment on minority groups. All large organisations are designed around dominant interests and client groups. Addressing this requires light to be cast upon the needs of groups that are sometimes hidden, giving voice to their experiences. In their article on the experiences of Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic (BAME), and Foreign National Prisoners (FNPs), Yulia Chistyakova, Bankole Cole, Jenny Johnstone describe that people in these communities can experience 'susceptibility to harm resulting from being unprotected from subtle and overt experiences of racism, to experiences of isolation and disempowerment'. This can vary from place to place, and the focus of the study in a Northern prison also brings out the particular local characteristics of the prison and community. The authors suggest that the experiences of these minority groups are best understood and responded to institutionally by focussing on vulnerability. This will not be an approach that everyone will agree with, but it is an important contribution. Vulnerability is also the focus of Dr. Maggie Leese's small scale study of a women's centre in a female prison. This article highlights the previous victimhood and complex needs of many women in prison. While prison can be painful, Leese acknowledges that many women experience this as a safe haven where they can work constructively to address problems they have experienced. The approach adopted by staff, Leese describes, is concerned with the emotional and social needs of the women rather than their offences. While this reflects an empathic outlook, it is a gap in addressing the needs of these women. Professor Amanda Kirby and Hayley Gibbon are concerned with the experiences of prisoners with learning disabilities and difficulties. In particular, they draw attention to the problems in offering consistent screening and needs assessment. They offer an IT based approach to better assessment and needs identification, but also argue that to be effective this needs to be situated in a supportive environment with well trained staff and imaginative approaches to meeting diverse needs.

Prison Service Journal aims to offer research and analysis that informs policy and professional practice. It is also a publication that engages with the values of imprisonment, having a concern with the lived experience of people in prison, ameliorating harms and promoting progressive practice.