

# PRISON SERVICE JOURNAL

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**Special edition:  
Recovering from the COVID-19 Pandemic**

## Editorial Comment

The production of this special edition of *Prison Service Journal* illustrates the uncertain times in which we live. It was initially commissioned in the summer of 2021, a moment of some optimism that the threat of coronavirus was receding. The roll out of vaccines was proceeding successfully and on 19 July 2021, legal restrictions introduced to respond to the coronavirus pandemic were lifted and life for many people appeared to be returning to some normality. In contrast, the edition was finalised during the winter of 2021-22, in the midst of the rapid spread of the omicron variant of coronavirus, which although resulting in less hospitalisations and deaths than previous waves, did see the re-introduction of some legal restrictions and significant disruption across the country. Prisons found themselves again reducing regimes for prisoners, introducing more rigorous health protection measures including additional testing, and managing the impact of increased staff absenteeism. By the time this edition is published in March 2022, it is likely that the latest wave will be receding and again activities in the community and in prisons will be increasing.

The focus of this edition is ostensibly 'recovery from the coronavirus pandemic', which as Flora Fitzalan Howard and Dr Helen Wakeling describe in their opening article, is 'the process of providing for the needs of the community following a disaster or crisis, while also dealing with the consequences'. The experience of the coronavirus pandemic is that managing the pandemic and initiating recovery are not discrete processes. Crises including pandemics do not have a neat start and end point, instead the processes of response and recovery are interconnected and overlapping. This edition attempts to explore the experiences of simultaneously living with and recovering from the coronavirus pandemic.

This special edition explores these questions by drawing upon a range of perspectives and approaches. There is a combination of literature review, empirical research and interviews. The edition opens with an article by Flora Fitzalan Howard and Dr Helen Wakeling, which sets an important context by defining 'recovery', summarising the research drawn from a range of contexts, and articulating the principles and practices that can most effectively be deployed in prisons. Professor Nick Hardwick, Professor Rosie Meek and Paul Crossey report a study undertaken at HMP The Mount. This research was conducted during the initial waves of the pandemic and traces the shifting experiences and

responses. The article draws lessons not only for responding to crises but also about how the response can inform everyday prison management. The third article focusses on vaccine roll out in prisons, a vital element of response and recovery. This article reports research into effective vaccine programmes and the lessons from prisons. This is an excellent example of how evidence can be developed and reported in order to inform practice.

Interviews are not a conventional way of accessing and presenting knowledge in peer review journals but are regularly used in *PSJ* and in some cases, such as this edition, form the main body of the content. Interviews can be a way of accessing expertise by summarising or reporting research, evaluations and other empirical findings; they can also illuminate the lived experience of people in an authentic way with all of complexity and messiness, and; they are an accessible and engaging way of presenting knowledge. The interviews in this edition feature people who work in the prison system, including operational leaders, a leading international public health expert and a distinguished youth justice specialist. These interviews attempt to convey both the strategy and activity undertaken as well as the emotional experience of working through such a critical time. Interviews with Paula Harriott and Sarah Burrows are intended to provide access to the experience of prisoners and their families, drawing upon their research and work supporting these people. The interviews with the Chief Inspectors of England and Wales, and Scotland offer insights from inspection findings, providing an independent assessment of the challenges and successes of how the prison system has responded. The interview with Dr. Emma Palmer draws upon her expertise in the uses of technology, including in prisons. Many in prisons and the community have suggested that the pandemic has accelerated trends in the use of information technology, and this interview is an informed insight into how this might shape prisons in the future.

This special edition of *Prison Service Journal* reflects the long-standing aims of integrating research, evidence and practice. It is produced in real time, in the midst of recovery from the coronavirus pandemic, a process that is not linear and neat but instead is messy and protracted. The intention is to capture learning; offer a critical and questioning perspective; amplify a range of diverse voices and experiences, and; inform effective and progressive practice.