

# PRISON SERVICE JOURNAL

September 2011 No 197



*Special Edition*  
**Young people in custody**

# The Keppel Unit:

## The jewel in the crown of the juvenile secure estate?

*Karen Harrison is a Lecturer in Law, University of Hull, and Terry Wilson, Head of Keppel / Long Term Unit, HMYOI Wetherby.*

**Until recently the phrase 'The Jewel in the Crown', in relation to prisons and prison units has almost exclusively referred to HMP Grendon and the impressive work which is undertaken there on its therapeutic community wings. Since October 2008, however, there may now be competition for this accolade, in the form of the Keppel High Dependency/Enhanced Support Unit sited at HMYOI Wetherby in West Yorkshire.**

In 2006 the Youth Justice Board commissioned and completed research looking at young people held within the juvenile secure estate. One of the findings was that there were up to 200 15-18 year olds who were considered to be under the radar in terms of their progression through the custodial system. These were young men who were not excelling or engaged in the process, but were not especially disruptive either, so were not coming to the attention of prison officers or external workers. The report concluded that this was for a number of reasons including the fact that they were serving long sentences, or because they had mental health needs or physical problems. Many of these young people had withdrawn into themselves and thus were not making progress. Due to these findings it was decided that what was needed was a unit specifically designed and run with the needs of these service users in mind, that is those who did not, or alternatively could not, cope with the regime in mainstream prison. Initially the idea was that the young people would spend periods of time on the unit so that issues such as self esteem could be built up and improved upon which would then enable them, it was thought, to move onto other establishments back within the main prison estate. In practice, however this has not happened with many of the young men on the unit remaining there either until their release or until they reach the age of 18 when they are transferred to the young adult prison estate.

The result is the Keppel Unit, which has been running since 6 October 2008 and which currently has the capacity to hold 48 young men between the ages of

15 and 17. One of the reasons for the success of the unit is said to be the fact that there was a long lead up time to its opening. All members of staff who work on the unit are specialised, with many of them involved in the units initial planning and development. This has enabled them to make important contributions with regards to layout and design. To work on the unit, staff have to complete a 10 week training programme. This includes training on mental health awareness, child protection, pro-social modelling, sex offender training, behaviour management and suicide, self harm and resilience training<sup>1</sup>. In essence it is so staff are able to fully understand the needs of the young men housed there. Thankfully, many of the staff who helped in the early-days of development are still there, ensuring that all staff on the unit share the same ethos when it comes to working with such vulnerable people. Having such an ethos inevitably helps offender/staff relationships, which is furthered by the offender/staff ratio. For example, when the unit is full, the ratio of offenders to staff is 48/36. This is based on the premise of there being one member of staff per six offenders. In practice however, the ratio is often higher, as this does not include the non HM Prison Service staff who are often present on the unit for intervention work (see below). For example, in an intervention class such as education, there will be a HM Prison Service security officer in the room as well as the intervention staff member. Although the security officer is not there to provide education, similar to the sessions at Grendon however, such officers will often get involved and engage with the intervention sessions. Ensuring that Keppel maintains current levels of funding and levels of staffing is therefore imperative to the success of the unit, even though in 2009, an annual place at Keppel cost approximately £90,000<sup>2</sup>. Whilst this is approximately £30,000 higher than a mainstream Young Offender Institution (YOI) place, it is significantly cheaper than an equivalent place in either a secure training centre or a secure children's home (£160,000 and £215,000 respectively)<sup>3</sup>.

1. Department for Education (2010) *Safeguarding the Future. A review of the Youth Justice Board's Governance and Operating Arrangements*. Available at: <http://publications.education.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DSCF-00223-2010> (accessed 6 May 2011).
2. Pemberton, C. (2009) 'Wetherby YOI and its Keppel Unit are changing perceptions of prison', *communitycare.co.uk*, 9 December 2009. Available at: <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/Articles/2009/12/09/113369/Wetherby-YOI-and-its-Keppel-Unit-are-changing-perceptions-of.htm> (accessed 6 May 2011).
3. Department for Education (2010) see above, n. 1.

## Referral criteria and population

In conjunction with the initial idea behind Keppel, in order to get onto the unit all residents must have been identified as being vulnerable and thus unable to cope in the mainstream under-18 estate. Many of those on the unit, therefore, have mental health problems, have been socially excluded from a young age and therefore need individualised care and support, rather than a regime based on discipline and control. In February 2011, it was estimated that of those on the unit at that time, 80 per cent had mental health issues and just over 6 per cent were self harming, although this had been as high as 35 per cent at another time. Perhaps unsurprisingly, up to 80 per cent of the young men either came to prison directly from the care system or had been known to social services, often due to being on the child protection register. The unit takes young prisoners who are being held on remand, who are serving detention and training orders or who have been sentenced to indeterminate life sentences.

Even though the unit is situated in a Northern YOI, it is a national resource, with referrals having come from as far as Southampton, Wales, London, Cornwall and the Isle of Wight. When deciding whether or not to accept a referral, unit staff, will consider the distance which the young man will be from his local community and this will be weighed up against the benefits which the unit can offer. If the family of the young person are in a position to make the journey up to Wetherby for visits then the referral is more likely to be accepted. However, if it is perceived that it would be detrimental to the young person to be taken away from community links, the referral will often be refused. Despite this process, in practice and as highlighted above, the vast majority of the young men do not have strong family ties, often coming from the care system, and so this balancing act, in these cases, is not needed. Despite this, some vulnerable young men are potentially not benefitting from the regime offered at Keppel solely due to geography and so clearly more units around the country are urgently required.

The average stay at Keppel is 8-10 months, with the majority being released into the community at this point. This can be problematic for those who have no

family ties as they will often not know where they are staying until they have seen their youth offending team officer after they have been released. Keppel can therefore be described as a safety bubble in which these vulnerable young men can flourish; although to maintain this work there needs to be better reintegration and through-care work. There is approximately a 20 per cent return rate, at the current time, although reconviction rates may be much higher than this as many will either be too old for Keppel or may no longer be deemed to be suitable for it.

One of the biggest problems for the young men on the unit is that when they reach 18 they will be transferred. Due to the fact that many young people under the age of 18 will not have received a mental health diagnosis, this will often not take place until this stage. The outcome of this assessment will largely determine whether the prisoner is transferred to a secure hospital or will return to the main prison estate, albeit this time the young adult estate. If the latter option is taken then any success which has been achieved at Keppel has the potential to be lost, as a comparable unit for those aged 18 and over does not exist. A unit for post 17 year olds is therefore also required.

### Life and regime

In recognition of the fact that the young men on the unit are vulnerable, every resident will have his own en-suite room. This is particularly important for those who have mental health needs or have been abused by others. Interestingly, when compared to main estate prisons, there is very little in-cell damage with many of the young men taking a pride in their rooms with one commenting that it was the nicest place that he had ever lived (compared to B and Bs in the community). To support an environment not primarily based on discipline and control, Keppel is divided up into four spurs, named after different colours. Each spur is made up of 12 bedrooms and one safe room. The young men will eat and spend their recreation time on their spur, often not mixing with residents on other spurs. This is again in recognition of the resident's needs and vulnerabilities. The communal areas at Keppel have been described as feeling and looking like a secure children's home<sup>4</sup>. The walls are full

When deciding whether or not to accept a referral, unit staff, will consider the distance which the young man will be from his local community and this will be weighed up against the benefits which the unit can offer.

4. Pemberton, C. (2009) see above n. 2.

of artwork, there is soft lighting, a fishing lake and also a garden. There is also a different feel about the place in the sense that you do not feel that you are inside a YOI.

The regime at Keppel is based around personal centeredness. Every morning and afternoon the staff will have a multi-disciplinary meeting to discuss individual offenders. Every young offender has a care plan which is reviewed and updated every two weeks. This will identify what interventions and priorities are needed for that individual. Unlike the main site, the boys do not have to complete a minimum number of education hours, which means that plans can be tailored towards priorities. Therefore if an offender cannot read or write then the team can set realistic targets which are more likely to be achievable. These priorities will be discussed and dealt with in the twice-daily meetings. In addition to this care plan, each young offender will have a personal officer (and a back up officer when the first is not working) and a case worker.

### Interventions

Keppel is a purpose built, standalone unit and due to this all intervention staff will come onto the unit. The only time that the young men will leave its confines and go to the main HMYOI Wetherby site is for visits, chaplaincy, to use the library or to use the gym, although when using the gym no mainstream prisoners will be there. As well as education provision (see Elaine Cobb's article in this issue), other intervention priorities may include:

- ❑ CAMHS- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.
- ❑ Basics skills — including reading, writing, washing, dressing etc.
- ❑ Offending behaviour programmes — although there is one accredited offending behaviour programme for young people (JETS Living Skills<sup>5</sup>) often this is not suitable for the young men on Keppel due to their mental health needs. A lot of the work is therefore carried out using non-accredited programmes. The programmes are carried out by psychologists and cover issues such as anger management, emotional management and substance misuse. Many of the young men on

the unit have behavioural needs or have learnt behaviour which needs to be altered and this is one of the main ways in which this is addressed.

- ❑ Acupuncture — for relaxation.
- ❑ Music.
- ❑ Art.
- ❑ The Lucy Faithfull Foundation — who offer a one-to-one consultation and counselling programme for sex offenders.

In addition to traditional interventions the young men may also get involved in Children in Need days; concerts; family days; the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme (up to bronze level); sports day; fishing and caring for animals (rabbits, ducks, chickens, and tortoises). Staff have seen, for example, the sense of

achievement which is felt when a resident catches his first fish. Animals have also been used to communicate with the young men when dealing with difficult issues, for example some staff reported that it was often used as a mechanism to get a prisoner to open up about his problems and feelings. The staff have also had some success in reducing levels of self harm, by paying particular attention to alternative ways in which the young men can express themselves and their feelings. This may be through art or it could be through using other techniques such as the means of red water to simulate blood or by giving the young person an

elastic band to wear on his wrist so that a minimal level of pain can be inflicted. This success is a credit to the staff at Keppel.

All of these activities encourage the young men to get involved and to take responsibility for something. Importantly they offer the opportunity for them to do something positive. Similar to Grendon, however, Keppel is not the easy option. The residents cannot just stay in their rooms and keep their heads down and do their time. They have to actively participate and engage with the system. The regime at Keppel was thus described by one member of staff as 'how it should all be'.

### Efficacy

Despite its relative newness, the unit has been inspected by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, who in a

Every young offender has a care plan which is reviewed and updated every two weeks. This will identify what interventions and priorities are needed for that individual.

5. A juvenile version of the adult Enhanced Thinking Skills (ETS) programme.

post-opening inspection noted that it was 'an impressive facility, achieving a great deal with some very damaged young people with a range of complex problems'<sup>6</sup>. The unit was thought to be a fundamentally safe place, with little self-harming, little bullying and excellent staff/offender relations. In conclusion it was stated:

*The Keppel Unit is among the most impressive custodial facilities to have opened in recent years. In a very short time, a committed group of staff have established a safe, supportive and purposeful unit in which the risks and needs posed by some very damaged and complex young people are effectively addressed. However, after only a few months in existence, the unit is already a victim of its own success, with referrals coming from across the country rather than merely from its original northern catchment area. This strategic drift is unhelpful and inhibits resettlement and family ties. The Youth Justice*

*Board and the Prison Service need to clarify the unit's role and, perhaps, replicate it in the south of the country, to help meet the evident need and to ensure that this much needed resource can fulfil its immense potential<sup>7</sup>.*

## Conclusion

Early data and anecdotal evidence from the staff on the unit, suggests that Keppel is a success. The extension of the service is therefore essential. This should not be limited to the opening of one other unit in the south of the country, but should be even more widespread. On the basis that Keppel offers a regime where the individualised needs of young people are taken into account, all vulnerable young prisoners should be treated within a similar regime, so that vulnerabilities, criminogenic needs and social exclusion can be more effectively addressed within a safe and positive custodial environment.

## Prison Service Journal

The Prison Service Journal is now available electronically through the website of the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies at

**<http://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/psj.html>**

The Centre for Crime and Justice Studies was established in 1931 and is an independent public interest charity whose mission is to inspire enduring change by promoting understanding of social harm, the centrality of social justice and the limits of criminal justice.

6. HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2009) *Report on an announced inspection of HMYOI Wetherby, The Keppel Unit, 20-24 April 2009*. London: HMIP, p.5.  
7. Ibid.