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Special Edition
**HMP Whatton
Achieving Change**

Editorial Comment

This special edition of *Prison Service Journal* focuses on the work of HMP Whatton, a prison which specialises in the management of men who have committed sexual offences.

There are around 10,500 people in the prison system convicted of sexual offences, almost 15 per cent of the sentenced prisoner population¹. They are a group who have increasingly been the subject of public and political concern, being characterised as the '*the hate figure of our time*'². This edition details the professional response to the management and treatment of sex offenders, as such eschewing the emotive responses that have characterised much public debate and instead taking a more evidence-based and rational approach to a controversial and challenging subject.

HMP Whatton was originally built in 1966 as a detention centre for boys and for much of its history was a young offender institution. In 1990 it became an adult male category C training prison and over time developed a specialist role for men who have committed sexual offences. Its population more than doubled in early 2006 with a major expansion. It now holds over 800 men, all of whom have committed sexual offences, approximately 70 per cent of the population have child victims and the remainder adult victims.

This special edition provides an in-depth focus on the complex and successful work of HMP Whatton. The edition opens with an article by Dr Nicholas Blagden from Nottingham Trent University and Karen Thorne, a chartered psychologist at HMP Whatton, which reports on a mixed-methods study of the therapeutic and rehabilitative 'climate' in the prison. This study suggests that a progressive and positive culture has been created and maintained that enables change. This is followed by Alison Levins from the University of Cambridge who offers a sociological study of HMP Whatton highlighting that there are some similarities but also significant differences between the culture of HMP Whatton and that of other prisons. She accounts for these differences not only in the fact that the population of the prison are distinct, but also in the culture and approach of the organisation.

The remaining articles focus on specific issues and groups within HMP Whatton. Rebecca Lievesley, Belinda Winder, Helen Elliott, Adarsh Kaul, Karen Thorne and Kerensa Hocken offer a sober account of the use of medication in the treatment and

management of deviant sexual arousal and behaviour. This is an issue that has received salacious and polarised coverage, but this research provides a more balanced, evidence-based account of the innovative work at the prison. A range of specific groups are discussed in greater detail in subsequent articles including a thoughtful descriptive account of the strategic development of a disability strategy by Elizabeth Dunn, Karen Thorne and Kerensa Hocken. This is followed by Kerensa Hocken's detailed and practical discussion of techniques to improve the risk assessment of those with intellectual disability. There is a fascinating description of the development of a sex offender treatment programme for deaf prisoners by Nicola Payne and Helen O'Connor, which reveals the subtlety and complexity of undertaking such a task. Lynn Saunders, Governor of HMP Whatton, discusses the work to provide services to large numbers of older prisoners, including those who will die in prison. She argues that this work is not only important in itself, but also for what it reveals about the wider organisational culture and values. Finally, Dr Ron Harper and Deborah Franks describe how the benefits of counselling psychology can support and enhance the rehabilitative work of HMP Whatton.

Together, these articles illustrate that HMP Whatton has become an innovative, imaginative and leading service in the treatment and management of men who have committed sexual offences. In the most recent HM Inspectorate of Prisons report³, it was recognised that, '*Whatton is a prison with a clear purpose and function*', in which '*progress had continued and safety and respect outcomes... were good*'. It went on to say that '*A culture of respect was evident throughout the prison*' and that '*Relationships between staff and prisoners were excellent*'. In relation to its rehabilitative work, it was assessed that, '*The prison's key purpose, the management of sex offenders, was linked directly to the quality and range of its offending behaviour work. Much of this was excellent. Programmes appeared to be well managed and it was clear that the prison was seeking to respond to need*'.

The success of HMP Whatton with a challenging and complex population deserves closer consideration and offers the opportunity for others to learn. It is intended that this edition of *Prison Service Journal* provides exactly that consideration and opportunity.

1. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/offender-management-statistics-quarterly--2>

2. Thomas, T. (2005) *Sex crime: Sex offending and society* Cullompton: Willan.

3. HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2012) *Report on an announced inspection of HMP Whatton 30 January – 3 February 2012* by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons.