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Editorial Comment

Prisons can often feel like insular worlds with their own culture and dynamics. Terms such as ‘total institution’, proposed by Erving Goffman, suggest that some institutions, such as prisons are almost hermetically sealed and exercise a powerful, dominating influence over those inside. However, such a polar view could never be entirely sustained. There is always space, even if constrained and circumscribed, for the outside to seep in and for people to express and enact their own individual and collective will. In other words there is a dialectical relationship where there is to some degree a process of negotiation between different individuals or wider forces. Broadly speaking, this is the loose theme that runs through this edition of *Prison Service Journal*. The articles explore how the inside and outside coincide across the range of prison life. They raise a range of questions that are both instrumental, about how things might be made more effective, and normative, about the moral nature of these spaces. They ask how and in what ways the internal and external worlds are entangled? What are the effects of this upon prisoners, staff and the public? What are the values that are reflected in these exchanges and interfaces? How might these spaces be developed so as to ameliorate the pains of imprisonment?

The first two articles are drawn from a conference held at HMP Grendon in November 2013, on the issue of ‘Faith in confinement’. Dr. Ruth Armstrong of the University of Cambridge discusses her research on post-release support offered to ex-prisoners by faith community volunteers in America. Armstrong is candid about the weakness and potential benefits of this kind of support. Interestingly she also considers how the values of faith communities and the neo-liberal state conflict and how this may constrain the role of faith communities in rehabilitative work, but may also offer them an alternative role in being advocates for wider social reform. The second paper from the conference is by Michael Kavanagh, the Chaplain General in the National Offender Management Service. He offers an internal perspective upon the role of Chaplaincy in enabling prisoners to desist from crime. In particular, he argues that faith can offer people a means through which they can change their own sense of identity, but also that they can find social support and help.

In her contribution, Dr. Victoria Knight of De Montfort University, Leicester, considers the ways in which in-cell TV has altered the social life of the prison. This is a subtle, fascinating piece, which shows that as well as ‘normalising’ prisons, it has had an impact upon how prisoners relate to one another. Knight deploys case studies in order to illustrate the processes of negotiation that take place and the ways in which television has become an integral aspect of the social world of prisons.

Three articles focus on the experience of prisoners families. Kathryn Sharratt of the University of Huddersfield and Rebecca Cheung of Partners of Prisoners, consider the benefits of extended, supportive family days. They suggest that these have significant benefits for children and parents. They go on to argue that such visits should not be part of the Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme but instead should be open to all parents in prison. A further article by Kathryn Sharratt, this time with Jack Porter and Carole Truman, looks at the impact of the Families helpline funded by NOMS. This evaluation suggests that the service is well used and is an important and highly valued support for those who access it. For a group of people who are sometimes excluded and vulnerable, this can help them to cope with and survive the experience of a partner being imprisoned. The third article takes a legal perspective and examines how courts consider the needs of dependent children in making sentencing decisions on mothers. The article suggests that practice is inconsistent, under-developed and would benefit from more structured guidance.

The final two articles provide examples of the public coming into prisons. Allan Brodie of English Heritage offers an antidote to historical views of prison visits as prurient entertainment, instead providing examples of how during the Georgian period, it was visits to prisons which inspired prison reformers such as John Howard and gave their critical accounts an authenticity and credibility which helped them to influence changes in policy and practice. From a contemporary perspective, prison visits have been characterised as a form of ‘dark tourism’ which revel in pain, suffering and construct a perverse enjoyment from discomfort with modern life. Professor Michael Brookes, formerly Director of Therapeutic Communities at HMP Grendon, discusses the annual debate between students from Birmingham City University and residents at HMP Grendon. Rather than being a form of ‘dark tourism’, Brookes suggests, using recent research, that this has a beneficial impact upon participants. Brookes goes on to suggest that this is an activity which other prisons may usefully develop.

As always, *Prison Service Journal* attempts to offer diverse, engaging and thought provoking articles. This particular edition offers opportunities for those who live, work and are connected with prisons to consider how the relationships between the inside and outside worlds are constituted and how the interaction between them can influence and shape one another. This has implications for both academic theory but also prison policy and everyday practice.