

PRISON SERVICE JOURNAL

March 2017 No 230



Editorial Comment

In November 2016, the Government published its *White Paper Prison safety and reform*¹ setting out what were claimed to be 'the most far-reaching reforms for a generation'. The main elements of these changes included reasserting discipline, reducing violence and improving safety in prisons. Building on this foundation, prisons will have a greater focus on reducing reoffending, helping those in prison to change their lives. It is intended that these changes will be enabled by transferring greater responsibility to the frontline, while also tightening accountability for delivery. This edition of *Prison Service Journal* is not intended as a direct response to the White Paper, but a number of the contributions do address themes regarding safety and rehabilitation.

The first article by Charlie Lloyd et al, focusses on prison staff working in drug recovery units. In her Foreword to the White Paper, the Secretary of State for Justice, Elizabeth Truss, stated that success depended upon, '...prison staff who are not just security guards and minders but also mentors. Staff will have the resources, authority and tools needed to break through the road blocks to reform and take on the challenge of transforming lives'. The article illustrates that staff working in recovery units successfully took on this challenge and were having a positive impact. The article reveals that such success is dependant upon a range of factors, including the amount of staff resources available, but also the culture and values of those people, as well as a conducive working environment including architecture and building small communities. This article is complimented by Joe Sim's review of a new edition of Jimmy Boyle's famous autobiography, *A sense of freedom*. This book recounts Boyle's descent into the darkest corners of the Scottish prison system in the 1960s and 1970s. The change for him came when he was transferred to the therapeutic unit at Barlinnie. As Sim traces, despite its successes, the unit fell out of favour and was closed in 1995. This is a tale of how the reform efforts are not new, such efforts have been made successfully before, but they are often precarious, liable to be blown away in the changing political winds.

The impact of and on staff is the focus of two articles. Flora Fitzalan Howard uses her research in order to illustrate how adjudications and the formal disciplinary process can contribute towards a more rehabilitative culture within prisons. In contrast, Collette Barry's research in the Irish Prison Service illustrates the distressing and traumatic experiences of staff responding to suicides in

prison. Together these show the extremes that are often demanded of those who work in prisons, where idealistic optimism exists alongside desperation.

The process of reform is addressed in two further articles. Helen Elfleet offers a critique of Baroness Corston's report on women's imprisonment, some ten years after it was originally published. Elfleet highlights how government reform strategies, including those of Corston, often reflect dominant ideologies. In this particular case, it is argued that neo-liberal ideas of self-regulation and resilience inform the approach rather than more radical notions of social justice. In contrast, The Reverend David Kirk Beedon, Anglican Chaplain at HMP Ranby, focusses on the spirit of humanity, emotional connectedness and deep relating as the core elements of a socially just institution. These articles therefore posit contrasting emphasis on whether reform is best served through altering political and social structures, or through the moral agency of individuals.

Other contributions in this article offer new approaches to understanding criminal behaviour, improving institutional safety and reducing reoffending. Deborah Fortescue, Sara Da Silva Ramos and Michael Oddy set out the case for brain injury being a causal factor in criminal behaviour and the need for better identification and intervention, while Jennifer Hogan explores the evidence for the relevance and effectiveness of mindfulness as an intervention, and also Dr. Ulrika Haggård and Dr. Åsa Eriksson evaluate the effectiveness of risk assessment tools in predicting institutional violence. These articles illustrate the broad and diverse clinical approaches that can be adopted in attempting to address offending behaviour.

The book reviews in this edition have all been deliberately selected in order to focus upon the experience of prisoners. These include autobiographies by distinguished writers such as Jimmy Boyle and Erwin James. This selection is intended to emphasise the importance of those who experience imprisonment in any discussions about reform.

Although not specifically commissioned in order to respond to the new White Paper, the contributions in this edition of *PSJ* do reflect upon major themes regarding institutional safety and rehabilitation. As always, these articles do not simply echo and amplify organisational perspectives, but instead offer an opportunity for reflection, discussion and critique.

1. Available at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/565014/cm-9350-prison-safety-and-reform-_web_.pdf