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Special Edition
Rehabilitative Culture

Editorial Comment

In January 2018, Prison Service Journal published an article by Dr Ruth Mann, Flora Fitzalan Howard and Jenny Tew, which focused on 'rehabilitative culture'. This article attempted to define a concept that had become increasingly discussed in prisons, had been the subject of a guidance document, and was starting to shape practice. The authors optimistically claimed, 'we are seeing something of a cultural revolution taking place'. A year and a half down the line, and interest has continued to grow in this concept and this edition of PSJ attempts not only to take stock of the current state of play, but also to provide ideas, illustrations and advice that are deliberately intended to shape practice.

The edition opens with an article by Dr Ruth Mann, in which she describes that a rehabilitative culture is 'a culture with a purpose; that is, to support people in turning away from crime and toward a different life'. As Mann explains, this is 'not necessarily the same thing as a happy culture, and certainly is not a soft culture'. The article goes on to highlight the seven features of rehabilitative cultures: relationships and interaction; gives hope; fair processes; physical environment; encourages identity change; builds social capital; and, rehabilitative leadership. The article illustrates these with a variety of examples from prisons.

The edition goes on to examine two examples of prisons that have cultivated more rehabilitative cultures. The first is HMP Springhill, an open prison, which became the first men's prison to achieve whole-prison accreditation as an Enabling Environment, through the Royal College of Psychiatrists. In a conversation between the previous Deputy Governor, Matt Tilt, and Governor, Jamie Bennett, they describe the journey the prison undertook, recovering from catastrophic failure and rebuilding the culture in a positive, progressive way. The second project described in this edition, is the Prison Growth Project at HMP Guys Marsh. Independent academic, Dr Sarah Lewis, and Steve Robertson, Deputy Governor of HMP Guys Marsh, describe the background to this project, its key features and impact. This was a project that originally started in a Norwegian prison, and fosters positive relationships and collaboration between those who live and work in prisons.

The sense of what is possible and what is achieved, will vary from prison to prison. This edition attempts to bring this to life through a series of interviews with those who are in prisons. This covers the spectrum of adult male prisons from high security, to category C, to open prison. These interviews illustrate that the exact shape of rehabilitative practices, and the perception of them, alters significantly in different settings. This reflects a number of factors, including the depth and weight of custody, the stage of sentence each individual is at, and the organisational context.

The edition then goes on to address the vital contribution of those who work in prisons. The Five Minute Intervention training has been an important element of the institutional support for nurturing rehabilitative cultures and has been rolled out nationally. Catherine Vickers-Pinchbeck contributes a qualitative study of this training. This study offers grounds for cautious optimism. It shows that those who work in prisons generally support rehabilitative aims, and either have relevant skills or can be assisted through training to develop them. Making the most of the talents of prison staff can, however, be hampered by resources. Many people feel they do not have sufficient time and opportunity to maximise their impact. Two further sets of interviews give opportunity for prison staff to describe their contribution to rehabilitative cultures. These interviews were conducted in a category C prison, a young offenders institution, and at HMP Grendon, a specialised prison housing therapeutic communities for men who have committed serious violent and sexually violent offences. These interviews show the passion, imagination and talent of those working directly with people in prison.

The previous edition of PSJ was on the theme of 'The prison crisis'. It is no accident that this is now followed by a hopeful edition. Indeed, it is no accident that the support for rehabilitative cultures has emerged during such a challenging time. Crises are clearly a threat to institutions, including prisons, but they are also an opportunity. They are an opportunity to move in new directions, take different approaches and develop innovative practices. The potential of rehabilitative cultures is that in a period of crises, they offer what Mann, Fitzalan Howard and Tew described 18 months ago as a 'cultural revolution' in penal practice.