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Special Edition: Prison Leadership

Editorial Comment

Each year, *Prison Service Journal* publishes articles based upon the annual Perrie Lectures. This is a longstanding and greatly valued collaboration, of which PSJ is very proud.

The Perrie Lectures is an annual event which has the purpose of stimulating dialogue between criminal justice organisations, the voluntary sector and all those with an academic, legal or practical interest in offenders and their families. It is hoped that the event will contribute towards improving the care of offenders, and advancing penal policy, in its broadest sense. These are aspirations that are shared by *Prison Service Journal*. The Lectures are named in honour of Bill Perrie, who retired from the Prison Service in 1978. He worked as a prison governor for 32 years, latterly at HMPs Hull, Long Lartin, and Birmingham. He was noted for his contribution to the development of hostels, working out schemes, and regimes for long term prisoners.

This year, the theme of the lectures was 'What does leadership mean in prisons?'. This is a theme that has been the focus of political attention during recent years. As Secretary of State, Michael Gove called for prison governors to have greater autonomy and piloted a new model of 'reform prisons' that operated with reduced central prescription. In contrast, Prisons Minister Rory Stewart sought assistance from the military in order to develop a proposal for a training college for new governors. A third approach emerged in the 2016 White Paper, *Prison Safety and Reform*, which both called for governors to be more empowered and to be more accountable through independent scrutiny and the production of performance league tables. It is in this contested climate that the Perrie Lectures invited speakers to contribute to the debate on prison leadership.

The first lecture was delivered by Dr. Jamie Bennett, a prison Governor and researcher, titled 'Against prison management'. The lecture criticized what Bennett described as being the dominant approach to prison management, which he characterized as over-using targets, audits and other measures so leaving little space for individuality, creativity and autonomy; over-emphasizing compliance with measures for their own sake without meaningful connection with the social context, and; nurturing compliant behaviour and uniformity amongst prison managers with the aim of producing identikit corporate citizens. In contrast, Bennett called for an alternative approach, which he described as starting to emerge in some corners of the prison system. The main features

of this alternative approach were described as: a strong concern with the moral and social context of imprisonment; more locally-rooted institutions that are connected to and engaged with the communities they are situated within and the communities that are situated within them; optimism about the creativity and self-motivation of people and their capacity to do good, and; a more craftsman-like set of management practices that imaginatively and sensitively engage with the moral, cultural and emotional dimensions or organisational life.

Dr. Kate Gooch, senior lecturer and University of Bath, delivered the second lecture, 'The Opportunity, Challenges and Politics of Prison Leadership', which drew heavily upon her research in prisons. Gooch also rejected the over-emphasis upon performance measurement, and instead drew attention to the quality of leadership, which 'creates an environment where people are more likely to flourish rather than disintegrate, where lives are saved not lost, where people grow instead of shrink, and where people find some hope even in what can often be a hopeless situation'. An important contribution of Gooch's lecture was to draw attention to the changing role of the prison Governor, with reduced formal power and authority meaning that a traditional hierarchical and directive approach would no longer be sustainable. Instead, Governors had to develop relationship and be able to connect with people, motivate and engage them, and shape their actions. Gooch also sensitively dissects and reflects the challenges of prison leadership, revealing it as a technically and emotionally complex task.

Dr. Sarah Lewis, an independent researcher, and Steve Robertson, Deputy Governor of HMP Guys Marsh, delivered lectures that described their collaboration at HMP Guys Marsh, called the Prison Growth Project. This was initiated by Lewis, drawing upon Scandinavian practices. In particular, the project enabled those who lived and worked in the prison to participate in community activities, supporting each other and forming meaningful connections. Together, Lewis and Robertson capture the practices, values and the emotional texture of the approach they developed. As Robertson describes, in contrast to the traditional hierarchical approach: 'Leadership should not be linked to grade, rank or title, leadership is bestowed on those who have the right skills to do so, and who do not think they are in any way better than others'. The Prison Growth Project played a significant role in the

improvements delivered at HMP Guys Marsh and recognised by the independent inspectorate of prisons.

The final lecture was delivered by former Chief Executive of HM Prison and Probation Service, Michael Spurr. This focusses on what he describes as the 'three P's' — purpose, presence and perspective. In relation to purpose, Spurr rightly highlights the conflicting and contested purposes of prisons and how leaders must be able to work with ambiguity and dynamic tensions, attempting to balance and make sense of the messiness of organisational life. Presence captures the role of leaders in building relationships and role modelling the right approach. The third area, perspective, Spurr describes as people maintaining their values and having focus despite the competing pressures that they face. Spurr concludes that his prescription is also an alternative to the narrow, constraining managerial approach that over-emphasises targets and monitoring.

The edition also includes two articles that are intended to complement the Perrie Lectures. The role of

prisons is the focus of Dr. Kimmett Edgar's article on the work of the Prison Reform Trust supporting active citizen panels. These panels involve facilitating collaboration between those who live and work in prisons to identify the most significant problems and develop proposals for addressing them. The second article is an interview with Simon Shepherd, Director of Butler Trust. This interview particularly focusses on 'The good book of prisons', which Shepherd produced after visiting every prison in England and Wales in order to identify what was best in each prison. These two articles intend to emphasise the role of prisoners and charitable organisations in leading and improving prisons.

This edition is the fruit of a long and productive collaboration between PSJ and Perrie Lectures. Both organisations intend to encourage debate, discussion and reflection, but also stimulate progressive actions and developments in practice. Long may that progressive partnership continue.