

Editorial PQ30

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Published version

PHILLIPS, Jake (2023). Editorial PQ30. Probation Quarterly, 30.

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WELCOME TO PROBATION QUARTERLY ISSUE 30



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EDITORIAL

The Government recently announced plans to reduce the numbers of people being sent to prison for sentences of less than 12 months. Although we await precise details it looks like the presumption against short sentences will be enabled via a move towards suspending short sentences rather than replacing them altogether. This is - on paper - a positive and progressive move: after all, we know that short prison sentences are less likely to reduce people's risk of reoffending when compared to community sanctions (Mutebie and Brown, 2023). Despite the Government introducing these reforms partly (or perhaps primarily) in response to an overcrowded prison estate that is of the Government's own making this should be seen as a positive shift. Whether the use of more community sentences will reduce the number of people in prison is an important question and Carr (2023) is right to point out that probation cannot be seen as a panacea for the prisons crisis.

One thing we can be sure of is that should these reforms come to fruition they will have a significant impact on the size and nature of the probation caseload over the coming years. In 2022, 37,548 people were sentenced to a custodial sentence of 12 months or less (Ministry of Justice, 2023). If just half of those sentences are suspended, the Probation Service will have an additional 18,000 Suspended Sentence Orders (SSOs) to supervise over the course of a year which will then be followed by a move from large numbers under post-sentence supervision to more people serving SSOs. The pressures that the Service is already under in terms of workloads and understaffing have been widely recognised. Without planning and increased resources any potential positive effects of this policy risk being nullified by a workforce that is simply unable to support extra people on the caseload due to workload pressures.

<https://doi.org/10.54006/XFWF4805>

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In this issue of *Probation Quarterly* we start with an article from Matt Tidmarsh which explores probation practitioner experiences of unification. Although the story from probation tends to be negative, Ailie Rennie's research with people who have been released from prison on a life license provides a positive look at how probation can help people given the right circumstances. We then turn our attention to people who are on probation following a sexual offence conviction. Kirsty Teague and Charlotte Oliver provide an insightful discussion of the importance of language when talking about this group while Pete Brown and colleagues offer some insight into the ways in which people experience the Horizon programme.

David Adlington-Rivers then explores the role of hope in probation, arguing that hope can and should play an important role in probation practice, although doing so in the current climate might seem difficult. Tony Doherty and colleagues provide an overview of their work that has focused on black fathers in the criminal justice, providing valuable insight into how this neglected group can be better supported and engaged. Continuing the theme of gender, Sarah Page and colleagues have written a summary of their research into women's experiences of drug treatment adding to the evidence around the need for women-specific treatment spaces.

The penultimate article in this issue comes from Beth Weaver and colleagues in Scotland in which they provide an overview of their work with

young adults and - specifically - how young adults understand and conceptualise social justice. In our final article, we hear from James Tangen who writes about current efforts to set up a probation network in the British Society of Criminology. Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to remember and pay tribute to Mike Guilfoyle who was a regular contributor to, and supporter of, PQ. His articles combined his experience as a magistrate and a probation officer to shed light on the realities of practice and the relationship between the court and probation work. Mike will be much missed in the world of probation.

As ever, I hope that you enjoy reading this issue of PQ and please do get in touch if you have any comments, or want to contribute to future issues.

References

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