

Editorial PQ29

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Welcome to Probation Quarterly Issue 29



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Editorial: A dismal summer for probation?

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Since my previous editorial in June, there seems to have been a slew of bad news for probation in England and Wales. Numerous HMI Probation inspection reports have highlighted poor quality practice. A quick scan of reports published since June suggests that the key issues facing probation are – still – recruitment and training and supporting new staff. Creating a coherent culture out of two organisations (CRCs and the NPS) is proving to pose significant challenges for services, most likely compounded by low staffing levels and high levels of sickness absence. The legacy of the disaster that was TR lives on.

More positively, HMI Probation research identifies a positive correlation between high quality supervision (as defined by their standards) and early outcomes and progress for people under probation supervision. There is not enough in here to suggest causation and how these early outcomes then shape reduced reoffending and desistance in the longer term remains unknown. However, this innovative way of using inspection data to deepen our understanding of how to create pathways to more fulfilling lives for people on probation is to be welcomed and I look forward to seeing subsequent publications on this theme in the future.

In this issue I am delighted to include a range of articles from people with lived experience of probation, practitioners, academics and organisations working in the criminal justice sector. Two themes cut through this issue: the importance of higher education; and the value of providing first-hand accounts of desistance, imprisonment, risk assessments and other difficult to capture but critical aspects of the probation experience. PQ29 starts with an interview with Professor Rob Canton who was appointed patron of the Probation Institute earlier this year. Rob's insights into probation and what it can offer people in terms of a career are – as always – excellently made and his identification of key challenges is relevant to everyone who has an interest in the field of probation. Max Dennehy then reflects on his experience of desistance and relates it to what we know about desistance and recovery in the academic literature. His call for 'recovery ready' communities should be heard by all. Eve Mullins and Steve Kirkwood's article explores the ways in which desistance narratives are constructed by people both working and participating in group work in Scotland. We then hear from colleagues at Portsmouth University and their research into the use of 'XR technology' in the training of probation officers. Marj Rogers provides us with a

summary of her research into the experiences of black, Asian and minority ethnic residents in Approved Premises – an example of research which targets two under-researched areas of probation: racial inequality and Approved Premises.

Dave Honeywell is a lecturer at Arden university who has recently published a book about his experiences of desistance – in his article in PQ he reflects on his experiences of probation and the role probation practitioners played in his desistance journey. Bird Podcast investigates what it means to do time in the UK prison system and in this issue of PQ I am pleased to include a summary of a recent episode in which they spoke to young adults in Belmarsh prison about their experiences of prison. Finally, colleagues from Liverpool John Moore's University provide a summary of their evaluation of the Beyond the Gate magazine which aims to raise awareness of organisations/services that link into resettlement and publishes real resettlement experiences/stories to inspire individuals within prison.

As ever, I hope you enjoy the articles in this issue and please do get in touch should you wish to discuss writing an article for Probation Quarterly.