

the Howard League for Penal Reform

Early Career Academics Network Bulletin

July 2011 – Issue 10

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## Introduction

The first reading of the legal aid, sentencing and punishment of offenders bill was published on 21<sup>st</sup> June and was closely followed by its second reading (29<sup>th</sup> June). The Howard League, as you would expect, added its voice to the media frenzy that ensued – with much of the early attention focussed on sentence discounting for early guilty pleas. Yet there is so much more in the bill for us. Our parliamentary briefings have highlighted four issues: the role of short prison sentences; real work in prison; the role of probation and IPPs (indeterminate sentences for public protection). We will be working hard over the next few months to ensure that our views and ideas are brought to the attention of opinion formers, as well as MPs and peers.



Two other things I'd like to bring to your attention. First, there is still time left to apply for the Oxford/Howard League post-doctoral fellowship. Information can be found here (<http://www.howardleague.org/post-doctoral-fellowship/>) and also our annual wine reception, hosted by our President, Lord Carlile QC. This year it will be held on Monday 18 July 2011, 4pm – 6pm on the Terrace of the

House of Commons. To book your place follow this link:  
<http://www.howardleague.org/wine-reception-2011/>

**Anita Dockley**  
**Research Director**

## News

### No winners

The Howard League's research, in collaboration with the Prison Governors' Association, into the experience of adult men serving short sentences has been published. It showed that prisoners preferred serving a short time in prison rather than a community sentence. Ultimately, they suggested that prison was easier to complete and less challenging. Prison staff interviewed concurred with this view.



ECAN member, Dr Julie Trebilcock from Imperial College, London was commissioned to undertake the research. At the launch of the report she said: "The survey responses of both prisoners and prison staff highlight how damaging short prison sentences can be. Many prisoners regard their return to prison as inevitable on the basis that they leave prison 'just the same', or even more disadvantaged, than they were on arrival. The current use of short prison sentences offers no winners: neither prisoners nor staff are being equipped with the necessary support and interventions to help break the cycle of reoffending, while communities are having to cope with the frustration and disillusionment that is generated by the consistently high reoffending rates of this population."

Julie is now extending this research to look at the issues facing short term women prisoners. The research is due to be published at the end of the year.

More information about the research can be found at <http://www.howardleague.org/current-research/>

### CPS consults on perverting the course of justice and false allegations of rape

Following a number of high profile cases of women being sentenced to prison following prosecution for perverting the course of justice following allegedly false allegations of rape, Kier Starmer QC, the Director of Public Prosecution issued a consultation on the issue. The Howard League made a submission: [http://www.howardleague.org/fileadmin/howard\\_league/user/pdf/Consultations/Submission\\_to\\_the\\_consultation\\_on\\_CPS\\_Interim\\_Guidance\\_on\\_Perverting\\_the\\_Course\\_of\\_Justice\\_-\\_May\\_2011.pdf](http://www.howardleague.org/fileadmin/howard_league/user/pdf/Consultations/Submission_to_the_consultation_on_CPS_Interim_Guidance_on_Perverting_the_Course_of_Justice_-_May_2011.pdf).

It was based on interviews with women who had experienced imprisonment following such prosecution and a review of published literature and media sources since 2009. This research revealed that in 2009 there were at least 10 high profile cases reported in the media. All but two of these cases attracted custodial sentences ranging from four months to two years. In 2010,

it appeared that the number of women prosecuted for making malicious allegations increased with at least 26 cases reported in the media.

Our submission concluded: the Howard League for Penal Reform believes that there needs to be a reconsideration of the role of the charge of perverting the course of justice in cases involving rape allegations. Cases involving rape and other sexual offences, remain under-reported, under-charged and under-convicted precisely because they are complex and difficult. They bring the usually private world of sexual relations into the public arena. They also involve the public imposition of an out-dated moral code based on a paternalistic view of such activities. This, we consider, has led to a greater propensity to question the victim's motives rather than focus on the original complaint. Perhaps this consultation should be regarded as an opportunity to review and revise the investigation process as well as prosecution in allegations of rape, retracted or otherwise.

### **Inaugural winner of the Howard League's research medal**

The first research medal has been awarded to Professor Shadd Maruna, Queen's University Belfast, with Dr Anna King for their work entitled "*Once a criminal, Always a Criminal?*": '*Redeemability*' and the Psychology of Punitive Public Attitudes. Shadd spoke to the ideas in the research at the award giving ceremony held at Clifford Chance.



Four other pieces of research were also given awards by the Competition Panel at the ceremony. Papers based on each of the recognised pieces of research will be published later in the year. More information about all the award winners can be found at <http://www.howardleague.org/medal/>

### **Payment by results at Peterborough**

The first research by the RAND Corporation, commissioned by the MOJ into the Social Impact Bond pilot at HMP Peterborough has been published. Justice Secretary, Kenneth Clarke, said the report will be used to "inform our continued progress in payment by results' schemes to reduce reoffending". The findings in the report are based on interviews with 22 key stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of the Social Impact Bond (SIB), and raise issues and potential lessons for other payment by results pilots set to be announced later this year. Link to report: <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/publications/research-and-analysis/moj-research/social-impact-bond-hmp-peterborough.pdf>

Subsequently, with the first reading of the legal aid, sentencing and punishment of offenders bill which focussed on sentencing reforms (21<sup>st</sup> June) an increased role for payment by results was mooted. The Serco contract in Doncaster prison was held up as a new model. It will mean that Serco are held to account both for running a safe, decent and secure prison and the

reoffending of prisoners on release. For each year of the pilot, 10% of the contract value will be placed at risk, and will only be retained by Serco if they reduce reoffending by 5 percentage points. If they fail to achieve this target, then money will be paid back to the Government. If they deliver more, then they will be paid more than the original contract price.

### **Inquiry into Former Armed Service Personnel in Prison reports**

The Howard League's inquiry, headed by Sir John Nutting QC, reported at the end of June. Official estimates suggest that English and Welsh prisons hold around 3,000 ex-servicemen. Our research, supported by ECAN member, Dr James Treadwell, showed that the issues facing ex-servicemen were broadly similar to most adult prisoners: social exclusion, alcohol misuse and financial problems.



Sir John Nutting QC commented: "To a degree this inquiry has been involved in a process of 'myth-busting'. Ex-servicemen are not committing crimes shortly after leaving the plane from Helmand and it is unlikely that combat trauma is driving criminal behaviour. The reality is that most ex-servicemen resettle into the community without problems but that for some, issues arise later in life which can lead to offending."

The full inquiry report can be found here:

[http://www.howardleague.org/fileadmin/howard\\_league/user/pdf/Veterans\\_inquiry/Military\\_inquiry\\_final\\_report.pdf](http://www.howardleague.org/fileadmin/howard_league/user/pdf/Veterans_inquiry/Military_inquiry_final_report.pdf)

### **Adjournment debate on sexual exploitation of young runaways**

Labour MP, Ann Coffey secured an adjournment debate during June in which she raised the issues affecting an estimated 100,000 children under 16 who run away and go missing from home and care each year. In the debate she highlighted the risk facing these children from violence, drugs, alcohol, sexual exploitation and grooming. She suggested that: "*Missing children will be protected only when they are seen as a priority for every local authority, police force, school, community and youth worker in every part of the country.*" The transcript of the debate can be found:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm110621/halltext/110621h0001.htm#11062132000002>



This links to our own research into the decision making process affecting sexually exploited young women. Professor Jo Phoenix, from Durham University is undertaking the research and she is currently keeping a research diary highlighting issues that arise during the research process. More information about this can be found at: <http://www.howardleague.org/young-women-on-edge-research/>

## **Justice select committee vetoes appointment of Chief Inspector of Probation**

On May 11<sup>th</sup> the Justice committee held a pre-appointment hearing with Diana Fulbrook the preferred candidate. Later that day they wrote to the Secretary of State, commenting: *“Although we were favourably impressed by the candidate's experience and successful track record as a Probation Trust Chief Executive, we also set out some reservations [her] candidature in relation to the importance of reducing re-offending and the need for the Chief Inspector to be a driver for change within the probation system. We also had regard to the fact that a number of the most successful inspectors in the criminal justice system have come from outside that system. We were given no indication that external candidates had been sought or placed on the shortlist on this occasion. We concluded that we were not in a position to give our approval to the appointment... and we recommend that the recruitment process be re-opened”*. See:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmjust/1021/102109.htm>

## Feature

### Should I take Keys? Some Ethical Issues to Consider when Researching in Prisons

#### Professor David Wilson

The title of this paper 'should I take keys?'<sup>1</sup> is posed as a rather simple, instrumental question. And, of course, there are any number of other practical, ethical issues and dilemmas that face the prison researcher. However, the academic and philosophical ethical dilemmas that prison researchers face are not so often discussed, or as easily resolved as these practical issues. Indeed, it is the answers to these philosophical and academic ethical dilemmas that provide, I believe, the context – the backdrop – to resolving more practical matters.



Of course, as with any ethical context, some of the contours of that context are not very clear; they lack focus – especially when you get up close. They therefore demand that you make – and continue to make – judgements; and these judgements can sometimes simply present you with still further ethical issues. This paper is based on some personal, penal reflections about how I resolved the ethical dilemmas that I have faced when researching in prisons. It is not an ethical roadmap.

#### The research

These reflections focus particularly on a variety of issues, dilemmas and opportunities that arose when conducting ethnographic research with young black people, and their relationship to the youth and criminal justice systems, between 2002 and 2005<sup>2</sup>. Part of that research programme involved going into three Young Offender Institutions (YOIs), and interviewing 45 young, black men.

This research was underscored by an ethnographic approach. But, as David Nelken has pointed out, “the choice of whether to examine crime from the point of view of the offender, victim, potential victim or controllers, for example, is never innocent of consequences”<sup>3</sup>. In other words, the research programme that forms the basis of this seminar was not “innocent”. It was

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<sup>1</sup> The question also implies that the researcher will be offered keys to get around the prison. This is not always the case, and will depend on a variety of local circumstances within the specific research prison and the length of time that the researcher has been allowed to be at the prison.

<sup>2</sup> This research was conducted on behalf of and in partnership with The Children’s Society. See Wilson, D (2004), “‘Keeping Quiet’ or ‘Going Nuts’: Strategies Used by Young, Black, Men in Custody,” *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 43, July, 317-330.

<sup>3</sup> Nelken, D (1994), “Reflexive Criminology?” in Nelken, D (ed), *The Futures of Criminology*, London: Sage

specifically constructed to listen to and take account of young black people's life stories and experiences of being young, black and involved with the youth or criminal justice systems. By doing so, the researched aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding this particular group of young people. Philosophically and academically, even in constructing what it was that I wanted to research, how that research would be conducted and with whom that research would be done, I was making an ethical choice.

### **Two sides of an ethical coin**

The first choice, in one sense, a simple statement of penal fact: prisons are factories built for the production of suffering and pain, and everyone who encounters a prison will – must – find the experience both traumatic and damaging<sup>4</sup>. Most obviously, prisoners experience intense feelings of loneliness, helplessness, depression, anxiety, fear and distress. Only the most ethically blind can fail to see that our prisons are filled with the poor, the disadvantaged and the dispossessed, and that we disproportionately lock up people from communities who are black. Given that this is the case, can we ethically enter such institutions knowing what we are going to find there?

The second reality, the other side of our prison research ethical coin, is concerned with the academy and the development of sociology and criminology. In particular, this reality is inspired by an observation made by Loic Waquant in 2002 that, just as Western societies entered a period of “mass” or “industrial” incarceration, social science deserted the prison, forcing sociologists and criminologists to “turn to the writings of journalists and inmates to learn about everyday life in the cells and dungeons of America.”<sup>5</sup>

Wacquant made this observation so as to help to “reinvigorate field studies of the carceral world” and explicitly stated that he wanted to encourage scholars to get “inside and around penal facilities to carry out intensive, close-up observation of the myriad relations they contain and support.”<sup>6</sup> That was exactly what he did in visiting Los Angeles County Jail in 1998, observing in his field notes:

I'm literally gasping trying to get my emotions under control. I can't tame the nauseating feeling of being a voyeur, an intruder into this plagued space...I am horrified by the intensity of promiscuity, the total subjection of the permanent and pervasive gaze of others who are themselves subjected to the same ongoing visual and sensory penetration, the instantaneous and irresistible negation of self it carries.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Quoting from the work of David Scott, and in particular his chapter on prison officer working cultures. See Scott, D. (2008), *Creating Ghosts in the Penal Machine: Prison Officer Occupational Morality and the Techniques of Denial*, in Bennett, J., Crewe, B. and Wahidin, A. (eds) *Understanding Prison Staff*, Cullompton: Willan, pps. 168-186

<sup>5</sup> Waquant, L. (2002), “The Curious Eclipse of Prison Ethnography in the Age of Mass Incarceration,” *Ethnography*, Volume 3(4), pps. 371-391, quote taken from page 385

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, pps. 386-387

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p.389

So, in essence, is it possible to reinvigorate field studies of prisons at a time of mass incarceration? Even though we know that when we go behind the prisons walls we will witness pain, distress and the outcomes of neo-liberal public policies which have driven wider the gap between the rich and the poor, the have and the have-nots?

Wacquant, in his lively and enthusiastic endorsement of prison fieldwork, does not explicitly address this ethical dilemma, beyond noting in his field notes that he felt like a “voyeur”. There is, of course, an importance about witnessing suffering, but here I think that Wacquant uses the idea of being a “voyeur” as many academics do when considering the value of so-called “carceral tours”.<sup>8</sup> Put simply, given that prisons are institutions that house people, how do you prevent turning the prison into a “human zoo”? How do you stop simply looking at all the exotic animals that are locked up there?

Applying Stan Cohen’s discussion (in *States of Denial: Knowing About Atrocities and Suffering*) regarding how we go about acknowledging - or denying - suffering when we encounter it, may provide some useful insights. According to Cohen we acknowledge suffering when we have knowledge that a person is in pain and fully realise the personal implications of possessing that knowledge. This acknowledgement will, in turn, lead to some form of action that attempts to mitigate, or end the pain that is being suffered. However, when pain, harm, or suffering is ignored, re-interpreted or re-contextualised, the gap that develops between cognition of events and possible action to alter that situation should be regarded as denial<sup>9</sup>.

So, we need to acknowledge this pain, and in doing so help to overcome what it is that we find when we walk through the prison’s gate; our research should be used to end the pain that we find there, and to help to overcome the disproportionate numbers of the poor and the dispossessed who are being imprisoned. Research that does otherwise is in denial. Prison research, for me, should never be “passive or neutral”, to use Paul Rock’s phrase, but rather interactive and creative, selective and interpretive<sup>10</sup>. It should also challenge the status quo.

### Immediate Dilemmas

To return to the fieldwork with young black men in YOIs: first, given the desire of the research to give this group of young people a “voice”, to what extent could they actually “speak for themselves”? After all, whilst extensive use of their voices was eventually used throughout my published work, through verbatim quotes and “thick description”<sup>11</sup>, these voices had been analysed,

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<sup>8</sup> For a recent review of the problems surrounding such prison visits, see Piché, J. and Walby, K. (2010), “Problematizing Carceral Tours,” *British Journal of Criminology*, Volume 50, pps. 570-581.

<sup>9</sup> Cohen, S (2000), *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering*, Cambridge: Polity Press

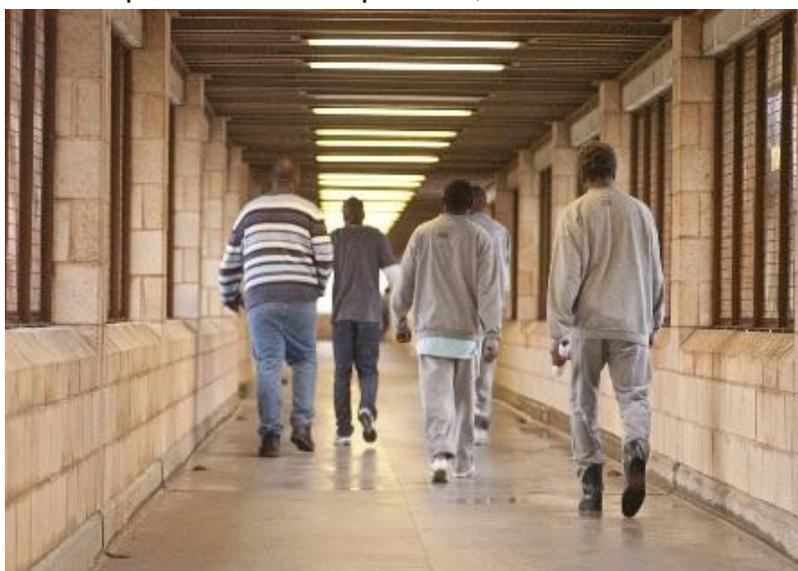
<sup>10</sup> Rock, P (2001), “Symbolic Interactionism and Ethnography,” in Atkinson, P, Coffey, A, Delamont, S, Lofland, J and Lofland, L (eds), *Handbook of Ethnography*, London: Sage. Quote taken from p. 30.

<sup>11</sup> The idea of “thick description” is to be found in Geertz, C (1973), *The Interpretation of Culture*, London: Hutchinson

contextualised and theorised by an adult and white researcher. In these circumstances how then have those who participated in the research actually been given a “voice”, and, more crucially, is the “voice” that they have been given loud enough? If not, can this be justified, or is this merely another example of what Lather has recently described as the “romance of empowerment that drives much current ethnography”?<sup>12</sup>

Secondly, the research could have been accused of bias and relativism<sup>13</sup>. This might not only antagonise potential audiences for my research, but could also serve to undermine the force of the arguments and conclusions that were advanced. All of this brings to the foreground the issue of standpoint, although this in itself is nothing new. Criminologists have long had to deal with the question of deciding which “side they are on”; especially as they work in a subject area that often labels “outsiders”<sup>14</sup>. This issue became even more complicated as this research hoped to influence practice, which in itself can be problematic.

However, the research I undertook attempted to overcome this issue by fashioning a solution based on resolutely listening to, and documenting what it was that the young black people that I spoke to actually said. As such they prompted, guided, and, to use an ethnographically



loaded description, *grounded my theorising*<sup>15</sup>. This approach allowed me to see the world through their eyes; the research was able to generate a fresh perspective on policy and practice about race in our youth justice system.

<sup>12</sup> Lather, P (2001), “Postmodernism, Post-Structuralism and Post (Critical) Ethnography: Of Ruins, Aporias and Angels,” in Atkinson, P, Coffey, A, Delamont, S, Lofland, J and Lofland, L (eds), *Handbook of Ethnography*, London: Sage, 477-492. Quote taken from p. 482

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, coverage of the research in *Society Guardian*, “The Truth about Life for Young Black Men in Jail,” 10 December 2003. This very favourable report includes some details about how the prison service responded to the research. Later, I was also advised by friends still working within the prison service that the then Director General of HM Prison Service had expected me to come directly to him with any observations that I might have had about racism in the YOIs where I conducted the research, rather than publish these as research findings.

<sup>14</sup> Becker, H (1967), “Who’s Side Are We On?,” *Social Problems*, 14: 239-247

<sup>15</sup> For a general introduction to “grounded theory” see Glasser, B and Strauss, A (1967), *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, Chicago: Aldine; Corbin, J and Strauss, A (1998), “Grounded Theory Methodology: An Overview,” in Denzin, N and Lincoln, Y (eds), *Strategies of Qualitative Enquiry*, London: Sage; Charmaz, K and Mitchell, R (2001), “Grounded Theory in Ethnography,” in Atkinson, P, Coffey, A, Delamont, S, Lofland, J, Lofland, L (eds) *Handbook of Ethnography*, London: Sage

This returns to the first question regarding the extent to which the young, black men's "voice" has been used. Pat Carlen's observation from her research with female prisoners that there is a necessary limit as to how far the subjects of research can be made to "speak for themselves" guided the research<sup>16</sup>. After all, given that I was conducting the research I also had to accept responsibilities too in co-producing, rather than simply discovering the world of the research.

### **Practical Problems Everywhere**

Gaining access to institutions such as prisons or to the people within those institutions is never easy; it almost seems like prisons exist not only to keep prisoners in jail, but to also keep researchers on the other side of the walls.

Access difficulties took two forms: gaining access to the prisons; and, thereafter, gaining access to the young people themselves. In relation to the former, for example, most obviously I had to negotiate gaining access to young black men in Young Offender's Institutions, and this involved protracted, and at times farcical negotiations with HM Prison Service. For example, given that my research was ethnographic it was impossible to complete the Prison Service's research proforma, and access to one institution – HMYOI Feltham - was denied. So too I was 'encouraged' to allow the Prison Service's Race Advisory Consultant to join the Advisory Group that oversaw the research programme (although she never attended). However, even after all these hurdles had been cleared, the number of days that were allowed to conduct field research at one establishment was cut to just two, which hardly allowed for "immersion" in the field.

A second ethical dilemma centred on the issue of payment. One member of staff working with the young people that I wished to interview felt that they should be paid for agreeing to take part in the research programme. After much discussion, and for various reasons, this was not something that I felt that I wanted to do. Nonetheless, it was clear that in raising the issue this gatekeeper had created an expectation that the research participants *should* be paid, and my unwillingness to do so undoubtedly contributed to creating a climate in which some potential research participants chose not to participate.

Here I should also raise the issue of race. I am white. More than that, I have had experience of working in the youth and criminal justice systems as a Prison Governor. The danger here was that I might have been seen, as Kate McCoy worried about her ethnographic research with drug abusers, as "doing spy work". Indeed she went as far as to suggest that, in spite of the researchers' good intentions, "all research is to some degree surveillance."<sup>17</sup> I have no way of determining if either this racial, or professional background might have deterred potential research participants from coming forward,

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<sup>16</sup> See Carlen, P (1983), *Women's Imprisonment: A Study in Social Control*, London: Routledge and Carlen, P (1985), *Criminal Women: Autobiographical Accounts*, Cambridge: Polity Press

<sup>17</sup> McCoy, K (1998), "Drug Research and the Politics of Knowing and Being Known," paper presented at the Harm Reduction Conference, Cleveland, Ohio, October. Quote taken from p.6

although it is worth reflecting that when access to the young people that I wished to speak to was gained, my professional background was often a source of great interest, with several of the interviewees asking for advice in relation to particular problems or incidents.

Nonetheless, these practical problems that have been described had to be overcome, and a variety of strategies were used to do so. Two in particular were employed. First, I tapped into existing networks from my days as a Prison Governor, where this was appropriate, and any other prison networks that I had. So I used networks belonging to the charity and pressure group The Howard League for Penal Reform and New Bridge. Secondly, the well-established technique of “snowballing” was used, so that after research had been conducted with one particular individual or in one specific prison they were then asked to recommend another individual that they thought would be prepared to participate, or recommend other prisons that I might approach.

It is quite clear that research with young people generally is fraught with difficulties. To this extent, for example, I had to have police clearance, as required by the Children’s Act (1989, 2004), before being able to begin the research process. This in itself was time consuming. However I was never asked by any of the YOIs to produce the certificate of clearance, which rather undermined the process that I had gone through.

There were also concerns from YOIs that in giving the young black boys as voice that they, the boys would be “off message”. In short, they would provide an insight that challenged the prevailing new public management culture of key performance targets and indicators that were being “met” and “achieved”.

It also became clear that some young black people had become used to requests for interviews from researchers, and that they have not necessarily found it in their interests to participate. Gaining access to the prisons where they were locked up was therefore only the beginning of my problems of gaining access to these young people. Some of the interviewees and prospective interviewees felt that “nothing was going to change”, so why bother? Here, it seemed that the failure that was being articulated was not concerned with organisations and agencies of the youth and criminal justice systems, but rather with the failings of academic research to have “impact”.

After all, a whole library of research about the counter-productivity of imprisonment – in an age of “evidence led policy” – has not reduced the prison population. Nor has our knowledge of the “multiplier effect” of racism in the criminal justice system, from institutional racism in operational policing, through the process of prosecution, remand or bail, and sentencing decisions markedly altered the circumstances of black people when they come into contact with the criminal justice system<sup>18</sup>. Thus what seemed to be

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<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Home Office (1992), *Race and the Criminal Justice System*, London: Home Office; Home Office (1995), *Race and the Criminal Justice System*, London: Home Office; Hood, R (1992), *Race and Sentencing*, Oxford: Clarendon Press; Graham, J and Bowling, B (1995), *Young People and Crime* (research Study No. 145), London: Home Office;

articulated was pessimism about the academy, and the impact that academic research could have on practice.

### An Ethical Dimension

The importance of ethics is paramount. Ethnographic research brings with it distinctive ethical challenges<sup>19</sup>. Throughout the research Jupp *et al's* definition that “ethics is about the standards to be adopted towards others in carrying out research”<sup>20</sup> was helpful, as was a recognition that an ethical dimension should guide each stage of the research programme, from design to dissemination. It is also worth remembering that as ethnographic research is a creative, open-ended, and an often dynamic process there were issues that had to be faced as they were encountered, and this inevitably resulted in the need to exercise discretion. However my discretion was guided by three considerations: individual rights; “informed consent”; and confidentiality.

Each is important, but the issue of informed consent, by which is meant that the research was conducted in such a way that those who were participating had a complete understanding at all times of what the research was about, and the implications for themselves of becoming involved had particular challenges. For example, how could this be done with children – moreover children in prison – who were relatively powerless in relation to those conducting the research? In this sense could it be perceived that the

research simply exploited the young people who participated? Eisner has even gone as far as to suggest that it is virtually impossible for research not to be exploitative, given that it uses the experiences of others for one's own ends<sup>21</sup>.



I took the view that informed consent assumed that participation in the research should be voluntary, and which also helps to explain why those who agreed to be interviewed were not paid. This assumption brought with it some difficulties in that, for example, each of the YOIs “chose” those who were to be

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Penal Affairs Consortium (1996), *Race and Criminal Justice*, London: Penal Affairs Consortium; Bowling, B and Phillips C (2002), *Race, Crime and Justice*, Harlow: Pearson

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Noaks, L and Wincup, E (2004), *Criminological Research: Understanding Qualitative Methods*, London: Sage, pps.37-52

<sup>20</sup> Jupp, V, Davies, P and Francis, P (eds) (2000), *Doing Criminological Research*, London: Sage. Quote taken from p. 171

<sup>21</sup> Eisner, C (1991), *The Enlightened Eye: Qualitative Enquiry and The Enhancement of Educational Practice*, New York: Macmillan

interviewed for the research. How then could their participation be described as voluntary? Practically, irrespective of the fact that they had been chosen, each participant was offered the opportunity to withdraw from the research. However, this was not a simple process. I ensured that the potential interviewee was advised that they could withdraw, but crucially after the member of staff who had escorted that interviewee from his cell had left the interview room. Again this was not a simple matter, for if a potential interviewee wanted to withdraw his refusal might have been interpreted negatively by the prison authorities – after all, they had “chosen” him to be interviewed. In these circumstances, I simply passed the time of day until a suitable period had elapsed and the non-interviewee could go on his way.

Each interviewee was promised anonymity and this also meant that some specific issues, situations or circumstances that were subsequently described, had to be generalised to maintain their anonymity. This inevitably placed limits on my desire to use their “voice”. It is noteworthy that a significant number of interviewees throughout the research programme did not want their conversations to be tape recorded at all, and which thus resulted in my having to take contemporaneous notes, or hurriedly attempting to write everything down after the interview had ended. This dislike by some of the interviewees of tape recorders perhaps reflects their negative experiences of being recorded in police stations and other formal interview situations, but it is hoped that my willingness to accept their preference at the very least indicated my commitment to be guided by them.

I would argue that these actions were not exploitative. Firstly, the research was specifically designed to provide a platform for young people in circumstances in which that platform would not have existed independent of the research. There has been very little research with young black people in YOIs beyond Elaine Genders and Elaine Player’s work in the late 1980s<sup>22</sup>, and more recently the otherwise very helpful paper by Goldson and Chigwada-Bailey about justice for black children discusses every stage of the youth justice process, but with only two pages devoted to the racialisation of custody<sup>23</sup>. Secondly, it is hoped that the research would contribute to a greater and deeper understanding of the issues faced by young, black people in their dealings with the youth justice system and thus contribute to better practice. It would be very hard to view this as exploitation, although perhaps this may also depend on whether or not practice actually changes.

### **And, at the end of it all?**

The broader themes that emerged throughout the research programme were:

#### 1. Lack of trust and confidence

The reality that young black people have little trust, or confidence in the youth or criminal justice systems, and crucially, as a result, they are not passive and accepting, but rather strategise accordingly. They “play the game”, by taking

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<sup>22</sup> Genders, E and Player, E (1989), *Race Relations in Prisons*, Oxford: Clarendon Press

<sup>23</sup> Goldson, B and Chigwada-Bailey, R (1999), “(What) Justice for Black Children and Young People?” in Goldson, B (ed), *Youth Justice: Contemporary Policy and Practice*, Aldershot: Ashgate

action themselves, or in concert with other young black people when they need support, or are in difficulties. In short, they do not look to the police, or other agents of the state for help, but to each other.

In doing so, they were both directly and indirectly rejecting the adult world of youth justice. 'Directly' in that they employ strategies to overcome and share intelligence about issues that would normally be handled by the police, social workers, teachers, prison and probation officers. While 'indirectly' refers to the shared lack of trust and confidence that they often simply do not realise that the adult world would offer them support at all. In relation to prison very few of the interviewees had actually heard of the various monitoring procedures about race, or the numerous ways that they could make a complaint. The small number who had described them as "not for us". This observation raises the issue of who these procedures were actually for, if they were not for the young black people that they were supposed to be supporting.

## 2. Monitoring

It became an absurd and recurring reality that every time I conducted research in a prison I discovered that the monitoring systems suggested that their 'targets', in relation to race, were being 'met' or 'achieved'. Indeed various staff would often proudly and sincerely show mountains of monitoring forms that had been diligently, almost religiously completed, as if their very existence demonstrated that 'everything was as it should be'.

The reality was much more complicated, and the monitoring forms seemed to be measuring a parallel universe to the one the research suggested. It does not take much imagination to understand who these monitoring forms were "for", and the purpose that they served.

## 3. Optimism among young black people

This is a finding that may seem perverse, given that I have argued about prison being a factory for the production of pain. But despite everything that they faced the young black people interviewed were creative, resourceful, funny, welcoming, diligent, hard working, innovative, competent and charming. This is not to imply that prisons should be used more regularly, or that the institution of prison itself produced these qualities. Prison, as one young man put it, was a "pause in his life"; a pause that he wanted to be over as quickly as possible. Their optimism seemed to me to come from recognising the problems that they faced and the strategies that they had developed to overcome them.

I concluded this research believing that if public policy was more focussed on the positive qualities of young people, rather than their potential threats; keener to offer young people support and care, rather than naming and shaming them; and that if we took account of their possibilities, rather than their deficits we would all do much that much better.

### **Postscript**

So, did I take keys? Should you? For me, the answer to that question is that I did not. To have done so – even if they would have eased my passage from one part of the prison to another - would have placed me in a position of power over the young men that I was interviewing that I did not want, and would have marked me out as yet another, white man in a suit, asking questions that led almost inevitably to these very same young men suffering in some way. I cannot be certain that this was appreciated by the young men that I interviewed, but at least it allowed me to believe that in doing so I was acknowledging the harm that prison can cause, and that my research was not going to deny that reality. I chose a side, and that side did not have access to keys.

*David Wilson is based at the Centre for Applied Criminology at Birmingham City University. He is vice chair of the Howard League for Penal Reform. This article is adapted from a seminar which he gave at BCU in April 2011.*

## Feature

### **Methodological and conceptual challenges for evaluating community-based alternatives to imprisonment**

**Dr Liz Frondigoun**

#### **Introduction**

The need for alternatives to prison sentences has increasingly become the focus of attention for the Scottish Government especially in relation to low tariff, high volume offenders. This has been driven by the persistent overcrowding problem in our prisons (Scottish Government, 2010) and also the acknowledgement that prison sentences appear to be relatively ineffective in addressing the criminal and social issues of this population of offenders (Scottish Government, 2009).

Evidence suggests that a successful transition from a chaotic lifestyle characterised by offending behaviour to one of desistance is more likely to be successful when an integrated package of interventions and support is available which addresses addictions, education, housing, self-esteem, employment, and personal relationships (Scottish Executive, 2007; Whyte, 2004; McNeill, 2006).

In Scotland there is a move, reinforced in the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010, to replace where appropriate short-term custodial sentences of three months or less with community-based programmes. This requires firstly, the support of the criminal justice system (CJS) and secondly, that they (the CJS) have sufficient confidence in such community-based programmes to offer a realistic alternative to imprisonment.

However, methodological and conceptual issues are emerging around evaluating and/or measuring outcomes when the emphasis by the government and funding bodies generally is focused on the need for transparency and statistical evidence. Evaluation, even of short-term interventions is therefore focused on providing statistical evidence of desistance from crime, although the literature/knowledge base indicates that such a transition is likely to be a long-term personal journey characterised by lapses and/or relapses (Maguire and Raynor, 2006) or by some life-changing structural, social, cognitive, or identity factors (Laub and Sampson, 2001; Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001).

The evaluation of this community based service (see below) did identify examples of good practice and many positive outcomes for clients, but the emphasis on quantitative data - statistical evidence - led to the overshadowing of qualitative data and the testimonies of clients. Future funding for the programme, it appeared, was also dependent on strong statistical evidence. Our emerging concerns, especially when there is a move to increase such community-based programmes, are with methodological and conceptual issues: in this case, how desistance and other key indicators are defined and recorded.

## The Research



This paper draws from a research evaluation carried out by the author and two of her colleagues, Dr Nika Dorrer and Dr Sue Morrison, at Glasgow Caledonian University in 2010. The aim was to carry out an evaluation of a new community-based programme towards the end stage of its first 3 years of funding. The service, consisting of four day units and one residential, was running in West Central Scotland. It aimed

to provide person-centred, flexible support for young males aged 16-30 with a history of low tariff, high prevalence offending who also had issues with drug and/or alcohol addictions. It was designed, in line with best practice, to offer support across a range of personal and social issues including health and well-being, and to provide relationship, housing, education and employment advice. Stabilisation of alcohol or drug misuse was to be supported in the residential unit.

## The Outcomes and Finding

The evaluation found the programme to be successfully delivering across the range of its aims yet crucial issues began to emerge for both the policy community and the government. The first was methodological and highlighted the need for purposeful dialogue on information-sharing protocols. The programme was jointly funded by the Scottish Government and a consortium of charitable trusts. Its evaluation was required to provide statistical evidence by comparing the clients' criminal justice history as recorded on the CJS databases before and after entering the programme. This however, had not been sufficiently thought through and built into the design of programme delivery which rendered cross-referencing to the CJS databases impossible. Crucial client information which was needed to allow for cross-referencing to the CJS databases was not systematically recorded in clients' records, nor were lapses and/or relapses of criminal behaviour. The programme records were more focused on charting individual clients' skill-building progress towards enabling them to make positive life choices.

The second issue, related to the one above, was a conceptual one. The requirement for statistical evidence to support desistance for this client group assumes that offending rates will drop if the programme is successful. This assumes that all criminality will be recorded in official data bases. However not all lapses or relapses result in the client being caught, arrested and prosecuted through the CJS. Therefore, we argue, reliance on the CJS databases will not establish desistance from crime across the complex range of issues for the client group. This is compounded by the programme records not formally monitoring and recording client lapses or relapses that could be accessed by the evaluators without breaching the confidentiality of the clients. Furthermore, there was little evidence of any agreed conceptual understanding between the funding bodies and the service providers on what was meant by desistance, lapses, or relapses or how they were to be measured. For example, would a client who after a period of abstinence went

on a 'bender' or took drugs but was not charged be viewed in the same way as one who was charged, prosecuted and sentenced? Would one be understood to have had a lapse but count as desisting as opposed to another client, who got a conviction, being understood as a failure?

Thus there was very little statistical data that provided meaningful evidence of the desistance rates for this client group beyond that based on clients' self-reports. The only exceptions to this were the few clients whose drug misuse was being monitored by a Drug Treatment and Testing Order.

The third issue of concern was the apparent lack of secured funding to effectively establish stability and develop and deliver new and innovative services. The current three-year funding cycle is too short. It took 18 months to fully establish all of the four day units and the one residential unit, which was the last to open. Consequently it was difficult to establish a true comparative analysis of the effectiveness of each unit.

Our evaluation took place in the last six months of the first three-year funding period at a time when it was evident that the service was experiencing a significant loss of resources, especially fully-trained staff. This meant vacancies were being filled by agency staff and/or provision was being compromised by a shortage of suitably qualified staff. This exodus of staff was linked to the uncertainty of future funding for the service. Therefore it is argued that there is a need to examine funding and evaluative mechanisms to enhance confidence in the staff about the longitudinal sustainability of the programme.

### **Conclusions**

Clients report that they found this service to be more effective than both custodial sentences and other community-based services they have tried in the past. This is due to the non-judgemental attitude of key workers, the person-centred and individually tailored packages of support and interventions available and the informality of service provision including drop-in sessions, flexible appointment times and client-led frequency of appointments.

We argue that if demand is to be met for community-based programmes and their funding is linked to successful evaluations of service delivery, there needs to be clarity around measurable outcomes between the funders and service providers. Conceptually they need to agree and define their terminology; in this case, it is around definitions of lapse, relapse and desistance. Measurable outcomes also need to be clearly defined and should include qualitative data as it is most likely to enhance and add context to any statistical evidence provided.

We also argue that greater attention needs to be given to the evaluation process and conceptual issues need to be given consideration to ensure that appropriate recording systems are adopted at the developmental stage of new community-based services. Short-term funding agreements need to be examined as we found they can have a profound impact on the effectiveness of service delivery towards the end of the funded period.

**Dr Liz Frondigoun** is a Lecturer in Sociology/Criminology, the Scottish Institute for Policing Research (SIPR) lecturer in Police Studies at Glasgow Caledonian University and the Scottish Network Coordinator of the British Society of Criminology. She has conducted research for the police, the Health Board and various community and voluntary organisations with marginalised, socially excluded and hard to reach groups, including minority ethnic communities.

**Dr Nika Dorrer** was a research fellow on this project at Glasgow Caledonian University and she is current developing a career in social work and criminal justice research.

**Dr Sue Morrison** is a historian and is a Member of the Scottish Oral History Society at the University of Strathclyde. Her research interests in British history include: history of work and industrial relations; occupational health; history of leisure; history; and, immigration and migration.

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## Member profile

### Dr David Turner, University of Gloucestershire



Hello. I'm Dr David Turner and I'm a Lecturer and Course Leader for Criminology at the University of Gloucestershire. However, I arrived here via a rather circuitous journey having completed my PhD in 1992 researching gambling and drinking in South Wales. I then embarked on a career in public service beginning with local authorities along the M4 corridor before moving onto become the Research Manager for Hampshire Constabulary. It was here I developed an interest for youth re-inclusion work and joined the National Youth Agency delivering the Neighbourhood Support Fund. This is a national programme of youth work led projects aimed at young people not in education, training or employment. Turning from poacher to gamekeeper I was recruited by Cardiff University Business School to undertake the evaluation of this programme. This re-acquaintance with academia whetted my appetite for the world of learning once again and I became a lecturer in Local Policy and Community Development at my current University. From here it was but a small step, given my research interests, to become more engaged in criminology and I became course leader in 2008. In 2010, I completed my Masters in Social Policy and Criminology with the Open University in 2010. I recently became a member of the Higher Education Forum for Learning and Development in Policing and I am an external examiner at the University of Glamorgan.

My research interests have developed through my engagement with local practitioners in Gloucestershire where I volunteer as a restorative justice (RJ) facilitator with Gloucester Prison. I am involved in evaluating the scheme and engaging our criminology students through their dissertation and by volunteering on the scheme. We are currently seeking further funding to evaluate the county wide, multi-agency engagement of RJ and have been in discussions with the Ministry of Justice about the direction this should take. I am also writing up the findings of a CLINKS funded research project that examined the service needs of ex-offenders with drug and alcohol issues in partnership with Stonham Housing Association.

I have recently joined the Howard League's Early Career Academic Network (I hope I qualify even though I will probably be the oldest member) and I am willing to share ideas, learning and develop potential joint-working opportunities with other early career academics in my areas of interest. So if you are interested in getting in touch then please do [dturner@glos.ac.uk](mailto:dturner@glos.ac.uk).

## First look

### Public confidence in policing: the effects of police cuts

**Dr Katy Siddall**

I have just submitted my PhD, which I completed at the University of Surrey. My research centred around public confidence in the police and particularly on the ways in which confidence might be shaped by the strategies the police employ, their organisation and their effectiveness at preventing and solving crime. It also considered the degree to which confidence has changed over time and the factors that might account for such changes. In the wake of public sector budget cuts and proposals to slash police officer numbers and services, the focus of this short article will draw out the elements of the thesis concerning the effects of police numbers, neighbourhood policing and police visibility on public confidence in the police.

From a personal perspective, my interest in the public's opinion of the police grew from working as a researcher for the Metropolitan Police some years ago, but academic interest in the subject has been strong for a while, particularly in the US. A number of scholars have recognised the importance of public confidence in the police and have argued that it must be secured to ensure the legitimacy of the institution. Without such legitimacy, they contend that the public may not co-operate with the police, comply with the law, report crime, nor act as jurors, witnesses and so on (Roberts 2004; Hough et al. 2010). In addition, as a publicly funded body, it is reasoned that the police must ensure they are accountable to the tax payer and are meeting the public's expectations (Roberts and Hough 2005; Hough and Roberts 2007), while politically, ensuring that the electorate have confidence in the most visible and accessible representatives of state power might aid in securing confidence in government (Benson 1981). Indeed, political attention toward public opinion of the police grew rapidly in the UK over the last decade or so.

In the late 1990s, the newly elected Labour government initiated a shift toward a more 'citizen-focused' policing agenda. This placed the public at the centre of policing, emphasising public reassurance and tackling local-level crimes and anti-social behaviour (Povey 2001). In practice, it saw the introduction of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), the implementation of Neighbourhood Policing and the introduction of police performance measures that were centred on public confidence in policing. The focus on confidence culminated in 2009, when improving confidence in the police became the sole target for police forces to meet (Home Office 2009).

This police target was short lived, as the new coalition government has seen fit to abandon such targets and refocus police priorities on crime and disorder prevention. However, despite this move, they continue to place importance on public opinion, emphasising the need for visible, accessible and accountable policing and for the public to have 'confidence' and 'trust' in the police. They also continue to support the use of neighbourhood policing (Home Office 2010). Nevertheless, the police must now achieve these

objectives and deliver these services in the face of 20% cuts to their budget, cuts which have led the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO 2010) to announce the inevitability of reductions in police numbers. Within my thesis I examined the effects of neighbourhood policing and police visibility on public confidence in the police and the effect that the numbers of police officers employed in England and Wales might have on confidence.

Over the last five years, neighbourhood policing has been introduced across England and Wales with the express intention of increasing public confidence in policing (Mason 2009). While this is not the place to detail statistical frameworks and present the results of statistical analyses, in brief, I examined the relationship between neighbourhood policing and confidence using the Metropolitan Police Public Attitudes Survey of London residents and employing structural equation modelling. After controlling for a range of socio-demographic factors, I found that on the whole, if the strategies employed by neighbourhood policing teams are noticed by the public, they should increase confidence in the police. Those who frequently saw police



officers patrolling their local neighbourhood, those who knew police officers by name or by sight, those who had engaged with local policing teams and those who felt informed about local crime and policing issues were more confident in the police.

Broadening the scope of the study, I used data collected by the British Crime Survey (BCS) across England and employed multilevel modelling to lend support to the findings regarding the importance of perceptions of police visibility. The results showed that confidence in policing varies according to the police jurisdiction (called Basic Command Units) in which an individual lived and that confidence tended to be higher in police jurisdictions where residents report frequently seeing police officers patrolling the streets. These findings held after controlling for a range of socio-demographic factors and a range of characteristics about respondents' 'neighbourhoods' taken from the census, such as socio-economic disadvantage, ethnic diversity and population mobility. In contrast, the number of police officers employed (per 100,000 of the population) across these same areas were not associated with confidence, confidence in policing being no higher among residents living within jurisdictions with a high number of police officers than those in areas with far fewer. Similarly, aggregating BCS data to the population level and employing time series regression analysis showed that monthly fluctuations in confidence between 2001 and 2008 were not associated with fluctuations in police strength.

Of course, there are a number of 'health warnings' surrounding the conclusions that can be drawn from these findings. For example, they seem to indicate that neighbourhood policing and police visibility are important factors in contributing to an individual's confidence in the police, but measures were based on survey respondents' *perceptions* of these factors rather than more 'objective' data about police operations and movements. Similarly, it would appear on the surface that the number of police officers employed has no effect on confidence. However, police strength was calculated per 100,000 of the population and it is possible that the use of a different denominator (such as the crime rate, or square miles) might have produced different results. Furthermore, even if we were prepared to accept that police strength has no direct effect on confidence, it is not to say that it will not lead to increases in crime and disorder, a reduction in solved crimes, or less police officers patrolling the streets, all of which were factors that the findings of the thesis suggested would lead to a reduction in confidence.

While not altogether surprising, what did seem clear from the research as a whole is that if the police and the coalition government are still concerned with improving public opinion, they should be working to reduce both perceptions of and rates of crime and disorder. Nevertheless, as I have described, the role that the police can play in increasing confidence in the institution seems to go further than purely fulfilling their most basic function. The strategies they employ and the manner in which they are perceived to behave plays an additional part in forming attitudes toward the police.

*Katy Siddall is lecturer in social science research methods at Southampton University*

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## ECAN Event Review

### Short-Term Prison Sentences

The Howard League for Penal Reform and the Mannheim Centre at the London School of Economics hosted an event to explore whether short prison sentences had a role in the rehabilitation revolution that has been mooted in the rhetoric of the coalition government. The event was chaired by the Mannheim Centre's Professor Jenny Brown.

To explore this, Dr Sarah Armstrong, University of Glasgow and Dr Julie Trebilcock, Imperial College London both gave presentations based on their recent research.

Dr Sarah Armstrong's research entitled 'User Views of Punishment: Qualitative Research on the Comparative Experience of Short Prison and Community-Based Sentences' focused on Scotland. While Dr Julie Trebilcock presented her research, based in England, 'No Winners: The Reality of Short Sentenced Prisoners'.



Image by Andy Aitchison Photography

Both speakers drew out the many similarities as well as the key differences between their research.

### Jean Henderson: A review

This was my first ECAN seminar having only recently joined the network. The topic, the impact of short-term imprisonment, was a subject close to my heart. I am a former probation practitioner and now an academic involved in the delivery of probation training along with undergraduate teaching on punishment and rehabilitation.

From both presentations, it was apparent that short-term prisoners were clear in articulating the boredom and monotony of the short sentence, which was described by Dr Armstrong as 'life by instalments'. This concept certainly brought home, in a powerful way, the significant impact of frequent short-term sentences. The qualitative approach of both pieces of research was a refreshing antidote to statistics on sentencing and prison populations with both presenters conveying the richness of their data. The speakers provided deep and at times disturbing conclusions on the impact of the short prison sentence and the attitude of many 'revolving-door' prisoners to community sentences.

The study in Scotland demonstrated that prisoners had a positive view of 'meaningful' community sentences. The research from England however, left me with a sense that for many, the probation service had diminished in its relevance as an agent of change in their lives and there was an acceptance of prison life that simply 'happened around them'. The seminar left me thinking about the extent to which the increasingly managerial approach of probation may have contributed to the perception of community sentences as offering little.

This is very timely research and a wake-up call to those of us involved in research and education within the criminal justice system. It certainly made me think about the knowledge, skills and most importantly the policy context necessary to facilitate practice that could try to re-engage these individuals. A failure to do so, could lead to ever increasing numbers being 'warehoused' without purpose or intervention, in a vortex of custody/community which strengthens their links with the former and gradually erodes their sense of belonging or accountability to any community on the outside.

As for my first experience of ECAN; it was a rewarding seminar and a friendly and stimulating group which I look forward to attending again.'

Jean Henderson  
Senior Lecturer  
Department of Law, Criminology & Community Justice  
Sheffield Hallam University

## **Guidelines for submissions**

### **Style**

Text should be readable and interesting. It should, as far as possible, be jargon-free, with minimal use of references. Of course, non-racist and non-sexist language is expected. References should be put at the end of the article. We reserve the right to edit where necessary.

### **Illustrations**

We always welcome photographs, graphic or illustrations to accompany your article.

### **Authorship**

Please append your name to the end of the article, together with your job description and any other relevant information (eg other voluntary roles, or publications etc).

### **Publication**

Even where articles have been commissioned by the Howard League for Penal Reform, we cannot guarantee publication. An article may be held over until the next issue.

### **Format**

Please send your submission by email to [anita.dockley@howardleague.org](mailto:anita.dockley@howardleague.org).

### **Please note**

Views expressed are those of the author and do not reflect Howard League for Penal Reform policy unless explicitly stated.