

## **EDITORIAL**

*Jean Hine, Co-editor*

At first glance, this issue of the journal seems to contain a disparate range of papers, but each in their own way addresses the notion of justice and its meaning in relation to responding to offending, and each, explicitly or implicitly, addresses the question of the values that underpin the concept of justice. This is not the place for a philosophical discussion about what we mean by 'justice', and others more qualified than I have addressed this question in depth. But it is a word which we use frequently, often without thinking too hard about its meaning, and it is worth taking the time occasionally to reflect on our use of terms such as this.

Justice is a concept which cannot be measured, at least not in any reliable way. It is a relative concept that varies between individuals and cultures. We might not be able to define it but we recognise it when we see it (though more frequently we recognise its nemesis, injustice). How we see it may be different to our neighbour: it is an ontological concept, linked to our individual and cultural values and beliefs. This is perhaps a weakness, but at the same time this is its strength - it leads to continual debate about what is just and what is not. Criminal law, which is the basis of criminal justice system, emerges from this debate. The most significant changes in criminal law have come about as a result of shifts in the value base of society. Changes such as the introduction of probation, the introduction of separate criminal procedures for children, and the abolition of the death penalty are examples of such value shifts. Some laws, such as the Human Rights Act, are fundamentally about a statement of values.

At the same time, our individual values and beliefs shape the way in which we interact with the criminal justice system, as policy makers, practitioners, educators or researchers, as victims, offenders and witnesses. A call for the clearer acknowledgement and understanding of values and how they influence what we do and how we do it is at the heart of the first contribution to this issue, a thought piece by Anne Robinson. As she points out, these values and beliefs can inadvertently lead to discrimination and oppression, and therefore to injustice. It is therefore important that we take the time to reflect on what we do, how we do it and its impact, to ensure we do not fall into this trap. We need to be open to new ideas and ways of understanding events that enable us to review our values and beliefs. Researchers have an important role here in questioning

policy and practice, and there are numerous examples of such questioning highlighting the unintended consequences of legislation and policy. Some of these, such as notions of net widening, are so well established they have become acknowledged value based considerations for new initiatives.

Debate about values is fundamental to the question of partnership working in drug treatment, which is the topic of the paper by Samantha Weston. This paper presents an analysis of key drug policy and guidance documents, demonstrating how they present inconsistent messages about drug treatment, which in turn hampers the possibility of improved services for drug users. At the heart of the tension are the different objectives of the agencies involved, particularly medical and criminal justice agencies, and the values which structure the organisations and underpin their work and priorities. They are seen to take very different approaches to the issue of drug treatment: on the one hand focussing on harm reduction, and on the other aiming for total abstinence. These understandings are articulated by the responses of drug treatment practitioners who were interviewed as part of the project. The case for shared values is clearly made, but the achievement of this is harder to envisage.

Readers of this journal will be very aware of the government's 'Transforming Rehabilitation' changes currently taking place, and the often heated debate which it has prompted: a debate which is fuelled by the competing values of the debaters. This is a topic taken up by Jake Phillips in his paper which analyses the debates which have taken place in the media about the reforms. Somewhat surprisingly he identifies that the media campaign has enabled the supporters of the reforms to promote the rehabilitative agenda whilst the opponents of the changes have focussed more on the public protection agenda. These issues are necessarily closely intertwined but this work shows how the media representations of the debate have presented a more polarised view, and one in which the image presented seems to be at odds with the underlying values of the groups concerned.

Values and justice again come into play in the paper by Victoria Knight in describing the tensions apparent in her evaluation of an alternative education initiative provided by a youth offending team: the tension between education and criminal justice approaches, and their implications for understandings of social justice. The poor educational attainment of many young offenders is well documented, and indeed is the focus of the proposal to establish 'secure colleges' for young offenders which is a component of the recently introduced Criminal Justice and Courts Bill. As with other multi-agency initiatives involving criminal justice, such as Samantha Weston's paper about drug treatment, the tension is essentially between the 'care' ethos and values of education and the 'control' ethos and values of youth justice. This was particularly apparent from the conversations with young people involved in the programme who, whilst often acknowledging the value of the educational component, also perceived it as controlling rather than caring because it was a component of their sentence.

The film review of "Go for Sisters" by Mike Nellis also raises the question of values, and particularly draws attention to the way in which for each of us there are times when our values are tested and we need to make choices between our values. In this instance it is

“a parole officer who needs to walk on the wild side”, and in the process begins to question her beliefs and values.

This film review is a novel addition to this issue. It is a spontaneous submission which highlights that a range of media can have messages of potential interest to our readers. Similarly some of the books reviewed this time are not strictly speaking academic texts, but do address relevant themes. If you would like to submit something similar or see other appropriate opportunities, then do get in touch.