

EDITORIAL

PROBATION: THE EVER-CHANGING SERVICE

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Trainee Probation Officers qualify with a degree in *Community Justice*. As an integral part of that degree they will achieve a National Vocational Qualification in *Community Justice* at level 4. The Probation Journal, established in 1929, and owned by the National Association of Probation Officers is, in its new home with SAGE Publications, re-styled as The Journal of *Community* and *Criminal Justice* and it has a monograph series entitled Issues in *Community* and *Criminal Justice*. Does this thus locate the probation service as a community justice agency and if so what does that actually mean and what might be the implications for the training and professional development of its staff?

With a pace which is unrelenting there continues to be refinements to the organizational and political context and indeed mission of the probation service within a 21st century 'joined-up' criminal justice system. There are clear signals about focus being provided through the passage of the Criminal Justice Bill (2002) through parliament. In addition there is growing confidence, at least from the central hub of the National Probation Directorate (if less so from emerging academic critique - see Mair, 2003) in the efficacy of its approach to evidence-based practice with its flagship accredited programmes provision. The Probation Service is proud of its commitment to public protection, risk management and enforcement. It is becoming what Paul Boateng stressed the service must become - a law enforcement agency, 'that is what we are; that is what we do' (National Probation Service, 2000). But does this suggest a vision of probation practice which may not entirely be in keeping with that dimension of community justice nomenclature implied in the aforementioned opening paragraph above?

This journal's key mission is to explore this relatively new domain of community justice. This editorial builds on the editorial in Volume 1 No 1 (Williams, 2002) and also the Propeller Image developed by Sue Raikes in the same edition (Raikes, 2002). It focuses on the nature of the probation service through the critical questions raised by Simon Green in Volume 1 No 2 (Green, 2002). These contributions have suggested, in part, that the use of the term community justice was as much concerned with image as with any real connection to the nature of New Labour's agenda for the treatment of offenders and less with any moral imperative to engage the community in seeking an inclusionary or restorative approach to this issue. Indeed we seem a long way from David Haxby's vision of community involvement which he outlined in 1978 (Haxby, 1978). With three articles in this edition which focus on the probation service (Morgan; Madoc-Jones et al and Lancaster) we can further investigate the use of the term 'community justice' as an apposite and appropriate one for the modern probation service.

Rod Morgan and Andy Smith's important contribution in this volume tentatively charts the impact of the Criminal Justice Bill and the Correctional Services Review on the trends towards punishment and rehabilitation both in the community and in prisons. They discuss implications for the nature of the work the probation service will be asked to undertake and the size of the task. Whatever the actual scale of the changes they conclude it is highly likely that the probation service will continue to grow and will be required to take on increased numbers of offenders on their caseloads. In particular, those offenders will be in the higher risk categories and thus will further extend the service's public protection and enforcement foci. It will be crucial to watch these developments closely and to see if the staffing implications will be adequately financed. Given the massive increase in personnel needed and the already expanded probation trainee scheme, which must be near capacity at present, it forces us to ask crucial questions about how they will equip the workforce to manage this increased workload. This is in a context of maintaining a commitment to what Eithne Wallis, the Director of National Probation Service, refers to in NPD's People Management Strategy 2002-2007 that 'it needs a workforce that is well motivated, well led, highly professional, and trained to deliver' (Wallis, 2002: 3)

This is not unproblematic as the latest newsletter from NAPO (NAPO, 2003) reporting on their last AGM and quoting Rob Thomas, the Chair warns:

If we are not careful the National Probation Service will fall into a downward spiral which could destroy it. This dangerous spiral will be caused by staff bailing out, leaving in ever increasing numbers because they are being asked to do the impossible. Staff have been asked to write too many reports and supervise too many cases (NAPO, 2003: 1).

The staffing issues are acute and when staff are in survival mode only they are unlikely to be able to deliver the highly professional approach the Director-General desires. How might this staffing crisis be resolved? It has been suggested that there will be an extension of responsibilities for a grade of staff located somewhere between Probation Service Officers and Probation Officers, what is somewhat inelegantly being referred to as PSO+ staff. This group of staff will be trained to deliver many of the duties arising from custody plus and custody minus provision in the Criminal Justice Bill (2002) allowing probation officers to find space for the more professionally demanding tasks. An equally possible interpretation is that PSO+ staff will take over many of the duties of current probation officer staff and blur yet further the role boundaries between staff grades. The unintended implication of this changing role demarcation will be cheaper staff to deliver this increased workload.

This goes right to the heart of what training to be a professional is all about and to the type of service those professionals are concerned to maintain and flourish. Can we find the right human resources strategy for this new group of workers as they will most likely be at the cutting edge of this increased workload? Can they maintain a commitment to the

community justice focus played out by the current professional training for probation officers. The Diploma in Probation Studies is the obvious starting point for consideration here.

HM Inspectorate of Probation, (incidentally whose Chief Inspector is Professor Rod Morgan) alongside the Community Justice National Training Organisation (CJNTO) have published a report praising the Diploma in Probation Studies. As reported in the recent NPD Bulletin (National Probation Service, 2003: 1):

The inspectors found that the trainees who had completed the new qualification showed an impressive level of knowledge and understanding.

Its success in producing probation officers able to deliver the 'highly professional' workforce Wallis (2002: 3) desires seems, self-evidently, to be doing just that. At the heart of this enterprise is a model of professional development which effectively combines (albeit in a demanding format) the skills and competences needed with the critical and reflective skills to work with unpredictable, vulnerable and dangerous individuals. Indeed it is that ability to have an evidence-base and to use it in a reflexive and changing manner which distinguishes this award from its predecessor qualifications. The article by Madoc-Jones et al in this volume gives us an insight into the processes which engender those outcomes in reviewing the educational processes of one programme delivered largely by e-learning in North Wales and Dyfed Powys.

This type of programme shows the processes which are essential to working within this difficult practice environment and is one which should be at the centre of discussions about the form and nature of any new qualification arrangement developed for the new grade - PSO+. There will be temptations to provide a competence-based service-led programme which will 'train' staff to deliver programmes but which will not give them the professional wherewithal to adapt and change according to the actual circumstances they find themselves in or make links to local communities to engage them in crime reduction and inclusionary approaches to the reintegration of offenders. The seemingly ill-fated Certificate in Community Justice designed as a complement to the Diploma in Probation Studies and constructed in the same approach is a worthy frontrunner as a model for PSO+ staff. Pragmatic concerns about staff time should be set against that wider objective of developing a 'highly professional' staff group as Wallis (2002: 3) desires.

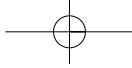
Let us briefly return to Raikes (2002) who suggested that a positive model for developing community safety and by implication community justice was in seeking a balanced and mutually reinforcing approach between the drivers of protection, inclusion and rehabilitation which would ensure, if the mix was accurately calibrated, an appropriate blend to deliver an agenda which would integrate provision and produce what Braithwaite (1989) calls reintegrative practices. Raikes posits that each driving force is held in tension with each other suggesting that this tension could be derailed if one element achieved dominance. This conceptual struggle is articulated by trainee probation officers in their

attempt to make sense of their prime objectives as expressed in *The New Choreography* (National Probation Service, 2001) alongside a commitment to maintain and enhance a value base which gives them moral purpose and an ethical set of practices. Elizabeth Lancaster's contribution in this edition focuses our thinking on whether these organisational aims can fit within a value system which draws on a wider notion of community engagement in a framework of individual values which emerge from the Regulatory Framework for the trainee programme itself. She notes the struggles which trainees have to make sense of these tensions but shows convincingly that at the heart of their practice is a set of values consistent with a community orientation and one which delivers the kind of probation practice desired by the service. It is in such attention to values and ethical practices and to maintaining a focus on all three of Raikes drivers that the probation service can continue to aspire towards community justice in its practices. This is nowhere better illustrated in the commitment to resettlement articulated by the Social Exclusion Unit Report and in subsequent regional strategies. Let's hope that fragments of Haxby's vision of community involvement (Haxby, 1978) will not be lost in the rush to offer a too narrowly-based training in community justice practice for this new grade of staff.

This edition also features two further articles. Gwyneth Boswell drawing on extensive research completed over a number of years offers compelling insights into violent crimes committed by children and adolescents which often result in public outcry. Boswell asks who are these young people and why do they do it? She goes on to explore the areas of treatment and prevention and how criminal justice practitioners can play an effective part in this process.

Rob Mackay is the fifth contribution and offers a rather different and contrasting insight into the study and relevance of restorative justice for young people. He uses an approach drawn from law and literature to trace the emergence of dissonance between young people and adults in their interpretations of their interactions and suggests that an understanding of this can help in providing relevant approaches to reconciliation and mediation.

The Probation Service is only one location for a growing aspiration to community justice. It is located ever more firmly in the protective and rehabilitative drivers which Raikes (2002) discusses. It can help to maintain the necessary equilibrium between those drivers and that of the third driver of inclusion if it continues to harness a training environment which encourages critical reflection in all its staff. Aspiring to be a community justice agency in the context of expansion and performance targets is the challenge the probation service faces in the next 12 months.



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