EDITORIAL: A DECADE OF REFLECTION
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I have had the privilege of being the joint editor of this journal, first with the late Brian Williams and then Jean Hine since its inception in 2002. I feel proud therefore to be writing this editorial on the completion of the tenth volume of this journal. We were never quite sure that we would get this far and, at the same time, achieve and maintain the quality and diversity of contributions which we have managed. We have done this without a commercial publisher but with the goodwill and support of academic colleagues from De Montfort and Sheffield Hallam, administrative excellence in getting the journal from conception to published form from successive Hallam Centre for Community Justice Administrators, and the good advice and counsel of our Advisory Board.

It is though somewhat unnerving to be promoting a journal committed to exploring the positive contribution of community justice for over a decade when one of its key constituents, the probation service, has suffered unprecedented levels of attack, and now stands on the verge of extinction or at least severe constriction in the face of the current, seemingly ideological, assault by the current government.

Any review of the last 10 years would have to note that probation itself was not entirely lacking in responsibility for what happened to it when the National Probation Service was created in 2001. The loss of the voice of probation in the demise of ACOP, the simultaneous retirement of 50% of its leadership, the increasing difficulty the trade union at NAPO faced in remaining at the decision-making table, and the willingness of the new probation leadership to passively accept a series of managerialist and target-driven outputs left it vulnerable to attack. Practitioners became more office-bound and struggled to maintain their historic connections with local communities. The centre usurped the bottom-up developments of 'what works' to impose a programme of CBT delivery which was ill-conceived in its scope and execution, and threw the champagne out with the cork in allowing some of the traditional essence of probation - case management, relationships, continuity of care, pro-social modelling - to be lost in the pursuit of bureaucratic targets such as breach statistics, risk assessment completions and programme completions. This distorted organisational priorities, as all target-driven reforms have a tendency to do (and Payment by Results is no less a target-based mechanism with all the likelihood of ‘gaming the system’) and most disturbingly threatened the very essence of what probation is about. It is therefore somewhat surprising, though gratifying, that the resilience of probation practitioners has remained and its voice has been re-kindled to articulate a
coherent, evidence-based and robust defence of probation against the precepts suggested in the government paper 'Transforming Rehabilitation'. NAPO has continued, often as a lone voice, throughout the decade with a robust media presence which has produced challenging and thought-provoking analyses of practice. The setting up of the Probation Chiefs Association (PCA) and its work alongside the Probation Association (PA) has begun to produce a more coherent and robust defence of probation, though whether it is too little too late, only the outcomes emerging from government in May 2013 on the future arrangements for the delivery of community sentences will ultimately answer that question. The promotion of a probation register and Probation Institute by the PCA may act to defend probation as an occupation and we will watch this development with interest.

In the last few years the growth of social media has produced an immediacy to this strongly articulated defence of probation practice drawing on the insights of academic, researcher, practitioner and manager contributions, allowing an instant replay of thoughts through linking newspaper and academic articles, extensive blogging, campaigns, reports by think tanks and Penal lobby groups and just the reflective exchange of ideas. This became particularly noticeable during the probation consultation on 'Transforming Rehabilitation' when lobbying of MPs via E-petitions and multiple blogs, media appearances and response documents crowded the cyber waves linked via Twitter as people tried to come to terms with the plans for change. Though inevitably some of the debate can become a little stylised in 140 character exchanges and the mantra of PUBLIC GOOD: PRIVATE BAD did mar some of the debate, when you unpacked the thoughtfulness of the blogs and media discussions a clarity and more nuanced perspective emerged. Indeed I would argue that the role of the private sector is now so endemic given the way it has annexed such criminal justice practices as electronic monitoring; court escorting; private security; prisons; and most recently community payback and other bastions of public sector work in welfare, health and work that it is not possible (or even desirable?) simply to wish the private sector out of existence completely. Indeed should the public sector through probation and the police have engaged more robustly in the delivery of electronic monitoring at the outset as has occurred in other European jurisdictions and might this have changed the historical course of events?

Whilst the private sector, alongside the voluntary sector may have an important role to play in the delivery of community services, no convincing argument has yet been proffered that probation must not remain as the guardian of the statutory elements enshrined in the delivery of court sentences. Whilst probation is to retain a residual set of functions around public protection, risk assessment and management of ‘high risk’ cases and the provision of courts reports the abject failure to understand the interrelationships between those roles and the case management of individual service users threatens to fragment services, and ultimately to put the public at risk. The dynamics of risk assessment and management are complex and the professional judgement and coordination between services is a taken-for-granted often unnoticed set of skills which probation workers undertake on a daily basis. Static characterisations of risk as low, medium and high fails to acknowledge this complexity and it is not scaremongering to speculate that if services become fragmented that lines of responsibility will be obscured and good defensible decision making will not
be possible. This is about victim and public safety and alone should make politicians pause about instigating drastic ill-thought out changes.

However the evidence-base is far more extensive about the effective role that probation plays in managing service users resulting in a reduction in reoffending. A high quality, high performing and professionalised service with quality awards to support this and a growing history of effective partnerships to delivery alongside other providers should not be allowed to wither. Indeed this is precisely the high quality service government apparently desires. A brief look at Integrated Offender Management (IOM) shows a complex multi-agency system which has pooled budgets, created justice reinvestment and savings, (another government priority), and delivered a positive resettlement service to that neglected group of service users who have no statutory licence on release. At the core of IOM is the role of the probation worker providing the case management glue to link providers from the police, voluntary sector, health service and private sector. Do these dedicated hubs need the incentivisation of cash reward to focus on reducing reoffending or the stimulus of competition to perform better. The evidence from the research is that the public service ethos of delivery provides sufficient motivation to good practice and that cooperation rather than competition provides a stimulus to pool budgets and make savings. This is an alternative model to the profit-driven approach which has been so singularly unsuccessful in the Work Programme. But will government heed the constant tweeting of good news or will they seek to silence the voices of the probation chiefs by removing them from twitter as their voice becomes a significant countervailing force to the government rhetoric. Probation has belatedly found its voice again in the last few years and any attempt to silence it now should be resisted. Whether the government will listen to the cacophony of noisy dispute which has been created by responding to these reforms is doubtful. As co-editor I am committed to presenting evidence-based articles in these pages which demonstrates the wealth of good practice here and abroad. I hope we will still be celebrating and supporting probation in another ten year’s time.

This final edition of Volume 10 has already experimented with the form of the journal by introducing two interviews, another thought-piece presented as a polemic for debate and a response to a thought-piece as well as a traditional article. The emergence of blogs as a form of expression of ideas is very similar to what we are trying to present in the Thought Pieces. So if you wish to send us a polemical argument on our core themes which draws maybe on a blog then we would be happy to consider them.

We wanted to find a way of reflecting on 10 years of publishing and draw some lessons from it. I decided to sit down with one of our Advisory Board members, Emeritus Professor Mike Nellis to have a conversation about those 10 years. We spent an enjoyable day reflecting on some of the key themes and issues and then recorded the thoughts. This is presented as the opening article in this contribution.
Our Managing Editor, Professor Dave Ward, had recently spent some time in Canada and Jean Hine, my co-editor, was dispatched to discuss this trip with him. The resultant interview is a fascinating insight into the way in which public provision is managed in Quebec which shows many differences to that which we take for granted in the UK. He also en passant discovered that the underpinning CBT movement on accredited programmes which originated in Canada is in fact based on research within prisons and casts further doubt on their efficacy in the community context. This is a fascinating read.

Our Thought Piece this issue is from a reformed offender Trevor Hercules who makes an impassioned plea to locate work with reforming offenders in the context of their lived experiences. He terms the pressures on them as a 'social deprivation mindset, and he regards it as essential that you have to get beneath this mindset to impact on the individual and he strengthens the arguments for utilising peer mentors more to achieve this breakthrough. It also reminded me too of what I sometimes regard as the missing analysis in social capital discussions. Offenders are sometimes assumed to lack social capital and thus services are developed to integrate them back into society. However in my experience offenders have social networks which may be damaging to them but which nevertheless give them some support and also social obligation. What I might term illicit social capital. I think Trevor's description of the pressures to conform to a deviant lifestyle encapsulated in his notion of the social deprivation mindset is a perfect illustration of this tension.

Charlotte Knight in a brief piece develops the debate from a previous Thought Piece on the use of avatars in classroom based teaching. She welcomes the initiative but raises some important issues with regard to the complexity of social circumstances which can underpin complex decision making and cautions the need to align traditional methods alongside the use of this new technology.

Jo Ashby and Christine Horrocks focus on aspects of their research on coercive treatment for alcohol misuse and in particular focus on the use of Alcohol Treatment Requirements. This research was funded by the NHS and raises many issues about the nature of the interactions between male offenders and their female alcohol workers. They weave a challenging and pertinent account surrounding the complexities of compliance based treatment and air many neglected cultural and social dimensions.