

### **Book review:**

Pycroft, A. and Gough, D. (eds) (2010), *Multi-agency working in criminal justice: control and care in contemporary correctional practice*. Bristol. Policy Press.

The book charts the developments of multi-agency working in the Criminal Justice system. It presents some of the key issues and challenges of multi agency working, whilst considering the wider and ever changing political landscape.

The book is well structured and strikes a good balance between theoretical, policy, legislative, and practitioner perspectives. Each chapter builds on emerging themes and gives a unique and detailed perspective of the challenges facing particular service users in the criminal justice system.

Early chapters set the scene and provide a comprehensive overview of the legislative and political developments that have shaped and evolved the mixed economy of service provision. Political emphasis in the 1990's on efficiency and effectiveness paved the way for a 'joined up' criminal justice system, harnessing other private and third sector providers to complement and assist the probation service and others in delivering statutory provision of services. Further changes and the creation of NOMS reinforced the multi-agency approach to working with offenders, and necessitated competition with other agencies rather than cooperation. The challenges relating to diversity policy and practise in the criminal justice system is outlined by Mitchell and cuts across all areas of multi-agency working.

Subsequent chapters focus on a range of multi-agency arrangements, briefly outlining the historical context and development of these arrangements in delivering services to key offender groups. Each author critically discusses and evaluates aspects of multi-agency working, highlighting key issues through examples and case studies.

Throughout the book, a number of key themes central to effective multi-agency working are raised which identify the barriers that impede it.

Communication is fundamental to effective partnership working yet in practise the authors demonstrate this is a common and reoccurring barrier.

Clift & Nash when examining multi-agency arrangements for managing risk highlight the importance of inter-agency communication, and the lack of it in MAPPA cases, illustrated using a number of high profile case studies.

In order for agencies to play a full and active role to work effectively, communication, cooperation and a shared ethos are paramount. Different working cultures within individual agencies can lead to mistrust, negatively impacting on cooperation and reluctance to share information.

Watson in examining the approach to safeguarding children draws attention to not only the sharing of information but in addition the quality of the information being shared and the meaning attributed to that information which is critical to effective risk management.

Linked to this are other barriers including professional status and power, shared responsibility and professional relationships.

The dilemma between agencies underpinned by holistic and humanistic values as opposed to the more punitive approach favouring punishment and public protection is clear. This is not unique to only non-statutory and voluntary agencies as demonstrated by Skinner. Tensions still remain in the Probation service where traditional values are still embodied by its front line staff in helping individuals to reform through individual assessments located within a social and environmental context. This 'welfarist' approach is in contrast to the reforms of the service now defined as an 'agency for corrections, administering punishment in the community.

This shift has evoked centralised control and standardisation of practise.

Professional expertise has been diluted in the use of non-probation qualified staff within a competitive framework which leads to further challenges and misunderstanding about roles and responsibilities of different agency workers.

Hilder notes where attempts have been made to 'mainstream' the black and voluntary sector agencies, tensions can arise including centralisation and control thwarting creativity, the impact on differing values and the mission creep that can occur towards statutory bodies and the additional layer of competitive tendering.

From the outset, particular attention is drawn to third sector and voluntary organisations and their unique and innovative response to service users, particularly with hard to reach groups and populations with different cultural practises and distinct needs.

Hilder discusses the work of several local black and voluntary & community sector organisations working with statutory agencies such as probation that highlight the pockets of good practise and innovative work that is taking place to work with black and minority ethnic offenders.

Goldhill highlights that partnership working allows access to wider local resources particular through the voluntary sector and is welcomed in tackling the multiple disadvantage and exclusion faced by women. The fundamental traits of women only centres are its staff made up of qualified, ex offender, ex addict, female role models. It is an approach which listens and responds to the service user.

This opens up a crucial examination on the role of the service user in multi-agency working. As Skinner notes the erosion of the 'professional relationship' between worker and service user is a major concern and one which will seriously hamper the practice outcomes that multi agency working was designed to achieve.

Clarity and careful coordination is required to prevent the service user from being unable to develop a meaningful relationship or understand the purpose of the interventions, as demonstrated in the chapters covering mental health, drug misuse and dual diagnosis.

The professional and organisational conflicts within multi agency contexts are apparent and evidenced throughout, and cover not only difference in values and ethos but ethical disparities too.

Parkinson examines the multi agency approach to the resettlement of prisoners, previously an area of neglect and now one of priority which stems from the high rates of re-offending. A multi-agency response in meeting resettlement needs of prisoners is critical, however Parkinson highlights the tension between a punitive response to offenders, exacerbating exclusion over the rehabilitative response, reinforcing individual relationships and supporting personal change.

Heath examines how the collaborative arrangements to the delivery of drug treatment and draws attention to the ethical dilemmas and sharply differing perceptions faced by the various agencies involved particularly around the coerced treatment of offenders.

Methods of assessment and management linked to definitional differences present conflicts which again are clearly evidenced in multi-agency working across justice and health agencies in approaching drug misuse, mental health and dual diagnosis.

Despite the challenges and poor outcomes, most noticeably in Pamment's examination of youth offending teams, multi-agency working is the most widely accepted process to effectively achieve improved outcomes for service users with complex and multifaceted needs. There are pockets of good practise identified enhancements to aid the process.

Tapley notes that multi agency partnerships have focused on improving the response to domestic violence victims, requiring a better understanding and recognition of the complex and varying forms of abuse at all stages by all agencies involved. Tapley's research into services in one area of the UK provides evidence suggesting improved responses to victims of domestic violence. Pakes & Winstone discuss the fundamental need of a multi agency response to mental disordered offenders and examine the Lord Bradley review and note the government's response is a positive one, which will hopefully overcome some of the challenges they have raised.

The authors provide an informed and wide ranging perspective, which provides a comprehensive and clear picture to the reader. The experience and arguments reflected in the book are an excellent starting point for learning lessons and reflecting on the issues raised, in order to improve effectiveness. Despite the ever changing political and legislative landscape and the difficulties it creates, the foundations of partnership working remain the same - a shared goal.

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