

ETHICS AND VALUES IN PRISON PRACTICE

Introduction

There is growing interest in sectors of prison management with their key strategic partners, regulators and some commentators in the philosophy behind custody and offender rehabilitation. While most attention is paid to the tensions and demands of operations in prisons and other settings and the interaction between components of the criminal justice system, the values and ethos behind the services deserves more consideration. An endeavour to clarify these matters amongst service leaders, staff and offenders in the system now arises, together with a willingness of those interested in this area of practical and theoretical education in several settings. Education in ethics and values in criminal justice would seek to empower and educate participants towards creating greater confidence in the discussion of values that lie behind decision-making at strategic operational and individual level. There is also the dimension of influence of peers in these matters.

Background

There is increasing interest in the ethical basis behind the operation of criminal justice services. A specific programme was carried out in the late 1990's/early 2000's, with positive results, in North Carolina prisons, amongst both staff and prisoners. At its height more than 5,000 inmates at 71 facilities had completed the interactive *Ethics and Choices* course which was developed by the Institute for Global Ethics (IGE) with the North Carolina Department of Corrections. Interest in the UK in principle grew following a consultation in Spring 2007 at Windsor Castle, convened by the Institute for Global Ethics UK Trust and supported by two charitable foundations, which brought together senior figures from Prison Services and key players with an interest in this area, together with representatives of the North Carolina prison project, and representatives of WHO Health in Prisons Project. In early Spring 2008, 3 pilot seminars were delivered by an accredited IGE UK trainer in an Open Prison, Prison College and a venue in Central London, with senior figures in a range of backgrounds in and around the prison system.

These meetings and seminars established that there is both interest and commitment amongst prison and justice service partners. The appetite for further engagement and development of these ideas has more widespread interest.

Proposal

Following discussion at the close of each seminar, participants proposed that there is potential for further seminars aimed at 3 levels of participant:

1. prisoners;
2. operational staff; and
3. Governors, management, specialists and leaders from partner organisations.

It may be possible to mix these 3 groups.

The format would probably be a one day seminar – any shorter period would be insufficient to introduce principles of ethical decision-making and move to the practical experience and discussion. It would be on a voluntary basis and it is likely that charitable support would still be available, pending suitable levels of interest and positive evaluation.

Theory of Change

The reasoning behind such a proposal is as follows:

- ❖ to encourage capability and confidence of individuals and groups to engage with colleagues, external partners, and offenders with different value systems;
- ❖ to lead and influence those with whom they manage, or with whom they interact, with confidence, engendering clarity of values and ethos in the interventions, programmes and management processes where they work and engage;
- ❖ to influence operational practice that guides and supports offenders to understand the ethics and values that underlie their personal conduct;
- ❖ to influence levels of general education in ethics and values, attitudes, understanding and behaviour amongst offenders; and
- ❖ to reduce the risk of re-offending consequent on these changes, attitudes and behaviours.

The seminar aims to achieve educational and attitudinal objectives at varying parts of the chain of theory, to act as a basis for behavioural change.

Evaluation

Accepting the assumptions in the theory of change, objective evaluation would be to measure the achievement of key objectives of the seminar series and “distance travelled” amongst individuals involved in the series. A more complex evaluation could be a qualitative evaluation of the peer group around the person engaged in the seminar.

Intermediate objectives for evaluation might be:

- ❖ appreciation of the importance of ethics and values in daily practice;
- ❖ levels of awareness of ethical principles;
- ❖ the deployment of values and ethical reasoning behind decision-making in everyday life/practice; and
- ❖ demonstration of transparent decision-making, background behaviours and insights, both personally and amongst peer groups.

Evaluation may result from engagement with the seminar series as an individual or operational team (exceptionally).

For individuals, there would be a 2 stage evaluation which would principally be in structured questionnaire format:

- (a) to explore baseline pre-seminar understanding, awareness and perhaps, decision taking intentions;
- (b) a post-seminar evaluation at a suitable period following the seminar, perhaps one month; and
- (c) also, there would be a conventional course evaluation at the time, to close the seminar itself.

Preliminary Actions

In order for the seminar series to go ahead in a particular service, it would be necessary for lead figures within each service to approach their Management Board and key partners who are service providers and likely sources of seminar participants:

- (a) to accept in principle that such a seminar would be a useful component of educational and personal development for staff and/or offenders;
- (b) that it would be suitable for evaluation, accepting work to evaluate and establish the seminar's uses and potential benefit as part of the programme; and
- (c) that such a seminar series could be an auxiliary part of College or educational strategy, although not (yet) a subject for training and accreditation, although such an initiative might attract awareness and support in principle.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Fraser', with a stylized 'A' and 'F'.

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