

WHAT WORKS IN OFFENDER COMPLIANCE (2013)

Pamela Ugwudike and Peter Raynor (eds)

Palgrave Macmillan, 350 pp excl. index

ISBN: 9781137019547

Reviewed by Neil Stone, Head of Community Offender Management Policy, NOMS

This volume is both ambitious in scope whilst retaining an exclusive focus on offender compliance. It is ambitious because as the editors acknowledge compliance is a very widespread term, and its explication lies in detailed theorization and empirical analysis.

Many readers will be familiar with Ugwudike and Raynor's use of Anthony Bottoms framework for understanding compliance. Compliance, according to Bottoms, is a broad concept. There are numerous forms of legal compliance; constraint-based compliance; habit compliance; instrumental compliance; and normative compliance. Several contributions in the book draw on or critically analyse this fourfold classification. Acknowledgement is also made of Gwen Robinson and Fergus McNeill's conceptual framework for understanding compliance giving the whole book a wide, intellectually stimulating and rewarding learning experience.

What is it about compliance that requires a volume such as this? The first reason, as the editor's point out, there has been a dearth of academic research relating to compliance. The second is that we need to know what is behind the official statistics relating to offenders that reveal many of them are reconvicted shortly before their orders expire and that some of those convictions for non-compliance have inflated an already increasing prison population putting pressures of capacity on the prison estate. Thirdly, some offending behaviour programmes attract higher non-compliance rates than others so there is a need to understand why this is occurring. However, put simply and according to Trish McCulloch the overarching reason we need to know more about compliance is because: "the pursuit of compliance in community penalties is, necessarily, a complex, challenging and far-reaching endeavour." I would add to that the importance of compliance is central to gaining the confidence of the public in what probation is trying to achieve and a mark of individual success for the offender in the journey to a non-offending lifestyle. Equally, as we move into a diverse landscape of probation provision the relationship between effective compliance and the financial returns of a Payment by Results scheme should be all too obvious for the prospective providers of probation services.

The book is easily navigable with four sections divided into broadly policy and what is meant by compliance; offender motivation and the relationship between the key agents, practitioner and offender; evidence and developments in offender research and the contextualisation of compliance within a diverse demographic population. The strength of the book is that there are links and connections between and within all of these four strands and the structure of the book encourages the reader to explore these interconnections.

As someone whose interests are enmeshed in policy development I found the first quarter of the book fascinating. Beginning with Maurice Vanstone's canter through probation history and its relation to the engagement both compulsory and "voluntary" of offenders with the Probation Service through to Gwen Robinson's historical analysis of compliance as: "a moving and historically contingent target." Robinson's contribution in particular identifies and marks what the editors call the "seismic" change in probation practice and policy where compliance gained an official definition which was less oriented towards promoting desistance and more focussed on improving attendance and reporting arrangements - a legacy which can easily invade and confuse contemporary thinking on what compliance as outlined in this book is really about. I would strongly recommend anyone wishing to make sense of and put into context the current coalition government thinking around offender management to read this section of the book.

Practitioners wishing to acquaint themselves with the latest thinking and research outcomes will find plenty on which to reflect. Global perspectives on compliance are included with contributions from the USA, Canada and Europe. The chapter by Pamela Ugwudike is particularly compelling as it explores the strategies employed by probation practitioners to promote compliance. Thankfully, from a personal perspective, Ugwudike's work highlights evidence of a continuing commitment to social work and what were once called "welfarist" practices that were common to early probation intervention.

In addition to this concern for personal welfare what appears thematic throughout most, if not all, contributions is the importance of relationships be it in prison as described by Ben Crewe or in the case of female offenders as Loraine Gelsthorpe argues. Compliance is built around an agenda of decency. As Gelsthorpe states: "Building genuine relationships that demonstrate 'care' about the person being supervised, their desistance, and their future, and not just control/monitoring/surveillance." Gelsthorpe's chapter is especially helpful in that it outlines the theoretical concepts of compliance as articulated by Anthony Bottoms and Fergus McNeill and how practitioners can apply these in context to female offenders.

Along with relationships and applying an offender strengths model to achieving compliance thematic within the book is that the relationships need to have identifiable collaborative elements. Achieving collaboration whilst in the coercive relationship that defines current probation practice is a challenge especially now that with the introduction of the Schedule 16 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013 all community sentences are required to contain a punitive element.

With any book that openly admits it is eclectic there is the potential for drift and softening of the focus on what should be the core subject. This volume manages to combine its eclectic approach with detailed consideration of what constitutes compliance. The three key themes that help answer the question as to what works in offender compliance; an understanding of the dynamics of policy; how compliance is "done" by the actors involved; and the empirical evidence that supports the "doing" give one hope and belief that compliance can be achieved and all the benefits that this can bring to turning lives around and creating safer societies are achievable. As the market for probation fragments and becomes competitive these "winning" strategies will ironically have the potential to become more valuable and gain greater currency than they have in the past. The word of caution, uttered by a few within this book, is that the hegemony of punishment has the potential to undermine the argument for compliance which means extending and building on the work contained within this book.