

**BARLINNIE SPECIAL UNIT AND SHOTTS UNIT:
AN ASSESSMENT**

A Report prepared for the Scottish Office

by

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**INTRODUCTION:
BACKGROUND, TERMS OF REFERENCE AND METHODOLOGY**

The history of the provision of small units for long-term prisoners who pose problems of order and control within the Scottish prison system can be traced back at least to the early 1950s, when a decision was taken to establish a Segregation Unit at Peterhead Prison, intended for the allegedly very small group of prisoners who had been primarily responsible for a series of incidents of 'serious indiscipline', violence and subversion. The 'philosophy' of this first special unit for disruptive prisoners was quite simply that of the segregation and 'group isolation' of persistent troublemakers, in place of the more traditional and even less constructive strategy of individual isolation (SPS, 1990b: 55).

The Peterhead Unit fell into disuse in 1954, and although it was reestablished in 1956 it was finally abandoned in 1957. There was apparently no formal assessment of the Unit and very few surviving records that provide even the most basic data on the type or number of prisoners who went through the Unit, or how long they stayed there. From the very limited accounts that remain, and according to the SHHD Departmental Working Party of 1971, the Unit appears to have been judged a limited success in terms of its overall function of reducing the level of violence and subversion among other prisoners in the main prison at Peterhead (SHHD, 1971; SPS, 1990a, Appendix A).

There was then a gap of almost ten years before a second Segregation Unit was established at Inverness in 1966. Its location was deliberately chosen to isolate it from the rest of the long-term prison system in a way that had not been possible at Peterhead, and it also served to indicate its role as a national resource rather than exclusively for Peterhead. The chequered history of the Inverness Segregation Unit and the wide variety of special or 'alternative' units that were subsequently established during the next 25 years is better documented and does not need to be rehearsed here - although the lack of an authoritative historical critique of small units in the Scottish Prison Service is an unfortunate gap that merits attention for the benefit of policy makers and the prison service alike.

Following a serious incident in the Inverness Unit in December, 1972, during which several prison officers and prisoners were seriously injured, its use was temporarily suspended. It did not reopen until 5 years later, in December 1978, with a regime that was intended to be very different from its ill-fated predecessor. In the meantime, the Barlinnie Special Unit (BSU) had opened, early in 1973, following the recommendations of the SHHD Departmental Working Party, *Treatment of Certain Male Long Term Prisoners and Potentially Violent Prisoners* (SHHD, 1971). This was destined to be by far the most long-lasting and significant development in the treatment of 'difficult' prisoners in the SPS. In the words of *Opportunity and Responsibility*:

Barlinnie Special Unit has come to occupy a significant position amongst both criminologists and the public at large as a bold penal experiment. Over that period, the therapeutic approach emphasized by the Working Party has gradually been replaced by the 'community culture' in which the individual becomes answerable to the community and in which the discipline of the community meeting replaces conventional prison disciplinary procedure. (SPS, 1990b: 56)

In the 1980s, when the problems of poor prison conditions and disruptive behaviour amongst the Scottish long-term prison population showed no signs of abating, but in certain respects escalated to new levels of protest and serious actual or threatened harm to staff and prisoners, other units were opened, including the Peterhead 10-Cell Unit (1984-86) the Perth 6-Cell Unit (opened in August 1989) and, most recently, Shotts Unit, opened in April 1990.

The brief of the present research, in the light of the essentially pragmatic approach adopted to the small units strategy in SPS during the period outlined above, was to carry out a 'broad evaluation' of two of these small units - Barlinnie Special Unit and the Shotts 12-Cell Unit - and to provide an essentially 'snapshot' account of how they currently operate, how they are linked to the rest of the long-term prison system and what lessons might be drawn for the development of the small units strategy in the 1990s.

In particular, the research would examine the extent to which each unit successfully meets the objectives set down in *Opportunity and Responsibility* (SPS, 1990b) for all the small units within the Scottish Prison Service: viz.

1. To provide an additional option for the location of prisoners who present management problems, or the potential for management problems, within the mainstream prison system;
2. To hold such prisoners securely;
3. To provide a range of additional opportunities geared to the personal development of such prisoners within a small, supportive environment;
4. To return prisoners to the mainstream better able to cope and to make progress towards release; and
5. To provide settings within which it is possible to test alternative approaches towards the relationship between prisoners and prison officers, from which lessons may be drawn for the mainstream prison system. (SPS, 1990b: 59)

In addition, we were invited to examine the impact of the units on the host prison (and *vice versa*), and provide an overall assessment of the future place and role of the units in the system as a whole. The research should consider the need or desirability for more special units of this kind, as opposed to finding an appropriate method of dealing with difficult prisoners in the mainstream.

In view of the fact that each unit had its own unique history and current ethos, particularly in terms of staff-prisoner relationships and community living, it was agreed that a number of specific issues should be focused upon in each unit, with the details to be discussed beforehand with unit members, without whose cooperation research of this kind would have been impossible.

Among the issues that it was agreed the research would address in both units were the following:

- i. the current regime: philosophy and day-to-day operation;
- ii. physical environment and facilities;
- iii. staffing issues, training and prisoner-staff relationships;
- iv. management issues, including staff roles, specialists, community meetings etc.;
- v. selection and types of prisoner, assessment, sentence planning and reintegration into the mainstream;
- vi. community links and family involvement in the unit;
- vii. measuring 'success';
- viii. aspects of cost effectiveness, ethics and priorities within the Scottish Prison Service.

In the case of Barlinnie Special Unit, given the unique place which it holds within the system and the changes and ethos developed since it opened in 1973, our research had necessarily (and frustratingly) to be very much a 'snapshot in time' - the summer of 1992 - a very small piece in the complex jigsaw of its 20 year history.

In the case of Shotts Unit, which received its first prisoner on 25 April 1990, and is still very much in its infancy when compared to the BSU, a particular focus of the research was to be upon the extent to which the philosophy and objectives of the unit are being met, as set out in the Shotts Unit Planning Group Report, published in January 1990 (SPS, 1990a). The Group identified four key objectives which must be held in balance:

- i. Maintaining secure custody.
- ii. Creating a community.
- iii. Providing opportunities for personal development.
- iv. Maintaining the position of Shotts Unit in relation to the mainstream system.

(SPS, 1990a: para 4.1)

In association with the philosophy of the unit and its role, Shotts Unit was intended to provide prisoners with opportunities for:

- a. Increased family contact.
- b. Greater self-determination.
- c. A supportive environment.
- d. Personal growth and development facilities.

(SPS, 1990a: para 2.3.3)

The research would assess the extent to which such opportunities were being provided for prisoners, together with the personal development programme, which was intended to be the main feature distinguishing Shotts from other units (see SPS, 1990a: para 4.4).

On the academic side, the research was a collaborative exercise by the Universities of Hull, Keele and Cambridge. The overall coordination and management of the project was the responsibility of Professor Keith Bottomley, Director of the Centre for Criminology & Criminal Justice, University of Hull. Most of the fieldwork in the units was carried out by two other experienced English prison researchers: Dr Richard Sparks, of the Department of Criminology, University of Keele, who did the research in BSU; and Dr Alison Lieblich, of the Cambridge Institute of Criminology, who did most of the research fieldwork in Shotts Unit. It was never the intention of the research to engage in any sort of direct comparison between these two very different units. Although the fieldwork was carried out during the same period, in the summer of 1992, each researcher worked independently in order to be able to view their own particular unit in its own terms, without being unduly influenced by knowledge of how the other unit functioned.

Great care was taken by the research team to liaise closely with the governors, staff and prisoners of each unit, at every stage in the process. Preliminary visits were made to BSU and Shotts, and meetings were held with prisoners and staff, before the detailed arrangements for the research had been finalised. Additional visits were made in the early summer, prior to the main period of fieldwork, in July/August 1992, when Richard Sparks and Alison Lieblich spent three consecutive weeks in their respective units. During this time, the daily life of the unit was observed and participated in; prisoners and staff were talked to extensively; and all prisoners who agreed were interviewed at length, together with a majority of staff and specialists. Outwith the units themselves, all the former prisoners from Shotts Unit agreed to be interviewed (see Part II, below) and meetings were arranged with mainstream and former unit governors and senior administrators closely involved in the development of small units in SPS.

In the period following the main fieldwork, a number of return visits were made to the units and to SPS headquarters. Most importantly, towards the end of November 1992 formal feedback/consultative meetings, involving both staff and prisoners, were held by the researchers in BSU and Shotts Unit, at which the main points emerging from the research and our provisional conclusions were reported and fully discussed with unit members. We were reassured by the generally very positive reactions to our findings and that despite the severe constraints of time under which we had worked it seemed that we had succeeded in identifying many key aspects of the experiences and views of those who worked or lived in the units, and who shared in a more direct way than we ever could a real concern about the present running and future prospects of the units.

The report which follows is divided into three parts. Part I describes Barlinnie Special Unit, and was written primarily by Richard Sparks. It concentrates on current themes and issues, on the assumption that much of the history of BSU is quite well known (and was in any case outside our research brief). Part II gives a rather fuller descriptive account of the running of Shotts Unit - as we are the first researchers to have been given such full access for observing the daily routines and talking extensively to unit members - and was written primarily by Alison Liebling. Each of these reviews draws its own conclusions, pertaining mainly to the unit on which it is based but also addressing some aspects of the wider relationship between the unit and the mainstream.

In Part III we have tried to draw together, albeit at the cost of some slight repetition, the main themes and conclusions that have arisen from the research as a whole, based upon our collective reflections upon the wider implications of our findings, and being mindful of the need to try to make relevant connections with the current policy debate within the SPS about the future of small units.

PART I BARLINNIE SPECIAL UNIT

Introduction

This first part of the report describes research conducted with prisoners and staff in the Special Unit at Barlinnie prison during the summer of 1992. The research proposal on which it is based envisaged:

An evaluative study of the current operation of the Barlinnie Special Unit, in light of the objectives laid down for small units in the Scottish Prison Service in *Opportunity and Responsibility* (SPS, 1990b:59). The research will explore the perspectives of prisoners and staff within the Unit. It will also consider: the position of the Unit within the host prison; the role of the Unit in relation to the system as a whole; implications for future developments within the Unit and for the mainstream.

The work reported here records our attempts to make sense of each of these matters. On some (in particular 'the position of the Unit within the host prison', which few participants raised as a pressing issue) we have little of note to say. In other cases the underlying issues are quite large, complicated and sometimes controversial. We address them here as fully as has been possible within the constraints of time, space and resources.

~~This report is written from the vantage point of outsiders sympathetic to the efforts and predicaments of prisoners and staff in an unusual, indeed arguably in some respects unique, penal setting.~~ That the Barlinnie Special Unit (hereafter BSU) is a very small institution in no way precludes its being a complex one. In fact one problem that it has confronted over the years is precisely that it has been seen by some 'inside' the Scottish Prison Service but 'outside' the Unit itself as enigmatic and puzzling - as the tone of perplexity in some official documents perhaps indicates (see for example, the report of H.M. Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland, 1986:23). Such documents have repeatedly called for a programme of research to review the workings and development of the Unit, and although it has been quite widely written about elsewhere¹, no such first-hand research effort has been undertaken until now. It is to be hoped, therefore, that the present work goes some way towards making good a long felt deficiency in understanding.

We have never been either prisoners or employees within the Scottish Prison Service (hereafter SPS) and this is not a 'managerial' document in the sense that internal policy reviews or Inspector's reports are. Rather it is a small piece of first-hand social research based on interviews with prisoners and staff and relevant documentary material, and informed by a general awareness of larger academic, political and policy debates on long-term imprisonment in Scotland and elsewhere.

Two significant areas of discussion are precluded here, for reasons of space, time and the quite highly focused terms of reference of this report. The first is any full account of the Unit's historical development. Curiously, given the significance of the Unit as a reference point in British penal politics and the public controversies that have at times surrounded it, that history remains to be written. We submit that this omission should be regarded as quite serious, even for immediate practical purposes. It inhibits a full explanatory account of how the Unit came to assume its present form and the development of its practices and accustomed ways of working. It also works against the adequate appraisal of the place and potential of small units in the long-term prison system or, for example, of the possible points of tension between policies based on certain consciously articulated principles and the 'pragmatic regime development' which official documents attribute to the establishment of alternative units. The second area of discussion which is excluded is any systematic treatment of international comparisons of 'unit management' principles or measures directed towards the 'special handling' of particular groups of long-term prisoners². This inevitably makes the discussion of certain points of principle less explicit than it should ideally be. We suggest that both of these areas should be given close consideration as future research directions of more than purely 'academic' interest.

In view of these excluded dimensions the aims of this review are comparatively modest. It places its emphasis on the *current* operation of BSU in respect of four key areas: aims and objectives; assessment criteria and the process of coming to the Unit; the regime in daily operation; and issues in the relation of the Unit to the 'mainstream', especially the vexed question of moving on from the Unit. It concludes with a short summary and some tentative recommendations. Its distinctive contribution lies in the attempt to discuss these issues as far as possible from the vantage points of the prisoners and staff who presently make up the Unit community, supplemented where appropriate by the authors' own observations and interpretations. Accordingly it is written from the premise (now officially acknowledged within SPS and implicit within such initiatives as the *Scottish Prison Survey* (1992)) that the enlightened formulation of policy can only take place with a full awareness of what those individuals who actually live and work within the prison system really want and regard as being in their own and its best interests.

1. Aims and objectives: what is the Special Unit for?

Since BSU's inception in 1973 various attempts have been made by officials, prisoners and former prisoners, Unit staff and clinical specialists to define and redefine its purposes. Inevitably given the range of interests and perspectives represented in such claims these definitions have varied, and not all have been easily compatible with each other.

As is well known, the working party whose report prefigured the creation of the Unit concerned itself largely with the presumed propensity for violence of probable Unit candidates and proposed a regime drawing explicitly on 'therapeutic community' principles (SHHD, 1971; Stephen, 1988). Circular 73/1972 stated:

The purpose of the Unit will be to treat those inmates whose potential for violence stems from some degree of mental instability or whose length of sentence gives rise to difficulties in their being treated and contained within normal institutional routines.

Later formulations of the aims and functions of the Unit have been considerably more eclectic and less prescriptive and, in keeping with the tenor of most subsequent penology, less wedded to the idea of 'treatment' as such. For example, one departmental working party of the 1980s says no more on this point than that it is desirable to separate 'difficult' prisoners from other long-termers and to have intensive staff involvement with them (SPS, 1986: 25). Discussion documents circulated during 1990 and 1991 are more concerned with declaring criteria for the acceptability, and perhaps more explicitly the exclusion, of certain candidates than with the fundamental aims of the Unit as such. One such refers to 'prisoners who remain highly problematical in terms of their capacity to cope with mainstream prison life, and who have shown genuine signs of wanting to find other ways of tackling the problems they have encountered in custody.' Another document prepared by a former Unit Governor suggests:

...it is imperative that we are seen to be taking those prisoners that are presenting genuine ongoing difficulties in their current establishments. The Special Unit should not be viewed as a reward for bad behaviour or as a soft option but as a positive attempt by the Service to enable the prisoner to come to terms with his situation.

The same paper goes on to contemplate extending the Unit's remit to include some prisoners who are 'not creating management problems as such' but rather who are clearly 'not benefiting to their maximum potential from being located in a conventional closed prison.' Such documents usually go on to list an agreed set of exclusionary definitions: sex offenders, current drug users, prisoners receiving psychoactive medication, others clearly unacceptable to current Unit occupants.

In brief, the original purposes of the Unit seem to have lain in (i) a felt sense of impending emergency surrounding a 'small number' of persistently 'violent' or 'disruptive' known individuals, (ii) an awareness at that time of the likelihood of some prisoners serving very long indeterminate sentences in the wake of the abolition of the death penalty and (iii) a conscious desire to diverge from the historically dominant responses to 'disruptive' prisoners by punitive measures involving extended segregation in spartan conditions. However, subsequent statements have moved towards a more flexible and open-ended definition of the Unit's purposes and of qualifications for admission.

For all the complexity of the Unit's history (including the oft-noted absence of adequate documentation and research) two threads of continuity emerge from these debates. These are:

i. That the Unit performs a function for SPS as a whole by removing 'difficult' prisoners from the mainstream and from the environments in which their difficulties become apparent; and

ii. That the Unit should seek to meet the needs of those referred to it through altered staff-prisoner relationships, opportunities for personal development, and specialist support in a relatively unstructured and non-punitive environment.

These aims are by no means contradictory. But which of them has been prioritized in the various position statements depends on the conditions prevailing in SPS at the time as well as on *who* is speaking and their interests in relation to the system as a whole. Thus conceived there are a variety of possible tensions between the stances of those whose professional commitment is to the management of SPS more generally and those who have looked at the Unit from within in more directly personal terms. Be this as it may, the main purpose of this section will be to advance discussion of the aims of the Unit by reporting the views of those currently or recently involved in its life - their assessments of its purposes and its adequacy in fulfilling them.

Aims of the Unit: staff perspectives

Broadly speaking, governor grade staff (including present and former Unit managers) and specialists accept what appears to be an official (system-level) definition of the Unit's purposes, or at least acknowledge that these must provide the context within which it operates. Thus:

I see it from the point of view that the system is trying to solve a problem for itself, rather than for the individual prisoners. (Clinical specialist)

Or again:

I think you've got to go back to what it was set up for. The Special Unit was basically set up to protect prison officers against being injured. And that's it. Anything else is a bonus and is extrapolated from there. (Clinical specialist)

Looked at from this perspective all such speakers affirm that the Unit must be considered a notable success:

Difficult and disruptive prisoners are a danger to themselves, to staff and to other prisoners if left in a system which frequently they are unable to adjust to and to cope with to any meaningful degree. Unit systems have been shown over a long period of time to be a safe environment for such prisoners and for the staff with whom they work. In many cases personal growth has taken place and this would not have been possible in the mainstream. (former Unit manager)

One former Unit manager reflected from his present vantage point in a mainstream jail:

You've got to remember that the Unit's role in taking people out of the mainstream is the driving force.

He continued:

I really see BSU being for extremely difficult cases. There's a certain part of me that wants to resolve... you know, passing on my trouble to someone else is not something I relish but I think I'm professional enough to know when I'm beaten...When I look who's in there at the moment and I think, well, would I really want any of these people in [this prison]. I mean what do you do with the [Phil Archers] and the [Sid Perkoes]?

In this light, this individual proposed a modest definition of the Unit's aims and criteria for success:

I mean you start off with the ability to take extremely difficult prisoners, the ability to hold them. We've mentioned the violence side of it has only been on very rare occasions, right? The ability to get them moving through the system, albeit rather slowly. And I suppose to a degree modification in the prisoner's attitude.

This observer also stated his view that one reason for such modesty is to encourage realistic expectations, and hence defend the Unit from unfair criticism. However, most such speakers also went on to comment that this emphasis is only their initial starting point and to reiterate their view that the Unit has also genuinely contributed to facilitating personal development and behavioural change in many of the people who had been through it:

I suspect what the end is, what the objective is, is to take very difficult, often aggressive and violent men and somehow to apply a regime, a method of living, which dissipated the violence and which allowed them and staff to come to an understanding, a living together. And there is no doubt that the Unit certainly has achieved that objective...Once you take a man out of the mainstream and you're offering him... there's a consensus at that point between him and the administration that he has to change. He has to buy into that. Also I guess at this point in time there is a history to the Unit which has shown that people can change... I think that the conditions in the Unit allow him to deal with staff as individuals who are human beings and I think that actually changes their behaviour. (Unit manager)

In a similar vein one specialist worker commented:

What's the long-term objective of the whole exercise? It's to get people out into the community, presumably, to function as reasonable citizens. You want to get them away as much as possible from crime culture etc. etc. etc. If you brought them into this setting one's broken down a lot of that institutionalized crime culture that you've got next door [i.e. Barlinnie main prison], by the nature of the place.

Most uniformed staff would I think also endorse such views. Some state quite plainly that the system level objective of removing difficult prisoners from the mainstream constitutes the major part of their sense of their own role:

If the guy is such a problem that it's affecting the running of that institution, to get rid of one for the good order of the rest makes sense and if the Special Unit is the place for that, so be it. I agree with that. You've got to try and maintain order for people continuously. You've got to go. And that should be the mainstay of the reasons to come to the Unit. (Unit officer)

Or as another put it:

I'll take every prisoner that comes, I mean I'm not bothered what they are, who they are...I'd take anybody that's sent to us who's a difficult prisoner. That's why we came. That's why we volunteered for it, to take them... I see my job as managing difficult prisoners and that's it. Full stop...Totally end of story about that.

But at the same time officers generally draw a sharp distinction between 'managing' and merely containing. The last speaker also says of the Unit: 'It certainly makes a prisoner more responsible' and 'Every prisoner I've seen come to the Unit has changed'. In general most Unit staff place much of their emphasis on these latter points. For them the day to day development of relationships and the promotion of trust are key features of their work. This is an important feature of staff perspectives on the Unit, which we develop at more length below (in the section on staff-prisoner relations).

Aims of the Unit: prisoner perspectives

It is important to note, here and elsewhere, the degree of overlap between staff and prisoner perspectives on a range of issues. In confirmation of some of the above comments about altered staff-prisoner relations the near unanimity on a number of points between many staff and prisoners constitutes a clear difference between our experience as researchers in the Unit and previous experiences in other prisons. But prisoners' views are more directly influenced by particular personal experiences. Their views on the Unit are only really intelligible in the light of the sometimes extreme situations out of which they have come (a point developed more fully below). Some prisoners express powerfully a sense of relief, even of escape:

Being suddenly given access to more of the norms of society, and more of the normal standards of society, from, from dungeons of dire despair, you know, from that position into, you know, a small society but closer to the norms of society, entailed a degree of culture shock, disorientation and rapid readjustment, rapid readjustment.

(Unit prisoner)

Or again:

At the end of the day, it's not a case of rewarding bad behaviour, it's a case that there are certain types of people who just cannot function in a mainstream jail. Even if they wanted to they couldn't. I was one of them. I'd served fucking [x] years before I came here. I should have been on my way out. I just couldn't, I couldn't function...We're responsible to ourself because if you fuck it up in here, you know, you're, you know what I mean...It works in the sense that it humanizes us, whereby the sense that we can form relationships with ordinary people outside, which I could never have done in a billion years in an ordinary jail. It works, Richard. There's a million ways that it works, but not easy to define. (Unit prisoner)

And again:

It's not what the Unit done for me, first of all...it's what the prison done - damaged me very, very badly. You know. The anger. The pain. And I just couldn't give a fuck what happened to me in there...I'd've destroyed myself in the mainstream. Right? Because everything was getting unbearable. Unbearable. But when I came here, in a sense it saved my life..What happened was I got a lifeline just in fucking time.

By implication these prisoners are acknowledging that the Unit has 'worked' in respect of the first of its aims - its contribution towards problem-solving for the system - inasmuch as it has provided some sort of resolution in their own particular cases. But their *emphasis* perhaps lies elsewhere - in a directly personal assessment of how being in the Unit has altered their views, the course of their sentences, their relationships with their families and their orientation towards the future. These themes are detailed more fully below in discussing the assessment/selection process and the regime in practice.

In sum, by accident or design, BSU has always had more than one kind of aim attributed to it, and which of these is taken to be most important depends on the vantage point from which it is seen. However much its function for the system as a whole may be its driving force, its internal logic as described by both prisoners and staff naturally leads to a stress on behaviour, relationships and personal experiences. To that extent any attempt to conceive of BSU (or to simplify or reduce its aims) simply to a holding or containment function would be resisted strongly by the members of its community. That some have at times mistrusted (and indeed still mistrust) official attitudes within SPS towards the Unit and felt that it (and they) has been marginalised is problematic. It reflects a concern, especially amongst prisoners, that aim 1) (cynically: the achievement of a quiet life) might be prioritized over others with possible detrimental consequences both for the individuals involved and for the full development of the Unit's potential. It is not at all surprising that in a large and complex organisation such as a prison system (especially one whose participants have in the past been very directly in conflict with one another) views of any particular institution within that system should differ. Nevertheless, the perception that key decision-makers have at times been equivocal in their attitude to the Unit has heightened anxieties and risked compounding the problem of prisoners preferring to 'dig in' within the Unit and to postpone moving on (sometimes, it seems very probable, at the cost of extending their confinement overall). Some participants, including senior staff, insist that recent developments - the refurbishment of the unit, the dropping of the "experimental" tag - do clearly signify an official recognition that the Unit is a permanent and valued part of the long-term prison system in Scotland. If this is indeed so it should be confirmed in some clearer way than has been apparent (certainly in prisoners' eyes) hitherto, lest the carefully cultivated trust which already exists in large measure between staff and prisoners in the Unit be undermined by a continuing mistrust of the system's intentions towards it.

2. Assessment Criteria: who comes to BSU and why?

Evidently, this discussion (and the debates within it) follow from and extend those concerning the Unit's basic objectives. In origin, as we have already signalled, there was a stress on violence and on the sense that problems existed which had failed to be resolved by other means. This continues to be reflected in the view of some present and former staff that the Unit must properly be reserved for those 'extremely difficult cases' which provided its original *raison d'être* and its claim to 'special' status.

This in turn leads some staff to query, for example, the number of prisoners at present in the Unit who now have, or who will shortly become eligible for, 'C' category status. Such staff worry that BSU might thereby be seen as moving away from its original and proper functions and that this in turn makes it vulnerable to criticism from elsewhere in the system (views which I have heard voiced) that it no longer really takes 'difficult' prisoners, or that those who are there have ceased to be 'difficult' and so forth (and hence that the Unit has become peripheral to the main concerns of SPS).

Plainly this is a vexed and difficult area, and a crucial one for this research. In this section I will first briefly review the formal position on the referral process; second I will note some salient points about the state of our knowledge about past and present occupancy of the Unit; third I will outline in brief the views of staff and prisoners on eligibility and assessment for the Unit. Finally I will raise some general issues about the referral process.

The referral procedure

The procedure for referrals to BSU is a quite time-consuming and painstaking one. In general candidates are nominated by the Governor of the holding establishment. This nomination is considered by the Standing Committee on Difficult Prisoners. If on this advice the Department gives authority for a detailed assessment, a team from BSU (including the Governor and Deputy Governor, clinical specialists and representatives of other staff) interviews the prisoner concerned and makes a detailed assessment. If the team recommend transfer a decision is made centrally and put to the Junior Minister for formal approval.

This is necessarily a time-consuming process. It acts against any sense that the Unit can be used as a 'hot-line' facility for sudden and urgent problems - i.e. the point at which the Governor of the holding prison may feel the greatest inclination to make a referral. This procedure, whilst commendably exhaustive, has been criticized for being too cumbersome and too secretive, perhaps giving rise to uncertainty and disaffection amongst Governors elsewhere. It can also, as has been widely noted, be stressful for the prisoner concerned and impose an extended period of uncertainty. This in turn has led to an internal debate over whether Governors should be encouraged to continue

making nominations during a period when the Unit is effectively full and with no short-term prospect of vacancies arising. Unit managers past and present and clinical specialists have taken the view that referrals should still be encouraged, even if a full assessment is postponed until vacancies impend. Our view (outlined more fully in conclusion of this section) accords with this on the grounds that the larger interest in maximising the usefulness of small units crucially requires a more systematic assessment of needs throughout the long-term system than is presently available. Moreover a full appraisal of who is most likely to benefit most from a period in BSU (or Shotts) is inhibited whilst referrals do not take place since that leaves the units in a basically *reactive* rather than *proactive* mode.

Prisoners in the Unit: a note on records, experiences and prospects

All eight prisoners in the Unit at the time of this research were serving life sentences. Several also had concurrent determinate sentences imposed either at the point of conviction or following incidents in other prisons. At that time (July 1992) one prisoner had already served 22 years, another 18. None had served less than 8 years and their average time served on this sentence stood at very nearly 13 years.

One prisoner had already spent 8 years in the Unit, whilst two had arrived only a little over a year before. Their average time since arrival stood at 3 years 8 months. Four of the eight had previously escaped or attempted to escape from other prisons. Seven had previously been variously charged with hostage taking, 'mobbing and rioting' or staff assaults. Four had received additional sentences after incidents in other prisons. All (7) had, either shortly before coming to the Unit or in the more distant past, spent varying periods in segregation in Peterhead, Shotts and elsewhere. Three had previously been through the Inverness Unit.

Since 1973, a total of 35 prisoners have been admitted to the Unit. Excluding those at present in the Unit their average length of stay had been 43 months, including four earlier instances of stays over seven years. Fifteen of the previous 27 occupants were serving life sentences. Average age on transfer to the Unit, including the present group has been over 30.

Apart from the one distinctive feature of the present situation, namely that all the present Unit occupants are serving life sentences, it is not immediately apparent from the (admittedly imperfect) available information that they are untypical in comparison with their predecessors in other respects. Certainly they are not *prima facie* a less 'difficult' group. Neither is it clear, contrary to a widely held view, that periods spent in the Unit have been increasing to a disproportionate extent, especially when account is taken of the fact that, for example, five of those who had left the Unit in the six years up to July 1992 had done so under special circumstances (two released, two transferred on disciplinary grounds, one transferred to Carstairs Hospital). That

is to say, it has long been the case that those transferred to the Unit in the middle portion of a long sentence (as appears to be officially preferred) and who are not removed for any exceptional reason have tended to remain there for quite lengthy periods (usually in excess of three years and frequently considerably longer).

The present group are on aggregate very slightly older than their predecessors and probably (though figures are not to hand) further into their sentences. There is, as I have indicated, no evidence to substantiate the view that they are a less genuinely 'difficult' group than BSU prisoners of the past or, with one exception, that they have yet remained there longer than usual. If therefore, as some argue, it is to be regarded as a problem that people remain 'too long' in BSU and hence 'clog up' the availability of places, it should be noted that this is not a new problem. Neither, consequently, can it be attributed purely to the alleged stubbornness of some current BSU occupants in 'digging in' and refusing to move.

However, what is arguably distinctively problematic for the present group is not their past records but rather their individual and collective futures, given that all are well into long life sentences and few can see even medium-term clear prospects for release. The impending situation, therefore, is one in which a group of men doing, as one of them put it, 'heavy, heavy, heavy porridge' find little prospect and few incentives for moving on from the Unit. The implications of this tend to preoccupy all concerned. For managers and staff this is registered as a concern about the felt lack of viable options to offer prisoners. For the prisoners concerned it takes the form of a persistent anxiety about where they might be called upon to move to, when and under what conditions. For some on both sides its singular effect lies in a growing sense of marking time, standing still even of 'stagnation' within the Unit community.

This possibility of 'stagnation' or 'siltage' is registered in comments from various quarters about a perceived lack of involvement in creative projects, sometimes an alleged waning of commitment to the community and so forth. The implication of such remarks, especially when voiced by those outside the community itself, is sometimes to 'blame' individual prisoners for their imputed apathy. Alternatively, one such 'outsider' rather cynically commented 'Do we really want to loosen up the siltage?' - a remark which would only compound the suspicions voiced by some prisoners that they have in effect been shunted into a siding and forgotten by a system which feels it has no reason to like or care for them.

Research of this kind is not concerned with the apportioning of blame, only with the appreciative understanding of contexts and reasons. Rather it throws its emphasis in interpreting the impending situation of ageing and stasis on two structural features of SPS which must be addressed if there is a serious interest in developing the Unit's potential, reintegrating it into a coherent long-term prison

policy and enabling prisoners to progress towards release. These are (i) the current indefiniteness of parole arrangements for lifers in Scotland and (ii) the lack of options for forward movement that are credible in the eyes of the prisoners. These in combination seem to us to represent the primary difficulties currently facing the Unit and to constitute a principal source of tension in its relation to the mainstream, especially when they appear to confirm the view from elsewhere in the system that for so long as there is no prospect of vacancies arising referrals are pointless and the value of the Unit to anyone elsewhere in the system limited. Our point is that such limits on the Unit's 'usefulness' are themselves at least in part the result of systemic problems and not just Unit problems. We discuss below (in the sections on 'obstacles to progress') the sorts of steps which need to be considered if such problems are to be obviated.

It should be noted, however, that not all participants in any case share the view that either the concentration of lifers or their spending relatively long periods of time in the Unit is necessarily particularly problematic. Some of those with the longest experience of the Unit take a longer view. For example one clinical specialist noted:

I think one has to say about this place that initially one was rather concerned that it would become a backwater, rather like a tomb. That it would be filled up with very long-term people, that it would stagnate and there would be very, very little movement at all. In fact it's one of the most dynamic organisations I've ever had dealings with...

And later:

And you've got to think long term. There's not going to be people in here for six months. It would be a waste of time. And you see how they mature, how they develop, how they relate to visitors if they get them, how they relate to staff. And over a period of two or three years you expect to see a change in them, in their personality and as people.

Such a perspective is also shared by individual prisoners. Thus:

Over the last five years I've come a million miles...a million miles...Recently I've taken on board things, issues that I didn't give any thought to. I've taken things on board and I'm working on it - why I do these things - and eventually I'm going to overcome them, like I've overcome a lot of other things. But basically the thing is to understand myself...So only I can think of the answer. It's my head, you know. I mean this place gives me time, it gives me an opportunity to in a sense experiment with myself. OK? (Unit prisoner)

On the other hand this contrasts rather clearly with some of the natural anxieties of Unit managers:

When we have long periods of relative calm and nothing is happening then we've got to motivate the fellows otherwise we move into a kind of becalmed situation

and we lose... Trivia becomes important and then we will hit a difficult patch and they're not geared to meet that...In a sense not only do we have to integrate special units with the rest of the service but we also have to integrate the Parole Board...These policies have got to interface well otherwise we can be managing an individual well and he behaving himself properly and the Parole Board say that's all very well but...Now somehow all that has to be brought together, it has to be a fully integrated plan, otherwise we lose the guy. Otherwise he says "Well, what are you doing with my life? You're screwing me around. Here I have been satisfying everything that that the prison service wanted and it is of no account.

With this in mind we can inquire a little further into staff and prisoner perspectives on eligibility and assessment for the Unit.

Eligibility and assessment: staff and prisoner perspectives

In general it is a commitment of staff that the Unit should be able to receive anyone referred to it, no matter how problematic their behaviour. This can appear to provide a lack of interest in the referral process, but this would be to misread their comments. However, prison officers and managers alike quite often remark that different individuals are likely to benefit to differing degrees from the Unit experience. This has two implications: (i) that some people would not be appropriate for the Unit but that (ii) the definition of who qualifies ought not to unduly narrowed to a fixed notion of a Unit 'type'. A number of people (prisoners and staff alike) also stress the proviso that the individual must want to come to the Unit, should be informed beforehand to some extent what to expect and should be prepared to make efforts to fit into and contribute something to the community (hence staff mostly support the community veto on admissions).

One speaker, from a quite senior vantage point in SPS administration commented:

My own definition is when we come across a man... I've always [felt that] the original concept of the BSU was for the long-term prisoner who woke up one morning as though he was in a swimming pool and no matter what he did could not get his nose above water... that was my own crude definition. He needed help. We've only had a few of that kind...The other people have been control problems, who staff in the establishment and the assessment team in the unit felt this guy *might* - not would - benefit. I'm content to work on a 'might' basis.

Others largely concur but note not only that the unit should be able to accommodate a range of people, experiences and problems but also that some such blend is important in itself:

After a number of years, in fact quite early on, it became clear that you wouldn't want a small unit like this with too many highly explosive anti-authority people held together. And another dimension that came into this was that there were people in the system who were grossly institutionalized and who were going to pose enormous problems for how they could be got out. So that created a mix and that leavened the place quite a bit. (Clinical specialist)

Another specialist commented:

It's a complicated thing because you're not just assessing the chap in front of you, it depends very much on who we've got here at the moment as well. But you're looking firstly to see whether he is a genuine management problem and then whether he could be dealt with in another setting without taking up a place here. Then whether there's any psychiatric disturbance that would preclude him coming here...We're looking for a mix in a sense. So, you know, we wouldn't want eight [Nelson Gabriels]. We wouldn't want eight volatile, aggressive, verbal, confronting people at one time.

Thus staff tend to feel that the unit should exercise a broad, problem-solving brief which is responsive to need, and that the unit benefits from a degree of diversity, subject to qualifications about who benefits most and about preparedness to fit in with the demands that community life imposes.

Prisoners' views overlap with those of staff to a considerable extent, both in regard to their own experience and in more general observations. Naturally these views are expressed in the first instance in terms of their own experiences and stories. All those I spoke to drew a rather sharp distinction between their pre-unit and their present situations. In each case their experience of the mainstream is recounted in terms of conflict, mistrust and a sense of hopelessness:

A lot of people didn't like me. I didn't trust prison officers, I didn't trust prisoners, I didn't trust prison authorities and most of all I didn't trust the Scottish Office...The prison authorities had adopted against me a war of attrition whereby they would just sit and wait and wait and wait for me to say "Look, I've had enough", which was not what happened at all...There's no doubt whatsoever that had I not been moved here I would have seriously injured somebody at [x] prison.

And on arrival at BSU:

I had a picture in my mind and my picture was just totally, totally wrong...I wasn't disappointed. I was surprised, very surprised...It's a different world. The way you would feel if you landed on Mars, you know. But when you met the Martians even after a couple of days you felt better. And it was like that. And it was a sense of disbelief that I was actually in something so different.

This story is typical of all those with whom we spoke. Each such account affirms that coming into the Unit is a difficult and demanding transition but one that each individual ultimately regards as very positive. These stories are haunted by mingled fear and relief - fear at what might have happened had they stayed in their original situation, relief that this has been avoided. Prisoners stress that living in the Unit has its own peculiar difficulties and challenges (see below on 'community'). All their stories are marked by anxiety about the future and by a continuing mistrust of the larger prison system beyond the Unit. These feelings and their consequences constitute a major issue in discussion of the Unit's role in the system as a whole.

Plans, projects and personal development

One of the most distinctive features of the Unit is not merely that people spend quite long periods of time there but also that in comparison with the routinization generally characteristic of prison life such time is quite unstructured. It can therefore be deployed in a range of more or less purposive and active ways according to personal preferences and capacities.

Both staff and prisoners make this point quite clearly. Prisoners point out that this distinctive feature of the regime is welcome to them and regarded as challenging:

It gives you the opportunity. The SU doesn't help you, it gives you the opportunity to help yourself, that's the most important thing. It can be very degrading if people keep helping you all the time..If you're given the opportunity to help yourself it's up to you whether you go for it. If you do then fine. If you don't you've got no complaints if, you know, if it doesn't work out..You're right there and you've got to say well, I either sink or I swim.

For this individual swimming was still not easy:

I'm still a bit..I still don't have the ability to structure a day. I don't have that ability but I'm in the process of getting that ability...So hopefully within the next six months I'll have a structured, rational day.

Q. And it's a structure you have to create for yourself?

You've got to. No, it's not imposed on you. No, you must create it for yourself.

Some staff, however, express disappointment that prisoners are not seen to be using their time in more active and fruitful ways than sometimes appears:

The day's unstructured. I think any prisoner if he was telling the truth, nobody likes being told what to do, nobody. Here they've got the option, where in the past they've been told "You go there" and you go. But here they don't make enough use of their time. The gymnasium's a big, big avenue for interaction, staff and prisoners alike. But other than that there's...They could do more. There's more that could be done. They've got the luxury of being able to decide what to do and at the end of the day they're doing to do fuck all. So the time's been wasted.

Exactly what activities might fill this perceived gap is not always wholly clear. What is certain is that prisoners would not welcome any attempt to build in programmes of activity as compulsory or expected, insisting instead that the element of self-determination is intrinsic to the Unit's character. Several resent the notion attributed to some visitors and other external commentators that they should all necessarily be busily writing their life stories, creating monumental sculptures etc. They also argue that if some people appear to 'opt out' that is their prerogative, and sometimes a necessary consequence of the 'damage' they have suffered in the past.

Nevertheless, this is not to say that they do not express an interest in the availability of other activities of artistic and more especially educational sorts. Neither are all prisoners inherently hostile to the idea that periods spent in the unit should in principle be limited, nor to the notion of an agreed set of ways of spending that time - only to ideas of compulsion or conditionality. Several prisoners accept that in principle it would be possible to spend too long in the Unit - to stand still, to regress, to unwittingly extend one's time in prison. Some note the possibility of some form of collaborative induction process, including an awareness of how long one might expect to remain there, and consultation as to where one might go from there.

In this sense prisoners express a good deal of openness to notions of sentence planning provided that they could be convinced that it would limit the indeterminacy of the time they face, and as yet most remain to be convinced that such ideas have been shown to have any relevance to their situations.

It is therefore clear that there is more common ground than is often supposed between the view sometimes expressed by staff that time spent in the Unit should be more purposeful and the desire of at least some prisoners for goals, plans and attainable aspirations. However, prisoners also strongly point out that the SU must be able to accommodate difference, including allowing for a degree of retreat for periods of time. They believe that whatever programmes of education, activity or personal development are on offer must be voluntarily entered into. Some of the sorts of personal development in question - moving away from sub-cultural values, from violence as a means of problem-solving, reconstructing family and community links - are in any case lengthy and testing processes which must allow for uneven progress. For as long as the Unit must seek to answer a range of individual needs there will be a limit upon how far one should seek to legislate for a 'normal' period within it, either in terms of length or of activity. Nonetheless it is arguable that greater opportunities for stimulating and involving activity could be achieved. This is not regarded by most participants as an argument in favour of making the daily routine more 'structured', or more like that of a 'normal' prison. Indeed any such idea would be met by very strong resistance from prisoners and receive little support from staff. On the other hand, it is an argument for seeking to ensure that the Unit experience as a whole has some sense of direction and purpose that the individual can grasp and engage with. However, as we shall go on to argue, this is more difficult to achieve where individuals do not feel that their sentences as a whole (and hence in an important sense their lives) have a feeling of forward movement. In this respect the daily level of activity within the unit and uncertainties imposed by external conditions are closely connected.

3. The Regime in Daily Operation

The Unit and the community principle

That the Unit should be seen as being in some sense a community is one of the points most often affirmed in common by prisoners and staff. Nevertheless people are also conscious that 'community' is a fuzzy and difficult term and that each may mean differing things by it. On the one hand there is often a desire to demystify the word and to point out that there is nothing magical about the idea of the Unit as a community. Some explicitly hope thereby to fend off unrealistic expectations which the term appears to invite. Moreover there is a general and clear awareness that living in a very small and confined space with others whose company (inevitably in a prison) you may not otherwise have chosen is difficult. Some liken being in the Special Unit to being in a submarine on a long voyage - you *have to* get along. Others use the analogy of a tenement house or block of flats. For many there is an almost equal stress on the need to make efforts to construct community on the one hand, and the equally powerful need for privacy and autonomy on the other. All are therefore agreed on the need for caution and clarity. A number of speakers (both staff and prisoners) argued that the reality of the community might not be very visible on a day to day basis but that its latent existence would come to the fore during moments of crisis or stress. The main dimensions most often isolated were tolerance, the need for give and take, efforts to reach agreement (or at least agreement to differ), and the capacity for individuals to be offered support in the face of difficulties. Another theme, raised in differing ways by managers, staff and prisoners, was the element of mutual accountability. For managers and staff this meant the need to adapt to a diminution of hierarchy - being unable to rely on status or uniform to achieve one's objectives. For prisoners similarly it meant at times having to justify oneself to others and to orient one's own behaviour to some extent to others' needs and requirements. One former manager summarized the views of several:

I considered the concept of community extremely important to BSU. Personally I felt that BSU was nothing without the community. However I saw it as an ideal - an aspiration - rather than anything concrete or something that we had achieved. I do not believe the unit was ever a real community in my day. I suspect that the unit has never been a community. However, I believe that everyone signs on to participate in that community and although it has different meanings to different people at different times nevertheless it's a term that has survived. It's a term that needs to be constantly redefined and re-emphasised. Without this I believe BSU would become a small prison with perks.

Another said:

I think it has patches of being a community in certain areas. I think there's still a divide between prisoners and staff in attitudes. But on collective issues, or issues of threat to the unit, you will see a community spirit there.

Some officers expressed a degree of scepticism as to the reality of community. One or two flatly denied it. Another commented: 'It's a community on a Tuesday afternoon.' Several pointed to 'factions' or groupings among the prisoners or to the relative isolation of one or two prisoners.

Others were much more positive:

I think it's a community. Community to me doesn't mean everybody is hand in hand with everybody. A community is like a block of flats. You've got good, you've got bad, you've got indifferent. But at the end of the day everybody is there for everybody if something's going down. If it was something, if one of the guys, heaven forbid, that one of their wives was taken seriously ill or something, there would be support. There would be support from everybody. Not just their immediate contacts. So that's a community for me.

Some prisoners, meanwhile, are quite emphatic about the existence of community as a real and important feature of their lives, though all with whom I spoke also stressed the necessity of privacy. Others were quite qualified and measured in their assessment of the 'community thing':

There are eight guys in here but at the end of the day we're all eight individual guys and every one of us has got individual needs. So each one of us copes with his own individual need. But if there's any one guy who is sinking and needs any other guy's support well we are all there with that support, you know. As regards to a complete community on a daily basis, it would only work if there was a goal. If there was a goal then the guys would then start gathering together and maybe talking more freely to people. At the end of the day, you give a little bit Richard you'll get a little bit back. It's not easy to spend time in the Special Unit. It's not easy. I've found that.

One specialist commented simply: 'It's as much of a community as you can have in a prison.'

Community meetings

Whether they regard BSU as a community in a strong sense or not almost everybody we spoke to in whatever position affirmed the central importance of the community meeting. The most commonly voiced reasons for its importance lay in the opportunity it provided for the airing of grievances, the ventilation of frustration and the clarification of misunderstandings. For these reasons the meeting is most often spoken of in terms of a 'vent', a 'safety valve', an 'opportunity to express yourself' and so on. Some participants take the view that commitment to the meeting has declined, that it has tended to become routinized and a bit perfunctory, that some community members will not attend given the chance and so on. Problems are raised such as the differential abilities of individuals to express themselves - the tendency of some to say very little and others to hold the floor. Whatever the shortcomings of the forum it finds its strong advocates amongst both prisoners and staff. One prisoner commented that even where some people find difficulty in expressing themselves in meetings:

the fact that the opportunity is there that they can express themselves is a wonderful thing, whether they do or not is up to them. They are aware of the fact

that if they do express themselves there are people who will listen to what they're saying. And they'll not just say we don't like your view and dub them up. Very, very, very, very important part of the Special Unit. As far as I'm concerned it's indispensable. I think it would be a much poorer place without it.

Others point out as well that the fact that the chair and minute-taking jobs circulate are themselves encouragements towards community involvement and responsibility. Others again note that the occasion of the meeting sometimes gives rise to other kinds of interaction and that one of the commonest times to find staff and prisoners in serious interaction is after the meeting as such has finished. Unresolved issues continue to be discussed, either 'round the back' or in the front tv room. In that sense the strong wish of one former manager that the meeting should provide the "focal point of the week" continues to be at least partly fulfilled.

On the other hand a number of prisoners are reluctant to have their time dominated by meetings. Special meetings (which are in any case an emergency resource) are infrequent; four-groups apparently a virtual dead letter. Moreover, some prisoners also feel that some of the more serious potential purposes of the meetings beyond the venting of frustration and the approval of visitors (i.e. as a forum for debate and decision making on matters of general concern) have tended to go by the board. Thus at least one prisoner in stating his view that the meeting should be seen not merely as a problem-aising forum but a decision-making body said:

Yes it works, you know, at present. But it's not working as good as it could, but that's because of other external things that people will not... that they might in private grumble about and fuel general discontent about, but wouldn't bother to raise at a meeting while you've got a governor who's going to refer to the department all the time... So it's becoming so that there is no point, where always there was a point you know. But that's just part of my general view that the Unit is slightly regressing rather than evolving.

It may well be said that this rests on an unrealistic premise about how much autonomy the unit community has ever had from central direction. Nevertheless it broaches a serious point about the construction of the community as (as one observer put it) a 'community *with* responsibility'. So far as We can ascertain the official view is that the community meeting is authorised to make decisions on 'domestic' matters. Perhaps some clarification is called for as to what precisely this means, and hence to what extent the community can be empowered to make self-determining decisions?

Staff-prisoner relations

By common consent the nature of staff-prisoner relations is one of the most distinctive features of BSU. For the most part this distinctiveness is highly valued by prisoners and staff alike. On the staff side even some officers who are sceptical on the notion of 'community' are strong in defence of relationships characterised by informality and (the most frequently used term) trust. Some have reservations - that the 'us' and 'them' is never altogether forgotten, that votes in community

~~meetings tend to divide on staff/prisoner lines and so on.~~ But most accept that the informality of the Unit and its lack of structured routines pose challenges to staff in meeting prisoners and their families on a more personal and intimate level than is possible in mainstream jails. Some attribute this mainly simply to the small size of the Unit, others more specifically to the distinctiveness of its style of operation or 'ethos'. Those who hold the latter view also go on to comment more generally on the challenge of achieving order without compulsion:

You've got to strike the dialogue before any meaningful interaction can take place. You've got to gain the confidence of somebody by speaking to them...And if you can do that, you're breaking down the barriers all the time and it makes it more comfortable for somebody to speak to you and also for you to speak to them...The most important thing has got to be the contact between yourself and the individual in the Unit. It gets down to the time that you're reluctant to call them prisoners.

(Unit officer)

A number of staff comment that the development of such ways of working has been important for their own self-confidence, for their understanding of prisoners and their problems and perhaps, though the translation is difficult, for the ways they hope to work in the future elsewhere.

~~Problems raised by staff include (for some) the lack of much training or preparation for working in the Unit. For some this means a sensed lack of expertise in the psychological and emotional complexities that they observe around them. For others this relates particularly to a concern about being unqualified to write reports in detail on Unit prisoners. For a few there is a concern that the natural tendency of prisoners to take matters of any complexity directly to clinical or social work specialists leaves staff at times in a marginal and somewhat de-skilled position. Most staff feel that the length of time they expect to work in the Unit is about right. For some it is too short. Amongst some of the latter, whose commitment to the Unit is perhaps particularly high, there is a concern that all staff coming into the Unit must be genuine volunteers who have shown a clear desire for that experience on other than simply career grounds. They infer that any sense of a lack of staff commitment could have damaging consequences for the Unit's development.~~

Managers note some of the same challenges and anxieties, both on their own part and on behalf of the staff. One former Unit manager noted the difficulties that he personally had experienced on arrival in the Unit:

It's stressful because you are right up front, nose to nose with the prisoners most of the day...You're part of a community where apart from decision appertaining to security and control you are just another member. It strips you of your role and you stand if you like naked as an individual.

He extended this view to other staff also:

Staff felt that they were stripped of their previous position and rank and how the system worked and they had to deal with issues, deal with them on a face to face basis with a prisoner and be expected to cope with that without having recourse to a formal disciplinary system.

This commentator drew two sorts of conclusion from this. One was 'I think the lesson of course is the absolute necessity for a dialogue between staff and prisoners.' The other was for a recognition that this was stressful for staff, and especially for Governors. Another former manager stated his view that the choice of Governor was central to the success of the Unit, and regretted bitterly that the choice of governors had by no means always been appropriate in the past, that they had stayed too short a time and that they had at times come in without any clear demonstration of sympathy with or understanding of the Unit's philosophy and aims.

All present and former managers expressed the concern that the staff role in the unit should be better defined, preferably more proactive, and that more attention should be given to induction, skills and training.

Prisoners in general welcomed strongly their sense that their relations with staff within the Unit differed from those they had encountered elsewhere:

Well the help that came from staff here was just by being and behaving as normal human beings. The staff here do behave differently from any other staff that I've known throughout the prison system. I mean they've behaved with normal human respect..with normal courtesy and not make you subject to every demand, or order, or command you know. They don't treat you as if you're some kind of lesser human being that must obey under any circumstances, without questioning their authority.

(Unit prisoner)

However some prisoners are suspicious that, for some staff, coming to the Unit is primarily a career move, or mainly a way of getting away from a previous situation. They variously describe this as 'disappointing' and 'false'. One or two felt that the predominantly young staff were naive ('They don't know what day of the week it is') and certainly unqualified to write reports and assessments about prisoners' progress or state of mind.

The overall view which emerges of staff-prisoner relations in the unit is on both sides predominantly positive. In view of prisoners' past views and experiences, and their general abiding mistrust of the system as a whole, the degree of openness and trust which exists between staff and prisoners in BSU is striking. There are however certain concerns (which are to some extent shared concerns) about how actively staff are equipped to engage with prisoners, about some aspects of training and preparation and, for some, about commitment.

Visits and outside community links

That the visiting arrangements in BSU are unique in SPS is well known and requires little elaboration here. All are aware that the practice of private and largely unsupervised visiting is dimly viewed in some influential quarters and by some as a can of worms better left unopened. For most staff and prisoners in BSU the visiting arrangements are felt to be an almost unqualified good. They are held to help prisoners to stabilize in emotional and behavioural terms, to reconstruct relationships with parents, partners and children, to help begin the process of transition from prisoner to citizen on which release and reintegration depend. Extended visits, prisoners and staff generally agree, call upon prisoners to take responsibility for domestic and family affairs long placed in deep freeze. Hence, even when visitors bring problems and complexities with them this can in itself be beneficial. It calls for involvement, and demands an orientation towards the outer world in place of an exclusive concentration on the prison and its troubles. Most agree that there is at present almost no abuse of such arrangements in terms of the smuggling of alcohol or drugs and that they are largely successfully self-policed because they are a privilege too valuable to risk losing - hence most hold that the most permeable prison in Scotland is perhaps the most drug free.

Whether this altogether justifies the generally held view that all this makes the visiting arrangements so central that to alter them at all would be the death knell of the unit as we know it is less clear. This is not to advocate any such alteration - it is merely to note an odd underlying lack of confidence in the other features of its operation already outlined which may not be warranted.

Everyone is of course conscious of a sharp disparity between these visiting arrangements and those available elsewhere in SPS. For some this is simply a fact of life - it is part of the specialness of the Special Unit and what happens elsewhere is of no relevance. Others (both staff and prisoners) go further and argue strongly that the BSU model should in future set the pattern for developments in other prisons. For a few staff the disparity is a source of misgiving and soul-searching accompanied by a sense of unfairness towards other, perhaps more amenable prisoners in other jails.

For those outside who look less sympathetically upon BSU the visits are quite simply the primary 'perk' of the 'small prison with perks'.

For most community members, though, the benefits of the visiting arrangements so far outweigh such other considerations as to make changing them unthinkable. Various subsidiary problems are noted, however, and these can be listed briefly. First, to some individuals emerging from long-term isolating experiences, the sudden reacquaintance with family problems and pressures can be stressful. It can only be handled with careful clinical, social work, staff and peer support. Second, the fact that some people receive many visitors and others rather few can become rather painfully apparent, and this calls for particular sensitivity. Third, some staff feel that the presence of children can be irritating for other prisoners and hence a source of tension. Some go so far as to say

that a prison is in any case an inappropriate environment for children. Fourth, there is a concern amongst staff that some prisoners 'hide' behind their visitors as a way of keeping staff at a distance and avoiding involvement with staff and other community demands. Some staff suggest that had they the opportunity to remake the unit as if from first principles they would seek to build in half days or other periods when visitors were not present in an attempt to facilitate other kinds of interaction. Finally there is the underlying concern that the visiting arrangements are so attractive as to present a serious disincentive to prisoners to move on from the Unit when they might otherwise do so.

Naturally it is an open secret that one aspect of privacy is sex. For some staff and most prisoners this is in any case regarded as a benefit. For others if privacy is itself a value, so be it - and since intimate contact is part of the process of reconstructing relationships this is inevitable. Besides, few feel that this alone has the centrality sometimes attributed to it in the prurient maunderings of the tabloid press (who have in all probability now largely lost interest in the Unit). The challenge to central decision makers is to determine whether they feel there are really any arguments of principle against the Unit's visiting arrangements which are so important as to cancel their other benefits or to risk jeopardizing other aspects of its work - or else whether the real motor of misgivings has historically been the fear of short-term public embarrassment. The more important arguments from the point of view of this research concern disincentives to prisoners against leaving the unit. So far as visiting is concerned this means either (and more radically) ensuring that prisoners retain comparable visiting arrangements in their next prison, unit or hostel or making such options sufficiently attractive in other ways to compensate for their loss. Such options for forward movement are the main concern of the next section.

4. The Unit and the Mainstream

It is in the issues grouped under this heading that most of the most controversial and difficult questions about the Unit's aims, success and future development occur.

We have already noted the general view of managers (and in part Unit staff) that the primary justifications for the Unit's practices lie in its ability to remove (or from the prisoner's point of view to rescue) individuals from extreme or intractable situations elsewhere - hence alleviating at least those particular problems in mainstream jails. We have also suggested that from the prisoner's point of view these matters necessarily appear somewhat differently - that having once arrived at the Unit the emphasis falls on 'getting better', 'experimenting with myself', renewing contact with families and surviving the rest of one's sentence. In the outlooks of some prisoners the 'mainstream' figures as 'a very hard jungle to survive in', 'dungeons of dire despair' - in short not somewhere one would willingly return to. A number of staff fundamentally support these assessments.

If the question is posed 'could these prisoners have survived in the mainstream with help' or had particular circumstances been otherwise, issues become a little more complicated. One or two individuals point to certain mainstream experiences which, had they been able to continue, might have worked out positively - experiences at Greenock pre 'Grand Design' for example. Others can envisage no possibility that their situations in the mainstream could have been resolved.

Clearly the existence of such feelings spurs reflection on the development and improvement of mainstream conditions, and a number of those with whom I spoke feel strongly that this is where the main thrust of policy emphasis must lie. One or two believe that mainstream conditions can be improved to such a degree that 'special' or 'alternative' provisions should eventually cease to be necessary. More often they assert that the improvement of mainstream conditions should reduce pressure for unit places (improvements which may in any case entail the application of at least some of the principles of unit management) but that this does not argue against the continuing need for BSU and other units *in extremis*.

Certainly unit staff and prisoners are often strong in emphasizing the possibility of units or unit-like structures throughout SPS. Moreover, their own experience of BSU in a difficult (indeed decrepit) physical environment leads them to isolate particular features of its approach and regime, rather than being entranced by the idea of marvellous purpose-built new plant. For such individuals the diffusion of unit management principles is more an intellectual than a technological or economic challenge. There is thus a significant degree of consensus amongst those with whom I spoke on the general implications of the unit experience for mainstream system: that smaller is (if not beautiful) at least preferable; that under a unit management system significant changes in both staff and inmate cultures are possible; that degrees of consultation and participation by both staff and prisoners become possible which are precluded by traditional larger halls; that variety is necessary in regime provision to answer individual preferences and treatment needs.

Obstacles to progress

Returning to the present, however, it is difficult to deny that there are a certain number of difficulties in the unit's relation to the mainstream that need seriously to be addressed. These can be listed as follows:

1. '*Marginality*' as an obstacle to progress. The perception amongst some Governors and policy makers that the unit is peripheral to the main concerns of SPS. The view of some unit prisoners in the past has been that the system has it in for them. This gives way for some to the feeling that the system has forgotten about them.

2. *'Siltage'* as an obstacle to progress. Meanwhile the understanding that the unit is full and perhaps likely to remain so deters assessments and makes needs analysis both for BSU and for units more generally difficult. (In point of fact it is not absolutely true that no recommendations have been made, even in the relatively recent past. In 1987 there were a total of 11 referrals of which only three were accepted. In 1988 there were eight and two acceptances. Historically refusals outnumber acceptances by a ratio of 5:3.) In general the view of BSU managers has been to encourage referrals even at the cost of developing an extending waiting list. As we have seen this has been disputed centrally on the grounds that it wastes time and creates uncertainty. A piece of research on a larger scale than this one might have gone some way towards an objective assessment of need from the point of view of mainstream Governors, or else discovered other reasons why referrals might now run at a low level. Even in the absence of such research there is a weight of informed opinion that other candidates answering unit criteria exist, that in some cases it is known who these individuals are and that for as long as a number of prisoners remain locked-down in Peterhead or recurrently in and out of segregation elsewhere it is difficult to dispute the need for unit places.

3. *Fear and loathing of the mainstream* as an obstacle to progress. The powerful feelings and memories of prisoners about mainstream experiences makes it very difficult for them to contemplate returning to 'it'. It is true, of course, as managers point out that in returning they would not generally be returning to the same places. But the genuine feelings of fear and resistance to the idea of returning to the 'mainstream' as such cannot be underestimated. Staff at BSU are acutely conscious of this and by no means unsympathetic to the prisoners' dilemma. At the same time they fear that for prisoners to remain over long in the unit, gain C-categories there and so forth compounds the perception of marginality and puts the Unit's future role in some jeopardy. The problem of 'fear and loathing' is compounded by a highly specific dislike of Dungavel as an option, partly on the grounds that it includes dormitories, partly on other perceptions of its population and regime. A rationally organized system, which includes BSU as an integral element must cater for options for progress towards release which the relevant prisoners can interpret as positive (see below).

4. *Indeterminacy* as an obstacle to progress. The Scottish lifer system (see SHHD, 1989, ch 8) and its associated parole arrangements have historically been significantly more indeterminate than their English counterparts. This perhaps applies with particular force to BSU prisoners who have previously been 'difficult' and who are in any case serving long life sentences. To note this is not an argument for preferential treatment for unit prisoners. Rather it should prompt reflection on the nature of the life sentence more generally. In this regard it is worth noting recent House of Lords debates on the future of the life sentence as the mandatory penalty for murder and the gathering weight of opinion (including the views of at least one former Lord Chancellor not noted as a bleeding heart liberal) against it. Moreover, recent cases coming before the English courts (*R v*

weight of opinion (including the views of at least one former Lord Chancellor not noted as a bleeding heart liberal) against it. Moreover, recent cases coming before the English courts (*R v Secretary of State for the Home Department, ex parte Walsh* and *R v Secretary of State for the Home Department ex parte Doody, Pierson, Smart and Pegg*, see *The Times Law Report* 8 May 1992) assert the right of life sentence prisoners to know the tariff period fixed in their cases to satisfy the requirements of retribution and deterrence. It seems quite likely that similar tests will be brought before Scottish courts in the future. It would therefore seem both prudent and enlightened to anticipate such a situation by ensuring that prisoners do not reach the twelfth or fourteenth year of a life sentence with no clear expectation as to their release date. Such a general view would also have the beneficial side effect of actively encouraging some unit prisoners to see positive benefits in moving on from BSU. The present state of affairs encourages a structured stand off between the individual prisoner and the parole system in a way which cannot be said to serve the interests of justice or the more pragmatic interests of SPS and which, additionally, risks sacrificing the goodwill between the prisoner and unit staff by casting SPS and the parole system in an obdurate light.

5. *The 'test' as an obstacle to progress.* It is unfortunate and counter-productive that the perception has arisen that the parole system requires prisoners to return to the mainstream as in some sense a 'test' of their fitness for release. This relates on the one hand to the points about indeterminacy and conditionality made above. The necessity for a test in this form is disputed by both prisoners and staff within the unit. Such a terminology has the additional property of unnecessarily stigmatizing unit prisoners. Against this one might suggest some sort of informal 'statute of limitations' on earlier bad behaviour so that several years of trouble free cooperation within the unit be regarded positively as 'good time' rather, than as appears at present, as 'dead time'. On a more general level the issue arises of precisely what might be being tested? A number of unit staff and prisoners raise the point that a distinction can be drawn between a good prisoner and a good citizen - a differentiation which the present arrangements do not seem ideally suited to make. They argue instead that the period spent in the unit should itself be regarded as a testing one, and perhaps one especially geared toward establishing the virtues of citizenship over those of prisonization.

5. Summary and Recommendations

Briefly put, the distinctive internal practices of BSU receive in the main strong support from both prisoner and staff members of the community, and often in strikingly similar terms. For the most part, community members affirm that BSU, against the background of a very imperfect and

Maybe by accident, we have stumbled onto something that is worth preserving and worth keeping and maybe even worth expanding. And that is a message we have to explain to other people. We have to explain it to the Parole Board, to ministers, to the public at large.

This review concludes that those features of Special Unit practice that are really valuable (perhaps in particular the community meeting, the encouragement of autonomous responsibility, the reconstruction of outside ties, the patient and skilled work of staff in absorbing and deflecting anger) should be noted and encouraged. Close consideration should be given to their implications for regime developments elsewhere. The following points summarize the conclusions of this part of our report and some tentative recommendations for the future:

1. *Research.* Future research initiatives in Scottish prisons should include attention to BSU's complex history. A mature sense of that history is vital to the planning and successful implementation of progressive developments elsewhere. Research should also attend to international comparisons and experiences of 'special handling' and 'unit management'. Moreover, the further development of unit strategies throughout SPS depends on a developed awareness of special needs (not only those of 'difficult' prisoners but also sex offenders, drug and alcohol abusers and so on).

2. *SPS and BSU.* The perception remains amongst prisoners and some staff that SPS has been ambivalent in its attitude towards BSU and failed to engage with its existence at a policy level. If we can safely assume that SPS intends to continue the development of small units and that BSU will continue to be a part of that strategy then there should be no obstacle to affirming its value unequivocally.

3. *Referrals and assessment.* (i) The development of a needs analysis requires that referrals/nominations for BSU and other units continue to be made and noted, whether or not vacancies exist at any given moment. (ii) Assessment criteria have broadened over the years - for good reasons in terms of the needs both of SPS and of BSU itself. There would be no benefit in attempting to narrow these again. Certainly the original emphasis on violence no longer seems either a necessary or sufficient criterion on its own. Nevertheless, that one of the Unit's functions is to prevent harm to staff and prisoners elsewhere should continue to be emphasized, as should the fact that it is the Unit's aim to accommodate those who have experienced/created exceptionally difficult and intractable situations elsewhere. The exact content of such problems is of less significance than their severity.

4. *BSU and time.* That the *day* is unstructured at BSU is not for the most part seen as particularly problematic by either prisoners or staff. Indeed prisoners argue that having to create one's own structure in the use of time is important in itself. On the other hand there is arguably a need for for

a more purposive structuring of the larger extensions of time (the months and years) which define the individual's experience of the Unit. That means (i) access to constructive activity, especially education, (ii) a well-thought out, informative and cooperative induction period, (iii) guidance, as early as possible, on rough expectations for time spent in the Unit and options for moving forward on leaving it.

5. *Community meetings.* The principle of the community meeting requires continuing commitment and emphasis. Should it become routinized to the point that people no longer bring important or controversial matters before it much of its value will have been lost.

6. *Staff issues.* Staff need to be supported and encouraged in engaging actively with prisoners and their families. It is possible that their induction and training needs may need to be reevaluated - just as the distinctive skills which prison officers develop in such a setting should be recognized, valued and fed back into more general training and staff development initiatives. It is essential that all incoming staff should continue to be genuine volunteers, including where possible unit managers. The very recent arrival of the first female uniformed staff is very much to be welcomed.

7. *Visits.* It is for SPS to resolve any misgivings it experiences about BSU's visiting arrangements. As social researchers interested in understanding the inner life of the institution itself, they seem to us to have more benefits than disadvantages. Their only really problematic feature is the tendency of some individuals to disappear behind a stream of visitors. It is possible that thought should be given to building in more dedicated 'community time' during which visitors might not come in, or do so on the understanding that they would be joining in more general activities.

8. *Moving on.* As we have noted above all of the most testing issues concern this area. It is, ultimately, a problem about the Unit's unsatisfactory interfaces with the mainstream system. In a sense, therefore, posing questions about when prisoners should move on and where they should go, is also to pose questions both about the Unit's future role and about developments in the mainstream. The issues can thus be raised as a set of options for change (not all of them mutually exclusive):

- i. The Unit could be closed down. We do not regard this as a serious option that merits further discussion. The achievements of BSU are their own justification.
- ii. Prisoners could be released from the Unit. One or two prisoners have been released directly from the Unit in the past. There is no necessary reason why this should not happen if special circumstances dictate. But to allow an expectation of direct release from the Unit to build up would be to change its function. It would dilute its commitment to receiving difficult prisoners whose prospects for release are still

some way off. It would become in effect a pre-release unit, or simply the 'small prison with perks' - the prospect which some of its strongest supporters most fear.

- iii. Relationships could be established between the existing units such that they formed a sub-system with its own progressive structure of movements (Shotts - BSU - TFF, for example). This might have the advantage of facilitating movement at both Shotts Unit and BSU and also of prompting continuity of specialist support etc. But we suspect that this is something that should only occur in particular needful cases. The overall effect would probably be to reduce the numbers for whom unit places were available. It might also be regarded as a highly favourable route through the sentence, perhaps compounding existing anxieties about disparities in resources and facilities between unit prisoners and those elsewhere.
- iv. Amend parole arrangements for lifers. The drift of both European and domestic legislation is against the current indeterminacy of the Scottish lifer system. It seems likely that the idea that the question of parole arrangements can be postponed until after prisoners leave BSU will have to be abandoned sooner or later. It would be wise to anticipate such developments by seeking to agree a clear programme of progressive moves, including a probable liberation date, with Unit prisoners as soon as the question of moving on from BSU arises in earnest.
- v. Review provision for long-termers nearing the end of their sentences. Prison managers and prisoners both feel that the current options for the latter part of long sentences in Scotland are rather limited and not particularly attractive. Future reviews of the prison estate, and especially of the creation/construction of new small units, should pay particular attention to this problem. BSU prisoners are particularly attracted to the idea of smaller institutions (thereby getting away from some of the negative connotations for them of the term 'mainstream'). Consideration in future planning should be given to the creation of one or more small establishments/units suitable for, but not exclusive to, ex-BSU and Shotts Unit prisoners. The model established in England at Blantyre House, for example, is one that deserves close study.

Footnotes

1. Previous accounts of the Special Unit have included contribution by prisoners, most famously Jimmy Boyle in *A Sense of Freedom* (1977) and *The Pain of Confinement* (1984) and by others with a direct professional involvement in it such as Stephen (1988). The most

systematic reflections on his work and related issues to date are those by Cooke (1989; 1991; 1992).

2. See for example the articles collected in Bottoms and Light (1987) and Bottomley and Hay (1991); see also Robson (1989).

PART II SHOTTS UNIT

Introduction

The main focus of this account of Shotts Unit based upon fieldwork in the summer of 1992, is upon the extent to which the Unit appears to be meeting the objectives set down for all small units in the Scottish Prison Service in *Opportunity and Responsibility* (1990). It also makes a preliminary assessment of how far the objectives laid down in the Unit blue-print (Shotts Unit Planning Group Report, January, 1990 hereafter SUPGR) have been implemented, developed or supplanted in practice.

There are certain qualifications which should be made at the outset. The research upon which this account is based was tightly constrained by time and resources, which imposed severe limitations on the scope of the evaluation which was carried out. We were not able to spend time in mainstream prisons, nor were we able to follow prisoners through over time although we did meet and interview all the former prisoners of the Unit. Our impressions of the Unit were informed by observation, discussion, some participation and the carrying out of a number of systematic interviews. There is much more to the Unit world than we are able to report here. However, the timing of the research - almost exactly two years after the Unit opened - provided an opportunity to meet and talk with most of those who had been involved in the life of the unit.

Among the main issues we shall address are the following:

- i. Unit aims and objectives: inc. physical environment and facilities;
- ii. 'difficult prisoners': definitions, assessment and selection;
- iii. regime features: inc. staff roles, specialists and the role of weekly meetings;
- iv. Shotts Unit and the mainstream.

This part of the report will begin by describing the research methodology and then give a brief outline of the Unit's aims and objectives as laid down in official documentation. It will then describe the Unit and its daily routine, outlining procedures and practices in the Unit, including the selection and assessment of prisoners, drawing selectively on the interview material to illustrate Unit members' views on these aspects of the regime. Finally, the 'success' of the Unit in its first two years, so far as this can be measured or assessed, will be discussed. Our conclusions, which were informally discussed with Unit members at the end of the research period, will highlight some of the most significant themes to emerge from our research, including the Unit's very real achievements and possible lessons for the future.

Methods

Before the research began officially, on 1 June 1992, informal contact had been made with Shotts Unit and visits had been arranged over a period of several months. During more formal 'introductory' visits made during April and July, the research was introduced and discussed with members of the Unit, both at formal meetings and informally with small groups or with individuals. Time was spent getting to know prisoners and staff, and talking over the scope of the research, the sorts of questions likely to be asked, and the purpose and validity of the evaluation. At no stage was there any lack of co-operation with the researchers, although some initial scepticism about its long-term usefulness was expressed. Both staff and prisoners took a lively interest in the research, and many went out of their way to provide information, assistance and guidance in the early stages and throughout the duration of the project.

The main fieldwork period comprised three full weeks spent in the Unit carrying out interviews, observing most aspects of life in the Unit and talking informally to both prisoners and staff. Some informal visits were made at weekends. Visits were also made during this time to Peterhead, Noranside, Shotts main and Saughton prisons - in four cases to interview ex-Unit prisoners and in one case to attend a long-term prisoners' discussion group on the subject of small units. Two visits were arranged to Carstairs, once to interview an ex-Unit prisoner, and a second time to informally discuss the role of small units with a psychiatrist who was also a member of the Standing Committee for Difficult Prisoners.

Semi-structured but wide-ranging interviews were carried out with the seven prisoners in the Unit at the time of the fieldwork, and with all of the five additional prisoners who had spent some time in the unit but who had moved on - in two cases to open conditions, in two cases back to Peterhead and in the last case, to Carstairs. The interviews lasted an average of one and a half hours, and were supplemented by extensive informal discussions. A new arrival to the Unit after the main fieldwork period had ended was included in the informal discussions during return visits.

Over half of the Unit staff (15) were interviewed: nine basic grade officers, two senior officers, one principal officer, two governor grades and one specialist (a psychologist). Formal semi-structured interviews were also carried out at a later stage with some of the original planning committee, with the Peterhead Governor in post at the time of the Unit's opening, and with the Unit's first Governor. A total of 32 interviews were carried out during the course of the research. All the interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed in edited form.

Documentary material was made freely available to the researchers, in confidence, including prisoners' files, assessment reports, minutes of weekly and special meetings, Unit diaries and

planning documents. A 'Governors' diary had been kept since the opening of the Unit in April 1990, with entries made by various staff each day about the opening of the Unit, the arrival of the first prisoners and the process of settling into and developing the Unit in its early days. This was also made available to the researchers.

Weekly and special meetings were attended, with the permission of Unit members. Two staff training sessions, a morning meeting, a senior management, POA and Visiting Committee meetings were attended. Participation in Unit life included games of table-tennis, coffee breaks and meal-times spent with staff and prisoners, invitations to three formal lunch-time meals prepared by two education staff, and an invitation to attend a formal dinner prepared by staff and prisoners during the last week of the research. One of the return visits also coincided with the Unit's annual sports day. Visits, projects and some sporting activities were observed as unobtrusively as possible, and one long but informal discussion with a regular visitor was arranged for the researcher by one of the prisoners.

1. The Unit: aims and objectives

Shotts 12-cell Unit opened in April 1990. It was the first purpose-built Unit of its kind in Scotland. It is a modern, maximum security national facility within the Scottish Prison Service, designed to hold prisoners of category A and B status. It has small individual cells and a large main concourse area with workshops, a small laundry, a kitchen, a gymnasium, a sports field and a garden. Within the Unit but beyond a grille gate, there is a visits area, a children's play area and the staff offices. The visits area was carefully laid out to resemble a bar or lounge; it allows for a certain level of privacy and is comfortable and pleasant. All prisoners have cells which are decorated to their own taste, with cell furniture, televisions, plants and in one case, pet snakes and a tarantula! They are able to keep their own possessions, which include books and study materials, personal stereo systems, musical instruments and so on.

Daily routine

The Unit's physical design was praised by staff and prisoners. The few changes suggested included larger cells, more workshops or 'corners', windows or murals on the outer perimeter wall and a running track around the perimeter.

The physical building and the facilities were seen as 'reflecting the aspirations of the Scottish Prison Service as a basic requirement for any prisoner' in order to 'maintain human dignity':

This is one of the reasonable resources to ask for - a pleasant working environment. If we can maintain an environment that is pleasant for staff to work in, there is a possibility they may be pleasant to prisoners. (Governor grade)

Daily life in the Unit was generally relaxed and informal. Prisoners emerged from their cells for breakfast, gym or cups of tea from 6.30am. Few appeared so early, but one or two might be up by 7.00. Some did not appear until 10.30am. There were no 'rules' about this, but it had been agreed at the Governor's request that 'Unit business' could take place between 8.30am and 5pm. No complaints about being disturbed at these times (eg. any noise) could be made. Some of the prisoners became involved in project work immediately, others spent some time in the gym. There was an informal gathering for coffee each morning at 10am, at which tea and coffee, toast and often 'home-made' cakes were available, at a small charge. Some came to this regularly, sitting with staff or visitors and mixing freely. Often discussions would ensue, problems would be aired and answers to questions clarified. Other prisoners came to collect their coffee but soon moved back to their own activities. This recent innovation seemed popular and provided welcome opportunities for the researchers to mix informally with Unit members, to catch up on what was happening in the Unit, to gauge the atmosphere and to make more formal arrangements for interviews to be carried out later in the day.

The rest of the morning was spent in individual activities, receiving official visitors or participating in sports. Lunch would begin at 11.30. This coincided with the main prison time-table, where the food was cooked. In other ways, the institutional timing might seem out of place in such a Unit. Prisoners prepared their own lunch or had a choice of two cooked meals or sandwiches from the main prison. Most sat at a table with some of the staff and the governor, not always at the same time, but coming and going over a period. One prisoner normally had responsibility for setting the table and making tea. One day each week two women education staff came in to cook a meal. A small charge was made to cover the cost of the meal. This was a popular event and brought almost everyone to the table at the same time. Washing up and clearing away was done by prisoners on a rota basis. After lunch, visits would be taken, or the activities of the morning would continue. One lunch-time each week, prisoners would be locked up for an hour at 1pm for staff training to take place. This would also happen at weekends.

At 5pm, staff went off duty for their meal, and prisoners would be locked in their cells until shortly after 6pm. They were locked in at 9.00pm. Staff went home at 9.30pm. The Unit was covered at night by one officer on night shift. Informally, staff had volunteered to forego a breakfast break between 8.30 and 9.15am in return for a smooth and open regime and a shorter early shift on Thursdays and Fridays.

Many of the prisoners had recently acquired pets, including a rabbit, a cat, hamsters, fish, a rat, two cornsnakes, a cocateil, budgies and two love birds. This assortment of animals had been introduced by a vet committed to the notion of pets in prison and their appearance had brought with it a considerable amount of largely positive media publicity.

Aims and objectives

According to the *Shotts Unit Planning Group Report* (SPS, 1990a), the Unit's philosophy was seen to be in keeping with the mission of the Scottish Prison Service:

(It) will seek to keep in custody those committed to it, maintain good order, look after inmates with humanity and provide them with opportunities for self development and change to positive behaviour. (SPS, 1990a: para 2.2)

The Planning Group recommended that this broad aim was achieved by:

1. Establishing a relationship between staff and prisoners which allows all concerned to interact freely and, wherever possible, as equally as the need for good order will allow.
2. Running the Unit as a Community in which the individuals act responsibly in relation to each other and act supportively towards each other. The main form of support should occur in community meetings where prisoners and staff may air their feelings in a conducive atmosphere. The main form of discipline and control should be the 'hot seat' and the legitimate sanction of the community meeting.
3. Regarding each prisoner as a responsible person who will be treated with the respect due to him as an individual and to encourage him to take his place and part in the life of the Unit.
4. Encouraging each prisoner to review his own personal development and to take up activities which will challenge, improve and equip him to make progress within the prison system and prepare him for a fuller life on release.
5. To place emphasis on assisting each prisoner to achieve personal control, personal developments, increased self-worth, and some vocational or social skills.

(SPS, 1990a: paras 2.2.1. - 2.2.5).

The Unit's own mission statement added to this:

Having accepted the constraints of secure custody, everyone who enters this Unit will be encouraged to share and live our values of mutual respect and trust. We will provide opportunities for self-development and meaningful progression for all, seeking to evaluate and promote understanding of creative practices and standards of excellence.

Human dignity is our future.

The objectives of the Unit were: to provide an additional option for the location of difficult prisoners who present management problems, or those with such potential, away from the mainstream; to keep such prisoners securely; to provide opportunities and ensure access to these opportunities within a secure and structured environment. These opportunities should include:

- increased family contact
- greater self-determination
- a supportive environment
- personal growth and development facilities

to return prisoners to the mainstream better able to cope and make progress towards release (SPS, 1990a:para 2.3.) and to provide settings within which it is possible to test alternative approaches towards the relationship between prisoners and prison officers, from which lessons may be drawn for the mainstream of the prison system (SPS, 1990b: 59)

Four key objectives were intended to be held in balance:

- maintaining secure custody
- creating a community
- providing opportunities for personal development
- maintaining the position of Shotts Unit in relation to the mainstream

(SPS, 1990a: para 4.1.)

The Report of the Planning Group stated that 'the personal development programme should be the main feature distinguishing Shotts Unit from other Units' (para.4.4., emphasis in original). It continued:

This proposed ethos is based on an 'opportunities model' where opportunities or options for self development are offered. The role of staff in this model is as facilitators to respond with support and assistance where prisoners wish it. The role of the activity programme is to require of the prisoner commitment to take the first step which should lead to an increasing take up of the opportunities and the consequential opportunity for facilitator support. (SPS, 1990a: para.4.4.)

These documents provided an unusually clear brief for the development and progress of the Unit regime. The expectations made quite explicit by these statements above were high, but they provided an important yardstick by which our impressions of the various aspects of Unit life could be measured. It is important to note that Shotts Unit was planned in the historical context of the precedent of Barlinnie. Some of its objectives were explicitly intended to avoid some of the unfavourable accoutrements BSU had acquired. A constructive regime commanding active participation, non-negotiable limits to security and staffing issues, and a clearer focus on forward

movement out of the Unit after a period of time were clear statements of the intended anchorage to the mainstream. The term 'Special' was deliberately avoided for Shotts Unit. The word 'Alternative' was also quickly abandoned, as in some ways making too explicit its distinction from BSU. The Unit was simply a small unit intended to provide another option for prisoners struggling in the mainstream. There was an apparent distinction between the personal development of a 'self-determination' type that appeared to characterise the Barlinnie regime and the more structured development and 'sentence-planning' expectations that Shotts Unit Planning Group had in mind. A balance was sought between the expression of individual identity/autonomy (empowerment) and the (more 'constraining' or prescriptive) facilitation of what the Governor referred to as 'soul development' (the responsibility/community element).

2. 'Difficult' Prisoners: Definitions, Selection and Assessment

Final confirmation of a prisoner as 'difficult' seems to be at a time when options within the mainstream have been exhausted. Associated with the description 'difficult' is likely to be a history of indiscipline reports, violence or subversive activity and lengthy periods out of circulation. (SPS, 1990a: para 3.2.1.)

It is not our task here to describe the problems inherent in the notion of the existence within any prison system of a group of identifiable and individually 'difficult' prisoners. This debate is treated elsewhere (Cooke, 1989; Bottomley and Hay, 1991; Home Office, 1984; Coyle, 1991). Staff reported a broad consensus on the notion of a small and identifiable group of prisoners who had become 'unmanageable' in mainstream conditions:

Somebody that's had a time in the last two or three years where they just cannae cope with the system, or they're just not going to cope with it, for whatever reason, they get to a stage where they say, 'I'm never going to beat this'. It's an option where they can get back in and do something. (Officer)

The current management in Shotts Unit have abandoned the term 'difficult prisoners' and prefer instead to refer to 'prisoners with difficulties'. Some aspects of the history of the Scottish Prison Service's response to these prisoners, whatever their label, are important in describing the context in which the current population talked to us about the Unit and its function. Again, only the briefest of reference can be made to these discussions.

After the major troubles and hostage-taking incidents of 1986 and 1987 (documented in Coyle, 1991; Scraton et al, 1991), the 50-60 supposedly most difficult prisoners in the Scottish Prison system were transferred to Peterhead where a number of experimental and spartan regimes were developed. This reactive response to a series of problems and challenges is now seen as a counter-productive and damaging era in Scottish Prison Service history. When Shotts was due to open in 1990, it seemed

appropriate to select the first five prisoners (and the next three) from Peterhead, where these prisoners were located in the most restricted conditions the service had to offer. Some of those involved in the Planning Group suggested to us that there were several types of difficult prisoners currently housed in these regimes. These 'types' described the range of Shotts' first intake, deliberately selected from the different groups. Crudely, and in others' language, the main types could be described as:

- 'thinkers and planners'
- 'front-line bullets' or 'volatile impulsive' prisoners
- 'potential protection prisoners'
- 'wrongly labelled/managed prisoners'

The significance of mixing the types of difficult prisoner selected was:

to send the right messages out, mainly to prisoners, that whatever their backgrounds, there was another way. It was essential that the Unit accepted 'genuinely difficult prisoners' (Governor grade)

Some of the first prisoners interviewed for the Unit did not want to be considered. Other 'difficult prisoners' existed in the system, but had been transferred out of Peterhead to (for example) Greenock, where they became anonymous. Thus it does not necessarily follow that the prisoners in Shotts Unit comprise the most difficult prisoners in the system. It is an important qualifier to the 'success' of any Unit ('special' or otherwise) that other prisoners with similar but unmet needs or in long-term segregation still exist in the system.

Selection of prisoners

The Planning Group felt that 'selection criteria and a process which will send the appropriate signals to the rest of the service' was necessary (5.1.). The signals intended (for both staff and prisoners) in the initial selections made were that different types of 'difficult prisoners' could be eligible for Shotts Unit, that it was not necessary to be violent to achieve a place in the Unit, but that the Unit was serious in its stated intention to cater for the most difficult prisoners in the system, provided that those prisoners showed some signs of willingness to try another route.

The initial selection of prisoners was intended to be based on three underlying criteria:

- i. to meet a discernible need amongst the prison population for personal development, social contact, self-expression and self-determination;

ii. to provide some management benefit; that is, to unhinge the restricted delivery of opportunities in the mainstream which occurs when particular prisoners tie up a disproportionate amount of resources; and

iii. to make an initial selection which would allow the growth of the community, to enable it to 'bed-down' quickly. Staff and prisoners should be capable of working with each other. Prisoners with first hand experience of the Barlinnie Special Unit (BSU) should be excluded, in the first instance.

These criteria were very much in the initial assessment group's minds when making their first selections. It was important that the Unit should start cautiously but with credibility and a reasonable chance of success. So prisoners were selected on two main criteria. First, they had to be demonstrably eligible for the unit: ('there was no point in taking any soft options'). This would have destroyed the credibility of the unit, it also would have wasted an expensive facility and 'would have led to the staff being generally held in contempt by the rest of the service'. Equally, taking in 'five screaming wild cats' and 'booting them back to Peterhead three days later' would have been disastrous. So:

We tried to toe the line between the two and get people who...we thought we could work with, but people who...had a reputation which would put Shotts on the map as a useful facility in dealing with difficult prisoners. (Planning Group Member)

The prisoners selected were expected to be highly motivated; they were volunteers, people who were prepared to contribute to the Unit and who were thought capable of coping with a community based regime. Those taking psychotropic medication or having any outstanding court cases were technically excluded. In practice, one of the prisoners had spent a considerable length of time in the BSU on a previous sentence, and at least one of the prisoners had outstanding charges at the time of his selection.

The selection process

Referrals were initially invited from Peterhead, before extending the trawl to all mainstream prisons. Governors of local establishments were asked to put names forward for consideration for the Unit, based on the criteria outlined above. Most of the referrals were 'genuine'; that is, the individuals were posing serious management difficulties to staff, but others were thought to originate from 'pressures outwith the institution those people were in'. Most of the referrals originated from case conferences held with local management teams about prisoners reaching a 'stalemate' in relation to their 'disposal'/progression.

The selection team consisted of the Unit psychologist, a governor and a uniformed officer. During our interviews, basic grade officers complained that they were not given sufficient opportunity to be

involved in the assessment process. Each team member asked a series of questions, each member wrote a report and then the team discussed each case and voted for or against selection. This process took some time, and the prisoner was not likely to be informed of the outcome for several weeks after the interview. There was some criticism of this aspect of the assessment procedure, in particular the delay in informing prisoners who failed to be selected for a place in the Unit.

The Unit was looking specifically for prisoners presenting management problems at a relatively early stage in a long sentence; those who were 'digging themselves into a deep hole', building up resentments of staff and accumulating further sentences in the process. The Unit was intended to provide an opportunity to 'stem the flow of self-destruction' (a Governor referred to this process as 'slow social suicide') and to enable prisoners to build a future. Many had been in 'lockdown' situations - segregation or limited association - for many years and were thought to need to re-acclimatise before being able to cope with mainstream conditions.

Admissions into the Unit

At the time of our research, Shotts had received 12 admissions since its opening in April 1990. Five of these prisoners had been moved on, two somewhat surprisingly perhaps, to open conditions, despite not meeting the ordinary criteria and therefore somewhat contentiously 'jumping the queue'. Three had been returned to Peterhead - one as the result of an 'assault' (which he defined as a fight) and the second as a result of continued involvement with drugs. The third prisoner had been returned to Peterhead, but was transferred to Carstairs State Hospital within weeks of his move out of Shotts. Nine of the 12 admissions were received from Peterhead. Most had been in conditions of lockdown or minimal association for long periods of time (up to five years). Only one of the prisoners came directly from normal location in a mainstream prison. The 13th admission arrived in the Unit on 3 September 1992.

In practice, prisoners themselves expressed some surprise about the selection procedures and the choices that were made. Some wondered why they had been chosen; others wanted to know why they had not been eligible the 'first time around', or with the initial intake. Several of the prisoners pointed out that the initial group knew each other and that this would enable a steady start to Unit life.

The following Table shows the arrival dates, ages, original offences, sentences and security categories of the prisoners admitted to Shotts Unit since it opened. It also shows the further sentences received as a result of prison behaviour and experiences, the length of time served and the length of stay to 1.8.92. in the Unit. It can be seen from this Table that prisoners selected for the Unit do tend to be at a relatively early stage in their sentences (in the first third) and that the length of stay in the Unit can vary considerably according to the individual's progress. At this

Admissions to Shotts Unit

	Date Arrival	Category	Age	Original Offence	Original Sentence	Additional Sentence	Offence	Time Served	Length Stay in Unit	Transfer
1	25.4.90	ex. A	39	Armed robbery	11 years	8 years	Hostage taking Assault Mobbing Attempt escape	7 years	2 years 7 months	
2	25.4.90			Armed robbery	12 years	Life	Murder	6 years	29.10.91 1 year 6 months	Peterhead Perth
3	25.4.90			Robbery	5 years	8 years	Mobbing Rioting Assault	4 years	.9.91 5 months	Noranside
4	25.4.90			Murder	Life	12 years	Hostage taking		25.7.91 3 months	Peterhead
5	1.5.90		33	Assault and robbery Racet	10 years	7 years	Hostage taking	5 years	21.11.90 6 months	Peterhead
6	3.5.90	A	34	Armed robbery	20 years	Life	Assault Armed robbery Escape	7 years	2 years 7 months	
7	1.8.90		32	Murder	Life	8 years	Escape Assault	5 years	2 years 3 months	
8	9.8.90	A	38	Murder	Life (30 years)	10 years	Malicious damage Mobbing Rioting Hostage taking	5 years	2 years 3 months	
9	.12.90			Armed robbery Attempted murder	20-14 years			7 years	.6.92 1 year 6 months	Noranside
10	8.8.91	ex. A	28	Murder	Life	12 years	Hostage taking Robbery Rioting Assault	8 years	1 year 3 months	
11	11.11.91		29	Assault Robbery	6 years	7 years	Assault Mobbing and rioting	7 years	1 year	Dungavel
12	9.12.91	B	32	Armed robbery	10 years	18 years	Armed robbery Kidnap Hostage taking Escape	4 years	11 months	
13	3.9.92		38	Murder	Life		Assault	7 years	2 months	

early stage in the Unit's history it is impossible to estimate how long the maximum (or average) length of stay is going to be. Implicit in the Unit's stated objectives is the assumption that prisoners will not stay in the Unit for longer than is 'necessary'. It is possible (in exceptional circumstances) that those individuals with 'nowhere to go' in terms of their sentence length and security category may be eligible for a place in Barlinnie. Certainly the aims articulated most clearly in SUPGR and relating to increased family contact, self-determination, personal growth and development are aims requiring different, in some cases indefinite, but in most cases long periods of time.

How far the prisoners first chosen for the Unit fulfilled the criteria of 'difficultness' is hard to assess. Each had posed different management problems in the past. The decisions made about individual admissions into the Unit may have been as much about achieving balance within the Unit as about prisoners' needs and difficulties. Matching individual and Unit needs was one of the major tasks faced by the assessment team in the selection of the original group of prisoners for the Unit. For most prisoners the Unit was felt to offer an opportunity to create a new identity and to cultivate interests that would take individuals forward in their sentences, towards release. Many were 'high-profile' prisoners in terms of their prison histories. The explicit aim of Shotts Unit in the first instance was to dismantle the Peterhead lockdown regime. Most of the prisoners had a history of long-term segregation, preceded by some involvement in escape attempts, disorder and hostage-taking. Two of the prisoners had no real indication of a release date. Two of the prisoners had experienced serious assaults by staff in the past. In one case this had resulted in an award of compensation. Many of the prisoners selected for the Unit had been withdrawing from communication with staff. All were strong and highly individualistic personalities. One of the features of 'the group' within the Unit was that there were several natural 'leaders'.

Not all of the prisoners in the Unit at the time of our research had challenged management in a persistent or direct way. The issue of 'perceived potential for problems' seemed to be very significant across this group of prisoners and therefore in Units as a whole. Some had been involved in violent incidents. All showed signs of wanting to take advantage of the opportunity to shake off their 'difficult prisoner' label and progress through their sentences in a constructive way. This was part of the bargain. In order to be accepted into the Unit in the first place, some re-thinking had to have already taken place. A theoretical 'peak' had been reached, and progress was negotiable. It was probably unwise for us to assume that the only function a small Unit can or does serve is for the most difficult prisoners in the system. Some of the 'most difficult' prisoners had not been accepted into the Unit 'at this stage' and remained in Peterhead, or elsewhere. This aspect of the Unit's function was significant, but there were additional functions served by the Unit (see conclusions) which were valuable in other ways.

Movements out of the Unit and non-admissions

Those prisoners who had moved out of the Unit by the time the research began were all interviewed and staff were asked about the decision to accept them into the Unit in the first place and about their moves. Three were considered as 'Unit failures' (in their own eyes, despite some efforts made by staff to interpret their moves positively in some ways). Two were seen as 'Unit successes'. Again, this term is misleading without a clear picture of the criteria for success, both in terms of selection and progress.

It is unlikely that those prisoners who had left the Unit would have any investment in saying that the system was wholly successful. It might be worrying if there was no opposition to system issues from prisoners. It is not clear that 'failures' and 'successes' are identifiable. For example, one of the prisoners who left the Unit had spent eighteen months there. During that time staff had worked with him despite a continuing drug problem, he had an opportunity to develop a close relationship with his son facilitated and supported by the staff and he had the time to reflect upon his life sentence and his drugs use. By the end of his stay, his relationship with his son had been re-established on a more permanent basis. Although he 'chose to leave' rather than to admit his drugs problem, within months of leaving the Unit and returning to Peterhead, he sought counselling for his drugs problem. He later managed to seek a place in Greenock prison, with the continuing interest and support of Unit staff, where his visits could continue and he could settle into a more relaxed regime and cope more successfully with it. The time he spent in the Unit, and the decision to hold him responsible for his actions, may have served as the catalyst required to help him. He did not exit from the Unit in the expected direction, but arguably he had progressed.

In the other cases, the shortest staying prisoner requested a return to the Unit, perhaps seeing more of its relative qualities once he had been returned to Peterhead, but clearly also feeling that the decision to send him back had been unjust. There was some feeling that he had been using the Unit to furnish his drugs habit, and that although he could have benefitted from a stay, he was not ready for the type of commitment required to make a success of it. Another prisoner who was sent back to Peterhead after nine months again was described by some as a 'Unit failure', but seen in the context of his history, this is not necessarily a fair reflection of events. He had posed continual problems throughout his sentence, accumulating additional years as a result of violence, hostage-taking and roof-top protests. The Unit took an enormous risk in accepting him in the first place, knowing that his volatile behaviour would be difficult to contain. The fact that he spent nine months in the Unit without assaulting anyone directly could be seen as a small success. The Unit was able to be more tolerant of his activities than other establishments would have been, thereby avoiding the continual spiral of additional sentences. During his stay he did participate in Unit life. He was not reflective about his behaviour, despite some awareness that it was destructive. His lack of motivation or apparent ability to control it and his dependence on medication made all

efforts to work with him more difficult. He was quickly transferred to Carstairs from Peterhead, despite some doubts about the presence of any psychiatric illness. The expectations placed on one small unit to 'cure' or contain all varieties of difficulty are unrealistic. 'Success' in such circumstances may need to be cautiously defined. We return to this important point below.

Two prisoners were moved on to open conditions from the Unit at the end of its first year. In the first case, the prisoner had become associated with a label ('one of Scotland's 50 most dangerous prisoners') because of his involvement in a riot at Barlinnie several years before. Because of this label (misapplied, according to most of the staff), he became stuck in the system - 'no prison was going to take him'. He 'sailed through the Unit', changing very little, and was soon seen as acceptable for open conditions. It was 'ludicrous', according to some of the staff, that he needed to come through the Unit to progress in that way; he could have gone directly to semi-open conditions, in the view of many of the staff. The Unit did offer him a situation in which he could move on, whilst allowing him to improve the quality of his contacts outside. Unfortunately, at the time of writing, he had failed to return from home leave from his new open prison.

The next transfer out to open conditions was again a prisoner who had not been violent, but who had 'played the system' using its own mechanisms against itself, creating organisational problems and making himself unpopular in establishments. He was felt to be capable of inciting others to action. He had spent three more months in Perth Unit than had originally been intended, because no other prison would have him. After leaving the Unit, he continued to identify and take bureaucratic action about shortcomings in his new establishment, but settled and took advantage of the additional home leave facilities.

A common theme in the selection of prisoners for the Unit was that no other establishment would take the prisoner, not always as a result of damage done but because of fears about their potential. The view of particular prisoners as potentially dangerous or disruptive seemed as significant as their actual record in the eyes of the media, the Scottish Prison Service, the staff and prisoners themselves. Status was related to reputation and potential.

What sort of prisoners were not being accepted into the Unit? At least six prisoners had not been accepted for the Unit by the assessment team, following referral. Not all referrals were accepted the first time around. The newest arrival to the Unit had applied three times previously. Two of the prisoners leaving the Unit in its second year requested a return. Neither were accepted.

One prisoner was not accepted on the basis of his need for psychiatric support. He was taking prescribed medication, and was felt to present too big a threat to both the security of the unit and its stability. It would be asking too much of other prisoners to cope with him, at his current stage.

Another prisoner was referred two years into a life sentence. He was seen as an inappropriate referral as there was no evidence from which to judge that he was not surviving in the mainstream. A third prisoner was 'looking for protection'. One of the preferred criteria for acceptance into the Unit was that difficulties being encountered were as a result of the prisoner's behaviour, and not just a refusal by mainstream prisons to accept the prisoner. This was a necessary but not sufficient condition. Some intuitive judgement would be made about whether the individual would fit into the open and communal regime of the Unit. The question of balance was a crucial consideration. If a prisoner was considered too 'manipulative', or too 'manipulable' by others, the Unit would not be able to function. A certain level of 'intelligence and sophistication' was felt to be important in order for prisoners to make a success of their stay in the unit. The skills to be self-determining were important. Feuds between particular prisoners would be taken into account. Individuals who were simply refusing to go to mainstream prisons, and who demanded a Unit place as a 'stepping stone' without having any particular identifiable need for one, were not accepted. Evidence of initiative, flexibility and a desire for self-development and progression were felt to be important. A positive response to challenge and conflict was sought. Improved family contact was not a sufficient reason for placement in the Unit, although there was some recognition that some family contact was a desirable aspect of Unit life. Most of those involved in the assessment process felt that far more prisoners could have benefitted from a Unit place than they had places available. It was generally agreed that those who needed it most were accepted.

Sentence planning for Unit prisoners

It is recommended that the ethos of the Unit should be that it will be a place for prisoners who have come to recognise they have difficulties in settling into the mainstream system to go provided they agree to undertake a mutually devised programme of personal development linked to their perceived needs...A central thread running through the entire selection process is that the prisoner 'signs on' for a regime, the details of which will be known to him in advance...The progress of each prisoner towards meeting the objectives set out in his individual programme should be monitored and assessed, in discussion with the prisoner, at the intervals proposed in his programme. (SPS, 1990a: paras 4.4-5.4.)

Formal sentence planning and structured personal development did not take place in the Unit in practice, as envisaged above. There were two main reasons for this. One was that the Unit was in its infancy; other agendas were still being met. Priority was given to the selection and assessment procedure, to staffing (selection, training and development) and structural/regime issues within the Unit and, importantly, to providing prisoners with sufficient space to adjust to a new environment and regime. This process took considerably longer than envisaged by the Planning Group.

At the time of the research, sentence planning (or more specifically, 'exit-planning') was being introduced. Staff had undergone considerable training, a settled and constructive regime was in

place and plans were being formulated to move one or two prisoners on in the near future. In the mainstream, a more formal system of sentence planning was in place, subject to the natural constraints characteristic of an overcrowded system.

In each individual prisoner's case in the Unit there was an informal plan or agenda relating to his acceptance into the Unit and how this might relate to forward movement. Most of the prisoners were selected with an expectation that a move to the Unit would eventually facilitate their onward progress through the system. Personal development plans were vaguely formulated and remained flexible. Two types of planning were possible: onward movement from Shotts, and time spent during their stay in the Unit. Neither of these stages was formally planned or documented, except in the case of the most recent admission. It was clear that a great deal of thought had gone into each prisoner's selection and acceptance into the Unit. Case conferences had been held, detailed assessments made, discussions carried out and alternatives considered. Half day visits, with the prisoners' family, were arranged before arrival by way of introduction into the Unit once a prisoner had been selected.

There was agreement in the accounts given by staff of each decision to accept a particular prisoner into the Unit and the reasons for this. A consensus about the possible length of time he would stay and about his next move was discernible. Each prisoner had a particular (set of) problem(s) that had brought him to the Unit. There was some variation in the degree to which his personal development needs were being addressed (e.g. increased family contact, the development of interests, risk to security, volatile temper, distrust of staff, and so on). Each prisoner was thought to have a particular or 'key' need which could be resolved within the confines of a small unit (e.g. family problems, the need for space, support from staff, a degree of autonomy, the development of interests and so on).

Each prisoner was given space to adjust before plans were formulated or projects chosen. The induction procedure was 'laissez faire', sometimes consisting of a series of 'four-groups' (see below) where a new prisoner could get to know people a few at a time and discuss his opportunities and plans in the Unit. The issue of onward movement was not raised until the time was considered right and opportunities for 'meaningful progression' were found. Referral and selection for the Unit were major decisions in their own right. They were decisions which were carefully made. Once selected, prisoners sometimes spent a period of several months adjusting to the environment before addressing the question of how to use the time and the opportunities available. Reviews and assessments took place after the first year, and thereafter every four months. These reviews were thorough and well documented and were fully discussed with the prisoners. The nature and extent of their personal development programmes depended on the staff members they got on well with and the interests they developed, often by chance, over time.

Some of the staff were happy with the informal nature of these arrangements, feeling that this was appropriate and effective, facilitating individual choice and responsibility:

Just let them get on with it and don't worry about trying to change their minds; let time change their minds. If they get into a situation where they're doing something...The answers don't come straight away. This is a way out for them. What you're doing is taking the pressure off them, from the normal prison situation and letting them just get their head together for a certain length of time. It's not just about coping with the mainstream, it's coping with life itself, to be able to think, rationalise things... (Officer)

Others wanted to see a more structured personal development strategy:

There is an induction period, but again I feel we have never really got that straight. There is a time when we use this 4 group method, which I don't think is necessarily always appropriate. When people arrive they should be involved in a number of 4 groups, where they sit and talk with various staff and prisoners about the different aspects of Unit life. That's how it's meant to be done, but I don't think it's particularly successful. (Specialist)

One identifiable short-coming of the informality of personal development programmes was that prisoners could end up without anything to do for long periods of time if practical problems were encountered or individual staff members did not facilitate (for example by ordering materials) effectively. On the other hand, the range of problems prisoners faced during their time in the unit were not necessarily the sorts of problems that 'plans' could address:

Plan? No. I was surprised about finding myself in the Unit. I want to take opportunities to do things which provide support through rest of my sentence; give it everything I've got, to be seen in a new light. In the mainstream, I would crumble, destroy myself in the process. I would like someone to take care of this - a personal officer, could have done with that earlier. I've mentioned these things at meetings, but you're met with silence - no dialogue on this. Frustrations about the Unit raise anxieties about going back into the mainstream. You're picked for some reason, if you put effort into Unit that removes you from the old system, it doesn't seem fair to go back into it. You're preparing for a new future, you learn new values. If you go back, you'll end up under pressure again. You say to yourself, is it fair to do that to myself while I'm in here? A lot of fear, barriers. Things you learn about yourself, how you cope with your sentence. Trying to shed them; it leaves you not knowing who you are. It's like an identity crisis, you throw all that away, then you think, who am I? What do I do here, have I got the ability to do that? How much pain will it result in when I do go back into the mainstream.

...Sitting at a meal in here and getting involved in an activity in here that is normal - it's abnormal, because it's nice. You get confused. It doesn't make sense to me. You think enjoy it while you can, but it's not connected to my future. You volunteer to come here and take part in this experiment. You change - how will this affect me when go back? That causes a lot of sleepless nights. It's unfair. You know within yourself you've got the potential, but there's a fear that it will all collapse round about you. [Q: The unit supports the change, you're afraid the mainstream won't?] Yes, through the pressure. I have experienced this, where I have been acting out these new ideas, presenting myself in a new way in the mainstream.

There's no support, no group meetings, no psychologist, just me, in the old system. I couldn't cope with it, being dragged back in. Couldn't resist it, if you do, you get pressure. I had to go and lock myself up, just to survive, all that effort to change for nothing. This is to be creative, get to know myself, no time routine - if the mainstream had been more like that, we would all be more normal, if you got more support. The building, the setting here helps you come to yourself. Once you do that, it's got to be acknowledged, seen. There are times when I've seen myself really stretching forward, then something will happen, and you're viewed as an ordinary prisoner...there are the things you want help with. (Unit prisoner)

The sort of personal development that took place in the unit was in many ways unrelated to the project activities individuals adopted:

You can't put 'personal development down to any one thing. It's the whole process, including relationships inside and outside this place. Even cleaning the laundry and the toilet can be good for the soul. It's a thousand things. (Prisoner)

The essential ingredients for personal development seemed to include a degree of structure, the freedom to emerge as an individual (and to make mistakes), the support of staff, the granting of respect and the encouragement of self-esteem. As expectations rose, so attitudes and behaviour could strive to meet them. The process was slow, stumbling and painful. Occasionally, huge backward steps were taken. What most prisoners felt however was that 'all prisons should be like this'.

3. Regime Features: creating a community

...some of the most valuable potential of the Unit lies in the involvement of all members of the Unit, prisoners, staff management and specialists, in developing structures...In this way progress can be made towards a genuine community. The community concept can only work where there is a visible, genuine sharing of both decision making and responsibility.

(SPS, 1990a: para 4.3.)

In *C-Unit: Search For Community in Prison* (Studd et al, 1968), the authors argue that the notion of community incorporates the fundamental ideal values of life in our society: respect for individuals, dignity and concern for the rights and welfare of others. Creating conditions in prison under which prisoners (and staff) can live as responsible community members will, to the extent that this is possible, reveal and support the capacity of its members to do that. A community ideology encourages social competence, co-operation, learning, growth and change. Positive social controls can thereby replace coercion, and diverse and potentially conflicting individual interests can be met. This community should be participatory (cp. SPS, 1990a: para 4.3.1.), involving both prisoners and staff; its walls should be permeable, it should be used as a context for 'problem-solving in the present' and it should be transitory - 'part of a continuum with the free community' - preparing prisoners for a return to that community. Enabling prisoners to deal with problems experienced in

the present according to a set of generally accepted rules, would empower them to manage their own futures more competently.

There are several problems in the direct application of this ideology to a Unit such as Shotts. Most important is the role of the Unit in returning prisoners to mainstream conditions (see below), where 'community' and 'responsibility' are (or have been) largely absent. Consistency, the imposition of rules and punishments, and dependence on external controls characterises the mainstream prisons to which prisoners from Shotts Unit will return. This is certainly the memory of the mainstream that Unit prisoners retain throughout their stay. Somewhat oddly, the Unit is modelled broadly on the philosophy of responsible individuals making active moral choices in a community (community in a political rather than in the therapeutic sense). To the extent that the Unit achieves this, its major flaw is that it aims to return prisoners to conditions of largely undignified dependence and traditional relationships of control. In order to answer the question, to what extent has the Unit succeeded in 'creating a community', a caveat needs to be stated. The Unit should perhaps be judged on its ability to create the conditions outlined above, whatever the relationship between this achievement and any future move. Our limited task is perhaps restricted to this in the first instance.

This question was perhaps the hardest for both staff and prisoners to answer. It was easier to identify areas where the Unit fell short of a community than to specify what a community was and how far aspects of life in the Unit met this definition. In our view, the problem-solving mechanisms (weekly, special and four group meetings) were signs of community life, as defined above, but not necessarily as outlined in the Planning Document referred to earlier. Staff and prisoners talked positively about these aspects of the Unit, but not usually in relation to questions about its community life. Other areas where community life was evident were the scope for choices to be made about such things as how to spend time, what projects to adopt, who to invite into the Unit as visitors, and so on. The walls were certainly permeable to outsiders (see section on family and outside contact). Prisoners were (on the whole) treated with respect by staff (see below) and they were able to exercise their individuality and responsibility over a far greater range of their lives than they would have been able to do in mainstream prisons. There is no question that these aspects of life in the Unit were valued.

Despite these positive features, the single issue agreed upon by almost all staff and prisoners was that the Unit was *not* a community. The notion of 'community' in people's minds was perhaps an 'ideal type' that few communities would match. Some felt it should not aim to see itself as a community; it was after all, a prison. Others saw this as a deficiency in the Unit's regime. There were three main ways in which the Unit was not a community. The first related to the perceived lack of any democratic decision-making process in practice. Again, few communities would be

democratic in such a fundamental way. Decisions were made by the Governor. Prisoners voiced this view strongly, but so did staff. Participatory or consultative management were ideals not borne out in the life of the Unit. The Governor was accountable; he was also in charge. Prisoners did not engage staff in decision-making discussions because they knew the staff had very little power.

The second point where community life was felt to be absent related to the lack of group cohesion between prisoners within the Unit. They did not speak with a common voice. They were highly individualistic, and rarely presented a common will to the staff. This individuality was felt by some to be a welcome feature of life in the Unit, and was almost inevitable given the selection criteria. Others felt the Unit was intended to have a community life, symbolised and facilitated by the large communal areas of the concourse. The small cells were seen as an indication that more time was to be spent out of them than in them. The design of the Unit reflected the desired community spirit. Aspects of daily life in the Unit did not.

The third area related to staff-prisoner communication. This will be discussed below.

It seems that there had been an explicit attempt by the Planning Group, to 'tie the governor's hands', to keep the Unit on track in case he 'went native' and to avoid the unfavourable publicity Barlinnie had received in its earlier days. This was achieved through the 'non-negotiables': viz. all matters having a bearing on security, matters relating to staffing, visiting arrangements and the policy of on-going commitment to a personal development programme - none of which could be discussed at meetings or altered:

If the management style of the Unit is to be based on consultative/participatory management then it must be clearly understood that there are certain matters or areas of concern which remain the concern of Prison Service Management Group and which are therefore not open to the community to change.

(SPS, 1990a: para 4.3.2.)

These non-negotiables set the tone of the Unit: it was not another BSU. Some aspects of the BSU had been adopted by Shotts Unit. In other ways the Unit was reined in and given a tighter and more proactive set of guidelines. One major style of operation borrowed directly from BSU was the use of meetings as the main community decision-making process.

The role of weekly and other community meetings

The main forum for community decisions/consultation/discussion will be the community meeting...attended by all members of the community. During that meeting all present should be able to raise issues concerning such matters as: the daily routine; the programme for the coming week; staff practices; prisoner attitude, behaviour and response; changes of the community, etc. From time to time the meeting will discuss ways in which one or more members of the community are operating within the community and by the process of verbalising and airing problems the meeting will seek to resolve personal issues and maintain equilibrium. (SPS, 1990a: para 4.3.5.)

Tuesday meetings began at 1.15, and lasted up to three hours. They were not referred to as 'community meetings'. All Unit members attended. Other attenders were kept to a minimum, and permission had normally to be sought in advance at previous weekly meetings. Those meetings that were attended by the Governor in charge (most) tended to be the longest. Prisoners took it in turns to chair the meeting. Each member of the Unit was asked if they had points to raise. Domestic business would be discussed, information about comings and goings at the Unit would be disseminated, and particular issues relating to individuals, their grievances and complaints were raised. Minutes were taken by one prisoner and one member of staff, and a version compiled from these two accounts for the records. The purpose of the meeting was 'to let everyone feel they have a forum whereby they can safely express their opinion about any issue that is affecting their lives or the lives of others in the unit and in the running of the unit'.

Problems relating to Tuesday meetings had been raised frequently in the early months, according to Unit records and Unit members' accounts. There was too little staff participation (with some officers conscious that the length of the meeting determined the end of their long shift), too little decision-making power arising from meetings and a strong staff-prisoner divide. There was also a tendency for the meetings to become bogged down by domestic issues relevant to only one or two individuals in the Unit. By the time of our research, meetings were chaired more efficiently and the purpose of the meetings was more clear. Prisoners still felt cynical about their actual value, given their perception that little could be changed or decided at them. Ideas could be put forward, but the Governor had the final say, for example on who could visit the Unit, on how 'family days' were organised, and so on. The notions of community and responsibility were felt to be incompatible with this concentration of decision-making power. There was no voting ('this is not a democracy'). This theme was raised throughout the research. In some ways, the role of the Governor in a small Unit is completely out of proportion to the role he would play in individual prisoners' lives in other, larger establishments. This had the benefit of direct access, but the disadvantage of magnifying the significance of personal style. Now and again comments were made that the Unit was no different to a Peterhead 10-cell Unit with a carpet. Efforts had been made to make the meetings more productive. 'Housekeeping' issues were steered elsewhere and the meetings were

more structured. As an information-exchange forum and an opportunity to air grievances, the meetings were seen as valuable, for prisoners:

Just sorting out some of the differences that we've had, throughout the week, any information that's going to be brought up, any problems or worries. Sometimes it just falls into the category of we want, we want, you can get, you can't get...but for the one that comes along and says, I have got a serious problem here, well, that is worth it's weight in gold. That's what it's there for. I wouldn't change them, I think they're successful. (Officer)

The meeting provided a skeleton or structure around which other unit activities revolved. There tended to be a build up to the Tuesday meeting, and then a wind down afterwards. Some of the staff may have been reluctant to contribute as it put them into the firing line, having to answer supplementary questions and accept challenge. A recently recruited officer commented that staff need to learn how to participate in such meetings. No specific training was given.

Special meetings were called by any individual who felt that an issue had arisen which was too urgent to be left until the weekly meeting. Their function was to relieve tension and prevent issues from fermenting, to get issues sorted out on the spot. All Unit members had to attend these meetings, which were usually quite short (2 to 25 minutes). The person who called a special meeting also ended it. Several special meetings were called during the time of our fieldwork. They tended to run in spates, sometimes several in one day, within one hour of each other, depending on the atmosphere or the level of tension in the Unit. Special meetings were minuted. They could be called by staff or prisoners, but were more often called by prisoners - and by some more than others. There had been a lot of special meetings during the early months of the Unit's life (average of six per month) and a lot during the period up to and including our research fieldwork in the Summer of 1992. Of 101 special meetings called since the Unit opened (average of 4 per month), 74 had been called by prisoners and 27 by staff, a ratio of 3:1. Of those meetings called by staff, seven had been called by the Governor (three by the previous and four by the current Governor).

Six special meetings were called in June 1992 and ten were called in July 1992. The sorts of issues raised at these meetings were the operation of four groups (see below), disagreements about equal treatment, complaints about food, delays in dental treatment, items going missing, not being fully informed about visitors expected in the Unit, staff attitudes, cleaning the visits room and the concourse, washing up and weeding the garden. They could be called at awkward times, for example when important visitors were around, and were in this and other ways a powerful tool for prisoners, but one 'worth living with'. Staff tended to call meetings to challenge attitudes and behaviour or explain why prisoners had been removed from the Unit.

The meetings were felt to be a valuable and effective resource which did not always bring about a satisfactory conclusion to every conflict but which relieved tension, avoided unnecessary aggression and encouraged members to be answerable for their actions, to both staff and prisoners:

If there's a situation arises, and it's gone beyond...say an argument arises, between two prisoners or with a member of staff. If it's a controlled argument, then that's ok, but if it gets to a stage, well, before violence can take over, or it gets to a serious situation, then a special meeting should be called to diffuse the situation. You can go through one week and maybe get 6 or 7, and you can go through a month and maybe get none. A lot depends on the atmosphere in the place at the time. If there's a build up between two prisoners that can maybe last for a while, a lot of these build ups go back years and years and they surface now and again, and if they've surfaced for any reason, you'll maybe get a run of 3, 4, 5 meetings within a week. If the atmosphere is good, you can possible go for weeks. We're going through one of these surface phases now. Yesterday's special meeting was about washing up. I think you find in these places, the thing the meeting's called for, is not the issue. The issue is not about the washing up, a meeting just had to be called; it goes so deep, it takes an awful strong meeting to bring it out. I don't think it developed, that one. Staff can't push that - you have to realise how severe the hatred is they have for each other, things going back. That never leaves, they could live their lifetime in the jail and that would never leave. You've got to get a workable situation where they can give each other space and get on with each other - this is where your superficial comes in. You can normally do that. Then all of a sudden something happens and it all comes back. The real issue is way way back. You can't get at that - sometimes things get so serious, you do...that would go from a special meeting into a four group. You go back a bit, but they won't disclose that type of thing to staff, very very rarely, unless they're cornered. (Officer)

Four groups were mainly used when problems were not being resolved by a special meeting, or the prisoner did not wish to discuss his point of view in front of the whole community. He would call a four group 'against' another Unit member (usually a member of staff), choosing a second member (usually a prisoner) to go into the group with him. The staff member would pick a second member (usually another member of staff) and the group would go into a room to air their views and seek a resolution in conditions of confidentiality. These groups were a last resort device and were reserved for apparently intractable grievances. They were felt to be valuable and effective by staff and prisoners:

Four groups? Again, if the differences can't be resolved in the special meeting, I can pick one of my pals, you pick one of yours, we go in and we try and get it hammered out. One of the good things about the four groups...it's not minuted, and you don't talk about it when you come out, so at the end of the day, you could have stole my milk (this is how ludicrous the thing is when it starts...) and you're not prepared to say in front of the whole group that you're sorry, and you'll give me yours tomorrow. But once you go into a four group, where there's no minutes and no group sitting listening, as soon as you walk in you say look I'm sorry...and we're all happy. that's a good thing. It's usually a wee simple thing like that, but they just want to save their face. We all walk out smiling. (Officer)

Activities which encouraged community life were aspects of the weekly meetings (although they were sometimes the focus for overt expressions of conflict between prisoners); sporting activities (again, sometimes used to vent frustration and conflict), open days and sports days, meals eaten together (both routinely and 'special dinners'), the 'common good fund' and other social occasions (barbecues, kareokes, concerts, and so on).

Factors which militated against community life were conflicts and 'status-fighting' between prisoners, the individual pursuit of projects, their individualistic styles and their personal situation within the unit (time and circumstances of arrival, sentence length, stage in sentence, and so on), all pursuing different goals, the staff-prisoner divide and the power imbalance, exacerbated according to accounts given to us, by the Governor's authoritarian style. Conflicts between particular prisoners were most often mentioned as long-term problems which stood in the way of developing a community spirit in the Unit.

Staff

The willingness of the staff to develop a role in which they can interact with prisoners more freely than is often the case in mainstream prisons will be central to their support function. The staff selection and training programmes will underpin this. (SPS, 1990a: para 4.4.3.)

In any prison staff-prisoner relationships are central (Dunbar, 1985; Bottoms, Hay and Sparks, 1991). This is especially true of a Unit focussing on ideals of 'the responsible prisoner' and on the development of respect, support, dignity and trust between prisoners and staff. In practice, the issue of staffing was mixed.

The Unit was staffed by a total of 24 officers, although only 21 were in post at the time of the research. Staff shortages, and the deployment of detached duty staff, were frequently raised in the interviews by both staff and prisoners as problems within the Unit. The fieldwork period was a time of transition, with several staff putting in for transfers. It was interesting to note that the initial trawl for staff when the Unit had first opened had brought 130 applications. A 'paper sift' brought the number down to about 60. Staff who were short-listed all spent a week working at BSU, after which some deselected themselves. During this initial selection process, applications from women staff were not permitted. The second trawl, after the first year, received no applications. The most recent trawl in June 1992 received 37 applications - an indication of the changing perceptions of the Unit as myths declined and favourable exposure to the Unit increased, in part through the use of detached duty staff from Shotts main. Staff from the main prison retained some of the 'disapproval' perceived by Unit members and expressed in jokes and derogatory comments during walks through the main prison corridors to and from the Unit. Typically, they expressed a defensive interest in but very little knowledge about the Unit, supposing that prisoners ran the

place and that they had everything they wanted, at other prisoners' expense. Officers applying to work in the Unit often did not wish to admit this to their colleagues. A week's detached duty in the Unit did persuade some officers to apply for a post. It was helpful in demystifying Unit life and taking a more realistic view of Units back to the main prison. Detached duty was a challenge however, as prisoners felt resentful of new faces and transitory appearances, tending to keep unfamiliar officers at a bit of a distance.

It is more difficult to answer questions about whether or not the Unit has the 'right staff' than it is to answer these questions in relation to prisoners. There are both formal and informal rules about what sort of prisoner the Unit is looking for. There are identifiable needs at several different levels: individuals, establishments and systems. With staff, there seemed to be no such guidelines. Staff volunteer for selection to work in the Unit, with the exception of the Governor and Deputy Governor. Given the restricted time-table we were working to, one of the limitations of the research was the little time we were able to spend investigating the staff selection process.

Given the nature of the Unit - its cost, its experimental nature and its significance in the prison system in Scotland, it is surprising that the requirements for staff were not more clearly articulated, both in our discussions and on paper. As with the prisoners, it was felt that a range of staff were necessary, bringing different qualities and skills to the Unit. Staff with drive and enthusiasm, who were stable and flexible, were wanted. Practical skills were highly valued, as were sporting interests. Staff short-listed for interview were invited to spend a week in the Unit before being considered for the job.

There was some evidence that the Unit had not got all the most appropriate staff at the present time. Some were obviously right for the job, others were not so suitable. There was a feeling from the prisoners that officers should have been more carefully screened in terms of their previous involvement with prisoners likely to be admitted into the Unit. It had only emerged in recent months how significant were the tensions that the presence of certain staff created at the beginning of Unit life. References were made to flashbacks. Prisoners said that these might have occurred in any case, but added that it was not helpful to have 'built in prompts'. They thought that a more detailed examination of the prison histories of the staff might have avoided some of these feelings.

Some of the staff did not have sufficient interest or motivation to work effectively in a Unit setting. This was difficult to predict from selection interviews, and was felt to be easier to guard against now that the Unit had a stable life of its own and staff were invited to spend a week working in the Unit before being formally assessed. Qualities felt to be valuable in a Unit environment were honesty, openness, patience, and flexibility. Qualities particularly valued by prisoners were

commitment to the Unit philosophy, practical and sporting skills, the absence of any bitterness from the past, confidence, compassion, maturity, enthusiasm, the ability to communicate and understanding. Several comments were made in favour of staff who were 'not too pushy' and who were seen as 'genuine'.

It was mentioned by several different individuals (prisoners and staff) that the unit was over-staffed and that the number required for the setting up of the Unit was no longer the optimum number for its maintenance. On the other hand, many officers felt that time spent just being present, playing snooker or involving themselves in activities facilitated relationships in a natural way. That they were not always 'busy' did not mean that they were surplus to requirements.

Training for the Unit

There were several complaints about the limited training offered to staff when the Unit first opened. Some felt training could only take place 'on the job'. Others felt that further or more specific training could have been given. In practice, it was likely that Unit staff were offered better and more frequent training opportunities than staff in other establishments. An important team-building exercise took place at the outset, whereby staff were invited to attend a week long training course in a hotel during the early stages of the Unit's opening. The course was however felt to be too unstructured. Some argued that this had been deliberate, in order to allow the team to be self-directing, and to avoid the 'Barlinnie-therapeutic' form of training:

The idea was not to have a fully formed and prepared staff/governor response when the prisoners arrived, but rather to greet the prisoners at a point at which they were going to be encouraged to take part in fleshing out the plan of how the Unit was going to operate. (Governor grade)

A certain amount of uncertainty as to how best to operate and a genuine interest in securing prisoner participation in the setting up of the Unit left some of the staff feeling unprepared for what they encountered during the Unit's first months. In this situation, the Unit started life with:

~~prisoners who clearly knew what they wanted, and staff who didn't know what they wanted, so the prisoners were obviously in a successful negotiating position.~~
(Governor grade)

Some industrial action over staffing levels delayed the admission of prisoners so that 'the momentum was destroyed' and the disruption unsettled the staff.

~~Aspects of training that were felt to be helpful were the team-building exercises and coping with prisoners who 'wound you up'. The main role of staff in the Unit was to operate as facilitators, helping and encouraging prisoners with their personal projects, getting them access to services and materials outside, providing support and participating in aspects of Unit life.~~

Staff-prisoner relationships

Given the requirements of security and good order, the role of the ordinary officer cannot be defined as that of also being the prisoner's friend. (Emery, 1970:96)

Most of the staff, and slightly fewer but still a majority of the prisoners felt that relationships between staff and prisoners in the Unit were good. Certainly they were infinitely better than they had been in the mainstream:

Overall good. The main reason being they are interacting all the time. Like in any relationships, there is going to be confrontation and clashes of personalities, but there has never been any serious physical threat. There has been confrontational shouting at meetings and that, but that is just part of human relationships.

(Officer)

Excellent. I would do things with prisoners here I would never do to prisoners in the mainstream - challenge them on different things. Going back to the bit on responsibility, in the mainstream, if somebody swears at me, I'm perfectly entitled to say, you're on governors report, let the governor deal with it in the morning. In here, I've got to challenge it and deal with it myself, through the different avenues of special meetings and four groups... so I feel more confident in doing that. But also the prisoner will feel more confident in challenging me. If he can do that, that goes a long way; that shows you how well our relationship is going, if he can challenge us on things we say, instead of letting things build up, or lashing out.

(Officer)

Some of the senior staff were critical of the fragile and sometimes shallow nature of staff-prisoner relationships within the Unit, feeling that they could be much better:

On the surface they are good...every time when something emerges, when a crisis happens, I believe it is because that fundamental support mechanism hasn't been there. That relationship hasn't been cultivated to the extent that they can help that prisoner. Because it is shallow I think that is why we have all these blow ups. (Governor grade)

Relationships were much more positive than is typical in establishments. A small majority of the staff were described as 'excellent' in this respect. There were potential pit-falls in relation to the close staff-prisoner relationships required according to the philosophy of Unit life. One was that the 'relationship' was perceived by prisoners as superficial or false. A good illustration of this feeling was when prisoners commented that on a bad day, when staff were met by occasionally 'serious' problems (protest, verbal or threatened physical aggression), they might express their 'bottom-line' view that dealing with 'these sorts of prisoners' in any other way besides the use of traditional force, was hopeless. 'I don't know why we don't just lock them up. We all know what we're dealing with..'Prisoners commented that staff working in Units would have no trouble reverting to their traditional role when they eventually get posted back to a mainstream prison. This real possibility was seen as an indication that any relationship built up was a false one,

motivated by pay and career prospects and not by a view of the prisoner as a responsible individual. Staff were thought to be less supportive than they could have been.

Another problem was the effects upon staff of living and working closely with prisoners who surfaced as individuals, with qualities and interests that officers and others genuinely responded to. Staff occasionally expressed difficulties experienced in living so close to the individual and his suffering. He was no longer 'just' a prisoner, but a friend. This problem was rarely mentioned by uniformed officers, but was independently raised by several governors and specialists. The toll this recognition has taken on particular senior staff (and staff in other units) may be underestimated. Close relationships between staff and prisoners may reach a threshold beyond which the consequences for staff are so severe as to be harmful. The contrast between friendship and containment becomes too stark: social distance makes imprisoning possible. Reducing social distance between staff and prisoners, an overwhelmingly favourable feature of small Unit life, brings home the effects of imprisonment in a way that has shaken one or two staff members. One of the unintended consequences of this change in relationships may have been to raise questions staff do not usually ask about the nature of their job.

The role of specialists

There will be occasions when members of the community will require the support of specialists. In addition to the psychologist, psychiatrist and social worker seconded to work within the Unit and as part of the community, there will be other specialists and groups whose presence would be beneficial. (SPS, 1990a: para 4.3.5.)

Shotts Unit was not intended to operate as a therapeutic or psychiatric facility. The degree of organised specialist support available to the Unit was deliberately limited: 'the challenge was that the Unit should run with the resources of its own staff'. There was no social work presence in the Unit. This was occasionally commented upon unfavourably by prisoners. The Unit was generally not very welcoming to specialists - especially of a therapeutic kind...

The main specialist input came from a part-time clinical psychologist, who had worked at the Unit since its opening. His time (two sessions a week) was bought by the prison department from the National Health Service. Towards the end of the project, he was also working at Shotts main prison, which allowed a more flexible working arrangement with the Unit, as he was regularly 'on hand', next door. The psychologist was felt to play a valuable role in Unit life, but not exclusively in his capacity as a psychologist:

He has a great knack of just sitting back...He can see things happening, as a sort of outsider, that we get caught up in. He makes some great observations and comes out with things that make us question ourselves. He's on good terms with the prisoners.
(Officer)

One or two reservations about the effectiveness of a psychologist's role in the Unit were expressed by prisoners and by some of the staff. One prisoner felt reluctant to call upon his very limited time in the Unit, as he thought others had greater needs. Another (ex-Unit) prisoner felt the psychologist's position was not neutral, or supportive, enough:

He doesn't play any role. He'll give you the impression that he doesn't like the way the Unit is running, that it's not running the way it should be, but he'll not do anything about it. He'll sit and listen, watches - and then he'll go in the back and tell the Governor what he thinks. What else would he be there for? (To help prisoners?) He's there to help the company. The department employ him. Say there's an argument about something, the Governor will take him out the back for a coffee, what did you think of that, and he'll give the Governor the benefits of his professional opinion, his problems are all this..tell him the best way they should manage him, get the best out of him. I like him, mind. (Prisoner)

The psychologist saw his main role as providing individual support for prisoners and management support for staff. He did this in two ways. First, he saw individual prisoners when approached by them, or by staff with particular concerns. Second, he regularly attended the weekly meetings and other (eg. special) meetings, and was able to provide an additional 'neutral' perspective on problems and situations as they arose. He played a central role in the assessment process, and in reviews. He saw himself as offering complementary skills to those offered by staff. He also saw himself as informally monitoring what went on in the Unit. His low-key approach was welcomed by prisoners. Some of the staff were uncertain about his role, as they knew very little about what he actually did with prisoners, and felt uncomfortable with the low level of feedback from his individual work. His great quality, in the eyes of the staff, was his robustness; he played a good game of football, and he was involved in incident command teams - two important measures of his credibility as a Unit resource.

Other specialist input to the Unit was provided by five women education staff, and various chaplains. Education was seen as a central aspect of the personal development process in the Unit, and many of the prisoners were involved in formal education courses. The self-discipline and self-determination inherent in education was felt to be an essential opportunity. Importantly, it was an area of self-development which could realistically be carried through to the mainstream.

A highly valued chaplain to the Unit had recently retired, leaving a gap which was still to be filled. Other individuals from a variety of churches and organisations visited the Unit regularly, and were a welcome source of friendship and support:

Anyone else who takes an interest in the Unit really provides these guys with new faces and something to look forward to. (Officer)

Education are great - they just come in and teach you. Priests, they're alright, too. But their hand are tied, what can they do? Tell you to keep your chin up and soldier on. (Unit prisoner)

Opportunities and responsibility in the Unit

The central theme of personal development (see above) is a difficult area to evaluate, given the informal level of much of the work and the broad meaning implicit in such a term. There are three main ways in which personal development could be identified and assessed. One was work: personal projects to which individual prisoners were committed for a minimum of 20 hours per week. The others were family/outside contacts and responsibility.

All prisoners were sooner or later involved in and committed to a project or in some cases several projects of their own choosing. In reality, some prisoners chose more freely than others. In some cases, suggestions were made by staff or projects were inherited by new arrivals following a departure. The projects included making garden gnomes; making chess boards, tables and pieces; running a canteen, carpentry, picture-framing, leather work, working with stained glass, soft toys, fish-keeping, and the maintenance of a greenhouse. Each of the projects depended on acquiring a certain amount of training and securing the support of staff and the necessary equipment. Some of the projects would not be transferable into mainstream establishments on leaving the Unit, but all involved the acquisition and application of skills, a certain level of commitment and the production of saleable goods. If they had talents, the Unit was there to facilitate and encourage these.

Other opportunities revolved around the quality of the contact they could have with outside, particularly families - contact which had been superficial or in some cases non-existent prior to their stay in the Unit.

Family and community links

One of the main features of the Unit is its visits facilities. They are seen by management as offering both the main opportunity for self-determination within the Unit and by prisoners as the main source of personal support. Prisoners are allowed to receive up to three visits 'sessions' per week (a session was a morning or afternoon). Individual prisoners who exceed this level are allowed to, provided the frequency of visits does not become 'excessive'. Visits are taken in a specially designed area of the Unit, between the main concourse area and the administration corridor. Visitors are not allowed to pass through the grille gate separating the concourse areas from the rest of the Unit, except on open days and first visits to the Unit. The visits room is large and comfortable, with seats arranged like a bar. Music can be played, and staff supervision is moderate. All of the prisoners talked favourably about visits, many illustrating how such facilities had enabled them to renew, improve or maintain relationships, with partners, parents, children and others. Families were

much less anxious about their sons or partners, particularly as staff communicated with them and got to know them well:

The visiting facilities, in particular, allow a prisoner to have contact with his family in the most meaningful way we have got within the long-term system at the moment. (Governor grade)

One prisoner had married in the Unit. A celebration party and buffet had been arranged, and both the prisoner himself and his wife spoke highly of the staff who had facilitated the day.

Visits were seen as a 'key control factor', one of the major incentives for complying with Unit rules and expectations. One of the problems with the centrality of visits to the regime was the sometimes tenuous nature of outside relationships for some prisoners. Families could not always meet expectations and differences between individuals and their visiting patterns were occasionally stark. Not having outside support would make survival in the Unit much harder. On the other hand, not all prisoners used their full entitlement, particularly once they had got used to the idea that visits were possibly too frequent. Visits that were meaningful inevitably meant that they could also be painful and problematic:

I find visits very difficult. If you've got no future, you cannot offer anything. You don't feel in a position to contribute in way that is natural. I just look at my sentence...friendships are OK. Here you can let more barriers down during visits, you're on your own, you can tend to fantasise for the duration about the reality - I find that too hard. As long as you're getting a visit, someone coming up to see you, staff and management think everything's fine. But they don't know nothing. As soon as you take measures...you withdraw from it, then you get all the pressure, you feel guilty as if you've done something wrong, this was a visitor to the Unit and they were helping you, but they don't understand the pressure it was putting you under. (Prisoner)

Outside visitors to the Unit included a fairly constant stream of 'official visitors' consisting of governors, academics, journalists, nurses, sports teams and individuals with an interest in prisons. Many of the visitors were from overseas. Staff and prisoners felt that visitors brought an important dimension to Unit life, providing a bridge between themselves and the outside world, and providing a welcome relief from the routine and monotony of prison life. Outside interest counteracted to some extent the feeling expressed by long-term prisoners that they have been forgotten about. Such visitors were often extremely well received. Prisoners in the Unit were keen to carry out this task themselves and preferred not to have visitors 'taken off' them by staff. One prisoner had recently initiated a 'Friends of the Unit' scheme whereby official visitors would be invited to befriend the Unit and visit on a regular basis.

The negative aspects of access by outside visitors were the transitory nature of their interest, the constant requirement for prisoners to communicate with them to no future end, the feeling of being

invaded and 'on show', the high concentration of visitors with associations with the prison service and the superficial impression gleaned of the Unit in one short visit.

Responsibility

Apart from the physical facilities and relative comfort of the Unit, one of the most valuable aspects of life provided by the Unit was felt to be a certain amount of power/responsibility for the prisoner, crucially the power (however limited) to negotiate for himself both his relationships with people outside (as outlined above) and important aspects of his life inside. This fundamental 'privilege' was the hinge upon which respect, responsibility and human dignity could be made real:

The main opportunity for a prisoner here is that he can be an individual. He can get his identity back. We can live with individuals surfacing here. (Governor grade)

The most important aspect of the regime is the relative freedom within the Unit, you can make decisions for yourself, have responsibility to get through the day without having a structure you have to conform to, that's new to me. You can be an individual in here, the opportunity to do something different. You learn that it's easy to make decisions, but hard to stick to them, have to get your priorities right. The TV can steal your time. That wears off. (Prisoner)

An element of choice and self-determination against the backdrop of a mainstream system to which they will return, was identified as the unique contribution of Shotts Unit. The limits were realistic, yet difficult to maintain at the right level, straddling between absolute responsibility ('Responsibility is about imposing *your own* limits') and survival within a custodial environment which maintains an essential level of control.

4. Shotts Unit and The Mainstream

The main aim of the Unit was 'to return prisoners to the mainstream better able to cope and make progress towards release' (SPS, 1990a: para 2.3.4.). The Unit had to be 'anchored' to the mainstream and to mainstream practice by 'a clear definition of regime boundaries'. No 'drifting' away from the mainstream framework should occur (para 3.5.).

We were not able to look in any detail at the impact of the Unit's existence on mainstream prisons. This shielded us from some of the power of arguments put forward by some prisoners and staff (and members of the public) who felt that an unjustifiable and disproportionate amount of resources were being channelled towards those who 'least deserve the best facilities', at the expense of prisoners who behaved well, and their families. This appeal was rarely reversed and used as an argument that 'all prisoners should have these things'.

During a long-term prisoners' discussion group on the role of small units held at Saughton prison, to which one of the researchers was invited, prisoners were eager to ask: how was trust or respect established in a prison setting? How were the staff selected? What were the facilities like? What could prisoners do there? Is it fair? Should prisoners be able to jump the queue and go to open conditions ahead of us? How do you expect these prisoners to return to mainstream prisons, where their problems started, where there are orderly rooms and segregation blocks, poor conditions and restricted visits? What sort of hope do they actually have if the future is a return to the mainstream?

Their understandable resentment was tempered by interest. Many Unit prisoners had cut themselves off from their families or had lost all hope of ever circulating with other prisoners in ordinary locations. It was clear that other prisoners in the system were able, willing and deserving of a place in a Unit. They wanted to communicate, be responsible and be respected, just like Unit prisoners. Why could the mainstream not provide these conditions, operate with special meetings and four-groups, particularly in small halls and with long-term prisoners? Why are we not helped; we have problems too? Why is the Unit not full? These were all reasonable questions.

The discussion focused on the needs of prisoners who were accumulating eight or twelve year additions to their already long sentences. The group maintained that there was a serious flaw in the logic of small units if few of the promises made about the mainstream in the light of *Opportunity and Responsibility* were being delivered. It was argued that significant restrictions, for example on home leaves, the location of visits outside the main concourse, and the maintenance of security regulations (such as cell searches) provided an effective motivation to move forwards out of a unit and back into the mainstream system, where progress towards open conditions, parole and home leaves - and release - were possible. The main aim of the Unit was to try to identify people who had lost sight of the future, and to attempt to give them something internally that would help them to cope with the future, even if that future required a further stay in conditions that were poor, and in an environment which was potentially damaging, to family relationships in particular. Examples were given of prisoners in the Unit who had exhibited new ways of dealing with pressure and who were making positive and responsible choices for themselves. Other examples, of prisoners who might simply be keeping a low profile in order to avoid having to face long sentences in mainstream conditions they felt unable to face (with the collusion of staff) were cited as one of the many conflicts between the needs of individuals and the needs of the system, for small units.

Transition from the mainstream

One of the first points raised by prisoners in relation to our research during its initial stages was the difficulty experienced in the transition from conditions of frequent isolation and segregation in the mainstream to the relative 'freedom' of the Unit. Before the research started we were fully aware of the problems of moving on from Units and the readjustment that would be required in moving back to mainstream conditions. What came as more of a surprise was the issue raised by prisoners of the problems of adjusting to the Unit from the mainstream, often from conditions of lock-down:

When I came in, I felt terrified. I went through some really weird feelings. I thought they were doing it to me, I was scared. The stress you feel - it's like looking for a drink of water in a desert and falling into a swimming pool. I was suspicious. I even thought my family were in on it. (Prisoner)

One of the other surprises of the research was how much prisoners wanted to talk about their previous experiences in the mainstream. This went well beyond a wish to describe the conditions in which they had spent the last (in some cases) four or five years, locked up in Peterhead, although this was something they were eager to do. More important in terms of the time it took to relate were the experiences that had led to their isolation in the first place. Although life in the Unit was intended to reverse the process of increasing isolation and destruction their imprisonment had involved, there was no explicit recognition within the unit of the damage (in one case, a serious and brutal assault) that had been done. The future was there to wipe away the past. Particular prisoners expressed some disappointment that they had not been helped to talk about or deal with 'the past':

For me, the Unit is not about preparing people for the mainstream. It's about repairing damage. The worst thing I could go through now would be to have to go back into the mainstream. I'm only about half way through the process of repair. So what the Unit is about, officially, is not what I'm about. Responsibility is about trust. They're repaying a debt. (Prisoner)

This was recognised by one or two staff members but was not discussed often by staff. This was significant as many of the barriers to individuals' progress within the Unit hinged on these aspects of their experience:

What has been vastly underestimated has been the experience of these prisoners before they came to the Unit and just how long it has taken them to come to terms with what actually happened to them. In the light of that we underestimated individuals'...no matter how intelligent they were their ability to come out of that situation and get on with the situation in the Unit and I think we have had to live with that difficulty. Some of them have not been able to get out of that. I am sure you have spoken to them...one guy spent 15 months under a blanket. another guy spent three years locked up 23.5 hours a day. You don't go through that sort of experience and then come into a sort of Unit experience and just adapt to it. In retrospect, I think there should have been an awful lot more strictly organised for them in terms of the projects, in terms of support, in terms of facilities...We should

have had mechanisms ready that people want to be reactive to, because I think coming out of that situation you have got to treat people like that...that's really what I am getting at: the real difficulty of getting people from that situation to think long-term about things. (Specialist)

Moving on from the Unit to the mainstream

[How do you feel about moving on from here?]. Oh terrible. I've only been here a few months, but even the time I've been in here now, going back to the mainstream tomorrow morning would be bad. I think I'd have to go back to the cells first, and have nothing at all, just to get used to it again. It's really a nightmare for everyone in here, leaving here. (Prisoner)

At the time of writing, no prisoner had yet progressed into a 'mainstream' establishment from Shotts Unit in the way that was anticipated by the Planning Group. As indicated earlier, two prisoners had moved on to open conditions. Part of the explanation for this unexpected and controversial move was that these two prisoners were atypical. These were seen as 'soft successes'. The acid test would be a successful transfer direct from the Unit to a mainstream prison. Three prisoners had been placed out of the Unit in a 'backwards' move to Peterhead. All three saw themselves as 'Unit failures', and one in particular saw the move as a shattering blow to his newly established relationship with his ten year old son. This prisoner has however recently been offered a place in Greenock where visits will be reasonably easy for him, and he will be in association within a fairly relaxed regime. Two prisoners were considered to be almost ready for a move. One was being offered a move to semi-open conditions, and had spoken with the governor of this establishment formally about this possibility. A second was being gently introduced to the idea of a move to a top hall in a large mainstream prison. In both cases, discussions were slow, no direct pressure was exerted, and visits to the proposed establishments were being arranged. Securing the consent of the prisoner was felt to be an essential precondition to a meaningful and successful move. One or two of the other prisoners occasionally expressed a wish to move. Many expressed some dissatisfaction with the uncertainty over the length of time they would spend in the Unit.

Most of the staff and prisoners agreed with the official statement that the main purpose of the Unit was to prepare prisoners for eventual release back into the mainstream:

Well, that was certainly flagged up as being an objective of the Unit. It was certainly clear in everybody's minds that what we didn't want the Unit to do was silt up in the way the BSU did, simply having people who were there, and finding they were on to a good thing and staying put until they were released, and then there being one vacancy in the Unit every two years - everybody felt that that would be a deplorable waste of a resource. The main thing was to get those up to twelve prisoners out of Peterhead, and beyond that, I think realistically, people said they would just have to wait and see how it developed. (Governor grade)

They are constantly reminded that that's what we are in business for. (Officer)

The resistance to moves into the mainstream was felt to be justifiable, and would only be overcome by a sensitively and openly *managed transfer*, where visits and discussions were arranged, some choice could be exercised, the prisoner was fully consulted and the time was felt by all concerned to be right. There had to be something on offer in mainstream prisons (such as regular home leaves, equally good visiting facilities/arrangements and more opportunities to mix socially) that were not on offer in the Unit: 'We have to offer them a system they can cope with. We can't offer them that at the moment'.

Ways in which the Unit might help to prepare them for life in mainstream prisons included helping them to find confidence in themselves as individuals, helping them to make rational choices and to accept unsavoury aspects of prison life as 'necessary hurdles that they must leap if they are going to progress to liberty'. The time in Shotts was felt to allow them to 'realise the futility of protesting' in destructive ways and to visualise a positive future for themselves, and then set about achieving it:

I see the purpose of the Unit that after any given amount of time in the unit a person would be further on in a sentence than they would have been if they had remained in the situation that they were in. I see that operating at lots of different levels. I see it operating at a personal level - I see people more able to cope psychologically with the fact of being in prison. I see that as crucially important, and that is in terms of, I am not going to escape, I am not going to take hostages, I am not going to be assaultive towards staff; or that they are going to be able to operate within the limits of the fact that they are in prison. Not necessarily that they are going to open conditions. I can say for some people that the next step is that they get a B category and they move to Shotts mainstream. It might not be better facilities, it might not be an easier regime, but the fact is that it is a progress in their sentence....There has to be something we can say to prisoners: at the end of your three years this is what you are going to get...we don't get that. So it is a very difficult situation for the management and the staff in the Unit. We are dealing with people who do not know what their future is going to be. (Specialist)

There was no agreement with the view that Units could be criticised for providing the best resources for the most badly-behaved prisoners, at the expense of prisoners who behaved well. Most of the staff felt that in justifying the Unit's existence, cost was irrelevant. Human dignity, with secure custody in return, was priceless.

5. Conclusions: Unit achievements and lessons for the future

Measuring 'success'

The unit actually provides a context in which people needn't be afraid of being seen to help people. This is very much more difficult in a big mainstream prison, so the time, the attention, the courtesy that can be given to prisoners is manifestly greater in the unit. I think that the staff who work in the unit, many of whom take away

positive knowledge and skills that will benefit them when they are dealing with prisoners in large units. So I would hate to be the person who decried us having units, because they are a sort of least worst option in an imperfect world. Some of the possibilities that have been offered by units, and the way that staff feel they can work with prisoners whilst maintaining security but in a more useful and positive way, some of those lessons can be replicated in the mainstream jails... If the good lessons that are taken from units are going to be properly supported by the establishment, they have got to accept the consequences, financial and otherwise, of doing good on a wide scale. If they did that, they wouldn't need small units, because they wouldn't have so many intractable prisoners. (Governor grade)

Shotts Unit has many positive features and undoubtedly provides a valuable service both to the Scottish Prison Service, to individual prisoners and to staff. At its best it is facilitating change and personal development in conditions which are consistent with the respect and dignity of those who live there. It is probably one of the few establishments to actually live up to the demands of the Scottish Prison Service's mission statement. How far the Unit is and has been 'successful' is a vexed question which we shall try to address in this concluding section. Its very real achievements can be summarised as follows:

- high levels of staff/prisoner satisfaction
- low level of assaults on staff (nil to date) and prisoners
- low staff sickness rates (lower than average)
- low number of prisoner assaults (two minor assaults to date),
- active level of self-determination and personal development
- progress made towards release/recategorisation
- relieving the mainstream of difficult prisoners
- the quality and quantity of family visits
- prisoners' sense of relative liberty, personal autonomy and trust.

There are other perhaps more indirect measures of success which the unit appeared to have achieved and which members included in their own assessments of how successful it was. They included:

- the high levels of positive communication with visitors
- a favourable view by mainstream staff of the Unit
- a high (increasing) application rate to work in the Unit
- good publicity and openness to the media
- the ability to contain individual mistakes and difficulties.

However, there was a range of difficulties both within the unit and more particularly in its relationship with the mainstream. We saw these problems as the key issues to arise from our

research both in terms of wider management issues and the need for support and guidance for those currently in the unit. They can be summarised as follows:

- i. *The mainstream context.* Prisoners were in many cases not prepared to return to mainstream conditions. This was understandable both in terms of past experience and present aims. Their time in the unit both raised expectations of what prison life could be like yet simultaneously led to a potential stagnation. Unit time was 'dead time' in terms of their release. 'Progress' was not necessarily in this sense achievable whilst in the unit.
- ii. *The marginalisation of units.* Related to the above; Once the 'trouble-makers' were removed from the mainstream, they and their units could be forgotten about. Staff, managers and prisoners felt neglected by the mainstream.
- iii. *Staffing issues.* The high staff-prisoner ratio was not felt to be necessary to an effective unit regime and appeared to rule out the possibility of translation of good practice into the mainstream. Staff and prisoners did raise the issue of labelling; this was perceived as significant on leaving the unit. Staff morale and motivation was low in places. The level and type of specialist support in the unit was relatively low. Small units seemed to take their toll on governor grades.
- iv. *The notion of community.* This was a key objective according to the Planning Group, and yet carried less weight with those in the unit. Not everyone felt that a 'genuine community' was a realistic or desirable aim. There was a consensus that the unit fell short of a community in several fundamental ways.
- v. *Lack of sentence planning.* Again, the low level of structured personal development and the limited sentence planning was not a clear 'problem'. How important these aspects of unit life are in relation to its other aims and the uncertain futures of many of its members remained questionable. Individual prisoners had found exits from the unit that were not foreseen.
- vi. *Unresolved histories.* Prisoners repeated the message to us that their histories, their feelings of anger and their experiences of conflict were still live issues. 'The past' still marred relationships with each other and with staff.

Many of those we spoke to, both in and out of the unit, felt that improvements should be concentrated in the mainstream and that units were a necessary but limited response to a general problem. Most thought that additional units could be carved out of existing mainstream facilities.

Some of those we spoke to thought that more units should exist, both for different types of prisoners and for those emerging from units like Shotts with nowhere viable to move on to:

To achieve some notion of the quality of life requires a range of different regimes, and a flexibility on the part of staff and governors in dealing with individuals.
(Governor grade)

Realistically, it was difficult for us to evaluate Shotts Unit in isolation. Arguably the most crucial issue is where prisoners go to from the Unit. By implication, an additional question is how long it is reasonable or beneficial for them to remain in a unit such as Shotts. It is likely that each individual's requirements are different, and, to some extent, unpredictable.

Being in a Unit helped prisoners in terms of their release, developing their interests, encouraging them to relate co-operatively with others, exercising self-control and allowing them space in which to consider their lives and their futures. It helped them less directly in terms of coping with the mainstream - its stated aim. In some ways, surviving in the unit was thought to make coping with the mainstream much harder. Whilst the Unit made some headway in facilitating individual responsibility and dignity, prisoners anticipated a further assault on these 'temporary privileges' once they returned elsewhere. At best, the Unit turned around a negative spiral and gave prisoners 'breathing space' for long enough for them to realise they had no choice but to keep on track, whatever they faced, with a view to release. This they would have to do even with the loss of all that they had valued in the Unit - better quality visits, the freedom to develop interests and hobbies, the right to be an individual. These unique aspects of small unit life would be lost in return for occasional home leaves in the future, and a release date.

Lessons for the mainstream

There were several aspects of life in the unit which staff and prisoners thought could be transferred to the mainstream. Many of the best features of the unit (its physical facilities, high staff numbers and project opportunities) could not realistically be reproduced elsewhere given the restriction on resources/staffing levels that were expected. There were however important lessons to be learned:

Given the will, yes. I think given a good day you can see officers and prisoners sitting down and thrashing out issues which people are on report for. There is no governor's orderly room in the unit. Here we are dealing with supposedly the most difficult people in the Scottish prison system without an orderly room. Right, let's try it. There is an issue there about mutual respect and about dealing with a personal challenge in a way which is productive and positive for both parties concerned. Now, I think the unit on a good day can do that and I think that is a lesson that should be learned. Why not pick the top end hall, say in Saughton and say, right, no orderly room, we have to work it out some other way?

(Specialist)

Apart from dispensing with orderly rooms, unit members thought that having smaller, more manageable units within mainstream establishments would facilitate responsibility, choice and better staff-prisoner relationships. Other lessons could include allowing some profit from activities; increasing possibilities for taking small, calculated risks; extending similar visiting arrangements to other establishments; improving staff-prisoner relationships and treating prisoners humanely and with dignity. These aspects of unit life offered long-term prisoners a future.

An alternative way: custody with human dignity and mutual respect.

The central role of Shotts Unit within the Scottish Prison Service is to provide an alternative facility for dealing with those prisoners who, for whatever reasons, cannot or will not cope with what the prison system demands of them. It is not possible to show why certain prisoners become defined as 'difficult' or how far either their personal histories, their individual characteristics or the situation and environment they have encountered in prison, contribute to the difficulties they present. Their isolation and the levels of security required to house these prisoners in the mainstream as it currently operates is costly and damaging. Meeting the problem reactively and with force created 'the monster' of a Peterhead lockdown regime. Shotts Unit provides a way out of this repressive cycle. Trust and responsibility replace protective clothing, riot shields and total physical control. The dignity of the individual prisoner, and that of the staff, can be returned. Illegitimate force is replaced by legitimate control. A Unit such as this is in one sense a good test of the mission statement proclaimed by the Scottish Prison Service. The ultimate test of that mission statement lies in its implementation throughout the mainstream. However, in Shotts Unit prisoners are treated, to a larger extent than seems possible elsewhere in the system, with humanity and dignity. It is not an easy regime. Prisoners found it challenging, painful and at times, psychologically brutal. For some staff, the challenge (and pain) of the job, when it works, is that 'prisoners become people, they behave responsibly, and then you end up beginning to think you shouldn't be locking them up'.

A primary function is to provide opportunities for prisoners which are not available in the mainstream. It removes 'intractable problems' and interrupts destructive patterns. The Unit also makes up for deficiencies and mistakes made in mainstream prisons. These destructive patterns may 'belong' to the individual prisoner - or to the system, which responded to such individuals with punitive regimes. It also provides a temporary refuge for individuals serving extremely long sentences. One of its major tasks is to present the human face of staff to prisoners who had seen all grades of staff at their most brutal. Suspicious and defensive prisoners are particularly difficult to manage.

When Shotts Unit is compared to life in mainstream prisons, it is infinitely preferable. As things stand in the mainstream, prisoners in the Unit will be returned to a system which falls far short of

the ideals envisioned by the Shotts Planning Group. How far that shortfall undoes the work achieved by prisoners and staff in the Unit was not a question we were able to address.

In conclusion, in order for Shotts Unit to meet its objectives there is a need for more viable ('meaningful progression') mainstream moves. The Unit calls into question aspects of the mainstream system, without the possibility of such progression. In its favour - despite this problem of context - the Unit may be cost-effective across the system and prisoner and staff (job) satisfaction is high. In terms of a comparison between prisoners' behaviour in the mainstream and their behaviour in the Unit, it is undoubtedly a success. However, the existence of the Unit is a limited response to a more widespread problem. Other 'prisoners with difficulties' are still in the mainstream, some in unacceptable conditions. Above all, lessons must be learned from such units and translated across to the mainstream in order to prevent circumstances arising that make special provision necessary.

PART III CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The two units that have been the subject of this report are in many ways quite different from each other, despite fulfilling very similar functions within the Scottish long-term prison system. The Barlinnie Unit has a very long, distinguished and, at times, notorious history extending over the past two decades, with perhaps one of the only disappointments for those who established it being that such a relatively small number of prisoners over the years have been able to take advantage of its unique facilities and opportunities. Its full history remains to be written and surely deserves to be - before the few surviving records disappear and memories fade. Shotts Unit, on the other hand, is the most recent and only purpose-built small unit within SPS for the handling of prisoners who have found it difficult to cope with the conditions and prospects of long (and often indeterminate) sentences of imprisonment. In its short life so far, Shotts Unit has had its share of problems, in the difficult task of implementing and 'bedding down' a very specific regime package, in a unique architectural setting and with a new group of prisoners and staff. Towards the end of our research period it seemed to have reached a more stable situation, helped fortuitously by the new hope offered to two prisoners by the recalculation of their release dates, that gave back to one of them at a stroke several years of freedom.

Our accounts of the main features of each unit and their links with the rest of the Scottish prison system have been presented in Parts I and II of the report, each of which concluded with a summary of findings and recommendations relating to the individual units. Particularly as these reports were written independently by the main fieldworkers concerned, it is perhaps significant to note the extent to which there are many similarities in the observations and recommendations made.

In this final part of the report we shall attempt to draw together some of the main themes to have emerged from our research and present some tentative conclusions about the future role of small units in the Scottish Prison Service.

1. Unit Achievements

At the outset, we must acknowledge and reiterate the very many positive achievements of each unit. Not only have they fulfilled the first two objectives set out for all small units in *Opportunity and Responsibility* (SPS, 1990b: 59), by providing 'an additional option for the location of prisoners who present management problems, or the potential for management problems, within the mainstream prison system' and holding such prisoners in secure custody, but they have done this by providing a quality of life for prisoners and staff that is found nowhere else in the Scottish (or, we might add, in the English) long-term prison system. Here, in these units, if nowhere else, the SPS

mission statement comes very close to being a reality instead of merely well-meaning rhetoric. There can also be little doubt that the other central objective set out in *Opportunity and Responsibility* has been achieved in BSU and Shotts, each in its own way:

To provide a range of additional opportunities geared to the personal development of such prisoners within a small, supportive environment. (SPS, 1990b: 59)

Virtually all the staff and prisoners we interviewed in the course of our research were unanimous in agreeing that unit conditions and relationships were exceptional in their experience.

Although our terms of reference talked about unit 'evaluation', we quickly came to the view that it would not be very helpful to attempt to develop complex statistical measures of 'success' (or 'failure'). The fact that the level of interpersonal violence in the units - whether between prisoner and prisoner or prisoners and staff - has generally been so low, indeed almost infinitesimal, when compared to the stormy histories of violence and aggression against people and property exhibited by the majority of unit prisoners in earlier parts of their sentence, seems to us to speak for itself. The reduction of pain, suffering and stress that has patently been achieved by the units' existence needs little further justification - either by a detailed financial 'cost-effectiveness' exercise or as part of the ethical debate about the provision of the best conditions for arguably the 'least deserving' of prisoners. The higher daily running costs of the units, compared to the mainstream, pale into insignificance when balanced in the scale against the financial and especially the personal costs to all those involved in a hostage situation or roof-top demonstration. Similarly, we found no evidence of prisoners trying to manipulate their way into the units in order to take advantage of the facilities.

Another major achievement of the units - in view of the prison histories of those who are in them - is hopefully to challenge and scotch once for all the notion of 'difficult prisoners'. The fact that these long-term prisoners, with often quite horrendous backgrounds as aggressors and victims within the prison system, can and do clearly survive and even flourish in the small unit environment without recourse to their former aggressive behaviour must surely confirm that problems of individual violence and disruptive behaviour in prisons stem mainly from the *situational* elements of the prison experience - especially the physical conditions, restrictions on personal liberty and the patterns of interaction within the prison culture, rather than from any inherent tendencies towards 'evil' within the individual prisoner's psyche.

Perhaps a final, more cautionary, comment in the context of the very real achievements and success of the units is that this seems to have been at the cost of personal and sometimes professional career damage to some governors and senior managers. It ought, in our view, to be a serious cause of concern that governors find it one of the most stressful (as well as at times most challenging and rewarding)

postings to be in charge of one of these small units, holding prisoners who have posed some of the most difficult management problems for them or their colleagues in the mainstream. If we are to highlight particular recommendations for action, then one important one would be that SPS should provide greater support and active encouragement for governors in these very sensitive units, and should hesitate before endorsing political or media priorities about what is or is not important in the treatment of these prisoners.

2. Rethinking the Concept of 'Community'

We fully appreciate the significance of the 'community' ideal in the establishment and development of these two units. Historically, in the case of BSU, this meant a 'therapeutic community', whereas for Shotts Unit, nearly twenty years later, the Planning Group envisaged the creation of a community based on a distinctive pattern of participation and collective decision-making:

The community concept can only work where there is a visible, genuine sharing of both decision making and responsibility The management style for the Unit should be described as consultative/participative management. On those issues where it is imperative that the Governor makes the decision because it is an area of crucial accountability, then the most he will be able to do is to consult the community. In other areas the Governor will wish to ask the community to participate in the decision making process. (SPS, 1990a: para 4.3.1)

These distinctions were probably too subtle and the expectations of the 'community' too great to be likely to work to the satisfaction of all parties concerned - Governor, staff and prisoners. The role of the Governor in this respect has led to problems within Shotts Unit - although not so serious as to threaten the breakdown of the 'community' - in a weaker sense of the concept. The balance between *participative* and *consultative* management is difficult to get right in the most stable communities, so it is not surprising that it creates confusion and difficulties in the more intense context of the 'total community' of prison small units. We are inclined towards the view that it may perhaps be time to dispense with the dominant notion and language of the 'community' ideal - or, at the least, to redefine its meaning and application in small units. We are certainly not intending to deny the very real significance of the underlying *conflicts* at the heart of much disruptive behaviour by prisoners and their inability to cope or unwillingness to tolerate the conditions and uncertainties of a long sentence of imprisonment; but to overuse the rhetoric of 'community' may serve only to confuse and/or raise expectations that are unlikely to be met. Among the more surprising findings of our research was the way in which BSU - which to many outsiders and visitors may appear to lack many of the essential ingredients of community living - is perceived by most of its members (both prisoners and staff) as a *true community*; whereas Shotts Unit, which gives all outward appearance of a community in action - from its physical design to its many shared social activities -

was almost universally denied the status of a 'community' by unit members. If the terminology is retained, then the essence of what is desirable and/or possible for a small unit 'community' needs to be disentangled from the almost casual rhetoric of the slogan. The purposes and powers of the 'community meeting' (interestingly not a term used to describe the weekly Tuesday unit meeting in Shotts) need to be more carefully specified. The limits and constraints of the 'empowerment' accorded to prisoners and staff need to be clarified.

Apart from any rethinking of the scope and function of unit meetings, the wider social and personal implications of the community ideal also need to be carefully reviewed. Arguably, the success of any community - experimental or otherwise - lies in getting the balance right between *collective responsibility and sentiments* and *personal privacy and autonomy*. Too much emphasis upon communal aspects (whether by management or prison culture) may be at the unacceptable cost of the loss of privacy and individual autonomy - whether we are talking about the physical design of cell accommodation and communal living areas, or visiting arrangements. The 'community', as experienced at BSU, clearly coexists with a high degree of personal privacy and autonomy - which may appear so great on occasions as to deny any real meaning to the community, *per se*. The balance may have tilted too far. In Shotts Unit, on the other hand, perhaps further thought needs to be given to the provision of more 'private spaces' and the enhancement of personal autonomy, as a necessary counterbalance to the dominant community ethos, design features and organisational/social structures that emphasise communal living and decision-making.

3. Coping with 'Doing Time'

Most people's knowledge and experience of imprisonment is necessarily of a 'snapshot in time' variety. Indeed, even many prison staff are directly involved with only a relatively small segment (or several, often disconnected, segments) of a long-term prisoner's sentence. Our own involvement as short-term researchers, over a period of a few months in a single year, brought home to us what is probably one of the most important areas of failure of small units - the failure to recognise or adequately address the fundamental significance of the prisoners' past (and almost entirely negative) experience of the prison system. Arguably, coming to terms with this is the most vital part of their adjustment to unit life, which should also be linked more directly to the ultimate justification and overriding objective of small units - 'to return prisoners to the mainstream better able to cope and to make progress towards release' (SPS, 1990b: 59). It is by no means coincidental that 'doing time' is the prison culture's way of referring to serving a sentence of imprisonment. Others, in different contexts, have captured the significance of time - the link between a person's experience of his or her past, present and future - poetically:

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.

(T.S.Eliot, *Four Quartets*, 'Burnt Norton: I')

The essentially unstructured and formally 'undemanding' nature of the BSU regime means that prisoners may be better able to cope with the transition from mainstream segregation and isolation. In Shotts Unit there is greater ambivalence and genuine differences of opinion among community members about how best to facilitate a prisoner's adaptation to the totally different environment and relationships of the unit, compared with what has gone before. We recommend that more systematic attention needs to be given to ways of easing the transition from mainstream to small unit - perhaps by allowing this to be done in each prisoner's own time - providing that support, both formal and informal, is readily available when and if necessary. Enabling prisoners to come to terms with their previous prison experiences and integrating them with their present conditions of life in a small unit in order to cope with an often unknown future is probably the most important task for any unit to undertake.

4. Marginalisation and Personal Development

Quite closely related to the key problem (identified above) of integrating unit prisoners' experiences of imprisonment - past, present and future - is the need to recognise the risk that the units' achievements in 'system' terms (i.e. providing an additional option for those who have presented management problems in the mainstream) may be at the cost of 'marginalising' the units vis-a-vis the rest of the system and thereby offering very little clear sense of direction to the prisoners, who may feel somewhat isolated in a backwater when they may want to progress more quickly into the main channel towards release. The personal regeneration that is possible for many prisoners in the sheltered environment of a small unit has at some point to face up to the ultimate challenge of re-entry to the harsher realities of the mainstream - 'better able to cope and make progress towards release' (SPS, 1990b: 59).

Neither of the units we studied had a very obvious or structured programme of personal development - which we see as a necessary but not sufficient ingredient for 'meaningful progression' towards release. Some may think that BSU has gone so far down the road of individual autonomy, and freedom for prisoners to 'do their own thing', that it is difficult to see how a more structured programme of personal development could be incorporated into its current ethos. In this situation the widely recognised problem of 'siltage' in BSU remains one without any easy or very apparent

solution. Individually negotiated and tailor-made 'exits' from the unit seem to be the main strategy for introducing some movement into the system and creating vacancies for prisoners whose needs and problems are currently not being met in an appropriate fashion.

Similarly, but for perhaps different reasons, Shotts Unit did not yet appear (at the time of our research) to have delivered the *structural* programme of personal development that was envisaged and expected by the Planning Group to be one of the main features that would distinguish it from other units. This may well change as the full implications of sentence planning work their way through to the long-term prisoners in the small units. The theory underlying the provision of opportunities for personal development in Shotts Unit certainly sounds impressive:

This proposed ethos is based on an 'opportunities model' where opportunities or options for self-development are offered. The role of staff in this model is as facilitators to respond with support and assistance where prisoners wish it. The role of the activity programme is to require of the prisoner commitment to take the first step which should lead to an increasing take up of the opportunities for facilitator support. (SPS, 1990a: para 4.4)

There were, however, a number of flaws in the practical application of this model. Not least among these was the quite unrealistic notion that the framework of a prisoner's development plan should be worked out with him in advance, as part of the assessment procedure *prior to entering the Unit* - thus totally ignoring the huge problems of transition and adaptation required of a prisoner moving, for example, from lock-down in Peterhead to the unimagined freedom (at least in his prison world) of the Shotts Unit.

In some ways a 'personal development plan' could be likened to a map that should enable a prisoner to make his way from his own particular starting point to a desired destination. There has to be direction and purpose to his journey, and plenty of 'watering stations' along the way. Unfortunately, in many cases, the necessary sense of direction and the ultimate destination (not to mention the uncertainty of the time available for the journey) are often outside the direct control of the prisoner himself. Our comments (see Part I, above) about the vital need to reform the parole and life licence provisions in the Scottish system highlight one of the major uncertainties surrounding the direction and timing of so many long-term prison sentences. Until there is much greater linkage and liaison between those in different parts of the decision-making system, then 'personal development' will be seen as a hollow sham.

The combination of indeterminate sentences and the absence of conditions in the mainstream that are acceptable as 'meaningful progression' for so many unit prisoners provides the crucial back-cloth for the continuing debate about the future role of small units and possible lessons for the mainstream to which we now turn.

5. Small Units and Lessons for the Mainstream

Our approach to the question of whether there is a need for more small units in the SPS for prisoners who seem unable or unwilling to come to terms with their sentence without recourse to violence or threats of violence is strongly influenced by the first-hand knowledge that there are still many prisoners who are being kept in conditions of segregation, isolation or 'lock-down' that should not be tolerated even as short-term 'solutions' to the very real problems they pose for prison management.

The opening of a new unit at Saughton Prison, Edinburgh, in 1993 may provide for most of the prisoners who are currently being held in conditions that are intolerable both for them and the prison staff assigned to look after them. If the new unit does not meet the present demand (or need) for such places, the short-term alternatives are either to devise effective ways of releasing the 'siltage' in the existing units (especially BSU), or to provide yet more small units for prisoners of this type.

Looking beyond the immediate needs of the system for alternative provision for those prisoners who behave in a disruptive manner, we are generally persuaded by the medium-term strategy outlined in *Opportunity and Responsibility*, more than two years ago. At the core of this strategy is the need to see small units as *complementary to the mainstream*. One important element of this complementarity is to identify those aspects of small unit regimes that could be applied to the mainstream. Indeed, the final objective for small units, as set down in *Opportunity and Responsibility*, was:

To provide settings within which it is possible to test alternative approaches towards the relationship between prisoners and prison officers, from which lessons may be drawn for the mainstream of the prison system. (SPS, 1990b: 59)

The other important element in this strategy is the development of 'small regimes' in the mainstream, so that there is a greater number of acceptable options for the prisoners currently in small units to move to and from (see SPS, 1990b, Chapter 8).

Whether in designing further dedicated small units or planning 'small regimes' in new or existing establishments - with necessary structural and /or organisational modifications - more needs to be known about precisely which features of small unit regimes/design are responsible for their success in providing an environment for prisoners that is both individually stimulating and collectively free from physical aggression.

The indications from our research about those features that are seen as particularly important by prisoners in the units suggest that they would include good visiting arrangements (although not

necessarily to the full extent of BSU); geographical location; opportunities for individual development; participation in unit decision-making; and much smaller living units, i.e. compared to the large halls in the mainstream establishments. What is not entirely clear is the extent to which a high staff-prisoner ratio is an essential element in the successful running of a small unit or a modified 'small regime'. This is a complex matter, involving professional and personal issues relating to security, safety and conditions of work. It should not, however, be taken for granted that a high staff-prisoner ratio is a *sine qua non* of any regime for long-term prisoners who present threats to order and discipline. In the USA, examples are to be found of 'new generation' prisons (similar in many design features to the purpose built Shotts Unit) being run on 'direct supervision' principles, whereby one officer may be in charge of anywhere from between 20 to 60 or more unlocked prisoners.

Apart from wide consultations being necessary with staff associations, especially on the issue of staffing ratios, perhaps the Prison Survey methodology suggests a way forward for the selective canvassing of long-term prisoner opinion on what they see as essential features of an ordered yet liberating regime.

A final important advantage of developing the strategy of a variety of small regimes within the mainstream system is that it would sever the controversial association between the so-called 'difficult prisoner' and the privileges/facilities currently only available in 'special' [sic] units like Barlinnie and Shotts. Instead there could be a range of regimes and facilities, based on the 'small is preferable' principle, but available for long-term prisoners with a variety of different needs and/or problems, and at different stages of their sentence. The facilities and opportunities available in each regime would not be so dissimilar as to deter movement from one to the other - each would have its own particular advantages and incentives - and hopefully none would carry the label of 'special' or 'last resort' regimes, for difficult or disruptive prisoners.

6. Staff and Specialists

It is a truism that prisoner-staff relationships are probably the single most important element in a successful prison regime. In the important Report of the Control Review Committee in England, *Managing the Long-Term Prison System*, it was stated unequivocally that:

At the end of the day, nothing else that we can say will be as important as the general proposition that relations between staff and prisoners are at the heart of the whole prison system and that control and security flow from getting that relationship right. (Home Office, 1984: para 16)

Similarly, *Opportunity and Responsibility* ended with a fitting acknowledgement of the importance of staff:

We recognise that our staff are the most valuable resource of the Service and they will have a critical role to play in the initiatives outlined. The rewards for staff will lie in enhanced professionalism and greater job satisfaction.

(SPS, 1990b: 64-65)

If the small units of today (and the small regimes in the mainstream of the future) are to take seriously and respond actively to their tasks of easing the transition from segregation to free association, providing meaningful programmes of personal development and preparing prisoners for return to *acceptable* conditions in the mainstream, then prison staff will almost certainly need more support and training for their individual work with prisoners - many of whom will have suffered almost irreparable emotional as well as physical damage during their previous time in prison. In this immensely difficult task, serious consideration should be given to an increased role for specialists - primarily as facilitators of main grade prison officers and middle managers, but also, where deemed appropriate, being involved in personal counselling of individual prisoners at critical stages in their progression through the sentence. Several specialisms may have valuable contributions to make to this facilitating process especially, perhaps, psychologists, social workers, chaplains and teachers/counsellors. The other associated development within SPS which we welcome as entirely desirable is the recruitment and deployment of more women officers who have a special contribution to make towards the 'normalisation' of the prison environment of small units and regimes.

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Innovative Prison Programming

The Barlinnie Prison Special Unit (Glasgow, Scotland), 1973-1994

In the United States, the misbehavior of repeatedly assaultive, disruptive, and violent prison inmates is increasingly addressed through administrative segregation units and "super-max" facilities. The use of 23-hour-a-day confinement is on the rise. Prisoners who find themselves at this end of the carceral continuum are limited to one-hour-a-day outside their cells, or housing. No counseling, no therapy, no conflict resolution is proffered. The cell door slams shut. That's the end of the matter.

In February 1973, the Governor of the Peterhead prison sent Scottish prisoner Jimmy Boyle, 29 years old at the time, to a special unit at Barlinnie Prison. The Governor wrote this about Jimmy Boyle in his notice of referral:

I am firmly of the opinion that this man is so dangerous that he should never, under any circumstances, be liberated from prison and further, despite the assaults and incidents in which he has been involved in the past, he is still, even at this moment, planning further assaults and further incidents. He is liable at any time, if given the slightest opportunity, to attack and kill anybody with whom he is liable to come in contact.

Jimmy Boyle, if in America today, would most likely be found at Marion, Southport, or at one of the federal or state "super-max" prisons that have become commonplace in the past decade. Instead, in a different country and time, he found himself at Barlinnie, the site of a once famous, now defunct prison experiment.

The Barlinnie Special Unit—Its Origin, Purpose, and Program

According to a recent report by psychologist David J. Cooke (1997), the Barlinnie Special Unit opened in 1973 (a year prior to Robert Martinson's infamous dictum that "Nothing Works") as a means to address the rising number of assaults within Scottish prisons. The Special Unit was based on therapeutic community principles, notably that prison violence stems from poor staff-prisoner relations, prison systems generally frustrate prisoners by removing prisoner autonomy, and prisons are inherently stress-

ful, giving rise to prisoner anger and violence. The Special Unit itself centered on the development of community through three types of meetings aimed at preventing and resolving conflict. Weekly meetings focused on routine housekeeping concerns for the Unit. Special meetings were called to resolve conflict through debate and discussion, rather than by physical means. Finally, "four group" meetings were held between two staff members and two prisoners to "indoctrinate" new staff and prisoners into the style and ethos of the regime" and as a smaller unit to resolve specific conflicts. Overall, prison community-imposed sanctions diminished assaultive and disruptive behavior. Several research studies found that critical incidents were reduced dramatically.

Over the 22 year life course of the Unit, only 36 prisoners were in residence. But mostly, they were hard-core, what we now sometimes call "the worst of the worst." Much negative media publicity focused first on the "plush" conditions prisoners in this Unit were alleged to have, and then on the failure and closing of the Unit. Both views were faulty. While prisoners in the Unit had greater visitation rights and other amenities, they were also housed in much tighter space. Conditions were not nearly "plush."

The Lessons of Barlinnie

The Barlinnie Special Unit closed in 1994 at the recommendation of a Scottish Prison Service task force assigned the task of investigating small units. But many lessons were learned. First, limiting prisoner frustration can reduce violence through purposeful, rather than time-consuming, activities. Access to visitors encouraged both a reduction in violence and incentives to change personal behavior. Good prisoner-staff relations had the effect of reducing the capricious use of authority, virtually eliminating "face-saving" violence. And, the Unit manifested the importance of management structures that affirm staff morale.

Interestingly, the demise of the Barlinnie Special Unit was neither negative publicity nor inmate violence. Instead, the end came more routinely. "The regime did not fail," psychologist Cooke notes, "it gradually disintegrated. Prisoners, and perhaps

staff, spent too long in the regime. Prisoners were allowed to disengage from even the tenacious community base of the regime, new prisoners perceived non-involvement as the norm and the control function of community meetings was lost." Furthermore, Cooke concludes:

Failure to comply with fundamental obligations in the regime, such as attending community meetings, went unchallenged. There was a gradual loss of staff skilled in challenging prisoners, new staff lacked appropriate role models and were unclear about how to challenge but also when it was appropriate to challenge. The morale of new staff dropped as the image of the Unit failed to match the actuality.

Conclusion

When prison administrators, or prison systems, tackle problems associated with prison misbehavior, including the offending behavior itself, they can take two philosophy-based approaches. One, of course, is punitive in nature, and this is the course most American prison systems have taken. The other is rehabilitative or restorative in nature, a method of looking at the problem instead of simply locking it down. Between these two extremes are a range of possible alternatives. But, these possibilities are rarely described or discussed. And, particularly for assaultive and violent offenders, the American prison system seems to have lost interest in seeing what could be done. The Barlinnie experiment is notable not just for its bold efforts at working with violent offenders, but also for the routine concerns that guided it, and that contributed to its downfall. Barlinnie remains—in its origins as well as its outcome—a realistic possibility, not an idealistic daydream, for any prison system that chooses to replicate it.

Selected References

For readers who wish to pursue a deeper appreciation of the Barlinnie Special Unit, the following resources offer a comprehensive examination of its policy, programming, and research perspectives. Boyle, J. *A Sense of Freedom*. Edinburgh: Corgene Publishing Limited (1977).

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SUBSTANCE ABUSE, from page 95

ples has decreased, with the exception of this past year when testing increased by approximately 15,000 tests and positive samples increased by 17. (For a four-year overview of the Massachusetts experience, see the chart on p. 95.)

More important still are the trends developing within the agency, particularly in the community corrections division. Escapes are down dramatically, hitting an all time low of 12 in 1996 (down from a high of 161 in 1990); incidents of violence are few and far between; program participation in such areas as violence reduction, life skills, substance abuse, and basic education are up; and in the last two random institutional shakedown (where every inmate in the population was tested for substance abuse) no positives were reported.

Substance abuse testing, sanctioning, and treatment intervention is a program-orientation that has the potential for disrupting the offender's cycle of crime and reducing recidivism. It is imperative that all public and private criminal justice agencies serving offender populations adopt these substance abuse guidelines. It will not come easy. Good things never do!

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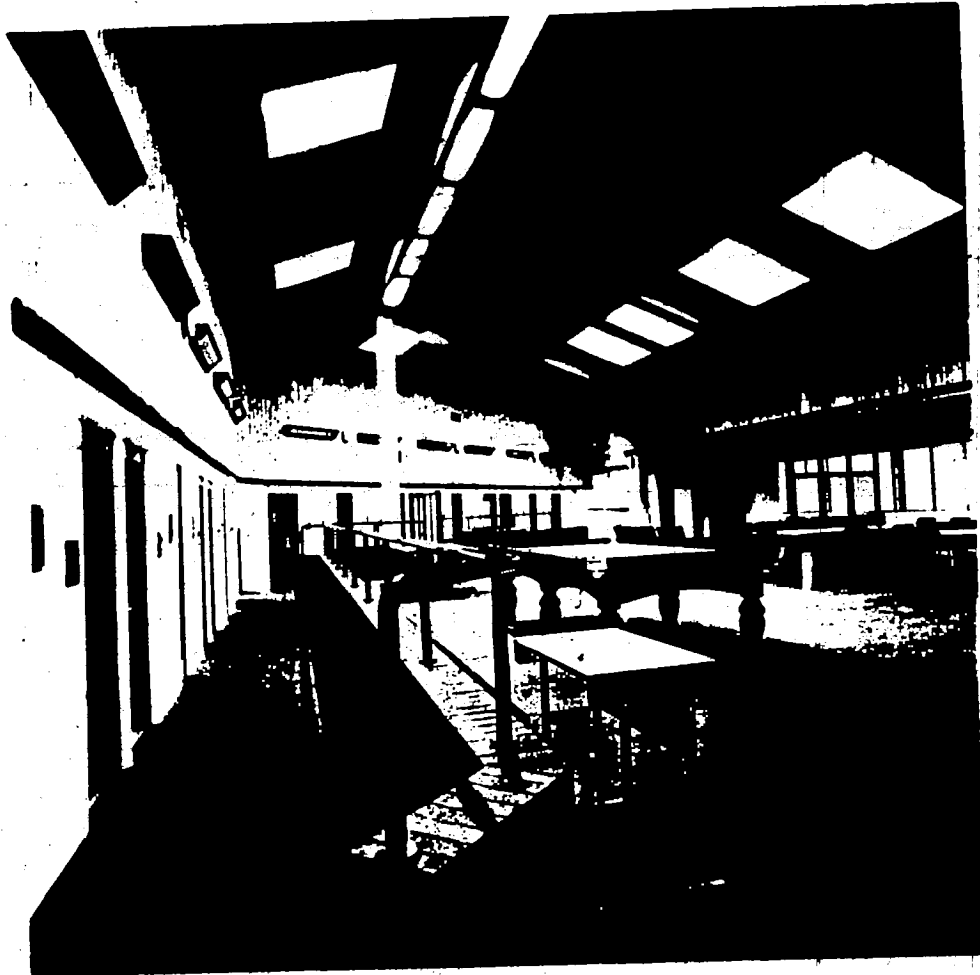
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SHOTTS UNIT



Since April 1990 staff and prisoners have worked and lived in a modern, purpose built facility which exhibits many of the physical improvements planned for most of the mainstream prisons.

The Unit is an additional national maximum security location for adult male long term prisoners who have identified themselves as having difficulties which in turn have caused them to present management challenges.

STAFF SELECTION

With the exception of the Governor and Deputy Governor all staff are volunteers. Staff, with a reasonable length of service, are invited for interview and if successful then return to participate for a full week in the Unit's activities. At the end of this period there is a final interview which determines whether or not it will be to the mutual benefit of all concerned for the applicant to work in the Unit. Amongst the qualities looked for are honesty, openness, politeness, compassion, practical and sporting skills.

PRISONER SELECTION

The Unit is designed to provide accommodation for up to 12 Category A and B prisoners. (Since opening the average number of prisoners held has been 8).

Mainstream prisons forward names of volunteer prisoners to the Unit Governor. As vacancies occur respective prisoner candidates are seen by an assessment team from the Unit. This normally includes a member of the Governor grade, the Unit Psychologist and one other staff member. The assessment team visit the prisoner in his sponsoring prison and determine whether or not he is a suitable candidate for the Unit.

A week prior to coming to the Unit the prisoner is invited to spend a day in the Unit and normally he is accompanied by members of staff from his sponsoring prison. On his initial visit day members of his family are also invited to come to the Unit and along with the prisoner are given a full tour of the Unit facilities. A normal Unit type visit is also granted on that day. Family members meet with the Unit management team and any questions they may have are discussed.

LENGTH OF STAY

For both staff and prisoners who come to the Unit there is no fixed length of stay. It is hoped for the majority who do spend some time in the Unit then 'meaningful progression' will become the norm and that onward transfer will lead to career development or a step nearer to liberty via the existing channels in the mainstream.

Since 1991 several members of staff have moved on to postings of their choice and the hope is that they have taken with them experience in handling the challenges of managing long term prisoners in a different way which they hopefully will translate into their new working environment.

One prisoner who came to the Unit when it opened in late 1990 was successful in his request to be transferred to an open prison and he moved on in September 1991. Another followed in June 1992. Early in 1993 another 2 prisoners progressed to an open and semi-open prison.

Unfortunately during 1991/92 3 prisoners who had different lengths of stay in the Unit had to be returned to their original location.

The 7 prisoners who have passed through the Unit to date came from 'lock-down' regimes and are all now in some form of association. When prisoners have left there is follow up contact.

After about a year in the Unit each prisoner is formally seen by the Governor, the Unit Psychologist and a staff member to discuss progress. A written report of the interview is agreed by the Governor and the prisoner concerned - both sign a record of what has been said. In addition to this prisoners are encouraged to use the SPS Sentence Planning material.

REGIME

Further steps have been taken to develop a more consultative style of management reflecting community approach yet at the same time keeping a regime which is anchored close to that prevailing in the mainstream prisons. There is an emphasis on mutual trust and respect.

Staff and prisoner working groups consider most of the issues that affect the daily life of the Unit. Recommendations, taking into account budget considerations, are brought to a weekly meeting for everyone's information. The Unit management team then have the opportunity to decide, taking into account all views expressed, the way forward.

One of the main features of the Unit is the visiting facilities. Time allowed for and environment in which visits take place encourages increased family contact. This contact has proved to be vital in the development of a more responsible attitude in most of the prisoners who have come to the Unit.

Recognising that to live in a Unit environment and to maximise the benefits that the regime allow is costly for prisoners, all are encouraged to develop projects which produce some financial return. Any net profit is divided at present 3 ways - equal proportions to the prisoner and the community fund and a proportion to a charity fund. The latter is disposed of from time to time to different organisations identified by prisoners. In 1992 charity giving from the Unit amounted to more than £1,500.

OUTSIDE CONTACT

Throughout the year several events are organised on a monthly basis which involve visitors from the outside community. Seminars and discussion groups have been arranged involving active participants in the Criminal Justice System. On a weekly basis 2 local ladies direct the preparation of the 'Unit - family type' meal. Most staff and prisoners share this together and also at normal meal times staff often sit down with prisoners.

A number of international visitors as far as Sweden and Canada have also visited the Unit and without exception have commented on how the Unit and its progress to date reflects the visionary policy of the Scottish Prison Service as declared in 'Opportunity and Responsibility' - May 1990. The media have also had access on a number of occasions.

SUMMARY

It is recognised that the Unit is a challenge to all concerned to evaluate and promote an understanding of creative practices in the difficult task of managing long term imprisonment and prisoners but it is everyone's hope that human dignity will indeed be our future. The aim of the Unit has been achieved thus far because people have worked together to establish hope.

ALASTAIR MacDONALD
Governor

February 1993

