Restorative Justice Council

New Publication: Building a Restorative Culture in Prisons, Volume Two

Progress Towards Relaunching the APPG on Restorative Justice

Actively Shaping the Future of Restorative Justice within HMPPS

An update from our senior Standards officer

Monthly Bulletin

September 2026

A MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO

Welcome to this month's membership bulletin. I hope it gives you a useful sense of the breadth of work taking place across the RJC and the different ways in which we are working to support members, strengthen standards and ensure that restorative justice has a clear and credible voice. Much of this activity happens behind the scenes, through sustained conversations, partnership working, research and the development of practical guidance, so it is important to me that members can see how we are using the RJC's position to open doors, shape discussions and create opportunities for restorative practice.

In this edition, I share updates on our new prison leadership guide, progress towards relaunching the APPG on Restorative Justice, our engagement with HMPPS and partners, and the work of the Scientific Circle examining restorative practice in schools. I also reflect on our recent Brave Rooms event in Belfast, where delegates from across Northern Ireland and further afield came together to explore what restorative practice requires when the environments around practitioners become more complex. The energy, openness and willingness to engage with difficult questions provided a strong foundation for extending these conversations across the sector.

I am also pleased to share news of the forthcoming book Integrating Restorative Justice: A Whole-System Approach, which includes a chapter I have written with Dr Katherine Doolin on restorative justice in prisons. The chapter explores the opportunities and challenges of developing restorative work in prisons and considers what is needed to move from individual processes towards a more consistently restorative culture. I hope it will be a useful contribution for members working across prisons, criminal justice, victim services, family support, research and commissioning.

You will also hear from our Senior Standards Officer, who reflects on a busy month of listening, learning and connecting. Her update draws together learning from the Devon and Cornwall Restorative Justice Summit, the Intermediaries for Justice Annual Conference and a Peace Education workshop, with a strong focus on access, informed choice, inclusive participation and the support people need to engage safely.

These themes sit at the heart of our standards work. They remind us that good restorative practice depends not only on commitment and intent, but also on practitioner competence, clear information, effective partnerships and approaches that are genuinely accessible to those taking part. I hope the updates that follow give you confidence that the RJC is active, ambitious and working constructively on behalf of our membership and the wider restorative sector. As always, I welcome your reflections, ideas and examples from practice.

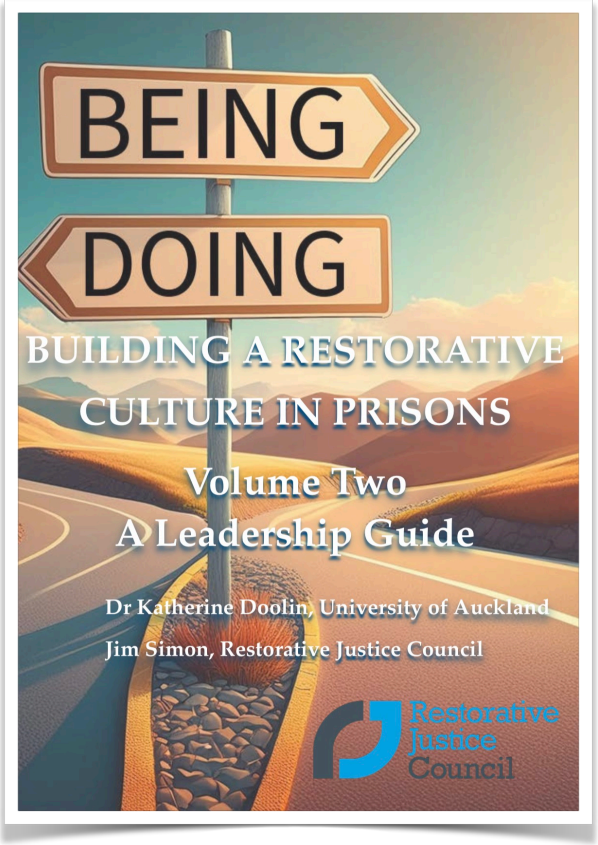
Jim Simon

Chief Executive Officer

NEW PUBLICATION: BUILDING A RESTORATIVE CULTURE IN PRISONS, VOLUME TWO

In September, I was delighted to publish the second volume of Building a Restorative Culture in Prisons, developed in collaboration with Dr Katherine Doolin from the University of Auckland. Katherine and I have brought together our shared experience of restorative justice, research and practice to produce a practical leadership guide for prisons that are beginning, or looking to deepen, their restorative journey. It builds on the evidence and examples explored in Volume One, but this time our focus is firmly on what it takes to turn restorative principles into safe, credible and sustainable practice.

A central theme in the guide is the distinction between doing restorative justice and being restorative. Doing restorative justice includes carefully prepared and voluntary processes such as victim-offender meetings, conferences, indirect communication and restorative circles. We also look beyond the original offence to consider the harms that can arise within prison life itself, including conflict between prisoners, tensions between staff and prisoners, bullying, violence and damaged relationships. Being restorative is about the wider culture around those processes: how leaders exercise authority, how people relate to one another, how decisions are made and how harm is addressed. Katherine and I are clear that this is not about weakening boundaries, risk management or public protection. It is about making authority and accountability more transparent, relational and effective.



The guide is deliberately practical. We set out the conditions that help restorative work take root, including visible leadership, trained practitioners, staff and prisoner understanding, proper preparation and supervision, clear safeguards, referral routes and follow-up support. We also recognise the very real pressures prisons are working under, from overcrowding and staffing instability to restricted regimes and limited resources. Our message is not to wait for perfect conditions, but to start small, be clear about purpose and build carefully from what is learned. The readiness framework and five leadership questions are there to help prison leaders decide where to begin, what support is needed and whether the work is ready to develop further. I hope members will find the guide a useful contribution to the wider conversation about how prisons can strengthen safety, dignity, accountability, rehabilitation and repair.

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PROGRESS TOWARDS RELAUNCHING THE APPG ON RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

The RJC has been progressing plans to relaunch and strengthen the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Restorative Justice. Following positive discussions with parliamentarians during September, work is now underway to develop proposals for the APPG's future direction and build a renewed platform for informed, constructive engagement with Parliament. This is an important opportunity to strengthen the political voice of restorative justice and ensure that parliamentarians can draw on the experience, evidence and expertise of the restorative justice sector.

A key part of this work will be developing a new advisory board model for the APPG. We want the model to make it easier and more accessible for RJC members and the wider sector to engage with the Group, contribute ideas and evidence, and help shape the issues it explores. Our ambition is to create clearer routes for practitioners, researchers, services, partner organisations and people with lived experience to inform policy discussions and strengthen parliamentarians' understanding of effective restorative practice. This renewed approach should support broader participation, closer connections between Parliament and the sector, and a more inclusive foundation for the APPG's future work. We are encouraged by the progress so far and look forward to sharing more detail about the relaunch, the advisory board and opportunities to get involved as plans develop.

ACTIVELY SHAPING THE FUTURE OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE WITHIN HMPPS

The RJC is actively engaging with partners and key stakeholders as important decisions are considered about the future of restorative justice within His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). We are bringing the sector's experience into the conversation and making the case for restorative justice to remain a visible and credible part of the wider criminal justice system.

That work will continue in October, when the RJC, Restorative Solutions and Remedi will meet jointly with HMPPS. Together, we will bring our respective experience and perspectives into a direct discussion about the future direction of restorative justice across prisons and probation, with a focus on practice, quality and the realities facing services and practitioners. While there are limits to what we can share at this stage, members should be assured that we are actively involved in the conversation rather than waiting for decisions to be made around us.

Our role is to represent the interests of the restorative sector, press for high standards and help shape an approach that is sustainable, accessible and capable of delivering meaningful outcomes. These discussions are still developing, but the RJC is engaged, making your voice heard and working constructively with others to influence what comes next. I will update members as soon as there is more that we can responsibly share.

SCIENTIFIC CIRCLE BEGINS WORK ON RESTORATIVE PRACTICE IN SCHOOLS

The RJC is working in partnership with the University of Essex on a major Nuffield Foundation-funded research project examining restorative practice in schools. The project's Scientific Circle is now up and running, bringing together expertise from across practice, education, research, training and system leadership to ensure the study is grounded in both evidence and real-world experience.

Our first key task is to determine what makes a school genuinely "fully restorative". That means developing a clear and credible framework for recognising restorative culture and practice, while also exploring where the threshold lies between a restorative system and one that remains primarily punitive. These are important questions, not only for identifying and validating schools taking part in the research, but also for understanding how restorative practice is interpreted and implemented across different settings.

The Circle includes a diverse mix of school leaders, practitioners, trainers, consultants, education professionals and researchers, who will contribute through focused meetings, workshops, document review and discussion at key stages of the project. There is still an opportunity for others with relevant experience to contribute. If you would be interested in being part of the research, please contact Jodie Gould at jodie.gould@restorativejustice.org.uk to express an interest.

STRENGTHENING OUR VOICE AND SUPPORTING MEMBERS

The Restorative Justice Council has appointed Media First to provide focused media and communications support, helping us make better use of our existing work and give restorative justice a clearer, more consistent public voice.

For members, this is about ensuring that the value of your work is better understood. As restorative justice gains recognition across different settings, clear and accurate communication can help build confidence in restorative approaches, open new conversations and strengthen the case for high-quality provision.

Working with James White and the Media First team will give us additional capacity to promote strong examples of practice, respond more effectively to media opportunities and showcase the knowledge and impact of our members, registered practitioners and partners. It will also help us develop useful messages and content that members can draw on when explaining restorative justice to commissioners, partners and the public.

This is a practical, targeted partnership focused on extending the reach of activity already underway, rather than creating a costly new programme. We will keep the work centred on clear benefits for the sector: stronger public understanding, greater visibility for members' expertise and more opportunities to demonstrate the difference restorative justice makes.

BRAVE ROOMS: DEVELOPING PRACTICE FOR COMPLEXITY

At the end of September, we brought our Brave Rooms event to Belfast, gathering practitioners, leaders, policymakers, organisational representatives and people with lived experience for a day of honest discussion and shared learning. We began from a simple but important idea: restorative principles remain consistent, but the settings in which they are applied can change what participants experience, what practitioners are required to hold and what support needs to sit around the work. Together, we explored how complexity is located differently across community-based practice, criminal justice, prisons, education and work involving organisational or multi-organisational harm.

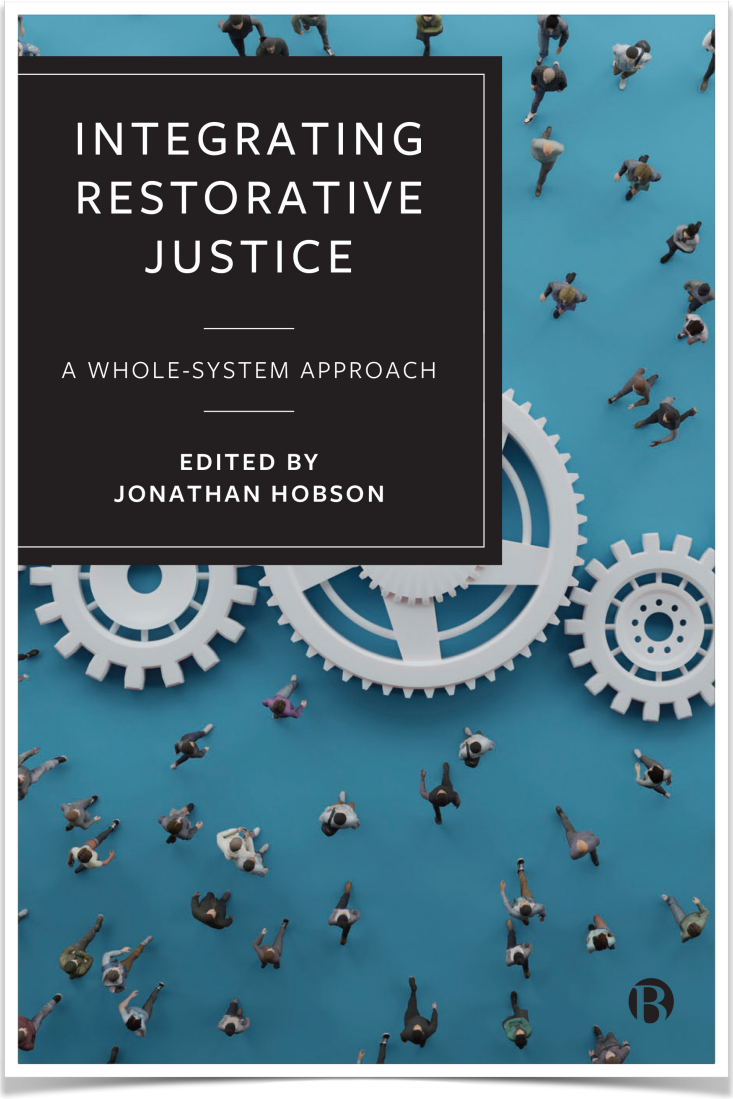
The conversations moved between the deeply relational and the highly practical. Delegates considered trust, consent, voice, accountability and the continuing importance of careful preparation, while also examining safeguarding, supervision, governance, information-sharing and decision-making. We asked what community practice can make possible and what it should not be expected to hold alone; how formal justice systems can support participants without weakening choice; and what changes when an organisation implicated in harm also holds the records, authority and capacity to respond. A powerful contribution from lived experience reminded us that restorative justice is shaped not only by the conversation itself, but by the relationships, decisions, support and care surrounding the whole journey. Across the day, one message came through strongly: safe and credible practice cannot rely on the skill and goodwill of individual practitioners alone. Practitioners also need clear roles, reflective supervision, proportionate governance and organisations willing to take responsibility and follow through.

I am hugely grateful to everyone who joined us from across Northern Ireland and further afield, and to our speakers, facilitators and contributors for sharing their experience so generously. The enthusiasm in the room, the willingness to test ideas and the care delegates brought to difficult questions made the event what we hoped a Brave Room could be: a space for respectful challenge, curiosity and practical learning without pretending that every question has an easy answer. For members, the discussions provide an important foundation for how the RJC continues to develop standards, practitioner support and its wider thinking about complex restorative work. Belfast was the beginning of this next phase, not the end. We will extend the Brave Rooms conversations and will announce our next event for England in the coming months.

FORTHCOMING PUBLICATION: INTEGRATING RESTORATIVE JUSTICE: A WHOLE-SYSTEM APPROACH

I am delighted to have contributed a chapter alongside Dr Katherine Doolin to the forthcoming book Integrating Restorative Justice: A Whole-System Approach. Our chapter, “Restorative Justice in Prisons: Approaches, Opportunities and Challenges”, examines how restorative justice has developed within prisons in England and Wales and what is needed for it to become a more consistent and credible part of prison life.

The chapter considers the opportunities that restorative processes can create for victims, prisoners, families, staff and wider prison communities, while also addressing the real challenges of working in institutions shaped by punishment, control and significant power imbalances. For members working in prisons, criminal justice, victim services, family support, research or commissioning, it offers a useful overview of both the potential of restorative approaches and the safeguards, leadership and organisational commitment required to deliver them well.



At the heart of the chapter is an important distinction between doing restorative justice, through specific and carefully prepared processes responding to harm, and working towards being restorative, where respect, accountability, empowerment and repair are reflected more consistently in the culture and everyday life of a prison. This distinction matters because individual interventions are more likely to be safe, meaningful and sustainable when the wider environment supports restorative values rather than leaving practitioners to carry them alone.

Our research suggests that more restorative work is taking place in prisons than is widely recognised. That is encouraging, and it underlines the value of the knowledge and experience already held across our membership. It also points to the need for stronger evidence, independent evaluation and sustained leadership if good practice is to move beyond isolated projects and contribute to a genuinely whole-prison approach. We hope the chapter will support members to reflect on their own work, strengthen conversations with prison leaders and commissioners, and make the case for well-resourced, evidence-informed restorative practice.

A huge thank you to Professor Jonathan Hobson for bringing together such a wide-ranging contribution to the restorative justice field. The book is due to be published on 29 October, and I look forward to sharing further details with members when it is available.

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AN UPDATE FROM OUR SENIOR STANDARDS OFFICER

September has created valuable space to listen, learn and connect across the restorative justice sector. From the Devon and Cornwall Restorative Justice Summit and the Intermediaries for Justice Annual Conference to preparations for our own annual conference, one message has been consistent: meaningful participation depends on clear information, informed choice and the right support. This matters directly to our members because it shapes how people encounter restorative justice, how practitioners respond to differing needs and how the RJC develops standards that work in practice.

DEVON AND CORNWALL RESTORATIVE JUSTICE SUMMIT

Much of my work this month has focused on restorative justice within the criminal justice sector. I began by attending the Devon and Cornwall Restorative Justice Summit, delivered in partnership by Devon and Cornwall Police, the High Sheriff of Devon and Make Amends, the commissioned restorative justice service for Devon and Cornwall. The Summit brought local partners together to consider how access to restorative justice could be strengthened across different areas of harm. Participants worked in groups focused on domestic abuse and sexual violence, youth justice, road traffic incidents, serious violence, retail crime, anti-social behaviour, assaults on uniformed workers and hate crime. Each group explored the same questions: what is preventing people from accessing restorative justice, and what practical action could help address those barriers? I contributed to the discussion on hate crime.

Across the discussions, several common barriers emerged: limited public and professional awareness, inconsistent referral pathways, misconceptions about restorative justice and organisational practices that can prevent people from making a genuinely informed choice. The practical responses were equally clear: better information, earlier and more consistent offers, stronger inter-agency relationships, specialist champions and improved training for those introducing restorative opportunities.

At the hate crime table, we considered the isolation and repeat victimisation experienced by people affected by hate crime, the deeply personal nature of the harm, questions of readiness

and accountability, and gaps in joined-up working. Specialist champions, stronger community education and clearer referral pathways emerged as important priorities for making support more visible, responsive and accessible.

The Summit highlighted the difference that can arise between a person's right to be informed about restorative justice and how consistently that opportunity can be communicated in practice. For the RJC, this reinforces the importance of clear standards, practitioner competence, effective partnership working and accessible public information. It also connected our national standards work with the practical experience of local services working to make restorative justice more visible, consistent and safely available.

INTERMEDIARIES FOR JUSTICE ANNUAL CONFERENCE: ANOTHER WAY FOR JUSTICE?

Another important opportunity for learning this month was the Intermediaries for Justice Annual Conference, where I led a session exploring how restorative justice might work alongside court proceedings, follow them or, where appropriate, offer an alternative for those who have communication needs and struggle with the court environment.

Across the conference, from multiple speakers, several consistent themes emerged: meaningful participation requires more than simply being present; communication needs should be understood individually and addressed as early as possible; and safe, effective support depends on clear professional boundaries, sound assessment, safeguarding, reflective supervision and joined-up working. The discussions also highlighted how unmet communication needs can interact with wider inequalities and complex experiences across justice and social care systems.

For the RJC, the day offered valuable learning about accessibility, safeguarding, practitioner competence, role clarity and reflective supervision, while also reinforcing the expertise that already exists across restorative practice. It strengthened the case for closer dialogue between restorative practitioners, intermediaries and other justice professionals. If restorative practice is to remain safe, inclusive and genuinely participant-led, communication access must be considered from the outset rather than only after barriers have emerged.

These conversations raise important questions for our membership. Where are people still missing opportunities to access restorative justice? What is helping you make practice more accessible and inclusive? We would particularly welcome examples of approaches that are working, barriers that remain difficult to overcome and areas where clearer standards or guidance would help. Your experience can directly inform the RJC's standards, guidance and wider sector engagement.

PEACE EDUCATION: USING CIRCLES TO SUPPORT PEDAGOGY

Towards the end of the month, I attended a Peace Education workshop exploring how circles can support learning and inclusive, relational practice in schools. The discussion considered how circles can create structured opportunities for pupils to think together, share perspectives, ask questions and build understanding. Although the setting was different from the justice-focused events earlier in the month, the same principle was evident: participation works best when it is intentionally designed, supported by practical training and embedded within the wider culture of an organisation.

THE RJC ANNUAL CONFERENCE IS TAKING SHAPE

These themes of access, participation and informed choice will continue through the RJC Annual Conference, Restorative Justice in a Time of Fractured Systems. Thank you to everyone who submitted an abstract and contributed ideas to the conversations we will bring together this year.

We received a strong range of proposals, reflecting the breadth of practice, experience and thinking across the field. Our speakers have now been selected, and we look forward to confirming the programme and sharing further details very soon.

We will be meeting in person again this year, responding to something our members consistently tell us they value: the opportunity to connect, exchange ideas and learn together in the same space. Registration is already open, with reduced conference fees for RJC members. The programme will offer practical learning, new perspectives and opportunities to build relationships across the field, while the reduced fee is intended to make participation more affordable.

The reduced member fee reflects how much we value the contribution our membership community makes to the field. The future of restorative justice will be stronger when practitioners, services, researchers and policymakers have opportunities to learn from one another, test ideas and help shape what comes next.

If you are planning to join us, please book your place soon to avoid disappointment. We look forward to welcoming the restorative community back together at the RJC Annual Conference 2026 and continuing these important conversations together.

REGISTER TODAY

Aisa Shearing

Senior Standards Officer

ABOUT THE RJC

Serving as the national, independent membership body for the restorative sector, our mission is to promote and advance the use of restorative practice, in all its forms, for the betterment of the public. We believe that restorative practice has the power to enable communities to cultivate a culture that prioritises reconciliation and empowers individuals to build strong, effective and resilient relationships.

By embracing a restorative and relational mindset in every aspect of society and our own lives, we create safe environments where those in conflict can engage in meaningful dialogue and begin the journey of repairing the harm caused. It is our goal to see restorative principles deeply integrated in all aspects of our society.

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