

Sentencing Academy News

December 2021 / January 2022

Public Knowledge of Sentencing Practice and Trends

The Sentencing Academy has published a major new report exploring public knowledge of sentencing based on polling conducted by YouGov. The survey found that whilst a majority of the public consider sentencing to be too lenient, there is a tendency to under-estimate the severity of current sentencing practice – often by a wide margin. The survey also highlighted some key misperceptions around crime and sentencing: most respondents thought that crime had been rising in the past 25 years (when it has fallen since the mid-1990s) and that the average prison sentence length is shorter than it was a quarter of a century ago when it is now longer.

'Public Knowledge of Sentencing Practice and Trends' by Julian Roberts, Jonathan Bild, Jose Pina-Sánchez and Mike Hough discusses the findings and implications of the survey and is available [here](#).

Intoxication and Sentencing

We have also published the latest report in our *Issues* paper series; this paper examines the contested issue of intoxication as a sentencing factor and is authored by Dr Carly Lightowlers. It explores how intoxication can be either an aggravating or mitigating factor depending on the context and highlights the limited research in this field despite the prevalence of intoxication as a factor in offending.

Intoxication and Sentencing: A review of policy, practice and research is available [here](#).

Sentencing Academy Fellowship Scheme

During the course of the 2020/21 academic year, the Sentencing Academy ran a Fellowship Scheme as part of our commitment to furthering knowledge on sentencing issues and widening participation and we are delighted to publish the work produced by our two Fellows following their participation in this scheme. We are grateful to Dr Shona Minson and Professor Nicky Padfield for supervising these research projects.

Anisa Kebbati examined the issue of the impact of maternal imprisonment and her paper is available [here](#).

Jamie Dickson's paper explored the issue of mental illness at sentencing and her paper is available [here](#).

Other News

Magistrates' sentencing powers to increase

The Government has announced an intention to increase magistrates' maximum sentencing powers for a single offence from six months to 12 months. The increased sentencing powers were contained in the Criminal Justice Act 2003 but, to date, they have not been brought into force. The Government aims to reduce the current backlog of cases in the Crown Court by bringing this provision into force and estimates that the change will free up 2,000 days of Crown Court time annually.

The announcement of this decision is available [here](#).

Consultation on improving victims' experiences of the justice system

The Government has also launched a consultation seeking to understand how victims can be better supported through and beyond the criminal justice process as a step towards its proposed 'Victims' Law' that will aim to improve victims' experiences of the criminal justice system. Amongst the proposals is an increase to the Victim Surcharge to provide greater funding for victim support services.

The consultation closes on 3 February 2022 and details are available [here](#).

Prisons Strategy White Paper published

The Ministry of Justice has published a Prisons Strategy White Paper which 'sets out a vision for a modern prison estate that protects the public and cuts crime by rehabilitating offenders'. Underpinning the Government's approach is a £3.75 billion investment in prison building to create an extra 20,000 prison places, alongside an additional £550 million of spending aimed at tackling reoffending.

The White Paper is available [here](#) and the consultation ends on 4 February 2022.

Sentencing guideline for unlawful importation of firearms comes into effect

The new sentencing guideline for the unlawful importation of firearms offences came into force on 1 January 2022. This follows a consultation process last year and it

supplements the offences covered by the firearms offences guideline which came into force in January 2021.

The announcement and links to the relevant guidelines are available [here](#).



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