

# scottish justice matters

# POLICING

Reflections on developments and  
changes to policing in Scotland

ISSN 2052-7950



9 772052 795005

# BOOK REVIEWS

---

## **Conviction: Violence, culture and a shared public service agenda**

**John Carnochan (2015) Argyll Publishing. ISBN: 978-1-908931-63-4**

Reviewed by **Ali Malik**

---

*Conviction*, at around 116 pages (excluding the bibliography) makes a valuable contribution to the understanding of problem-oriented preventative policing by focusing on a specific policy initiative and serves to show the virtues of asking 'what works' and 'how' in shaping wider public policy. It follows the journey of John Carnochan who worked as a police officer for 35 years and co-founded the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU), and offers an insightful account of how the existing practices were challenged by Carnochan and his team and how other public services and young people involved in gang violence, belonging to some of the most deprived areas of Glasgow, were brought together to take part in an initiative to prevent violence.

The style of the book is almost like a diary of events and at times readers may feel that the writer is pontificating, but this might actually be one of the strengths of the book. Carnochan's introspection and honesty about the culture of violence that persists in certain parts of Scotland is evident very early on as he reflects: "I think that Scots are thraven, that we take offence easily and we never forget" (p. 14). The scrupulous approach does not stop there as Carnochan goes on and touches on another sensitive issue in policing and police governance; the use of crime statistics, as he describes them as "notoriously inaccurate" (p.23) predominantly due to the under-reporting of violent crimes. This approach serves to highlight that an open and honest identification of the problems is a key prerequisite for any problem-oriented preventative policy to work.

The book also touches at the heart of some of the other key issues in criminology and criminal justice policy particularly in relation to the treatment of young people in deprived communities and the virtues of early intervention and diversion from criminal justice. This is evident from the author's observation that a conscious effort was made not to include the word 'crime' in the name of the Violence Reduction Unit precisely because this was not an issue solely for the police and criminal justice (p. 28), but rather a wider public health issue (p.34-36).

Whilst for the most part the book documents the experiences of Carnochan and his team, their attempts to engage with other public service bodies to gain support for the VRU and the challenges they faced to convince other stakeholders, the most insightful moment comes when an initiative called CIRV (pronounced serve) is launched (p.77) and 85 young gang members are gathered in the Glasgow Sheriff Court along with police officers, surgeons, youth workers, victims and motivational speakers. This was one of the most interesting and engaging chapters of the book as it offered a first person perspective into the proceedings that took place in an emotionally charged and "electric" environment (p.83).

The book is largely successful in not only illustrating 'what works' but also taking a chronological approach to show 'how'. Following the success of the Violence Reduction Unit, Carnochan makes some insightful observations on how the preventative approach has been applied to other areas of concern such as domestic violence. This book is recommended for both criminology and criminal justice students and practitioners alike, particularly those with an interest in preventative policy and problem-oriented policing.

**Ali Malik is a PhD candidate at the University of Edinburgh. He is exploring the landscape of police governance and accountability in Scotland following the reforms, with a particular focus on the Scottish Police Authority.**

