

Holding persons to account for their actions in respect of a death in prison custody – A critical analysis of the current model in England and Wales

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1. Brief summary of what the research is about.	This morning over 85,000 people awoke inside a prison cell in England and Wales. Based on occurrences in previous years however, 20 of these prisoners will die within the next month, with seven taking their own life. Following each such death, a range of mechanisms, including investigations by both the Coroner and the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman, will operate so as to attempt to ensure that accountability is achieved at an appropriate level. The primary aim of my research is to examine whether those existing accountability mechanisms are effective at completing this task and to consider how, if at all, they can be improved hereafter. In addition, the way in which the effectiveness of a complex accountability framework such as exists in this context is presently assessed in the pre-existing research is also scrutinized, with further reforms suggested as appropriate.	
2. What are the research questions?	The primary focus of this research, as set out above, is to determine both how persons are held to account for their actions following a death in prison custody in England and Wales and to address whether, both individually and in combination, the mechanisms that	

	currently exist for this task are as effective as possible. As a result, five subsidiary questions sit at its heart and ultimately guide the subsequent narrative; in particular, these are: i. What does it mean to hold a person to account? ii. What accountability mechanisms operate after a death in prison custody in England and Wales? iii. How is their effectiveness best measured in the existing scholarship? iv. How effective are such mechanisms using this methodology and how can these results be improved? v. How is the effectiveness of a complex accountability framework best measured in the existing scholarship and how can this methodology be improved?
3. What, if any, outputs so far?	This research is currently being written up and makes three key contributions to the field. First, an analysis of the various mechanisms that presently operate in this context is conducted by reference to a consideration of how far each advances the underlying purposes of holding a person to account. Such information is then compared to the basic aims of that mechanism so as to identify how each can be improved in the future. This analysis indicates that in nearly all cases, the mechanisms in this field presently fail to fulfil even their own basic objectives and thus require reform to both their structural design and operational practices. Second, the existing scholarship concerning how to analyse such tools not as lone instruments operating in isolation, but rather as interwoven pieces of a single, multi-level and complex accountability framework is reviewed. The best of this research is then applied to this specific case. This work identifies further key weaknesses in both the operation and design of the accountability model as a whole, with a second set of reform proposals made as a result. Finally, having analysed the accountability framework that presently operates in this context by reference to the most developed methodological tools available in the existing

	research, a critical analysis of the scope of that research is undertaken. As a result, an enhanced methodological model is thereafter developed which more overtly reflects the key, but thus far under-valued, systemic issues which arise in such cases, most notably the extra value that may feasibly be added by any of the interactions that occur between the various mechanisms. The research then closes by setting out a broad normative framework against which both this system and others more broadly can be further assessed.
4. What outputs are planned?	As above.
5. What is the anticipated impact?	Whilst representing the first modern in-depth study of the current system of accountability that operates following a death in prison custody in England and Wales, the lack of a satisfactory corpus of scholarship in critical areas, most notably at a methodological level, means that that this research can only ever be in-part exploratory in form. Nonetheless, it aims to draw together the existing research, to consider the analysis contained within, to develop new conclusions concerning the effectiveness of the current system of accountability and to fill a critical gap in the existing research methods literature. In doing so, it aims more broadly to stimulate general debate on how to respond to the undeniable fact that each year, hundreds of people die whilst in prison in this jurisdiction, to assist other researchers who engage in the study of complex accountability frameworks of this kind hereafter and to contribute to future practical change both in this field.
6. Comments / additional information / requests for data or input from the broader administrative justice community	My research is presently in the process of being written up. If anyone has an interest in this field and wishes to discuss my research or issues surrounding deaths in prison custody more generally with me, please feel free to get in touch at cws29@cam.ac.uk