

Lessons from Norway

How we can improve our prisons by learning from Norway



Briefing paper
By Lauren Davison, August 1st, 2022

Contents

■ Cover page	01
■ Contents	02
■ Writers	03
■ About Centre	04
■ Foreword	05
■ Endorsement	06
■ Summary	07
■ Introduction	08
■ Prisons in England and Wales	09
■ A different philosophy	12
■ Norwegian prisons	15
■ Laying the groundwork for release	18
■ Through-the-gate and post-release	20
■ The lessons from Norway	22
■ Conclusion	24
■ Bibliography	25
■ Company details	29
■ Back cover	31

Author



Lauren Davison

Justice Spokesperson for Centre Think Tank

Lauren is the co-Policy Officer for Open Labour, the Secretary of the Young Fabians Criminal Justice Network, and holds a master's degree in Criminology.

Contributors

Our contributors appeared in our "In Conversation" series and quotes from these interviews are included in this paper.



David Rudolf

Criminal Defence and Civil Rights Attorney

David Rudolf is a criminal defence and civil rights attorney who appeared in the Netflix series *The Staircase*, was portrayed in the HBO version, and founded a law firm in 1982.



Chris Daw QC

Lawyer, writer and broadcaster.

Chris wrote the book "*Justice on Trial: Radical Solutions for a System at Breaking Point*" and co-presented the TV series "*Crime - Are We Tough Enough?*".

About Centre

We are an independent non-profit foundation and cross-party think tank. Our mission is to rebuild the centre ground and to create a more centrist and moderate politics. We support better public services and a strong economy inspired by policies from the Nordic countries.

To achieve these goals, we work with people from across the UK and party politics. This includes engaging with politicians and our networks, which include academia, politics, and law.

Our work includes creating new conversations by hosting events and conducting interviews. We also produce new policy ideas to better inform debate, publish papers, and release articles. We aim to build consensus, shape public opinion, and work with policymakers to change policy.

Published by

Centre

Foreword by Minister of State in the Home Office, David Hanson

The justice system should always aim to achieve two objectives – firstly, justice for the victims of crimes committed, and secondly, reform to ensure perpetrators are reformed after interaction with the system.

This new paper aims to look at how we can improve the U.K. justice system and gives some strong pointers in looking at how Norway has helped make its society safer and reduced crime. It is a lesson in what we should continue to strive to achieve.

The solutions remain clear. Greater use of community sentences and an end to short-term prison sentences. Support for those in prison to learn skills, training and preparation for employment after leaving. A much smoother transition through the prison gate to a job, accommodation, and reintegration to family and community ties outside. A continued effort to modernise an ageing prison estate to support safe prisons fit for the 21st century.

These things are clear yet often remain a challenge to achieve – a challenge due to public and media perception of what prison should be, and a challenge to the government to prioritise and resource the change needed. But reform there should be. The justice system needs to be a deterrent and to punish but it also needs to be a place of reform. The lessons of Norway give encouragement to those who have tried or wish to see that change.

The debate now needs to continue. As a former prison minister who grappled with these issues in government, I know how difficult change can be to make, but I welcome this contribution to that debate as change there must be. This debate is about how we use that justice system to make our community a safer place.

It is never an easy political pitch to argue for community penalties for lower-level offences, for restorative justice when victims wish it, and for interventions in prison to assist reform, rehabilitation and reintegration, but they are arguments that political parties need to make and need to find consensus on.

There is scope for agreement on the change needed and I hope this pamphlet helps in that discourse. The approach of Norway to reducing offending and rehabilitating offenders gives us scope for thought. The challenge now is to translate that into action.



Minister of State in the Home Office



Endorsement from Andrew Dixon

I commend Centre Think Tank for producing a timely and compelling report that makes a powerful case for supporting employment programmes for ex-offenders and proposes realistic ways of moving forward. I call upon the government to give this area the attention and resources it clearly deserves. Private enterprises, philanthropists, and third-sector organisations are ready to support this initiative. Are ministers, prison governors, and the civil service willing to do the same?

When it comes to supporting prisoners in transitioning from a life of crime into one of law-abiding employment, we fall short. We need to provide ex-offenders with a recognised pathway. This will require a coherent programme – beginning in prison – which, in addition to introducing offenders to employment opportunities, will provide advice on CV writing, alignment of skills and expectations, interview practice, and perhaps most importantly, will ensure that robust support continues post-release.

Several organisations, such as Prosper4 and Tempus Novo, have been successful in supporting prisoners into employment, but without institutional support such efforts remain disconnected and poorly funded. A solution will require a joint commitment from the government, prisons, private enterprise, and the third sector.

Despite talk of a “rehabilitation revolution,” the criminal justice sector has yet to see these words put into action. I have seen many impressive individuals and organisations retreat from this initiative – despite initial goodwill – because of frustrations arising from poor implementation and a perceived lack of government support.

In the near future, I hope we can look back with pride at the work we have done to help ex-offenders find their feet as important members of the workforce – filling skills gaps, selling goods and services, building companies, employing others and paying taxes.



**Trustee of the Woodhaven Trust
and Founder of the Fairer Share
campaign.**



Summary



The UK currently has a broken prison system, and it is getting worse. There are high levels of reoffending, decreasing budgets, unsafe areas within prisons, and overcrowding.



To improve our prisons, we should look to Norway. They have lower reoffending rates and, rather than our focus on punishment, instead focus on ensuring people are good neighbours when released.



We need to improve prisons themselves by upgrading our prisons, ensuring prisoners have their own space to live in, and giving prisoners more opportunities to learn new skills.



To reduce the number of people in prisons, we should focus more on reducing the number of shorter sentences given out.

Introduction

We have seen discussions around the justice system within the UK continue to move towards punishment and revenge. This paper looks at how the prison system within England and Wales works in practice and the areas where it needs to be improved. It then looks at how we can do this by trying to understand the fundamental ideas behind the Norwegian prison system and how these are put into practice within Norwegian prisons.

In short, this paper provides a roadmap that moves the UK from a prison system built on punishment and results in high reoffending rates to one built on rehabilitation, reducing crime and reducing reoffending rates.

Chapter one

Prisons in England and Wales



The prison estate is home to around 80,000 people at any one time¹, and as of 2021, England and Wales had the third highest prison population in Europe². Although the prison population has fluctuated through the years, the post-war period saw prison numbers begin to increase at pace. Between 1900 and 2018, the prison population quadrupled. Current projections estimate that by 2026 there will be 98,700 prisoners in England and Wales³. At present, 61% of people sent to prison were not convicted of violent offences, and 40% received custodial sentences of less than six months. These statistics alone show that a serious conversation must be had surrounding who gets sent to prison, and for how long. This is especially true given that the research shows us short prison sentences are less effective at reducing reoffending than community sentences⁴. Prison should be a last resort - but that is currently not the case⁵.

The fact that 78% of prisoners reoffend within nine years of release⁶ raises urgent questions about prison effectiveness. The most obvious is that despite rehabilitation supposedly being an aim of prisons⁷, it is not happening. Many commentators, penologists and politicians will give differing views as to why that is, but there is widespread consensus that in their current state, they are not set up to perform this function. Not only has a decade of Tory austerity stripped away the funding for rehabilitative elements such as education and skill-based learning, but our prisons have also become too unsafe to facilitate them⁸.

Between 2010 and 2015, the prison service had its budget reduced by 20%⁹, and today's budget remains lower in real terms than in 2010. Between 2010 and 2017, 26% of frontline prison staff were cut¹⁰. Unfortunately, this means that even before the pandemic, activities that would be considered basic and a normal part of the prison routine are not being carried out, because there are not enough staff to safely manage prisoners. Unlocking prisoners to enable them to have recreational time outdoors and showering/eating is not guaranteed - there are sometimes only one or two prison officers in a prison wing. Therefore, some prisoners get less than 30 minutes outside of their cells a day¹¹. Many prisoners and staff feel that lack of time unlocked leads to heightened tensions and makes prisons harder to run safely. During the pandemic, daily activities, family visitation and time out of cells were even further restricted, exacerbating the poor mental health of many prisoners¹². As the outside world begins to relax restrictions, many prisons still haven't, and there are fears that COVID restrictions in regimes may become the new normal - impinging even further on human rights, and worsening conditions.

Confining prisoners to a cell for over 23 hours a day would be problematic at the best of times, but when poor living conditions are factored in, the issue is further compounded. The Chief Inspector of prisons said in 2018 that prison conditions are "the most disturbing ever seen"¹³, going on to say they are not fit for the 21st century. Vermin infestations, uncleaned bodily fluids and broken cells are just a few of the issues discovered. Deaths within prisons are at the highest ever level recorded, with suicides 6x more likely inside prison walls and self-harm rates are at the second highest level on record¹⁴.

In addition, many prisoners are being held in overcrowded cells—an issue that has been worsening since 1994. Two-thirds of all prisons are overcrowded, and over 15,900 prisoners are held in overcrowded accommodation¹⁵. The recent Prisons Strategy White Paper doesn't set out a timeline for when overcrowding will be dealt with and fails to get to grips with many of the most pressing issues facing prisons in England and Wales, instead promising £315 million to expand the prison estate¹⁶. Despite the total number of people being sent to prison falling, the inflation of sentences means that prisons are being made to operate beyond their safe capacity, with an additional 2 years added to sentences on average, compared to 2008¹⁷. This is likely to worsen, with the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill increasing sentence lengths and the total time spent in prison. Measures such as creating more prison places alone won't solve the issue of overcrowding because, as we know¹⁸, when prison places are created, the courts will fill them, often for more minor offences. Prison will continue to be overused and nothing will change.

It doesn't have to be this way. It is entirely possible to reform an ineffectual, punitive and broken system—there just seems very little will to do so among politicians. Instead of sending people to prison for low-level offences, on short sentences, more consideration and funding should be given to diversionary schemes to keep people out of prison unless necessary (for example, the diversion scheme piloted by Mayor of London Sadiq Khan to deal with cannabis use¹⁹). For this to work, there will need to be a concerted effort to educate the public, boost confidence in alternatives to custody and change punitive public attitudes. Labour has recently set out plans to bolster public confidence in 'community payback' schemes which, providing they are not just retributive and benefit the offender too, could be a good starting point²⁰.

The scale of the crisis is so bad that merely tinkering around the edges will not do. The best way to begin this process is to look to other countries with a vastly different outlook on punishment, and for whom a change of tack has paid off—resulting in a more humane prison system that actually works.

Chapter two

A different philosophy



The best example for international comparison when it comes to prisons is Norway. Despite being a smaller country, with a much smaller prison population, there is much to be learned from the Norwegian penal system. Norway's two-year reoffending rate is around 20%²¹. By contrast, nearly 40% of released prisoners in Britain reoffend within the first year²².

Norway has a prison population rate of 58 per 100,000²³ (a figure which reduces year on year), compared to England and Wales' rate of 133 per 100,000. Some critics of the Norwegian system suggest that a smaller population is the reason for its success. However, there are many other nations with a smaller population, and a different overarching penal philosophy, who experience high imprisonment and reoffending rates. Prisons in England and Wales operate at 103.3% capacity, while Norway operates at 83.4% capacity²⁴. With spaces left in their system, the Norwegian courts do not rush to fill them. This speaks to the differing cultural attitudes to punishment on display in both countries and the Norwegian belief that traditionally punitive prisons do not work.

Norway does not have parole-free life sentences; most custodial sentences are determinate and everyone sentenced will eventually be released, a fact emphasised in Norwegian prisons. Halden prison, one of Norway's maximum security prisons, espouses the slogan "Who do we want as our neighbour?" reminding prisoners of the purpose of their imprisonment - preparation for their inevitable return back into society, hopefully as law-abiding individuals. Therefore, prisons are designed to reintegrate by encouraging prosocial behaviour, resembling life outside of the prison walls as closely as possible, with the only punishment being loss of liberty²⁵.

This approach was described by David Rudolf as follows: "...a desire to punish when someone does something wrong as opposed to a desire to understand and to rehabilitate and leave people in a better position when they come out than when they went in. All of which is completely rational."²⁶

There is some evidence that a nation's approach to the economy may impact upon their overarching attitudes towards punishment. Michael Cavadino and James Dignan²⁷ undertook a comparative analysis which mapped 12 capitalist countries, categorised by using welfare typologies originally developed by Danish sociologist Esping-Anderson²⁸. They found a correlation between nations which have social democratic welfare states (higher levels of public spending on benefits, service provision and support), also having the lowest levels of imprisonment²⁹. Norway best fits this category. Conversely, liberal and conservative nations, such as the UK, have the highest levels of imprisonment. This was corroborated by Downes and Hansen³⁰, who found that nations with a higher GDP spend on welfare, have lower prison rates. Wilkinson and Pickett³¹ found that nations with lower income inequality have lower levels of imprisonment. This is another way in which British politicians should be willing to learn from Norway. Spending more money on welfare, education, public services, and support services is the best way to reduce crime - not prison expansion.

As has already been discussed, the ethos inside most British prisons is that the primary purpose is to punish - and rehabilitation is viewed as a 'bonus' which has no guarantee of taking place. It was not so long ago that Tory Justice Secretary Chris Grayling attempted to ban books in prisons, although this was found to be unlawful³². As some academics suggest, justice policy in this country has for some time been purely reactionary, after events occur - rather than coherently formulated and implemented³³.

Indeed, often the view amongst Brits is that there are prisoners who are undeserving of rehabilitation, no matter how successfully they could be reformed and prevented from reoffending. Penal populists also balk at the suggestion that prison conditions should be improved, because they often believe in the fallacy of grim living conditions when in prison acting as a deterrence³⁴. British politicians seeking to reform the system will have the challenge of overcoming the false narrative that rehabilitation is the soft option, or that it cannot coincide at the same time as punishment, despite Norway proving that to be untrue. It's not too late for Britain to change course, however. Before the 1990s when Norway reformed its system, reoffending rates reached highs of 70%, before dropping to today's extraordinarily low levels³⁵.

For this to happen, progressive parties will need to build consensus and reclaim the narrative from authoritarian parties, who use law and order as a cynical tool to whip up fear and division³⁶. Rather than Labour attacking the Lib Dems for being "soft on crime" because they support alternatives to the currently failing system, they should be working together to reframe public discourse about justice. The Tories have monopolised the public narrative on crime, and with a media which sensationalises particularly violent crime for profit, progressives must be under no illusion that there is a mountain to climb. Ironically, some of the most rehabilitation-minded reforms in recent years were proposed by Ken Clarke³⁷, who touted the idea of ending IPP sentences and ending minimum sentences, as well as a tranche of other ideas to reduce the prison population. However, David Cameron spiked them, for fear of being seen as "soft on crime". IPPs did eventually get abolished - but not retrospectively, which has contributed to the current overcrowding issue. Successive Tory Justice Ministers have failed to tackle the issue, for fear of being seen as soft, and ministerial churn has ensured that justice policy has remained disjointed and inconsistent. Progressive parties who form a government should seriously consider the need for stable oversight of the justice system if they are undertaking a program of reform, rather than constantly changing the person at the top with little to no handover process³⁸.

Winning support to change the current system and move away from a knee-jerk tendency to imprison is one thing. Gaining consent for the widespread public spending necessary to achieve lower inequality levels as has been done in Norway, is entirely another. Working separately only makes the task harder to complete.

Chapter three

Norwegian prisons



Conditions within Norwegian prisons are a world away from those in Britain, with maximum security prisons having cells with mini-fridges and flat-screen televisions. Additionally, there are shared common areas such as kitchens and living rooms which foster a greater sense of community³⁹. The basic architectural design of Norwegian prisons is centred around making prisons more comfortable for prisoners. Some areas of Norwegian prisons do not have CCTV; prisoners can move around freely, benefit from large windows that allow more sunlight, and have ensuite toilet facilities. In Halden prison, which is situated in the middle of a forest, there is an onsite grocery store for prisoners' use, a music studio and a garden⁴⁰.

Chris Daw QC said: "The most important difference between the Norwegian and British models is that Norway focuses on making the prison environment as close to the outside world as possible – people live in ordinary housing units, prepare their own food, and may have family stay occasionally. Those levels of normality mean that, when a prisoner is released, the transition is less extreme than it often is in Britain."⁴¹

In contrast, British prisons have experienced years of poor maintenance, causing a backlog of £900 million in repair costs, whilst closing some of the most decaying prison buildings in the estate is contributing to the clogged and overcrowded system⁴².

An important premise of Norwegian prisons is cultivating a culture of trust. The prison island of Bastøy, just off the coast of Norway, is only accessible by ferry, which at one point was operated by a prisoner serving 14 years for drug smuggling⁴³. Prisoners have jobs, live in 'pods', which are small dorms rather than cells, and mix with guards.

The role of the prison officer in Norway is also very different from their British counterparts. In Norway, it is not uncommon for officers to socialise with prisoners over coffee and play sports, meaning that the uneven power dynamic between themselves and the prisoner is far less pronounced than in British prisons⁴⁴. Many British prison officers are too thinly stretched to properly oversee their caseload of prisoners that they are meant to give pastoral support. In British prisons, 44% of prison officers said they had witnessed colleagues treating prisoners inappropriately⁴⁵ and almost half of prisoners claim to have been mistreated by staff. Prisoners rely on officers for the majority of their care, support and guidance when incarcerated, and when those relationships break down, it can have serious consequences. Serious assaults on prison staff are far too frequent, and a better relationship between prisoners and their caregivers may prevent them in such high numbers.

Additionally, far more funding is given in Norway to train prison officers. As of 2016⁴⁶, British prison officers were expected to do around 8 weeks of training before being expected to begin work. There is also a documented difference in quality and duration of training in the private prison sector, with staff citing that they felt underprepared and given no practical learning opportunities, which doesn't help when faced with issues on the job⁴⁷. Conversely, Norway has a Correctional Service of Norway Staff Academy, which all prison staff attend. The Academy carried out research, providing training for staff pre-employment as well as in-job⁴⁸. All prison staff must train for 2 years, during which time they undertake a multi-disciplinary learning program and then have a year-long placement in a prison.

One idea to improve the performance of prison officers is to professionalise the service, requiring a higher minimum standard for entry⁴⁹. Just as has been done with nursing, requiring degree (and equivalent) qualifications and training could bring prison staff more in line with those in Norwegian prisons. As is the case in Norway, the prison officer shouldn't just be a uniformed security warden but trained in all manner of areas, from understanding offending behaviour, psychology, criminology, mental health, and ethics. This is something the Howard League of Penal Reform set out in 2016.

In Britain, the average prison place costs the taxpayer £40,000, whereas a place in some Norwegian prisons costs around £98,000⁵⁰. However, after considering the wide range of therapeutic, vocational, and recreational activities and courses on offer to prisoners⁵¹, it becomes clear why the latter is more expensive. In Norway, there are a significant number of activities that prisoners can enrol in, for example, woodworking and yoga⁵². Research indicates that among Norwegian prisoners who were unemployed prior to incarceration, participation in vocational training rose by 34%, and employment after release increased by 40%⁵³.

Given that reoffending costs the public purse £18 billion a year, it could be argued that spending more to improve living conditions, skill learning, recreation, therapeutic activity, and education within prisons would be more cost-effective⁵⁴ if it lessens the chances of reoffending. There is a clear economic, as well as moral, case for prison reform.

Chapter four

Laying the groundwork for release



As has been mentioned, the primary purpose of Norway's prisons is reintegration. This means that work needs to begin before a prisoner is released, whether that be skill acquisition, therapeutic sessions, workshops, or education. In addition, helping prisoners to change their mindsets and build self-esteem, establish pride in their surroundings, and give them the chance to build prosocial relationships are important components on their journey to reintegrate into the community.

There are small things British prisons could do to foster changing attitudes. For a start, as is the case in Norway, prisoners should be given the chance to manage their surroundings, whether that be creating gardens for them to cultivate, painting their cells, or allowing them to do basic maintenance. Not only would this help them learn new skills, it would also instil a sense of pride in their surroundings. When people feel they have a stake in their community, they are more likely to protect it and be more committed to abiding by norms - which will be key upon release if they are to desist from offending behaviour.

Another aspect of prison life that can be improved is increasing the availability of skills training and improving education for prisoners. This is something the government could learn from private and non-profit organisations, one such group being Code4000. Code4000 provides training to prisoners by teaching them coding skills and they also help with securing future employment prospects for them. This approach allows individuals to learn new skills and then work in that area.

The story of one former prisoner, Franky, shows just how much these programs can benefit individuals and how they give former prisoners a better future: "Before I went to prison, I never saw myself in this position, it's unbelievable. I couldn't ask for anything more. Code4000 has been unbelievably supportive, both Neil and Stephen at Humber and the broader Code4000 team. The deposit for my house was the biggest help that I could have asked for, and I was really grateful that Code4000 were able to sort that. Prison can be an isolating place and you can sometimes feel that nobody cares, that nobody is there to help you, but the Code4000 course was different and everyone involved, both inside and outside The Humber, were great throughout."

This approach is one we should be aiming to copy within prisons across the country. This can take place by supporting outside organisations carrying out this work and strengthening education and skills training within prisons.

Chapter five

Through-the-gate and post-release



To truly ensure offenders desist from criminality in the future, there needs to be a greater investment in support post-release, to ensure former offenders can thrive. Recent years have seen record highs in deaths shortly after release; approximately 30–35% of these deaths were self-inflicted⁵⁸.

This is another area in which Britain lags behind Norway. Work needs to be done at an earlier stage, before release, to ensure offenders are equipped with the tools they need to thrive after prison. Partly, the issue is that rather than being a profession which prioritises helping offenders, the Probation Service is often preoccupied with being yet another arm of law enforcement⁵⁹. In Norway, this is not the case - the Probation Service has a higher level of discretion and autonomy than in the UK⁶⁰.

Additionally in Norway, in 2005, a “reintegration guarantee”⁶¹ was established, which ensures every person who serves a custodial sentence is provided housing, work, education, healthcare, addiction treatment or financial help when they are released. There are prolonged efforts to keep probation caseloads in Norway down to below 20 per officer⁶². This is a stark contrast to the situation in Britain, where many offenders are released from prison back onto the streets, often in a worse state than when they were jailed, being dealt with by a Probation Service ill-equipped to safely manage skyrocketing caseloads. The work of Norwegian Probation Services has been far less impacted by budget cuts than those in Britain, because the effects of cuts in Norway were absorbed internally, rather than allowing service users to be impacted.

Some work is being done to help British prisoners gain employment after they are released, such as the scheme at HMP Drake Hall that sees prisoners undertake a 9-month course to work at Halfords, with a guaranteed full-time job when released⁶³. Another scheme, run by The Timpson Foundation, is set up to provide work for ex-offenders, with 10% of Timpsons’ workforce being former prisoners⁶⁴.

However, other obstacles remain – for example, prisoners are typically not permitted personal email accounts⁶⁵, which makes tasks such as opening bank accounts, applying for social housing, or accessing Universal Credit more difficult. This is especially important as prisoners near the end of their sentence and enter lower security prisons.

Equally, some offenders have complex needs, which require more resources and joined-up thinking to address, such as the smooth transfer of prison health records to outside providers, and helping them pre-register with GPs. When small details like this are overlooked, resettlement is more challenging for those with comorbidities of substance abuse and mental health issues⁶⁶. It is pleasing to see the government recently committed to no longer release prisoners on a Friday⁶⁷ - as currently, many support services are not accessible on a weekend, or they may be resettled far away from their prison. Due to the nature of some offending (serious violence or sexual), offenders may face additional stigma and barriers when attempting to reintegrate.

Chapter six

The lessons from Norway



1. Spend more on welfare, education, public services, and support services. Social democratic countries, like Norway, have lower prison rates and often spend a bigger chunk of GDP on funding these vital services. Our politicians often talk about early intervention - they should put their money where their mouth is.
2. Prison should be a last resort. Fewer people should be sent to prison, short sentences of under a year should not be handed out, and diversion through non-custodial schemes and appropriate treatment for mental health should be a priority. Scotland has banned sentences under 12 months - we should too.
3. Use education as a tool to foster cultural changes in attitudes towards alternatives to custody. Aim to boost public confidence to gain support.
4. Ensure the unlocking of prisons post-pandemic. As the rest of the country unlocks after COVID-19, prisons need to be too. As a bare minimum, prisons must have more access to open air, time out of cells, and recreation. Prisons need to be made safe before this can happen. More prison staff should be recruited to allow the safe management of prisons. If they are to be unlocked, they need to be places of reform. Imprisonment without meaningful reform is just warehousing. Huge investment is needed into mandatory skills-learning, education, therapeutic and recreational activities. All of these things will help mental health, desistance from crime, and foster a better internal prison culture.
5. Focus on improving and modernising the current prison estate. This could be done by diverting the money used to fund more prison places (which wouldn't be needed if custodial sentences, especially short ones, were reduced, and rehabilitation began to work) into improving conditions. To free up space, consider releasing non-violent offenders where appropriate.
6. Consider moving to a Norway-style professionalisation of prison officers. Prospective prison officers must take longer, more comprehensive, and educational training to do the role, potentially requiring a degree or equivalent level qualification. This could take the form of degree requirements or the creation of a training college akin to the College of Policing.
7. Progressives should work together to bring about a reframing of penal policy and punishment (as well as justice more widely) as an electoral issue, as well as building consensus. When those supporting authoritarian punishment control the narrative, any progressive alternative is seen as "soft". This is probably the most crucial if we are to see any tangible change. Labour and the Lib Dems (particularly) should not be attacking each other over this. In government, progressive parties need to acknowledge that ministerial churn is a hindrance to achieving change. Consider bolstering a mandatory portfolio handover process, with better briefing, and reducing the number of reshuffles in the department.
8. Encourage a greater emphasis on reintegration post-release. Work must begin whilst incarcerated. This does not just mean education and learning, but interpersonal skills, money management, therapeutic programmes, and help to re-establish/maintain positive relationships.
9. Establish a reintegration guarantee as is done in Norway. This means that offenders are provided housing, education, addiction treatment if needed, healthcare, financial support, and employment - to ensure they do not re-offend and have the tools to reintegrate back into society.

Conclusions

As this report has discussed, serious questions need to be asked as to why Britain sends so many people to prisons that are woefully inadequate as tools of rehabilitation. It is of course not the case that any system, even Norway's, can fully prevent reoffending, or be deemed a total success. However, there are absolutely a plethora of changes that could be made in England and Wales, as outlined in this paper, that would make the prison experience more dignified and effective.

Unfortunately, until politicians of all parties (but particularly progressive ones) stop buying into myths of authoritarian stances being the only available option, we will continue to have some of the highest reoffending rates in all of Europe. Until politicians stop using crime as a tool to stoke fears, which they respond to by claiming they have all the answers and only they can be trusted to keep the public safe, British prisons will continue to be warehouses of marginalised communities.

We should be looking to Norway, which, let's not forget, only changed tack in the 1990s, when they had reoffending rates broadly comparable to ours. We can't know how successful our attempts to learn lessons from Norway will be. Cultural and demographic differences may prevent a complete emulation of their penal system, but given the dire state of play across Britain's prison estate, it seems a worthy endeavour. Reoffending rates have remained too high for far too long, which signals that the current approach is not working. More people in prison is not driving down crime rates. With lives on the line, and untold misery inflicted not just on offenders but also their families by our antiquated and ineffectual system, the time for change is now.

Bibliography

- ¹ Howard League, Prison watch. Available at: <https://howardleague.org/prisons-information/prison-watch/> [Accessed 2 July 2022].
- ² The Justice Gap, UK prison population third highest in Europe and suicide rate twice the average. Available at: <https://www.thejusticegap.com/uk-prison-population-third-highest-in-europe-and-suicide-rate-twice-the-average/> [Accessed 2 July 2022].
- ³ House of Commons Library, 'UK Prison Population Statistics' (London, House of Commons Library, 2021), p. 5.
- ⁴ Prison Reform Trust, 'Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile' (London, Prison Reform Trust, 2022), p. 10.
- ⁵ Prison Reform Trust, 'Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile' (London, Prison Reform Trust, 2022), p. 12.
- ⁶ UK research and innovation: Breaking the Cycle? Prison Visitation and Recidivism in the UK. Available at: <https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=ES%2FK002023%2F1> [Accessed 2 July 2022].
- ⁷ GOV.UK, New prison strategy to rehabilitate offenders and cut crime. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-prison-strategy-to-rehabilitate-offenders-and-cut-crime> [Accessed 2 July 2022].
- ⁸ This Week, How safe are UK prisons?. Available at: <https://www.theweek.co.uk/news/crime/955378/how-safe-are-uk-prisons> [Accessed 2 July 2022].
- ⁹ Prison Reform Trust, 'Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile' (London, Prison Reform Trust, 2022), p. 24.
- ¹⁰ Prison Reform Trust, 'Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile' (London, Prison Reform Trust, 2022), p. 24.
- ¹¹ Inquiry into women's health and well-being in prisons Briefing one, 'Inquiry into women's health and well-being in prisons Briefing one' (London, The Howard League for Penal Reform, 2022), p. 2.
- ¹² Prison Reform Trust, 'It Doesn't Have To Be Like This' (London, Conquest Litho, 2021), p. 3.
- ¹³ The Independent, Prison conditions 'most disturbing ever seen' with staff now accustomed to jails not fit for 21st century, watchdog says. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/uk-prison-report-conditions-inspectorate-disturbing-jails-21st-century-a8442111.html> [Accessed 2 July 2022].
- ¹⁴ Prison Reform Trust, 'Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile' (London, Prison Reform Trust, 2022), p. 18.
- ¹⁵ Prison Reform Trust, 'Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile' (London, Prison Reform Trust, 2022), p. 23.
- ¹⁶ Prison Reform Trust, 'Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile' (London, Prison Reform Trust, 2022), p. 23.
- ¹⁷ Prison Reform Trust, 'Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile' (London, Prison Reform Trust, 2022), p. 12.
- ¹⁸ The Justice Gap, Ministers reveal plans to create 500 new places for women in prisons. Available at: <https://www.thejusticegap.com/ministers-reveal-plans-to-create-500-new-places-for-women-in-prisons/> [Accessed 2 July 2022].

- ¹⁹ The I, Sadiq Khan: We can't arrest our way out of London's crime problem, but rethinking our drugs approach will help. Available at: <https://inews.co.uk/opinion/sadiq-khan-london-crime-problem-arrests-rethink-drugs-approach-1384459> [Accessed 2 July 2022].
- ²⁰ Twitter, Conservative MPs should back Labour's Community and Victim Payback Boards today in the House Commons to restore public trust in community sentences and show that they care about tackling the type of crime that's wrecking our communities. Available at: <https://twitter.com/SteveReedMP/status/1541690505376980993> [Accessed 03 July 2021].
- ²¹ The Borgen Project: NORWAY'S PRISON SYSTEM BENEFITS ITS ECONOMY. Available at: <https://borgenproject.org/norways-prison-system/> [Accessed 2 July 2022].
- ²² UK research and innovation: Breaking the Cycle? Prison Visitation and Recidivism in the UK. Available at: <https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=ES%2FK002023%2F1> [Accessed 2 July 2022].
- ²³ World Prison Brief: World Prison Brief World Prison Brief data. Available at: <https://www.prisonstudies.org/country/norway> [Accessed 2 July 2022].
- ²⁴ World Prison Brief: World Prison Brief World Prison Brief data. Available at: <https://www.prisonstudies.org/country/norway> [Accessed 2 July 2022].
- ²⁵ Pell Center for International Relations and Public Policy, 'Incarceration and Recidivism: Lessons from Abroad' (Rhode Island, Pell Center for International Relations and Public Policy, 2014), p. 3.
- ²⁶ Centre Think Tank podcast interview with David Rudolf.
- ²⁷ Cavadino, M and Dignan. J 'Penal policy and political economy', *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, 6 (2006), p. 435.
- ²⁸ Esping-Andersen, G. *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 52.
- ²⁹ Centre for Crime and Justice Studies: Capitalism and penal policy. Available at: <https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/publications/cjm/article/capitalism-and-penal-policy> [Accessed 2 July 2022].
- ³⁰ Centre for Crime and Justice Studies: Capitalism and penal policy. Available at: <https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/publications/cjm/article/capitalism-and-penal-policy> [Accessed 2 July 2022].
- ³¹ Centre for Crime and Justice Studies: Why does Britain have such a high prison population?. Available at: <https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/resources/why-does-britain-have-such-high-prison-population> [Accessed 2 July 2022].
- ³² The Guardian: Prison book ban is unlawful, court rules. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/dec/05/prison-book-ban-unlawful-court-chris-grayling> [Accessed 2 July 2022].
- ³³ King, R and Willmott, L. 'The Truth about Prisons and Probation', *Prison Service Journal*, 260 (2022) p. 4.
- ³⁴ HitMix: NEW 'SMART' PRISON WITH NO BARS ON WINDOWS AND CELLS CALLED 'ROOMS' IS NO 'SOFT TOUCH', SAYS JUSTICE SECRETARY DOMINIC RAAB. Available at: <https://www.thehitmix.co.uk/2022/03/05/new-smart-prison-with-no-bars-on-windows-and-cells-called-rooms-is-no-soft-touch-says-justice-secretary-dominic-raab/> [Accessed 2 July 2022].

³⁵ The Borgen Project: NORWAY'S PRISON SYSTEM BENEFITS ITS ECONOMY. Available at: <https://borgenproject.org/norways-prison-system/> [Accessed 2 July 2022].

³⁶ Centre for Crime and Justice Studies: Why does Britain have such a high prison population?. Available at: <https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/resources/why-does-britain-have-such-high-prison-population> [Accessed 2 July 2022].

³⁷ King, R and Willmott, L. 'The Truth about Prisons and Probation', Prison Service Journal, 260 (2022) p. 6.

³⁸ King, R and Willmott, L. 'The Truth about Prisons and Probation', Prison Service Journal, 260 (2022) p. 8.

³⁹ Pell Center for International Relations and Public Policy, 'Incarceration and Recidivism: Lessons from Abroad' (Rhode Island, Pell Center for International Relations and Public Policy, 2014), p. 3.

⁴⁰ The Story Institute: Inside Norway's Halden Prison. Available at: <https://www.thestoryinstitute.com/halden> [Accessed 2 July 2022].

⁴¹ Centre Think Tank podcast interview with Chris Daw QC.

⁴² House of Commons, 'Improving the prison estate' (London, House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, 2020), p. 11.

⁴³ The Guardian: The Norwegian prison where inmates are treated like people. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/feb/25/norwegian-prison-inmates-treated-like-people> [Accessed 2 July 2022].

⁴⁴ The Story Institute: Inside Norway's Halden Prison. Available at: <https://www.thestoryinstitute.com/halden> [Accessed 2 July 2022].

⁴⁵ The Howard League for Penal Reform, 'Howard League for Penal Reform's submission to the Ministry of Justice's consultation on the Prisons Strategy White Paper' (London, The Howard League for Penal Reform, 2022), p. 4.

⁴⁶ The Howard League for Penal Reform, 'Turnkeys or professionals?' (London, The Howard League for Penal Reform, 2016), p. 6.

⁴⁷ The Howard League for Penal Reform, 'Turnkeys or professionals?' (London, The Howard League for Penal Reform, 2016), p. 13.

⁴⁸ The Howard League for Penal Reform, 'Turnkeys or professionals?' (London, The Howard League for Penal Reform, 2016), p. 11.

⁴⁹ The Howard League for Penal Reform, 'Turnkeys or professionals?' (London, The Howard League for Penal Reform, 2016), p. 6.

⁵⁰ BBC News: How Norway turns criminals into good neighbours. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/stories-48885846> [Accessed 2 July 2022].

⁵¹ The Howard League for Penal Reform, 'Turnkeys or professionals?' (London, The Howard League for Penal Reform, 2016), p. 11.

⁵² The Borgen Project: NORWAY'S PRISON SYSTEM BENEFITS ITS ECONOMY. Available at: <https://borgenproject.org/norways-prison-system/> [Accessed 2 July 2022].

⁵³ The Aspen Institute, 'Policies to Reintegrate Former Inmates Into the Labor Force' (Washington, D.C., The Aspen Institute, 2019), p. 133.

⁵⁴ UK Parliament: Reoffenders: Costs. Available at: <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-03-09/137323> [Accessed 2 July 2022].

- ⁵⁵ Prison Reform Trust, 'It Doesn't Have To Be Like This' (London, Conquest Litho, 2021), p. 15.
- ⁵⁶ Chriss, J. 'The Functions of The Social Bond', *The Sociological Quarterly*, 48 (2016), p. 689.
- ⁵⁷ CODE4000, FRANKY, A CODE4000 GRADUATE, IS NOW A LLOYDS BANKING GROUP SOFTWARE ENGINEERING APPRENTICE!. Available at: <https://code4000.org/> [Accessed 2 July 2022].
- ⁵⁸ Wakeling, H; Howard, F; Edge, C and Hard, J. 'Understanding and Preventing Drug-related Deaths, and Encouraging Treatment Uptake, after Release from Prison', *Prison Service Journal*, 260 (2022) p. 39.
- ⁵⁹ King, R and Willmott, L. 'The Truth about Prisons and Probation', *Prison Service Journal*, 260 (2022) p. 4.
- ⁶⁰ The European Organisation for Probation, 'SUMMARY INFORMATION ON PROBATION IN NORWAY' (Utrecht, The European Organisation for Probation, 2018), p. 2.
- ⁶¹ The European Organisation for Probation, 'SUMMARY INFORMATION ON PROBATION IN NORWAY' (The European Organisation for Probation, Utrecht, 2018), p. 3.
- ⁶² Todd-Kvam, J. 'Probation practice, desistance and the penal field in Norway'. *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 10 (2022), p. 350.
- ⁶³ Prison Reform Trust, 'It Doesn't Have To Be Like This' (London, Conquest Litho, 2021), p. 15.
- ⁶⁴ The Timpson Foundation: The Timpson Foundation. Available at: <https://www.timpson-group.co.uk/timpson-foundation/ex-offenders/> [Accessed 2 July 2022].
- ⁶⁵ Prison Reform Trust, 'It Doesn't Have To Be Like This' (London, Conquest Litho, 2021), p. 16.
- ⁶⁶ Wakeling, H; Howard, F; Edge, C and Hard, J. 'Understanding and Preventing Drug-related Deaths, and Encouraging Treatment Uptake, after Release from Prison', *Prison Service Journal*, 260 (2022) p. 44.
- ⁶⁷ GOV.UK: End to Friday releases to cut crime and make streets safer. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/end-to-friday-releases-to-cut-crime-and-make-streets-safer> [Accessed 2 July 2022].

Company details

Centre is a registered company; our company number is 15477955, our D-U-N-S® Number is 231462215, and we are registered as CENTRE THINK TANK FOUNDATION LIMITED. Registered office address: 82 James Carter Road, Mildenhall, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk, England, IP28 7DE.

Serial title and volume number

Centre Think Tank, Vol. 15.

Released

August 1st, 2022

ISSN number

Centre Think Tank ISSN 2634-4696

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the members of Centre that proofread this paper and all mistakes are those of the author and the author alone.

Disclaimers

Any errors or omissions are the responsibility of the author alone. The paper is a republished version of the original and the titles of those who contributed to this paper have been updated including endorsements, forewords, authors and editors.

Author Disclosure Statement

Nothing to disclose.

Reference this paper

Reference as a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO):

Centre Think Tank, 'Lessons from Norway' (Bury St Edmunds, Centre Think Tank, 2022)

Reference the website link: Centre Think Tank, Lessons from Norway. Available at: <https://centrethinktank.co.uk/2023/02/lessons-from-norway/> [Accessed 00/00/0000].

Reference as a journal article: Davison, L., 'Lessons from Norway', Centre Think Tank, Vol. 15 (2022), pp. 1–31.

If you indirectly reference or use the ideas from this paper, include a link to the paper and the name of our Think Tank.

Attribution

This work is shared under Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). Whilst you can share this work or any part of it, it must be correctly attributed. Any remixed, transformed, or built-upon versions of this work may not be distributed. It may also not be used for commercial purposes if shared. A simplified version of this licence can be found here: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.

Centre