

Cut reoffending – and plug the NHS funding gap

Sir, As an organisation that helps individuals and their families come to terms with and cope with a period in prison, we welcomed Michael Gove's speech at the Prisoner Learning Alliance on July 17. It showed that perhaps the trend of sadistic and counter-productive measures meted out in the past may be coming to an end and that perhaps some logical thought may be being applied to the prison system.

The question is: why should we care about those who have committed such heinous atrocities that have resulted in a prison sentence? The answer can be summed up in one word: "recidivism". Our failure in this country to tackle reoffending has resulted in reoffending rates averaging at an astounding 50 per cent. In cost terms this equates to £13bn per year – a staggering sum, equivalent to staging one and a half Olympic Games each year.

As in any line of business, efficiencies can be made. A simple 15 per cent cut in reoffending could plug the £2bn funding gap in the NHS.

Other countries have shown that offering prisoners training and education coupled with respectful treatment have seen reoffending rates fall, so we do not need to reinvent the wheel to make a difference. The way we treat prisoners in this country is shocking by comparison. The chief inspector of prisons, Nick Hardwick, recently described prisons as "places of violence, idleness and squalor". It is unsurprising, given the hopelessness of their situation, that our newly released return so quickly to crime. Without a future they will resort to their past.

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