

Letter**Offenders on early release can contribute to society**

From Steve Dagworthy, Senior Consultant, Prison Consultants, London EC1, UK



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The recent developments at [HMP Birmingham](#) will come as no surprise to those who have watched successive governments ignore the defects in our prison system.

There is supposedly a public interest in encouraging the rehabilitation of offenders, but our prisons are simply acting as warehouses for offenders. One consequence of Chris Grayling's cuts is the virtual abolition of educational courses, vocational training and offending behavioural schemes at prisons. What has been put in their place? Nothing.

The prison system's main problem is overcrowding. The resources available simply can't deal with the number of prisoners. This has a multiplicity of knock-on effects: more violence; more strain on medical services; more accidents; more officers suffering from stress; and so on. There are many sensible ways to reduce prison numbers. Other countries manage it: why can't we?

As a company we represent many first-time white-collar offenders. They will never offend again. They are, on the whole, educated. They are non-violent. They are remorseful. Most have families and friends who will support them on their release. The prison system accepts that they have an infinitesimally low risk of re-offending, but has no resources to train them, or make use of their skills and experience while they are in prison. Basically, they vegetate until their release date.

Executive Release is a power available to the justice secretary which can be delegated to prison governors. It is the power to offer early release to offenders who have served the punitive part of their sentence, who show contrition, are of no risk to society and who can demonstrate that they will be able, on early release, to obtain and maintain paid employment or contribute to society.

This is not a reduction in sentence. The offender serves the remainder of their sentence on licence. Further, power exists so that a levy can be attached to earnings. The offender becomes a benefit to the state, not a burden.

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