

Crime Reduction Factsheet

How Can We Reduce Reoffending By Known Criminals – The Overseas Evidence

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An 18-month survey of the social science evidence on effective policies for crime reduction has reached three main conclusions about Government policy.¹

- The Government has wholly or partly ignored overseas evidence of programmes that work.
- It has implemented programmes despite evidence that they have not worked elsewhere.
- When it has pursued evidence-based policies, it has failed to implement them effectively.

Programmes known to be effective but not implemented

Incapacitation of persistent offenders

In the late 1990s, the US Congress commissioned an inquiry to discover the best evidence of effective schemes for crime reduction. A team from the University of Pennsylvania surveyed all the major programmes in the recent past and put them into two main categories: those that reduced offending and those that did not. A large number of schemes were also found to be promising but not proven. Among the schemes found to be effective was the incapacitation of known offenders.² What is the evidence?

Two comparisons suggest that increasing the risk of imprisonment reduces crime: a contrast between England and Wales and the USA from 1981 – 1996, when the two countries pursued very different policies; and the contrast between England and Wales before and after 1993, when Home Office policy changed, partly to reflect American experience.

A study carried out by Professor David Farrington of the University of Cambridge in conjunction with Patrick Langan of the US Department of Justice, compared the USA and England and Wales between 1981 and 1996, when significantly different crime policies were being pursued in the two countries. They set out to discover whether increasing the risk of punishment was associated with a reduction in crime. Between 1981 and 1995, the risk of being imprisoned *increased* in the USA and *fell* in England and Wales. During the same period, crime *fell* in the USA and *increased* in England and Wales.³

From 1981 to 1995 (1994 for the USA), an offender's risk of being caught, convicted, and sentenced to custody *increased* in the United States for the two high-volume crimes, burglary and motor vehicle theft, but the risk *fell* in England and Wales (see Appendix 1 for

the charts). For example, in the US in 1981 there were 5.5 imprisoned burglars for every 1,000 alleged burglars, increasing to 8.4 in 1994. In England and Wales there were 6.9 imprisoned burglars for every 1,000 alleged burglars in 1981 and only 2.9 in 1995. In the US in 1981 there were 3.6 incarcerated motor vehicle thieves for every 1,000 alleged thieves, increasing to 9.9 in 1994. In England and Wales there were 13.0 imprisoned motor vehicle thieves for every 1,000 alleged culprits, falling to 3.5 per 1,000 in 1995.

What happened to the crime rate during this period? According to the 1995 and 1996 (USA) victim surveys, rates of burglary and motor vehicle theft *fell* in the US and *increased* in England and Wales. In the US, the number of burglaries fell by more than half from 105.9 per 1,000 households in 1981 to 47.2 in 1996. In England and Wales the number of burglaries doubled from 40.9 per 1,000 households in 1981 to 82.9 per 1,000 in 1995. In the US, motor vehicle theft fell slightly from 10.6 per 1,000 households in 1981 to 9.1 per 1,000 in 1996. However, in England and Wales the number of vehicle thefts increased from 15.6 per 1,000 households to 23.6.

Most serious commentators accept that being in prison prevents offenders from stealing cars and breaking into houses, although some diehard utopians are squeamish about prison, believing it to be medieval, and refuse to accept that prison reduces offending at all. There is an academic debate about how big an impact imprisonment has on the crime rate and we have made a variety of estimates, based on different assumptions.⁴ However, the most straightforward assumption is based on a Home Office survey of prisoners in 2000, when offenders admitted carrying out an average of 140 crimes in the 12 months before going to jail. If they had continued at the same rate, then a full year in jail would have prevented 140 crimes, or 140,000 crimes for every 1,000 additional prisoners.

Much can also be learnt by comparing the impact of policies before and after 1993, when the British Government began to take American experience into account, at least partially. Burglary and car theft have fallen, according to the British Crime Survey (BCS), since 1995. How can the fall be explained?

In the 1980s and early 1990s, a combination of ill-advised measures led to a surge in the crime rate, including increased use of cautions and unrecorded warnings, less use of prison up to 1993, and in 1988 downgrading the taking a motor vehicle without consent to a non-indictable offence, which carried a lower sentence.

This surge began to fall back after 1993 (according to police records) and after 1995 (according to the BCS), as a result of a partial reversal of some of these earlier policies. For example, in February 1995 the maximum sentence for 15-17 year-olds was increased to two years. And in December 1999 a mandatory minimum sentence of three years for third-time domestic burglars was introduced. It has been rarely used but nevertheless has a deterrent value. Overall there has been an increased use of imprisonment. In 1993, only 60% of convicted burglars, for example, were given immediate custody. By 2002 the proportion was 77%, having gone as high as 81% in 2000. The average length of sentences for burglars also increased from 16.4 months in 1993 to 25 months in 2002.⁵

The policy changes are half-measures compared with the United States, but have had an impact on offending. The Government claims credit for the fall in crime since 1995, and with some justification, but it has allowed itself to take satisfaction from reversing the surge in crime from the late 1980s. We are now back to the rate in the early 1980s, when crime was ten times the rate in the 1950s, as Appendix 2 shows. Further sustained reductions require more concerted action.

When it took power in 1997, Labour continued the policies of the previous Tory Government. The prison population had increased by 15,000 at the tail-end of the Tory years from about 46,000 to 61,000, and Labour has subsequently added another 14,000. But Labour's leaders don't really like prison and long to discover alternatives. Consequently, huge sums have been poured into programmes intended to rehabilitate offenders. As we show below, none of them have worked.

In 2002 the Home Office projected that over 109,000 prison places might be needed by 2009, but provision was never made. Instead, the Government has been letting prisoners out early under Home Detention Curfew. It has now revised its maximum prison population projection to 87,500 by 2011 but it plans to limit the prison population to no more than 80,000.⁶ A more consistent approach would focus on the 100,000 offenders who, according to the Home Office, commit half of all crime. It thinks that only 15-20,000 are in jail at any one time. Instead of a crash programme to lock up the other 80,000, its recent national action plan announced a puny effort to focus on only 5,000 ultra-serious offenders.⁷

In-prison therapeutic communities for drug takers, with throughcare

Getting offenders off drugs has proved to be an uphill task, but some schemes have been more effective than others. In-prison therapeutic communities (TCs) have proved able to reduce drug taking and offending by drug takers. There is also considerable evidence that the impact on behaviour weakens with the passage of time, but that the improvement can be maintained if offenders are provided with support after their release from jail.

The first TC for drug addiction was California's Synanon, which based some of its concepts on psychiatric therapeutic communities and on the blend of mutual support and self-help characteristic of Alcoholics Anonymous. Participation in a TC usually lasts at least a couple of months and sometimes more than a year. There are now several such schemes, including Stay'n Out in New York State, Cornerstone in Oregon, Key-Crest in Delaware, New Vision at the Kyle Unit in Texas, and the Amity Project in California.

Therapeutic communities isolate the drug-dependent offender from the rest of the prison population. This increases social pressure from other group members to commit to the programme and decreases peer pressure from outside the group. TC's often use ex-offenders and ex-addicts as staff, and work through confrontation and support groups. A set of rules governs behaviour, and group members are expected to enforce the rules against one another, often in meetings of the whole group where feelings can run high. The isolation and comprehensive pressure to which participants are subject go a long way to explaining the impact of TCs.

Key-Crest in Delaware has been carefully studied. After three years, only 5% of the control group were free of drugs, whereas 22% of those who took part in the prison therapeutic community were drug free. A similar proportion (23%) of offenders who took part in a similar programme at a halfway-house were also drug free, but if they completed the halfway-house programme and a further six months of aftercare, 35% were drug free. Arrest rates were also lower.⁸

The results of the Amity project in California were similar. The control group received no drug treatment and 75% had been reincarcerated after 3 years. Of those who completed the prison-based therapeutic community, 79% had been sent back to prison after three years, but when offenders completed the prison therapeutic community plus aftercare, only 27% had been jailed three years later.⁹

The nearest thing to a TC in England is RAPt, but there are few such programmes.¹⁰ The key to success appears to be, not the TC as such, but the combination of the TC with

prolonged follow-up support. There is enough evidence to justify the introduction of TCs in the UK.

Universal Mandatory Drug Testing on Admission to Prison

One Home Office Study found that 75% of prisoners interviewed had taken drugs whilst in prison, most commonly heroin (53%) and cannabis (55%).¹¹ Random mandatory drug tests of prisoners are carried out daily across the prison estate, but the Prison Service annual report concluded in 2002-03 that testing had not led to a significant overall reduction in drug use.¹² During the course of visits by the Home Affairs Committee in 2004, prisoners complained about the widespread availability of drugs and the consequent impact on morale for those trying to get off drugs.¹³

The Home Affairs Committee recommended in January 2005 that mandatory drug tests on admission should be carried out on all prisoners, including those on remand. In addition, far more treatment centres are needed.

Programmes known to have failed but still being carried out

The Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme

The study for the US Congress mentioned earlier had looked at similar schemes in the US, variously called intensive community supervision or intensive supervised probation (or parole) (ISP). It found that ISP, including schemes under which offenders were tagged, did not reduce offending. However, the authors thought that combining restraint with rehabilitation might improve the record of these schemes. The nearest equivalent in England is the Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme (ISSP), which has been presented by the Government as a 'tough' alternative to prison. As such, it closely resembles intensive supervision schemes already tried out in America.

US studies found that ISP allowed more breaches to be detected but did not bring about lasting changes of behaviour. The RAND corporation evaluated 14 intensive supervision programmes (ISPs) in nine states in 1993. They measured re-arrests after one year and violations of court orders after one year. Of those on ISP, 37 per cent had been arrested after one year, compared with 33 per cent of the control group. And, of those on ISP, 65 per cent had committed technical violations, compared with 38 per cent of the control group.

About £45m has been invested in ISSP since 2001. The Government claims it is the

most rigorous, non-custodial intervention available for young offenders. It initially targeted 2,500 of the most serious and prolific young offenders (aged 10 to 17) per year. They were thought to be responsible for a quarter of all youth crime. Young offenders on ISSP can be subject to intensive monitoring for up to 24 hours a day, seven days a week, if necessary (although usually for a far shorter period). Electronic tagging and voice verification (telephone checking of an offender's 'voice print') can be used to monitor offenders, as well as intelligence-led policing and 'tracking' of their movements by case workers from the Youth Offending Team. The minimum requirement is for two surveillance checks per day.

A separate online report¹⁴ describes the findings, which were similar to American results. Yet, with typical hype, a Government press release about ISSP began with the headline, 'New report shows positive start for bold and imaginative scheme to reform the worst young offenders'. However, the independent evaluation found that 85% of participants were reconvicted within 12 months of the start of the programme and that over half of offenders (53%) did not even complete the six-month programme.¹⁵ As our online report shows, ISSP was more costly than normal community sentences, such as routine probation, and was less effective.

Drug treatment in the community

There is some favourable US evidence, especially from Baltimore, but the overall evidence is that few schemes have been effective. Nevertheless, millions of pounds have been put into Drug Treatment and Testing Orders. They too have not worked. About 70% of offenders did not even complete their order and 80% were reconvicted of a crime within two years.¹⁶

Offending Behaviour Programmes

Offending Behaviour Programmes based on cognitive-behavioural therapy are a borderline case, because the evidence does not show complete ineffectiveness in overseas experiments, but they had a very limited impact on offending. Nevertheless the Government has invested heavily in them. Cognitive skills courses were first introduced in 1992 and have been stepped up under the Blair Government. They are based on the idea that criminals carry out crimes because of mistaken beliefs. They might tell themselves that no one gets hurt (they are all insured) or interpret innocent actions as aggressive

(demanding to know ‘what are you looking at’ if you catch their eye in the street) or they may simply be unable to put themselves in other people's shoes. Psychologists claim to know how to alter these attitudes and the Home Office has been stepping up the number of offending behaviour programmes inspired by their theories.

David Robinson's study of 2,125 prisoners in Canada was the first large-scale primary study of cognitive-behavioural therapy. Taking re-admission to prison as the measure: 45 per cent of the treatment group were readmitted; and 50 per cent of the control group – a change of about five percentage points.¹⁷

The Home Office has put considerable effort into cognitive behavioural therapy, including schemes such as Reasoning and Rehabilitation, and Enhanced Thinking Skills. They have not been successful. A Home Office study (Findings 226) covering adult males from 1998-2000 found that the reconviction rate for the treatment group was 75.4 per cent and the control group 75.7 per cent.

Ineffective implementation

Education in Prison

Even when the Home Office does the right thing, measures are often half hearted or ineffective. Prison education and work programmes have been found to be among the most effective methods of encouraging prisoners to lead a law-abiding life on release. There are only a few large-scale studies. William Saylor and Gerald Gaes studied 7,000 American prisoners who performed work in a prison industry or workshop, or who underwent vocational training or both. Twelve months after release, 86.5 per cent of the experimental group had a job as did 62 per cent of the control group. They were followed up eight years later, when the authors tried to distinguish between prisoners who had taken part in prison work and those who had studied for vocational qualifications. Those involved in prison industries reoffended 24 per cent less than the control group and those who had acquired vocational qualifications 33 per cent less.¹⁸

One of the aims of the Prison Service is to prepare offenders for release and to provide constructive activity, technically called ‘purposeful activity’. It encompasses time spent in education, training, physical education, and other activities such as offending behaviour programmes, tackling substance abuse, anti-bullying initiatives, family visits and a range of work responsibilities within the prison and in prison farms and gardens.

Until 2004, the Prison Service had a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) target stipulating that every prisoner should spend an average of 24 hours per week engaged in a purposeful activity. According to the Home Affairs Committee in 2005, the Prison Service only met its purposeful activity KPI once in the previous eight years. In 2002–03 only 44% of prisons met the purposeful activity target, with the average across the prison estate as a whole of 22.6 hours per prisoner. As a means of checking the Prison Service's statistics, the Home Affairs Committee conducted a 'Prison Diary Project' aimed at finding out from prisoners themselves how much time they spent out of their cell engaged in useful activities. The committee wrote directly to 1,036 randomly selected prisoners in six establishments, although the response rate was only 31%.

The findings suggest a 'significantly bleaker' picture than the one provided by Home Office statistics.¹⁹ Over 60% of prisoners said that they spent no time in vocational training or offending behaviour programmes/drug treatment programmes, 47% spent no time in education and 31% no time in prison work. One in six spent no time during the week in sporting or gymnasium activities or in association.

The Prison Service has recently abandoned the purposeful activity KPI. In February 2004, the then Director General of the Prison Service, Mr Phil Wheatley, said that the KPI was: 'a target which was never properly resourced and was in danger of distracting us from our more important work in reducing re-offending, particularly delivering education and offending behaviour programmes.'²⁰ The Home Affairs Committee strongly criticised this decision.

However, the Prison Service has improved its provision of basic and employment skills in recent years. The majority of offenders have low basic skills and few qualifications: 52% of male and 71% of female adult prisoners have no qualifications at all. Half the prisoners screened at reception were at or below Level 1 in reading (the level expected of an 11-year-old); two-thirds were below Level 1 in numeracy and four-fifths in writing. Only one in five ex-prisoners is able to complete a job application form.²¹

Since 1993, the Prison Service has contracted with local further education colleges or community colleges for the provision of education services in prisons. Each prison has an education manager responsible for the delivery of prisoner education. Moreover, funding for education in prisons was 'ring-fenced' for the first time from 2001–02 and transferred to the DfES. Funding for vocational training was similarly ring-fenced from 2003–04. Total funding has been increased to £97m in 2003–04 and £122m in 2004–05.²²

About 130,000 prisoners pass through the prison system in a year, and in 2003–04 prisoners achieved over 46,000 qualifications in literacy, language and numeracy, as well as nearly 110,000 qualifications in work-related skills.²³ Thus, improvements are being made, but many prisoners are still discharged with no qualifications and a substantial increase in effort is still called for, as the Home Affairs Committee acknowledges.

Juvenile Offenders

The National Audit Office (NAO) concluded in January 2004 that efforts to rehabilitate juvenile offenders were often ‘fragmented’. The Youth Justice Board (YJB) is responsible for offenders under 18, for whom hopes that rehabilitation might work are highest. YJB policy is to reduce the number in custody, ostensibly to devote more resources to rehabilitation. However, the NAO remarked in January 2004 that if the policy were to succeed, the YJB needed to ‘improve the credibility and effectiveness of higher tariff community sentences’.²⁴

The National Audit Office examined case files and found that it could not always determine whether contact hours were being achieved by the Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) charged with supervising juveniles, nor could it tell the nature of the work undertaken during sessions. Records were not always updated, and in some cases records of ‘several weeks work’ were not available. Staff shortages meant that in six YOTs examined by the NAO no case worker at all had been assigned to at least five offenders, and only 76 per cent of YOTs were able to say that every young offender had been allocated a case worker within five working days of sentence.²⁵

Reconviction data were unconvincing. The NAO analysed Home Office data for community sentences served by juveniles in 2001 and found that the actual rate was close to the predicted rate (based on the age, sex and criminal history of offenders). In many cases it was worse. For example, those sentenced to supervision orders, action plans, reparation orders and fines all exceeded the predicted reoffending rate. Offenders sentenced to community rehabilitation and community punishment orders had reoffending rates a percentage point or two lower than the predicted rate but in both cases between 60 per cent and 70 per cent were reconvicted within one year. The latest two-year reconviction rate for juveniles sent to custody was 84 per cent.²⁶

Worse still, the most elementary aims of providing ‘purposeful activity’ and education were not being achieved to a satisfactory standard. The YJB target for purposeful activity

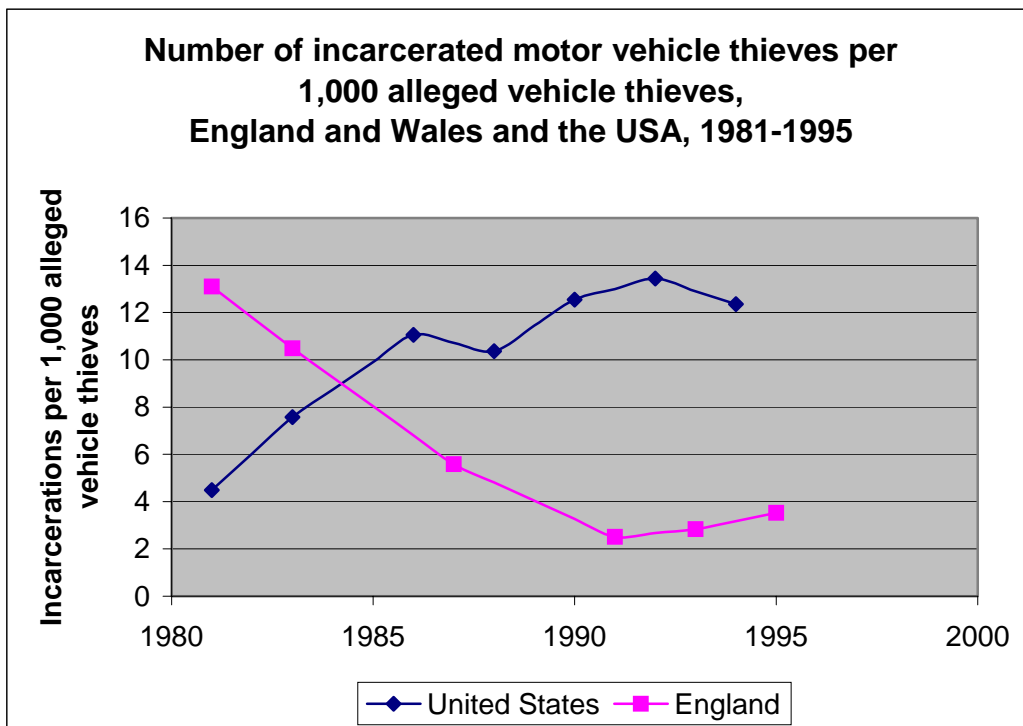
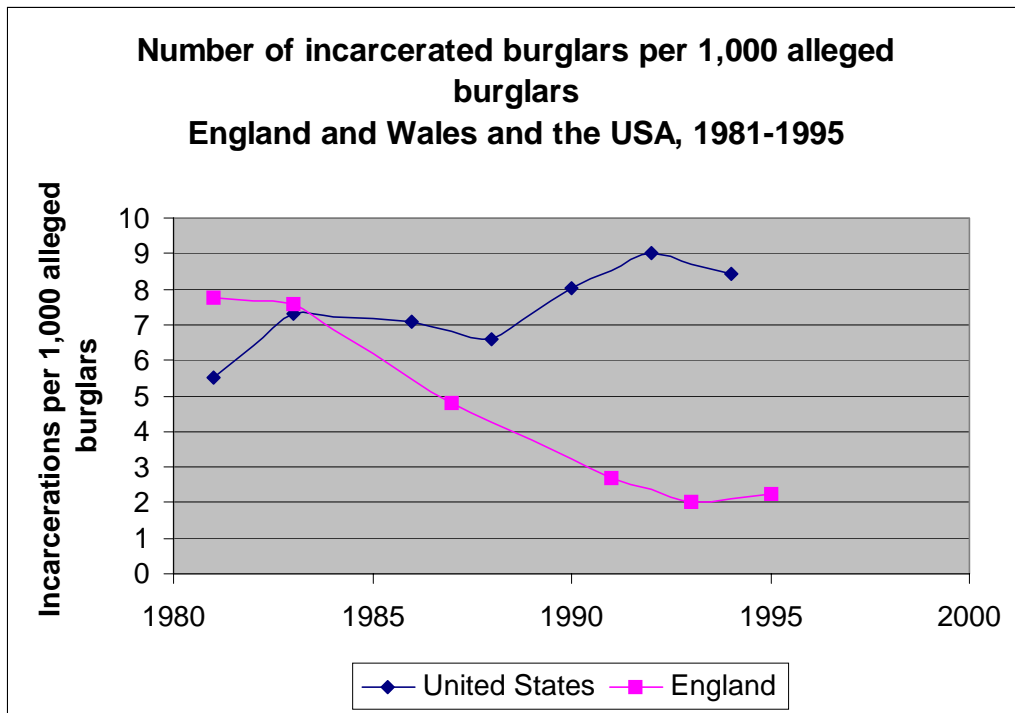
was 30 hours per week, including a minimum of 15 hours education. The Prison Service, which manages the Young Offender Institutions for the YJB, reported that it delivered an average of 35.6 hours of purposeful activity in 2002-03. However, the NAO remarked that this claim should be interpreted 'with caution'. YOIs were in fact unable to provide information on the number of hours of education and training for 2002-03.²⁷ Moreover, the YJB and the Prison Service performance measures were not the same. Purposeful activity in the Prison Service included prison work like cleaning, whereas the YJB excluded it. Worse still, the YJB had adopted a rather undemanding definition, including association time such as playing board games, 'eating with staff' and watching TV documentaries.²⁸ A fundamental aim of a detention and training order is to ensure that offenders keep up their education. Half the time is spent in custody, and half in the community continuing education or training begun inside. Custodial sentences were an opportunity 'to lead a more structured lifestyle and to return to education or training' and the YJB target was that YOTs should ensure that 80 per cent of offenders were in full-time education, training or employment by the end of December 2003 and 90 per cent by the end of 2004.²⁹ In 36/155 YOTs the 80 per cent target had been met by the end of March 2003 but 14 reported that less than 50 per cent were in full-time education, training or work. The NAO also found that integration between YOTs and custody was inadequate. Only six per cent of YOTs said that young offenders were able to continue the education started while in custody.³⁰

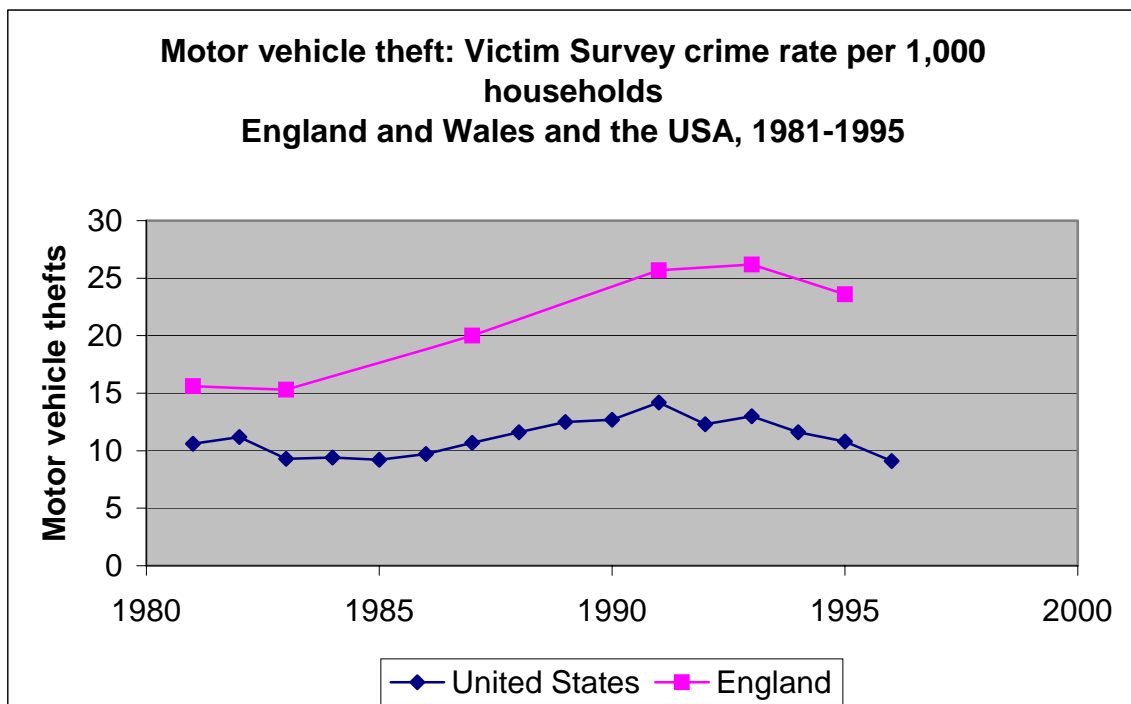
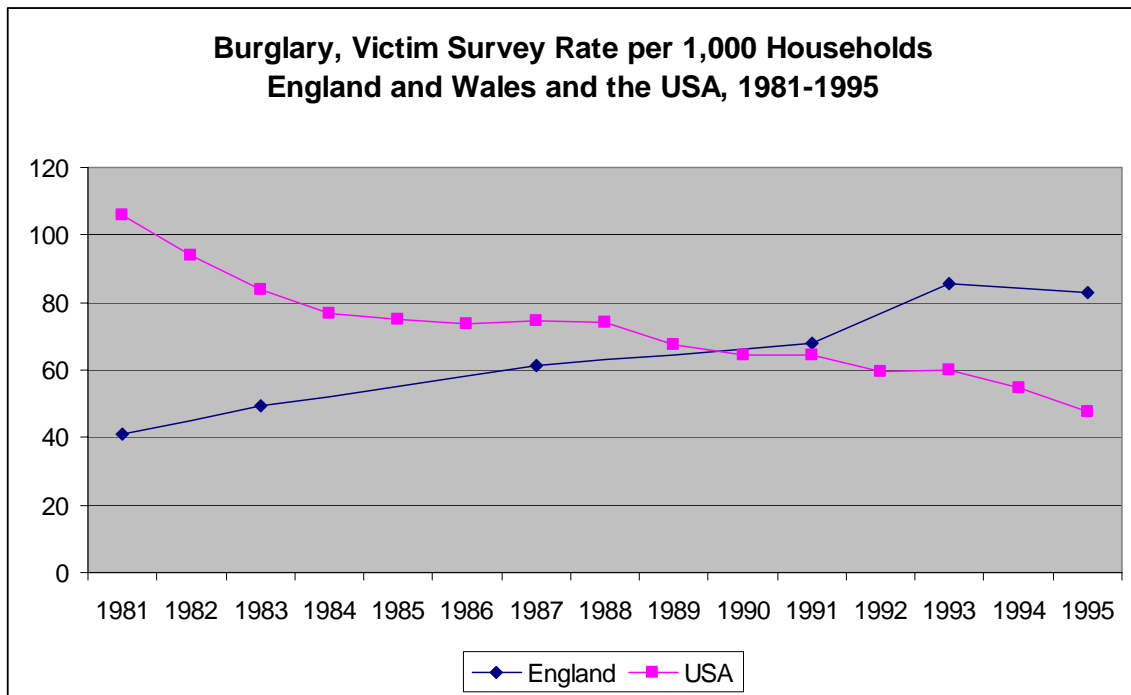
Conclusion

To summarise: the Government is failing to get many simple things right.

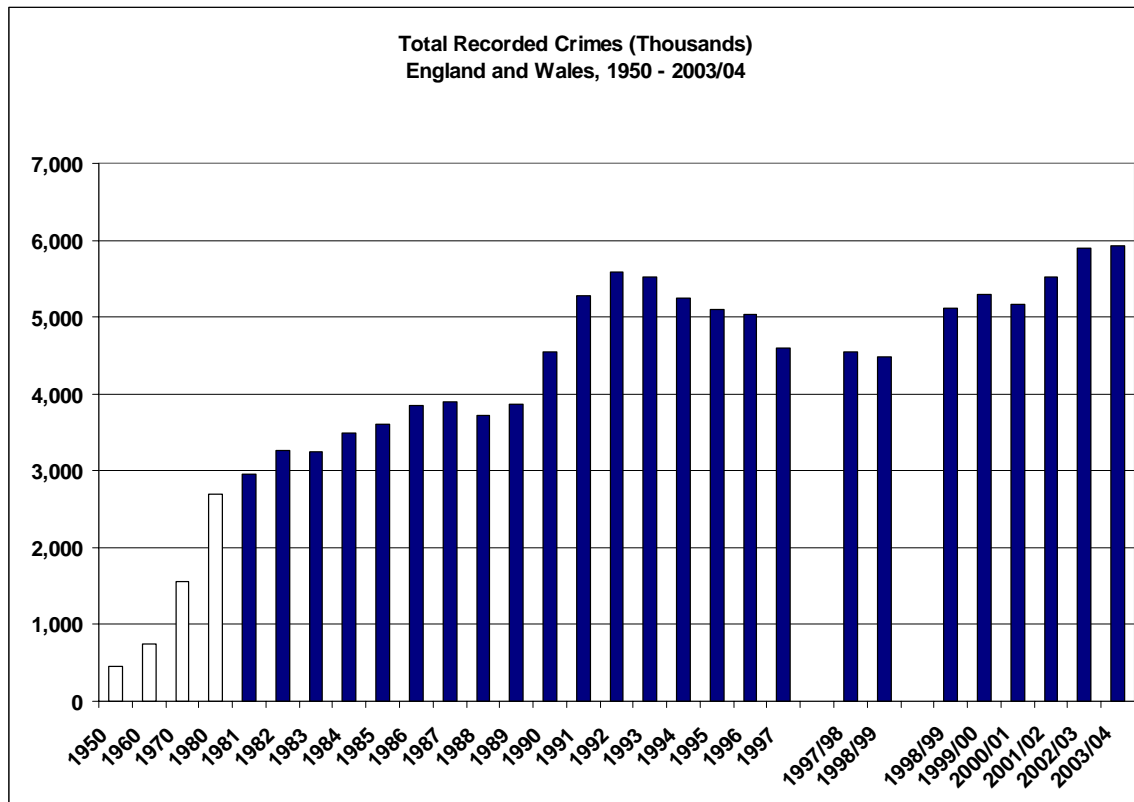
1. Serious and persistent offenders are not being jailed.
2. The most basic measures necessary to encourage a law-abiding life on release are not being taken in all cases: particularly getting prisoners off drugs and providing sufficient basic and vocational skills.
3. Efforts to reform young offenders, where hopes for reform must be the highest, are particularly inadequate, as the NAO found. Drug treatment was often not available when needed and training courses begun during the custodial part of Detention and Training Orders (DTOs) were often not continued in the community.
4. Prisoners continue to be discharged without any sustained supervision to discourage them from resuming old habits.

Appendix 1





Appendix 2



Notes

- ¹ Based on Green, D., Grove, E. and Martin, N., *Crime and Civil Society*, London: Civitas, 2005.
- ² An updated version of the report was published as: Sherman, L., Farrington, D.P., Welsh, B.C. and Mackenzie, D.L., *Evidence-Based Crime Prevention*, London: Routledge, 2002.
- ³ Langan, P. and Farrington, D., *Crime and Justice in the United States and in England and Wales, 1981-96*, Washington: US Department of Justice, 1998.
- ⁴ *The Times*, 12 May 2004: <http://www.civitas.org.uk/pubs/prisonValue.php>
- ⁵ *Criminal Statistics 2002*, Table 4.16.
- ⁶ Prison Population Projections 2005-2011. HOSB 01/05; Home Affairs Committee, Rehabilitation of Prisoners, January 2005.
- ⁷ *Confident Communities in a Secure Britain: the Home Office Strategic Plan 2004-08*, Home Office, Cm 6287, July 2004.
- ⁸ Martin, S.S., Butzin, C.A., Saum, C.A. and Inciardi, J., 'Three-year outcomes of therapeutic community treatment for drug-involved offenders in Delaware: from prison to work release to aftercare', *The Prison Journal*, vol. 79, no. 3, 1999, pp. 294-320.
- ⁹ Wexler, H.K., Melnick, G., Lowe, L. and Peters, J., '3-Year reincarceration outcomes for Amity in-prison therapeutic community and aftercare in California', *The Prison Journal*, vol. 79, no. 3, 1999, pp. 321-36.
- ¹⁰ Martin, C. and Player, E., *Drug Treatment in Prison: An Evaluation of the RAPt Treatment Programme*, Winchester: Waterside Press, 2000.
- ¹¹ Kimmet Edgar and Ian O'Donnell, Mandatory Drug Testing in Prison, Home Office Research Study 189, Home Office, 1998.
- ¹² Prison Service Annual Report and Accounts 2002-03.
- ¹³ Home Affairs Committee, Rehabilitation of Prisoners, January 2005, para 273.
- ¹⁴ Link: <http://www.civitas.org.uk/pdf/issp.pdf>
- ¹⁵ Moore, R. *et al.*, *ISSP: the Initial Report, Summary*, London: YJB, September 2004.
- ¹⁶ Hough, M., (October 2000) *Drug Treatment and Testing Orders: Final Evaluation Report*, Home Office Research Study 212, London: Home Office, October 2000.
- ¹⁷ Robinson, D., *The Impact of Cognitive Skills Training on Post-Release Recidivism among Canadian Federal Offenders*, Research Reports, Ottawa: Correctional Services Canada, 1995.
- ¹⁸ Saylor, W.G. and Gaes, G.G., *PREP: Training Inmates through Industrial Work Participation and Vocational and Apprenticeship Instruction*, Washington, DC: US Federal Bureau of Prisons, 1996.
- Saylor, W.G. and Gaes, G.G., 'Training inmates through industrial work participation and vocational and apprenticeship instruction', *Corrections Management Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1997, pp. 32-43.
- ¹⁹ Home Affairs Committee, Rehabilitation of Prisoners, January 2005, para 34.
- ²⁰ Quoted in Enver Solomon, *A Measure of Success: An analysis of the Prison Service's performance against its Key Performance Indicators 2003-04* (Prison Reform Trust, August 2004), p 11.
- ²¹ Home Affairs Committee, para. 193.
- ²² Home Affairs Committee, paras 196, 198.

²³ Home Affairs Committee, para 199.

²⁴ National Audit Office (NAO), *Youth Offending*, 2004, p. 2

²⁵ NAO, *Youth Offending*, 2004, p. 38.

²⁶ Quoted in NAO, *Youth Offending*, 2004, p. 29-30.

²⁷ NAO, *Youth Offending*, 2004, pp. 20-21.

²⁸ NAO, *Youth Offending*, 2004, pp. 19-20.

²⁹ NAO, *Youth Offending*, 2004, p. 3.

³⁰ NAO, *Youth Offending*, 2004, p. 33.