

## Letters to the Editor



### Islamists and rehab

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For general offenders, a better approach might be to restrict the Ministry of Justice to the role of a Department for International Development-style funder, handing over the resources for rehabilitation work to experienced charities that can identify the best mentors and job opportunities in local communities.

Monitoring released terrorists is in a different league of complexity. The Ministry of Justice's small group of specialists is introverted and inadequate: hardly any of them speak Arabic let alone understand misinterpretations of the Koran.

However, in or around Whitehall there are experts to be found who have the necessary insights into fanatical belief and manipulative behaviour. They include Sir Andrew Parker, director-general of MI5; Suhel Mulla of the Home Office, whom I greatly admired as a colleague when he was managing chaplain at HMP Pentonville; Ian Acheson, the former prison governor whose prescient reports were emasculated by ministers; and Peter Welby, an Arabic-speaking theologian with a profound understanding of extremism.

Raising our guard with the help of such specialists needs a long-term strategy transcending the simplistic blame games of the hustings.

**The Rev Jonathan Aitken**  
Prison chaplain, HMP Pentonville

### Starter for ten

Sir, Andrew Hayward's suggestion ("Doorstep politics", letter, Dec 3) that voters should be disenfranchised should they be unable to name the home secretary or chancellor would result in many of us being barred from the ballot box. Although I am a regular *Times* reader and Radio 4 listener, I struggled to recall both the present and recent incumbents, because they rarely last long in their posts and are by and large unmemorable. In a democracy, all have a right to vote, and indeed, sit on a jury, regardless of educational attainment or political awareness.

**Helen Dracup**  
Cobham, Surrey

## Wanted: big political beasts with gravitas

Sir, Clare Foges ("Johnson should summon back the big beasts", Dec 2) is right to call for the use of retired politicians in our governance and points to the ages of the leading presidential candidates in the US as an example, though the transition there from gerrymandered to geriatric government has not been smooth (witness Donald Trump). But our system is totally different and requires cabinet ministers to be answerable in parliament. We do not need another batch of peers, however eminent, to strengthen the House of Lords and I don't see former prime ministers standing in by-elections.

That said, ways could be found for them to do useful tasks. One of the many tricks, largely unnoticed, that Theresa May missed was when she appointed herself to take charge of the housing crisis. That is not a prime minister's role. It cried out for Michael Heseltine to be given the job, a man with the force of personality to ride roughshod over out-of-date planning restrictions and with the experience of forcing through radical change in depressed areas.

Tony Blair seems to be forever doomed over the decision to go to war in Iraq. Churchill, by contrast, was

forgiven for causing 30,000 deaths at Gallipoli and remains a national hero. Alistair Darling, George Osborne and Gordon Brown have an expertise at the Treasury unrivalled by ministers today and I could name a dozen others of value. The problem is that properly to use these men (and Shirley Williams) requires statesmanship, which I fear Boris Johnson and Jeremy Corbyn do not possess.

**Joe Haines**  
Press secretary to Harold Wilson, 1969-76; Tunbridge Wells, Kent

Sir, Clare Foges adroitly summarises how political experience could benefit Boris Johnson. If Johnson were to gain a solid majority he would be wise to use past cabinet ministers from both sides of the political fence. There was the odd element of bias in Foges's suggestions but the likes of Sir Malcolm Rifkind, Lord Hague of Richmond, David Miliband and Lord Blunkett could only enhance the prestige of a Johnson government.

These politicians would know how to get things done and restore some credibility. Government is not a one-man show.

**David Rimmer**  
Hertford Heath, Herts

Sir, "This is not the time for statements. We have an opportunity to stand together against terrorism and jointly to find a way to deradicalise our disaffected youth. Let us in a spirit of unity, reach out to both hands." This, or something like it, is what a statesman would have said in the aftermath of the Fishmongers' Hall last Friday.

Neither of the leaders of the major political parties did. What, says Foges, where are the statesmen we used to have?

**Margaret Bradley**  
Huntington, York

Sir, Clare Foges is spot on in describing the present political class as lightweight. I can think of no profession where an "expert" is almost never worth listening to, and the infusion of "big beasts" must be done once, but then what?

**Ken Pounds**  
Oadby, Leics

Sir, The article by Clare Foges is well written and articulates thoughts that have long been harboured. But is this not what the Privy Council is for? **Dr Lindsay GH Hall**  
Elie, Fife

### Geography degrees

Sir, As educationists and geographers we know that the schools we lead, whether independent, maintained, selective or comprehensive, are clear demonstrations that geography is for everyone, regardless of background. ("Geography degrees 'soft option for posh but dim', says Professor Danny Dorling", Nov 28, and letter, Nov 30).

Over the past ten years the proportion of British pupils taking a geography GCSE has risen from 27 per cent in 2010 to 40 per cent today. Schools should take pride in the fact that this growth has come largely from pupils who previously were less likely to study geography, such as black, Asian and minority ethnic pupils, and individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. Many of these students choose to study the subject at a higher level as well, because they understand its importance and relish the intellectual challenges it poses.

We recognise that there is more to do, in schools and universities, to help pupils from all backgrounds to study geography at the next stage. However, the stereotyping of geography, and the young people who are studying it

today, do a deep disservice to the interests, achievements and aspirations of our next generation.

**David Atkinson**, headmaster, Dr Challoner's Grammar School, Amersham; **Bennet Carr**, headmaster, King Edward VI School, Stratford-upon-Avon; **Paul Cornish**, vice-principal, East London Science School; **Grace Healy**, subject specialist leader in geography, Inspiration Trust *Plus a further six signatories at thetimes.co.uk/letters*

Sir, To use the teaching of geography as a class warfare weapon is divisive and unhelpful. The role of geography should be to develop a global, holistic, scientific approach to the linking and interdependence of topography, water, weather, climate, the biosphere and other relevant topics, with human civilisation. This might help to alleviate much of the unfair opinion of geography and its intellectual content as an easy option, a view held by many academics. Without geography, we might end up ruining Earth's surface.

**John F Dewey, FRS**  
Emeritus professor and supernumerary fellow, University College Oxford; **Celal Sengor**, Istanbul Technical University

### Social work

Sir, After a lifetime of work in social work, mostly with children, I welcome the suggested reorganisation of social work charity Frontline. I have been in social work shake-up to ditch my name (news, Dec 2). Over the 40 years of my social work career I have seen first-hand a move away from preventive work, a massive increase in work done with vulnerable families, and a ridiculous increase in time-wasting meetings to "service" the computer use of computer systems as a priority.

Senior managers do outnumber social workers on the front line, and in recent years has been a feeling that no social workers have the capacity to do relevant experience to complete the required task, let alone be on the front line.

It really is time for a shake-up. It is vital to retain highly experienced and competent staff. This can be done by paying them appropriately and by providing a career path that will make them feel valued. **Elizabeth James**  
Shiplake, Oxon

## "TARZAN OF THE APES"

FROM THE TIMES DECEMBER 4, 1919

Remus, who had an even stranger foster-parent. In more recent days, Mr Rudyard Kipling described a human boy, Mowgli, also brought up by wolves. At times Tarzan is reminiscent of Mowgli, but although he is not quite all he is proclaimed to be, his life and adventures make an extremely entertaining film.

is shown putting whole tribes of natives to flight. There are slighter threads to the story of relations in England plotted title and estates and a fair amount who reveals his whereabouts put into a lunatic asylum. The pains. There is also what is called a "love interest"





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