

## Letters to the Editor



Letters to the Editor should be sent to [letters@thetimes.co.uk](mailto:letters@thetimes.co.uk) or by post to 1 London Bridge Street, London SE1 9GF



### Pensions time bomb

Sir, Paul Johnson draws attention to the ticking time bomb of future pension provision, highlighting many of the major causes ("Low interest rates are killing chances of decent income in retirement", Business, Sep 16). He rightly points out that one of these was the demise of company defined-benefit schemes, which were closed because of the open-ended commitment that these implied and the cost of deficit funding that emerged in the early 2000s. What he omits to mention is that most companies took the closure of these schemes as an opportunity to considerably reduce pension contributions. This is compounded by the ridiculously low minimum contribution to auto-enrolment schemes. Hopefully, when the need for deficit funding comes to an end, companies will decide to use some of the ensuing spare cash to reverse decreases in pension contributions.

**Gary Rawlinson**  
Burbage, Wilts

## 'Broken' prison system and rehabilitation

Sir, On my chaplain's rounds at HMP Pentonville yesterday morning I summarised the arguments of Melanie Phillips ("Criminals deserve punishment, not excuses", Sep 17) to a handful of intelligent inmates. While not dissenting from the headline, they were amazed by the implication that a prison sentence is insufficiently punitive. For incarceration hurts, especially when it takes place in overcrowded, unpleasant and often dangerous conditions alongside difficult companions, from fast-breeding cockroaches to violent Spice addicts. I have not gone soft on crime as a result of being an ex-prisoner turned prison chaplain. But unlike Ms Phillips I feel there are higher priorities than putting more people in jail.

What our prisons desperately need is a culture of safety, decency, hope and encouragement towards post-release rehabilitation and employment. Sir Tom Winsor ("We are paying for our failure to prevent crime", Sep 16), the chief inspector of constabulary, seems to understand this, as do most governors and managers. But the political will and the resources to implement such a culture have long been lacking under successive governments. When the

Brexit crisis is over, solving the prison crisis should come high on the agenda of whoever will be governing us.

**The Rev Jonathan Aitken**  
London SW5

Sir, As an English tutor working in prison, I agree with Sir Tom Winsor's astute assessment of the prison population. I teach a disproportionate number of learners who exhibit low self-esteem, lack of confidence and mental health issues, which far too often stem directly from an uneducated childhood that has been corrupted by violence and neglect.

The declaration by the home secretary, Priti Patel, that criminals should "literally feel terror" (report, Sep 17) will do nothing to alleviate the critical underlying social issues that permeate our society and encourage crime. Many prisoners have been failed by the social system. We have a moral duty not to fail them again with a justice system that advocates fear rather than rehabilitation.

**Candida Waters**  
Witney, Oxon

Sir, Melanie Phillips is to be applauded for her straight talking. The purpose of the criminal justice system is to

reassure the public that offenders will be properly punished; prison is a key part of that. All other considerations such as rehabilitation are secondary, but too many commentators make the mistake of inverting their priorities. Naturally we all would wish prisoners to learn the error of their ways. But the refrain that prison sentences should be avoided simply undermines public faith in the system.

**Tony Narula**  
Wargrave, Berks

Sir, Sir Tom Winsor is correct in observing that the criminal justice system is broken — anyone directly involved in it acknowledges this. A day spent in even the best-run prison reveals a scarcity of resources and a system that has been largely ignored for decades. Investment in prisons is not a vote winner so is not considered a priority by politicians. Winston Churchill, when home secretary, said: "The mood and temper of the public in regard to the treatment of crime and criminals is one of the most unflinching tests of the civilisation of any country." We are failing that test.

**Fiona Sample**  
CEO, Oswin Project, which finds work for ex-offenders in the northeast

### Clearing a house

Sir, I was moved by Janice Turner's article recounting the clearance of her mother's home, and I was reminded of that difficult task ("She's leaving home. For the last time", Magazine, Sep 14). A few weeks after the death of my widowed mother, my sister and I started this job. Like Janice, certain things affected me more: her shoes neatly placed by the bed, a half-completed shopping list, and her hairbrush with several grey hairs still in it. So, to lighten the mood, I told my sister to look out for a feather, as some people believe that these are an angelic message of love from the newly departed. I emptied the corner cupboard of my mother's best china, then stood on a chair to make sure that I hadn't missed anything. There in the far top corner were two large white feathers, resting on a Christmas card that my daughter had once made for her, a black card with a shiny golden angel on the front. We weren't sure whether to laugh or cry.

**Janet Cowie**  
Shandon, Argyll & Bute

### Football's values

Sir, Henry Winter's article on Vincent Kompany as an outstanding ambassador for the game (Sport, Sep 17) reminds me of a talk I heard this

**Flexible working**

than nine to five. It is time to start

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