

Why Justice Matters?

At the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies we believe that the United Kingdom's over reliance on policing, prosecution and punishment is socially harmful, economically wasteful, and prevents us from tackling the complex problems our society faces in a sustainable, socially just manner.

Our three year initiative - Justice Matters - is running from July 2013 to June 2016 to turn this belief into action.

Unnecessary suffering

The starting point of Justice Matters is simple: the criminal justice system is far too big; far too costly; far too intrusive. Far from being a means of delivering social justice, it is the cause of much social injustice. The large footprint in society occupied by the combined criminal justice institutions is profoundly socially harmful.

The criminal justice process inflicts unnecessary suffering on many thousands of suspects, defendants and convictees every year. This suffering is experienced very differently depending on your position in society: for instance whether you are young or old, black or white, male or female, rich or poor.

The collateral damage of the criminal justice process is also profound. A criminal record is a life sentence for many: an ongoing obstacle to participation in work and the wider community. Families and communities whose loved ones are arrested, prosecuted, imprisoned and supervised experience deep and lasting loss. Collateral damage is also found in the stress experienced by many victims of crime, whose traumas and distress are often left unresolved, and in the dissatisfaction of witnesses, whose experience of the criminal justice process can be so negative.

The criminal justice system also crowds out other, more innovative, just and effective policy and practice solutions to the problems our society faces. It is good at punishing certain individuals and groups. It fails to prevent social problems from arising, or to resolve those that occur.

Reforming the system

There are many excellent and inspirational individuals and organisations working to address specific criminal justice harms:

- challenging miscarriages of justice;
- campaigning on discriminatory police stop and search;
- supporting families whose loved ones have died in custody;
- helping ex-prisoners and their families to rebuild their lives.

Others offer vital support to those victims of crime recovering from life-changing trauma and violence, or to witnesses who have an important story to tell.

Justice Matters does not deny the importance of this work. We recognise that respect for human rights and the rule of law are fundamental features of a healthy society that is responsive to human dignity and needs.

We admire and respect the work of those seeking to reform the criminal justice process, to make it more responsive to the needs of victims and witnesses and to ensure that those caught up in its coils as suspects, defendants and convictees are treated with dignity and respect. But Justice Matters is not intended to be another voice making the case for criminal justice reform.

The Justice Matters initiative is in favour of a much smaller criminal justice system and the development of an alternative set of justice policies and practices that are a proportionate response to the harms that people experience. It is about rethinking the entire configuration of policy and practice so that many current criminal justice responses are not required at all.

Downsize, build, transform

Justice Matters has a threefold focus: downsize, build, transform:

Downsize	Build	Transform
<p>Developing ideas to downsize fundamentally the criminal justice systems in the United Kingdom.</p> <p>We are interested in exploring an across the board reduction in the social footprint occupied by the criminal justice system.</p> <p>This means fewer arrests; fewer prosecutions; fewer prisoners; fewer probationers. It also means fewer criminal justice workers, whether police officers, judges and magistrates, prison and probation officers or others.</p>	<p>Exploring options to build policy and practice alternatives to criminal justice.</p> <p>This is not about enhancing the capacity of criminal justice agencies to address the needs of those convicted of offences.</p> <p>It is about rethinking the configuration of policy and practice – for instance in housing, education, health, social security and employment – so that many current criminal justice responses are not required at all.</p>	<p>Developing an evidenced agenda to transform policy and reduce reliance on criminal justice.</p> <p>This means a sustained change in the way that problems currently managed by criminal justice are dealt with.</p> <p>The long-term goal is a much smaller criminal justice system that treats all subject to it with dignity and respect and a comprehensive set of services and interventions that respond to human need and promote well-being.</p>

A shared endeavour

We are making a long-term commitment as an organisation to sustaining and delivering on this ambitious agenda. We know that we do not have the monopoly of wisdom. Over the course of this initiative we plan to build strong, sustained and significant partnerships with a range of like-minded individuals and organisations committed to fostering lasting and long-term change.

What you can do

- I will share Justice Matters publicity with others I know
- I want to invite a Justice Matters speaker to an organisation that may be interested
- I want to help develop the Justice Matters initiative

Name

Email