

Building a public philosophy of punishment

Work by Ian Loader, Professor of Criminology at the University of Oxford has informed and influenced penal reform policy, including policies relating to alternatives to imprisonment.



Professor Loader's research into punishment has spanned both the empirical and theoretical. In his work Professor Loader has developed the concepts of excess and moderation in relation to punishment. Using this conceptual framework, Loader has built the case for 'justice reinvestment'. This is the idea of using the savings from reducing imprisonment to invest in the community to help prevent crime. The objective of much of his work has been to develop a public philosophy of punishment rooted in principles of dignity and restraint and connected to public sentiment. His work has enhanced understanding about the political and cultural dynamics of crime control.

Between 2007 and 2009, Loader was a member of the Commission on English Prisons Today, which was chaired by Cherie Booth QC. As part of the commission, Professor Loader wrote two briefing papers that were considered as evidence: 'Principles of the Penal System' and 'Why Penal Moderation?'

His research shaped the commission's final report – 'Do Better, Do Less' which advocated the idea of penal moderation. This report informed the arguments and campaigning of the Howard League for Penal Reform, the UK's leading charity for penal reform and their development of a view on alternative penal change. The report also influenced a number of other groups and NGOs including the campaign group 'Make Justice Work'. In turn the Commission report became influential on the criminal justice agenda of the Conservative Party, then in opposition.

In 2008, the Home Office Select Committee's Inquiry into Justice Reinvestment invited Professor Loader to give evidence. Professor Loader's evidence drew on his research into the changing governance of crime. In developing their views on creating a political consensus for alternative punishment measures the committee drew on Professor Loader's arguments.

Through his research and the evidence Professor Loader has contributed, his work has shaped both public and political debate surrounding penal reform and alternatives to imprisonment including justice reinvestment.