5.8 The Effectiveness of Prison and Rates of Reoffending: 30-minute Pack

AQA 8192 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Write full sentences for extended responses and for any question asking you to explain. Aim to spend about 75 minutes on the whole paper.

1 Explain two reasons why some sociologists argue that prison may reduce crime for certain offenders even if overall reoffending rates remain high.

(Total for Question 1 is 4 marks)

2 Discuss how far sociologists would agree that prison is an effective way of reducing crime in society.

(Total for Question 2 is 12 marks)

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3 Identify one argument used by supporters of prison that refers to public perception and punishment being visible to society.

(Total for Question 3 is 2 marks)

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4 Explain one way in which imprisonment is claimed to act as a deterrent to potential offenders in society.

(Total for Question 4 is 2 marks)

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5 State one financial criticism of using imprisonment that is commonly raised in UK public debate about effectiveness of punishment.

(Total for Question 5 is 2 marks)

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6 Identify two practical problems often reported in UK prisons that critics say reduce the effectiveness of custody as a response to crime.

(Total for Question 6 is 4 marks)

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Mark scheme · 5.8 The Effectiveness of Prison and Rates of Reoffending: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

identifies first reason, e.g. for some dangerous individuals putting them in custody removes immediate risk of harm to the public	**B1**
development of first reason, e.g. incapacitation can protect potential victims while the offender is imprisoned	**B1**
identifies second reason, e.g. lengthy sentences combined with effective rehabilitation for some prisoners can address causes of offending	**B1**
development of second reason, e.g. those who receive and complete relevant treatment or training may be less likely to reoffend	**B1**

Answer: Prison may reduce crime for some offenders because incapacitation removes immediate risk of harm for dangerous individuals; and because lengthy sentences combined with effective rehabilitation can address causes of offending for those who receive and complete treatment or training.

Question 2

Level 1 Basic statements about prison and crime with little development or use of sociological ideas. Limited or no evaluation and no clear conclusion.	**1-3**
Level 2 Clear description of arguments for or against prison with some sociological explanation. Some evaluation present but may be limited in balance or depth. A simple conclusion may be offered.	**4-6**
Level 3 Good analysis that compares arguments for and against prison, using sociological concepts such as incapacitation, deterrence, labelling and prison culture. Evaluation is balanced and supported, with a plausible conclusion.	**7-9**
Level 4 Comprehensive, balanced discussion drawing on several sociological perspectives. Considers strengths and limitations of evidence about reoffending and about immediate public protection, analyses wider social consequences for families and communities, and reaches a well-supported judgement on how effective prison is at reducing crime overall.	**10-12**

Indicative content:

- Arguments that prison is effective: incapacitation removes dangerous people from the community and prevents immediate harm; visible retribution and publicised sentences may deter potential offenders; custody can provide a controlled environment for structured rehabilitation for some individuals.
- Arguments that prison is not effective: high rates of reoffending suggest custody often fails to prevent future crime; prison can act as a 'university of crime' where inmates learn criminal techniques and networks, increasing recidivism; overcrowding and funding shortages limit access to rehabilitative programmes.
- Sociological theories and evidence: labelling theory warns custody can stigmatise and exclude ex-offenders, reducing lawful opportunities and increasing reoffending; strain or deprivation explanations suggest that unless underlying social causes like poverty or addiction are addressed, imprisonment alone will not reduce offending.
- Practical and social consequences: effects on families, loss of housing or employment while imprisoned, and difficulties on release should be weighed against immediate public protection benefits; short sentences may be particularly ineffective at rehabilitation.
- Evaluation of evidence: critique of relying solely on reconviction statistics, recognition that prison may reduce crime in the short term for dangerous individuals but may not lower community crime rates long term unless combined with meaningful rehabilitation and social support.
- Conclusion: careful judgement that prison can be effective in specific cases for public protection but is limited as a general method for reducing crime unless structural and rehabilitative issues are addressed; suggested balance between custody for high-risk offenders and alternative measures for others can be discussed.

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Question 3

identifies visible retribution or public shaming as an argument, e.g. prison shows society that offenders are punished — **B1**

brief development, e.g. this can reassure victims and the public that justice has been done — **B1**

Answer: Supporters argue visible retribution, that prison shows society offenders are punished, can reassure victims and the public that justice has been done.

Question 4

identifies the claim, e.g. the threat of losing freedom and facing a prison sentence discourages some people from offending — **B1**

development, e.g. publicised sentences can create fear of punishment that reduces willingness to commit crime — **B1**

Answer: Imprisonment is claimed to deter because the threat of losing freedom and facing a sentence discourages some people from offending; publicised sentences can create fear of punishment that reduces willingness to commit crime.

Question 5

identifies high cost of keeping people in prison as a criticism — **B1**

brief development, e.g. money spent on custody could be used for prevention or rehabilitation in the community — **B1**

Answer: A common criticism is the high cost of imprisonment, with the argument that money spent on custody could instead fund prevention or rehabilitation in the community.

Question 6

first practical problem identified, e.g. overcrowding — **B1**

brief development of first problem, e.g. overcrowding can limit access to education and rehab programmes — **B1**

second practical problem identified, e.g. lack of funding or staff shortages — **B1**

brief development of second problem, e.g. staff shortages may reduce supervision and the quality of rehabilitative work — **B1**

Answer: Two practical problems are overcrowding, which can limit access to education and rehab programmes, and lack of funding or staff shortages, which can reduce supervision and the quality of rehabilitative work.

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