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Parliamentary News

(January 1983–March 1983)

Grendon Prison: prison patients

On 9 February 1983 Lord Donaldson of Kingsbridge, the first Chairman of the Board of Visitors at Grendon Prison, initiated a debate on the expressed intention of the Prison Department to increase the number of inmates at Grendon to 270 by March 1983. The present Board of Visitors were concerned that this would result in a fundamental change of function and reduced therapeutic potential at Grendon. Lord Donaldson reviewed the work of Grendon Prison over the years and paid tribute to Dr Gray, the first Medical Superintendent/Governor. Lord Donaldson referred to the work of Professor John Gunn and Graham Robertson and their evaluation of Grendon Prison with their conclusion that the Grendon system achieved a significant psychological and psychiatric improvement in the prisoners selected to go there. Lord Donaldson went on to review the present work of Grendon in detail and concluded that the present population of 245 was dangerously high and should in fact be reduced by at least 20. He sincerely believed that the present intentions to increase numbers would end by destroying one of the four outstandingly good features of the prison system—the others being Barlinnie, the Annexe at Wormwood Scrubs and the therapeutic unit at Holloway. Lord Longford also spoke and said that he had no words which were not a condemnation of the Home Office treatment of prisoners who may be described as psychiatric although he recognized the great difficulty of the task. He was concerned about the large number of individuals in prison who should be in a hospital and thought that it might be estimated as 1,000 who were, by most ordinary standards, medical cases. He was followed by Lord Foot and Lord Kagan, both of whom expressed concern, and then by Lord Hooson who said that he was 'filled with dismay'. He spoke warmly of the research that had been carried out at Grendon over the years and could be applied to other penal establishments. Lord Harris of Greenwich referred to the need to reduce the total prison

population and discussed the proposal which had been previously made in the Criminal Justice Act to bring down the parole threshold from twelve months to a lower level. Lord Elton (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Home Office) replied that the prison population stood at nearly 44,000, that is approximately 6,000 higher than the current figure of certified normal accommodation. It was expected to peak at about 44,700 in April. He said that 452 places in regional secure units were either under construction or now open. This included one unit in the North-East of England which provided 30 places and two further units in the Trent and Western regions with 60 and 30 places respectively which will be opened following commissioning and recruitment of staff. The Home Office were concerned that the unit (C Wing) at Parkhurst Prison had to close in 1979, but the Department had recently been exploring the possibility of re-establishing the unit and of setting up a second similar unit elsewhere. With respect to Grendon, the Home Office did not accept that an increase in the population would inevitably destroy its regime. Grendon was regarded as an essential and a very successful part of the psychiatric services in the prison system and they were committed to ensuring that it continued to provide this service. The longer term aim was to ensure that Grendon was more fully used as a therapeutic establishment. There were plans for posting more permanent staff there and for converting some accommodation.

Mentally handicapped persons

In a written answer on 24 February 1983, Mr Rossi of the DHSS said that in the period April 1981 to March 1982 the average daily cost per patient to the NHS in a mental handicap hospital was £25. The daily local authority accommodation cost of maintaining a mentally handicapped resident in local authority accommodation was £12. These figures relate to England only.

The mentally handicapped in Wales

On 21 March 1983 the Secretary of State for Wales, Mr Nicholas Edwards, indicated that he would back the 10-year strategy proposed by the All-Wales working party on services for mentally handicapped people. A total of £1.6 million was available for the first year and the strategy would involve building up expenditure over ten years to £26 million. Funds were allocated to voluntary organizations and for staff training. Lead responsibility for local developments would rest with the personal social services authorities working in co-operation with other agencies.

Sentencing policy

In a written reply on 24 February 1983, Mr Mellor of the Home Office said that between 1965 and the end of 1981 over 1,600 persons were convicted of murder, and in 135 cases recommendations for a minimum period of detention applied to these individuals sentenced to life imprisonment. At the end of 1982, three life sentence prisoners convicted of murder had been released on licence at an earlier date than that recommended by the trial judge. As required, all three prisoners were released on the recommendation of the Parole Board and after consultation with the Lord Chief Justice and, where he was available, the trial judge.

Balderton Hospital (Eastdale Unit)

Mr Kenneth Clarke, the Minister of Health, gave a written answer on 16 February 1983 about the monitoring of patients who have been discharged from the Eastdale Unit. He said that in recent years the Unit has catered for nearly 10 per cent of all patients transferred or discharged from the Special Hospitals. A detailed review of the Unit had recently been completed by a joint sub-committee of the Trent Regional Health Authority and the Central Nottinghamshire District Health Authority. This sub-committee made a number of recommendations but did not include any proposals for detailed monitoring of the progress of former patients. The DHSS would give any research proposals serious consideration in the light of competing claims for the research funds available.

Data Protection Bill

The Committee Stage of this Bill in the House of Lords was taken on 22 February 1983. Lord Elton, for the Government, indicated that the sensitivity of medical records and health data was being considered by the Government who was considering placing some controls on the access of individuals to data so that harm to the individuals themselves could be avoided, while at the same time giving access freely where there is no danger of harm to the subject. It was said that the Government was consulting closely with doctors and other professionals in the health field about what arrangements for subject access to data and reports should

be available. Lord Avebury raised a number of questions with regard to this.

Hospital consultants

On 10 March 1983, in a written answer, Mr Finsberg said that the average earnings of whole-time NHS consultants are estimated to be £25,000 per annum. This includes £3,000 per annum from various fees and allowances, including distinction awards.

NHS (consultant psychiatrists)

In a written answer on 28 February 1983, Mr Finsberg said that at 30 September 1982 there were 216 consultant posts without a permanent holder in psychiatric specialties in England, some one third of which were partly or wholly occupied by locums. A detailed breakdown of these figures by Region was given and is published in *Hansard*.

Section 136

On 24 March 1983, in reply to a question, the Minister of Health gave the following information relating to hospital admissions under Section 136 of the Mental Health Act, 1959, in the last three years. The number of admissions to mental illness hospitals and units was as follows:

Regional Health Authority	1979	1980	1981
Northern	67	127	127
Yorkshire	29	29	32
Trent	25	34	35
East Anglia	41	29	22
North West Thames	426	484	524
North East Thames	477	504	469
South East Thames	151	284	311
South West Thames	314	291	305
Wessex	15	14	14
Oxford	1	2	5
South Western	18	33	22
West Midlands	23	33	28
Mersey	4	8	1
North Western	6	10	11
Board of Governors (Special Health Authorities since 1 April 1982)	1	—	—
Totals	1,598	1,880	1,906

In addition, there were admissions to mental handicap hospitals as follows: one in North East Thames region and two in North Western region in 1979; one in North West Thames region in 1980; one in North West Thames region in 1981. There were no admissions to Special Hospitals under Section 136 in any of these years. (Some patients will have been counted more than once if re-admitted under Section 136 during the year. Figures for 1982 are not yet available.)

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