



EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO SKILLS

CRISIS SUBMISSION

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Executive Summary

- The most vulnerable adults in society remain the least likely to take part in learning, despite the Government's Skills Strategy and having the most to gain by improving their skills.
- Learning for vulnerable adults is hampered by poor mainstream provision and a lack of available learning opportunities in the Voluntary and Community sector.
- Low participation in learning by vulnerable workless adults occurs in spite of their strong appetite for improved skills and employment.
- For vulnerable adults, skills are as relevant to secure housing, improved health and social inclusion as they are to sustainable employment.
- The danger posed by Lord Leitch's targets is a further redirection of resources to Level Two qualifications and away from the courses that act as stepping stones to Level Two.
- Many adult learners, whether disadvantaged or not, prefer flexible, personalised and bite-sized programmes which adapt to their needs.
- Vulnerable learners will not always progress smoothly and quickly from one level to the next but will at times stall, fall back, step sideways or even leap forward.

1.0 Crisis expertise – education and training for vulnerable homeless adults

1.1 *Crisis* is the national charity for single homeless adults. We are a leading provider of, and commentator on, education and training for vulnerable homeless adults. Working year-round we help adults get through the crisis of homelessness by enabling them to rebuild social and practical skills, secure their housing and move on to further education or employment. Our programmes are described below.

1.2 *Crisis Skylight*, based in East London, is a pioneering example of engagement, education and employment opportunities for homeless adults. Although open to all, *Skylight* specialises in enabling vulnerable homeless adults to succeed in learning. The centre provides:

- over 70 free practical, vocational and creative workshops including Woodwork, Interview skills, Art and Tai Chi;
- a high specification training suite offering accredited qualifications and basic skills training;
- a social enterprise Café offering training in catering and customer service and ultimately the opportunity for employment with an external catering partner.

Learners are able to regain self-confidence and motivation, build on existing skills or develop new ones and progress through to further education or employment. *Skylight* is delivered through an exciting array of partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders including *Newham College*, *Learn Direct*, *City Lit* and *Cardboard Citizens*, as well as with support from Government. A second *Skylight* Centre will open in Newcastle in 2007.

- 1.3 *Crisis Smart Move* and *Smart Skills* are complementary nation-wide schemes that assist homeless and vulnerably housed people with comprehensive housing advice, access to accommodation in the private rented sector and accredited courses that support independent living.
- 1.4 *Crisis Changing Lives* is a UK-wide financial awards scheme for homeless people to access training courses, buy tools and equipment for work or set-up their own business. *Crisis* also gives essential mentoring support to ensure that the pathway back into education or employment is successful. We are currently developing small business excellence awards to help grow particularly successful candidates.
- 1.5 Working with *Demos*, *Opinion Leader Research* and *Tribal*, *Crisis* has delivered an invaluable programme of research exploring the relationship between skills and homelessness. The research demonstrates that improving the skills of homeless people offers benefits across Government agendas including: reducing homelessness; skills; welfare to work; drug and alcohol strategies; reducing offending; improving public health; and sustainable communities.
- 1.6 Building on this knowledge and experience, the *Crisis* campaign, *Weapons of Mass Instruction: Fighting Homelessness through learning and skills*, aims to maximise access to learning for those adults in greatest need. Adults with the most to gain from learning are the least likely to take part. We want to change this. In pursuing the campaign, *Crisis* brought together 35 leading stakeholders in adult education to warn the Chancellor, Gordon Brown MP, about the consequences of the Government's skills strategy. A copy of the coalition's representations is attached.

2.0 Factual Information – The problem

- 2.1 The 2003 White Paper '21st Century Skills: Realising Our Potential' was bold in its commitment to ensure that unemployed and disadvantaged people have the skills they need to meet employer demand and to succeed in the modern workforce. For homeless people, three years on, the reality on the ground remains different. Fifty-six per cent of homeless people have low or no skills¹. Eighty-six per cent are workless². Two out of three housing agencies do not offer any kind of wider activity like learning³. Four out of five homeless people do not take part in any kind of learning⁴.
- 2.2 Recognising low participation in learning and the need to improve the skills of the UK's low-skilled workless population, Lord Leitch recommends that "*jobseekers who fail to find work within six months be **required** [our emphasis] to participate in basic skills training*"⁵. This recommendation demonstrates a lack of understanding into the reasons for low participation. The Ofsted 2003 / 04 annual report concluded the most vulnerable received the least effective provision, perpetuating underachievement⁶. The majority of Job Centre Plus learning providers are ineligible for core DfES funding to ensure high quality facilities and provision⁷ - only 30 per cent of Job Centre Plus basic skills

¹ Opinion Leader Research (2006) *Homeless People and Learning and Skills – participation, barriers and progression*. Crisis: London

² *ibid*

³ Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2005) *Key findings from the Supporting People Baseline User Survey*. ODP: London. This survey found that although more than half of socially excluded people (the largest group of which was single homeless people) receiving Supporting People funded support wanted help with finding out about activities, less than a third received this help.

⁴ Opinion Leader Research (2006) *Homeless People and Learning and Skills – participation, barriers and progression*. Crisis: London

⁵ Leitch Review of Skills (2006) *Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills*. HM Stationary Office: London

⁶ Ofsted, The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector 2003 / 04

http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/annualreport0304/annual_report.htm [18 February 2005].

⁷ National Employment Panel Skills Advisory Board (2004) *Welfare to WorkForce Development*. NEP: London

trainees complete their course⁸. Learning and training activities that homeless and disadvantaged people do take up are likely to be through Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) providers who have limited access to funding⁹. Over 83 per cent of Skills for Life courses taken up by July 2004 were based in Further Education rather than in the VCS which disadvantaged learners are more likely to use¹⁰. VCS partnerships with colleges, which help to raise quality, choice and progression, are being forced to close due to Further Education funding pressures. Lack of information and a lack of awareness about educational activities act as major barriers, especially for those who have been homeless for more than three years¹¹.

2.3 However, the appetite for learning and work amongst homeless people is strong. The vast majority want to improve their skills¹². Seventy-seven per cent want to work now and 97 per cent want to work now or in the future¹³. Without compulsion, coercion or requirement week on week, year on year more homeless people arrive at *Crisis Skylight* to take part in learning and improve their skills. Where choice, quality and accessibility exist, homeless people participate, succeed and move-on.

2.4 The Government measures success on the basis of the number of adults achieving qualifications. As a result, the Learning and Skills Council looks set to meet the Government's Skills Strategy interim target of 750,000 adults with improved basic skills by 'parking' more challenging learners, such as homeless people, and instead targeting recent school leavers¹⁴. In order to focus on long-term outcomes, Lord Leitch recommends a joint Learning and Skills Council and Job Centre Plus objective of sustainable employment and progression. Skills are as relevant, however, to secure housing¹⁵, improved health¹⁶ and social inclusion¹⁷ as they are to sustainable employment. For a disadvantaged individual, improving skills is fundamentally about raising life chances. The National Reducing Re-Offending Delivery Plan recognises through its seven pathways¹⁸ the interaction that occurs between disadvantages, the holistic solutions needed to raise life chances and, therefore, the cross-departmental responsibility for delivery. To achieve long term outcomes, this all encompassing approach should be adopted to welfare and housing interventions.

2.5 Lord Leitch does not address the success rates of different learning environments or course lengths. However, people who left compulsory education without basic school leaving qualifications have done so partly because full-time, continuous learning in formal institutions did not work for them in their teens. A first full Level Two entitlement based on full-time, continuous learning – mostly in formal institutions – is, therefore, not always appropriate. Adult Learning Accounts will only prove successful if learners are free to choose a course and a provider that match their personal needs and ambitions.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Public Accounts Committee (2005) *Skills for Life: Improving adult literacy and numeracy*. House of Commons.

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Opinion Leader Research (2006) *Homeless People and Learning and Skills – participation, barriers and progression*. Crisis: London

¹² Ibid

¹³ Singh, P (2005) *No home, no job: moving on from transitional spaces*. Off the Streets and into Work: London

¹⁴ Public Accounts Committee (2005) *Skills for Life: Improving adult literacy and numeracy*. House of Commons: London

¹⁵ Basic Skills Agency *Basic skills for housing organisations* BSA

¹⁶ OECD (2005) *Learning a Living; First Results of the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey*

¹⁷ Feinstein et al (2003) *The Contribution of Adult Learning to Health and Social Capital*. Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning. London

¹⁸ Accommodation; Education, Training and Employment; Health; Drugs and alcohol; Finance, benefit and debt; Children and families; Attitudes, thinking and behaviour. National Offender Management Service (2005) *National Reducing Re-Offending Delivery Plan*. Home Office: UK

2.6 Lord Leitch maintains the Government's focus on identifying individuals with skills needs on the basis of lack of previous attainment. However, skills not applied during periods of worklessness and homelessness can be lost and need to be replaced. Whilst the majority of homeless people have low or no skills, one-third are educated to Level Two or above¹⁹. Despite this 86 per cent of homeless people are workless. Of them 31 per cent have been workless for over six months and 57 percent have been workless for over three years²⁰. For many of these individuals, skills are now a disadvantage where once they were not. Re-skilling, both in terms of core competencies and qualifications, becomes crucial to improving their life chances. Lord Leitch does not propose to help them.

3.0 Recommendations

3.1 Lord Leitch recommends that by 2020 95 per cent of adults have basic skills and 90 per cent – with an ambition of ninety five per cent – of adults are educated up to Level Two. These targets are to be welcomed, as they require reaching low-skilled adults suffering from entrenched disadvantage. The danger, however, is a further redirection of resources to Level Two qualifications and away from the courses that act as stepping stones to Level Two. The effect of this will further reduce the opportunity for disadvantaged adults to succeed in education by requiring them to participate in courses for which they are not prepared.

3.2 To be met, delivery on the ground must take a different form and must be informed by examples of successful practice, such as *Crisis Skylight*. In seeking to maximise access to learning for those adults in greatest need, *Crisis'* campaign '*Weapons of Mass Instruction: Fighting homelessness through learning and skills*' sets out a series of recommendations themed by *Right People, Right Place and Right Approach*. These recommendations are set out below:

3.3 *Right People – Improving the skills of disadvantaged adults to be central to the national skills strategy and local Skills and Employment Board strategies.*

National

- **Personal and Community Development Learning should fund pre-accredited learning designed to widen participation and offer progression routes for disadvantaged learners.** Homeless and disadvantaged adults are less likely to take up learning because they feel that formal qualifications are beyond their reach²¹. However, research has shown progression does occur from supportive environments to more challenging learning²². Specialist funding is required for supportive engagement activities which attract people back into learning, enable them to gain quick wins, build their confidence and move-on to accredited learning. This design is built into *Crisis Skylight*.
- **Train to Gain should be extended to include workless adults.** Train to Gain Skills Brokers should provide impartial, independent and comprehensive advice on learning needs to workless adults accessing, for example, day centres, hostels, drug and alcohol rehabilitation and voluntary and community facilities. The Broker would be responsible for recommending and providing easy

¹⁹ Opinion Leader Research (2006) *Homeless People and Learning and Skills – participation, barriers and progression*. Crisis: London

²⁰ *ibid*

²¹ Public Accounts Committee (2006) *Securing Strategic Leadership in the Learning and Skills Sector*. House of Commons: London

²² Feinstein et al (2003) *The Contribution of Adult Learning to Health and Social Capital*. Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning. London

access to flexible, high quality training which would enable the individual to raise their life chances. The Skills Broker would also work directly with employers to identify their recruitment needs and ensure workless adults develop skills which meet these needs. *Crisis* is developing a detailed Comprehensive Spending Review submission on this recommendation.

Local

- **New housing and welfare applicants should be assessed against the seven pathways of Offender Management in order to identify and target wider disadvantage.** Around two-thirds of Job Seeker Allowance claims are repeat claims²³. Seventy-two per cent of homeless people who take part in learning believe they would have benefited from doing so earlier²⁴ and the longer you are homeless the less likely you are to participate in learning²⁵. The National Reducing Offending Delivery Plan *'demonstrates how the drug treatment worker, alongside the housing specialist, and the basic skills teacher together contribute to achieve a more stable and constructive future'*²⁶. Disadvantages interact with, compound and increase vulnerability to other disadvantages²⁷. As a result, services that only deal with one issue at a time can be ineffective and wasteful²⁸. To enable people to move out of homelessness, worklessness and disadvantage permanently, interventions need to be swift and holistic.

3.4 Right Places – High quality learning provided in the places disadvantaged adults are more likely to use.

- **Thirty million pounds a year for three years to extend the current Hostels Capital Improvement Programme (HCIP).** Poor physical conditions and services that don't motivate people to address their needs can reinforce rather than break the cycle of homelessness²⁹. HCIP should continue and be focused upon creating a nationwide network of high quality learning centres, particularly where provision is limited, where homeless people can take part in activities and get involved in learning.
- **The Learning and Skills Council should offer strong financial incentives for colleges and Local Authority Adult Learning Services to create new partnerships with high achieving local voluntary and community providers.** To create routes from the margins to the mainstream we need new partnerships that expand the reach of formal education and raise quality, choice and progression routes in the VCS.

3.5 Right Approach – Expanding the choice and availability of innovative learning provision which engages disadvantaged adults and lays the foundation for learning progression.

- **Seventy million pounds a year for three years to enable the 40,000 homeless people living in hostels, night shelters and refuges to undertake the Certificate in Self Development, a recognised qualification designed specifically for homeless people.** The Certificate in Self Development was developed by the Learning and Skills Council in partnership with homelessness

²³ Leitch Review of Skills (2006) *Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills*. HM Stationary Office: London

²⁴ Singh, P (2005) *No home, no job: moving on from transitional spaces*. Off the Streets and into Work: London

²⁵ Opinion Leader Research (2006) *Homeless People and Learning and Skills – participation, barriers and progression*. Crisis: London

²⁶ National Offender Management Service (2005) *National Reducing Re-Offending Delivery Plan*. Home Office: UK

²⁷ Social Exclusion Unit (2005) *Transitions: Young Adults with Complex Needs*. SEU: UK

²⁸ Social Exclusion Unit (2005) *Improving Services, Improving Lives: Evidence and Key Themes*. SEU: UK

²⁹ Communities and Local Government (2006) *Places of Change: Tackling Homelessness through the Hostels Capital Improvement Programme* DCLG: UK.

organisations and is a recognised City and Guilds qualification. Learners must complete five modules from a choice of 80. Examples include: me and my learning; coping with change; being healthy; coping with conflict; looking after myself; handling my own money; and me and drink and drugs. *Crisis* embeds Skills for Life into the teaching of the Certificate in Self Development.

- **A coherent foundation learning tier that encompasses pre-entry and entry level learning, and offers bite-sized modules and accredits progression regardless of the setting.** Many adult learners, whether disadvantaged or not, prefer flexible, personalised and bite-sized programmes which adapt to their needs. Crucially, so do employers. If we are to move to a truly demand-led system it is these programmes that must be developed into a coherent framework, which has at its heart an unrelenting focus on progression. However, it must also understand that disadvantaged learners will not always progress smoothly and quickly from one level to the next but will at times stall, fall back, step sideways or even leap forward.



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