



**RESPONSE TO THE DEPARTMENT OF  
INNOVATION, UNIVERSITIES AND SKILLS  
CONSULTATION PAPER *INFORMAL ADULT  
LEARNING – SHAPING THE WAY AHEAD***

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## **Introduction**

Crisis welcomes this Consultation and Government's recognition of the value of informal adult learning. We welcome the vision outlined in this document and Government's commitment to tackling potential obstacles for disadvantaged groups.

However, Crisis believes that Government would benefit from a strategy which gives greater consideration to the ability of informal learning to engage with the homeless and the most socially excluded people in society. We stress the importance of informal learning in and of itself and as a first step into education and employment.

Single homeless people are amongst the most socially excluded groups in society. In addition to almost 3,000 rough sleepers a year<sup>1</sup>, Crisis estimates that the UK has approximately 400,000 'hidden homeless' people – those ineligible for local authority support. Furthermore, our research has found that the vast majority (75%) of homeless people have not taken part in training or educational activities in the past five years, despite 97% of homeless people wanting to work<sup>2</sup>.

Crisis believes that homeless people and those who are most socially excluded have the most to gain from informal adult learning. Through informal adult learning homeless people can engage in activity, which, our research has shown, rebuilds their confidence and self-esteem, enabling them to reintegrate into society<sup>3</sup>.

Crisis delivers informal adult learning in London and Newcastle through our award-winning Skylight centres to 175 people a day in 63 weekly workshops and has found informal adult learning to be an invaluable tool in engaging with some of the most vulnerable people in society. Crisis' Skylight centres address the needs of vulnerable people and, through our Skylight Learning Zone, allow our members to progress to accredited education, putting them on the path to social inclusion and potentially employment. In the past year, we recorded 471 positive outcomes for 109 members of Skylight Activity Centre, demonstrating the overwhelming success of informal adult learning in engaging homeless people.

However, our consultations with members highlighted that the success of informal adult cannot be easily measured. Due to its very nature of being unaccredited learning, Crisis urges Government to consider that informal adult learning can have soft, positive outcomes, such as undertaking new activities, which are equally important to a person's progression.

Despite the proven success of informal adult learning as a vital tool with which to engage with homeless people, learning opportunities for vulnerable adults is currently hampered by poor mainstream provision and a lack of available learning opportunities in the voluntary sector.

Crisis believes that Government must invest in informal adult learning which is directed at engaging with homeless people and other socially excluded people, and helping them to begin the process of their reintegration back into society. In addition to fulfilling Government's desire to deliver informal adult learning across society, targeting homeless people will enable Government to meet further targets on reducing homelessness.

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<sup>1</sup> Broadway Street to Homes Annual Rough Sleeping Report 2006/7, available at [http://broadway.jamkit.com/ResearchInformation/RoughSleepingReports/main\\_content/CHAINUpdateApril08.pdf](http://broadway.jamkit.com/ResearchInformation/RoughSleepingReports/main_content/CHAINUpdateApril08.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Off the Streets and into Work (2005) No Home, No Job

<sup>3</sup> *Missed Opportunities* (2006), available at [http://www.crisis.org.uk/publications/Missed\\_Opportunities\\_FullReport%20-%20Crisis%202006.pdf](http://www.crisis.org.uk/publications/Missed_Opportunities_FullReport%20-%20Crisis%202006.pdf)

In our response to this Consultation, we answer questions 1b), 1e), 2a), 3c), 3e), 4a), 4b) and 4e), and make the following key points:

1. Crisis believes that informal adult learning should be interpreted as: “structured or unstructured, non-vocational, unaccredited learning, which aims to stimulate, engage and reintegrate those who are socially excluded”.
2. Crisis believes that the provision of informal adult learning should be shaped by its goals. By utilising informal adult learning as tool of engagement with homeless people, Government’s investment can be used to yield much wider-reaching achievements.
3. Crisis believes that informal adult learning is a vital way of engaging homeless people and other socially excluded people; helping them to gain confidence and form friendships, and leads to increased community cohesion.
4. Crisis believes that informal adult learning, whilst of value in itself, can be a proven stepping-stone to formal, accredited education and employment. Government should make efforts to establish clearer opportunities to move on to accredited education, volunteering and employment.
5. Crisis believes that a truly inclusive learning system must make concerted efforts to reach the most socially excluded people, especially those who are homeless, who are often unable to afford learning and have few or negative experiences of learning.
6. To ensure learning reaches such groups who need it and can benefit from it Crisis believes that the Government must focus on improving and broadening access and factors which affect that such as building opening hours, ease of access to classes and activities etc.
7. Crisis believes that to deliver these aims funding should be on a broader basis. In particular investment in informal adult learning should be made in the voluntary sector — an environment which is most suitable to reaching those who are socially excluded.
8. Whilst the variety, diversity and accessibility of adult learning should be encouraged, it is important to recognise that it does not need to be entirely without structure. Evaluation, progression and use of accreditation where it can be should all be encouraged and supported, whilst not imposing a restrictive single framework from above. Good informal learning includes feedback from the learner on what they have learnt and the quality of the course, and should involve the chance for the learner to find out about, explore and be supported into opportunities for other learning.
9. Crisis believes that the culture of volunteering would be best developed by delivering informal adult learning through an expansion of the existing voluntary sector provision as the voluntary sector is uniquely able to provide a greater sense of reward to tutors.
10. Crisis believes that Government should develop stronger partnerships with other Government departments to ensure informal adult learning is more effectively used to address wider social problems, such as homelessness and drug misuse. The Skills Minister in DIUS should take the lead in ensuring the work of other Departments and Ministers is co-ordinated and promoted coherently.
11. Crisis believes that Government should aid the development of partnerships at a local level, both between voluntary sector organisations and with providers of formal education.

## **About Crisis**

Crisis is the national charity for single homeless people and works year-round to help vulnerable and marginalised people get through the crisis of homelessness, fulfil their potential and transform their lives.

Crisis' client group is single homeless people - individuals or couples, with no dependent children. Crisis' runs and develops innovative services that help homeless people rebuild their social and practical skills, join the world of work and reintegrate into society. We run services directly or in partnership with organisations across the UK. We also regularly commission and publish research, campaign and organise events to raise awareness about the causes and nature of homelessness, to find innovative and integrated solutions and share good practice.

Crisis relies almost entirely on donations from non-government organisations and the public to fund its vital work. Last year we directly helped around 8000 people, and we also campaigned to improve the lives of all 400,000 hidden homeless people. Much of our work would not be possible without the support of over 6500 volunteers.

Crisis' response to this consultation is informed by our research and campaigning work on behalf of single homeless people for over 40 years and in particular by our knowledge and experiences operating the following projects:

### **Crisis Skylight Activity Centre**

Crisis Skylight Activity Centre is an inspiring centre which provides homeless people with free learning, skills and work opportunities each week. Crisis currently has Skylight Centres in London and Newcastle, which offer a choice of 63 weekly workshops. This engagement with homeless people is at the heart of Crisis' mission to fight homelessness and empower people to fulfil their potential and transform their lives. The centres are also open to non-homeless people – paving the way for homeless people to re-integrate into mainstream society.

Crisis Skylight Activity Centre aims to provide open access to activities, 365 days a year. In 2006/07, almost 800 homeless people were registered as members, with the number of homeless people accessing the centres on any one day averaging at 175 people. This work would not be possible without our volunteer tutors who run almost 30% of our workshops.

In addition to these inspired learning activities, Crisis Skylight also houses a Learning Zone which offers more formal learning courses; offers volunteering opportunities through the Member Volunteer Scheme; and provides work-based training and employment opportunities in the Skylight Café. All elements together form Skylight's three steps for progress: Engagement, Education, and Employment. Each step offers an opportunity for people to move forwards in their lives and one may serve as a stepping-stone to the next. This results in a more integrated service for members – enabling Skylight to be effective at meeting the needs of homeless people, irrespective of the stage they are at. This process is enabled by a Progression Manager who identifies key areas that Skylight members need help with in order to progress with their training, educational and employment aspirations.

## **Crisis Skylight Learning Zone**

The Learning Zone's aim is to offer structured, supported learning opportunities as a route out of homelessness. It is one element of Skylight, and is open to all members of the Skylight Activity Centre who are ready to move into more structured learning. Free, accredited modular courses are available in a range of subjects, including Basic Skills (Literacy and Numeracy), English for Speakers of other languages (ESOL), IT and Learning Power Awards (Communication skills, Personal Development Skills and Study Skills). The 'Learning Power' award has been specifically designed for homeless people and is delivered in partnership with the Centre for Innovation and Partnerships (CIPS) team at Newham College of Further Education (NCFE). All classes take place in small groups of up to 12 people, and all courses lead to a qualification.

The Learning Zone opened as a pilot in September 2005 and was officially launched in March 2006. During 2006/2007, the Learning Zone enrolled 295 members who achieved 250 accredited qualifications. It is a leading example of the Government, the FE sector and the voluntary sector working in partnership.

**Crisis Changing Lives** is a UK-wide financial awards scheme which helps homeless people to achieve their vocational goals. Applicants are awarded grants of up to £2000 to access training courses, buy tools and equipment for work or help them set up their own business. Crisis also gives essential mentoring support and monitors how the funding has helped change applicants' lives.

**Crisis SmartMove** is a nationwide programme, delivered in partnership in 25 areas across the UK, which provides homeless people with comprehensive housing advice and access to good quality accommodation in the private rented sector. It helps prospective tenants overcome barriers to accessing private sector housing, by offering landlords a guarantee in place of a traditional deposit. Through **Crisis SmartSkills**, an accredited learning programme, tenants are provided ongoing support and help to develop independent living skills.

## **Consultation with members of Skylight**

In response to the DIUS Consultation *Informal Adult Learning – Shaping the Way Ahead*, which aims to understand the benefits of and barriers to informal adult learning, Crisis undertook consultations with members of Skylight, our adult learning and activity centre, to ensure that our response reflected their views and experiences.

Crisis organised four focus groups, each with approximately ten homeless or formerly homeless people. Discussions were chaired by members of the Crisis Policy and Research Department and covered four key areas using the questions suggested in Government's Consultation Document for Learners.

### **Benefits of informal adult learning**

- **Though learners gained new skills during informal adult learning, benefits were fundamentally expressed in terms of the improvements to personal well-being. The key benefits of informal adult learning raised were:**
  - Allowed learners to get back to 'the real world';
  - Opportunity to engage in a non-competitive environment;
  - Provided an environment to interact and make friends;
  - Raised their self esteem and self-confidence;
  - Invigorated learners who were otherwise unmotivated;
  - Promoted a feeling of personal control;
  - Helped some learners to overcome depression.

### **Barriers to informal adult learning**

- **A lack of money was cited as the main barrier to undertaking informal adult learning. Other barriers included:**
  - Unable to meet travel costs to Skylight – the only informal adult learning centre in the area;
  - A lack of personal confidence and self-esteem to engage in learning;
  - Dislike for male-dominated environments;
  - Could not afford to take time off from work to do informal adult learning;
  - Family commitments prevented attendance;
  - As A8 nationals they did not receive any benefits allowing them to meet the cost of travel;
  - Lack of language skills discouraged engagement.

### **Importance of cost**

- **The vast majority of learners would not be able to afford to undertake informal adult learning classes if there was any charge for classes. Learners also noted that free classes:**
  - Encouraged learners to continue with their classes;
  - Allowed learners to use equipment they cannot not afford, e.g. gym equipment, photographic equipment and computers;
  - Enabled learners to sample new classes without risk – giving learners a sense of control and opportunity.

## Ways to encourage informal adult learning

- **Opportunities to sample informal adult learning first-hand were highlighted as crucial to encouraging informal adult learning. Other forms of encouragement included:**
  - Events where people could share their experience of informal adult learning within groups, but also one-to-one sessions with people facing similar problems;
  - Drop-in days where learners could sample other classes without having to wait for a course to begin;
  - Information in other languages;
  - Local outreach;
  - Ensure an understanding of particular needs, such as dyslexia;
  - More information in the media, including the internet and social networking sites;
  - Clarify that Skylight Activity Centre is free.

## **Responses to relevant questions**

### **Understanding and improving on current provision**

#### **1. b) What are the conditions that make it easier for learners to learn? How can we support people to be more instrumental in their own learning?**

***Crisis believes informal adult learning is most successfully used as a method of engagement with those who are socially excluded in society, including the homeless. Conditions that make it easier for learners to learn must reflect this aim. Crisis highlights that:***

- ***Those who are hardest to reach prefer to learn within the voluntary sector: an environment in which they feel safe and trust tutors.***
- ***Technically-advanced rooms build learners' self-esteem.***
- ***Informal adult learning is non-competitive and learners should be allowed to progress at their own pace.***
- ***A diversity of informal learning classes in close proximity to each other helps learners to easily sample and undertake new classes.***

Crisis welcomes Government's recognition of the value of informal adult learning and the contribution of the voluntary sector. However, Crisis feels that the Consultation understates the effectiveness of the voluntary sector to utilise informal adult learning to engage with those who are socially excluded – in particular homeless people – and fails to consider why people choose informal adult learning over formal, accredited education.

Crisis delivers informal adult learning to almost 800 people through our Skylight centres based in London and Newcastle. Our experience, enforced by opinions voiced in consultations with members ahead of this response, has shown that informal adult learning is an invaluable tool with which to engage with homeless people, who are amongst the most socially excluded people in society.

To achieve such engagement our conditions reflect the vulnerability and low self-esteem of our members. The location in which informal adult learning is offered is fundamental to ensuring learners feel comfortable and willing to enrol in spite of any negative attitudes towards learning. Those who are socially excluded, and especially homeless people, can often be intimidated by mainstream educational institutions due to their poor basic skills. It is therefore not surprising that research by HM Treasury and the Public Accounts Committee found that learners such as homeless people are much more likely to agree to being helped through voluntary or community groups they already know<sup>4</sup> and by people with whom they have built a relationship of trust.

Furthermore, conditions within Crisis' Skylight Activity Centres reflect our goal of engaging with some of the most socially excluded and vulnerable people in society. In particular, we stress the need for flexible learning models with short-term or flexible attendance requirements so learning can fit around their lifestyle and learners can dip into learning opportunities without feeling pressured to commit themselves.

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<sup>4</sup> *Missed Opportunities* (2006), available at [http://www.crisis.org.uk/publications/Missed\\_Opportunities\\_FullReport%20-%20Crisis%202006.pdf](http://www.crisis.org.uk/publications/Missed_Opportunities_FullReport%20-%20Crisis%202006.pdf)

Crisis further believes that investment in technically-advanced rooms and equipment is crucial to rebuilding the confidence of informal adult learners. At Crisis, we have purpose-built rooms with the latest technology, including; a fully equipped workshop in which our members can undertake bicycle repairs and wood work; a full complement of musical instruments together with an Apple Mac-based mixing unit, enabling members to produce their own music; top-of-the-range Apple Mac Pros with Adobe Creative Suite 3 , allowing creative web design and photo editing. The use of hi-tech equipment raises our members' sense of worth, encourages them to engage and serves as an arena in which to properly develop their skills.

Moreover, we emphasise the diversity of our classes, which include both traditional subjects and more modern activities. Our classes range fro Tai Chi to Drama; Pilates to Poetry; Jewellery Making to Japanese; wood work to music; hat making to creative writing. This diversity within a single centre of informal adult learning allows members to easily join new classes, encouraging further engagement.

Crucially, Government must consider what informal adult learning can achieve and for whom before it considers what conditions make it easier for learners to learn. Not all learners are the same; and not all homeless people will progress as quickly as others. Nevertheless, informal adult learning is a vital form of engaging with homeless people and other socially excluded people.

## 1. e) How can we further develop the culture of volunteering to support informal adult learning?

***Crisis believes that the development of the culture of volunteering to support informal adult learning can be achieved through investment in areas where the voluntary sector currently utilises informal adult learning. In this way, Government can tap into an existing infrastructure and, crucially, offer voluntary tutors a strong sense of achievement. Crisis notes that:***

- ***Helping the voluntary sector to deliver informal adult learning provides a unique and important incentive.***
- ***High-quality facilities encourage volunteering and promote informal learning.***
- ***Successful delivery of informal learning should include opportunities for learners to volunteer.***

Crisis welcomes Government's intent to utilise volunteering to support informal adult learning. In particular, Crisis commends Government's recognition of informal adult learning as an effective tool to engage with socially excluded people, such as refugees and asylum seekers (p.11, DIUS Consultation).

To develop the culture of volunteering, Crisis believes Government should invest where informal adult learning thrives within the voluntary sector – as a method of engagement with the socially excluded. This use of informal adult learning offers volunteers a unique and important incentive which cannot be gained through tutoring informal adult learning to the general public.

As noted above, Crisis uses informal adult learning to engage with homeless people in our Skylight informal adult learning centres in London and Newcastle. Volunteers are crucial to Skylight and run almost 30% of our weekly workshops that engage with 175 service users each day. Such is the success of the Skylight model that we are aiming to build, pending funding, a further seven Skylight centres in the next five years in cities across the UK.

Crucial to attracting volunteers to run our workshops, is our investment in modern, high-quality, technically-advanced rooms and equipment. The use of state-of-the-art equipment encourages the very best tutors to our centres, as well as creating an environment which promotes learners to engage with their tutors. Crisis believes that although informal learning should take place away from the mainstream, this should not mean that inferior equipment used.

Furthermore, our model includes opportunities for those who are currently members of our informal adult learning centre to become tutors of classes in a voluntary capacity. Each year Crisis takes on at least 20 Member Volunteers within our Skylight centres, enabling our members to take on greater responsibility within a familiar environment and providing another stepping-stone towards greater inclusion in society.

Despite informal adult learning being successfully used to engage with homeless people, Crisis Skylight Activity Centres represent an exception rather than the norm in the homelessness sector. The development of a culture of volunteering would be greatly served by investment in centres of informal adult learning, which aim to engage with homeless people.

## The contribution of other Government departments

### 2. a) Whether, and if so how, Government support for informal adult learning can be improved?

***Crisis believes that informal adult learning serves as an excellent and unrivalled entry point for the homeless and those who are socially excluded to reintegrate into society. This purpose should be central to the Government's strategy on informal adult learning.***

- ***Government's support needs a focus.***
- ***An ideal starting point would be to define 'informal adult learning' with reference to its aims.***
- ***This interpretation should be disseminated across departments, allowing Government to identify existing provision.***
- ***Through referencing the aim of informal adult learning, the interpretation will drive delivery across Government and promote partnerships.***
- ***Informal adult learning should be recognised as of value in itself, but particularly for socially excluded people such as homeless people, it is often the only stepping-stone to formal education and potentially employment.***

Crisis welcomes Government's recognition of the importance of informal adult learning for the implementation of Government policy – for example, the Department of Health's use of informal adult learning in promoting social inclusion for adults experiencing mental health problems. Crisis believes that Government's support for informal adult learning would be greatly enhanced through targeting those who are socially excluded and have the most to gain from informal adult learning.

Crisis highlights the Department for Communities and Local Government's Hostels Capital Improvement Programme (HCIP), which engages people in hostels in meaningful activity and with the community to increase the number of people who move on positively from a hostel or homeless service.

The successes of the HCIP's first cycle were detailed in the Government report *Creating Places of Change*<sup>5</sup>, which was followed by an additional investment of £70 million into the programme. The report illustrated the importance of the activities in engaging homeless people:

Services and activities engaged and interested people that had grown to mistrust most interventions. They provided approaches that were fun and allowed vulnerable people to gain self-respect and a network of friends. The changes that follow could result in measurable outcomes such as college, a job or a home, but this was often unachievable without the initial work around engagement.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> CLG, *Creating Places of Change* (2007), available at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/563964.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.* p.11

Evidently the benefits of engagement through activity are accepted by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Crisis draws particular attention to the phrase “meaningful activity” which is used in the *Creating Places of Change* report to describe the services developed through the HCIP. The ‘meaningful activities’ funded by HCIP are activities such as exercise in a gym and cookery classes in a purpose-built kitchen at the Women’s Direct Access Hostel in Liverpool; and music recording in a studio in a hostel on Endell Street in Camden. These activities are indistinguishable from the forms of informal adult learning mentioned in Government’s Informal Adult Learning Consultation. It is our submission that Government should recognise that ‘informal adult learning’ is often not described as such.

To aid Government’s efforts to identify where informal adult learning exists, Crisis recommends an interpretation of ‘informal adult learning’ be used by all Government departments. This interpretation should necessarily reflect what informal adult learning can achieve and for whom. Crisis therefore proposes the following interpretation:

**Informal adult learning is structured or unstructured, non-vocational, unaccredited learning, which aims to stimulate, engage and reintegrate those who are socially excluded.**

This common interpretation will allow Government departments to easily identify places where informal adult learning currently occurs.

Crucially, this interpretation provides Government with a clear sense of focus and direction to drive its delivery of informal adult learning through different departments. Crisis feels the inclusion of an aim is essential to ensuring informal adult learning is used to achieve social progress and solve wider social problems.

Furthermore, following this recognition of the use of informal adult learning, Government’s support for informal adult learning would be greatly improved by pursuing a more joined-up cross-Government approach to informal adult learning.

For example, DWP should recognise informal adult learning as being an important first-step for those who are long-term unemployed. Crisis stresses the need to ensure that benefits, such as Job Seekers’ Allowance, are not taken away for people undertaking informal adult learning. Government departments should recognise informal adult learning as an important tool in the reintegration of those who are socially excluded.

As described in greater detail below in response to q. 3c), Government can use this common interpretation as the basis for identifying informal adult learning in other departments and forming partnerships. For example, we suggest partnerships with Home Office Drug Treatment Programmes and Department of Health courses that both utilise informal adult learning.

Addressing wider social issues has significant cost-benefits to Government. Our research has shown that a typical case of homelessness costs Government up to £24,500 over the course a year<sup>7</sup>. These costs include costs to the health service, the police, support services and the cost of temporary accommodation.

Fundamentally, Crisis believes that Government support for informal adult learning should be shaped by its goals. An interpretation of informal adult learning disseminated across Government will allow departments to identify where informal adult learning is occurring, provide greater direction, and

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<sup>7</sup> *How Many, How Much?* (2003), p.4 (available at [http://www.crisis.org.uk/publications/HowManyHowMuch\\_full.pdf](http://www.crisis.org.uk/publications/HowManyHowMuch_full.pdf))

promote a joined-up approach that will yield significant savings for Government as a whole by tackling wider social issues.

## DIUS-funded informal adult education

**3. c) Have we taken partnership working as far as we can? The scale of the support from other Government departments is important for each partnership to grasp and take advantage of.**

*Crisis believes that Government should develop stronger partnerships with other Government departments to ensure informal adult learning is more effectively used to address wider social problems, such as homelessness and drug misuse. Crisis highlights that:*

- *Partnerships should be used to target specific groups to ensure everyone benefits from informal adult learning.*
- *Partnerships should be carried out on a local level to promote interaction with the mainstream society and encourage formal education.*
- *Partnerships should be carried out nationally to ensure that informal adult learning acts as an entry point for access to relevant public services.*

Crisis welcomes Government's overall vision of an inclusive adult education service in which people from all backgrounds can participate. Furthermore, Crisis commends Government's explicit recognition of the need for local partnerships to provide support in the most appropriate ways.

Crisis believes that specific consideration must be given to the most socially excluded people in society, especially those who are homeless and have very limited skills. In particular, Crisis believes Government should adhere strongly to the principle proposed in the Skills White Paper 2003, that those who have benefited least from the education system and are in the most financial need should have greatest access to public funding for informal adult learning.

Our research has shown that over half of all homeless people lack even basic school-leaving qualifications; with 37% having no qualifications whatsoever<sup>8</sup>. This lack of basic education leaves people who are homeless severely disadvantaged in being able to find employment and rebuild their lives. When these figures are compared to research that shows that 97% of homeless people want to work<sup>9</sup> and 6 in 10 homeless people want to participate in learning, it is clear that delivering informal adult learning to homeless people should be a key element of Government's strategy.

Crisis applauds Government's example of a successful partnership in Northamptonshire, described in the Consultation (p. 18), which targeted a low-participation group through specific courses tailored to their needs. Crisis recommends that in taking partnerships further, Government should take similar measures to target homeless people, who often have a limited experience of learning but have much to gain.

Crisis believes that partnerships work and Government should continue to develop partnerships at both local and national level. At the local level, partnerships provide an opportunity for learners to branch out and progress towards interaction with the mainstream. National partnerships provide an

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<sup>8</sup> *Weapons of Mass Instruction* (2006), available at <http://www.crisis.org.uk/downloads.php/1023/WOMI%20briefing.doc>

<sup>9</sup> Crisis' response to DWP Consultation on the Welfare Reform Green Paper *In Work, Better Off*, p.9, available at <http://www.crisis.org.uk/publications/0710%20DWP%20consult%20-%20GP%20Welfare%20Reform%20-%20Crisis%20response.pdf>

entry point to public services and, if a cross-Governmental approach is followed, wider policy goals can be more efficiently achieved.

At Skylight Activity Centre we hold local partnerships with organisations that deliver informal adult learning in our purpose-built rooms. Our partnerships with Cardboard Citizens (a theatre company for homeless people), Streetwise Opera (delivering classes on singing and acting) and Escape Artists (offering a range of artistic activity) allows members of Crisis Skylight to gain experienced teaching and crucially progress towards greater interaction with mainstream society. Ultimately, local partnerships of this nature will also increase community cohesion.

Crisis stresses that whilst informal adult learning is of value in itself, it should also be considered as a potential stepping-stone into education or employment. At Crisis Skylight, our Learning Zone holds a partnership with Newham College for whom we deliver the 'Learning Power' award, an informal adult learning, self-development course designed for homeless people. We also have partnerships with adult education colleges City Lit and the Mary Ward Centre to ensure that our learners can move on to appropriate external, formal education. Importantly, Crisis uses progression workers that can aid our learners in making decisions to develop their education.

Furthermore, partnerships should be formed at a national level between Government departments following the establishment of a common interpretation of informal adult learning as described in response to q. 2a). As noted above, the Hostels Capital Improvement Programme is a partnership in which the Department for Communities and Local Government invests in hostels and day centres to provide in-house informal adult learning. DIUS should look to form partnerships with other departments to ensure informal adult learning is delivered to those who are most socially excluded.

Further partnerships should be made with the Home Office to aid delivery of their Drug Treatment Programme which engages people in informal learning following the cessation of chronic drug use; and the Department of Health's programmes which utilise art and creative classes to improve mental health. As noted above, several of our clients noted that the informal learning undertaken at Skylight Activity Centre helped them to overcome depression.

Crucially, national partnerships can be an effective way to reach those who are socially excluded, reintegrate them back into society and pave the way for them to access further services from other Government departments. Departments must seek to use informal adult learning to address social problems and it is therefore imperative that the DIUS strategy on informal adult learning links with strategies of other departments. These national partnerships should build upon local partnerships that promote interaction with mainstream society and the development of learners through the education system.

**3. d) In terms of using the DIUS safeguarded budget, would it be better in future to focus spending on infrastructure and on the organisation of an effective service, rather than through direct subsidies to providers for putting on courses?**

***Crisis believes that the DIUS safeguarded budget should primarily be used subsidise providers of courses because such provision is currently limited and urgently needed. However, investment in the organisation of informal adult learning provision to ensure users are easily able to identify new courses would also be welcome. Crisis notes that:***

- ***Direct subsidies to the voluntary sector will ensure provision for informal adult learning is expanded for those who will benefit the most.***
- ***Improvements to infrastructure would benefit from partnership officers and Community Learning Champions to promote informal adult learning.***

As noted above, the focus of the DIUS safeguarded budget should be to deliver informal adult learning to those who are most socially excluded, especially homeless people.

Crisis estimates that there are as many as 400,000 people who are homeless yet are ineligible for local authority support. Homelessness is a very difficult cycle to break with two out of three homeless people having been homeless more than once, and a quarter of homeless people having been homeless for more than five years<sup>10</sup>.

Through our Skylight Activity Centres in Newcastle and London, Crisis has demonstrated that informal adult learning is crucial to engaging with people who are homeless. In Skylight Activity Centre London alone we have seen 109 members record 471 positive outcomes – with outcomes ranging from new activities to employment. Crucial to improving self-confidence and self-esteem is the non-competitive nature of informal adult learning allowing learners to re-engage in activities without the pressure to achieve targets.

Given the extent of homelessness and the lack of existing provision of informal adult learning from the voluntary sector, Crisis believes that the DIUS safeguarded budget would be best used to subsidise providers of informal adult learning directly.

However, Crisis also recognises that often informal adult learning occurs unnoticed, as illustrated by CLG's Hostels Capital Improvement Programme. We therefore also suggest that some investment goes towards the organisation of the informal adult learning sector, particularly to help voluntary and community groups. Crisis would welcome an open database of informal adult learning opportunities, such that learners, providers and potential volunteers are better informed of local and relevant provision.

Crisis also welcomes initiatives such as the nationwide Community Learning Champions scheme, which engages local volunteers to promote learning in their community. Community Learning Champions or partnerships officers could be used to strengthen the existing infrastructure by promoting links between providers of informal learning and ensure that learners can easily access information about new informal learning opportunities in their area.

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<sup>10</sup> *Missed Opportunities* (2006), p.10, available at [http://www.crisis.org.uk/publications/Missed\\_Opportunities\\_FullReport%20-%20Crisis%202006.pdf](http://www.crisis.org.uk/publications/Missed_Opportunities_FullReport%20-%20Crisis%202006.pdf)

**3. e) Do we need the service to become more learner-led? Would a way of doing that be to explore the possible use of real or virtual vouchers, taking advantage of new technologies? These might build on the Skills Accounts mechanism being phased in, starting in 2010.**

*Crisis believes that the learner should be central to Government's strategy. However, socially excluded learners, and especially homeless people, will benefit from support when making initial decisions to undertake informal learning. Informal learning should be seen as part of the educational system and learners should be able to readily move on to formal education when appropriate. Learners, tutors and providers of informal learning must be supported to achieve this progression. In particular, Crisis notes that:*

- *Those who are socially excluded may lack the confidence to utilise vouchers or purchase their own learning through the Skills Account initiative.*
- *In the initial phase of engagement through informal adult learning, socially excluded people benefit from progression workers.*
- *The service should integrate with formal education through partnerships with appropriate institutions.*

Crisis welcomes Government's vision of an inclusive adult education service in which people from all backgrounds can participate and Government's consideration of innovative ways of using funding. However, Crisis holds reservations over the delivery of funding; in particular the Skills Account scheme which allows learners to purchase their own informal education.

Though Crisis broadly welcomes the Skills Account scheme as a method of encouraging learning, we hold concerns over the implementation of the Skills Accounts mechanism to purchase informal learning.

Crisis notes that Skills Accounts are only available to eligible benefits claimants. This requirement of eligibility is not conducive to Government's stated aim to ensure that everyone can enjoy the opportunity of informal learning. For example, workers moving into low-paid, marginalised, part-time work would lose their Skills Account, despite being a group that has much to benefit from informal adult learning. Eligibility would also create an administrative requirement which could only work against the preferred voluntary sector approach of provision of informal learning irrespective of benefits.

Crucially, we feel the Skills Account initiative is more suited to confident learners with experience of the education system. Crisis believes that those who are amongst the most socially excluded in society, especially those who are homeless, often lack the confidence and level of independence that would be required to purchase their own informal adult learning.

Similarly, an initiative involving vouchers might pose problems to those who are most vulnerable in society. Crisis submits that any process of obtaining vouchers and proving eligibility would be difficult to implement. Demanding attendance for further vouchers might also place an unnecessary pressure on those who are socially excluded and possibly discourage them from attending – this approach is not commensurate with the principles of informal adult learning.

To reiterate the principle proposed in the Skills White Paper 2003, those who are in the most financial need should have greatest access to public funding for informal adult learning. Therefore,

Crisis believes that in order to serve the interests of socially excluded learners, DIUS must focus funding on areas of the voluntary sector which provide informal adult learning. The voluntary sector is best placed to reach the most socially excluded – those who will benefit the most from Informal adult learning – and best understand their needs and vulnerabilities.

However, Crisis stresses that informal learning should not be considered in isolation from other forms of learning. At Crisis, the Skylight centre consists of an Activity Centre for informal adult learning and a Learning Zone which delivers accredited, formal education. As evidenced in our findings from the consultation above, informal learning is essential to overcoming personal barriers, rebuilding self-confidence and interacting with other learners. Each learner in Skylight is assigned a progression worker that speaks to members who have overcome their barriers and are ready for their next step.

With a formal education centre, Skylight Learning Zone, housed in the same building, members can easily progress to formal, accredited learning. Our courses are designed to give members the skills they will need for employment, including numeracy and literacy. Furthermore our progression workers will also work with members to identify appropriate external courses, such that they can continue their education. As part of ensuring our learners' needs are met, we are also beginning a monitoring and evaluation process which enables learners to give feedback on informal courses.

Crucially, our delivery of informal adult learning is seen as the stepping-stone to formal education and potentially employment. Though direct investment in the voluntary sector will ensure socially excluded people who lack confidence are still able to enjoy the benefits of informal learning, Crisis would welcome a voucher scheme which allowed progression workers to encourage learners who had built up sufficient self-confidence to purchase their own informal or formal learning.

## Equality of access

### **4. a) How can we do better in ensuring that no one is excluded from the benefits of learning? Or from the same opportunities that others enjoy?**

***Crisis believes that a truly inclusive learning system must necessarily make concerted efforts to reach the most socially excluded people. This can be achieved through; a widely-accepted interpretation that reflects the aims of informal adult learning; investment in outreach work; and investment in the voluntary sector. Crisis recommends:***

- ***A widely-accepted interpretation of informal adult learning that reflects its aim.***
- ***Investment in providers to which those who are excluded will turn.***
- ***Investment in outreach, including experience days.***

Crisis welcomes Government's emphasis that everyone deserves equal access to the same kinds of provision that are benefiting others in society. We also commend Government's identification of poorer people and those with learning difficulties as groups that face barriers to learning. In addition to these groups, Crisis recommends Government's explicit appreciation of socially excluded people, including homeless people, as a group which faces barriers to learning.

The barriers faced by homeless people are similar to those highlighted in the Consultation in reference to those with learning difficulties and poorer people because many homeless people are suffer from learning difficulties and are financially deprived. Though each episode of homelessness is unique, the broad barriers to learning are:

- A lack of confidence, motivation or self-belief in one's ability to undertake *any* form of learning.
- A lack of knowledge of available and appropriate informal adult learning opportunities.
- An inability to afford informal adult learning or transport to such opportunities.

Without a fixed address, the UK's 400,000 hidden homeless people and 3000 rough sleepers rank amongst the hardest to reach group in society. In addition, research has found that only 30% of homeless people spend their day with people who are not homeless and 38% spent their day alone<sup>11</sup>. Faced with such exclusion it is no surprise that homeless people are unaware, lack the confidence and cannot afford to enjoy the same opportunities as those in mainstream society. Yet homeless people have much to gain from informal adult learning.

As noted throughout this response – informal adult learning is an invaluable tool of engagement with the most socially excluded people in society. At Crisis Skylight Activity Centre we recorded 471 positive outcomes for 109 members over the course of a year. However, Crisis stresses that informal adult learning often leads to soft outcomes which are difficult to quantify. We therefore urge Government to base its investment upon the proven uses of informal adult learning – the stimulation, engagement and reintegration of those who are socially excluded – rather than setting quantifiable goals.

To ensure homeless people are not excluded from the benefits of learning, Government must invest in areas where they prefer to undertake informal adult learning. As noted above, the voluntary sector

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<sup>11</sup> Homelessness Factfile (2003), available at [http://www.crisis.org.uk/publications/factfile\\_Full.pdf](http://www.crisis.org.uk/publications/factfile_Full.pdf)

is the destination of choice for homeless people. Crisis therefore proposes Government invests in the voluntary sector's provision of informal adult learning, to ensure homeless people enjoy the same benefits as others.

However, simply investing in informal adult learning where homeless people are most likely to join is certainly insufficient to reach those who are unaware of the services, unable to afford travel to such services or unwilling to use services due negative previous experiences or a lack of belief in their skills. Any investment in further courses or voluntary sector provision of informal adult learning *must* be supported by investment in outreach work to specifically target socially excluded people.

A third of Crisis Skylight members were informed of our centres through word-of-mouth, which illustrates that merely placing information leaflets in day centres and hostels – points of initial contact – does not compare to first-hand accounts. Crisis would welcome investment in the voluntary sector to directly present our activities to those who are homeless through presentations at hostels or taster sessions at day centres.

During our consultation with Skylight members in London, it was suggested that prospective members be informed of activity centres – and the positive impact of informal adult learning on homeless people – by former service users. Again, reaching those who are socially excluded involves rebuilding trust and demonstrating a firm understanding of the issues they face. Through interaction with people who have faced similar experiences those who are entrenched in homelessness can overcome their fears of learning. Crisis therefore recommends widely-advertised experience days to improve awareness of informal adult learning.

Skylight Activity Centre, Crisis' informal adult learning centre, is free and open to all, ensuring that those that can attend are not prohibited from engaging in our service for lack of money. Given the economic situation in which many of our members come to us – often without any money or form of employment - it is imperative that our classes are free. Crisis urges Government to ensure that areas of the voluntary sector which engage with socially excluded people can continue to offer classes free of charge.

Travel represents a tremendous barrier to accessing informal adult learning for those who are socially excluded, and especially those who are homeless and financially deprived. Given the lack of current provision of informal adult learning in the voluntary sector, those who are homeless may not be able to afford travel to centres of informal adult learning.

To reach those who simply cannot afford to travel to our centres, Crisis has a discretionary fund to reimburse travel costs in exceptional cases. However, with the cost of travel an estimated £400 a day at Skylight London alone, Crisis is generally unable to provide reimbursements for travel costs to our members – which runs the risk that some of the most socially excluded people are deprived the benefits of informal adult learning.

In addition to investment in the expansion of the voluntary sector, such that informal adult learning can be easily accessed by everyone, Crisis would welcome investment in a discretionary fund for providers of informal learning in the voluntary sector to ensure that the most socially excluded people in society are able to access informal learning. Crisis also recommends that Job Centre Plus advisers should have the ability to pay for informal learning as part of their discretionary funding.

Reaching the most socially excluded people in society is dependent upon a cross-Governmental recognition of informal adult learning as a vital tool in re-engaging people. Research has shown that those who are hardest to reach avoid mainstream institutions and turn to the voluntary sector for learning. Investment that seeks equality of access should therefore invest in voluntary sector provision and aid outreach programmes.

**4. b) How well do we understand the barriers to learning as they exist at present, and how they affect particular parts of society? To what extent are the barriers financial? What action would address each of the barriers?**

*Crisis believes that in order to address the barriers faced by homeless people, it is critical that Government invests in the voluntary sector that can best identify and respond to the vulnerabilities encountered. Crisis also recommends Government undertakes a joined-up approach to informal adult learning, whereby barriers in different departments are removed. Crisis highlights that:*

- *Barriers affecting homeless people relate to personal well-being and are best overcome by delivering learning in safe and comfortable environments.*
- *Language represents a crucial barrier. Government should link informal adult learning initiatives to strategies on ESOL.*
- *Time constraints constitute a major barrier to undertaking informal adult learning. Investment should ensure both daytime and evening classes.*
- *Restrictions imposed by Government departments can prevent participation. Government should ensure a cross-departmental approach to informal learning.*

Crisis welcomes the Government's recognition of the challenge to identify and tackle potential obstacles for disadvantaged groups and its commitment to design appropriate and attractive learning opportunities. Crisis commends the Government's analysis and identification of the barriers to learning as they exist at present, but feels that deeper, personal barriers as well as barriers imposed by other Government departments have been overlooked.

In our research report *Missed Opportunities*, several key barriers to learning faced by homeless people were identified<sup>12</sup>:

- Anxiety arising from poor self-esteem
- Negative attitudes built-up due to past experiences of learning and education
- Fears about ability to interact with other learners
- Feeling ashamed due to poor basic skills
- Problems concentrating and committing to regular learning due to wider needs
- Lack of peer support
- Lack of knowledge of the opportunities available

The conditions in Skylight, as highlighted in our response to q.1b) above, aim to address these vulnerabilities through a variety of measures<sup>13</sup>:

- Set within the voluntary sector – an environment chosen and trusted by service users
- Wide range of learning opportunities in one single building – enabling users to easily undertake new activities
- Short-term, flexible attendance requirements – allowing users to engage without commitment, suiting occasionally chaotic lifestyles

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<sup>12</sup> *Missed Opportunities* (2006), available at [http://www.crisis.org.uk/publications/Missed\\_Opportunities\\_FullReport%20-%20Crisis%202006.pdf](http://www.crisis.org.uk/publications/Missed_Opportunities_FullReport%20-%20Crisis%202006.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

- Explicit recognition of small steps
- Empathetic tutors
- Holistic support – progression workers ensure that users are directed to appropriate support and encouraged to progress

These lessons about barriers, effective delivery and what works should be applied more widely and not necessarily restricted to informal learning for those who are socially excluded. Our methods represent a good practice model and have been recognised by NIACE, and in addition to our members winning awards<sup>14</sup>, Crisis won the Adult Learners Week Award of Opening Doors in 2007.

Crisis Skylight Activity Centres also provide a day on which certain classes are strictly for women. The provision of these classes addresses the vulnerabilities faced by female members, leading to more effective engagement by such members.

Through our consultation with our members, Crisis has found that language was a particularly important barrier to learning faced by a large number of our members. Government notes the barrier of language faced by ethnic minority groups but it must also recognise that foreign nationals, especially those who have become socially excluded or homeless, also deserve access to and have much to benefit from informal adult learning.

Foreign nationals are often unaware of informal education taking place and language issues can prevent them from fully participating. To overcome this barrier Crisis believe that investment should be made, where possible to ensure that information is disseminated in different languages and that such learners are offered free ESOL classes. At Crisis, our Learning Zone which is within the same building as our Activity Centre, we run free ESOL classes for 100 learners a year.

Our consultations also highlighted that time constraints due to work commitments can present a barrier to learning. Efforts should therefore be made to ensure that opening times reflect the fact that many people do not work typical working hours.

Government should recognise the use of informal adult learning and ensure that users of informal adult learning do not have their benefits reduced in any way. Particularly we recommend, as argued by many voluntary organisations in numerous consultation responses, the removal of the “16-hour rule” which forbids those claiming Housing Benefit who have passed their 19th birthday from studying for more than 16 hours of guided learning per week, even if they are not claiming any other benefits<sup>15</sup>. DWP and Job Centre Plus should explicitly recognise the value of informal adult learning as part of the job seeking process, instead of routinely directing job-seekers to complete formal courses.

Government must address both the barriers created by different departments and the personal and financial barriers faced by learners to ensure that everyone is able to enjoy the benefits of informal adult learning.

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<sup>14</sup> Former rough sleeper wins award through education, available at <http://www.crisis.org.uk/media/display.php?id=317>

<sup>15</sup> See Crisis' response to DWP Consultation on the Welfare Reform Green Paper *In Work, Better Off*, available at <http://www.crisis.org.uk/publications/0710%20DWP%20consult%20-%20GP%20Welfare%20Reform%20-%20Crisis%20response.pdf>

#### **4. e) What more can Government do to overcome the 'digital divide' where the people who could most benefit from new ways of participating in adult learning are the least equipped to take advantage of them?**

***Crisis believes that overcoming the 'digital divide' must first begin with providing users access to computers through their informal learning classes. Once basic skills have been acquired, learners should be given opportunities to purchase equipment of their own. Crisis notes that:***

- ***Urgent investment is needed in informal adult learning classes on IT for the socially excluded.***
- ***Schemes should be run to allow learners to apply to be given computer equipment to drive self-learning.***
- ***Links should be made to providers of formal IT education, to ensure learners can benefit from the digital world.***

Crisis welcomes Government's identification of the 'digital divide' and that those who could benefit most from new ways of participating in informal adult learning are the least equipped to take advantage. We urge Government to invest in IT suites in which those who have no experience of computing can learn how to use computers to their advantage.

Crisis notes that homeless people as a group severely lack qualifications, with six in ten homeless people having no qualification or qualifications below NVQ Level 2, putting 80% of job vacancies beyond reach<sup>16</sup>. In an increasingly computer-driven world, it is imperative that homeless people are not denied opportunities through their lack of basic IT knowledge. We recommend that Learn Direct explores how they can support the delivery of informal adult learning.

Crisis Skylight Activity Centre in London has nine high-end Apple Macs equipped with Adobe Creative Suite 3 for web design and photo editing, and Apple Final Cut Pro for film editing. Furthermore, we have nine PCs on which learners are taught basic IT skills and CV-writing, with 2 hours open access every day.

Through funding IT equipment and lessons for those who are socially excluded, and especially those who are homeless, Government will not only promote learners to engage in further IT-based informal adult learning, but crucially it will enable learners to gain basic IT skills in an environment in which they will not feel intimidated due to their PC illiteracy.

Crisis also recommends that Government set up a scheme to provide those who would otherwise be unable to benefit from IT-based learning with laptops or desktop PCs where necessary. This may consist of opportunities for users to rent out laptops or funding a learner to purchase a laptop of their own.

At Crisis Skylight, members can progress from learning informal IT skills in the Activity Centre to gaining accredited qualifications in the Learning Zone - including the European Computer Driving Licence. Through our Changing Lives scheme, Crisis also offers members the opportunity to apply for funding for computer equipment including desktop PCs, Macs, laptops, digital publishing software,

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<sup>16</sup> Opinion Leader Research (2006) Homeless People and Learning and Skills – participation, barriers and progression. Crisis: London

and MS Office. Crisis urges Government to create partnerships with the private sector to ensure learners are equipped to take full advantage of the digital world.

To reiterate, informal adult learning should not be considered as an initiative in isolation but rather as part of a solution to a wider social problem. Involving those who are socially excluded, including those who are homeless, in informal adult learning run through computers will allow them to gain vital, basic IT skills, and will undoubtedly serve as a stepping-stone to formal education and employment.