



FURTHER EDUCATION: RAISING SKILLS, IMPROVING LIFE CHANCES

Crisis' response to the DfES consultation

June 2006

ABOUT CRISIS

Crisis is the national charity for single homeless people.

We have a vision of social integration and work year-round to help vulnerable and marginalised people get through the crisis of homelessness, fulfil their potential and transform their lives.

We develop innovative services which enable homeless people to progress through education and creativity and we campaign for a more inclusive society.

We run services directly or in partnership with organisations across the UK, building on their grass roots knowledge, local enthusiasm and sense of community. We also regularly commission and publish research 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 380,000 hidden homeless people.

Much of our work would not be possible without the support of over 5000 volunteers.

Crisis was founded in 1967 and has been changing the lives of homeless people for 39 years.

SINGLE HOMELESSNESS, LEARNING AND SKILLS

In 2005 100,170 households were accepted in England and Wales as being homeless and in priority need¹. These figures only tell part of the story. In addition to those who are accepted as homeless by local authorities there are others whose homelessness is unaccounted for. The vast majority are single people without dependent children living in hostels, bed and breakfast accommodation, squats and derelict buildings and sleeping on the floors of friends and family. Research suggests that there may be as many as 380,000 hidden homeless people in the UK².

Homelessness deskills, de-motivates and isolates. People become trapped in a spiral of decline - unemployment, addiction, poor health, particularly mental health, and offending behaviour become entrenched overtime.

Crisis offers engagement, education and employment opportunities to homeless people. Our experience demonstrates that participation in learning increases confidence and skills, so enabling people to break their spiral of decline, create pathways back into society and re-enter employment.

Participation rates in learning amongst homeless people are, however, desperately low. Despite over 86% of homeless people being out of work³ barely 19% take part in learning activities⁴. This compares to nearly half of people of working age⁵. Yet, homeless people are in need of learning. 37% of homeless people have no qualifications whatsoever⁶. Only one quarter are educated up to level 2, compared to two-thirds of the working age population.

Crisis welcomes the opportunities provided by the FE White Paper, Welfare Reform Green Paper and the Leitch Review of Skills consultations, to articulate a vision of adult education serving, first and foremost, those people for whom education did not work the first time around.

¹ ODPM (2006) *“Quarterly statutory homelessness statistical release*

² Kenway, P & Palmer, G (2003) *“How Many, How Much?”*, Crisis

³ OLR (2006) *“Learning and employment amongst homeless people”*, Crisis

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ DfES (2005) *“English local labour force survey”*

⁶ OLR (2006) *“Learning and employment amongst homeless people”*, Crisis

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Comment, Analysis & Recommendations

A Social Mission

Engaging the hard to reach in learning delivers benefits across the board. The learner benefits from an improving quality of life, the taxpayer benefits by a reducing burden on public services, and the Government benefits as it works to reach targets against Skills for Life, Level 2 and the 80% employment rate aspiration.

The Government, through the FE White Paper, sets out its intention to reprioritise adult education funding towards the low skilled. Crisis welcomes and supports this direction of travel. However, the process begins from a low base. According to *'Skills: Getting on in Business, Getting on in Work'* only £113m of the 2003/04 adult learning budget of almost £3b was spent on adults seeking their first, full level 2 qualification. The proposals as they stand in the FE White Paper will do little to engage in learning hard to reach adults over the age of 25 and not in employment. Government must be more ambitious. Bold targets have been set against Skills for Life and level 2. To date, however, many of those people successfully reaching the target levels have been learners already close to the mark. As this group dries up, for Government to meet its targets, increasingly learners must be drawn from the hard to reach⁷ who are furthest from level 2.

What is more, hard to reach learners are largely the same people that the Government needs to help prepare for employment if the 80% employment aspiration is to be met. Improved employment prospects, in terms of finding, keeping and progressing in work, are clearly an outcome of successful learning. To neglect the hard to reach, therefore, seems at odds both with DfES targets and with the aspirations of other Government departments.

Moreover, engaging the hard to reach in learning offers savings for the taxpayer. More than half of single homeless people suffer from multiple needs⁸ and require, at anyone time, interventions from a range of agencies. The annual cost of each homeless person to the taxpayer can be as much as £50,000⁹. Improving skills through learning enables people to use public services more effectively, to manage their own health conditions better, to secure their own tenancies and move off benefits.

The needs associated with hard to reach learners make them the people most in need of improved skills but also the least likely to participate in learning. Only 19%¹⁰ of homeless people take part in learning activities compared to 49%¹¹ of the working age population. Yet, 37%¹² of homeless people have no qualifications whatsoever and less than one quarter are educated up to level 2¹³. The White Paper does mention the FE sector's 'social mission' but Crisis is concerned it is not given due weight and consideration. Adult education has a fundamental social mission to serve, first and foremost, those people for whom education did not work the first time around. With Government proposals currently falling

⁷ Public Accounts Committee (2005) *Skills for Life: Improving adult literacy and numeracy*. House of Commons

⁸ NPI (2003) *'How Many, How Much'*, Crisis

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ OLR (2006) *"Learning and employment amongst homeless people"*, Crisis

¹¹ DfES (2005) *"English local labour force survey"*

¹² OLR (2006) *"Learning and employment amongst homeless people"*, Crisis

¹³ *ibid*

short of the ambition to engage the hard to reach, without further attention and focus, this social mission will continue to falter.

Crisis recommends – Improving the skills of the hard to reach must become a priority across each Government Department, with incentives reflecting this priority for learning providers.

Crisis recommends – Government must re-affirm and support the Adult Education Sector’s core social mission ‘to serve, first and foremost, those people from whom education did not work the first time around’.

Learning Outcomes

Sustainable employment is a fundamental benefit of learning. It is, however, but one of a number of benefits. For example, improved skills enables people to use public services more effectively¹⁴ - essential at a time when increased choice demands increased personal responsibility - improved skills helps people live more healthily¹⁵, improved skills means people are less likely to commit crime¹⁶ and more likely to participate in the activities society has to offer¹⁷. In short, improving skills allows people to tackle the vulnerabilities that have left them excluded from society. It is for this reason that Crisis objects to the narrow ‘economic mission’ as defined in the White Paper. A learner’s progression must be measured against improving quality of life and independence, which includes but is not restricted to increasing employability.

Crisis recommends – In partnership with the Voluntary and Community Sector, Government departments should jointly develop and adopt measures of distance travelled.

Personal and Community Development Learning

Though excluded from society and trapped in a spiral of decline, the desire for change amongst the hard to reach remains high¹⁸. There is no more powerful a driver of change than the belief that change can happen. Homelessness, addiction, offending behaviour, poverty and mental ill health rob people of their belief. Success in learning restores it. However, for those people for whom education is associated with failure, the prospect of taking part in learning can seem terrifying, embarrassing and without purpose.

It is for this reason that the first steps back into learning are so crucial. Learners must be able to build up quick wins and regain confidence in their ability. This helps to restore their belief that they can change their circumstance, so leading to medium to long-term planning¹⁹. Crisis Skylight demonstrates this process working effectively [see Crisis Projects and Research for details]. Support for this approach is seen in statements from the Department for Communities and Local Government that state, “*It is important*

¹⁴ Social Exclusion Unit (2005) “*Improving Services, Improving lives*”

¹⁵ OECD (2005) “*Learning a Living; First Results of the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey*”

¹⁶ Social Exclusion Unit (2002) “*Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners*”

¹⁷ Feinstein et al (2003) “The contribution of adult learning to health and social capital”, London: Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, Research Report 8

¹⁸ 56% of homeless people want to take part in learning now or in the future. OLR (2006) *Learning and employment amongst homeless people*”, Crisis; 97% of homeless people want to work now or in the future. OSW (2005) “*No Home, No Job*”.

¹⁹ SEU (2005) “*Transitions Young Adults with Complex Needs*”

*that all projects for homeless people both provide and promote meaningful activities*²⁰ and the Department for Health who encourage Occupational Therapists to assess and treat people using purposeful activity to prevent disability and promote independent function.

Despite this, there is extremely limited Government funding for pre-accredited learning activities that re-engage hard to reach learners. Personal and Community Development Learning (PCDL) is rare in that it does provide funding for non-accredited learning, although this is not currently targeted at hard to reach learners. The FE White Paper indicates that the future PCDL is to be debated. What is fundamental in this debate is that engagement learning for the hard to reach must be funded and engagement must be understood to be pre-accredited learning activities.

The FE White Paper makes clear DfES are to undertake an evaluation into Test-Bed Learning Communities and the lessons learnt will inform the PCDL debate. To be fully informed, however, Government should also assess and draw lessons from engagement projects that have not been funded by Government. Crisis would be a willing volunteer for such a role.

Crisis recommends – Personal and Community Development Learning should fund pre-accredited learning designed to re-engage hard to reach learners and offer progression.

Crisis recommends – The evaluation of Test-Bed Learning Communities, to inform future Personal and Community Development Learning spend, should be expanded to include Voluntary and Community Sector engagement projects that have not received Government funding.

Foundation Learning Tier

Crisis supports the introduction of a Foundation Learning Tier (FLT) which will encompass entry and level 1 learning, introduce a modular approach designed through the Framework of Achievement and attempt to offer a coherent learning pathway to level 2 and beyond. We are concerned, however, that the reduction in the adult learning budget and the resulting closure of over 500,000 places will limit choice and hamper the flexibility intended to exist within the FLT.

Furthermore, Crisis is disappointed to learn that the piloting of the FLT has attracted no new money. As a consequence, the pilots will almost certainly offer contracts to existing providers only. A modular approach to learning, offering coherent learning pathways already exists within the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)– the Crisis Learning Zone being one such example. The danger again of this pilot is that the lessons learnt will be drawn only from those taking part within the pilot and not those projects already successful applying a similar model.

Crisis are concerned to ensure that PCDL is used to fund non-accredited learning designed to re-engage hard to reach learners and offer progression. PCDL should not be used to fund the eventual roll out of the FLT. FLT rollout should be funded through the mainstream budget.

Crisis recommends – Pre-level 2 learning must preserve choice and flexibility in available courses and units.

²⁰ ODPM (2002) *More than a roof: A report into tackling homelessness*

Crisis recommends – Before the Foundation Learning Tier is developed and rolled out, Voluntary and Community Sector projects offering entry and level 1 learning should be considered alongside the FLT pilot.

Crisis recommends – Personal and Community Development Learning should not be used to fund the eventual roll out of the Foundation Learning Tier (FLT). FLT rollout should be funded through the mainstream budget.

Train to Gain

Crisis would enthusiastically support the national rollout of Train to Gain if the scheme were extended to include volunteers. Estimates suggest that volunteering contributes some £2.52 billion to the Scottish economy alone each year²¹. Volunteering is also an accepted route back into employment for the hard to reach - our experience bears testament to this with 82% of Skylight Café volunteers securing work at the end of their training. Volunteering, therefore, plays both a crucial role for the economy and also for hard to reach individuals. It makes sense that volunteering be made more attractive and the outputs of volunteering strengthened by inclusion within Train to Gain. The National Council for Volunteer Organisations (NCVO) stated that volunteers should be treated in the same way as paid staff - a position that the Government has endorsed. The Labour Force Survey needs to be reformed to include volunteering roles in order to facilitate this.

Crisis recommends – Eligibility criteria for Train to Gain must be extended to include volunteers

Crisis recommends – The Labour Force Survey should include volunteering rates

The Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector

Hard to reach learners are only hard to reach if looking in the wrong places. As borne out by HM Treasury and the Public Accounts Committee research the VCS is the destination of choice for those people that the mainstream find hard to reach^{22 23}.

In order to help people take back their future learning, at every stage, for the hard to reach must strive for progression. Progression in learning; progression in health; progression to employment. But progression cannot be delivered by the VCS alone.

The FE White Paper makes mention of the role of the VCS, but fails to offer a vision of the VCS embraced as an integral part of mainstream adult education. There is an opportunity for a new partnership between the VCS and the mainstream, with the VCS offering expertise in engaging and retaining the hard to reach in learning and the mainstream offering resources, choice and quality control. There is real reason to establish this partnership.

Government must embrace this partnership. At present, however, only a fraction of the learning and skills budget is directed towards the VCS. In the year 2004/05 £163,690 went direct. As an absolute maximum

²¹ <http://www.scvo.org.uk/scvo/NewsAndEvents/PrintArticle.aspx?pid=4875>

²² HM Treasury (2004) *Exploring the role of the third sector in public sector delivery and reform: A discussion document*, London

²³ Public Accounts Committee (2005) *Skills for Life: Improving adult literacy and numeracy*. House of Commons

a further 5% (based on LSC guidelines for colleges) of the college grant may have been directed to the VCS, a total of £254,043.

Crisis recommends – 10% of the Learning and Skills Councils’ adult learning budget should be set aside and used as an incentive for FE colleges to create new partnerships with the VCS.

Ensuring Quality

Hard to reach learners must have access to high quality learning, in welcoming places with inspiring staff. To achieve this the VCS must work to raise their standards, ensuring they are always of a high quality. In turn Government must commit to develop, resource and support this work.

Crisis recommends - The Learning and Skills Council must promote and fund the Certificate in Self Development through Learning and the Certificate in Supporting the Development Needs of Homeless and Vulnerable Adults.

Crisis recommends - HM - Treasury must renew its commitment to providing inspiring spaces in the VCS by repeat funding of the Hostel Capital Improvement Programme and other similar programmes.

Crisis recommends - The Quality Improvement Agency’s Quality Improvement Strategy must prioritise improving quality and responsiveness within the VCS, including those organisations not receiving public funds.

CRISIS PROJECTS

Crisis Skylight Activity Centre

The Skylight Activity Centre is an inspiring centre in east London which provides homeless people with a choice of over 70 free learning, skills and work opportunities each week. 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 centre is also open to non-homeless people – paving the way for homeless people to re-integrate into mainstream society.

The centre was started in 2002 with the aim to provide open access to activities, 365 days a year. In 2004/05, almost 650 homeless people were registered as members, with the number of homeless people accessing the centre on any one day averaging at 125 people.

The centre is just one element of Skylight, a project which also involves more formal learning courses (in the Learning Zone), volunteering opportunities (through the Member Volunteer Scheme) and 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, no matter what 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 2004/2005, there were around 150 registrations, which represents over 9000 contact hours. It is a leading example of the Government, the FE sector and the voluntary sector working in partnership.

Café

The Skylight Café is the latest in a series of projects which has been developed by Crisis to help homeless people rebuild their social and practical skills, join the world of work and boost their confidence and self-esteem. It is one element of the Skylight project, which offers a range of free opportunities designed to engage homeless people in learning, help them find constructive routes out of homelessness.

The café is located in the centre of London at Crisis' headquarters, and is currently open five days a week (Mon - Fri). All the trainees in the café are homeless or formerly homeless people and receive training and hands-on experience in practical, vocational skills in a friendly, dynamic environment. Under the guidance

of an experienced café manager, the trainees receive individually structured training leading to recognised qualifications in Food Hygiene, Customer Care and Health and Safety, as well as more specialised skills such as coffee making and the specialist aspects of food preparation. In addition to this specific vocational training, trainees also receive general employability training, through the Learning Power Awards run in partnership with Newham College.

In the first year, 82% of trainees successfully moved into paid employment and 14% went into further education.

Skylight Member Volunteers Scheme

Crisis has developed a volunteering scheme for members of the Skylight project, which offers a wide range of volunteer positions in Skylight and Crisis Head Office. Volunteering gives members new skills and confidence, smoothing the transition into paid employment. In addition to moving into opportunities within Skylight and Crisis, a link has also been made with Volunteer Action Tower Hamlets (VATH) enabling some members to progress into volunteering opportunities that exist at other organisations in the borough.

CRISIS RESEARCH

In partnership with Demos, Tribal and Opinion Leader Research, Crisis has undertaken a series of extensive research projects into learning and skills for homeless people, exploring the benefits, experiences and barriers. All research is available at www.crisis.org.uk



66 Commercial Street
London E1 6LT

Tel: 0870 011 3335

Fax: 0870 011 3336

Email: enquiries@crisis.org.uk

Website: www.crisis.org.uk

Crisis UK (trading as Crisis). Charity no 1082947. Company no 4024938