



REDUCING REOFFENDING THROUGH LEARNING AND EMPLOYMENT

Crisis' response to the DfES, Home Office and
DWP consultation

May 2006

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The Department for Education and Skills, Home Office and Department of Work and Pensions are consulting on new strategy ideas to help reduce re-offending. This consultation is based on the Reducing Re-Offending Through Skills and Employment Green Paper. The Green Paper sets a series of key questions on which comments are sought.

Crisis has offered general comment against each of the following consultation themes:

- A. Stronger focus on employment
- B. A better quality and increasingly effective learning and skills service. Strengthening the partnership to develop offender skills – a ‘campus approach’
- C. Greater coherence across the system
- D. Motivating and engaging offenders – including a new ‘contract’ for offenders

In addition we have responded specifically to the following consultation questions:

- What are the best ways to engage employers in opening up job opportunities, and what are the issues that arise?
- What support would be most helpful to employers considering recruiting offenders, and how might it be provided?
- What are the key considerations in constructing a campus model, and its links to more effective outcomes for skills and employment alongside a new contract model?
- What other measures might be considered in order to engage and motivate more offenders in positive action to improve their employability and readiness for resettlements and avoidance of reoffending?

In responding Crisis draws upon our expertise in providing engagement, education and employment opportunities for homeless people and our extensive research on the importance of equipping homeless people with the skills, confidence and knowledge to enable them to re-enter the workforce and re-integrate into society in a sustained way.

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 AND REOFFENDING

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 single homeless people in the UK².

Homelessness deskills, de-motivates and isolates. It can trap people in a destructive cycle of disadvantage - long-term unemployment, mental health problems, addiction and offending become increasingly likely. There is a clear association between homelessness and offending behaviour. Approximately 50% of rough sleepers have spent time in prison or in a remand centre³. One-third of newly convicted prisoners do not have secure accommodation, one-third of prisoners lose secure accommodation whilst in prison and one-third of prisoners have no secure accommodation upon release⁴.

Like offenders, homeless people have skills and education levels significantly worse than the general population, which in turn harms employment prospects. 37% of homeless people possess no qualifications whatsoever. A further 14% are educated only up to level 1. Yet only 19% take part in courses aimed at improving skills, of which only around 50% complete.⁵ The employment rate for homeless people stands at just 14%. Of those unemployed, 30% will have been so for over three years, with a further 27% unemployed for over ten years⁶.

Crisis provides engagement, education and employment opportunities for homeless people. We can successfully demonstrate that improving skills and raising confidence enables homeless people to break their destructive cycle, move into employment and create pathways back into society. Given shared characteristics, we believe our approach would be equally as successful if targeted at offenders.

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

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

³ Social Exclusion Unit (1998) *Rough Sleeping*

⁴ Social Exclusion Unit (2002) *Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners*

⁵ Opinion Leader Research (2006) *Learning and Employment amongst homeless people*, Crisis

⁶ *ibid*

A. STRONGER FOCUS ON EMPLOYMENT

General comments

- 1.0 Crisis welcomes and supports the vision of offenders leaving prisons *'trained for employment, skilled for life'*. **Caution is required, however, to ensure that a 'stronger focus on employment' does not lead to employment being recognised as the only worthwhile outcome.** A simple working or not working divide cannot effectively define inclusion or exclusion.
- 1.1 Furthermore, our experience has shown that **sustainable employment is but one of a number of outcomes achievable by improving skills.** For example:
- Improving skills helps people navigate and use services better;
 - Improving skills expands capacity, so helping people support and sustain themselves in housing;
 - Improving skills improves employability, people are more likely to find and keep a job;
 - Improving skills increases confidence, people are more likely to create and take advantage of life's opportunities;
 - Improving skills involves disadvantaged people in their own solution – crucial to breaking their destructive cycle.
- 1.2 In terms of employment outcomes **Crisis recommends an emphasis on sustainable employment.** HMT has recognised that the 'work first' approach adopted by Jobcentre Plus is less effective when applied to people suffering entrenched disadvantage. An 'any job will do' approach to offenders is likely to perpetuate labour market failure.
- 1.3 **Crisis recommends improving skills is understood more broadly than raising qualifications.** Skills must also be understood to include core competencies, e.g. communication skills, relating to others, decision-making and using initiative. These are the skills which enable disadvantaged people both move into and succeed in further education, sustainable employment and mainstream society.
- 1.4 Crisis fully supports the position of Campaign for Learning, which argues that many **people with a history of failure in education need to 'learn to learn'**. Provision for offenders needs to be pitched at the appropriate level including opportunities for 1st steps learning. If pitched at too high a level, whilst being appropriate for those closest to employment or further education, many offenders will remain excluded.
- **What are the best ways to engage employers in opening up job opportunities, and what are the issues that arise?**
- 1.5 **Crisis operates a successful social enterprise café, established in partnership with a large corporate.** Since opening, our partnership has expanded to include working with six national corporates. The Café offers homeless trainees the opportunity to learn on the job in a pre-employment environment. The demands of our café are as they would be in any other successful café and the manager came from an established cafe. Training is tailored to the needs of the specific trainee with support and time provided to allow the opportunity to build up their confidence, to develop the specific skills of food preparation and customer services and overcome any particular issues the individual might face, whilst still ensuring they reach the industry standard. Over its first year of operation 82% of trainees have progressed into sustained full time

employment and 14% into further education and training. We believe this model and method of operation is replicable and scaleable. Training periods have varied from 6 weeks to 6 months

- 1.6 **The café acts as a feeder for the corporate.** café providers we work with. Having played a role in the design of the training, the corporates can be confident of quality and experience of the applicant. For the corporate **this reduces the risk involved in the recruitment process.** Early or inappropriate referral from the training scheme would undermine confidence in the scheme and would not be in the interest of the trainees.
- 1.7 **The successful scheme National Grid runs to recruit, train and employ ex young offenders should be evaluated, developed and supported.** Support should be drawn from Government agencies to enable it to be rolled-out across other companies and to include the older offending population.
 - **What support would be most helpful to employers considering recruiting offenders, and how might it be provided?**
- 1.8 **Pro-active and on-call support for both the employee and the employer needs to be in place for the full first six months of a new job.** Support must be able to address work and non-work problems, create an understanding of each other's circumstance and intervene early to broker an agreement should conflict arise. In evidence given to the Work and Pensions Select Committee investigating Pathways to work, IPPR suggested there is likely to be a strong invest to save argument for support during the first six months. This support should be delivered by developing a single specialist support and advice function for both employers and employees, drawn from Job Centre Plus, the Small Business Service and other agencies as appropriate, and able to call-on additional support from these agencies as appropriate to the circumstances.

B. A BETTER QUALITY AND INCREASINGLY EFFECTIVE LEARNING AND SKILLS SERVICE. STRENGTHENING THE PARTNERSHIP TO DEVELOP OFFENDER SKILLS – A ‘CAMPUS’ APPROACH.

General comments

- 2.0 **Crisis fully supports and thoroughly recommends the ‘strong focus on social inclusion’** identified as a key feature of the campus. We welcome Government recognition, in the campus section of the Green Paper, that overcoming barriers to employment are but one part of the move to inclusion.
- 2.1 In recognition of this strong focus on inclusion **Crisis recommends that outcome measurements be broader than employment and account for progression.** If performance is measured solely against securing employment and gaining qualifications, it is inevitable that programmes catering for those clients closest to the desired outcome will be able to offer more tangible outcomes for less money, so winning the contracts. The effect, therefore, is to further exclude the most disadvantaged.
- **What are the key considerations in constructing a campus model, and its links to more effective outcomes for skills and employment alongside a new contract model?**
- 2.2 Crisis supports the recognition within the campus model of the need to better integrate programmes working in the areas of employment and skills. **The campus model must create a continuum of services, with an emphasis on progression, provided by both the 3rd and mainstream sectors.** To achieve this mainstream services should receive strong incentives to work closely with the 3rd sector to reach and motivate disengaged learners. Closer working can be manifested, for example, by franchise arrangements, provision of teachers, revenue funding, quality control and eligibility for support.
- 2.3 **Offenders should have access to the service that best meets need.** The campus director should have a duty to reach-out and identify all opportunities and services for advice, support, training, skills development and specialist assistance in their criminal justice area. Offenders should be able to access appropriate services regardless of whether the service is contacted by the campus.
- 2.4 **Crisis recommends guarding against a campus model that favours large bulk contracts.** Whilst the campus may find it easier to administer a small number of large contracts, this harms diversity of supply. Larger contracts are simply beyond the capacity of small or medium sized organisations, particularly when, for instance, ability to manage a grant or a financial database has to be in place before tendering. A diversity of supply offers more choice for hard to reach learners and the campus should work to encourage diversity.

C. GREATER COHERENCE ACROSS THE SYSTEM

General comments

- 3.0 **Participation in learning must not be packaged as part of the punishment.** Crisis fundamentally disagrees with an 'activity requirement' as part of an offender's sentence. Hard to reach learners can positively and successfully re-engage in learning if the right circumstances are provided. Crisis outlines effective mechanisms for doing so in our response to the section entitled 'Motivation and Engaging Offenders – including a new contract for offenders'. **Compulsion is not the answer and sanctions should not be used as a threat against hard to reach learners.**
- 3.1 Offenders, like homeless people, are often dealing with a number of overlapping disadvantages and negotiating multiple transitions simultaneously. **A holistic approach is needed, with offenders receiving flexible, personalised support.** Crisis supports the NOMs National Reducing Re-Offending Delivery Plan which identifies the need for support across seven strands: Accommodation; Education training & employment; Health; Drugs & Alcohol; Finance, Benefit & Debt; Children and families; Attitudes, thinking and behaviour.
- 3.2 However, offenders like homeless people tend to receive a fragmented response from a range of services simply because their circumstances are difficult to deal with. **To facilitate an effective holistic approach a Service Navigator is needed to bring together the planning and delivery range of mainstream services to ensure they provide a co-ordinated and personalised response for the individual⁷.** Every offender should be allocated a named Service Navigator before release who will work then to plan the delivery of the services they will need across the seven strands and stay with them as their needs require when they go out in the community.

⁷ Crisis (2005) *"From the Margins to the Mainstream"*

D. MOTIVATING AND ENGAGING OFFENDERS – INCLUDING A NEW ‘CONTRACT’ FOR OFFENDERS

General comments

- 4.0 **Crisis believes the offender contract will harm motivation and hamper efforts to improve the skills of offenders.** As the SEU has concluded success is the best incentive⁸. For those people with a history of failure in education and employment, risk free learning, with the opportunity for quick wins, is an imperative. Sanctions should not be attached to participation in learning. Motivating and engaging offenders in learning can be achieved, without the use of the contract, through approaches outlined below.
- **What other measures might be considered in order to engage and motivate more offenders in positive action to improve their employability and readiness for resettlements and avoidance of reoffending?**
- 4.1 **Crisis recommends prisons adopt a positive culture of learning, applying to both inmates and staff.** Crisis support the recommendation by the Education and Select committee report into Prison Education, which calls for *“a much greater level of investment in staff education and development ... in order to encourage a more positive attitude amongst Prison Officers towards the role that education has to play in prisons”*.
- 4.2 Crisis’ experience shows that hard to reach learners can be encouraged to participate where **high quality learning** is offered in **welcoming places** by **inspiring staff trained to educate people with a history of failure**. Funding, therefore, needs to be directed towards increasing the quality of facilities and teaching up to the standards of mainstream provision. This applies both to prison education and post-release education.
- 4.3 **It must be a priority to ensure that classes take place.** If the provider does not value courses the learner will not value them. Therefore staff shortages must be covered, courses must be funded on a stable and sustainable basis and resources must not be cut at times of difficulty. To achieve this additional resources must accompany the reducing reoffending through skills and employment strategy.
- 4.4 To reinforce this commitment to education **the Prison Service and providers should set out to learners what will be delivered in terms of choice of learning, quality, time-commitment, consistency and content, so establishing clear expectations against which learners are able to respond to.**
- 4.5 **Engagement activities and taster sessions must be part of the offer,** so allowing opportunities for offenders to participate in learning without unrealistic early demands. These ‘hooks’ increase enthusiasm, which can be channelled towards more structured courses and career goals.
- 4.6 **A wide variety of courses with learners free to choose** increases motivation to participate in learning. A variety of opportunities increases the likelihood of people finding courses of interest to them and of people staying engaged with learning. This will be achieved by offering a range of traditional and non-traditional learning pathways, and includes accredited routes, together with support services to help people learn and prepare for employment. This covers developmental

⁸ SEU (2005) *“Transitions Young Adults with Complex Needs”*

activities such as building self-confidence and improving communication skills, expressing talents through creative arts programmes, as well as formal learning with qualifications such as English for speakers of other languages, IT, the full range of specific and vocational courses, and useful life skills such as CV writing and budgeting.

- 4.7 For the learners with scepticism towards learning **courses must emphasise progression and outcomes**. The benefits of learning must be widely, clearly and enthusiastically articulated and they must be understood to be broader than employment alone. Peers, who have successfully re-engaged in learning, should be recruited as Learning Ambassadors to most effectively communicate this.
- 4.8 **Crisis recommends support for individuals into higher-level education**. It should not be assumed that all offenders are low skilled. Many will be able to participate in education and work at a higher level than entry-level. To motivate these offenders effectively, provision must be available at appropriate levels.



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