

Missed opportunities:

The case for investment in learning and skills for homeless people

Research Report

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homeless people

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They include 21 homeless people from London and Manchester who took part in in-depth interviews focused on their experiences of learning and skills work, and whose names have been changed in this report to preserve confidentiality.

We also interviewed and had discussions with more than 30 individuals from the following organisations:

- Addaction
- Brighton and Hove City Council
- Broadway, London
- Business Action on Homelessness (part of Business in the Community)
- City Lit Further Education College, London
- Crisis Skylight Centre, London
- Department for Education and Skills
- Department of Work and Pensions
- HM Treasury
- Homeless Link
- Learning and Skills Council for Coventry and Warwickshire
- Mind
- National Learning and Skills Council
- National Offender Management Service
- National Treatment Agency
- Newham College, London
- Off the Streets and into Work, London
- Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
- Social Exclusion Unit
- St Basil's, Birmingham
- St Mungos, London
- Thames Reach Bondway, London
- The Booth Centre, Manchester
- The Foyer Federation
- The Shekinah Mission, Plymouth
- Warwickshire College
- Work Directions

Our work at Crisis gives us first hand experience of the massive difference that learning and skills can make to the lives of homeless people. We owe it to these vulnerable learners to keep up the constant struggle for recognition, funding and results in this field. I welcome this research which confirms that it is not only homeless people who benefit from this work, but Government and taxpayers too.

Shaks Ghosh, Chief Executive, Crisis

Learning changes lives, transforms communities and can bring people from the margins to the mainstream of life. We abhor the waste of human potential that Crisis' research highlights. By targeting homeless people the Government could deliver on both its social and economic agendas. Every day that goes by without this investment delays changes in homeless people's lives and increases social exclusion and entrenchment into a homeless lifestyle.

Linda Siegle, Joint Chief Executive, Campaign for Learning



Executive Summary

Introduction

This research explores the benefits that learning and skills can bring to the lives of single homeless people and, through delivery of those benefits, to a wide range of Government strategies and programmes. It is based on a review of available research together with interviews with homeless people, and other agencies involved in the funding and delivery of learning and skills. It focuses on single homeless people.

The research highlighted how participation in learning and skills can transform the lives of homeless individuals, at the same time as delivering important policy and financial benefits for a wide variety of Government policies and programmes. It notes the multiple needs of homeless people, for instance the high levels of worklessness, substance misuse, mental ill health and physical illness or disability within the homeless population.

The findings

The research explored the impact of learning and skills upon homelessness (Chapter 2); both for the individual and

for homelessness strategies and programmes, and found clear benefits at both levels. Homeless people themselves recognise the potential benefits to them of engaging in learning and skills activities and more than half want to take part. Yet only a fifth do so at present.

Homeless people included in this research emphasised the impact that learning had had on their confidence and self-esteem and ability to address substance misuse, social isolation and lack of motivation. There is qualitative research evidence of the role that these factors play in preventing and addressing homelessness and a widespread belief amongst homelessness agencies of the crucial role that they play. Despite this, and the need to address unacceptably high levels of repeat homelessness amongst single homeless people in particular, the research found that the funding and delivery of learning and skills work with homeless people is largely adhoc and uncoordinated at present, with many agencies reporting reductions in funding for this type of work.

The research also explored (Chapter 3) the potential policy and economic

Benefits of learning for homeless people

- **Personal:** increased confidence, self-esteem, belief in ability to change; development of daily routine and structure; ability to set and work towards goals, capability to sustain themselves in housing
- **Social:** improved communication and social interaction skills; widened social network; reduced social isolation
- **Health:** improved well-being and mental health; reduced substance misuse and other harmful behaviours;
- **Economic:** development of the 'soft' and hard skills necessary for employment; contacts in the labour market; a chance to establish a work record; improved earnings once in work

benefits of investment in learning and skills work with homeless people for a much wider range of Government agendas. The multiple needs of homeless people suggest that they should be at the forefront of a number of key Government Policy agendas, and the research explored the specific benefits to each of these: Skills, Engaging Hard to Reach Learners, Welfare to Work, National Drug and Alcohol Strategies, Reducing Offending, Public Health and Building Stronger Communities.

The research found that investment in learning and skills for homeless people offers significant economic and policy benefits across all of these agendas. However the tendency of Government departments and other funders to assess value for money solely from the perspective of their own priorities and targets means that the whole value of this work is never measured and services struggle to demonstrate value for money.

The research identified the current barriers to funding and delivery of learning and skills work with homeless people (Chapter 4). These fell into three broad types: personal barriers; service barriers; funding barriers. The personal barriers are related to the history and needs of many homeless people including problematic substance misuse, low confidence and self-esteem, negative experiences of learning from the past. The service barriers relate to the lack of priority given to learning and skills by some homelessness agencies and their staff, and the inability or unwillingness of some mainstream providers of learning and skills to respond appropriately to the needs of homeless people.

Funding barriers largely stem from the fragmented approach taken by each of the potential funders of learning and skills work with homeless people. This leads to narrow outcome targets that learning providers find difficult to satisfy when working with homeless people, which in turn result in a reluctance of mainstream providers to focus resources on homeless people and a reduction in funding for specialist provision.

At present less than a fifth of homeless people engage in learning and skills work in any year. This could be increased through greater investment in engagement and first steps to learning, however it is this area of learning and skills work that is most difficult to find funding for, and indeed where funding is said to be decreasing. The report sets out (Chapter 5) how providers, funders and strategic agencies can better respond to the learning and skills needs of homeless people. It highlights how the personal barriers faced by homeless people can be overcome by the delivery of flexible learning opportunities that take account of their wider needs. It concludes that there is a great deal that central Government can do, alongside local agencies, to ensure delivery of a more holistic range of services that encourage, inform and support homeless people to engage in learning and skills development.

The report highlights the need for a more co-ordinated approach to the funding and delivery of learning and skills work with homeless people, that brings together key funders and providers in a partnership approach – led by central, regional and local government. It also considers how the wider benefits from this investment can be evidenced and recognised.

The proposals

The report concludes by setting out proposals for ensuring that the benefits identified by the research are delivered in practice. In particular, it calls upon the Government to take a lead by making learning and skills a central core of its homelessness strategies and programmes and ensuring the creation of effective partnerships to deliver the benefits at the national, regional and local level:

Proposal One: The Government should develop a new national strategy focused on reducing the social exclusion of homeless people which has learning and skills at its heart. The strategy should contain ambitious targets to increase the engagement of homeless people in learning and skills or work, which are shared across all relevant government departments and supported through identified funding streams.

Proposal Two: Other national strategies – for instance the national strategies for Supporting People, Drugs and Alcohol and Skills – should contain specific links to the new national strategy for homeless people and set out how the needs of homeless people will be met through their respective plans and programmes.

Proposal Three: New partnerships should be established at the national, regional and local level to deliver the national strategy and focus on the low skills and worklessness of homeless people. Local partnerships should be led by local, city-wide or regional government and be supported by a

new Local Partnership Fund from central government. Access to the funding should be dependent upon the involvement of all key stakeholders including Learning and Skills Councils, Jobcentre Plus, homelessness agencies, health and social care agencies, further education colleges and learning providers, housing providers and the business sector.

Proposal Four: The Government should resource the development of outcome measures for incorporation into funding contracts which avoid perverse incentives and enable providers to evidence the wide ranging positive benefits of learning and skills

Proposal Five: Homelessness agencies should be supported to develop a much stronger and properly resourced role for engaging and supporting homeless people in learning and skills activities, which includes appropriate training for staff to meet the development needs of homeless people and ensuring that the outputs from the Homelessness Sector Pilot are resourced and implemented across the sector.

1. Introduction

1.1 The aims and rationale for the research

The value of learning and skills development to individuals and society is widely acknowledged. The intrinsic value of learning is illustrated by the extent to which individuals engage in learning for pure enjoyment, as well as to develop or improve the skills they need for work and wider life.

Crisis commissioned this research to focus on the specific benefits of engagement in learning and skills activities for the 380,000¹ single homeless people who live in hostels, insecure housing or sleep rough on the streets, and who often have complex needs in addition to their need for a home. These needs include very high levels of worklessness, substance misuse, offending and mental ill health.

Needs of single homeless people

- 37% have no qualifications (compared to 10% of general population)²
- Only 2% are in full-time work²
- 19% have difficulties reading and writing (compared to 2-3% of general population)³
- 50-75% have a history of problematic substance misusers⁴
- 40% have a history of offending⁵
- 70% have mental health needs¹
- 50% have a long term illness or disability⁶

The primary aim of the research was to identify the wide range of benefits that can be achieved from supporting and providing learning and skills activities for homeless people and, if appropriate, make a policy and economic case for investment in them.

Other aims included:

- reviewing the evidence of whether current learning and skills programmes are effectively supporting the achievement of outcomes for homeless people;
- identifying what needs to change to maximise the benefits achievable;
- making recommendations to Government and other stakeholders to increase access to and outcomes from learning and skills for homeless people.

The term 'learning and skills' has been used in the report to refer to the range of activities that aim to provide or support the individual to take up opportunities to learn new skills, or enhance their existing skills. It encompasses learning in its widest sense and includes both academic vocational and non-vocational courses that may lead to a qualification, as well as much less structured learning opportunities that may be offered on a drop-in basis or as very short courses (such as painting and decorating taster workshops or open access arts classes). It also

includes support or activities that aim to develop 'life skills', such as anger management and punctuality, that enhance the individual's ability to build relationships in the work and non-work worlds, as well as those that are firmly focused on employment and the acquisition of qualifications and employment. It also includes paid and non-paid opportunities for employment.

Examples of activities that support learning and skills development

- Drop-in classes covering art, music mixing sessions, dance etc to attract hard to reach learners
- Computer skills classes
- Basic skills courses covering literacy and numeracy, ESOL, often embedded into wider learning
- Life skills (including skills that contribute to personal development, such as communications skills, self-esteem, learning to learn) delivered separately or as part of a wider package of learning
- Short courses leading, for example, to awards in health and safety, first aid, cookery
- 'Bite sized' courses that give learners a taste of learning in particular areas from Science through to vocational skills such as painting, carpentry or hair dressing
- Formal learning that leads to GCSEs, NVQs or other accredited qualifications
- Volunteering opportunities
- Sheltered or supported employment opportunities

The term 'single homeless people' has been used to refer to single people or couples without dependent children who do not have stable or secure housing. It includes rough sleepers; people living in night shelters, hostels or other insecure or temporary accommodation including squats, bed and breakfast hotels or on the floors of friends and family, irrespective of whether a housing authority has accepted a duty to rehouse them. Although homeless families were not directly covered by the research, it is likely that the findings and many of the recommendations that have come out of this research apply equally to them.

1.2 Methodology and report structure

The research consisted of several elements.

Firstly a literature review was carried out to identify the research evidence of the benefits of learning and how these relate to homeless people. This involved a review of literature relating to the wider population of learners as well as research carried out specifically with homeless people. The latter included two recent

surveys of the attitudes to and experiences of learning and work of more than 700 single homeless people.²

A policy review was also carried out through scrutinising key Government strategies and statements to identify how learning and skills work with homeless people might contribute to these.

Interviews were carried out with more than 30 funders and providers of learning and skills activities for homeless people. The funders and strategic bodies included officials from HM Treasury, Department for Education and Skills (DfES), Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG), and the Home Office), as well as national and local Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) and local authorities.

In-depth interviews were carried out with 21 single homeless people in London and Manchester to explore their experiences of learning and skills activities and their perceptions of the benefits and the impact it had made on their lives.

A seminar and workshops were undertaken with agencies providing or campaigning for learning and skills work with disadvantaged groups to identify how funding and service delivery arrangements could be improved.



2. The impact of learning and skills on homelessness

2.1 The relevance of learning to homelessness

Homeless people often have multiple needs and disadvantages that have both contributed to and are exacerbated by their homelessness. Overcoming these needs is crucial to the achievement of more independent living. The case of 'Edward' below provides a powerful reminder of the complexity of those needs and the extent to which learning can help to address them.

Case study one – Edward

Edward spent three years staying with friends, sleeping rough and in hostels. He used drugs and alcohol and also received support from a psychiatrist. He heard about the drop-in centre offering learning and skills activities through friends who encouraged him to come along.

Since coming to the centre Edward's life has changed. His lifestyle is very different now and he has a purpose. He sets goals for himself and is very motivated. He no longer uses drugs, only drinks small amounts socially and no longer needs to see a psychiatrist. He has also developed a social life around some of the other people that use the centre.

He feels comfortable at the centre and thinks it is an easy place to learn. He particularly values the fact that it is an alcohol and drug free environment *"you don't have to worry about people that are using kicking off...they don't get through the door if they are using"*. He also likes the fact that the centre helps people move towards their goals.

Edward began doing an art class and then went onto do a mosaic course. He has also undertaken a self employment course where he learnt how to build a business plan. He has now set up a social enterprise and has started selling his mosaic work with a group of others combining the skills learnt through both courses. The business is now looking to buy a van and rent a workshop so that it can use stalls in a number of markets and won't remain reliant on using space at the centre.

Edward has undertaken a course on volunteering and is hoping to train others through a mentoring programme. He volunteers on the reception desk at the centre and has helped to lay a floor. He is also sitting on the selection panel for recruiting new tutors. In addition to this he spends one day a week teaching arts and crafts at a local community centre for people who are recovering alcoholics.

Learning new skills or regaining lost skills is an integral part of tackling homelessness. There are high levels of repeat and serial homelessness amongst single homeless people with common reasons for tenancy failure including loneliness and isolation⁷, drink and drug related problems⁷ (leading to debt, rent arrears and anti-social behaviour) and relationship breakdown and domestic violence. Overcoming these factors involves learning of one sort or another – whether it be learning to manage money more effectively, learning how to be assertive with past associates who want to use your flat as a drinking den, or learning how to make new friends.

Experiences of homeless people

- Two out of every three homeless people have been homeless more than once²
- One in ten have been homeless more than 10 times²
- A quarter have been homeless for more than five years²
- Two thirds of rough sleepers have had tenancies in the past but lost them⁷
- Each tenancy breakdown costs housing authorities more than £2,000⁸

The rest of this chapter explores what evidence there is that engagement in learning and skills delivers benefits for homeless people themselves, and through delivery of those benefits, to homelessness strategies and programmes.

2.2 Skills for independent living

The high levels of tenancy breakdown and repeat homelessness highlight the need for pre- and post-tenancy support for homeless people to ensure that they are able to progress towards independent living and successfully sustain their tenancies. Although many hostels provide this type of support to homeless people, an evaluation of the support given to rough sleepers found that its delivery was inconsistent and that there were varying interpretations of what this should consist of⁷. Anecdotal feedback from providers and commissioners of pre- and post-tenancy support suggests that some services focus on 'doing things' for new tenants to enable them to get initially established, whereas others aim to enable the homeless person to develop the skills to support their own independence. Research has not been undertaken into the relative cost-effectiveness of each approach, or whether the latter achieves better value for money by avoiding tenancy breakdown in the longer term.

For those subject to prolonged or repeat homelessness the need to learn or regain lost skills will be most acute. Life on the streets, or in hostels accommodating people with multiple and often complex needs, requires the development of coping

mechanisms which may seem extreme or inappropriate in wider society⁹. Those who have been homeless for some time will be used to inactivity and unstructured days, and will need to develop their capacity to plan and structure their time so as to achieve their goals and, for instance, turn up to courses or work on time. It is arguably these people, with the most acute needs who have most to gain from participating in learning and skills activities.

Life skills¹⁰

- Practical skills that people need to live an independent life (like washing, cooking and budgeting)
- Soft skills needed to interact successfully with others (like good communication skills, coping with difficult circumstances, negotiation skills)

Many homeless people fear that they have neither the life skills (for instance money management, ability to deal with agencies, communication skills) nor social networks to enable them to live independently⁶. These fears can prevent homeless people from taking their first steps to independence and can increase their chances of tenancy failure once they are rehoused in independent accommodation. One ex-rough sleeper described the difficulties of managing a tenancy as follows:

*"It's a massive strain trying to pay bills. Paying housing benefit straight to landlords helped enormously, but it's still a struggle trying to keep everything going. [Having been] homeless reinforces those difficulties, so in a way it's a relief when you become homeless again. Once out of the system, life is simple. People give you things – food, clothes. It's easy it's all laid on."*⁷

The top ten skills required for successful housing¹¹

- Reading and understanding tenancy agreements and tenants' handbooks
- Reading instructions on washing machines, dryers and other communal facilities
- Filling out forms for housing benefit and other allowances
- Writing letters about repairs and transfers to housing officers
- Reading and understanding letters and posters about housing issues
- Reading gas and electricity meters, or setting thermostats
- Working out a household budget
- Communicating with the Job Centre (as failure to do so can result in loss of benefit)
- Speaking at tenants' meetings
- Making 'official' phonecalls – for example to set up accounts with water, gas, electricity and phone companies or to report repairs

The service case study below provides an example of learning that helps homeless people to address a number of factors linked to their homelessness including independent living skills, social inclusion, and employability. Like many of the other case studies in this report it highlights the extent to which increased confidence is a common benefit from learning.

Service case study – Moving in, Moving on

Thames Reach Bondway is a provider of housing and support to single homeless people, most of whom have slept rough and high proportions of whom have complex needs. Its Moving In Moving On (MIMO) project is a painting and decorating training scheme aimed at all levels of ability, teaching skills ranging from the basics to more advanced decorative techniques and design. The service is jointly funded through Job Centre Plus and the European Social Fund.

Trainees can choose from a variety of modules and work at their own pace. Along the way there is the opportunity to join the MIMO team of decorators, who provide a homemaking service for Thames Reach Bondway tenants, and get some hands on experience. MIMO trainees receive support from the project workers to look at areas of interest and options that they may want to pursue when the course finishes. This doesn't have to be related to decorating and can include a range of other options.. They have a chance to learn and practice new skills that will both help them to set up and maintain a home, and improve their employability at the same time. The course also gives them the confidence to explore their own interests further.

Peer support plays a major role in the scheme, providing an opportunity to meet and socialise with new people, build friendships and learn to work as part of a team. Many also value the opportunity to take part in a structured activity that gets them out of their flat or hostel and helps them to combat the feelings of isolation and depression that can sometimes lead to a life back on the street.

2.3 Confidence and self-esteem as a platform for independence

There is a wide body of evidence¹² that supports the notion that engagement in learning results in enhanced self esteem. Hammond¹³ for instance, found that learners believed that through learning their confidence had increased resulting in them taking more control of their lives, feeling empowered to tackle issues and

deal with problems. This is highly significant for homeless people who may not otherwise have confidence in their own abilities to live independently, and who often have other wider needs that need to be tackled in order to find a sustainable solution to their homelessness.

There is evidence¹² that the benefits from learning extend to many aspects of the learner's life and impact positively upon: self-esteem; relationships with friends and family; life aspirations; ability to speak out for oneself; ability to learn and aim for progression; work ambitions and performance; and community activity and activism. These benefits have been observed across the social spectrum but are particularly important for those groups who are most disadvantaged and who are likely to have poor self-esteem that is impacting upon their life chances.

In our interviews with homeless people and the agencies that work with them, there was frequent mention of the loss of dignity and self confidence that homeless people experience. Many of those we interviewed spontaneously mentioned how engagement in learning and skills activities had made them feel good about themselves or had given them a sense of achievement.

“When I am here [at the learning and skills centre] my mind is focused – I feel good inside. I feel proud when I finish a job and can see how I will be able to help friends and relatives in the future, or even make a career out of it.”
(service user)

Research has shown that increasing personal capacity and confidence not only enables people to access services more effectively but also helps to build aspirations, move people towards education or employment and take on new roles in the community.¹⁴ Restoration of confidence and self-belief was reported by homelessness agencies to be crucial for encouraging homeless people to progress from living a day to day existence towards one which includes goals, plans and expectations of personal development and growth.

This was reported to apply to the majority of homeless people, including those with previously very 'successful' lives, like 'Dave' on the next page.

Given the importance of learning for development of confidence, there is a strong case for ensuring that it features in the support packages offered to homeless people. It also highlights the importance of ensuring that learning activities result in positive experiences for homeless people that will build up rather than further damage their confidence and self-esteem.

Case study two – Dave

Dave became homeless when his marriage fell apart, and lived on the streets for three years. Prior to that he was a qualified engineer and owned property.

He has been attending a learning and skills centre for homeless people every day for the last two and a half years. During this time he has learnt to play the guitar and keyboard, has put tracks on the internet and has written a book for which he is seeking a publisher. Dave has exhibited and sold his art work at the centre. He has now set up his own company and had developed an item of new technology using his engineering skills in conjunction with a local university, and is awaiting a patent.

Dave feels very proud about what he has achieved. He finds art both therapeutic and motivating and thinks that creative activities can act as a form of therapy for people with complex needs who have had difficult lives. He thinks it is important that learning and skills activities are developed specifically for homeless people, in a 'safe environment' that enables them to establish a routine which would otherwise be difficult to achieve whilst homeless.

2.4 Boredom, social isolation and exclusion

Research¹⁵ has highlighted the boredom and lack of 'meaningful activity' common in many homeless people's lives. It revealed that less than a third of homeless people spend time with non-homeless people, and almost one in four spend the day alone.

Service providers and service users have highlighted the dangers that this lack of purposeful activity and restriction of social networks to other homeless people will lead to institutionalisation into hostel life. Recent research found that those who have been homeless for long periods are least likely to be interested in learning².

"Having nothing to do makes you stuck in the system and you find yourself being sucked in. You can't go out because you don't have decent clothes and no money to do anything, so you get sucked into hostel life. Associating with people who you have never met before and yet becoming best mates with them – you do what they do just to get on – like drinking." (service user)¹⁵

"If I wasn't here I would just sit at home and drink." (service user)

Boredom and isolation have been identified both as a barrier to someone progressing to more independent accommodation and a contributory factor in repeat homelessness. Agencies working with rough sleepers report that many continue to associate with other rough sleepers, even after rehousing, and engage in a street based lifestyle, in part due to loneliness and isolation.⁷

Two of the most commonly reported factors in tenancy breakdown are debt and isolation. For people in education, training and employment, these factors are significantly reduced ... homeless people [taking up] courses, apprenticeships or jobs is a crucial part of helping them out of homelessness.¹⁶

More than a Roof: A report into tackling homelessness (ODPM, 2002)

A large number of the homeless people we interviewed mentioned the impact that participation in learning and skills activities has had on their social network. For those involved in substance misuse one of the main benefits of a wider social network was being able to leave old associates behind as they began to change

Case study three – Norma

Norma is living in temporary accommodation after having become homeless. She is doing a painting and decorating course offered by her landlord (a homelessness agency) because she needs to be able to decorate the flat once she gets it. Before doing the course she went to some drop-in services but said *"I'm not keen on drop-ins, people just sit around drinking coffee and I can't see the point. I know they are good for some people but not for me."*

Before starting the course she felt isolated. She really enjoys meeting people on the course and likes the fact that things are broken down into easily digestible sections. She feels that she has learnt a lot and enjoys the fact that she has learnt new skills.

Before doing the course she had been applying for jobs but had not had any success. The course has given her a focus and increased her confidence. She also said that the things she has learnt on the course will be really useful once she has her own flat – as she will be able to decorate it herself. She hopes to use her skills to help friends with their decorating and thinks this will improve her social network and make her feel less alone. Once she has finished the course she hopes to do a women's DIY course to develop more practical skills.

their lives. Others also valued the opportunity to mix with a group who will support them in their attempts to change their lives, rather than hamper them. Two interviewees mentioned that they have met people on their course who they might never have otherwise associated with, including people from other cultures. To make a sustainable change in their lifestyle and any negative behaviours associated with their homelessness, homeless people often have to break out of their existing social circle and develop new friendships that are not founded on drug use or offending. This can be difficult if they do not have friends outside of the homeless community, given the prevalence of substance misuse and offending within it.

Front line staff working with homeless people have reported that, as a result of their limited social networks, homeless people often do not have the peer support to pursue work opportunities¹⁷. Homeless people themselves see the opportunity to mix and create friendships with non-homeless people as a clear benefit from participation in learning and skills activities. Group learning activities in particular have been shown to help homeless people to develop the communication and social interaction skills that are necessary for tackling both social exclusion and for employability¹⁸. Case study about 'Norma' on the previous page illustrates how learning can help homeless people to tackle their social exclusion and loneliness.

2.5 Structure, purpose and wider needs

Homelessness agencies interviewed as part of this research repeatedly stated that learning and skills activities play an important role in helping homeless people move away from having a day to day approach to their existence, towards one in which they start to plan and take control of their lives. This move is seen to be crucial to the achievement of lasting settlement into stable housing in the community.

Our interviews with homeless people confirmed the role that engagement in skills development can play both in improving mental health, and in reducing harmful behaviours. Several of our interviewees mentioned the sense of well-being they achieve as a result of participation in learning and skills activities, and a high proportion mentioned the impact that has on their substance misuse in particular. This was linked to feeling good about oneself, having something to do, a sense of purpose and "*something to get up for in the morning*", enjoying the company of others, and/or achieving goals.

For substance misusers in particular, the opportunity to keep busy and avoid contact with other substance misusers was seen to be crucial to them staying off drinks or drugs. Several attributed their reduction in or abstinence from substance misuse to "*coming down here and keeping busy*". Ten out of the eleven substance misusers we interviewed spontaneously mentioned that participation in learning and skills activities was helping them to limit or overcome their substance misuse.

The case of 'Craig' below is one of several that highlight the importance of learning and skills provides structure and purpose to homeless people's lives and helps them to address the wider needs that contribute to their homelessness.

Case study four – Craig

Craig described his alcohol problem as "*big*". He started drinking when he was 15. He was abused by his step father and started drinking to "*try and blank it out*".

Craig recently moved to a 'wet hostel'¹⁹, but before this was drinking on the streets. He said that he gets depressed when he is stuck in the hostel with time on his hands and so tends to drink there. Since going to a drop-in centre that provides learning and skills activities for homeless people, he has been able to get away from people who are drinking as they are not allowed into the classes. This helps him to forget about drinking because it keeps his mind occupied. "*It gives me something to wake up for and I feel motivated to come here.*"

Craig is now waiting to go into detox. He has taken a computer course and has learnt to use spreadsheets and word processing, and would like to move on to the next stage of this learning. He might even think about getting a job in computing eventually. He envisages that once he is ready to go back to work, his first step will be working in a hotel. He has taken a first aid certificate to help him achieve this. He is also doing voluntary work at the drop-in, making drinks and snacks for people taking the classes. He enjoys this and says that it makes him feel as if he is doing something good. He also hopes that the drop-in will be able to give him a reference from his voluntary work which will help him get a job.

Craig has also been to pottery classes and art classes at the drop in. He has had some of his pottery entered into a competition and the art teacher has put one of his pictures up in her own home. He has felt a real sense of achievement and said that it makes him feel good about himself.

2.6 Access to paid and unpaid work

Through learning the soft (generic) and hard (vocational) skills necessary for work, homeless people can improve their employability, and enhance their chances of living successfully in independent accommodation.

Work brings with it the opportunity to increase one's income and access to goods and services, and through these things have a better quality of life. Although increased financial independence can help homeless people to achieve more independent living, there are also significant non-financial benefits.

Employment and training schemes can help to prevent homelessness. Work, be it paid or unpaid, is also a key route out of homelessness. Many homeless people can benefit from schemes that improve employability by building confidence and self-esteem through education and training leading to work opportunities which can support a permanent move to a more independent lifestyle.²⁰

Service case study - Crisis Skylight Café

The Skylight Café is one element of Crisis' Skylight project in east London, which has been developed to help homeless people rebuild their social and practical skills, join the world of work and boost their confidence and self-esteem.

The café is currently open five days a week (Monday to Friday). All the trainees in the café are homeless or formerly homeless people who work on a voluntary basis for around two shifts per week to gain training and hands-on experience and practical, vocational skills in a friendly, dynamic environment. Under the guidance of an experienced café manager, the trainees receive individually structured, flexible 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 aspects of food preparation. Trainees can also receive general employability training, through the Learning Power Awards run in partnership with Newham College. In addition to this specific vocational training, which also builds softer skills such as communication, reliability and presentation, trainees also receive tailored programmes which can include building supervisory and management skills.

In the past year, 17 former trainees successfully moved into employment within the catering profession, two moved into other employment and one went on to college.

Work is strongly associated with a range of other positive benefits for homeless people including improved mental health, reductions in offending, wider social networks, a reduction in substance misuse and increased feelings of self-worth.

Several of the homeless people we interviewed mentioned the therapeutic value of the work they were doing, although in these cases they were not referring to paid work.

Even those who are still some distance away from the labour market, or who may never enter paid employment, can achieve these types of benefits through volunteering. Several of the homeless people we interviewed were working as volunteers and their sense of achievement and pride in their work was palpable. Research with homeless people with health conditions found that many felt that their confidence had been boosted by undertaking periods of voluntary work.²¹

As well as financial benefits, work can provide a sense of dignity and purpose, opportunities to meet new people, develop skills and give something back to the community, all of which improve health and well-being and promote independence.²²

2.7 Recognition of the benefits of learning and skills

More than half (56 per cent) of homeless people want to engage in learning² and more than three quarters (77 per cent) want to work¹⁷. Almost 97 per cent of all homeless people want to work in the future.

Homeless people themselves recognise the wide ranging benefits to them from engagement in learning and skills activities² as shown below.

Benefits of learning and skills identified by homeless people	
• Increased confidence	58%
• Qualifications	44%
• Increased self esteem	40%
• Sense of achievement	37%
• Better social skills	32%
• Something to do during the day	31%
• Increased employability	29%
• New friends	29%
• Direction in my life	25%
• Ideas about other things I could learn	25%
• A structure to help me plan my life	22%
• A job	20%
• Ability to socialise with non-homeless people	18%

In recent years there has been a growing awareness that many homeless people need more than just housing to help them overcome their homelessness. The Government has accepted that tackling the multiple needs of homeless people is essential if sustainable solutions to homelessness are to be found.

Helping someone to rebuild relationships with family or friends, stay in education or take up training and employment and deal with a drug, alcohol or mental health problem, is as much about tackling homelessness as ensuring a roof over their head

Louise Casey in the foreword to *More than a Roof*¹⁶

Through its Supporting People²³ and Homelessness funding programmes, the Government is investing in services to prevent and address homelessness. Funding for the development of independent living skills is potentially available from the Supporting People programme. However, although support for the development of life skills is seen to be part of the remit of Supporting People, the boundaries of what this funding source can cover, and what DCLG (the sponsoring government department) expects other funding programmes (such as funding from Learning and Skills councils) to cover is blurred. Certainly it would not expect Supporting People to fund the development of literacy and numeracy skills and yet the Basic Skills Agency has highlighted the importance of reading, writing and communication skills for successful rehousing¹¹ (see 3.2).

The Government is also currently investing £90m of capital funding from its Hostels Capital Improvement Programme²⁴ to transform hostels into places of change for homeless people, in which they can rebuild their lives and reintegrate into mainstream society. The inclusion of meaningful occupation, such as learning and skills work, is seen to be a key part of service delivery in these modernised services.

Meaningful activity must be at the core of service delivery within hostels, alongside access to health services including substance misuse or mental health services. An expectation that residents will take part in such activity should be made clear at initial assessment stage and encouraged by staff during a resident's stay in a hostel.²⁴

Despite this homelessness agencies interviewed during this research reported decreasing rather than increasing levels of funding available for learning and skills activities with homeless people. This shortage of funding is also reflected in the mismatch in the proportion of homeless people wanting to engage with learning

and the proportion actually engaged in learning. Although more than half want to engage in learning, only one fifth of homeless people do so at present.² Chapter 4 explores more of the barriers around delivering learning and skills within the Government's current homelessness policies, programmes and funding.

2.8 Key findings

- Single homeless people often have a wide range of needs which can both contribute to and be exacerbated by their homelessness – and all of which can be positively addressed by engagement in learning and skills.
- Engagement in learning and skills development helps to bring about an end to homelessness in a number of ways.
 - It builds confidence and self esteem – and through these the belief that positive change is possible
 - It gives people structure, purpose and meaning to their lives – all of which are essential first steps to goal setting and achievement
 - It equips people with the skills necessary to interact successfully both in work and non-work settings – and thereby the chances of ending their social exclusion
 - It tackles boredom and widens social networks – thereby helping individuals to leave behind negative past behaviours and peer influences
 - It improves the ability to access and make use of services – thereby increasing independence and ensuring that wider needs are more likely to be met
 - It improves mental and physical health, and reduce substance misuse and offending.
 - It improves employability - and thereby the chance of ending financial exclusion.
- More than half of all homeless people want to engage in learning and skills development but only a fifth do at present
- The Government recognises the important role that learning and skills plays in enabling lasting solutions to homelessness, yet its delivery to homeless people is ad-hoc and largely uncoordinated at present

3. Impact on wider Government strategies and programmes

3.1 Multiple needs = multiple benefits

The previous chapter noted the impact of investment in learning and skills on homelessness.

The multiple needs of homeless people should put them at the forefront of a number of priority agendas for Government. They also mean that single homeless people are often intensive users of public services. The annual costs to the public purse of each homeless person can be up to £50,000¹ per year if the costs of temporary accommodation, unemployment, the cost of health services, criminal justice costs and support are taken into account. Finding lasting solutions to homelessness should therefore be a key Government priority on both policy and economic grounds.

This chapter explores the policy and economic benefits that can accrue to a wide variety of Government strategies and programmes from investment in learning and skills for homeless people. The policy agendas covered include:

- The Skills Agenda
- Engaging hard to reach learners
- Welfare to work
- Substance Misuse
- Reducing offending
- Public health
- Building stronger communities.

This chapter also explores the potential for funding for learning and skills work with homeless people from programmes linked to each of these policy agendas.

3.2 The skills agenda

Homeless people have comparatively low skills compared to their peers, as shown by the statistics below.

Skills of homeless people

- 37% of single homeless people have no qualifications² (compared to 10% of general population)
- 19% have difficulties reading and writing English (compared to 2-3% of general population)³
- Just over a third have qualifications at level 2 or above (compared to two thirds of general population)²
- Less than a fifth of homeless people take part in learning and skills activities²

In 2001 the Government launched its 'Skills for Life'²⁵ strategy to improve the literacy, numeracy and language skills of adults. It was a response to the profound changes taking place in the workplace which brought with them an increased need for a highly skilled, flexible workforce. At that time, there were an estimated seven million adults who could not read or write at a level that might be expected of an 11 year old, with even more struggling with numeracy, and it was recognised that, as a consequence, the economic performance of the country was being adversely affected.

The strategy recognised the cost of low skills to individuals and society and stated that those with poor skills, unable to find employment and having had the least success within the existing educational system, should and could be supported to re-engage with learning. It also specifically recognised that the literacy, language and numeracy needs of many homeless people contribute to their difficulty in finding a place to stay and a place to work, and identified them as a priority group alongside unemployed people, low-skilled people in employment, offenders and other groups at risk of exclusion. However, the extent to which this commitment to meet the needs of homeless adult learners is actually realised in Local Learning and Skills Council planning is unclear.

Given their skills profile, homeless people should be one of the key target groups for increased investment in basic skills. Indeed, a new study for the Treasury of skills in the UK may lead to an increased emphasis on investment in basic skills for disadvantaged groups like homeless people.

In the interim report from his review of skills in the UK²⁶, Lord Leitch noted the need for a skilled workforce to enable the UK to compete well in the global marketplace. Crucially, the report stated that that investment in basic skills offers similar cost benefits to investment in intermediate or higher level skills. However the report had also recognised that there are other wider benefits from investment in basic skills including social benefits and a reduction in the gap between rich and poor.

Qualifications provide other benefits to individuals beyond wage returns. They are associated with higher probability of being in work, increased opportunities of progression, improved health outcomes, reduced offending, and greater social cohesion. Wage returns are therefore only one measure of the benefits or returns to an individual of attaining qualifications

The review highlighted how investment in higher level skills alone is likely to increase relative poverty in the UK as it will widen the gap between those with poor basic skills for whom there will be a decreasing number of jobs, and those with higher level skills who will continue to command much higher salaries.

Importantly the review argued that the level of basic skills required to be employable is rising. This is echoed in feedback from employers who emphasise the need for 'soft skills' such as communication skills, ability to team work, presentation skills.²⁷ It is these very same skills that also assist homeless people to successfully integrate back into society. However feedback from funders and homelessness agencies has highlighted the much narrower definition of basic skills that is generally being funded by Learning and Skills Councils.

*Most jobs increasingly require basic literacy, numeracy and IT skills, and the need for team working and communication skills is rising.*²⁶

To date, the review has concluded that investment in basic skills has the greatest potential for reducing income inequality and also that further investment is required in basic skills in order, through learning progression, to enable the expansion of the nation's capacity in higher end skills.

This recognition of the value of investment in basic skills work is significant. It has the potential to overturn a tendency reported by many homelessness agencies for local Learning and Skills Councils (the organisations responsible for all post-16 learning except Higher Education) to direct the greatest part of their investment towards achievement at a higher level, for example the commitment to meeting targets for Level 2 achievement (equivalent to five GCSEs), and to working with those that are closest to achieving qualifications at that level.

In its remaining work, the Leitch review should be encouraged to expand its assessment of value for money to include the policy and financial benefits to wider social programmes so that greater emphasis will be placed upon this.

3.3 Engaging hard to reach learners

Colleges receiving funding from Learning and Skills Councils can receive funding uplifts to reflect the additional support required by learners from disadvantaged groups, and which often requires learning to be delivered in smaller groups than would normally be the case. However, The Public Accounts Committee²⁸, in its report on Skills for Life, noted that 'hard to reach' learners such as homeless people are least likely to be attracted to learning in an institution such as a college, and are much more likely to agree to being helped through voluntary or community groups they already know.

Some homelessness agencies recognise the additional needs and barriers to learning (see Chapter 4) faced by homeless people. Some (like in the case study

below) have adopted a number of strategies to ensure that homeless people are encouraged to attend and continue attending learning and skills activities. These include: ensuring a wide range of learning opportunities to attract hard to reach learners; offering drop-in classes which require minimal upfront commitment from the learner, offering short term and flexible attendance options to facilitate early achievement and cater for wider needs, one to one support for the most vulnerable.

Service case study – Crisis Skylight Activity Centre and Learning Zone

The Skylight Activity Centre is an inspiring centre in central London which provides homeless people with a choice of over 70 free learning, skills and work opportunities each week. 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.

The range of learning opportunities include arts, music and performance-based activities, IT training and access, yoga, and practical skills such as bicycle maintenance. Free, accredited, modular courses are also offered in the Learning Zone 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). All classes take place in small groups of up to 12 people, and all courses lead to a qualification. During 2004/2005, there were around 150 registrations, which represents over 9000 contact hours.

Skylight also offers, 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, allowing people to move forwards in their lives, and one may serve as a stepping stone to the next. 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, both within and Skylight and through external organisations.

The benefits of this more flexible approach to learning provision are illustrated in the case of 'Harry' below. Harry's case shows that even the most disadvantaged of homeless people can be drawn into learning and that benefits can come from that engagement for both the individual themselves and for wider society.

The Learning and Skills Councils measure outcomes from their investment through the achievement of qualifications. Harry's case below, however, shows the much wider range of benefits that can be achieved from that investment including: reductions in crime and anti-social behaviour; reduced criminal justice costs; greater access to services; improved health and a reduction in related health costs; improved chance of a sustainable end to homelessness.

Case study five – Harry

Harry has had a significant drink problem which he described as "24/7". He has been serially evicted from hostels and has also spent several periods sleeping rough. This pattern has continued for about five years, and during this time he has been frequently arrested (about once a week on average) for theft and offences related to fighting when he was drunk. He has been sent to prison five times. He was also frequently admitted to hospital.

Harry has been attending a centre that provides learning and skills activities for homeless people for about four years now. He has done a number of classes including English and maths, art, computing and pottery. When he left school he had no qualifications and now he has a lot of certificates. The English and maths have helped him a lot. *"Now I can pick up a book or a newspaper and read it. It has also helped me to fill out forms like Housing Benefit forms which makes me less reliant on other people"*. He has also found that the maths course had helped him with budgeting. The computing course helped him to use the computer to find his flat on the council's internet based lettings scheme. Harry also works on the allotment run by the centre. He finds this very relaxing, and now he has a flat of his own he wants to get his own allotment so that he can grow vegetables.

Harry values the fact that he is not allowed to drink when he is at the centre and also enjoys being kept busy. He can now go through the day without drinking and has not been arrested for two years.

Although the Learning and Skills Council²⁹ has recognised the importance of using flexible models of learning to engage and retain homeless learners, feedback received from homelessness agencies interviewed during this research has been that

there have been steady reductions in recent years in the funding available for engagement work. Most funding is now targeted at courses that will lead to national qualifications, with very little available for 'first rung' non-accredited learning in areas of high interest (such as the arts, music, and 'drop-in' computer skills classes) that seek to draw people in and encourage their progression to wider learning opportunities.

Where engagement work is supported or funding given for specific work with homeless people by the Learning and Skills Councils, this is often as part of a one-off initiative, usually where joint European Social Fund funding is available as match funding, rather than as part of a mainstream funding programme. Similarly, European Social Funding is reported to be increasingly diverted away from work with hard to reach disadvantaged groups towards those that are closest to achievement of Level 2 outcomes, and the current round of funding is due to come to an end in 2008.

The Government recognises the importance of learning and skills in promoting social inclusion and, in the past, has been clear that a proportion of the funding given to the Learning and Skills Council should be safeguarded for community development and engagement work. For example, the 2003 Skills White Paper³⁰ proposed the creation of 'learning communities' within which the role of the Learning and Skills Council in widening participation in education could be linked with new initiatives to broaden access to economic opportunities to promote social cohesion and regeneration. However, this aspect was not awarded the status of being a goal in its own right and carried no individual set of targets around which to focus activity. Similarly, the 2005 White Paper³¹ referred to social justice and economic success as 'twin goals' but then went on to focus firmly on the delivery of work-related skills, such as the Train to Gain initiative that aims to raise the skills levels of those already in employment.

The current view of the National Learning and Skills Council is that providers should aim for an appropriate balance between accredited and non-accredited learning which will ensure that both national targets and the needs of all learners can be met. In reality however, their funding programmes are unable to support such ambitious coverage and local Learning and Skills Councils have inevitably had to focus resources on the achievement of national targets that focus on accredited learning outcomes.

The 2006 Further Education White Paper³² does acknowledge the importance of education and training for personal fulfilment and the need for 'stepping stone' provision which 'helps prepare people for success in life as well as work'. However, it also clearly makes the point that this is unlikely to be the central goal of mainstream-funded Further Education in the future, and other patterns of provision to support this type of learning will need to be developed without making clear what these are to be.

Consequently, in a time when there is more pressure than ever on budgets, due in part to the success of previous policies in driving up participation and rates of achievement across the general adult population, the danger is that the majority of all post-16 learning not directly associated with an economic target will be lost.

3.4 Welfare to Work

Every homeless person out of work costs:

- £7,758 per year in welfare benefits payments³³
- £1,341 per year in income tax and national insurance payments foregone (based on minimum wages)³³
- £12,000 per year in lost economic output¹

Less than 15 per cent of single homeless people are in any form of paid employment³⁴ and a third claim Incapacity Benefit.² This level of worklessness is higher than for any other disadvantaged group. For instance almost half of disabled people are in work³⁵, as are almost a quarter of people with mental health problems²² and a third of offenders³⁶.

Lack of work is both a cause and consequence of homelessness. Continued worklessness erodes skills and confidence and acts as a real barrier to getting and maintaining a home. Yet most homeless people have worked at some point in their lives and a high proportion want to work again¹⁷.

Jobcentre Plus is the government agency supporting people of working age from welfare into work. It is part of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Its objectives include:

- increasing the supply of labour by promoting work as the best form of welfare and helping unemployed and economically inactive people move into employment;
- helping people facing the greatest barriers to employment to compete effectively in the labour market and move into and remain in work;
- ensure that people receiving working age benefits fulfill their responsibilities while providing appropriate help and support for those without work.

Until recently, Jobcentre Plus' efforts on encouraging unemployed people back into work through the various New Deals have been focused on claimants of Job Seekers Allowance. It has achieved this through a combination of support to improve employability and re-enter work, and compulsion to attend work-focused interviews with a personal advisor and other work related activities, with a threat of reduced benefits for those not complying.

Jobcentre Plus offices provide services directly or contract with outside providers to do so. DWP has recognised the important role that the voluntary sector can play in engaging with the most disadvantaged people who are furthest from the labour market. However reductions in staffing levels in both DWP and Jobcentre Plus are increasing the tendency to create larger contracts that are easier to administer and which the private sector is much better placed to win than small or even medium sized voluntary agencies working with disadvantaged groups.

Some of the organisations winning Jobcentre Plus contracts clearly understand the particular complexities of working with homeless people and report that they take steps to ensure that sufficient support is available where required. However a survey of more than 500 homeless people¹⁷ found that a large proportion (42 per cent) of single homeless people with experience of Jobcentre Plus said that they did not find its services helpful to their needs. In particular they reported that the jobs they were offered were inappropriate and that their individual needs and circumstances were not acknowledged. Similarly 60 per cent of those who had been on New Deal thought they had not benefited from it.

In January 2006 the Government set out its proposals for reforming the welfare benefits system.³⁷ The primary focus is to increase the proportion of the population in work to 80 per cent, focusing particularly on people claiming incapacity benefit, lone parents and older workers. In respect of the first group, which has greatest overlap with single homeless people, the stated aim is to reduce by one million the 2.7 million people claiming incapacity benefit.

Incapacity Benefit is a welfare benefit for people who are incapable of any work or deemed to have a serious illness or disability. It is paid on a long-term basis to those who continue to meet the conditions of entitlement. To be entitled to Incapacity Benefit, people must be able to show they are 'incapable of work'. The key proposals for changing the system of relevance to homeless people are set out below.

Key features of the proposals for reforming the welfare benefits system³⁷

- Giving a stronger focus to capability to undertake work-related activity rather than 'incapacity'.
- Assessing the types of work related activity that claimants are capable of and what support they need to help them get back to work
- Asking claimants to undertake a 'job focused' interview during the period of assessment, and only paying job seekers allowance until the outcome of the assessment is determined.
- Personal advisors will devise an action plan with those deemed capable of work-related activity, and those that do not participate will have their benefit removed in slices.
- Those deemed incapable of work will have no conditions attached to their benefit.

The proposals are based on the Pathways to Work programme which piloted efforts to get more disabled people into work. The government has plans to roll out the Pathways to Work approach nationally from 2008, using the private and voluntary sectors to deliver a range of work-related activities.³⁸

Employers have emphasised that efforts to improve the employability of individuals need to address generic skills²⁷, such as communication, team working, motivation and problem solving, as well as those more traditionally regarded as vocational skills. They place more emphasis on these generic 'soft skills' over more technical skills, as the latter can often be covered by in-work training.³⁹ And this accords with the skills homeless people need for other aspects of their lives.

... what makes people employable is more complex than the possession of the right clutch of accreditable skills. If they are to secure employment and maintain themselves in it, people also need a range of 'deployment' skills, like the ability to present themselves and to navigate the employment market effectively, qualities like self-confidence and motivation and basic work habits like time keeping.⁴⁰

Jobcentre Plus services have until recently, been very firmly working to a 'work first' ethos that is founded on a belief that work is the most important outcome for individual and should be pursued as soon as possible. However some studies have shown that forcing people into unsuitable jobs can also be counterproductive to the achievement of wider outcomes⁴¹. Jobcentre Plus is now being adapted to be a 'work focused' approach for people with multiple disadvantages.

A work focused rather than a work first approach is being considered as part of the strategy that the DWP are devising for the most disadvantaged.⁴²

Despite these changes homelessness agencies have reported that it is becoming increasingly difficult to access funding from Jobcentre Plus for specialist work with homeless people.

In their responses to the Government's Welfare to Work proposals, homelessness agencies have argued strongly for a 'stepping stones' approach to re-employment for those people for whom full time paid employment is not a realistic short term

goal. Voluntary work (see 3.9) and supported or sheltered employment opportunities could play a key role in such an approach.

Homelessness agencies have also argued for an emphasis on sustainable employment, with post employment support for the individual. An example of a work focused service that does include these features is described in the case study below.

Service case study – Business Action on Homelessness

Business Action on Homelessness (BAOH) works with homelessness agencies and private businesses in 22 areas within the UK to provide homeless people with valuable work experience. Homelessness agencies identify 'job ready' clients who are introduced to the programme.

Homeless clients receive two days of 'Ready to Go' training before taking up their work placement. The first day is hosted at the homelessness agency's office and focuses on 'soft skills' and preparation for work, for instance self-esteem, motivational skills, hopes and aspirations. The second day is hosted at the offices of one of the prospective placement businesses and focuses on CV preparation, interviewing skills and 'work readiness'.

The work placement is for a minimum of two weeks, and is unpaid. Homeless clients receive support throughout their placement from an assigned 'buddy' who will provide support, encouragement and guidance. Towards the end of the placement BAOH's Ready to Work Manager interviews both the client and the buddy to get feedback on how it has gone, update their CV and secure a written reference.

The placement is followed by an Action Day to discuss and plan next steps into work, and each client is paired with a Job Coach who will work with them for the next six months to support their job searching efforts. Client support networks of those seeking and already in work take place monthly as a means of encouraging ongoing peer support.

Since 2001 when the scheme began, 62 per cent of those who have completed a work placement have been offered employment, and 72 per cent of those are still in work after three months. Businesses engaged in the scheme include Marks & Spencer, Barclays and KPMG.

With such high levels of worklessness amongst homeless people, they will be a key group affected by the Welfare to Work proposals. It is therefore important that future contracting arrangements for the programme encourage and enable the participation of homelessness agencies in its delivery. The methods employed to tackle worklessness amongst homeless people and other groups that include high proportions of long-term unemployed, need to recognise the wider needs of many of the individuals concerns and the support they will need to move towards employment. Explicit recognition should be given to the wider benefits of learning and employment, many of which are not dependent upon paid employment.

3.5 The National Drug and Alcohol Strategies

Substance misuse

- 50-75% of single homeless people have a history of problematic substance misuse⁴
- Each residential detox and rehab costs in the region of £14,000⁴³
- The annual health costs of those continuing to misuse substances are £1,100⁴⁴

The Government invested £537m in drug treatment programmes alone in 2004/5. With each residential treatment and rehab costing in the region of £14,000 it is imperative that treatment outcomes are supported and sustained by aftercare services. The National Treatment Agency⁴⁵ and substance misusers⁴⁶ themselves recognise the importance of including education, training and employment in the package of aftercare put in place following treatment.

Employment and engagement in meaningful activities, are seen to be key outcomes for substance misusers which can influence the longer term success of treatment programmes commissioned by local Drug Action Teams (DATs). There was compelling evidence from our interviews with homeless people, and from other research¹⁷, of the role that learning and skills can play in enabling substance misusers to develop structure, purpose and meaningful activity in their lives, and a wider social network to support their efforts to reduce or end substance misuse. This has also been confirmed by other recent research with homeless people²¹.

The potential savings to the public purse from investment in learning and skills work with this group are huge, as illustrated by 'Frank's' case on the next page. The link between substance misuse and crime is well established.⁴⁷ If only one spell in prison is avoided, then the financial return on this investment will be in the region of £37,500 from this saving alone.⁴⁴ This case also illustrates how learning and skills can help even those with very complex needs to address their substance misuse and begin making positive changes in their lives.

Case study six – Frank

In the last six years Frank has been in prison four times, and has spent two years living on the streets. Frank said he needs something to do every day to motivate him to get out of bed. When he was living in a hostel he had nothing to do. *“Inside the hostel is bad for me because many of the people are using heroin – this makes me think about using it.”* Many of his friends are using drugs and he tries not to see them too often.

He has been attending a painting and decorating course provided by his landlord (a homelessness agency). He likes the fact that the people attending the course don't use drugs and they don't talk about them. As a result he has things to do that take his mind off drugs, and this has helped him to stay off drugs for the last six months. It has also helped him to meet new friends and make new relationships. The course has helped him build his confidence.

Frank would like to get a job using his painting and decorating skills or to do another course to gain further skills. He has just moved into his own flat. The flat needs a lot doing to it but he will use the skills that he has learnt on the course to paint the flat. He feels that keeping busy is the most effective thing to help him stay clean of drugs.

Learning and skills activities already form part of some structured day programmes funded by local Drug Action Teams to help clients improve their:⁴⁸

- social functioning and community rehabilitation;
- life skills and vocational or educational goals;
- personal independence and responsibility (including improvements in family and social support networks);
- physical and psychological health.

However feedback from agencies working with substance misusers and homeless people suggests that funding for learning and skills has been patchy. Although the Government has invested specific funding in the Progress2Work initiative which aims to get substance misusers into work, work outcomes are reported to be particularly difficult to achieve with this group. The funding available for learning and skills work with substance misusers tends to be focused specifically on drug users, and funding via Drug Treatment Programmes is reported to be unlikely for agencies who work with a wider group of homeless people.

With such a high proportion of single homeless people engaging in problematic substance misuse, homelessness agencies are in a strong position to engage this

group in learning and skills activity. Homeless substance misusers are particularly difficult to engage in community based services for any length of time because of their transient lifestyle, and providing learning and skills activities in hostels and daycentres which they frequent can be an effective way to achieve initial engagement from this particularly 'hard to reach' group. Funding of learning and skills work with homeless people would therefore have direct impact upon the achievement of sustainable treatment outcomes.

3.6 Reducing offending

Offending and crime

- 40% of single homeless people have a history of offending⁵
- Single homeless people are 47 times more likely to be a victim of violence⁴⁹
- Each reported crime costs £359 on average⁴⁴
- The cost of re-offending is £126,000 on average⁴⁴

A significant proportion of homeless people have a history of offending and/or anti-social behaviour. As well as having an increased likelihood than the general population of having committed a crime, the lifestyle and living conditions of homeless people mean that they are also far more likely to be a victim of crime. Recent research⁴⁹ found that homeless people are 14 times more likely to be a victim of a robbery and 47 times more likely to be a victim of violence.

Education and training can have a big impact on reducing re-offending rates. Research quoted by the Social Exclusion Unit³⁶ found that participation in basic skills training could reduce re-offending by around 12 per cent, and that ex-prisoners with poor educational attainment who do not take part in education and training whilst in prison are three times more likely to re-offend.

Recognition of the link between offending and learning and skills has led the Government to devote significant resources to improving the skills of offenders, both those in prisons and those serving community sentences. The Offender Learning Green Paper⁵⁰ recognises that the voluntary sector has a key role to play in responding to the learning and skills needs of this excluded group and that activities like the arts, music and drama can play an important role in engaging with those that are hardest to reach by helping them to build self-esteem and broaden their horizons.

Feedback from homelessness agencies and probation services suggests that a high proportion of homeless offenders commit repeated offences receiving sentences of

one year or less. This means that they have frequent but fragmented engagement with the criminal justice system and the dedicated learning provision offered through the Offender Learning and Skills Service.

Homelessness agencies however are likely to have more sustained contact with this group and can therefore provide greater continuity of service. If offenders receiving short term sentences are to sustain their learning long enough for positive outcomes to be realised, then the support and involvement of homelessness agencies is crucial.

The Government is promoting Community Alliances which will bring the National Probation Service into the 'development of long-term business alliances with other providers who bring complementary capabilities'⁵¹. Partnerships between learning providers funded to work with offenders and homelessness agencies can help to ensure engagement from this particularly hard to reach group, as shown by the case study below, but more such partnerships are needed.

Service Case study – Warwickshire College

Warwickshire College agreed to provide basic skills classes in probation approved premises, owned by a housing trust. When the programme commenced, the basement in which the classes were to be delivered was a totally unsuitable learning environment in terms of décor, heating, furniture and availability of appropriate learning materials. Through funding provided by both the probation area and the housing trust, the room was completely refurbished and two terminals with internet access were installed to improve the range of learning resources.

Graham joined the class in September '05, when he was assessed as having significant skills development needs. At that time he disclosed he was suffering from depression and that he felt hopeless as far as his job prospects were concerned. His writing indicated serious spelling problems.

As a first step he was assessed for dyslexia and other learning difficulties by Warwickshire College's in-house dyslexia specialist. This flagged up various problems and a specialist phonics programme for adults was recommended. The local probation team agreed to fund this resource which, with the college's continued support, Graham went on to use with great success - both academically and as a confidence building exercise. He passed the Level 1 Literacy test and is now in full-time employment with Tesco.

3.7 Improving public health

People who are homeless or living in temporary accommodation are more likely to suffer from poor physical and mental health than the general population⁵². The Government's homelessness strategy recognises that "*drug and alcohol use and mental health problems are prevalent amongst the homeless population*". An estimated 70 per cent of single homeless people are estimated to have mental health needs¹ and 50 per cent have a long term illness or disability⁶.

Homeless people are:⁴⁴

- 5 times more likely to use Accident and Emergency @ £86 per visit
- 4 times more likely to be admitted to hospital @ £2,500 per admission
- 11 times more likely to use acute mental health services @ £6,000 per serious episode

Research⁵³ has shown that learning and education creates positive benefits for both psychological and physical well-being.

*Adult learning enables the development of individual skills and has positive impacts upon people's happiness, wealth, and mental and physical health.*¹⁴

The Social Exclusion Unit's report into mental health and social exclusion⁵⁴ highlighted the importance of education and training for widening social networks, promoting social inclusion, increasing quality of life, and improving the chances of recovery from mental ill health. In particular, employment was said to deliver the following benefits.⁵⁵

- Acquisition of new skills
- Feeling more empowered and having a greater sense of purpose
- Being viewed more positively by others
- Establishing new friendships
- Access to better jobs, better housing and easier access to leisure pursuits

Research evidence, particularly from the USA, suggests that up to half of people with severe mental ill health are able to obtain paid employment.⁵⁶

Arts are commonly believed to have a therapeutic role as well as helping people to reintegrate into wider society. In one survey⁵⁷, roughly half of the people involved in arts activities reported feeling better about themselves or healthier since becoming involved.

The case study below illustrates the importance that non-vocational courses and activities, including the arts, can have in engaging even the most marginalised people in learning and skills work, which for some will lead through to employment.

Case study seven – Scott

Scott was a prolific offender living in a probation hostel. He was keen to get a job but suffered from very low self esteem and felt unable to 'face' potential employers in interviews. With support from a member of staff at the hostel, he agreed to get involved in a project focused on engagement in the arts as a means of improving participants' confidence and employability.

Scott was given a chance to make a film about his past life of car crime and desire to change and leave his old peers behind. Whilst working on the project, he was referred to a course that enabled him to complete his Forklift Truck qualification and was eventually able to secure a job.

Scott has now been working on a temporary basis for over three months and has for the first time in his life started to save, with a view to securing his own accommodation in the near future.

Other health problems, such as obesity, are more common in unskilled and low-income households. The Leitch review of skills in the UK noted that skills can impact on health either directly, by providing information on improving health, or indirectly, by improving income and making a healthy life style more affordable.²⁶ It noted the difficulties of estimating the potential health benefits of skills investment, but suggested that they are likely to be greatest at the bottom end of the skills distribution. It cited one study that has suggested that moving 50 per cent of women without qualifications to Level 1 would have benefits of between £300 million and £1.9 billion per annum in terms of reduced obesity and depression.

Anecdotal evidence from homelessness agencies and those carrying out research with homeless people suggests that many homeless people have undiagnosed mental health conditions. In these cases, homelessness agencies are often in an ideal position to recognise the existence of mental health needs and ensure that learning and skills work with these individuals is combined with clinical and more general emotional support to maintain motivation and engagement. It is this set of benefits from learning and skills that is perhaps most under-recognised by funders. None of the homelessness agencies we interviewed reported accessing funding from health or social care agencies for learning and skills work, and very few were measuring health outcomes as part of that work.

The Government has been encouraging Primary Care Trusts to invest in learning and skills work with people with mental ill health. Funding from health and social care agencies for learning and skills work to improve health outcomes is, however, most likely to be targeted at people with diagnosed mental ill health or a disability, and is unlikely to be easily accessed by homelessness agencies working with a wider group of homeless people. Given the difficulties that many homeless people face in using mainstream health services⁵⁸, they are unlikely to benefit from new investment in this area where access to those services is determined by health professionals.

3.8 Building stronger communities

There is a range of evidence of the value of learning and skills work to neighbourhood renewal, social cohesion, active citizenship and social integration.⁵⁹ Volunteering, in particular, contributes to the building of social capital both by engendering greater understanding of homeless people within the wider community and by addressing their social exclusion.

Case study eight – Robert

Robert is a registered alcoholic and suffers from depression. He has been through detox more times than he can count. He has been coming to the centre for several years. He spends a lot of time working on the allotment. He knew a bit about gardening before starting his work on the allotment but has learnt a lot and finds the work there very satisfying.

Robert has completed a number of courses at the centre including health and safety, food hygiene and asylum seeker and refugee awareness. He does voluntary work at the centre – makes breakfasts twice a week and also makes a main meal once day a week. He says that doing this work puts a degree of pressure on him which he enjoys. He also thinks that it is good for new people coming to the centre to see people that have managed to move on, learn new skills and put them to use.

Keeping busy with the allotment and voluntary work at the centre is good for Robert - he doesn't drink whilst he is there which means that he limits his daily intake of alcohol. Being at the centre helps him to relax and gives him peace of mind. He has met and made friends with people from other cultures and has done things that he would never have had the opportunity to do otherwise.

The Leitch review of skills in the UK reported²⁶ that improved skills can have important impacts on the cohesiveness of society. It cited evidence to suggest that those with higher skills levels have, on average, greater levels of racial tolerance and higher participation in the political process. Several of these benefits are illustrated in the case of 'Robert' on the previous page.

An assessment of the public value of learning⁶⁰ cited a range of research evidence that learning and skills work is particularly valuable to neighbourhood renewal and social cohesion, and that further education promotes active citizenship and social integration through bringing people together whose lives would otherwise be socially separate. A survey of 140 adult learners, was reported as having found that one in four reported increased involvement in social, voluntary or community activities as a result of their learning experience.

Around 13 per cent of homeless people are engaged in voluntary activity at present², but this proportion could be greatly increased through increased investment in that area. Three quarters of homeless people think that opportunities for volunteering or part time work would make a difference to their employment prospects.¹⁷

An assessment of the economic benefits of volunteering⁶¹ found that there is a payback of between £2 and £8 for every £1 invested in volunteering. This assessment is based entirely on the costs and benefits to the organisation employing the volunteers and does not take account of the benefits to the individual volunteer (which are discussed in Chapter 1) or the wider benefits to society.

Investment in learning and skills work with homeless people builds stronger communities by breaking down the barriers between homeless people and the wider community, enabling homeless people to contribute to community life, and by reducing behaviours such as crime, begging, and substance misuse which all impact upon the confidence and well-being of the wider community.

Although some learning and skills work with homeless people is funded from regeneration funding (such as Neighbourhood Renewal Funds), this does not appear to be common.

3.8 Key findings

- Investment in learning and skills work with homeless people offers significant policy and economic benefits across a range of key strategies and programmes. In particular, this investment offers savings for Government budgets focused on welfare to work, drugs and alcohol, offending and public health. Wider economic benefits should also arise in relation to the agenda for Skills and Stronger Communities.

- The multiple needs of homeless people mean that investment in learning and skills for this group should deliver the enhanced value for money recognised in the Leitch review.
- The Government recognises the need for more flexible approaches to learning for homeless people. Despite this, feedback from a variety of funders and providers suggests that funding for work with disadvantaged groups is being reduced in favour of investment in in-work learning or formal learning leading to intermediate and higher level qualifications.
- Homeless people are a key group that will be affected by the Government's Welfare to Work proposals and it is therefore important that homelessness agencies play a role in both shaping and delivering the proposals.
- Learning and skills can help to stabilise and reduce drug and alcohol misuse for the high proportion of homeless people who are problematic substance misusers. Homelessness agencies are in a prime position to engage with this transient and hard to reach group and can help to ensure value for money from the considerable investment in treatment and other substance misuse services.
- A significant number of homeless people have a history of offending and/or anti-social behaviour and yet are unlikely to have sustained contact with the new offender learning opportunities funded by Government, due to their typical pattern of serial low level offending. Homelessness agencies can support continued engagement of this hard to reach group and ensure that the full benefits from this investment are realised.
- There is strong research evidence of the benefits for physical and mental health that can come from investment in learning and skills. Homeless people have high levels of mental and physical ill health and are intensive users of public health services in particular. The potential financial and non-financial benefits for public health programmes and for homeless people are perhaps least recognised at present with very few homelessness agencies accessing health or social care funding for this purpose.
- The pivotal role that the voluntary sector can play in engaging with and delivering learning and skills to disadvantaged groups has been recognised by Government, and yet there is only limited evidence at present of the necessary partnerships being in place between mainstream learning providers and homelessness agencies
- Unless homeless people are recognised as a target group in their own right for learning and skills investment, delivery of the wide ranging benefits identified will depend upon their willingness and ability to access services targeted at other groups or mainstream provision.

4. Barriers to delivery of the benefits

4.1 Barriers to learning

This research has revealed strong evidence both of the benefits that can be gained from investment in learning and skills work with homeless people, and of homeless people's interest in engaging. These findings are however inconsistent with the finding that only a fifth of homeless people are currently engaged in learning and skills activities and begs the question 'Why?'

We found a number of barriers preventing greater engagement by homeless people in learning and skills, some of which are personal but many of which are attributable to current service delivery and funding arrangements.

4.2 Individual needs and barriers

As this research has shown, homeless people are one of the most disadvantaged groups in society with a wide variety of needs and backgrounds. As with other disadvantaged groups they experience many personal barriers to learning, although arguably the multiple needs of homeless people increase the barriers they need to overcome to engage successfully in learning and skills activities.

The barriers to learning that arise due to the needs, attitudes and circumstances of homeless people are summarised below. These barriers were frequently mentioned in our interviews with homelessness agencies, and in some cases in our interviews with homeless people, and have been identified in other research and policy literature.²⁹

- **Anxiety arising from poor self-esteem:** As noted in chapter two, many homeless people suffer from low self-esteem and self-confidence that can act as a barrier to learning.
- **Negative attitudes built up due to past experiences of learning and education:** Like many disadvantaged groups with low level of skills, homeless people have often had a poor experience of learning in the past that makes them reluctant to try again.
- **Fears about ability to interact with other learners:** Many homeless people feel that they do not have the social skills to cope with a group learning environment.¹⁸
- **Feeling ashamed due to poor basic skills:** Many homeless people lack basic skills and, like other people in this position, are often reluctant to reveal this.

- **Problems concentrating and committing to regular learning due to wider needs:** Learners with substance misuse and mental health needs in particular can find it difficult to concentrate for long periods or keep to a very regular learning regime.
- **Lack of peer support:** Frontline staff have noted that homeless people often lack the peer support to engage in positive self-development.
- **Lack of knowledge of the opportunities available:** Several studies have highlighted that homeless people often do not have easy access to information about learning and skills opportunities.⁶²
- **A belief that there is no financial benefit to engage in work focused activities:** The high rents and service charges charged in hostels, and the benefits tapers that apply to those securing paid work, act as a disincentive to work as many homeless people feel that they will not be financially better off by moving into work. This may in turn discourage homeless people from taking the initial steps that would help them move toward work.

Overcoming these barriers to learning is critical to the achievement of the benefits described in previous chapters, but this can be done if the services are designed to take account of these barriers and the underlying needs that cause them.

4.3 Service barriers

Homeless people currently engage in learning and skills activities provided by a range of providers. The Public Accounts Committee²⁸ concluded that 'hard to reach' learners such as homeless people are least likely to be attracted to learning in an institution such as a college, and are much more likely to agree to being helped through voluntary or community groups they already know. The need for learning provision to be flexible and responsive to the wider needs of homeless people – for instance by enabling them to miss a few classes if their health deteriorates or they need to make appointments with other agencies – was frequently mentioned in our interviews with homelessness agencies. Mainstream learning provision was said to be rarely able to offer this flexibility.

Research with homeless people has shown that they tend to be more satisfied with training and education provided by the voluntary sector.² Their perception is that mainstream providers can be insensitive to their needs. Evaluations and reviews of employment schemes for disadvantaged groups, often emphasise that the support needs of those with complex needs (like homeless people) cannot be underestimated, and that Job Centre Plus Personal Advisors are not always well placed to provide this support – often because of inadequate assumptions of the time required having been built into the service and funding model.^{41, 63}

Homeless people with experience of New Deal and JobCentre Plus programmes reported that the jobs they were offered were inappropriate and that their individual needs and circumstances were not acknowledged.^{1, 17} At the same time some mainstream learning providers are said to be reluctant to work with disadvantaged groups who are least likely achieve the qualifications and work outcomes required by their funders.⁶² This is perhaps not surprising given the rigid outcome targets they are required to comply with as discussed in the following section.

Although this evidence points to a need for mainstream providers to take action to become more responsive to the needs of homeless people, it also highlights the need for funders to become more realistic about the 'hard' qualification and work related outcomes that can be achieved with homeless people.

Homeless people reported the pivotal role that homelessness agency staff can play in encouraging and supporting take up of learning and skills opportunities. This suggests that homelessness agencies have a key role to play in both delivering and encouraging take-up of learning and skills opportunities. At present only a third of homelessness services offer support for participation in outside activities like learning and skills.³ Many homeless people said that had not received information about learning and skills activities from the homelessness agency supporting them, and in some cases they reported that their support worker had actively discouraged their take up of available opportunities.

This ambivalence towards learning and skills for homeless people from within some homelessness agencies could be due to a number of reasons. In some cases it may be due to the worker assuming that the homeless person will not be interested in or ready for participation. In the case of work opportunities it appears to have been sometimes due to concerns that the take up of work will lead to non-payment of service charges and rent. This is because many homeless people currently have their housing benefit paid directly to their landlord whereas wages are not, thereby increasing the risks for the landlord.

Some funders and mainstream learning providers also reported problems in engaging homelessness agencies in learning and skills work. These problems included high staff turnover, lack of interest amongst frontline staff and, in some cases a lack of professionalism.

The ability of homelessness agency staff to support the development needs of homeless people has been the subject of a recent Homelessness Sector Pilot funded by the Learning and Skills Council. This pilot programme included the development of accredited qualifications for both staff and service users of homelessness agencies, known now as the 'Learning Power Award'. To date funding has not been identified for its wider implementation.

Whilst gaps in or inadequate service provision can often be the responsibility of the service provider alone, funders have an enormous role to play in ensuring that unmet needs are addressed and that service delivery is fit for purpose.

4.4 Funding barriers

The recognition that learning and skills work with homeless people can bring a wide range of benefits is reflected in the range of funding sources that are being used to fund learning and skills work with homeless people including Supporting People funding, Homelessness grants, Learning and Skills Council funding, Job Centre Plus funding, European Social Fund funding, Invest to Save funding and charitable funding. There are however a number of significant problems with current funding arrangements that must be addressed if those benefits are to be delivered in practice.

The key problem associated with all the funding streams potentially available for learning and skills work with homeless people is their focus on the specific and narrow range of outcomes that can be delivered to the single funding agency/strategic body concerned. Thus Learning and Skills Councils are largely only interested in the achievement of qualifications, JobCentrePlus is primarily interested in work outcomes, and Supporting People authorities are primarily interested in housing outcomes. Although the Government encourages strategic and funding bodies to take account of cross-cutting agendas and priorities, the reality is that each body focuses largely on its own particular targets and its own core business. This tendency intensifies at times when there is severe pressure on public expenditure – as at present.

In this context learning and skills work with homeless people will always struggle to be seen as value for money as no single agency will ever assess the totality of the benefits being delivered. The trends for the main funding sources are summarised below.

The **Learning and Skills Council** has developed the Learning Power Award to provide accredited learning opportunities that are tailored to the learning needs of homeless people. However, overall funding is being increasingly focused on young people, development of skills for those already in work, and the achievement of qualifications at Level 2 and above (equivalent to at least five GCSE's at grades A-C). Although the Learning and Skills Councils have previously been an important source of funding for learning and skills work with homeless people, both homelessness agencies and funders have reported the decreasing likelihood that funds from this source will be available to fund non-accredited learning, such as first steps to learning, or even accredited learning below Level 2. Some homelessness agencies expressed the view that they will no longer be seeking funding from this source due to the increasingly rigid qualification outcomes required. Where work with homeless people is funded it tends to be on a 'pilot' basis or as part of a short term initiative with a life span of three years or less.

As pressure on mainstream budgets intensifies, **European Social Funding** is being increasingly diverted to meet mainstream programme targets and away from the disadvantaged groups for whom it was originally intended. Feedback from

homelessness agencies suggests that this has become a decreasing source of funding for learning and skills work with homeless people.

Supporting People funding for life skills development is being cut as administering authorities seek to find savings to meet reductions in funding from central Government. One homelessness agency reported having lost two thirds of its budget for the development of life skills from this source. As the pressure to find savings mounts, administering authorities are increasingly seeing this work as 'icing on the cake' rather than a core part of housing related support services.

JobCentre Plus funding is being increasingly let on large scale contracts to mainstream learning providers with a firm focus on work outcomes upon which payment is dependent. Although large-scale contractors may be encouraged to enter into partnerships with agencies able to engage with disadvantaged groups there is scepticism about the terms upon which they will expect that engagement to take place. One homelessness agency reported being approached by a large mainstream provider asking their support to engage with homeless people but without any intention of a sharing of funding to enable this to happen. Homelessness agencies also report that JobCentre Plus is becoming increasingly rigid in its expectations of the work outcomes that must be achieved for funding to be delivered, to the extent that several agencies said that they no longer intend to seek funding from this source.

Other potential sources of funding include EQUAL, Invest to Save funding from the Treasury, Charitable funding, health or social care funding, funding from Drug Action teams (Pooled Treatment Budgets), regeneration funding. This multiplicity of funding sources can help to protect providers from a total loss of funding, but the blurred funding boundaries between them can also increase the tendency of each funder to assume that it is not their responsibility to fund the work with homeless people. It can also add greatly to the administrative costs of learning providers and thereby be wasteful of scarce resources as shown by the case study on the next page which describes a service with 15 funders.

The tendering of single services rather than development of a whole systems' approach delivered through partnership arrangements, was reported by homelessness agencies interviewed during this research to lead to competition between providers who might otherwise have collaborated. This creates perverse incentives to hold onto those service users who offer most scope to produce the desired funding outcomes rather than refer them onto other services where appropriate, and 'cherry picking' of service users most likely to achieve the specific (and often narrow) outcomes required by the funding agency for their service. Numerous studies have emphasised this point.

Service case study – Booth Centre, Manchester

The Booth Centre is a day-centre in Manchester that works with homeless people, many of whom are or have been rough sleepers, and a high proportion of whom have substance misuse and mental health related problems. The centre offers a range of services to meet the immediate needs of homeless people including housing advice, access to substance misuse treatment services and health services, healthy food, advice and support. Since 1995 it has expanded this to include a wide variety of learning and skills activities including accredited qualifications; supported work placements; two allotments in the community; a supported volunteering project and a gardening social enterprise.

The activities are deliberately designed to work for homeless people; some are offered on a drop-in basis, and others are relatively short in length so that the learner has their achievement recognised at an early stage without having to make a long term commitment to take part at the outset.

Service users have reported increases in self-esteem and confidence, and a widening of their social networks, both of which have supported them to make wider changes in their lives. The learning and skills activities costs around £40,000 per year. Recorded outcomes include:

- 194 people took part in learning and skills activities last year
- 41 people gained at least one qualification
- 29 people took part in voluntary work
- 36 people moved on to take up activities in the community
- 16 people took up and sustained supported employment

The funding for the learning and skills activities comes from a mixture of funding from the homelessness directorate within DCLG, and grants from a number of charities. Overall the centre receives funding from 15 different sources, all of which require a separate account of how money has been spent and a different focus on outputs/outcomes. Applying for funding and reporting to funders on a regular basis takes up approximately half of the Centre Co-ordinator's time at a cost of around £15k to the project, which represents more than a third of its total learning and skills budget.

Output-related funding ensures that it is in the business interests of contractors to assess what their future income stream from clients might be, raising the danger of just 'maintaining' people who are a bad employment bet.⁶⁵

The main advantage of outcome-related funding for [private sector led Action Teams for Jobs] was seen to be the clear focus on moving clients into employment rather than focusing on soft outcomes. Conversely, the main disadvantage was felt to be that it incentivised working with easier-to-help clients, as there was little incentive to help those with multiple barriers closer to employment.⁶⁶

Targets can create perverse outcomes for clients with complex needs if they discourage staff from engaging in activities like relationship building, which have a longer term payoff.⁶⁷

Some representatives from funding agencies and government departments interviewed as part of this research commented that the inability of many homelessness agencies to evidence the value of their learning and skills, in relation to even 'soft' outcomes, is a barrier to expansion or even continued investment in specialist services for homeless people. Although some agencies have begun to address this gap⁶⁸, current outcome measurement tools are unable to measure the full range of benefits identified in this research. Homelessness agencies, and other voluntary organisations, want Government to commit to working with them to develop and recognise the results of a broader set of measures of distance travelled by learners.

4.5 Key findings

- Homeless people face a range of barriers to learning, however these can be overcome with the right services in place.
- The important role that the voluntary sector can play in ensuring the engagement of disadvantaged groups in learning is well-recognised.
- Homeless people express greater levels of satisfaction with learning opportunities provided by the voluntary sector, and perceive that mainstream provision is often insensitive to their needs.
- Mainstream learning providers can be reluctant to work with groups like homeless people who offer low probabilities of achieving the outcome targets imposed by their funders.

- Staff working in homelessness agencies can play a key role in offering encouragement and support for engagement in learning, yet this is not universally provided.
- Government departments and agencies inevitably focus investment in those areas most likely to produce outcomes against their own individual targets and, as mainstream budgets are cut, investment in services delivering against cross cutting agendas is being reduced as a result.
- Homelessness agencies, other learning providers and funders report that funding for engagement and first steps to learning in particular is decreasing – and that this is happening on several fronts at the same time thereby resulting in a significant overall loss of funding for this work with homeless people.
- The trend in contracting arrangements is towards large scale contracts that are more likely to be won by large mainstream providers.
- Current contracting arrangements hamper rather than support joint working and create perverse incentives for learning providers.
- Until suitable measures of wider outcomes and distance travelled are more widely developed and accepted, providers of learning and skills work with homeless people will struggle to demonstrate value for money in ways accepted and recognised by funders.

5. Addressing the barriers

5.1 Flexible learning models

There is recognition that successful engagement of homeless people and other excluded groups requires the development of flexible models of learning.⁵⁰ Some homelessness agencies and other learning providers sensitive to the needs of homeless learners, have tailored their learning and skills opportunities to take account of these barriers.

The features of services developed specifically for homeless people include:

- a range of learning opportunities that can help to draw in people with different and abilities towards learning;
- short term or flexible attendance requirements so that those with chaotic lives or the need to attend to other needs can fit learning around their lifestyle, and dip into learning opportunities without feeling pressurised to commit themselves;
- explicit recognition of even small learning steps to maximise the sense of achievement and keep motivation going;
- the employment of tutors who understand and empathise with the situation of homeless people;
- delivery of learning and skills work in an environment in which the homeless person will feel comfortable and not 'threatened';
- holistic packages of support to ensure that other needs are addressed alongside those for learning and skills;
- financial help with fees, travel costs and lunches where required, together with benefits advice.

It is widely accepted that disadvantaged learners respond best to initial engagement with people who they know and trust⁶⁹. Several of the homelessness agencies we interviewed said that the poor self-esteem and social exclusion of many homeless people, mean that they often respond best to early engagement activities recommended by friends or staff with whom they have a good working relationship, and who may accompany them on their first visit. For this reason many offer early engagement activities at hostels and day centres which homeless people already frequent.

Throughout our research there were strong and consistent messages that good quality and responsive staff play a pivotal role in encouraging homeless people to engage in learning and skills and employment opportunities.

"I would probably just stay in bed if I didn't come here. I'm generally not a very active person but have been encouraged to do things by the staff here"
(service user with mental health needs)

Homeless people and homelessness agencies described the importance of having tutors with a knowledge of and empathy for the reality of homeless people's lives. A non-judgmental approach is essential to sustain motivation amongst learners, as demonstrated by the comments from homeless learners below.

"The staff treat you like people"

"The people here are very hospitable. They understand human suffering. I have found both friends and assistance here."

The case study below gives a personal account of the importance of staff who understand the situation of the learners they are working with, as well as the need for a flexible approach to learning.

Case study nine – Brian

Brian has been homeless since he was 17, began drinking at the age of 14 and using drugs at the age of 17. He has spent some time sleeping on the street.

Brian is taking part in a painting and decorating course run by his landlord (a homelessness agency). As well as learning a range of painting and decorating skills he has also learnt about health and safety, and worked on a couple of flats to prepare them for new tenants.

Brian suffers from depression and thinks that a regular college course would not be suitable for him and that he would find that type of course intimidating. The relaxed and flexible nature of his current course is crucial for him. On days when he doesn't feel able to come in because of his depression he is allowed to come in on another day later in the week. He feels comfortable because other trainees have been through similar experiences and don't pass judgement on each other. Staff also "understand the pressures of being homeless and let you work at your own pace."

Brian enjoys coming along and meeting other people. The course has helped him to feel more confident and to go out and do things. Because of his depression, he has previously only mixed with well established friends because this feels safe. The course has pushed him to meet other people which he has found rewarding.

Brian hopes that he will be able to get a job at the end of the course but said that even if he does not get a job the skills will be very useful for decorating his own flat which he hopes to get in about a year and a half.

Both homeless people, funders and providers emphasised the importance of qualified staff who are able to deliver good quality learning. The Homelessness Sector Pilot, funded by the Learning and Skills Council has produced two sets of outputs that address both the learning needs of homeless people and the skills needs of those working to help them learn. The challenge now for Government is to ensure that resources are identified to implement these outputs across the sector.

5.2 Recognising and prioritising the benefits

Chapter 4 noted that many of the problems associated with the funding of learning and skills work with homeless people stem from a lack of joined up strategies. The multiple needs of homeless people mean that investment in learning and skills work with them can deliver a wide range of benefits across a range of Government agendas and programmes. However there is no single funding source that both recognises and prioritises all of those benefits. Whilst funders continue to prioritise only those outcomes that will impact upon their own targets, providers of learning and skills work with homeless people will struggle to secure stable funding.

The position of homeless people in society and their tendency to miss out on the allocation of resources prioritised at the local level means that the joining up of strategy at the local level is unlikely to happen on any great scale without strong national leadership and allocation of specific funding. This type of approach has been taken with offenders for the very same reason; that offenders have complex needs that require joined up service responses but which are unlikely to be prioritised locally across all the relevant agencies.

The National Reducing Offending Strategy – which has brought together housing, health, employment and training, offender management, and drugs strategies for offenders - and the allocation of resources alongside this for the Offender Learning and Skills Service, offers a model that could similarly be applied to homeless people, focused on ending their social exclusion and homelessness.

5.3 Joining up services

Learning and skills work with homeless people does not take place in isolation, but is usually only one of a number of service interventions that may also include housing related support, drug treatment, rehabilitation for offenders, and input from health and social care agencies. Evidence from this research suggests that fragmented strategy and funding is leading to similarly fragmented service provision.

So, for instance, whilst funding from the local Learning and Skills Council, Jobcentre Plus and Supporting People team may be supporting an individual's progress towards employment and independence, the operation of local housing policy may be frustrating these aims through the absence of affordable housing into which the individual can move from the expensive hostel in which he currently lives.

Working with the most disadvantaged will mean drawing in the contributions of partners to provide the necessary holistic packages of help.⁷⁰

Delivering to multiply disadvantaged people in a poorly joined up way is not only bad for the service user. It is also costly and inefficient.¹⁴

Case study – Crisis SmartSkills

Crisis SmartSkills helps formerly homeless people who are living in the private rented sector to build lifeskills via an individual-led learning programme. Participants receive a rent deposit to enable them to access private rented housing from Crisis' SmartMove rent deposit scheme. The SmartSkills project helps the new tenants to build the lifeskills necessary for independent living, sustain their tenancies, identify aspirations, and gives advice and support to access mainstream education and training opportunities.

Those involved in the programme work towards a City and Guilds Profile of Achievement award, which provides recognition of achievement, as well as developing the individuals ability to recognise, reflect upon and articulate their strengths and achievements. Over 30 people have now completed the programme, many of whom have identified possible routes into employment that are now being actively pursued. A number of participants have moved on to vocational qualifications and volunteering placements, and there have been three recent successes in gaining paid employment in diverse fields (including a lorry driver and an insurance salesman) while one client is in the process of setting up a small business in lettings with help from Barclays Bank.

The case study above is one example of how joined-up services can work. However, competitive tendering arrangements can lead to competition between providers who might otherwise have collaborated. The introduction of more tightly focused performance measures focused on work and qualification outcomes, can

jeopardise the achievement of a wider range of benefits and create perverse incentives for providers.

There needs to be greater joining up of service provision at the local level that brings together all relevant stakeholders (providers and funders) in a partnership approach, and which is reflected in funding arrangements that encourage rather than discourage joint working. A range of agencies working in partnership together, with 'service navigators'⁷¹ acting as a key point of contact to a range of

Case study – Brighton and Hove Council

Brighton and Hove City Council's single homelessness strategy has recognised that work and learning are integral parts of any strategy to enable people to leave homelessness behind permanently. The strategy is focused on enabling individuals to progress through homelessness services into independent living, rather than remain stuck in a system that is not only costly, but also encourages dependency and social exclusion.

The council has taken a lead in ensuring that the 'whole system' of inter-dependent services for homeless people work together to provide holistic and appropriately tailored services to support their progress towards independence. This has included employing a Homelessness Work and Learning Co-ordinator who ensures that learning and skills is embedded into needs assessment and support planning processes for homeless people, and that staff in homelessness agencies support the take up of available work and learning opportunities. It also includes prioritised access to counselling, therapy and drug treatment services where required.

The council was the lead partner in successful bids to the European Social Fund to finance learning and skills work with homeless people, and proposes to use Supporting People funding to support the development of life skills vital to social inclusion, independence and employability.

Engagement in work and learning opportunities will be a key factor in the assessment of eligibility for move-on housing. Those who have engaged in the learning and work opportunities made available to them will receive additional priority under the council's system for allocating affordable independent housing, with the greatest additional priority going to those who have moved into sustainable employment. This co-ordination of housing and learning/employment opportunities, goes some way to addressing the poverty trap experienced by many homeless people in the hostel system, and provides a clear incentive for homeless people to engage in work and learning opportunities.

different services, can ensure that the needs of the individual are met in an appropriate, co-ordinated and timely fashion. Such an arrangement can also ensure that outcomes are maximised and that duplication and gaps in the overall 'system' are easily recognised and addressed.

These partnerships can ensure that an appropriate range and choice of learning and skills activities are available in a local area, reflecting the range of abilities and interests that will be present in the local population of homeless people.

There are already some examples of these approaches being developed, as illustrated in the case study of Brighton and Hove Council on the previous page.

5.4 Encouraging the development of effective partnerships

The Government has recognised the unique role that the voluntary sector can play in engaging with vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. However consideration needs to be given to building links with and establishing clearer communication between specialist provision and mainstream services. A more co-ordinated partnership approach would offer benefits not only for homeless people but also for both sets of providers. Specialist homelessness agencies should be able to ensure that their service users are able to access a wider range of services that are more responsive to their needs, and mainstream providers should be better able to engage with and ensure the delivery of valuable outcomes with a particularly hard to reach group.

Off the Streets and into Work (OSW) recognised the benefits that could be gained from partnerships for homeless people some years ago and secured funding for a pilot initiative ('Making Links'⁷²) that ended in 2003. The initiative was focused on building partnerships between homelessness agencies and further education providers which would encourage cross sectoral working and the opportunities for homeless people to progress to mainstream learning provision. The pilot resulted in a wealth of knowledge about the funding and strategic contexts within which both sets of providers operate and how the synergy between these could be harnessed to build strong partnerships. At the end of the pilot OSW applied for funding to produce a practical toolkit that would enable the replication of these partnership workings elsewhere, but was unsuccessful in its applications.

An example of an effective partnership between mainstream and specialist providers, using the outputs from the Homelessness Sector pilot, is described in the case study on the next page.

Service case study – Worcester College and YMCA

Worcester College of Technology has been providing learning opportunities to homeless people for over four years, firstly with the Foyer Federation, and latterly with the Homeless Sector Pilot (HSP).

The purpose of the HSP is to 'up-skill' the workforce in homelessness agencies so as to deliver a programme of support that ensures that essential learning is undertaken to enable a homeless client to live and work independently. Currently the College is working with foyers (centres for homeless young people between the ages of 16 and 25) and a number of other homelessness agencies in the wider region. To work effectively over a wide region, it has had to develop a dispersed model of delivery.

The staff programme consists of a vocational certificate at Level 2, which is currently being developed into a full Level 2 (the equivalent of an NVQ Level 2). Staff who undertake this programme can take a lead in delivering the client programme in their agency, and can 'cascade' the skills learned to other staff so that the client programme becomes embedded into normal working practices.

In the Worcester model, the member of college staff who has taken the lead in this area not only has the appropriate professional teaching qualifications, but was previously an employee of an agency working with homeless people. This expertise and credibility has been vital in the development and success of the programme, and has demonstrated the importance of trainers working with homeless people not only having professional expertise, but also an in depth understanding of the needs of homeless people. The fact that the lead member of the staff at the YMCA also has a teaching qualification has also helped.

Currently the YMCA delivers the staff programme to agencies across Worcestershire, while the College delivers to homeless agencies elsewhere in the region. Negotiations are taking place to enable additional organisations to develop a similar partnership role to the one developed with Worcester YMCA, with the aim of ensuring that as many agencies as possible implement this approach across the region.

The development of quality assurance systems that ensure the expertise of delivery staff are seen to be integral to the ongoing success of the programme.

One way to achieve clearer pathways between services and more choice and responsiveness to learner needs would be to develop greater co-ordination of learning opportunities for homeless people at the local authority, city-wide or regional level. The introduction of Local Area Agreements offers a mechanism through which strategy and funding for homeless people can be brought together and made to work more effectively.

The Department of Work and Pensions' proposed City Strategies seek to encourage partnerships in tackling worklessness. It will be important that these partnerships include agencies providing support and other services to excluded and hard to reach groups like homeless people. In order to maximise the value achieved from investment in these partnerships, it will also be important that they are not directed solely to work ends rather than wider skills development, and that they recognise the full range of policy and economic benefits that can accrue from more effective engagement in learning and skills.

The fear of many agencies working with homeless people is that the democratisation of local investment decisions that will take place through Local Area Agreements will diminish rather than support investment in services for socially excluded groups like homeless people, in favour of more 'popular' groups such as older people. Historically, it has often been the presence of additional funding from central Government that has enabled appropriate investment in services for socially excluded people at the local level (for instance the funding available from the DCLG under the Rough Sleepers Initiative and Hostels Capital Improvement Programme, and funding from the National Treatment Agency for drug users).

To increase the numbers of homeless people engaged in learning and skills development, and to create effective partnerships at the local level, there is a need for an injection of new central government revenue funding. This will support the development of the necessary partnerships, and through those partnerships, ensure that the value of other existing funding streams are fully realised.

At present less than a fifth of homeless people engage in learning and skills work in any year.² This could be increased through greater investment in engagement and first steps to learning, however it is this area of learning and skills work that is most difficult to find funding for, and indeed where funding is said to be decreasing.

The allocation of funding to individual local authorities would need to be of a sufficient level to encourage the engagement of all the key partners to meet the needs of homeless people. These would include: the Housing Department, Supporting People, Learning and Skills Council, Jobcentre Plus, Adult social care, the Primary Care Trust, National Offender Management Service, and voluntary and business sector partners. The new funding could be focused on those aspects of learning and skills least likely to be covered by other sources such as engagement and first rung learning.

5.5 A clearer role for homelessness agencies in learning and skills

Homeless people have highlighted the pivotal role that information about learning and skills activities, and support to take up those opportunities, can make to their engagement. At the same time this research confirmed findings from other research that front line staff in homelessness agencies often do not have the information to signpost their service users to learning and skills provision and support and, even more worryingly, will sometimes actively discourage people from taking those opportunities up. Recent research² has revealed examples of hostel staff telling homeless people that they can no longer stay if they enter paid employment.

At present there are marked differences in the resources and effort that different homelessness agencies put into learning and skills work with homeless people. Funders of day centres, supported housing and hostels are not always easily able to measure the different value that they receive from services in this respect. There is therefore a danger that simplistic value for money comparisons will lead to a reduction in funding for all providers to the level of those with lowest costs – and which may offer least benefits for tackling the social exclusion of homeless people.

Service case study – Foyer Federation

Assessing the 'learning environment' in Foyers⁷³

- A **holistic assessment process** that helps young people identify their personal, social and economic needs.
- A **dynamic support planning process**, which enables young people to target goals and reflect on outcomes achieved over time and serves as a contract of engagement between the young person and the Foyer.
- **Information, advice, guidance, and support** to enable young people to access the specialist services - housing, health, sport and leisure, cultural and social development, religious and sexual identity, education and employment.
- **Links with the wider community** with particular focus on securing progression pathways into education, employment and accommodation.
- A **learning programme** which enables young people to develop their confidence and lifeskills, and to achieve recognized certificates and qualifications.
- **Wider activities** that add value to the young person's experience by stretching their aspirations and developing social networks.
- **Opportunities to empower young people** by involving them in how the Foyer service is managed and how they can have a voice more widely as service users and active citizens.

There may be a place for a voluntary accreditation system so that funders and service users have a clearer idea at outset of the standard of service they can expect from different providers. A similar system operates in foyers for young homeless people (see case study on the previous page).

Where homelessness providers have invested in the development of a 'learning culture' they have reported the achievement of valuable benefits for their service users, staff and funders as shown in the case study of Shekinah Mission below.

Service case study – Shekinah Mission

The Shekinah Mission was established in 1992 as a drop-in centre for homeless people and rough sleepers in Plymouth. Most of its clients have a poor self-image and a chaotic/excluded lifestyle. Since 1996, it has transformed the ways in which it works with homeless people to focus, not just on their immediate needs whilst homeless, but also on helping them build the skills and confidence to exit homelessness permanently. Using funding from a variety of sources, including the Learning and Skills Council, it has developed training programmes for its clients that include:

- **Lifestyle** – addressing substance misuse, healthy eating & recovery from homelessness
- **Independence** – how to survive on a low income, managing a home
- **Access to Learning** – developing confidence and self-respect, a range of basic skills and other accredited learning opportunities that build upon and expand out from the existing skills and interests of the individual
- **Employment** – pre-employment skills, opportunities for volunteering, work placements.

Shekinah is widely regarded to be an example of outstanding practice in tackling homelessness and other disadvantage through learning and skills provision. The partnerships that it has built up both locally and nationally (with the local authority, Learning and Skills Council, local colleges and businesses) have all been crucial.

However, Shekinah regards the key to its success to have been its clarity of organisational purpose and investment in staff training and development to support a 'learning culture' within the organisation. Shekinah's aim is to support people to leave homelessness behind permanently – and it sees learning as the key to this. All of its staff (not just those directly involved in delivering learning and skills work) have been trained to support the development needs of homeless and vulnerable people. This means that all interactions between staff and clients are focused on 'solutions' to homelessness and support their engagement with learning activities.

Whilst recognising the importance that specialist homelessness agencies can play in delivering learning and skills provision, it is important to remember that all services should aim to enable the individual to progress to use of mainstream services as soon as they are able. This is seen to be particularly important if homeless people are to be given the opportunity to widen their social network, meet with and develop friendships with people who are not homeless, and have access to a choice of services. An example of this, delivered through a partnership involving a college and group of homelessness providers is illustrated by the case study below.

Service case study - City Lit's Inside Knowledge Programme

'Inside Knowledge' is a programme focused on the delivery of the City and Guild Level 2 Certificate in Supporting the Development Needs of Homeless and Vulnerable People which was developed as part of the LSC Homelessness Sector Pilot (see Worcestershire College case study on page 55). City Lit tutors developed the programme using European Social Fund funding and it has proved very successful in attracting and retaining participants, recruiting both from the pool of existing homeless sector workers and homeless adults themselves who feel that they might eventually be interested in working in the sector in a professional capacity.

The award is delivered in an innovative way at the City Lit, in that it is not solely classroom-based but combines key theory and underpinning knowledge with opportunities to undertake work experience. Participating sector staff are able to use their own employment to meet the practical demands of the course but the Inside Knowledge approach also means that the unemployed homeless people are also given an opportunity to undertake 42 hours of supported work experience through partner organisations and so gain the full Level 2 vocational qualification. Travel and meal costs are met for attendance and additional learning support is offered where required. Even though many of the participating homeless people are managing substance abuse and mental health issues whilst undertaking the programme, outcomes are reported as being very good. Evidence of success is reflected in participants' feedback, accreditations gained and numbers into work. Others go on to further study and voluntary work.

Learners who do not meet the standard required for the course at initial assessment are referred to the City Lit Key Skills team for literacy support and encouraged to re-apply at a later date. The excellent availability of courses means that applicants, and re-applicants, are not discouraged by a long waiting period before a course starts.

Several stakeholders interviewed as part of this research suggested that specialist providers of learning and skills to homeless people could do more to maximise the learner's progression to mainstream services wherever possible and appropriate. There are several ways in which this could be encouraged, by ensuring that:

- staff in homelessness agencies are fully aware of and able to signpost to a wide range of mainstream and specialist services;
- funding contracts do not include perverse incentives that work against progression to mainstream services where that is appropriate;
- mainstream services and their staff are able to respond appropriately to the needs of homeless people;
- homeless people and staff working with them are given information about the ways in which mainstream services will respond to their needs.

5.6 Development and adoption of suitable outcome measures

The trend to let Learning and Skills Centre and Jobcentre Plus contracts to non-voluntary sector providers could be a concern unless funders incorporate into those contracts a need for agencies to i) work in partnership with voluntary sector providers, ii) meet the needs of vulnerable people, and iii) ensure clear progression routes from first engagement within homelessness agencies through to mainstream learning and employment. Some homelessness agencies have reported that some providers winning large contracts that include expectations of support for homeless people have expected the voluntary sector to support that delivery free of charge.

Contracts also need to contain measures which avoid 'cherry picking' of those clients with whom the achievement of a work outcome or other 'hard' outcome will be easiest. As this research has shown, those clients that are furthest from the labour market may be those for whom engagement in learning and skills could deliver the widest range of benefits.

The incorporation of a wider range of outcome measures into contracts for learning and skills work and employment programmes has been called for by a number of important stakeholders.

The proposal to use outcome focused funding is welcome, although contracts must reward providers for a range of outcomes to ensure that focus is not skewed towards helping those who are already closest to the market.³⁸

We recommend that the Government seeks to develop and pilot a new range of targets aimed at measuring the 'distance travelled' towards labour market participation by clients who are not immediately job-ready. These targets would aim to measure improvements in employability achieved by the intervention of Job Centre Plus, either alone or through referral to external agencies. Key measures might be improvements in work skills, attitudinal skills, personal skills, and practical skills - as steps along the way to more tangible targets such as qualifications and jobs.⁷⁴

Case study - Broadway's 'I Can' outcome measurement framework

Broadway works with over 2,000 homeless people every year in London. As well as support focusing on the immediate problems of homeless people, Broadway also offers a range of formal and informal activities to build the individual's skills and confidence.

Broadway has been aware for some time that its learning and skills work with homeless people achieves a wide range of 'soft outcomes' that can improve their quality of life and capacity to live independently, as well as improve their employability. They embarked on a pilot project to begin to capture and measure these wider benefits. Service users and staff were involved in identifying the outcomes that would be measured during the pilot and a group of learners was recruited to the pilot from existing users of Broadway's day centre and accommodation-based services. All of those involved in the pilot had multiple needs related to homelessness, mental health, physical health and/or substance misuse.

The outcomes measured included: confidence; social interaction, ability to organise time, reliability/punctuality, writing skills, reading skills, maths skills, managing money, belief in own ability to plan and achieve goals. The areas of most striking gain were in improved social interaction skills and reduced isolation. All learners increased in confidence in their communication skills. Learners who felt unable to work in a group progressed from one-to-one work to pair work, and then to work in small groups. Increased confidence was closely related to reading and writing outcomes, which in turn had further impact on clients' wider lives.

The project brought the vulnerabilities of their clients into sharp focus and has helped Broadway to improve its own practices to respond these more effectively. Broadway hopes to secure funding to package the outcomes measurement framework into a toolkit that can be disseminated to other agencies working with socially excluded people.

Some providers are now addressing this gap through the development of tools to measure the soft outcomes and progress towards those outcomes achieved by homeless learners. The case study on the previous page describes the work of Broadway Housing Association¹⁸. Other tools have been developed by St Mungos⁷⁵, and Off the Streets and into Work⁷⁶. This work should now be further developed and extended to take account of the wide ranging benefits identified during this research, and be adopted for use in contract specifications and monitoring by key funders.

5.7 Key findings

- The personal barriers to learning experienced by homeless people can be overcome through appropriate service provision. The key features of successful approaches are already well established.
- There is widespread recognition of the crucial role that the voluntary sector can play in engaging hard to reach learners like homeless people.
- Good quality staff that understand the needs of and empathise with homeless people are pivotal to continued engagement and successful learning outcomes.
- A more holistic and co-ordinated approach to learning provision for homeless people would maximise the outcomes from learning and benefits across a range of agendas. The National Offending Strategy offers a model for taking this co-ordination forward in the field of homelessness.
- Joined up services deliver a whole that is greater than the sum of their parts. This joining up needs to happen both at the commissioning and contracting stage as well as during service delivery.
- Homeless people would benefit from support from 'service navigators' that can provide information about a range of services, and enable them to exercise choice and access key services.
- The Government needs to develop incentives that will encourage the creation of successful partnerships at the strategic and operational levels to address the learning and skills needs of homeless people.
- New funding is required to address the particular shortage of funding for the engagement work and first steps to learning that is crucial for engaging larger numbers of homeless people in learning.
- There should be a much stronger focus on learning and skills development amongst homelessness services and agencies.
- Pathways to mainstream learning opportunities for homeless people should be developed, through a clearer emphasis on progression from homelessness agencies and the development of more responsive and flexible approaches by mainstream learning providers.
- Providers and funders should work together to further develop and build upon current outcome measurement tools to measure the wider range of benefits possible through learning.

6. Conclusions and proposals for change

Homeless people are one of the most disadvantaged groups in society, with multiple needs. Investment in learning and skills work with homeless people clearly delivers a range of benefits for homeless people and the Government strategies and programmes. This investment would not only bring about improvements in the quality of life and welfare of individuals, but also policy and economic benefits for government and wider society.

Chapter 2 outlined the impact on individuals of engaging in learning and skills, and Chapter 3 presented the range of policy impacts of an investment in learning and skills for homeless people, and the potential cost savings. The case of 'Andrew' below illustrates both the impact on his life as an individual and how this can deliver significant savings for the public purse. The cost of learning and skills work with homeless people at the centre that Andrew attends is £206 per learner. This investment is negligible compared to the costs associated with Andrew's homelessness, and demonstrates a clear 'invest to save' case for the funding of learning and skills work with homeless people.

Case study ten – Andrew

Andrew has been drinking for 20 years and has a long history of drunk and disorderly charges, with many nights in custody. He has been through alcohol detox seven times. Before engaging in learning and skills work, Andrew spent much of his day drinking on the streets. He was evicted from his hostel for drinking and ended up living on the streets for seven or eight months.

During his time on the streets Andrew started coming to learning and skills sessions at a local drop-in for homeless people. It was the music workshops that drew him in, as he really enjoys music. He has kept coming because it has helped to keep his mind active and because *"staff here treat you like people and make you feel welcome"*.

Andrew hasn't been arrested for nearly a year and has been sober for over five months. *"This is down to coming here and keeping my mind busy"*. He has taken a number of courses and is using his new skills to help to run an art class for people with learning disabilities as a volunteer. *"I love working with people with learning disabilities – it's good to see them achieve something"*.

Andrew has learnt to cook and gained a qualification in food hygiene. He enjoys learning and says that this makes him feel better about himself. He also hopes that learning to cook will help him once he gets a place of his own. In the future Andrew plans to go to mainstream college and is starting to take part in activities away from the drop in centre to help with progression towards this.

Costs associated with Andrew's Homelessness

Illustrative costs and potential savings

• Average costs of alcohol treatment	£175 x 7 = £1,225 ⁷⁷
• Costs of police custody	per night - £363 ⁷⁸
• Costs of an anti-social behaviour incident	£204 ⁷⁹
• Costs of each tenancy failure	£2,000 ⁸
• Costs of support whilst homeless	£7,722 ³³
• Annual welfare benefits whilst living in hostel	£7,758 ³³
• Tax and NI paid if in work at minimum wage	£1,341 ³³
• Lost economic output whilst economically inactive	per week - £230 ¹
• Annual benefit to society of voluntary input of 7 hours per week (based on minimum wage levels)	£1,838 ⁸⁰

Andrew's case illustrates the importance of a wide range of engagement activities that can help to draw even the most disadvantaged people into learning and skills development and which can provide stepping stones to more formalised learning opportunities and work. As in Andrew's case these activities can help to build up the individual's self-esteem and social skills to the extent that they feel able to participate in 'mainstream' learning opportunities.

Despite the clear and wide-ranging benefits that can be delivered through investment in learning and skills work with people like Andrew, perversely it is this group of particularly 'hard to reach' homeless people that is least likely to be targeted by mainstream funders and learning providers. Government should now put in place arrangements to ensure that homeless people are targeted as a specific group for learning and skills development. It should ensure that the necessary partnerships and funding arrangements are put in place at the national, regional and local level to bring together all relevant agencies in a co-ordinated approach which delivers the benefits outlined in this research.

Our proposals for ensuring that the benefits outlined in this research are delivered for Government and homeless people, and for addressing the weaknesses in current funding and service delivery identified during the research, are as follows.

Proposal One:

A national strategy to reduce social exclusion amongst homeless people with learning and skills at its core

A national strategy should be developed for reducing homelessness, social exclusion and disadvantage amongst single homeless people which has learning and skills at its core. It should set ambitious and unambiguous high level targets that cross Government departments and which they jointly sign up to.

The targets should directly address the extreme levels of deprivation amongst homeless people, including the low level of skills and high levels of unemployment. For instance:

- *'The Government will increase the proportion of single homeless people who are in paid or unpaid employment or engaged in training or education to 75 per cent within the next five years'.*

Recognising the links to a wide range of Government strategies and targets, the key signatories to the national strategy should be the Department of Communities and Local Government, Department for Further Education and Skills, the Department of Work and Pensions, the Home Office, and the Department of Health.

As the lead government department for homelessness, DCLG should clarify that Supporting People funding can be used to fund the development of skills that will support independent living, and that administering authorities should give particular consideration to how their Supporting People investment can ensure an appropriate focus on learning and skills development for homeless people.

Proposal Two:

Making the strategic links

Other relevant national strategies should contain specific links to the new national strategy for homeless people and set out how the needs of homeless people will be met through their respective plans and programmes.

These should include the national strategies for:

- Skills
- Welfare to Work
- Supporting People
- Drugs
- Alcohol
- Offending
- Mental Health
- Long term conditions
- Disability
- Stronger Communities

Each should contain a clear and unambiguous statement about the resources that will be allocated from the resources covered by the strategy to the delivery of learning and skills work with homeless people.

As the lead government department for homelessness, DCLG should make it an explicit requirement that local homelessness strategies recognise the role that learning and skills can make in tackling homelessness.

Proposal Three: Creation of a new Local Partnership Fund

The primary focus of the new national strategy should be to make existing investment in learning and skills and other support for homeless people better able to deliver benefits for Government programmes and improve the quality of life for homeless people. To encourage the changes that will be necessary to ways of working at the local, city-wide or regional level to deliver the strategy, a new national fund should be set up to underpin new partnership working and act as a pump primer for the attraction of other local resources.

In order to encourage a holistic approach to the social exclusion amongst single homeless people, and ensure a whole system response, the fund should be available to those partnerships able to demonstrate:

- leadership from the relevant local or regional government;
- a willingness to co-ordinate and oversee the delivery of the strategy locally;
- a commitment to devote resources to the delivery of the strategy from all key strategic partners;
- an ability to engage all relevant partners including: the local Learning and Skills Council, local Jobcentre Plus; Supporting People Commissioning Board (incorporating health, housing, probation and social care); specialist and mainstream learning providers; and, where possible, the business community.

The impact that the supply of affordable accommodation has on take up of employment opportunities should be explicitly addressed by the local partnership.

The amounts available under the Fund should provide a sufficient incentive to the creation of the local partnerships and commitment of resources from all the partners. Funding from the Local Partnership Fund should be targeted at non-accredited learning and engagement activities that will complement and underpin the investment of funding and resources made by other partners through more mainstream budgets. We suggest that this should be a minimum of £250k in each local authority area chosen and a minimum of £1m for regional or sub-regional partnerships. Where appropriate the partnerships should be embedded into Local Area Agreements, to give maximum flexibility to use funding creatively to meet local needs.

Proposal Four:

Measuring outcomes without creating perverse incentives

The DfES, DWP and DCLG should jointly develop and/or resource and adopt measures of distance travelled and the achievement of soft outcomes for incorporation into the funding contracts issued by Jobcentre Plus, Learning and Skills Council and, where applicable, the Homelessness Directorate. Where possible the aim should be to develop outcome measures that are useful to homelessness agencies themselves as well funders.

These measures should be developed to avoid cherry picking and other practices that could jeopardise achievement of wider national and local targets. The measures should also address the need for 'mainstream' providers of learning and skills and employment support to work in partnership with the voluntary sector in order to meet the needs of homeless people. The measures should be used in the evaluation of the Local Partnership Fund.

The development of the measures could be achieved through the incorporation of 'Value Improvement Projects' (as recently used to improve procurement practices for Supporting People) into some of the local partnership projects receiving Local Partnership Funding.

Proposal Five:

Increasing the role of homelessness agencies in supporting the development of learning and skills

Local authorities should review their funding of homelessness agencies within their area to ensure that, as a whole, they support a process of change in which homeless people are helped to move away from social exclusion, economic inactivity and homelessness towards integration and independence. These changes should be supported through adequate funding.

This should include:

- i) including a specific focus on learning and skills in their local homelessness Supporting People and hostels strategies;
- ii) adopting outcomes measures that capture the learning and skills outcomes achieved with homeless people;
- iii) requiring providers of housing related support to homeless people to include learning and skills needs in their needs assessments and support plans and supporting this through Homelessness grants and Supporting People allocations;

- iv) Ensuring that the outputs from the Homelessness Sector Pilots – including those for training homelessness agency staff - are resourced and implemented locally;
- v) carrying out value for money assessments which take account of i) the different training provided to staff to support the learning and development of homeless people ii) the support provided for engagement and the development of life skills, and iii) the additional costs of achieving this added value;
- vi) a new system of voluntary accreditation for homelessness agencies that have adopted a 'learning culture' as a means of encouraging the development of a culture supportive of learning and skills, and to enable those providers who meet the accreditation standards to evidence the additional value for money they provide;
- vii) considering whether they wish to continue supporting services that actively and knowingly discourage homeless people from entering work.

We believe these reforms will ensure more homeless people will be able to access learning and skills and in turn achieve the benefits from learning and skills indicated in this report. The Government will be able to secure the wide ranging benefits to its policies and programmes and greater value for money from existing investment.



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About Tribal

Tribal is one of the largest consultancy companies operating in the public, voluntary and private sectors with expertise across housing and regeneration; homelessness; health and social care and education. Our clients include a number of government departments (including the Cabinet Office, DfES, DCLG, DoH, and Home Office) as well as independent and voluntary sector organisations. Jane Luby is a Director of Consulting in Tribal's social care team, specialising in consultancy services to commissioners and providers of services to vulnerable and socially excluded people. Julie Welch is a Business Development Manager in Tribal's Education team specialising in strategies for delivering Skills for Life and engagement of hard to reach learners.

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, fulfill 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.

Missed Opportunities:

The case for investment in learning and skills for homeless people

Research Report

Jane Luby and Julie Welch

The research highlights how participation in learning and skills can transform the lives of homeless people, at the same time as delivering important policy and financial benefits for a wide variety of Government policies and programmes. Despite this, it found that funding and delivery of learning and skills to homeless people is largely ad hoc and under-resourced at present. It calls upon the Government to make learning and skills a central core of its homelessness strategies and programmes and ensure the creation of effective partnerships to deliver the benefits at the national, regional and local level. This includes identifying homeless people as one of the key target groups within its Skills and Welfare to Work strategies.

A summary of this report is available for purchase (£5) or to download free of charge from the Crisis website (www.crisis.org.uk/researchbank).

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