

Homeless people and learning & skills participation, barriers and progression



Prepared for Crisis by

Opinion Leader Research, July 2006



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

- This report presents the findings of a qualitative and quantitative study based on a total of six group discussions with eight people (48 people in total) and 203 quantitative interviews with homeless people in Newcastle, Birmingham and London.
- The study aimed to help Crisis understand the learning and training experiences of homeless people in order to help the Government, the Further Education sector and voluntary organisations provide services which are suited to their needs.

Main Findings

Qualifications/skills of homeless people

- Six in ten homeless people (60 per cent) have qualifications below Level Two or no qualifications, this is almost twice that of the adult population (32 per cent).¹
- Just over one third (37 per cent) of homeless people do not have any formal qualifications. This is almost three times the national average of 13 per cent of the adult population.²
- Only one in ten (13 per cent) of homeless people have Level Three qualifications or above (i.e. more than one A-level). This is less than a third of the national average of 46 per cent of the adult population.³
- One fifth (19 per cent) of homeless people are currently taking part in a training or educational activity. This compares to nearly half (48 per cent) of people of working age currently participating in taught learning.⁴
 - Those who have been homeless for more than three years are less likely than other homeless people to be taking part in a training/educational activity (15 per cent).
 - Those aged under 44 were more likely to be taking part in training and educational activities than those aged over 45 (32 per cent compared to 13 per cent).

Perceptions of course providers

- Voluntary organisations have an important role to play in providing training/educational services for homeless people. Voluntary organisations achieve the highest satisfaction ratings from homeless people in terms of satisfying their training/educational needs compared to government training schemes. Homeless people think voluntary organisations:
 - are aware of the range of needs of homeless people;
 - have staff who are supportive and understanding;
 - offer learning environments and courses which are more suitable to homeless people's needs e.g. informal settings and flexible courses.

¹ DFES Labour Force Survey Autumn 2005

² DFES Labour Force Survey Autumn 2005

³ DFES Labour Force Survey Autumn 2005

⁴ DFES English local Labour Force Survey 2004/05

Benefits and barriers to participation in educational/skills activities

- Over half (56 per cent) of homeless people want to take part in training/educational activities now or in the future. Homeless people would be encouraged to take part if the following were provided.
 - Financial incentives and help with travel costs
 - Tutors who understand homeless people's needs
 - Courses linked to jobs
 - Information about courses available

- One in five homeless people got a job after participating in training/educational activities.
 - Encouraging more homeless people to take part in training/educational activities will lead to an increase in the proportion of homeless people in work.

- Homeless people perceive many benefits in taking part in training/educational activities. These include increased self-confidence and improved job prospects. However, despite this, few homeless people are currently participating in training or education programmes. Voluntary organisations have a key role to play in encouraging more homeless people to take part in training/activities so they can realise these benefits.
 - Voluntary organisations need to 'spread the word' about the range of courses available and explain the benefits of attending the courses. An intranet service could be set up which could give homeless people access to all of the courses in their local area. This could include ratings from other homeless people, an on-line community could also be set up for homeless people to interact with other homeless people to share experiences/tips etc.
 - There is a particular need to engage those who have been homeless for over three years in educational/training activities since they are less likely than people more recently homeless to have participated in a training/educational activity in the past five years (as referenced above).
 - Homeless people have gained many of the skills and opportunities they need to help them towards independent living from participating in training/educational activities such as getting a job, building self-confidence getting qualifications etc.

INTRODUCTION

Crisis believes in a world in which every homeless person has the opportunity to participate in quality education and learning activities to help them achieve their goals to move on. Unfortunately, many homeless people have, for reasons beyond their control, missed out on some of their schooling and lack the necessary qualifications for sustained employment. Many have bad experiences of training courses, or mainstream adult learning that didn't cater for their needs. As a result they lose essential self-confidence and lack purpose for improving their prospects. For others, the experience of homelessness has de-skilled and isolated them and the majority are caught in a destructive cycle of unemployment, mental health problems, addiction or re-offending which is preventing them taking control of their lives and moving on.

Crisis has proved that more tailored education and training programmes are successful at moving homeless people into work. For example, the Crisis Skylight Activity Centre and the Crisis Learning Zone are two projects that provide opportunities for informal learning in spaces that allow homeless people to gain the skills, build self-confidence and obtain qualifications to get work in an environment that is both supportive and pleasureable.

Based on a series of interviews and a questionnaire with homeless people living on the streets and in temporary accommodation in three cities across the UK (London, Birmingham and Newcastle), this report highlights that despite the low level of skills and qualifications amongst homeless people, they are less likely than the general population to be participating in any kind of learning activity which might improve their self-confidence and increase their level of education and skills. However, given the right circumstances, the majority of homeless people would want to participate in learning activities in the future.

The objectives of the research were to:

- determine the levels of formal qualifications amongst homeless people;
- identify main themes of homeless people's experiences of learning and employment;
- explore the main barriers homeless people experience to accessing learning and employment;
- identify what needs to change from a homeless person's perspective to help them into work and learning;
- identify what is needed/what is lacking in terms of learning and work service provision;
- identify patterns or trends according to homeless situation, background, location etc.;
- present results at the national level, as well as regional level.

1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

1.1 Qualitative research

A total of six focus groups of eight participants were conducted with homeless people aged between 18 and 65, across Newcastle, London and Birmingham. Five of the focus groups were with men and one group was with women to reflect the higher proportions of male homeless people in the UK. The exact breakdown is illustrated below.

- **Birmingham:** 2 groups (one group of men aged under 40, and one group of men aged over 40)
- **Newcastle:** 2 groups (one group of men aged under 40, and one group of men aged over 40)
- **London:** 2 groups (one group of mixed age men, and one group of mixed age women)

Qualitative research was conducted to achieve an in-depth understanding of homeless people's attitudes and experiences of educational and training activities. A list of organisations that provide services to homeless people was provided by Crisis. Opinion Leader Research contacted the organisations who invited one or two homeless people to attend the focus groups. All of the interviews took place at services for homeless people: in Crisis Skylight in London, in the Salvation Army in Newcastle, and in the Focus Futures – Homeless Services Centre in Birmingham. The group discussions were conducted between 27th and 29th March 2006.

1.2 Quantitative research

A total of 203 face-to-face interviews lasting approximately fifteen minutes were conducted with homeless people in Newcastle (40 interviews), Birmingham (65 interviews) and London (98 interviews). Facts International was commissioned by Opinion Leader Research to conduct the quantitative interviews. Interviews were conducted within various projects accessed by homeless people. A list of organisations providing services to homeless people was provided by Crisis. These organisations were contacted directly by Facts International who set up appointments to conduct interviews on the premises. The qualitative and quantitative surveys were conducted independently in order to ensure that the findings were not affected by participation in another part of the study. Quantitative research was conducted to include the views of wide a range of homeless people across a large number of service providers and to measure the extent of and attitudes to education and training provision for homeless people. The interviews were conducted during April 2006.

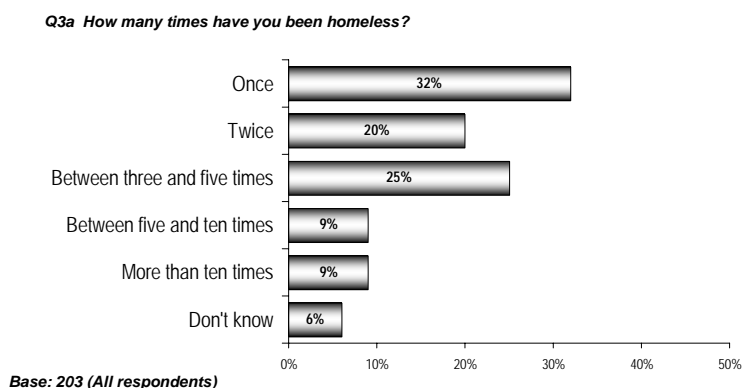
Table 1.1 Demographic breakdown of the 203 homeless individuals interviewed

Gender		Age		Organisation	
Male	88%	24 and under	10%	Hostel	34%
Female	12%	25-34	26%	Day Centre	22%
Housing situation		35-44	28%	Drop In	13%
Hostel	34%	45-54	25%	Soup Kitchen	5%
Rough sleeper	30%	55+	10%	Homeless services	4%
Staying with friends/family	11%	Benefits		St Martin-in-the-Fields	4%
Other	10%	Income Support	40%		
Flat	7%	Job Seekers Allowance	34%		
Squat	6%	Incapacity benefits	32%		
		Disability Allowance	11%		
		Housing Benefits	8%		

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

2.1 Frequency of being homeless

Table 2.1: The frequency of being homeless



The majority of homeless people experienced a cycle of repeated episodes of homelessness. There are several reasons for becoming repeatedly homeless which were mentioned in the qualitative research.

- Unsuitability of hostel accommodation, e.g. noisy, violent, costly
- Debt can lead to homeless people not being able to pay for accommodation
- For some, dependency problems were a priority

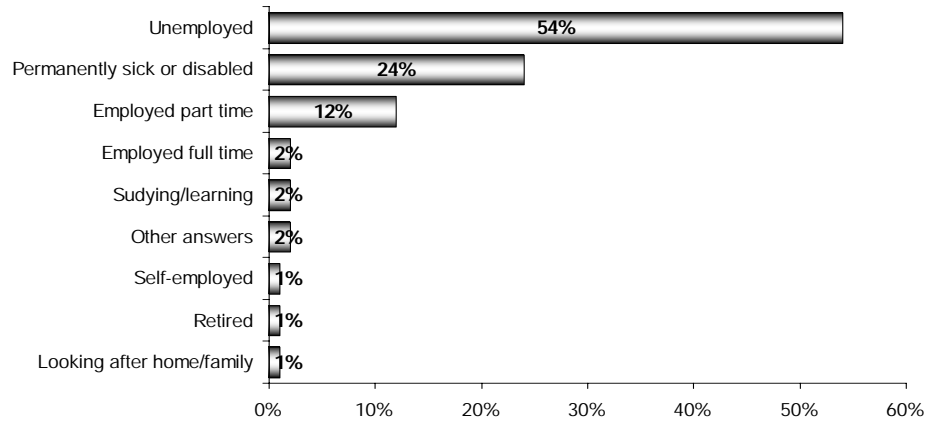
"I was in a hostel in St Mungo's in Covent Garden and I was only there for a couple of months and in that couple of months somebody had been stabbed, somebody had been burned and a guy got murdered. I just had to get out" (Mixed age men, London)

"I can't get a house because the minute I do the bailiffs would be around to take anything. There's just no way I could do it. I just want to be arrested. I could go to court and declare myself bankrupt but it costs £400. I don't have that sort of money" (Older men, Birmingham)

2.2 Employment status

Table 2.2: Most homeless people describe themselves as unemployed

Q4b How would you describe your current employment status?

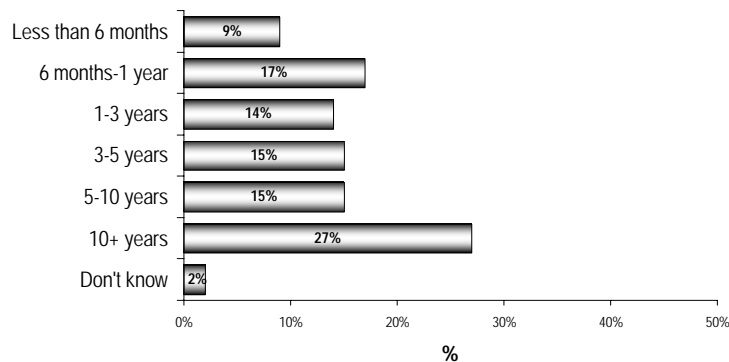


Base: 203 (All respondents)

- Only one in six (15 per cent) homeless people were in employment of any description.
- A very small minority (two per cent) described themselves as studying/learning.
- The majority (61 per cent) of people who have been homeless for less than three years described their current employment status as unemployed, compared to just a third (34 per cent) of those who have been homeless for more than three years. Those who had been homeless for more than three years were more likely to describe themselves as permanently sick or disabled (44 per cent).

Table 2.3: Varying lengths of unemployment

Q5 How long have you been unemployed?



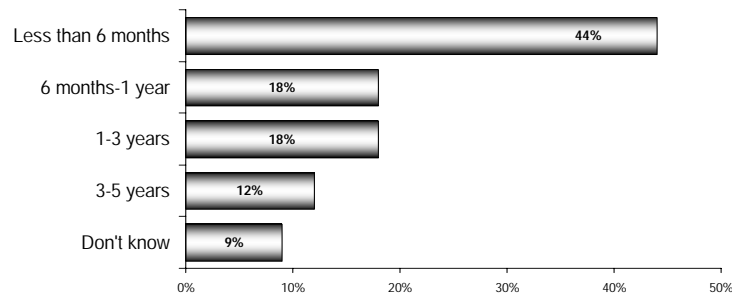
Base: 169 (Those who are neither employed nor retired)

There is a wide range in the length of time homeless people have been unemployed.

- Nearly six in ten (57 per cent) homeless people have been unemployed for more than three years.
- Over a quarter (27 per cent) of homeless people had been unemployed for more than ten years.
- Those aged over 45 were more likely to have been homeless for more than ten years compared to homeless people aged under 44 (49 per cent compared to 15 per cent).
- Some of the younger men interviewed in the qualitative research (aged under 40) had never had a job.

Table 2.4: Of those who work, most have been working less than a year

Q5b How long have you been working for?



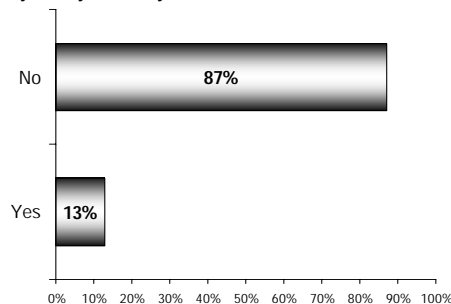
Base: 34 (Those who are employed or retired)

- Of the small number of homeless people who were working, most had been in work for less than a year.
- Over two fifths (44 per cent) had been in work for less than six months and a further fifth (18 per cent) had been working for between six months and one year.
- One in ten (12 per cent) have been working for more than three to five years, but none of the sample had been working for longer than five years.

2.3 Voluntary work

Table 2.5: The majority do not do any voluntary work

Q4a Do you currently do any voluntary work?

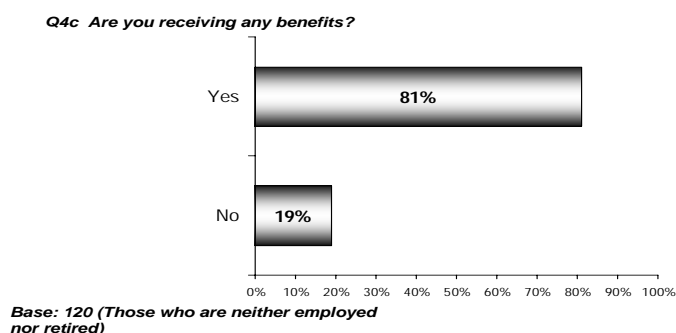


Base: 203 (All respondents)

- The vast majority (87 per cent) of homeless people do not currently do any voluntary work.
- Those who currently do some voluntary work were more likely to be currently participating or had participated in training/educational activities in the last five years than those who have not participated in the past five years (26 per cent and 22 per cent compared to six per cent).
- Those who had educational qualifications at level two and above were more likely to do voluntary work.
- Volunteers interviewed in the qualitative research helped other homeless people with drug issues or literacy skills.

2.4 Benefits received by homeless people

Table 2.6: The majority of homeless people are receiving benefits



- Homeless people received a wide range of benefits, and the vast majority (81 per cent) of the sample received benefits. The qualitative interviews revealed that some homeless people stopped taking benefits due to pressure from government agencies to find work, preferring to rely on other sources such as part time/casual work or begging to survive.

“And that’s one of the reasons I’ve actually not, I haven’t been signing on for a while, I mean I’m going to change that but it’s the reason why I’ve kind of signed off for a bit. I’d like to work you know what I mean but you get to the stage like it’s a small thing, you can’t cope with that, it’s a bit of pressure and it’s always there and you think oh” (Mixed age men, London)

- Those who had been homeless for more than three years were more likely to receive Income Support than those who had been homeless for less than three years (66 per cent compared to 30 per cent). The same pattern emerges for incapacity benefits (49 per cent compared to 27 per cent).
- However, those who had been homeless for less than three years were more likely to be receiving Job Seekers Allowance than those who had been homeless for more than three years (45 per cent compared to 14 per cent).

2.5 Summary and conclusions

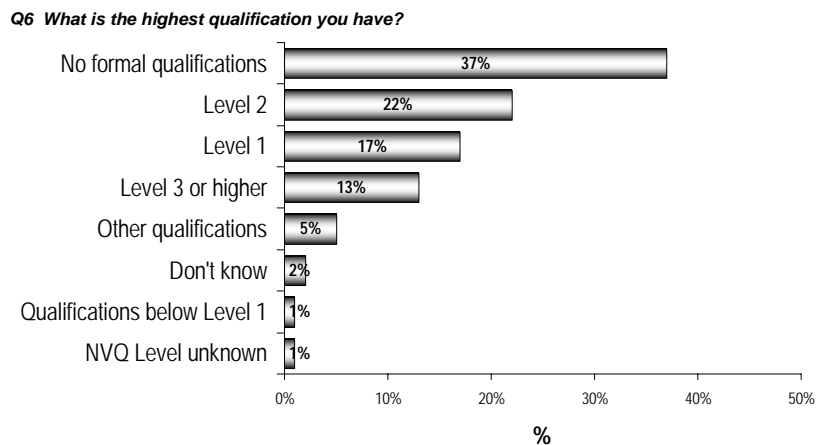
The majority of homeless people (63 per cent) have been homeless more than once. Homeless people found it difficult to keep a home once they get one due to a range of problems such as debt, dependency problems and difficulties with hostel accommodation.

Homeless people also found the transition from homelessness to living in accommodation difficult due to a lack of self-confidence, stress of paying bills, and anxiety about interacting with other people. They felt they needed help and support with the transition from homelessness into accommodation.

3. QUALIFICATIONS/SKILLS OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

3.1 The highest qualification achieved by homeless people

Table 3.1: Most homeless people have no qualifications or qualifications below level 2



Base: 203 (All respondents)

- Six in ten homeless people (60 per cent) have qualifications below Level Two or no qualifications. This is almost twice that of the adult population (32 per cent).⁵
- Just over a third (37 per cent) of homeless people do not have any formal qualifications. This is almost three times the national average of 13 per cent of the adult population.⁶
- The same proportion of homeless people have Level 2 qualifications as the general public, 22%.⁷
- Only one in ten (13 per cent) homeless people have Level Three qualifications or above (i.e. more than one A-level). This is less than a third of the national average of 46 per cent of the adult population.⁸

⁵ DFES website 2005 figures

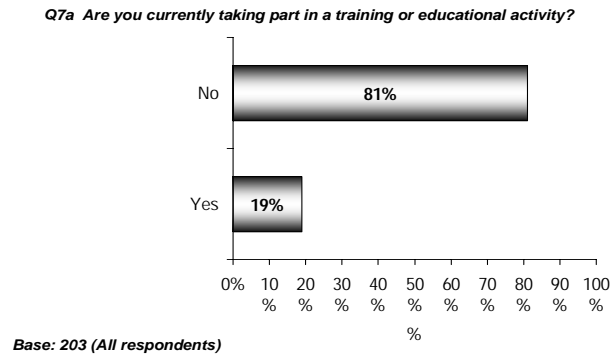
⁶ DFES website 2005 figures

⁷ DFES website 2005 figures

⁸ DFES website 2005 figures

3.2 Participation in training/educational activity

Table 3.2 The vast majority of homeless people are not currently participating in training or educational activities



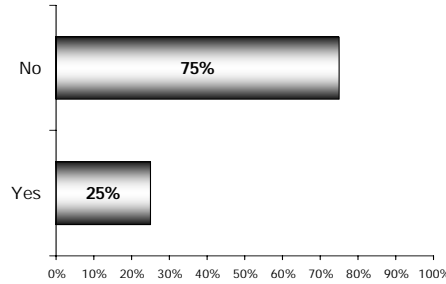
- Only one fifth (19 per cent) of homeless people are currently taking part in a training or educational activity. This compares to nearly half (48 per cent) of people of working age currently participating in taught learning.⁹
- Those who had been homeless for more than three years are less likely to be taking part in training/educational activities than those who had been homeless for less than three years (12 per cent compared to 21 per cent).
- Older homeless people (aged 45 and over) were also less likely to take part in educational activities than younger homeless people (aged 44 and under; 13 per cent compared to 22%).
 - The qualitative interviews revealed that older homeless people are more likely to take part in activities which they enjoyed doing whereas younger homeless people were more likely to attend more formal training/educational courses. Many of the younger homeless people believed that more formal training/educational activities would help them to get out of their homelessness situation. However some of the older homeless people participated in courses because they were interested in the subject/activity.

"Work based training – it's something I'd like to get into but because I'm 27 I can't get on to an apprenticeship" (Younger men, Birmingham)

⁹ DFES English local labour force survey 2004/05

Table 3.3: The vast majority of homeless people had not taken part in training/educational activities in the past 5 years

Q7b Have you taken part in training/educational activities/courses in the last 5 years?

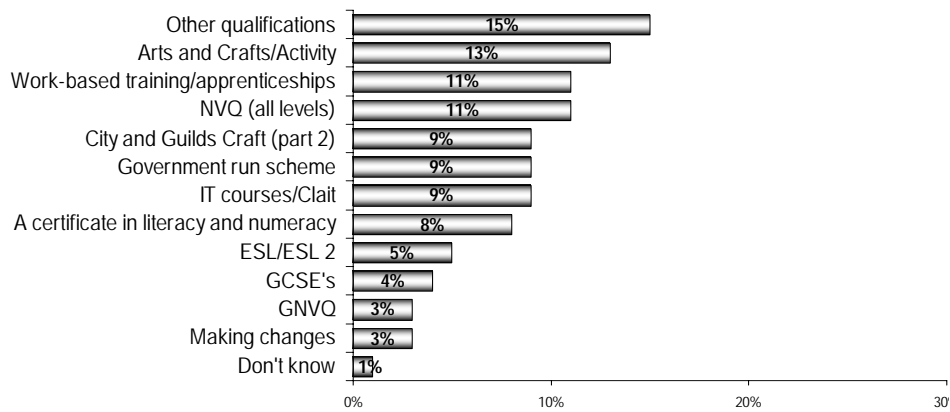


Base: 165 (Those who are not currently taking part in a training or educational activity)

- Three quarters (75 per cent) of those who were not currently participating in a training/educational activity had also not participated in one in the past five years.
- Those under age 44 were more likely to be participating or have participated in learning activities than those who were aged 45 and over (32 per cent compared to 13 per cent).

Table: 3.4: Recent experience of activities and courses

Q7c What was the last or current activity/course you took part in?



Base: 79 (Those who have participated in a training or educational activity in the last 5 years)

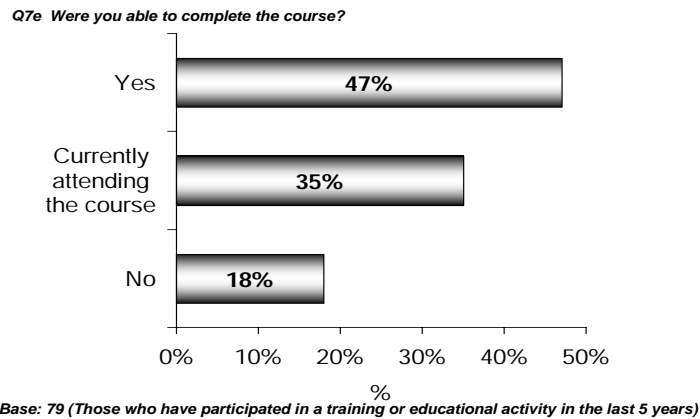
Homeless people were participating in a wide range of formal, work-based, governmental and vocational courses.

"I'm happy with my computer course. I can look at my emails too. I have two email addresses"
(Older men, Newcastle)

"I had been in a mental hospital for a year. Had ECT treatment. The course was great. It brought me out of my shell. I was amazed. I got 240 people on that bridge to span hands at 12 midday for the Princes Trust" (Older men, Newcastle)

3.3 Ability to complete the course

Table 3.5 Completion of courses



- The vast majority of homeless people who had participated in a training activity in the past five years were either able to complete the course (47 per cent) or were currently attending the course (35 per cent).
- However, it is a concern that just under a fifth of homeless people were not able to complete the course (18 per cent).
- Those who were unable to complete the course cited health, drug or alcohol dependency, housing problems and a lack of motivation as the main reasons for not completing the course. Other reasons included moving around a lot, not being able to attend each class and unsuitable teachers.

3.4 Summary and conclusions

Six in ten homeless people (60 per cent) have qualifications below Level Two or no qualifications. This is almost twice that of the adult population (32 per cent). Only one fifth (19 per cent) of homeless people are currently taking part in a training or educational activity. This compares to nearly half (48 per cent) of people of working age currently participating in taught learning.¹⁰

Homeless people are therefore both hampered by low levels of qualifications and are less likely to be attending training activities to improve their qualification and skills base.

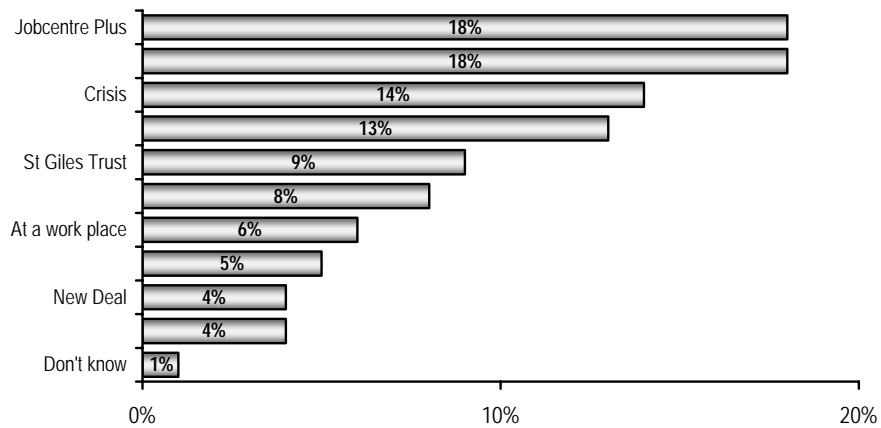
¹⁰ DFES English local Labour Force Survey 2004/05

4. PERCEPTIONS OF COURSE PROVIDERS

4.1 Organisations providing courses for homeless people

Table 4.1: The organisations providing courses for homeless people

Q7d Which organisation provided the course?



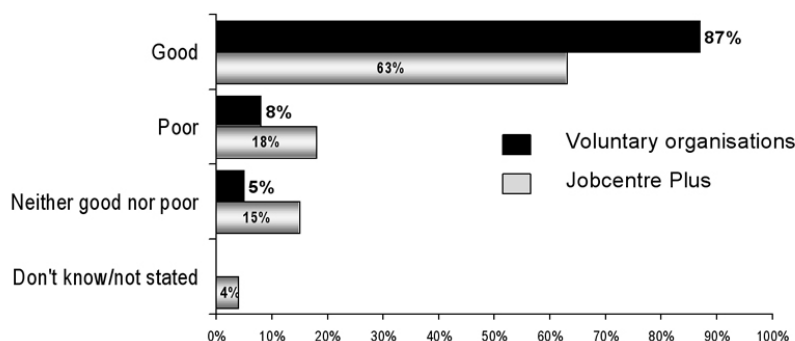
Base: 79 (Those who have participated in a training or educational activity in the last 5

- The courses that homeless people attended were provided by a range of providers from the statutory and voluntary sectors.
- One fifth of courses were provided by Jobcentre Plus (18 per cent) with the same proportion provided by further education colleges (18 per cent).
- Over one third of courses (36 per cent) were provided by charities.

4.2 Homeless people's perceptions of course providers

Table 4.2: The suitability of Jobcentre Plus and Voluntary organisations

Q9b How suitable was it to your needs? Jobcentre Plus and Voluntary organisations



Base size: 27 (Those who have received support for or undertaken a training or educational activity with Jobcentre Plus)

Base size 38 (Those who have received support for or undertaken a training or educational activity with Voluntary organisations)

- Most people who had participated in a course at Jobcentre Plus rated the course as good (63 per cent). However, just under one fifth (18 per cent) rated the course as poor.
- Those in the qualitative interviews liked the link of the courses to a job. However, some criticised the administrative processes as being inefficient at processing applications.

"The Jobcentre in some ways to me is very negative because of the red tape and getting shifted around and the time it takes to do everything" (Mixed age women, London)

- The vast majority of homeless people described the training/educational activity provided by voluntary organisations as good (87 per cent).
- Qualitative research revealed that homeless people believe that voluntary organisations are better able to provide educational/training services for homeless people because:
 - they understand what courses homeless people want/need;
 - they have staff who are supportive and understand the issues facing homeless people;
 - the learning environment is more informal and less rigid than other providers.

"They [voluntary organisations] are more likely to listen to what you have to say more than the Jobcentre, they don't really" (Mixed age women, London)

"I went to The Hambury 12/13 years ago and now I've got my City & Guilds in communications and writing, I can read, I can write today whereas before I couldn't" (Mixed age men, London)

New Deal

- Only a small minority (seven per cent) had received support or undertaken a training/educational activity with New Deal. Six in ten (60 per cent) of these described the support/training/educational activity as good (NB: low base size).

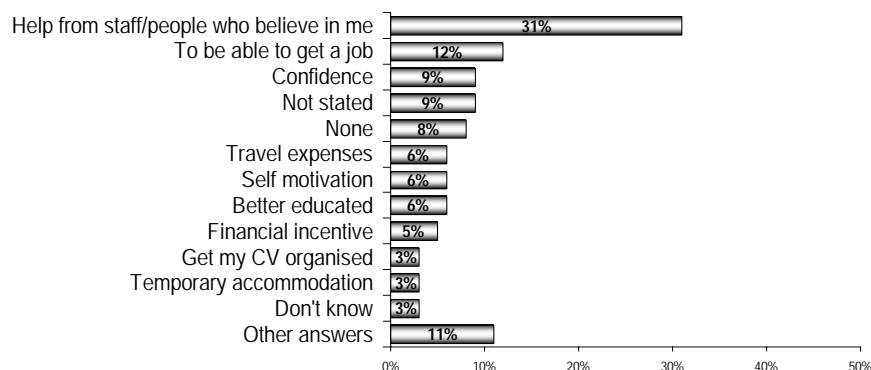
Other government programmes

- A small minority (five per cent) of homeless people had received support or undertaken a training/educational activity with other government schemes. The majority of these (65 per cent) described the support/training/educational activity as good (NB: low base size).

4.3 The benefits of attending a training/educational activity

Table 4.3: The most useful aspect of training/educational activities

Q9c What has been the single most useful thing you have had to help you take part in training/educational activities?



Base: 65 (Those who have received support for or undertaken a training or educational activity with a government or voluntary organisation)

- Just under a third of homeless people who have received support or undertaken a training/educational activity with a government or voluntary organisation mentioned the importance of staff believing in them (31 per cent).
- The qualitative research revealed that many homeless people had been treated poorly when seeking a job or educational opportunities and often have low self-esteem, they '*really appreciated it when people treated them with respect and believed in them*'.

"I bought a computer and then I applied to Crisis and got an [Crisis Changing Lives] innovation grant so I could buy a camera and more software and then set up in business" (Mixed age men, London)

4.4 Summary and conclusions

Voluntary organisations have an important role to play in providing training/educational services for homeless people. They achieve the highest satisfaction ratings from homeless people in terms of satisfying their training/educational needs, as compared to government training schemes. Homeless people think they:

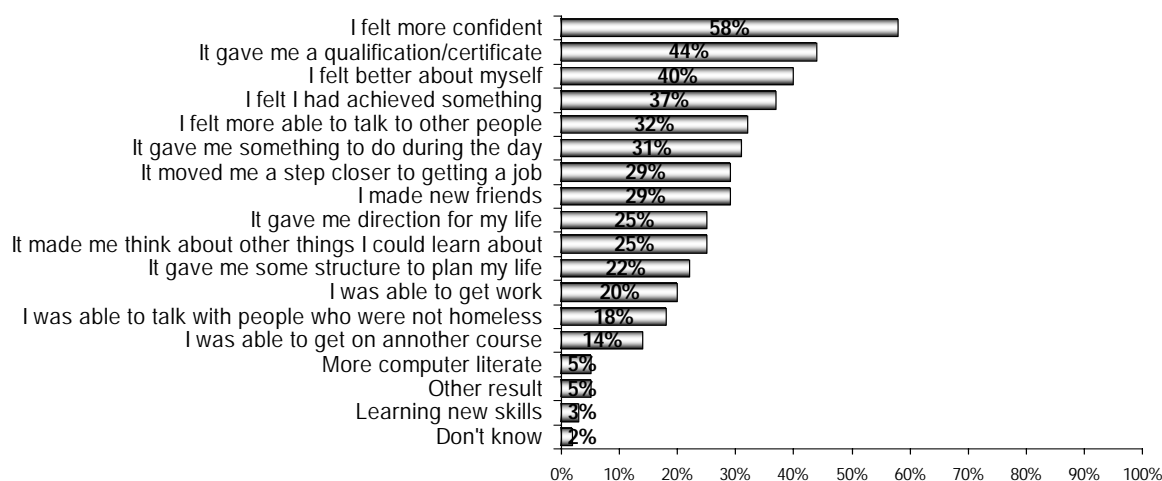
- are aware of the range of needs of homeless people;
- have staff who are supportive and understanding;
- offer learning environments and courses which are more suitable to homeless people's needs e.g. informal settings and flexible courses.

5. BENEFITS AND BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATING IN EDUCATIONAL AND SKILLS ACTIVITIES

5.1 Benefits of participating in educational/skills activities

Table 5.1: What course attendees gained from their experience

Q7f Thinking about the last or current activity/course you took part in, what would you say you got out of the experience (both at the time and following the event?)



Base: 65 (Those who have participated in a training or educational activity in the last 5 years and were able to complete the course)

- Homeless people who had participated in a training/educational activity perceived many benefits of taking part in training activities. The main benefit gained from undertaking an educational/training activity was feeling more confident (58 per cent).
 - A lack of self-confidence was an issue that many homeless people faced. It was a major barrier to getting back into society particularly for rough sleepers. Many ex-rough sleepers in the qualitative interviews said they had found it difficult to interact with others when they moved into shared accommodation or participate in a training/educational activity.

"Doing these little courses at Fairbridge and the Princes Trust, just little things like that, can help build your confidence" (Younger men, Newcastle)

"For me one of the best things I think was to find out that I wasn't alone, that other people had the same problem as I've got, I wasn't beating myself up and all these sorts of things" (Mixed age men, London)

- Achieving a qualification or certificate was the second most important benefit of taking part in a training or educational activity (44 per cent).

"I really wanted to do like childcare but I couldn't find that course because they told me if you want to do childcare you need to have an NVQ" (Mixed age women, London)

- Other “softer” skills such as making new friends and interacting with others, were perceived to be very important benefits of training/educational activities by homeless people. Many homeless people felt that they were more likely to achieve their goals in life if they develop their interpersonal skills.

“I have got very good skills and it is like I am not homeless because of lack of skills, maybe personal skills but as far as work-based skills it’s not going to solve the problem” (Mixed age men, London)

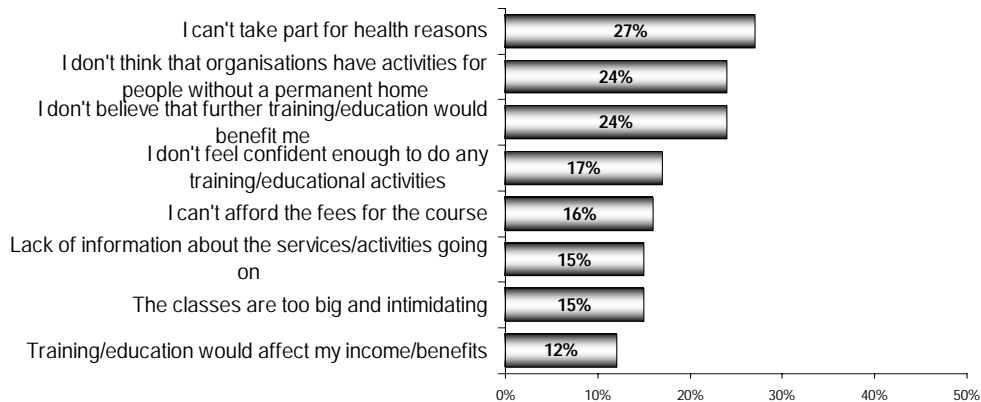
“What I find at The Hambrey that you’re not on your own, that you’re not a lost cause the people there truly take you for what you are. We’ve got a mental health team there” (Mixed age men, London)

- One in five homeless people (20 per cent) believed they got a job as a result of training/education.
 - Many homeless people see getting a job as one of the most fundamental barriers to getting out of homelessness.
 - Educational activities could be instrumental in getting homeless people into a job.

5.2 Barriers to taking part in training/educational activities

Table 5.2: Reasons for non-participation in training and education

Q8a Why have you not participated in any training/educational activity in the past 5 years?



Base: 124 (Those who have not participated in a training or educational activity in the last 5 years)

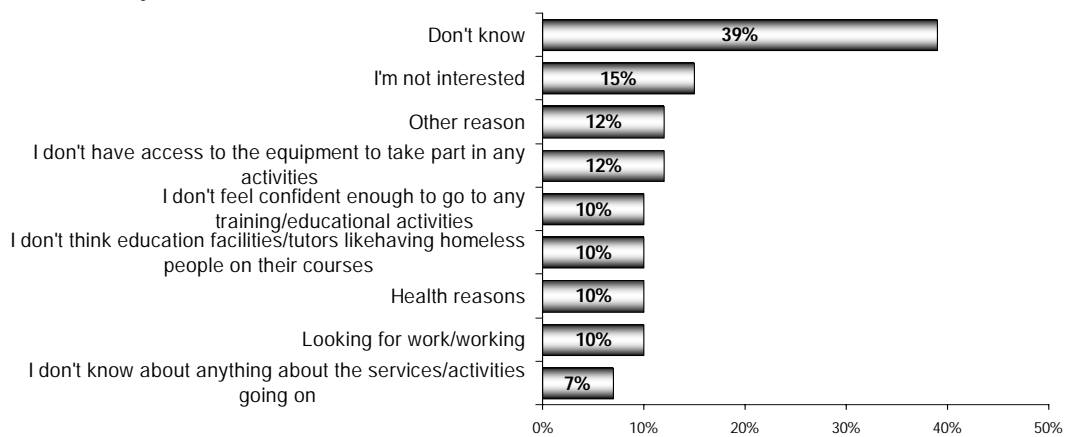
- The majority of homeless people interviewed had not participated in a training or educational activity in the past five years.
- The reasons for not taking part in training or educational activities were wide ranging.
 - The biggest barrier to taking part was health reasons. Just over a quarter (27 per cent) did not take part due to health reasons.
 - Lack of information and a lack of awareness about educational activities was also a major barrier, especially with those who had been homeless for more than three years.

"Some courses can be good. But there comes a point where you have the information and you don't particularly want to go through the process again. I did night classes for years when I wasn't working to fill in the time" (Older men, Newcastle)

- The longer homeless person is homeless, the more difficult they find it to fit into mainstream activities. Not knowing anyone on the training/education course and a perception that the venue was too institutionalised were cited as barriers by one in ten (11 per cent) of those who had been homeless for more than three years whereas none of those who had been homeless for less than three years cited these as reasons.
- The qualitative interviews also revealed that the greater the length of time homeless, the more difficult homeless people found it to participate in activities which involved interacting with new people.

Table 5.3: Specific reasons for non-participation in training and education

Q8b Are there any specific reasons why you are not participating in any training/educational activity/courses at the moment?



Base: 41 (Those who have participated in the past 5 years but are not currently taking part in a training or educational activity)

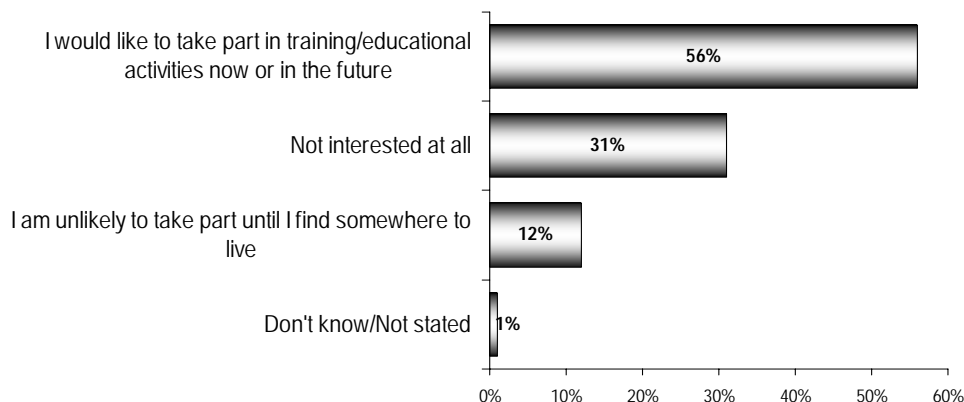
- Most of those who had participated in a training or educational activity in the past five years but are not currently participating do not know why they are not currently participating.

"There are courses like for old people like how to mend you car but it's a waste of time" (Younger men, Birmingham)

5.3 Interest in taking part in future training and educational activities

Table 5.4: Future training and educational activities

Q10a How would you feel about taking part in future training/educational activities?



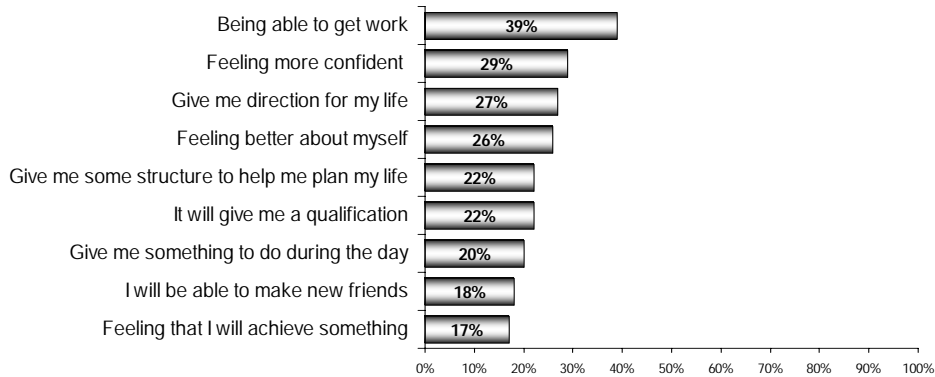
Base: 203 (All respondents)

- Over half of homeless people (56 per cent) wanted to take part in training/educational activities now or in the future.
- The longer a person has been homeless the less likely they are to want to take part in training activities now and in the future (40 per cent compared to 61 per cent of those who had been homeless for under three years).
- Just under a third (31 per cent) were not interested in training/educational activities. The qualitative interviews revealed some of the reasons for homeless people lacking an interest in some training/educational activities:
 - a lack of perceived useful outcomes is an issue for some, i.e. “what will I get out of this”;
 - a lack of relevance to their lives, e.g. IT skills for some older participants;
 - they resisted obligatory courses related to unemployment status – homeless people wanted to choose which courses they participate in.

“You do this Prince’s Trust and you think there’s an ethos that something will come out of it, that it will lead to life skills, more courses or a job or something but you come off the end of that course and there’s nothing happening. Although it’s an ingredient in a young person’s development and I’m pleased to be involved in that I didn’t see any real result” (Younger men, Newcastle)

Table 5.5 The perceived benefits of taking part in training or educational activities by those who want to be involved in the future

Q10b What are the main benefits that you feel would result from taking part in an educational/training activity? Choose the 3 most important aspects for you.

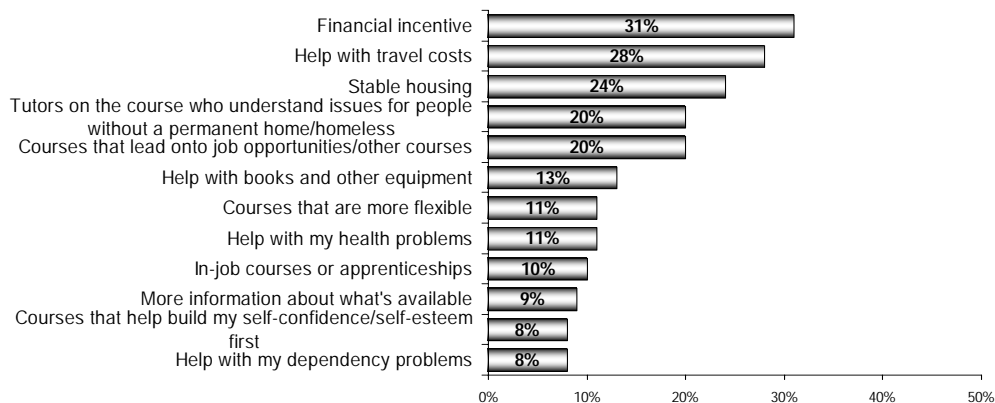


Base: 139 (Those who would consider taking part in future training/educational activities)

- The main benefit homeless people felt would result from taking part in an educational/training course was being able to get work. Qualitative findings reveal that many homeless people perceive getting work as a key stepping stone on the road to getting out of homelessness.
- Homeless people also believed that gaining softer skills such as gaining self-confidence (29 per cent) and self esteem (26 per cent “feeling better about myself”) were important benefits of participating in a training/educational activity.
 - Many saw these as equally or more important than getting qualifications since they believed skills which were useful in all social interactions (which many homeless people find difficult).

Table 5.6: Facilitating future training/educational activities

Q10c What would make it easier for you to participate in future training/educational activities? Choose the 3 most important aspects for you.



Base: 203 (All respondents)

- One in five (20 per cent) felt having tutors who understand the issues for homeless people would help.
- Financial help in the form of financial incentives or payment of travel costs would make it easier for around three in ten homeless people to participate in training/educational activities (31 per cent and 26 per cent).
- Homeless people aged under 44 were more likely to cite help with travel costs (33 per cent), stable housing (29 per cent) and courses that lead to job opportunities (26 per cent) as factors which would make it easier to participate in future training than those aged over 45.
- Homeless people aged over 45 were more likely to cite a more welcoming environment/less intimidating space than those aged under 44 (11 per cent compared to four per cent).

5.4 Summary and conclusions

Over half (56 per cent) of homeless people want to take part in training/educational activities now or in the future. Homeless people would be encouraged to take part if the following were provided.

- Financial incentives and help with travel costs
- Tutors who understand homeless people's needs
- Courses linked to jobs
- Information about courses available

There are many perceived benefits of taking part in training/educational activities. However, despite this, few homeless people are currently taking part in training and educational activities. Voluntary organisations have a role to play in encouraging more homeless people to take part in activities so they can move towards achieving independent living.

Homeless people gain many of the skills and opportunities they need to help them towards independent living from participating in training/educational activities such as getting a job, building self-confidence and getting qualifications.

6. WHAT HOMELESS PEOPLE WANT FROM LEARNING & SKILLS

6.1 Ideal learning environments

Homeless people were asked to describe their ideal learning environment in the qualitative research discussions.

- Homeless people wanted learning environments which provide learning and stimulate social networking. Ideally they would be given a financial incentive for attending.
- The location would be a comfortable place which feels more like a social than a learning environment – an airy open plan space with lots of natural light.

"I like lighting, space, I would say good customer service skills to the people that work there that really listen and are empathetic to what you tell them" (Mixed age women, London)

- Homeless people sometimes wanted to participate in activities alongside other homeless people, however they also recognised the benefits of integrating with people who are not homeless.
 - They wanted to mix with non-homeless people to help them become more integrated into society. However, at other times homeless people felt more comfortable sharing space with other homeless people.
 - Some women wanted to have some women only courses, especially for more emotional courses such as group counselling.
- Teaching staff should be able to empathise with homeless people – be supportive, non-judgemental, ideally someone from a similar background who can act as a role model.

"Someone who has been in the same situation that I have and had the same sort of struggles that we've had. That would go down a lot better. They have had that experience and can give you the confidence" (Younger men, Newcastle)

- Homeless people want a mix of structured and flexible courses to be available to them. Many like the idea of going away on residential courses, enjoying the freedom and the chance to build strong relationships with others.

"It would be very nice to go away for the week and do a course. Get away. Meet new people and the people there are interested in the same thing" (Older men, Birmingham)

6.2 Types of courses and learning opportunities

"I don't see why they can't do like a get off the street course. I have got a flat, I need to know how to decorate, I need to know how to cook, I need to know how to deal with my mail" (Mixed age men, London)

The courses homeless people wanted to be offered covered a range of their requirements for leading an independent life.

- General skills needed for everyday life, e.g. cookery, decorating, opening a bank account
- Psychological, e.g. self-confidence, personal development, positive thinking, counselling, group therapy.
- Social, e.g. communication skills, network of friends
- Financial management, e.g. budgeting, paying bills
- Education, e.g. basic reading, writing and maths
- IT courses – a range
- Fitness – aerobics/keep fit (women) sports – football, badminton, basketball
- Job-related, e.g. learning a trade, interview techniques, writing a CV, work experience
 - Younger homeless people were more interested in job related skills, whereas older homeless people were less optimistic about their job prospects and hence less interested in acquiring work-based skills.

6.3 Summary and conclusions

Homeless people wanted learning environments which provide learning and stimulate social networking, and a mix of structured and flexible courses to be available to them.

The courses homeless people wanted to be offered covered a range of their requirements for leading an independent life.

7. BARRIERS TO GETTING AND KEEPING A JOB

7.1 Barriers to getting a job

The qualitative focus groups showed that homeless people perceived many barriers to getting a job, including:

- The benefits system itself
 - Some homeless people perceived there to be little difference in the amount of money they can earn doing basic jobs compared to receiving benefits.
 - Homeless people perceived that only low paid jobs were available to them, therefore they perceived a lack of financial incentive to get a job since they would be no better off than relying on benefits.

"If I work in a factory for £7 an hour and spend all of that on bills that's not going to make me happy. I'm sacrificing so much for so many other parts of my life. I want to enjoy half of the money and half of what I do" (Younger men, Birmingham)

- Difficulties getting accommodation
 - Respondents felt that once they got a job they needed to move out of the hostel, find accommodation and pay bills – they thought this would be very stressful and costly (every hostel has its own set of rules regarding clients having jobs whilst at the hostel).
 - Deposits would need to be paid on rented accommodation which many could not afford.
 - Homeless people would also worry about whether the job would work out or if not they would be worse off than before i.e. no job and no hostel place.
 - If homeless people got a job they think they would be asked to leave the hostel at short notice which would make it very difficult to adjust.
- Lack of relevant experience
 - They said getting relevant experience can be a 'Catch-22' situation where employers want relevant experience, however they are unable to get experience until they get a job.
 - Several homeless people wanted more on-the job training opportunities which they felt would give them a good chance of getting a job.
- Lack of the right qualifications and skills
 - They perceived that many of the better-paid jobs require them to have specific qualifications in order for them to be eligible.

"Most of the jobs nowadays they have got IT skills, most of that you see, they are always like do you have IT skills, that's most of them now" (Mixed age women, London)

"A lot of people my age have gone through training before. They left school at 15 and went into an apprenticeship and now those qualifications that took a long time to do, going to night school and all of that. Now they're about as worthless as a chocolate fireguard" (Older men, Newcastle)

- Stress at work
 - This was an issue for some homeless people and some had walked out of jobs as a result of this and feared they would experience the same thing if they returned to work.
- Homeless status
 - If they are moving around it is difficult to send and receive communications to employers.
 - Some employers require a permanent address.
 - Some have been sacked when employers found out they were homeless.

"I was doing a labouring job over in the city and I know, I was on the streets, I had nowhere to go, so the only thing that I was doing during the day was doing this labouring, drinking of a night so I could get some sleep, wherever, crash out. They found that I was homeless so I got the sack" (Mixed age men, London)

- There is a perceived stigma attached to not having a permanent address

"Once you get into a hostel its more difficult to get work. Employers think that if you're living in a hostel you're probably using drugs and alcohol. You must have done something to have ended up in a hostel" (Older men, Birmingham)

"It's a perception of homelessness, they think you are on drugs or an ex-con or something like that" (Mixed age women, London)

- Physical and mental illness

"I did some voluntary work at the Roman Fort and they were going to dress me up as a gladiator to show people around as a guide. Got to the final interview and you've got to declare whether you had been in prison or had mental health problems. So I told them I had bi-polar disorder and that was the end of that" (Older men, Newcastle)

- Perceptions of being too old

"I am quite old so I'm unemployable but they keep interviewing me every three weeks because it's part of the process" (Mixed age men, London)

7.2 Barriers to keeping a job

Barriers to keeping a job were only explored by the qualitative focus groups.

- Once homeless people get a job there are a number of issues which make it more difficult for them to keep it.
 - Dependency on drugs or alcohol can be difficult to hide at work and can lead to employment being terminated.
 - Several homeless people had emotional problems which can cause difficulties in the workplace especially at times of high stress or conflict.

"A friend of mine worked for five years with voluntary work which led to a job for five hours a week then 15 hours a week but he had to give it up as the paper work was stressing him out so much, for the DSS and the work. He had to leave. He just couldn't handle the stress" (Older men, Newcastle)

- The low-paid, low-skills jobs that many homeless people believe are available to them did not provide high levels of job satisfaction and they are more likely to give them up.

7.3 Summary and conclusions

Homeless people perceived a number barriers to getting and keeping a job. While lacking the right qualifications and relevant experience are important barrier, there were a number of other barriers which were also important such as stress at work, the status of being homeless, the benefits system, accommodation issues, physical and mental illness and perceptions of being too old.

8. CONCLUSIONS

Homeless people are a heterogeneous group with a range of diverse needs and goals. Qualitative research indicates that homeless people need to have their needs individually assessed in order to provide tailor-made solutions to achieve their goals.

Homeless people need help and support with the transition from rough sleeping into accommodation in order to help break the cycle of homelessness. Voluntary organisations are best placed to offer this since they are perceived by homeless people to be in tune with their needs and requirements.

Homeless people face many barriers to work and education including dependency problems and physical and mental illness, which make getting and keeping a job very difficult. There is a need to prioritise solutions for these more chronic barriers in order to give homeless people coping with these problems the opportunity to progress on their pathway to independent living.

Many homeless people have qualifications and skills, however the vast majority remain out of work. Voluntary organisations can play a key role in showing homeless people how these skills can be transferred into paid and voluntary work. Gaining additional qualifications will help some homeless people achieve a goal of independent living, however for some, other life skills need to be built up in order to achieve their goals.

Homeless people need a wide range of training/educational and support services including general life skills, psychological support, social skills, financial management, basic skills and job related skills.

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