

**Expert seminar on Crime and Social Exclusion
5 September 2008**

Summary of discussion

This note summarises the key points and issues for further consideration by the Inquiry that were raised during the seminar.

1. Complexity of social problems. There is little evidence to suggest that a lack of basic skills is, in itself, predictive of re-offending, but basic skills are related to other factors known to be associated with offending – poor school experience, unemployment, social exclusion, and various psychological and cognitive factors. Social problems are complex and have no single cause and our strategies should reflect this, encouraging constructive partnerships and multi-agency working, and recognizing that the benefits of offender education/training will only come through if they are part of a package. This highlights a key difficulty for the Inquiry, as well as government departments, that of using standard models of cost/benefit analysis to assess the contribution of lifelong learning to other public policy priorities. The Ministry of Justice's public value approach to appraising the wider impacts of its policies is in line with the Inquiry's social productivity / public value work.
2. A lifecourse approach. There is potential for a stronger emphasis on a lifecourse approach which a) reflects the diversity of pathways and is not tied to chronological age stereotypes, but which b) also reflects what we know about patterns of development. There is a serious question about how we deal with 19-26 year olds as the evidence suggests that many young people grow up and out of crime at around 25. One conclusion might be that we should look at this as a separate phase of young adulthood. But the challenge of identifying key intervention points and strategies remains: it is doubtful whether the current evidence is robust enough to plan differentiated interventions for this age group.
3. Inequalities within this age group are huge: 19-26 year old young men from disadvantaged areas of London are largely absent from most LSC records. A significant number of young offenders have speech problems and poor communication skills and yet there is little systematic screening for learning difficulties and disabilities. Indicators of belonging to civil society such as being registered with a GP, paying tax, being able to vote are denied to prisoners. This exacerbates social exclusion and there are key issues for the Inquiry about identity, recognition, and what it means to 'belong' and 'contribute' to explore here, and also clear overlaps with the citizenship, wellbeing and demography themes.
4. Scoping and language: There is an issue about how broadly the Inquiry defines its 'Crime and Social Exclusion' theme. The focus of much of the discussion at the seminar was on offender learning, but some of the other areas for consideration could include: lifelong learning elements of crime prevention; work with specific groups at risk of involvement with crime;

lifelong learning's role in supporting communities damaged by crime;
lifelong learning's role in supporting literate and informed public debate
about crime through citizenship education.

5. OLASS ambitions too low. A challenge is needed to the narrowness of much prison education, and to the overwhelming focus on basic skills. Supporting progression is a key issue – how can we avoid people getting stuck repeating level 1 programmes without imposing a single vertical model of progression? There is anecdotal, if not quantitative evidence that movement between prisons disrupts prisoners' learning programmes and a real lack of support for people with qualifications at level two or above. OLASS has insufficient resources to properly align supply and demand in a number of informal learning-related areas. This is particularly acute in relation to creative learning, most of which is offered by voluntary organizations working in prisons.
6. Valuing creativity as a legitimate goal of prison education would help to broaden the curriculum. There is a significant issue, however, of not appearing to make crime/prison bring rewards which are not available to others, but perhaps this could inform a wider debate about universal entitlements. There was much discussion about how to secure greater autonomy and empowerment within the prison environment. Evidence from the Shannon Trust suggests encouraging prisoners to volunteer to take on teaching roles can be an effective strategy.
7. Support on release. Providing post-prison support is essential. Without it, all the investment in prison education is thrown away in the first 3 weeks if there are no planned pathways to further education, training or a job. The targets for this work should be raised enormously. Financial literacy is a powerful area of specific learning to be pursued. It can be a way of helping prisoners prepare to re-join the world outside, assisting them to (re) develop decision making skills.
8. Staff Training. The need for investment in training of staff was stressed throughout the seminar. Prison officers are potentially key intermediaries for learning, but for some, their own literacy and language needs require attention. The Inquiry should seek data on qualification levels of prison and probation officers. The introduction of ULR schemes amongst prison officers is an encouraging development but more remains to be done to raise the profile and quality of the service.