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Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning

Lifelong Learning and Crime: A Life-course Perspective

IFLL Public Value Paper 4

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Foreword

This is the fourth of the Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning's Public Value papers. This series of papers grapples with a range of questions about how we should understand the effects of lifelong learning. The 'public value' of lifelong learning resides in the benefits it brings, not only to the learners themselves, but to wider society. If learning makes individuals healthier, for example, that is good for them, but also for their family, their community and for the health service and the taxpayer. It signals a general uplift in the quality of life. This is public value.

The notion of public value is easy to grasp but not so easy to measure. For many of us it is almost self-evident that lifelong learning brings personal and social benefits as well as economic ones. Yet we need to examine the evidence as rigorously as we can: what actually are the effects; can we get an idea of how big they are; and what is the process by which they occur? We know that we cannot produce perfect answers to these questions. But by assembling a range of responses, the Inquiry aims to fill in much more of the picture than is currently available; to give a clearer focus to the policy options involved; and to prompt further reflection and debate.

John Bynner's paper is important for a number of reasons. First he sets out the evidence on the benefits of lifelong learning in relation to crime and offending – an issue of high political and social significance. He shows that the potential benefits are high, but that current policy and practice does not enable them to be realised. Secondly, writing with a wealth of experience as director of major longitudinal (cohort) studies, John Bynner makes a powerful case for a life-course approach to analysing the effects of learning. This argument is a serious challenge to many aspects of the way evidence is currently gathered and used. Thirdly, John Bynner adds a serious critique of how cost–benefit analysis is used and urges a broader approach. His plea for using many methods to get a genuine view of costs and benefits deserves wide debate.

We are grateful to John Bynner for this very substantial contribution to the Inquiry's work.

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Executive summary

This paper addresses the financial and other benefits to society to be gained from lifelong learning as an antidote to crime.

It starts by considering in general terms shifts in the policy perspective in the way that the links between learning and desistance from crime have been conceptualised, and the corresponding shifts in the way that education for offenders has been delivered.

Next, the evidence on the returns to be expected from educational interventions with offenders is reviewed, and the paper argues for a more broadly based methodological stance in relation to this kind of research than has typically been advocated in the past.

The paper then pursues this strategy through the life-course perspective, as applied to offending and the key role of poor education in the social exclusion process that is frequently a key part of it. This leads to a consideration of the kind of lifelong learning scenario that, through matching needs in different contexts, is likely to yield not only the best financial returns, but wider social and democratic returns. Such 'social productivity' is the foundation for active and fulfilling citizenship.

Appendix A contains a more detailed consideration of research strategies for producing the supporting evidence, arguing for a more eclectic approach in order to grasp the complex realities of offenders' experiences over the life course. It poses a challenge to how we approach evaluation, stressing above all the need for assessing social issues, such as the relationship between crime and education from a range of different angles, and drawing on different kinds of data. These aspects are rarely considered today, with the result that we miss many of the complexities.

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1. Introduction

The association between education and crime is well established. Research points to disaffection with school and a record of poor educational performance as important components of delinquent and criminal careers.[1] Such evidence has been used as justification for educational intervention with offenders, and prison is seen as the place where intervention may be most effective.

The theory to support the intervention has shifted over time. Thirty years ago the aim was cultural, if not moral, in accordance with the liberal aims of education. Absorption in learning directed especially at cultural pursuits would be uplifting and life-changing and, as part of prisoner rehabilitation, would reduce the likelihood of re-offending. The target group tended to be at the upper end of the scale, and the provision tailored accordingly – described by some as 'Open University or Learning the Guitar'.[2]

Subsequently, the emphasis shifted from education for personal development to learning for employability. There was recognition of the low skills base that existed in the prison population,[3] with poor literacy and numeracy standing out particularly.[4]

More recently there was a shift again, this time questioning the validity of an educational offer based narrowly on skills for employability, and recognising the need for a more holistic approach. Prisoner education should address more fully not only the skills deficit but the wider set of needs, taking full account of the social context of offenders' lives.[5] This latter development recognises the potential social and personal benefits of learning in all life domains, such as health, family and community, as well as employment. The wider-benefits approach therefore has implications, not only for the goals to which offender education is directed, but for the content of the educational offer, now to be more personalised to match individual need.

At the same time, some government policy statements about the rehabilitation of offenders at times appear to move in the opposite direction from the wider-benefits approach, largely dispensing with education other than equipping offenders with basic skills. Thus, in the community-based Intensive Control and Change Programme (ICCP), 'education, training and employment' was one of five programmes. Community sentencing, as set out in the 2003 Criminal Justice Act, which absorbed ICCP, makes no explicit mention of education or learning in the 12 requirements available to judges to impose on offenders. Nor, more recently, does the Prolific and other Priority Offender (PPO) programme, targeted at the 10 per cent most persistent and challenging offenders, give more than minimal attention to education.[6]

[1] Graham and Bowling (1995); Farrington (1996); Rutter, Giller and Hagell (1998).
[2] European Offender Employment Forum Conference, Basic Skills for Offenders, Paris, 1999.
[3] SEU (2002).
[4] BSA (1994).
[5] UK Parliament (2005).
[6] Home Office (2008).

The division is further enshrined in the Correctional Services and Reducing Re-offending Minister's introduction to the national action plan governing the work of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS), *Reducing Re-offending*[7]. There is no explicit reference to the educational needs of offenders, other than mention of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) as one of the local partners involved. The LSC-based Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS), charged since 2005 with providing learning and skills in prisons, similarly eschews a wider educational role in focusing primarily on learning for employability – in other words, the basic skills.[8]

1.1 Organisation and delivery

Ambiguity about the role of education in the treatment of offenders reflects the dual base for managing what goes on in the 'secure estate' and what follows when prisoners are released: NOMS links the prison and the probation services, while the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) holds responsibility through the LSC and OLASS for delivering learning and skills. Joined-up working through partnership is a central feature of OLASS, but has proved very difficult to implement in practice – not least perhaps because of the probation service's traditional wariness about taking an educational role. As a 1997 Home Office research report concluded, such a role may be seen as diverting energy from what are believed to be the most critical issues for offenders' rehabilitation: 'repeat offending, addiction, and a variety of personal problems including lack of accommodation, debt and domestic difficulties'.[9]

This position regarding offender education gains support from other sources such as the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation research programme, Rethinking Crime and Punishment,[10] which places little emphasis on education in the rehabilitation of offenders. The prescriptions for reducing crime focus instead on public and professional attitudes, community involvement, restorative justice, children and young offenders, gender-specific community programmes, drugs, mental health and community alternatives to prison. Discussion of education focuses exclusively on the needs of the children who will form the next generation of offenders, rather than the adults in the present one.

There is therefore some way to go in bringing to the attention of all sections of the service both the facts about the relationship between poor education and skills and offending and the changing societal context in which these relationships are strengthening. As part of the Home Office's 'What Works?' agenda, the pathfinder projects that ran from 1999 to 2002 included a basic skills assessment as a major feature of the pre-sentencing report, which heightened awareness of basic skills. Basic skills screening is also now a responsibility of the Probation Service, tied to a service delivery agreement target. How effective these measures have been is, however,

[7] Home Office (2004b).
[8] Home Office (2004a).
[9] Home Office (1997).
[10] Esmée Fairbairn Foundation (2004).

questionable because of the problems of implementation, as the Home Office evaluation of the programme shows.[11] The Select Committee's report goes further in its stringent critique of the whole offender education system:[12]

> "OLASS was set up to overcome the long-standing problem of the delivery of skills and learning for offenders. In practice it has failed in almost every aspect."
>
> "Only 6 per cent of offenders reported any education or training place to go to after leaving prison and only 6 per cent reported prison initiatives as being of any help to them. Most who had found jobs had done so with employment initiatives, the help of family or friends or gone back to what they were doing before conviction."[13]

Not much seems to have changed since the Select Committee report, as suggested by the National Audit Office in its 2008 report on OLASS:

> "There remains an unresolved tension about the purpose of learning and skills in custody – in respect of its role to enhance life chances and also as a way of providing activity to occupy prisoners, which may not be linked to the wider objectives of offender learning and skills."[14]

It is within the period of custody that the lack of clarity in curriculum aims, often matched by poor pedagogical strategies, is most evident. This starts with inadequate assessment of individual learning needs and little attempt to shape the curriculum to motivate individuals and maximise the opportunities for progression. In addition, the brevity or absence of provision for short-term prisoners, and the ever-present possibility of relocation within the system, usually without transfer of educational records, makes for fragmented and haphazard exposure to learning. The impression gained is of little recognition of the need for continuity within the system or out into the community, which is where the critical test in terms of further educational progression or job entry typically fails to be met.

1.2 Life-course approach

We have seen that in life-course terms[15] the one great opportunity that prison affords – to produce a turning point in an offender's life, away from a continuing criminal career – is frequently missed. The time between provision and long-term outcome is typically filled by the return to past social contexts and relationships, where the opportunity structure is more of the same – economic survival and incentives through crime.

Extending further the life-course perspective, the effectiveness of such provision will vary from one life stage to the next. The peak of offending is by young men in

[11] Home Office (2004a).
[12] UK Parliament (2005).
[13] Ibid.
[14] National Audit Office (2008).
[15] Elder (1998); Heinz (1991).

the middle to late teens, when both vulnerability to criminality and the opportunity to reverse it are at their most powerful.[16] From then on, the offending rate steadily declines – less so for young women than for young men – as other concerns such as job and family gain prominence in offenders' lives. Yet unlike other judiciaries – in Germany for example – the England and Wales criminal justice system persists in the rigid demarcation at 17 between the preventative and educative features of youth justice and the still mainly retributive and punitive system that takes over for all offenders from age 18.

The failure to recognise the prolongation of the transition to adulthood, now extending for the majority of young people well into their 20s,[17] compounds the sense of lost opportunities for major life-course shifts among those who will subsequently become persistent offenders. The title of the Barrow Cadbury Trust's report *Lost in Transition*[18] – also used for a recent book in the Cambridge Criminal Justice series by Lösel and colleagues – aptly describes the experience for many young people, as does the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) report in linking disadvantaged young adults' transitions to complex needs and troubled lives.[19]

Apart from the extension of the transition to adulthood, another life-course shift is also evident – the increasing number of older offenders entering and staying in prison. The challenge they represent for prison education, narrowly based on employability outcomes, is equally pressing. Provision attached to needs in this case demands even more emphasis on a wider-benefits, 'third age'-oriented curriculum.[20]

This is not to say that all prisoner experience conveys the same gloomy picture. Within both the youth and adult criminal justice systems there are numerous examples of educational initiatives that make a difference to those exposed to them; from basic education to Open University degree programmes, these initiatives exemplify what is possible.[21] Generally, the conclusion is that for as many as 15 per cent of prisoners, educational interventions are effective in reducing reconvictions.[22] The failure is in learning from past interventions and creating roll-outs based on syntheses of best practice to produce an optimum system.

In short, the current system is characterised by:

- lack of clarity in what offender education is for and how it is best delivered;
- gaps in educational attainment, which need to be made up;
- lack of continuity of provision within prison and from prison to the community;
- recognition of the importance of employment in desistance from crime, while failing to ensure that the means are in place for the individual prisoner to desist; and

[16] Barrow Cadbury Trust (2005).
[17] OECD (2005).
[18] Barrow Cadbury Trust (2005); Lösel, Bottoms and Farrington (2009).
[19] SEU (2002).
[20] McNair (2009).
[21] e.g. see Wilson and Reuss (2000); Wilson and Killingley (2004).
[22] Harper and Chitty (2005).

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- lack of recognition of the wider benefits of education, including the motivation to continue learning and the need for a balanced curriculum.

The following sections consider the possibilities for more effective strategy, first examining the costs of crime, and attempt to assess the 'returns' from different educational interventions. The paper then turns to the role of poor educational achievement in criminal careers, arguing for a more broadly based life-course-oriented approach. This leads to a consideration of the kind of needs-based learning scenario that is likely to produce the best economic, social and democratic returns.

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2. Cost of crime

The generally agreed figure for the cost of the criminal justice system in England and Wales, including 78,000 offenders currently in custody, is £60 billion.[23] About one-fifth of this cost represents public expenditure; the remainder is met by victims of crime, business and other parts of the Government, such as the health service. But the costs are not evenly distributed across the adult criminal population. In fact, offending and that which results in conviction varies hugely across age groups. Thus the 18–24 group accounts for 26–32 per cent of all 700,000 registered offences committed annually.[24] Moreover, two-thirds of male prisoners in the 18–24 age group leaving prison are reconvicted within two years, compared with 58 per cent of ex-prisoners as a whole – two-thirds of these go back to prison at a cost of £130 million. The striking point here is that over this period an increasingly large proportion of the general population of the same age is still in education. It is therefore surprising that education is not seen as the main experience in which young adult offenders inside or outside the secure estate should be engaged.

From the figures, it is not difficult to conclude that if fewer people were convicted in the first place, and fewer still were reconvicted after leaving prison, there would be substantial gains to society. However, economists caution against interpreting such causal links too literally – people currently imprisoned, if not imprisoned subsequently, may cost the public money in other ways.

The cost-benefit approach to assessing the financial returns from prison education against costs is exemplified by the work for the Inquiry of Matrix consultants.[25] Five examples of experiments undertaken in US prisons to reduce recidivism, meeting specified methodological standards (all randomised control trials), were reviewed. The results were then used to estimate the relative reduction in recidivism rates for each intervention compared with prison alone. The aggregated results were then used in an econometric model to estimate the monetary returns that may be expected from similar kinds of interventions in the UK. It is concluded that £19,000 (£15,000–25,000) is likely to be saved, net of costs to victims, for each prisoner involved. On the basis that the total cost of offending by ex-prisoners is, in the first year, £12 billion, education programmes are estimated as likely to reduce this figure by 25 per cent. Over 25 years, the cost of the criminal justice system would be projected to reduce from £600 billion to £475 billion.

The analysis is thought-provoking and undoubtedly points to some fiscal benefits from the programmes tested. But, as the authors acknowledge, the rather different aims to which the US interventions were directed – each with quite different targeted outcomes and estimated returns – make extrapolation to educational interventions

[23] Brand and Price (2000); SEU (2002).
[24] Bowles and Praditpyo (2005).
[25] Matrix Knowledge Group (2008).

generally problematic. Moreover, there is no theoretical appraisal of what it was that produced the changes overall and why the returns differed depending on the type of intervention. At one level, the effects could be little more than a reflection of opportunities to break the routines and accompanying boredom of prison life. At another level, the interventions could have been imparting something of real long-term vocational and personal value to the recipients.

A further difficulty is that the return from any intervention is typically calculated as a change in an average (mean) value, for example in income, or a percentage gain in the probability of employment. A tendency towards an effect is therefore indicated. But it is important to recognise that the return, for example in personal income, typically masks considerable variation around the mean, ranging for any given individual from no return to a very large return. Why the intervention should work with one individual more than another needs explanation, which is where the need for more explicit and better theory underlying interventions lies. In the meantime, blanket application of a given intervention because cost-benefit analysis indicates a return may be misdirected if not worthless for some of those exposed to it, reflecting the heterogeneity of the offender population as a whole. (Some further ramifications of over-simplistic application of experimental methodology and ways of improving on it are considered in *Appendix A*.)

In line with this argument, one of the more convincing evaluations of an educational intervention with prisoners is that by Porporino and Robinson (1992). Their study tested the effect on recidivism of basic skills teaching directed at prisoners diagnosed as having a literacy problem. The study broadened the approach to include qualitative investigation of the prisoners' own accounts of how the intervention affected them.[26] A sample of 1,736 offenders who, following literacy assessment, had participated in basic education courses in 1988 were monitored over a period of two years from the time they were released in 1990. Thirty per cent of those who completed the programme (i.e. achieved grade 8) returned to prison, compared with 36 per cent who started the programme but did not complete it, and 42 per cent of those who had withdrawn from it at the beginning. The largest reductions in recidivism were for young offenders and for violent offenders, followed by longer-sentence offenders.

These results were sustained under different release regimes – full parole and mandatory supervision – with the latter group showing the strongest effects. The qualitative interviews showed that the programme was held in high regard by the participants. More specifically, job search, family life and leisure life had all benefited from the programme, showing how the new skills had become embedded in the ex-prisoners' lives.

A more recent appraisal of three prison-based interventions, but with a relatively short period of follow-up compared with the Porporino and Robinson example, comes from

[26] Porporino and Robinson (1992).

a Home Office study by May, Sharma and Stewart.[27] Three surveys conducted in 2001, comprising 4,898 prisoners shortly to be released, were combined and matched with criminal records. Three types of intervention were significantly associated with reduced likelihood of re-offending: contact with a probation officer, attending a prison job club and attending a victim awareness course. Notably, exposure to other interventions, including education, offending behaviour programmes and drugs programmes, had an association with reduced re-offending only in the absence of employment difficulties – in other words, when the individual was able to get a job after leaving prison or was able to go back to a previous job.

These results tend to be at variance with other reviews such as that by Elliott-Marshall, Ramsay and Stewart in another Home Office study of alternative approaches to integrating offenders into the community, which identifies positive returns from education, in terms of reduced reconvictions.[28] The authors stress, however, the limitations of the evidence for determining actual impact, and problems with implementation in many of the non-educational interventions they covered.

In their review of 33 independent US experimental and quasi-experimental evaluations of educational and vocational training programmes, Wilson, Gallagher and Mackenzie also found consistently lower recidivism rates among participants.[29] They caution, however, that much of the work reviewed was weak methodologically, generally lacking randomised controls. They also argue that future research in the area would be strengthened by the incorporation of 'theoretical links between the programme and future criminal development'.

A strong theme emerging from these more recent reviews is that to address prisoner needs most effectively, multi-mode programmes are needed – alongside education, there should be interventions targeted at employment, housing, accommodation, drugs and alcohol, health, and social networks. The correct combination should be determined on the basis of pre-custody assessment of the individual prisoner's needs. However, policy-makers deciding on public expenditure strategies still need to know how much the education component is worth. Here, probably the best estimate comes from Feinstein's work for the Home Office using British birth cohort studies data.[30] Feinstein concludes that a 1 percentage point rise in the proportion of the working-age population with Level 2 qualifications compared with those with no qualifications would cut the costs of crime annually by £320 million, and, to Level 3, £500 million. A 16 per cent rise in those educated to degree level could save the country £1 billion annually.

[27] May et al. (2008).
[28] Elliott-Marshall et al. (2005).
[29] Wilson et al. (2000).
[30] Feinstein (2002).

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3. Crime and the life course

The need for better theory to underpin provision is highlighted by the somewhat mixed results about the effectiveness of educational interventions in reducing re-offending, considered in the previous section. Nevertheless, the findings share a common theme that education or any other form of intervention with offenders is likely to be more effective in combination with others in terms of life-course theory. This is because educational needs reflect the consequences of typically disadvantaged circumstances and associated problems in offenders' lives earlier on. Harper and Chitty identify what are described as six types of 'criminogenic' need, which average out at four per offender:[31]

- poor education;
- lack of employment;
- accommodation;
- mental health;
- drugs and alcohol; and
- social networks.

3.1 Offender profile

Drawing on the SEU report and other research, Solomon's report for the Prison Reform Trust gives a basis for amplifying the profile further.[32]

Poor education

- Offenders at the peak period for offending, in the middle teens, frequently have poor reading skills, with just over half below the level of an 11-year-old, compared with two-fifths of the prison population and one-fifth of the adult population generally.
- Offenders' schooling has often been disrupted or terminated early. The SEU reports that three-quarters have been excluded from school at some stage and a quarter have terminated their education by the age of 14. Two-thirds of female prisoners and half of male prisoners have no formal qualifications.
- Through the use of a sub-sample of the 1970 British Cohort Study, in which literacy and numeracy assessments were made at age 21, Parsons[33] refines the picture further, identifying poor literacy, lack of parental educational support, drug-taking, truancy,

[31] Harper and Chitty (2005).
[32] SEU (2002); Solomon (2004); Singleton et al. (2002); Farrant (2001).
[33] Parsons (2002).

suspension from school and number of spells of unemployment as all predicting offending, as reflected in the experience of being arrested.

Lack of employment

- The majority of young adult offenders are male and out of work. Nearly two-thirds (63 per cent) are likely to have been unemployed at the time of arrest, compared with 46 per cent of those aged over 25. A resettlement survey conducted in 2001 by the Home Office found that two-thirds of prisoners were unemployed before they went into custody and that 12 per cent had never had a paid job.[34] Poor literacy frequently underlies the employment problem. According to the Basic Skills Agency (BSA), half of all prisoners are excluded from jobs because they lack the basic skills for 96 per cent of all jobs.[35]

Accommodation

- Many young offenders have housing problems. Solomon[36] reports the Chief Inspector of Prisons suggesting in 1997 that one in five young prisoners had no idea where they would live on release.
- Up to 40 per cent of all young prisoners have been in local authority care, and many have slept rough.

Mental health

- Behavioral and mental health problems are particularly prevalent. Of prisoners aged 16–20, around 85 per cent show signs of personality disorder, and 10 per cent exhibit signs of psychotic illness, for example schizophrenia, compared with 0.2 per cent of the general population. One in five young men in custody have attempted suicide at some stage in their lives, and more than one-third of young women.

Drugs and alcohol

- Drug and alcohol abuse are major problems. Of prisoners aged 16–20, over half report dependence on drugs in the year prior to imprisonment. Over half the female and two-thirds of the male[37] prisoners had a hazardous drinking habit prior to entering custody.
- Up to 30 per cent of young women in custody say they were sexually abused in childhood.[38]

[34] Home Office (2005).
[35] BSA (1994).
[36] Solomon (2004).
[37] Singleton et al. (2002).
[38] Farrant (2001).

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Social relationships and pro-criminal networks

Both young women and young men in prison are more likely to be parents than young adults in the general population. Their social networks usually involve other offenders.

The origins of these problems, as viewed within the life-course perspective, emphasise the centrality of disadvantage in the family, the community, and society as a whole in the transitions that offenders typically make. Understanding the 'trajectory of disadvantage' rests on identifying the key shaping experiences that give rise to it.

3.2 Role of education

A common feature of offender disadvantage is poor educational attainment, the foundations of which are often established well before reaching primary school. Hard-pressed families, often headed by single parents, find difficulty in maintaining and supplying the foundations of educational experience on which primary school educational achievement will subsequently be built.[39] The consequence is failure of the child to acquire the basic competencies, resulting in continuing poor educational performance.[40] The gap then widens, with contemporaries able to progress towards qualifications and further education. In such a scenario, by Year 9 – age 13/14, when GCSE choices are made, preparing the ground for what will follow educationally – the disadvantaged young people are least likely to go much further.

In the highly competitive English education system, which is beset with league tables and other indicators of institutional success or failure, the presence in schools of high achievers is welcomed, and they are encouraged to stay on. Teachers' commitment to closing the gap by concentrating effort on the poor performers to retain them in the system is therefore unlikely. For the latter young people, the phenomenon of NEET (not in education, employment or training) may follow, with the late teens characterised by lack of education, employment or training and often an alternative lifestyle tied to gang life, drugs and other means of making money and maintaining self-esteem.[41]

Crime is not something that suddenly emerges in adolescence or adulthood, but has foundations in a whole set of lifetime experiences and contexts through which individuals develop.[42] The teens is a period when, particularly among young men, much activity takes place that pushes against the law, only some of which results in long-term offending and imprisonment. There is good evidence to suggest that in early childhood, such behavioural manifestations as ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) predict continuing behavioural difficulties and challenges to authority of various kinds, which often evoke admiration among peers. For many of these young

[39] Bynner (2001).
[40] Bynner and Parsons (2009).
[41] SEU (1999); Bynner and Parsons (2002).
[42] Bynner, Londra and Jones (2004).

men in their mid-teens there is further crystallisation of 'heroic status' through petty offending and gang activity.[43]

In contrast, much of the exuberance of youth, sometimes tipping into offending, is best seen in Terri Moffitt's terms as 'adolescent-situation specific', contrasting with the 'lifetime-persistent' type of behaviour that frequently underpins a criminal career.[44] The direction taken, however, is critically dependent on the family and education context of the young people involved. Thus, paradoxically, young people's contact with the criminal justice system may sometimes lead to adolescent-situation-specific offending becoming longer-term criminal activity rather than being inhibited by it. This is because of the additional obstacles the system may erect against the young offender establishing a conventional educational and occupational career. Moreover, such obstacles tend to be encountered most by disadvantaged young people, because custody may be seen by the judiciary as supplying the care and support that is lacking at home. The price to be paid is the stigma attached to a criminal record, which damages prospects for educational progression and employment. As a consequence, young offenders often drift in and out of custody – 'casually, intermittently, and transiently' – while establishing with every exposure to it another step on the adult criminal career path.[45]

3.3 Risk and protection

The idea of risk and protection is valuable in demonstrating that all life-course trajectories reflect uncertainty with outcomes that can be assessed only in terms of probabilities.[46] Life chances and their realisation in adult career paths are predictable from earlier circumstances and experiences. Thus one risk factor reinforces the next, leading to increasingly restricted outcomes in adult life. Protective factors may impede or halt the process, facilitating movement off the 'risk trajectory' in positive directions.

As writers such as Ingrid Schoon point out, risk and protective factors are not mirror images of each other.[47] Thus some risk factors such as geographical location are relatively fixed pre-disposing conditions, which, during childhood, are often beyond the scope of policy to influence directly. Others arise only at certain levels of the risk factor. Thus children born to mothers in their early teens may be at risk of developmental difficulties later on, whereas above this age the variable 'age of mother at first birth' bears no relationship to the risk of developmental difficulties. For others still, the risk is time-bound, such as falling behind at school at a critical educational stage. Protective factors work on the more malleable components of development, reflecting the different kinds of resources that may be marshalled to resist adversity. These resources comprise the emotional, educational, social and economic support residing in

[43] Farrington (2000); Farrington and Welsh (2007).
[44] Moffitt and Harrington (1996).
[45] Matza (1990).
[46] Robins and Rutter (1990); Catalano and Hawkins (1996); Schoon (2006).
[47] Schoon (2006).

the family and the community, to which the individual has access singly or, more often, in combination.

Professional support is directed at building these resources to protect against adversity, and is likely to be most effective when it is informal and mirrors as closely as possible the social world that the recipient is in. The main issue for adult offenders is that relationship breakdown or reconvictions may work for or against the reinforcement of the criminal identity and career. In the case of family breakdown, there may be a move back to the same risk-laden lifestyle that preceded custody; in contrast, relationship formation through partnership and marriage may have the opposite effect. Sampson and Laub show that marriage to a non-delinquent spouse is one of the most effective turning points in moving off the criminal career trajectory, providing there are no other risk factors involved.[48] Alcohol is frequently the most significant risk factor, often combined with others such as job loss, unemployment, health problems and marital breakdown.

Certain family circumstances such as poverty and unemployment, and drug and alcohol abuse, may thus increase the probability of offending behaviour, but there is always the possibility – either through the individual's own agency and/or through the influence of supportive family members and/or professionals committed to improving the offender's prospects – that the tendency will be reversed. Throughout the life course, as a whole, positive action through interventions to mitigate the risk factors may bring about a reinforcement of positive career pathways. This may be by building personal competence through education and training, assisting access to opportunities, or supplying individual and family support.

Occasionally, as Schuller et al. argue, there may also be a negative consequence if, for example, the outcome of new education and job opportunities conflicts with family loyalties and obligations.[49] 'Linked lives' are another feature of life-course construction, and moving on, as exemplified in the film *Educating Rita*, can sometimes put the linkage under strain. Again, adequate theory from which to predict such variation is essential for effective intervention.

In the setting of a prison, risk and protection continue, though in a highly institutionalised manner. Risks reside in the social relations and influence of other inmates – the criminal academy. As Tom Schuller notes in his Inquiry paper on crime, education may be the critical provider of protection or merely supply the tools to make criminal action more effective.[50]

[48] Sampson and Laub (1993).
[49] Schuller et al. (2004).
[50] Schuller (2009).

3.4 Social exclusion

The types of early-life characteristics that establish the foundations of poor educational achievement, and one of the routes to the criminal career, are similar to those identified with the origins of social exclusion. The welfare economist Amartya Sen characterises the social exclusion process as one in which individuals fail to acquire the capabilities that are central to effective functioning and fulfilment in modern industrialised societies.[51] Exclusion is manifested in poor employment opportunities, peripheral jobs and unemployment. A possible sequence of such outcomes thus becomes:

- poor acquisition of the basic skills;
- poor educational achievement through primary and secondary school;
- leaving education early without qualifications;
- early labour market entry problems, including jobs without training;
- casual work and unemployment;
- teenage pregnancy;
- trouble with the police;
- alcohol abuse;
- criminal convictions;
- family breakdown;
- poor physical and mental health; and
- disengagement from citizenship.

To acquire the capabilities needed for integration into, as opposed to exclusion from, mainstream society, individuals need access to a variety of resources from the family and the state. However, implicitly or explicitly, obstacles may be erected to prevent such access occurring. Families may have difficulty in giving the educational support their children need and are assumed by teachers to have. Lack of material resources, poor housing and unfriendly state institutions such as schools and the welfare services, erect a series of barriers to children's successful integration, thereby contributing to an accumulating risk of social exclusion.[52] Individual factors such as low birth weight, poor physical health, learning difficulties, and family factors such as poor education, low aspirations and stress, and poor-quality schooling will all compound the problem further.

Though the exclusion process in no way defines a criminal career, most offenders have gone through the process of disaffection and alienation from education on the route to the alternative lifestyles and survival approaches that crime offers. As their schooling proceeds, truancy and school exclusion become increasingly common, restricting further the prospects of rectifying basic skills deficiencies, and increasing the risk

[51] Sen (1992).
[52] Schoon (2006).

of criminal outcomes.[53] The consequence is typically young people leaving school ill equipped to meet the demands that employers are going to make on job applicants. Exclusion from mainstream routes into employment forces young people towards casual unskilled jobs and unemployment. Reinforced by the values of the peer group, this unsatisfying work experience may in turn lead to criminal activity in which drug-taking and alcohol abuse are often involved. The vicious circle continues, with contact with the police and criminal convictions reducing the prospects of employment and mainstream life chances even further.[54]

Such problems are compounded in a changing labour market, where unskilled manual work has dramatically declined and ever more emphasis is placed on qualifications. Thus, regardless of their basic skills problems, most young people leaving school at 16 in 1974 in the National Child Development Study (1958 birth cohort) made a successful transition into some kind of adult work. For the 1970 birth cohort, who reached age 16 in 1986 (now aged 38), the collapse of traditional manufacturing and reduced opportunities for manual work meant that many with basic skills problems and lacking qualifications never established a proper foothold in the labour market. Their early labour market experience often comprised little more than moving between training schemes, casual jobs and unemployment. Yet few returned to education once they had left school.[55]

Though causal connections cannot be justified from cohort shifts alone, the figures also show a dramatic cohort change in levels of offending. Thus, comparing the British cohorts born in 1970 and 1958, 65 per cent of the more recent cohort at age 30 reported having been stopped and questioned by the police, compared with only 28 per cent of the earlier cohort. For women, the comparable figures were 21 per cent in the 1970 cohort and 10 per cent in the 1958 cohort. Although 1970 cohort women overall were a fifth as likely as men to have been in trouble with the police and the law in various ways, this was still twice as many as in the 1958 cohort. Such differences between the cohorts were evident in all six indicators of trouble with the law that the surveys covered.

In Britain more than many other industrialised countries, employers judge potential recruits as much in terms of employment experience as in terms of qualifications. The ex-prisoners among the more recent cohorts are therefore often doubly disadvantaged: they may lack not only basic skills and qualifications, but also any relevant employment experience as evidence of employability. Educational programmes targeting the basic skills appear likely to be important means of combating social exclusion and the onset of a criminal career. For young offenders, basic skills programmes can also help establish the route from prison into the employment experience that will have such a high value in getting future jobs.

[53] Catalano and Hawkins (1996); Bynner (2001).
[54] OECD (1995).
[55] Ferri et al. (2003).

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4. Provision that matches needs

The complexity of individual lives – where people are coming from and where they are going – needs to be reflected as much in the educational provision in prison as in other contexts, while recognising what is likely to make a difference. Turning points, as Sampson and Laub stress, are always possible through a combination of appropriate and committed professional support, the motivation to change, and the exercise of individual agency to do what is needed to make the turning points happen.[56]

The near exclusive emphasis in current prison education on the basic skills of literacy and numeracy[57] has been challenged with the plea for a more holistic view involving immersion of the prisoner learner in learning across a range of subject areas and life domains. Of course, the two approaches may not be in conflict, as is well known from the work of the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning at the Institute of Education.[58] Courses leading to, or not leading to, qualifications (vocational or academic) are likely to set a range of motivational triggers going for some participants, as reflected in the desire to pursue learning further, especially progression to further and higher education.[59] Such benefits extend to the wider domains of everyday social and civic life, arousing interest in society in the broadest sense.

A further part of the advocated strategy links the learning provision to all the learner's needs. These range from specific needs concerned with personal problems such as drug and alcohol addiction and anger management, to the need for enhanced educational and occupational opportunities, met through general and vocational education. Both types of need share the common problem of inadequate diagnosis. There has been too little attention paid to the assessment of prisoners' learning needs when they begin their sentences, including the identification of those with (often undiagnosed) special educational needs.[60] Proper assessment can help to identify, not only the problem of learning difficulties in a cognitive sense, but what is most likely to motivate the prisoner to engage. Without such motivation, learning cannot succeed, and sitting in classes may be little more than marking time until the next stage of the prison day.

The Skills for Life strategy directed at enhancing adult basic skills nationally has come to recognise more generally that adults are not likely to invest the time and, particularly, the effort in acquiring literacy and numeracy skills unless they can see some tangible reward at the end of it, such as heading off redundancy or helping their children learn to read. Prisoners are no different. In their highly critical report, the Education and Training Select Committee noted that 'only 20 per cent of those who needed the skill joined a

[56] Sampson and Laub (1993).
[57] Leitch (2006).
[58] Schuller et al. (2004).
[59] Feinstein et al. (2008).
[60] UK Parliament (2005).

course and those who did generally got little from it – not least because 40 per cent of them had learning difficulties of different kinds'.[61]

Though recognising the value of broadening and liberalising prison education, the playing down of the basic skills element may not be all to the good, as without the facility to read, much else of the education offer may be rendered inaccessible. The balance to be achieved is recognised through 'embedded' forms of basic skills teaching, where the skills become not an end in themselves, through one-off training classes, but the means of accessing the wider range of learning opportunities and curriculum content that will match learners' longer-term goals.[62]

From the foregoing, it is relatively straightforward to specify the basic requirements for offender education to succeed. These requirements comprise both inputs through the curriculum and achievable goals to aid progression:

- Assessment – to identify the range of learning and other needs to be addressed.
- Personalised approach – by constructing a learning programme that contains the right mix of components that are most likely to succeed for the individual offender.
- Raising motivation – by ensuring the relevance of the learning offer to realisable learning goals.
- Embedded basic skills teaching – by linking the skills element to curriculum content that is perceived as directly relevant to the learners' educational and personal goals.
- Vocational opportunity – by improving the prospects of employment, thereby changing the direction of life through learning.
- Achievement – by supplying the means for course completion (and, where appropriate, accreditation) as the key to improving the sense of self-efficacy that drives the desire for further learning and achievement.
- Progression – by removing systemic obstacles to further learning as the basis for a 'learning career'.

In short, the educational needs of prisoners are much the same as for any group traditionally excluded from extended education. The exclusion may arise through failure earlier on or through dropping out by intent from a system that has offered from an early age little to encourage continuing participation. The advantage that prison education has is that, with its controlled learning environment, opportunities are available for intensive exposure to learning to rectify past failures in a way that is unlikely to be repeated elsewhere.

In this respect short sentences can almost have a disadvantaging effect: they may begin to whet appetites for learning, while frequently offering no opportunity for follow-through to an achievable goal. In some continental countries, the slightly longer sentence is seen as having advantages in ensuring that commitment is rewarded,

[61] UK Parliament (2005).
[62] Cara et al. (2006).

courses are completed and qualifications gained. The fact that continuation often does not happen in Britain is again a reflection of the lack of coordination of learning opportunities and progression, beginning in prison but typically extending outside to whatever context follows custody.

The adult education system has a part to play here in ensuring that whatever learning is begun in custody has every chance of continuing and being completed outside. Employers are another key part of the joined-up and holistic approach that is essential to success, as are local community services such as housing and health. Without such a needs-based underpinning of lifelong learning opportunities, the earlier learning benefits are likely to be dissipated, maintaining if not re-enforcing the vicious circle of crime.

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5. Conclusions: headline messages for the Inquiry

This paper started with with an overview of educational provision for offenders then considered attempts to assess the financial returns to the state to be gained from educational interventions in prison settings. The outcomes were costed entirely in terms of their contribution to enhancing educational performance levels and employment rates. The need for more theoretical underpinning of such work and a more holistic approach to their evaluation is also apparent. Such a strategy presents two kinds of challenges.

The first challenge resides in the calculation of the cost of educational provision. In multi-mode approaches addressing multiple needs and 'personalised' to the individual prisoner learner, much more attention needs to be given to all the components of provision and their use in combination to decide what the cost for the individual and in aggregate really is.

Greater complexity also arises on the other side of the equation, where the returns from learning will be personal, social (in a social capital sense) and financial. The methodology to make the appraisal here has largely yet to be developed, and what there is tends to be cast in the monetary terms of classical economics. To tease out the returns to set against costs in a 'social productivity' framework may require, not only new ways of conceptualising returns, but also new types of data to operationalise them. How do we measure the social returns from education as a contribution to community-level social capital formation in the fullest sense of trust-based relationships and reciprocity?[63] Perhaps most difficult of all: how do we assess the 'democratic return', for which any kind of monetary translation makes little sense? Failure to find the right operationalisation means that we shall not be truly determining whether educational interventions with offenders work and at what benefit to society, but forcing all of them to be judged purely in monetary terms.

The lifelong agenda offers significant returns to the economy, including the benefits to be found in educational interventions with prisoners. But perhaps more importantly it offers to prisoners the means of personal fulfilment not associated with crime, and to society the means of building social cohesion. The challenge is to do it and assemble the right mix of evidence to evaluate it.

[63] Baron, Field and Schuller (2000).

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Appendix A: Estimating costs and benefits – the case for a broad and multi-method approach

By and large, the studies reviewed in Section 2 are experimental or quasi-experimental in design, directed at robust identification of differences between one or more treatment groups and a control group. Quasi-experimental implies comparison in the absence of randomised controls. As noted in reviewing the Matrix contribution to the Commission's work,[64] the evidence is generally not embedded in any theoretical account of why a given educational intervention works or fails to work for all or some offenders. Though it is probably generally recognised in the criminal justice system that educational provision has value for those in custody and there is a basic skills need to be met, there are few signs of any general shift of perceptions in the direction of what constitutes, on theoretical grounds, the optimum educational offer.

As argued by Morgan Harris Burrows in its evaluation of the SEU's Youth Inclusion programme, directed at the 50 highest risk young people in a number of high-crime-prevalence neighbourhoods, such theorising is essential to understand not only what works and why, but also how best to build on it.[65] Thus although 40 per cent of crime is committed in 10 per cent of deprived areas, the most deprived areas are not necessarily the most crime-ridden. Such neighbourhood factors as social capital and employment opportunities are also involved in mitigating or reinforcing the effects of risk factors associated with crime. It is also a mistake to overlook national trends in employment and poverty, which may be confounded with the effects of the intervention, when accounting for any observed change in crime rates. Moreover, the motivation for offending differs depending on the age of the offender; hence an intervention directed at young offenders may have no relevance to adult offending. Morgan Harris Burrows makes the telling point from cost–benefit analysis that if the 30 per cent reduction in crime rates target for the Youth Inclusion Programme had been achieved, there would have been a 29 per cent return on the investment in it. The estimated actual return is 2.5 per cent.

Hypothetico-deductive reasoning and the experimental methodology that derives from it clearly have their place in programmes of research and evaluation and in the theory development that needs to accompany them. If applied fully, as in the randomised control trial to assess the effects on recidivism of an educational intervention, the 'true' experiment addresses the critical methodological challenges of:

- the counterfactual – would the likelihood of reoffending have reduced anyway for some individuals because of changes in their lives and attitudes to offending or by exposure to other interventions occurring at the same time?

[64] Matrix Knowledge Group (2009).
[65] Morgan Harris Burrows (2003).

- selection bias – do those who participate in the intervention have different motivations and attitudes towards the intervention from those who do not participate, which might account for any treatment and control group differences?

However, the much-regarded randomised control trial has serious limitations as a panacea for action-planning and decision-making, not least because, as traditionally applied in accordance with R.A. Fisher's prescriptions[66], the randomised control trial can deal with only one step in a policy process at a time – act/don't act, supply educational provision/don't supply educational provision – each relying on a test of statistical significance. As Ziliac and McCloskey point out in their trenchant critique of significance testing, imagine organising a moon landing in which every step depended on the result of a significance test. Clearly the moon landing would never happen![67]

The problem is compounded by the way in which the results of any single experiment tend to be interpreted, namely that failure to refute the null hypothesis of no significant difference between groups means there is no effect, whereas all that has been established is that, given the data from a sample of a particular size, selected at a particular time, we cannot prove at a given probability level that the observed difference has not arisen by chance. This disregards the cumulative features of scientific evidence, leading to Light and Smith's famous lament: 'it seems our ability to identify failure has outrun our power to instil success'.[68]

A more fundamental issue that arises in applying the methods of the natural sciences in the sphere of human action is epistemological. Lincoln and Guba,[69] drawing on the arguments of Schwartz and Ogilvy,[70] make the case for replacing a human science derived from nineteenth century Newtonian mechanics with a science that reflects more modern conceptions, post Einstein and Bohr, of physical reality imbued with uncertainty; in other words from:

- simple to complex realities;
- membership of single to multiple orders;
- mechanical to holographic imagery (reflecting dynamic processes of interaction and differentiation);
- determinacy to indeterminacy; and
- linear to mutual causality.

Their prescription is for wider use of naturalistic as opposed to experimentalist enquiry.

Similar arguments are advanced by Parlett and Hamilton in their influential paper promoting the idea of illuminative evaluation.[71] They question the appropriateness to the evaluation task of what they describe as the agricultural–botanical approach,

[66] Fisher (1935).
[67] Ziliac and McCloskey (2008).
[68] Light and Smith (1970).
[69] Lincoln and Guba (1985).
[70] Schwartz and Ogilvy (1979).
[71] Parlett and Hamilton (1972).

favouring instead evaluation strategies derived from anthropology and ethnography. They list five shortcomings of the conventional approach: artificiality, evolving situation, restricted scope, insensitivity to local perturbations, and salience for different interest groups. Under the last for these, Parlett and Hamilton make the important point that evaluation based exclusively on experimental methodology 'often fails to articulate with the concerns and questions of participants, sponsors and other interested parties'.

Lee Cronbach and colleagues in the Stanford Evaluation Consortium accept the illuminative critique of experimental methodology, but seek to reconcile it with what they regard as the key principles of scientific enquiry. They argue against abandoning quantitative methods, advocating instead the operationalisation of models to understand the consequences of action, that map more closely onto decision-makers' actions and the beliefs that guide them.[72] Policy-makers in criminal justice will adhere to their own beliefs about the causes of offending and the means of reducing re-offending until the probabilities of these being correct are sufficiently shaken by new evidence for a more valid set of beliefs to replace them.[73]

Successful strategy that becomes widely adopted thus always needs a convincing theory backed by a causal narrative supplying leverage to get the theory accepted. Theory development is concerned with formulating a comprehensive explanatory model of the relationships between all critical variables in the application of a new educational programme. Leverage is concerned with shifting the beliefs about these relationships in the minds of those responsible for implementing and developing the programme.

For example, officials introducing an educational programme to reduce recidivism through raising literacy and numeracy levels will have an implicit model in their heads of what works and why. A proper evaluation of the programme will first operationalise this model in terms of measures of the attributes (including skills level), prior educational experience and circumstances of individual prisoners. The relationships between the variables involved will then be estimated. The evaluation is moreover not just one-off, but needs to reflect the state of knowledge up to the time of implementation, cast in terms of the probabilities associated with the relationships reflected in the model. Adopting a Bayesian approach to statistical inference, the task of the evaluation is thus to update the probabilities and use this updating to convince those responsible for the intervention to shift their own beliefs about what is likely to work and what isn't to evidence-based policy in the fullest sense of the term.

Donald Campbell, passionate advocate of the randomised control trial as the gold standard in evaluation and key figure in the development of the quasi-experiment as the best approximation to it in normal administrative circumstances, also acknowledges the need to map the evidence into administrators' mindsets.[74] He has no doubt about the value of quantitative data and experimental reasoning to go with it, dismissing

[72] Cronbach (1980).
[73] Ibid.
[74] Campbell and Stanley (1966); Shadish, Cook and Campbell (2001).

opposition as 'a plea for the substitution of qualitative clairvoyance for the presumptive processes of science'. However, he acknowledges the leverage problem of influencing administrators through experimental evidence alone. His idea of 'qualitative knowing' suggests that unless the results of an evaluation can be understood and recognised in terms of everyday administrative experience, they are not only unlikely to be right, but, as importantly, are unlikely to be taken on board in the next phase of action.

It is being increasingly recognised that to develop a theoretical narrative that incorporates qualitative knowing and to embed it in a theory of change that translates the narrative into action requires a multiplicity of cumulative evidence in which biographical, ethnographic, survey and experimental data are all indispensable. When brought together through triangulation,[75] the data offer the possibility of additional forms of validation to compensate for methodological deficiencies. These include differential dropout between groups, and variations in implementation and outcome contexts – frequently overlooked in interpreting the results of randomised control trials. More broadly, all interventions suffer from the features of a particular context that interact with attributes of the actors (teachers and students), limiting generalisability of findings and hence their 'ecological validity'. Triangulation can help to bring about convergence across methods, analyses and contexts as an aid to ecological validation. Incompatibility across findings across contexts can help generate new theoretical insights not available from any one of them alone.

Longitudinal surveys are particularly useful as a key component of the empirical toolkit, having the merit of charting temporal shifts across a wide range of relevant variables and contexts and offering, through statistical modelling, quasi-experimental opportunities for improving causal inference. Thus the effects of other 'influence' variables potentially confounded with the effect of the intervention can be conditioned out of the estimated cause-and-effect relationship. At the same time, utilising knowledge of their combined effects increases understanding of the life-course trajectories in which the intervention is embedded. Such modelling is thus directed at developing the causal narrative by determining, illuminatively, under what conditions (personal attributes and social environment) a given intervention is most likely and least likely to work.[76]

[75] Smith (1981).
[76] Parlett and Hamilton (1972).