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Dr. John Sentamu

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Transforming Youth Custody consultation
Ministry of Justice
8.19, 102 Petty France
London
SW1H 9AJ

26th April 2013

Dear Sir/Madam,

**YMCA England response to the Ministry of Justice consultation on
Transforming Youth Custody: Putting education at the heart of detention.**

The YMCA is a major provider of a whole range of employment and training programmes to help young people into work. These include apprenticeships, vocational training, training courses, informal education and volunteering opportunities. YMCA Training is one of the UK's largest voluntary sector training providers with more than 50 training centres across the country offering opportunities to over 18,000 young people and adults every year.

YMCA George Williams College develops innovative programmes and resources supporting the needs of workers and managers. Courses include youth and community work, informal education and working with homeless people.

In addition to the work of YMCA Training and YMCA George Williams College, a number of YMCAs have also integrated education and training provision into their day to day work and operate as local providers. Examples of this would include the Halton YMCA Community Academy and the Plymouth YMCA Community Learning model.

Alongside this many YMCAs are involved in youth justice projects and operate crime reduction programmes as part of their offer to young people and the community. Exeter YMCA, for example, runs a 'Job Club' which helps homeless people, long-term unemployed and ex-offenders into employment and training.

Following the publication of the Ministry of Justice's inquiry, the YMCA national body, YMCA England, carried out a consultation of the 121 YMCAs across England on Transforming Youth Custody. Their comments and feedback form the basis of this response.



Tailoring education to young people in custody

(a) How should we best engage young people in custody (both sentenced and remanded) in education and training? What evidence is there of different approaches that work well?

The number of young people reoffending is at an exceptionally high level, with 7 out of 10 young people released from detention going on to break the law again within twelve months. This, alongside the significant cost to the public purse of holding a young person within a secure estate, means that urgent action is required. As such YMCA England welcomes the Ministry of Justice's green paper on *Transforming Youth Justice* which focuses on how youth custody can be reformed in the interests of both young people and society.

YMCA England also agrees that the approach should be education based which the YMCA believes has not to date, featured high enough as a priority. YMCAs have seen the benefit that education and skills training can play in shaping young people's lives and this is often with those young people who are hardest to reach and on the edges of society.

Young people who come out of the youth justice system will face barriers into employment but educational attainment should not be one of them. The system needs to adapt to give young people a decent chance when they leave custody. Education can be the catalyst to change young people's potential futures and this should not wait until they leave custody but should start on their first day inside.

The custodial element of the youth justice system should be utilised to offer stability in young people's lives and to give them help and an opportunity to change for the better.

The YMCA believes in a holistic approach to engaging with young people. Through all aspects of our work we focus on seeking to develop a healthy mind, body and spirit. The youth custody system should also focus on this same holistic approach in order to transform young people fully. A one size fits all model will not work within the youth justice system and especially given the varying needs, both educational and mentally, of those young people who enter.

Therefore education and training should focus on raising the numeracy and literacy levels whilst also being mindful that this may not be the best way to engage some young people. There should also be a focus on vocational education subjects and practical learning, where this is more suitable.

The development of the young person holistically is essential and their emotional wellbeing should be developed whilst in the youth custody system. Their social and emotional wellbeing will significantly impact on their ability to avoid reoffending when back in society.



It is important that the benefits of having an education and the opportunities it will present the young person with are articulated to them whilst in custody. If there is buy in from the young person at the beginning of their detention then they will be more likely to continue this through their time spent within the Young Offenders Institution (YOI) and upon release. Research has shown that there are signs of a desire from those in custody to better themselves but this could be improved further and it is essential not to waste this opportunity when they are engaged¹.

(b) How would you segment the young people in custody to deliver education and training?

When segmenting young people in the youth justice system, it is important to look at the physical age of the young offenders whilst also balancing their educational and emotional needs. The profile of young people in custody shows that 96% of them were aged 15-17 years and 17 year olds accounted for over half of the entire population². However over half of these 15-17 year olds were assessed as having the literacy levels equivalent to that expected of a 7-11 year old³. This draws attention to the need for an individually tailored approach to education being required for young offenders. Again a one size fits all model is not appropriate for supporting these young people adequately.

YMCA England would segment the young people based on three areas; age, educational attainment level and their behavioural requirements. The length of stay within the institution will also dictate how best to educate the young person as short term courses may be required if they are only going to be in custody for a few months.

(c) How might the educational balance in Secure Colleges best be struck between basic skills (literacy, numeracy, etc.), traditional academic subjects, vocational learning and wider life skills such as self-respect and self-control, communication and teamwork?

The number of hours which young people spend in educational activities whilst inside a Young Offenders Institution is insufficient, especially as some sectors of the youth estate will provide only 25 hours of education a week⁴. The focus of transforming youth custody should be on reforming the educational element but even if this reform is achieved, 25 hours per week is too little. Those in custody should be spending more time engaged in educational activities in order for the reoffending rates to be lowered.

¹ Murray, R. (2012) Children and Young People in Custody 2011/12: An analysis of the experiences of 15-18-year-olds in prison. London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons/Youth Justice Board.

² Youth Justice Board/ Ministry of Justice (2013) Youth Justice Statistics (2011/12) England and Wales. London: Youth Justice Board/Ministry of Justice.

³ Education Funding Agency (2012) Internal analysis of admin data, unpublished analysis.

⁴ Transforming Youth Custody: Putting Education at the heart of detention (2013) London: Ministry of Justice



YMCA England would agree that the same levels of expectations should be placed on young people within Young Offenders Institutions as those in mainstream education but this must be taken within the context of the young person's abilities before entering the Young Offenders Institution.

The education provided to those in custody must be sufficient to adapt to the varying levels of ability amongst the cohort. Previous studies have shown that those entering the youth justice system will more often than not have low educated achievements or experienced a troubled school life². As such the educational profile of the young person should be the initial assessment made when entering a Young Offenders Institution. The specific needs which the young person requires should be at the centre of the tailored support approach.

Within this initial assessment it should highlight the particular interests and strengths of the young person. Some will be more academically suited whilst others will be more suited to an education which is focussed around vocational and practical skills. If the youth custody system is to extract the best out of young people whilst inside then it should focus on their strengths and what approaches will elicit the most progress. In essence it is recognising that a bespoke approach will be more effective for the young person.

For many of the young people they will have already become disenfranchised with the traditional educational system. Young Offenders Institutions should use this as an opportunity to engage them in different styles of learning. Practical and vocation learning can offer young people an avenue which may not have been available to them prior to entering. It should not mean that literacy and numeracy are sacrificed but should be supplementary to these subjects or incorporated into them.

Meeting the wider needs of young people in custody

(h) How can we best meet the needs of young people in custody who are looked after children or care leavers?

A high proportion of young people who enter custody come from difficult or complex home lives⁵. Given the significant proportion of those young people who have at some point previously been under the care of the local authority, investment should be made to ensure that they do not end up in the youth custody system as well. This investment should start with greater co-ordination between local authorities and the probation service with agreed dual support packages, ensuring that both partners are working together effectively and coherently to help young people.

⁵ Murray, R. (2012) Children and Young People in Custody 2011/12: An analysis of the experiences of 15-18-year-olds in prison. London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons/Youth Justice Board.



There are already a number of examples of best practices in place where local authorities and other public bodies work effectively to steer young people away from a life in the criminal justice system. There is no reason why this cannot be developed further to assist those not re-entering the system.

Closing the gap between custody and community

(j) How would your model of a Secure College support young people leaving custody to get placements in education, training or employment on release and support them to maintain this engagement?

Focussing on education in isolation within the youth justice system will not help to reduce reoffending rates. The involvement of the community when they leave is important to maintain progress and keep young people safe. This transition has to be seen as valuable for all partners involved.

It is counterproductive for young people to leave the care of the youth custody system without being fully prepared for the outside world. Whilst it is important to have tailored support for them during their stay, it is also essential to ensuring they do not reoffend that tailored support throughout the transition back into the community is given. This should be focussed on two areas; transition into the community and society, and transition into employment, training or education.

YMCA England recommends that the youth justice system should be providing young people with a placement in education, training or employment when moving on. The longevity of these placements should be essential criteria when choosing them. Young people should want to stay on in these placements and see the value they are bringing by enriching their future prospects. The most important part of the rehabilitation process is that young people should not be leaving youth custody to simply walk straight into the job centre the following week. More has to be done to give them a focus and purpose when they leave as currently fewer than half of young offenders say they know where to get help with continuing their education when they leave prison.

The integration between education and training within Young Offenders Institutions and when they return to their communities is paramount. The vast majority of young people receive shorter Detention and Training Order (DTO) sentences and as such there should be procedures in place which allow for the continuation of study when leaving the Young Offenders Institutions. The majority of the curriculum within secure colleges should be in small accredited chunks, so that the young person has achieved outcomes prior to release. When a longer course has been started, or continued from pre-custody and not yet completed, the opportunity to complete the course in the community should be made available.

There has to be a significant investment in the models used to help them through the transition once they are released in order to decrease the chances of young people reoffending. The family and/or carer involved needs to be given assistance and guidance on what the best practices are in order to support the young person



and give them the best possible chance of success. If the young person feels isolated from the family when returning this will not aid the rehabilitation process. It is important that community investment is made to ensure the young people are encouraged back into society.

(k) More broadly, how would your model of a Secure College support greater co-operation between or integration of custodial and community services?

What is needed is a fast response so that when entering custody young people's needs are assessed immediately and a development learning plan can be put into place quickly. This quick assessment is predicated on the communication and relationship between Young Offenders Institutions, schools and local authorities.

The dissemination of information from these three partners has to be seamless and prompt in order to give those assessing young people's needs the most information and time to do this effectively. However what is being experienced in reality is that the information is not being exchanged in good time or at all between these three.

This breakdown in communication and information means that young people are not being supported as quickly or appropriately as they should be. With the focus being placed on education, the sooner this information is received the more chance Young Offenders Institutions have in engaging young people in the process.

A focus on outcomes

(v) How can tangible educational progress for different segments of the young people in custody best be measured, including by qualifications?

Literacy, numeracy and ICT progress can be measured:

- By the use of user-friendly diagnostic and screening assessments at start and at appropriate intervals thereafter;
- Through accredited outcomes such as Functional Skills assessments and GCSEs.

Personal and social development progress can be measured:

- Through accredited outcomes such as personal achievement and youth achievement awards, Wider Key Skills, Employability Awards etc;
- Through observation of the young person by those responsible for their education and others who come into contact with the young person;
- Through formal self-assessment by the young person;



- By monitoring rates of re-offending after release from custody.

Vocational progress can be measured by:

- Levels of engagement;
- Skills gained and demonstrated;
- Accredited outcomes such as BTEC Awards, Certificates and Diplomas.

Yours faithfully,



Denise Hatton

YMCA England
Chief Executive

