

# Press Release: 18 June 2008



## Young offender academies backed by reformed offenders

Plans for young offender academies for 10 to 18 year olds launched by Lord Ramsbotham have been backed by leading ex-offender charity UNLOCK, the National Association of Reformed Offenders.

Chief Executive Bobby Cummines spent 13 years in prison, was involved in gang violence, and was the youngest person in Britain to be convicted of possessing a saw-off shotgun at the age of 16.

Speaking today he said, "The academies apply the same principles as the ones I have proposed in the Diamond Project for adults: a single hub, local control and accountability, community involvement, consistent support from key agencies and a focus on training and education."

Since his release from prison in 1988, Mr Cummines has dedicated his life to crime reduction through UNLOCK; running projects, visiting schools and advising Judges, Select Committees and national governments.

"It's clear to everyone that our Government does not have the backbone to support such radical innovations. Dressing someone up in a luminous vest is not innovative or effective. It's cynical and dangerous."

Mr Cummines has proposed centres for adult offenders and the long-term unemployed and has secured private sector pledges of £2.2 billion pounds to build them. Rather than relying on the tax-payer, the investment would be repaid through rental income from the organisations operating within the centres. However, the project has been held up for two years while the Ministry of Justice 'considers its position on such schemes'.

"Offenders, young and old alike, need to feel part of the community, develop a positive sense of identity and get the skills to get a decent job" he added.

### Ends

For more information or to schedule an interview, please contact Debbie Young on Tel: 01634 247350 or [enquiries@unlock.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@unlock.org.uk)

### Notes

1. Unlock, the National Association for Reformed Offenders, exists to achieve equality for reformed offenders. It is a unique organisation founded in 1999 by a group of reformed offenders, each of whom, in their own way, successfully rebuilt their lives after serving prison sentences.
2. The UK Government Offender Index currently lists 7.3 million people
3. Bobby Cummines (Chief Executive) served 13 years in prison, across two sentences, spending many years within the UK's high security prison estate. He is now one of the most widely recognised and passionate advocates of penal reform in the UK, advising Government and the Judiciary and regularly appearing in the media. He advised the Chairman in the Zahid Mubarek Inquiry.

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4. Unlock is proposing an alternative to prison known as Diamond Project: Centres of Excellence, which will focus on vocational training, especially in the trades. Further information available from the website <http://www.unlock.org.uk/campaign.aspx>
5. The Government's own Social Exclusion Unit identified that the most powerful drivers of crime are community deprivation and income inequalities resulting from unemployment.
6. The drivers of social exclusion include low income, unemployment, education, ill-health, housing issues and past criminal convictions.
7. The cost of re-offending is £11 billion per year.