

## **Expression of Interest – How does having English as an additional language affect experiences and outcomes for individuals involved in the criminal justice system?**

The Bell Foundation is interested in hearing from university teams, think tanks, individual researchers, and other organisations with the capacity to deliver the research project outlined in this document.

The Foundation also plans to create an expert advisory group for the research, more detail is included at the end of this document.

### **About us**

Established in 2012, The Bell Foundation works with partners to change practice, policy and systems for children, adults and communities in the UK disadvantaged through language. In 2015, the Foundation launched 'Language for Change' a grant-making and research programme on the needs of prisoners and offenders for whom English is not a first language and it has funded projects including a peer advisor scheme, ESOL adapted reading programmes and development of a screening tool.

Following this earlier phase, the Foundation has now developed a broader Criminal Justice Programme, expanding the Programme's scope to include the needs of victims of crime as well as offenders and broadening to include a wider variety of contexts, recognising that in some cases, offenders may also be victims of crime. The Foundation has developed a research agenda, which alongside practical projects, aims to deepen understanding of the key issues.

### **How does the English language barrier affect experiences and outcomes?**

Language is often mentioned as a barrier for wellbeing and outcomes for offenders and victims of crime in the criminal justice system<sup>1</sup>. But there has been no in-depth examination of the impact that struggling to communicate or comprehend in English can have on individuals both in prison and within the community. There is little research around the needs of victims of crime although language is regularly mentioned as a barrier to crime reporting and effective victim liaison<sup>2</sup> with specific types of crime. For victims of crime there are support services available to help recovery and support access to justice, but with the high cost of interpreters, language support is highly variable.

### **About the project**

Given the gaps in evidence, The Bell Foundation intends to commission research on the needs of individuals with English as an additional language in contact with the criminal justice system.

The purpose of the research is:

- **Objective 1:** To guide the Foundation's future work and help focus resources on the most impactful interventions
- **Objective 2:** To build an evidence base for interventions and policy
- **Objective 3:** To identify promising practice and recommendations to improve experiences and outcomes of individuals with English as an additional language

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<sup>1</sup> HM Inspectorate of Prisons "Foreign national prisoners: a thematic review" July 2006

<https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprisoners/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2014/06/Foreign-National-Prisoners-2005.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/how-language-and-cultural-barriers-prevent-some-victims-accessing-sexual-assault-exams>

- **Objective 4:** To document the experiences of a group of individuals whose voices and experiences often go unheard

The Bell Foundation has drafted the research questions below to guide initial thinking.

### **Research questions regarding offenders**

1. Does having English as an additional language affect an offenders' outcomes from involvement in the criminal justice system?
2. How does having English as an additional language affect wellbeing when in the criminal justice system?
3. How do we improve the experiences of individuals with English as an additional language in the criminal justice system?

### **Related issues for consideration**

- Impact of different contexts such as police custody, community orders
- Multiple dimensions of language, such as differences in speaking, listening, reading
- Impact of frontline staff (including third sector) on individuals with English as an additional language

### **Research questions regarding victims**

1. How does having English as an additional language affect outcomes and experiences for victims of crime?
2. How can victims of crime with English as a second or additional language be better supported to access support services?

### **Related issues for consideration**

- Particular crime types with higher numbers of individuals with English as an additional language
- Crime types requiring long-term or specific forms of support
- Impact of frontline staff (including third sector) on individuals with English as an additional language

### **Outputs**

Outputs will be agreed with the chosen contractor, the Foundation envisages the following:

- Interim findings report and full final report
- Separate reports relating to findings for offenders and victims and relating to contexts
- Evidence-based policy recommendations
- A structured approach to capturing the views of experts, and relevant stakeholders
- A full dissemination strategy
- Output focusing on the voices of those with English as a additional language who have had involvement in the criminal justice system

### **Size of the project**

The project has a ceiling of £150,000 over three years.

## **Methodologies**

The Foundation anticipates a mixed methodologies project using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Shortlisted research teams will need to provide information on how they intend to capture the views of Individuals with English as an additional language, some of whom may have very little knowledge of English. As a grant-funder, the Foundation also has five current projects centred on offenders with English as an additional language or Foreign National Prisoners. In May 2018 the Foundation launched a grant-funding programme to support victim-focused organisations, to improve support for victims of crime with English as an additional language. There will therefore be a body of projects and possible contexts for research and, if relevant, evaluation and demonstration of promising practice.

## **Expert Advisory Group**

The Foundation will recruit a group of experts to help maximise impact and awareness of the research. The group will meet twice a year, and additional teleconferences on specific issues may also be scheduled. The Foundation will reimburse reasonable travel expenses.

Individuals interested in participating in the group should contact Letty Thomas, Programme Officer at [Leticia.thomas@bell-foundation.org.uk](mailto:Leticia.thomas@bell-foundation.org.uk)