

5 The educational and training needs of Victorian prisoners

This section details the key findings from the data analysis of the educational and training needs survey undertaken across Victorian prisons during October and November 2002. Key trends are identified in terms of prisoner needs.

5.1 The prisoner population

'The majority of men and women in custody have major needs in terms of the essential skills required for effective social and economic participation including basic literacy and numeracy. The majority of men and women are unemployed at the time of entry into the prison system. A significant number of prisoners have drug or alcohol problems with backgrounds of social disadvantage, significant health issues and poor family and social links.'

Dunne, F *Framework for Reducing Re-offending: Differentiated Case Management (DCM) in Victorian Corrections*, September 2000

5.2 Access and demand

5.2.1 Demand for education

'Education and training needs enhancement to enable the attraction of prisoners who see themselves as not capable enough to engage in the current education and training on offer.'

Submission to the Review of Education and Training
Provision in Victorian Prisons
The Brosnan Centre, Jesuit Social Services

As discussed previously, the demand for education programs is determined by a range of factors; the results of assessments undertaken at the time of reception, the goals outlined in the prisoner's IMP, awareness by prisoners of programs, the degree of interest expressed by an individual prisoner in participating in such programs and the availability of programs.

Prisoner attitudes to education are a major influence on demand and successful participation. Adult learners, generally with poor previous experiences in education, are likely to be resistant to further formal learning. This tendency increases with age and with perceptions about the value of further learning and

labour market participation. Most prison education centres seek to use broader adult learning principles of self-directed and learner-centred approaches to learning to instil an appreciation of the benefits of learning and to build learners' confidence and to assist prisoners' engagement in education.

Prisoner attitudes to education were evident during the consultation process, with older prisoners in the peer support network seeing education and training as being of great value for younger prisoners but 'not for them'. Other prisoners were passionate about the importance of learning for their future and expressed considerable frustration at the barriers they felt were denying their 'right' to education.

Issue: The attitude of prisoners to education is a key factor influencing prisoner involvement in education. There is a need to create an environment for prisoners built on adult learning principles attempts to address negative perception and redress past experiences of 'failure' in learning.

5.3 The survey

A questionnaire survey instrument was developed as part of the methodology for this study and administered in all prisons during the second semester of 2002. The purpose of the prisoner survey was to identify the extent of education and training undertaken by prisoners prior to their incarceration and to identify their current educational and training needs. Areas covered by the survey instrument include basic demographic background, education background, preferred learning styles, literacy and numeracy levels, experience of education and training in prison, assessment of learning while in prison, vocational background, other training undertaken and future plans.

Completion of the survey by prisoners was not compulsory, and response rates varied widely between the prisons (Figure 13). A detailed supplementary technical report covers all the data gathered via the survey, is an addendum to this report.

Figure 13: Response rates for individual prisons

Prison	Sample	Percentage of population at that prison
Ararat	95	24.6
Barwon	152	39.6
Beechworth	50	38.7
Bendigo	62	78.4
Dhurringile	13	8.2
Fulham Correctional Centre	130	17.8
Langi Kal Kal	59	57.2
Loddon	64	19.9
Melbourne Assessment	200	54.8
Dame Phyllis Frost	72	47.7
Port Philip	85	13.5
Tarrengower	28	53.8
Won Wron	37	31.8
Unknown	2	
Total	1049	

The instrument included the collection of basic demographic data about respondents, together with questions specifically designed to elicit information on prisoner background, prison experience and personal aspirations (targeting responses relevant to their lives before, during and after sentence). Matters such as educational history, educational aspirations, and training undertaken and desired were canvassed. In particular, prisoners were asked to record self-perceptions of skill levels in the basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy, since the literature on prisons (both local and international) suggests that attainments in these areas is crucial. These deserve to be a major focal point for the design of educational programming delivered in the hope of reducing recidivism. Figure 14 provides a comparison of the demographic data for the respondents to the survey compared to that for the entire prison population.

It can be seen from this figure that females are slightly over-represented in the sample; however, it is unlikely that this would greatly effect the interpretation of the survey results. The proportion of very young offenders (those under 25 years of age) is virtually identical to that in the population, and there is a reasonable match for other groups in the age distribution (i.e. the differences in distribution are not significantly different). On the other demographic indicators, the sample provides similar proportions of those born outside Australia and those of indigenous background to those in the general prison population. Accordingly, the sample, although self-selected, are representative of the prison population, meaning that inferences about the population can be reliably drawn from these data.

Figure 14: Comparison of sample characteristics to those of the prison population

	Percentage of sample	Percentage of prison population 2002
<i>Sex</i>		
Male	90.5	92.3
Female	9.5	7.7
<i>Age</i>		
19 or under	3.0	
20-24	17.6	
<i>Subtotal under 25</i>	20.6	19.6
25-29	22.5	20.4
30-34	17.6	18.7
35-39	12.1	13.6
40-44	9.5	10.1
45-49	8.0	7.1
50-54	4.4	3.9
55-59	3.3	2.9
60-64	1.2	1.5
65 or over	1.0	1.7
<i>Birthplace</i>		
Australia	78.2	75.8
Elsewhere	21.8	24.2
<i>Indigenous status</i>		
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	4.8	4.6

5.3.1 Non-literate respondents

Due to concerns about potential bias in the use of pen and paper survey tool, focus groups were undertaken at Port Phillip, Melbourne Assessment Prison and Dame Phyllis Frost prisons, with 27 prisoners identified as having low literacy and having not completed the original survey.

The focus groups were voluntary and conducted in January 2003. The purpose of the focus groups was to conduct the survey utilising a means that was not dependent on an individual's literacy skills.

With the exception of gender balance (the total of 27 included many more women (one-third) than the total female proportion of the prison population indicates - about one tenth), the group parallels the full prison population demographic profile reasonably well.

Almost all (23) were born in Australia, one is an Aboriginal person, and 23 spoke or signed English as their first language as a child. Of those who did not, two

spoke Italian, one Greek and one Vietnamese. The age range mirrors the full survey population quite well:

- 3 are 19 or under;
- 9 are between 20 and 24;
- 9 between 25 and 29;
- 3 between 30 and 39, and
- 3 are 40 or older.

All but one had lived in Australia all their lives or for more than 20 years. Six male prisoners were currently on remand, but their questionnaire responses indicated that they had all had previous experience of prison education during earlier sentencing.

The results gained from individuals participating in the focus groups reflected that same pattern of responses provided from the original sample. There were no identifiable trends in the responses from those in the focus group that were divergent to those provided by the original population of respondents.

For the purposes of this report, the data gathered from the focus groups has been incorporated into the overall analysis.

For further information on the results of the focus groups refer to Appendix C.

Finding: The population of survey respondents is generally representative of the prisoner population in terms of key demographic characteristics. Consequently, it is possible to generalise the findings from the survey to the wider prisoner population.

5.4 General trends

Figure 15 shows the last full year at school for the prisoners who responded to this question. Almost 60 per cent of prisoners completed Year 10 or higher, with around one in five completing a Year 12 qualification. It would be expected that the older a prisoner is, the less likely he or she is to have completed secondary education, however, this is not the case. Based on the analysis (and other than the 65 and over age group), the under-25 year old group is the least well educated. In this group, only just over one-half (51%) completed Year 12, compared to more than 60 per cent of those in the over 40 age group.

For those individual prisoners that participated in the focus groups, about half had left school before or at the end of Year 9, with two men and two women having left without secondary school experience. Four of the 27 (all men)

claimed education in post-compulsory years, but the language ability of two of them places some doubt on that.

Figure 15: Last full year at school

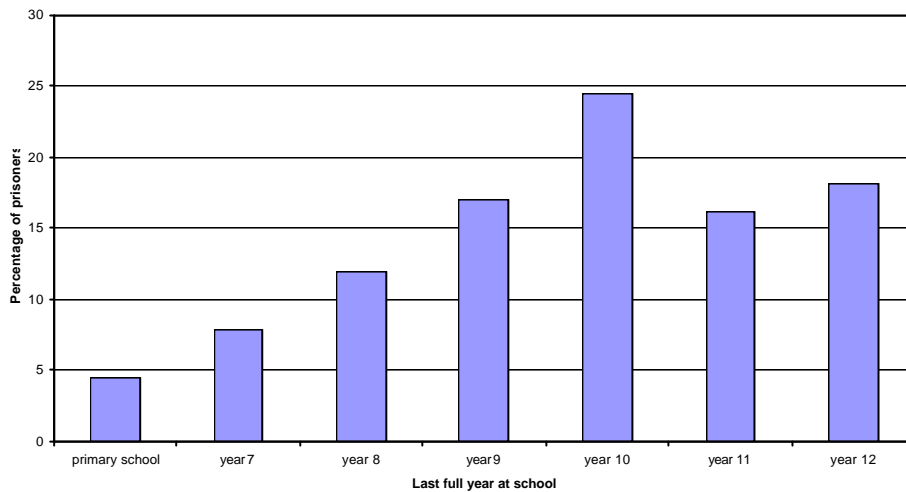
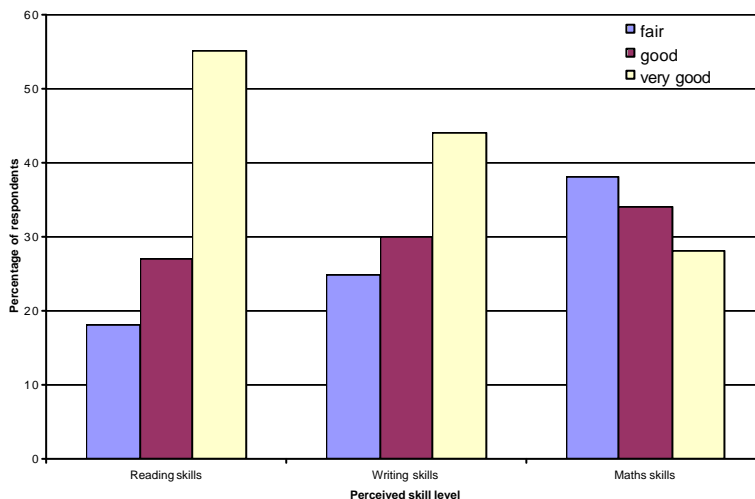


Figure 16 shows the perceptions of prisoners about their basic levels of literacy in reading, writing and mathematics, while Figure 17 shows the perception for computer skills.

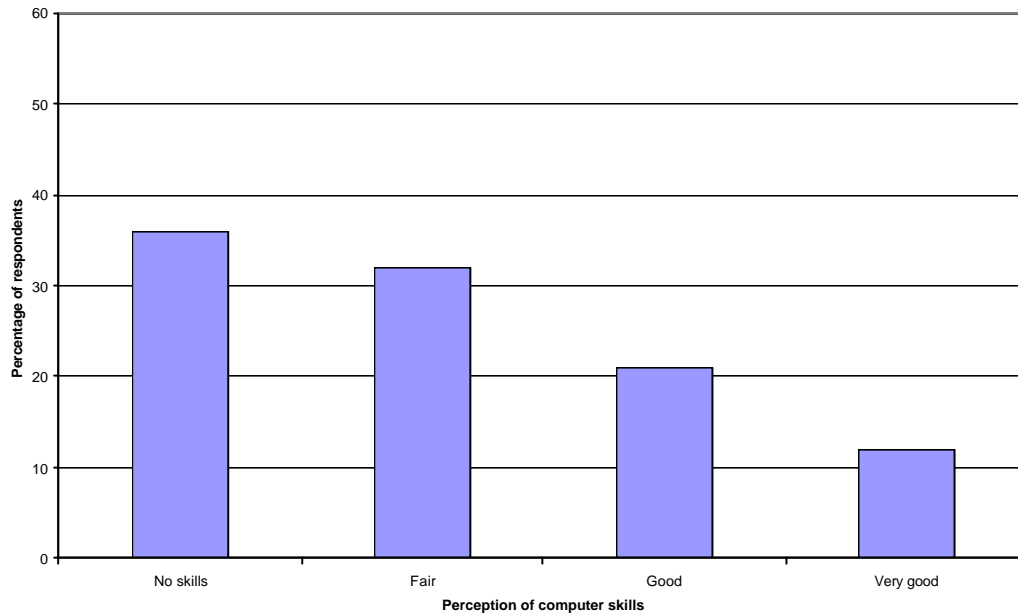
Figure 16: Perception of basic literacy and numeracy skills by prisoners



While it appears from Figure 16 that just over half (around 54%) of the prisoners appear to rate their reading skills as very good, less than one-half (43%) rate their writing skills at this level, and less than 30 per cent rate their mathematics skills at this level. The vast majority (a little over two-thirds) of prisoners rate their computer skills as non-existent or fair. Sixty per cent of respondents wish

to improve their reading skills, 67 per cent their writing skills, 70 per cent their maths skills and 66 per cent would definitely want computer training.

Figure 17: Perception of computing skills by prisoners



5.4.1 Focus group respondents

The reports offered by prisoners of their skill levels adequately mirrors the findings of the main survey population. The most important finding in both strands is that, even when self-assessment of skill levels is high, the desire for improvement of current levels is extremely strong.

Figure 18: Prisoner perception of basic skills

	Reading	Writing	Maths
Fair	13	10*	17
Good	5	9	7
Very good	9	7	3
Want to improve skills	23	23	22
Do not want to improve	4	4	5

**One prisoner, a male, wrote "Poor" alongside his response. This same person reported having left school by running away from home while in Grade 4, and having had two weeks of secondary education before being expelled.*

In questions relating to self-report of levels of other skills, responses may be sorted as below:

Figure 19: Prisoner perception of other skill areas

	Using computers	Working and talking in a group with others	Talking to and getting on with others in a work group
None	7		
Fair	14	14*	7*
Good	3	8	12
Very good	3	5	8
Definitely want training to improve skills	21		
Maybe want training to improve skills	3		
Do not want training	3		

**One prisoner, a male, wrote "Poor" alongside his responses for these two columns. This was the same person reported above as having had minimal school experience.*

As with the main sample, this sub-group show a similarly strong desire for upgrading of computer skills. Only two have a computer in their cell, neither wanting further training.

5.5 Factor analysis

A factor analysis⁶⁸ was conducted with a number of variables that were thought might influence willingness to participate in educational programs. The following underlying components were found:

- “*Acquisition of basic skills*”, which contains items regarding skill levels – in reading, writing, and maths. From the analysis, it is evident that prisoners are most concerned about, and give poor ratings to, their skill levels in these basic areas. It appears that writing skills are those that cause the most concern.
- “*Acquisition of interpersonal skills*”, defines those items that reflect prisoners’ perceptions of their level of social skills, which in turn facilitate better interpersonal relationships.
- “*Acquisition of computer skills*”. Training and courses in computing skills in and out of prison is clearly a priority for many prisoners.
- “*Willingness to undertake education*”. Items that reflect a prisoner’s willingness to participate in educational programs, and a sense of purpose for such education.

Prisoners recognise that skills in these areas are important and needed. These factors offer a clear indication of a possible basis for programs that prisoners indicate that they need or desire as well as basic skills training.

Finding: Based on the factor analysis, the following areas of need identified by prisoners that are:

- ***Basic skills acquisition – specifically writing, reading and numeracy***
- ***Social skills to facilitate better interpersonal relationships.***
- ***Computing skills.***

5.5.1 Willingness to undertake education

Thirty-seven per cent of all prisoners had gained some form of qualifications while in prison, and almost two thirds (64%) believed that training undertaken while in prison would help them to get a job. Prisoners were asked whether they were doing an Education Centre course at the present time, and if so, which course they were currently doing. Of the 420 (40%) who said that they were

⁶⁸ Varimax rotation

PUBLIC SERVICES

The Review of Education and
Training Provision in Victorian
Prisons - The Way Forward
31 March 2003



doing a course, 333 specified the particular course they were undertaking. Of these, 43 per cent were taking courses in Information technology (IT), computing or clerical skills, with a further 20 per cent enrolled in literacy courses. This was evident for females⁶⁹ in particular (see Figure 20), of whom 64 per cent were enrolled in IT courses and 10 per cent in literacy courses, while for males there were around 40 per cent undertaking IT courses and 22 per cent literacy courses.

Figure 20 Courses being undertaken by prisoners

Course type	Males (%)	Females (%)	Overall (%)
N	291	42	
IT/computing/clerical	40	64	43
Literacy	22	9	20
Workplace skills non-service	11	0	10
Service skills –hospitality etc	12	2	10
Trades or craftsmanship	13	24	15
Drugs	2	0	1

For many of the prisoners (46%), the course was undertaken for personal development while, for a further 38 per cent, the reason was to learn new skills. While around one-half of all prisoners agreed that they had learned some useful practical skills from their particular educational program, it is perhaps of some concern that almost one-fifth said that they had learned nothing or very little from the course. To put this into context, however, almost two-fifths of all prisoners responded that they had learned nothing or very little from their billet work, industry or other programs.

Thirty-three per cent of prisoners said that they were on a waiting list for a course, and this was more so for female prisoners, of whom a little over 40 per cent were on a waiting list. Most prisoners were waiting for IT/computing classes (particularly females), with quite a significant number also waiting for courses in food or hospitality (Figure 21). It is noteworthy that, while a large proportion of prisoners identified literacy as an area in which they needed to improve skills, only one in five males and one in ten females were actually undertaking such courses, and no females and fewer than one in ten males were on the waiting list for such a course.

Prisoners were asked how they chose the courses they were participating in, and were able to provide multiple responses. Primarily, the course was chosen because it was a special interest (49%), however, two in five prisoners believed that it would also help them to get a job. One-fifth of respondents said that the course they were doing was all that was available, and a further one-fifth that it

⁶⁹ These data will be presented separately for males and females as the provision of programs and opportunity to participate may be different in male and female prisons.

helped fill in time. Seven per cent of prisoners said that they were doing a course because it had been suggested by Education staff within the prison.

Prisoners were also asked what particular course they were waiting for, and it can be seen in Figure 21 that the highest proportion of both male and female prisoners had been waiting for IT courses. Again, literacy courses were not high in importance for prisoners, even though literacy had been an area in which additional skills were identified as being needed.

Figure 21 Courses prisoners are waiting for

	Males (%)	Females (%)	Overall (%)
N	223	22	
Personal development	9	9	8
Literacy	7	0	7
IT/clerical/clerical	34	59	36
Horticulture	7	4	6
Art	5	4	5
Food, hospitality	18	23	19
Forklift	13	0	11
Welding/fabrication	8	0	7

Prisoners were also asked whether they had wanted to do a course but been unable to. Of the respondents, 54 per cent agreed that this was the case. Ten per cent of prisoners started a course but were unable to complete it because they changed prisons, for 20 per cent the waiting list was too long, while for six per cent the course stopped. The remaining prisoners provided other reasons for not doing a course.

Figure 22 Courses prisoners would like to do but unable to

	Males (%)	Females (%)	Overall (%)
N	283	28	
Personal development	12	4	11
Literacy	8	18	9
IT / computers	33	46	34
Small business	4	4	4
VCE, tertiary education	10	11	10
Food, hospitality	14	18	14
Fork lift	12	0	11
welding	6	0	6

Fifty-seven per cent of prisoners surveyed said that they did not feel that they were given enough information about the Education Centre courses available in the prison. As a follow-up, they were also asked to give some thought to ways in which this could be improved. The summary of responses to this item can be seen in Figure 23.

Figure 23 Prisoners' views on ways to provide better information about courses

	Males (%)	Females (%)	Overall (%)
N	353	33	
Brochures/handouts	54	67	55
Interviews	34	18	33
Information at admission	11	15	12
On-line access	1	0	1

Prisoners were asked to list other things that they felt could be useful to them. While the responses to this were very diverse, they were categorised into eight basic areas, and the responses to each can be seen in Figure 24. Two-fifths of all prisoners identified the provision of a wider range of courses as being the main area that would be useful to them, while approximately one-fifth of prisoners identified better access to courses and in particular computer courses or facilities (a further one-fifth).

Figure 24 Other areas of education felt useful for prisoners

	Males (%)	Females (%)	Overall
N	281	27	
Anything	8	4	8
More access to courses	16	33	18
Wider range of courses	41	33	40
Computing/IT skills/facilities	22	22	22
More literacy skills	5	0	5
More licensing-transport etc	8	7	8

A little over one-half of the prisoners surveyed said that they planned to do a course after their release, and overwhelmingly computer or IT courses were identified as those that prisoners would like to do. A variety of reasons were provided as to why prisoners would not do any further courses, and they responded primarily that it was more important to get a job (45%) or that it was unaffordable (14%).

5.5.2 Focus group respondents

Of the 27 participants, 17 had, and ten had not, had contact with the education centre in their jail. Almost all those who had not had such contact were in at the

PUBLIC SERVICES

The Review of Education and
Training Provision in Victorian
Prisons - The Way Forward
31 March 2003



Melbourne Assessment Prison where, the staff member informed me, there is no Centre as such. Seven are doing courses at the moment (IT: Woodwork; Career Education: Basic Literacy: Web Page design: Art; a Pre-release program), and 21 would like to be. Nine of these are on waiting lists, about which there was much comment, dealt with in a later section recording oral and written comments. Four are waiting for computing courses, two for English: the others include Horticulture, Zoology, Art and Food Handling. Ten had done Education Centre courses in other prisons previously. Including other prison-run courses, the mean take-up was between 2 and 5, with some having done as many as 11-15.

Their reasons for take-up were a special personal interest (14) and the feeling that that course might help them get a job (13). Four did a course to fill in time, and five because it was all that was available. When asked if they had wanted to do a course and not been able to (in any prison): nine said no, but twice as many (18) said "yes". Their reasons varied:

- For 10, it was because the waiting list was too long (five of the nine women: five of the eighteen males);
- Five because it was not available at that particular prison;
- Two because of movement between prisons; and
- One because it "just stopped".

Three women and six men had gained some qualification while in prison - the other two-thirds had not.

Twenty-one prisoners felt that they were not given enough information about availability of courses: one who felt he had been informed sufficiently supplemented this with "not that there are that many". Suggestions as to how the situation might be improved ranged from publicity/brochures (12) to admission interviews (5), and beyond: "just plain asking us what we need"; "online access"; "they should market their wares"; "a survey like this one".

Expressed views on how they felt they learned best varied by gender. Traditional classroom teaching was favoured by nine men and one woman: learning alone with a teacher available to help by four of the eighteen men, but six of the nine women.

Finding: Over 54 percent of prisoners indicated they had been willing to be involved in education, but had been unable to do so.

With regard to the educational usefulness of various aspects of prison life, there was relatively little said:

- 14 mentions for 'education' courses (plus two who entered "nothing");
- 8 for 'industry';

- 9 for 'other programs', six men referring very positively to anger management and drug and alcohol courses;
- 9 for 'billet work', four of them referring to cleaning.

In response to "what else would be useful to you", there was again a wide but not intense response: the 22 entries were derived from only half the group. Information technology skills accounted for five responses.

5.6 Gender differences

While the low number of female respondents means that some caution should be used when interpreting the findings of this section, the statistically significant areas of gender difference were that females were found to be:

- More confident than males about their language skills (both in reading and writing);
- Less likely than males to have done an education centre course at another prison, but more likely to be doing one now, more likely than males to plan to do some training after release, and more likely than males to believe that training undertaken in prison will help get a job;
- Less likely to have completed an apprenticeship, more likely to have undertaken some form of computer training, and more likely to believe that they need to have more computer training;
- Very unlikely to have obtained a trade ticket; and
- Less likely than males to have a computer in their cell.

No significant gender differences were found in male and female prisoners' perceptions of their skills in either maths or computing. Given this however, 38 per cent of males and 44 per cent of females rated their maths skills as only fair, while 69 per cent of males and 60 per cent of females rated their computer skills as non-existent or fair.

Most prisoners would like to improve their skills in the basic literacy and numeracy areas, with 61 per cent of males and 59 per cent of females wanting to improve their skills in reading, 68 per cent of males and 62 per cent of females wanting to improve their writing skills and 69 per cent of males and 77 per cent of females wanting to improve their mathematics skills.

Apart from these trends, female prisoners identified the similar needs to the rest of the respondent population.

Finding: Based on analysis of gender differences the following trends are notable:

- ***Females were found to be more confident than males about their language skills (both in reading and writing);***
- ***No significant gender differences were found in male and female prisoners' perceptions of their skills in either maths or computing; and***
- ***Most prisoners would like to improve their skills in the basic literacy and numeracy areas.***

5.7 Age differences

There were no significant differences found for perceptions of basic literacy skills by age group.

Between approximately 15 percent and 25 per cent of those in all age groups felt that their reading skills were only fair (and this was the highest for those in their early 40s, but was next highest for those in the youngest age groups), while between 17 per cent and 35 per cent of those in all age groups felt that their writing skills were only fair.

Between 30 per cent and 46 per cent of prisoners in all age groups felt that their mathematics skills were only fair (and this was highest in the lowest age groups), and between 25 per cent and 48 per cent of prisoners in all age groups classed their computing skills as non-existent. Those who were in the youngest age groups (i.e. 25 years under) did not show the level of confidence in their computer skills that would be expected from their age group, with one-quarter saying that they had no computer skills at all.

The majority of prisoners in all age groups wanted to improve their skills in literacy and numeracy, and the majority of all prisoners wanted to have computer training, except for those in the oldest two age groups.

While no other significant differences were found, other findings were:

- The majority (40%) of prisoners have undertaken between 2-5 courses while in prison;
- For those prisoners under 65 years, more prisoners have wanted, but been unable, to do a course while in prison;
- In broad terms, for those prisoners under 60, between 33 and 62 per cent of prisoners have gained some qualifications in prison;

- Approximately 56 percent of the respondents have had training outside prison;
- Of those prisoners who have completed TAFE courses at some level or another, Level 1 was the most common qualification level attained for the very young, while for those in older age groups, level 2 and particularly level 3 was also commonly attained;
- For those prisoners below 25 years, about half (43%) of those who began an apprenticeship had not proceeded beyond 1st year, and only about 20 per cent had completed;
- For those prisoners older than 25 years, approximately half (60%) or more of the respondents had completed an apprenticeship if they had started one; and
- For those prisoners under 60 years, more than half (64%) of the respondents believe a prison training course will help them get a job.

Finding: Based on an analysis of ages, the following trends are notable:

- ***There were no significant differences found for perceptions of basic literacy skills by age group;***
- ***The majority of prisoners in all but a few age groups wanted to improve their skills in literacy and numeracy, and***
- ***The majority of all prisoners wanted to have computer training.***

5.8 Indigenous status

It is apparent that the Indigenous prisoners' perception of their skills is that they are less skilled in all areas, and this is statistically significant in the areas of reading, writing and maths skills. Indigenous prisoners were also significantly less likely to have completed courses in other prisons or to have completed any other training courses outside prison or school.

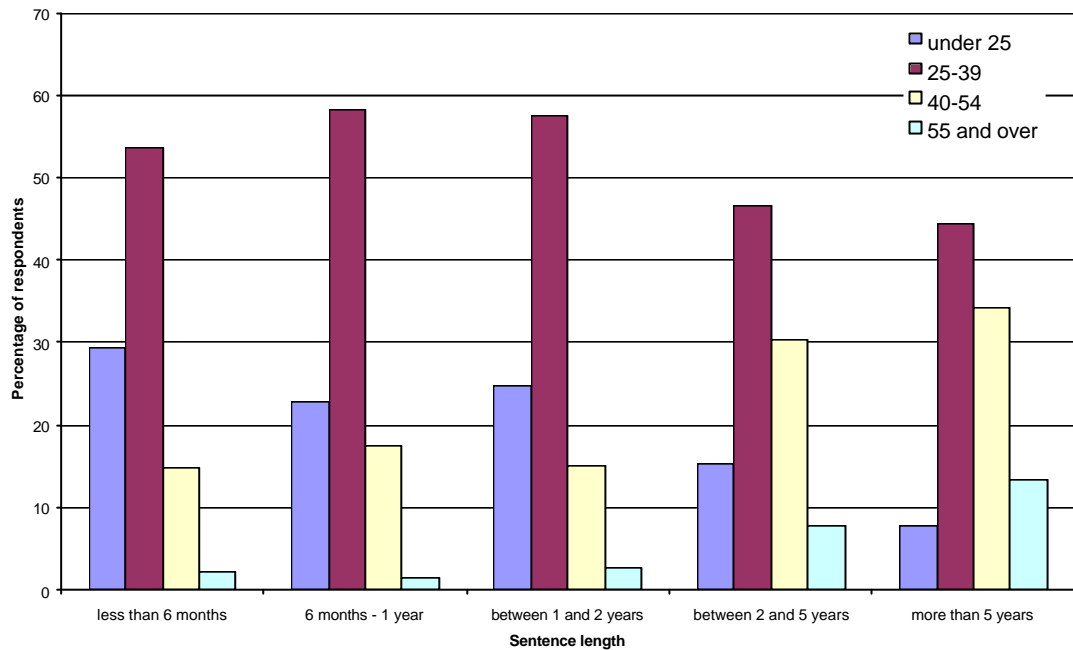
Apart from these trends, Indigenous prisoners identified similar training needs to the rest of the respondent population, wanting to improve their literacy, numeracy and computing skills.

5.9 Sentence length

Preparedness to participate in educational courses while in prison must be in some ways predicated by the length of sentence of the prisoner. In this section, a number of the key variables are analysed by sentence length.

Almost one in five prisoners are younger than 25, and a further half are between 25 and 40 years of age. Of those on short sentences (i.e. less than six months), just under 30 per cent are under 25, and 55 per cent are between 25 and 40 years of age. Around two per cent of those in the over 55 age group are incarcerated for a short period of time.

Figure 25: Sentence length by age group



Basic skills are an issue for all the majority of prisoners. Based on the analysis, it appears that those serving the shortest sentences are most concerned about their basic literacy, mathematics and computer skills. Around one-third of those whose sentence is less than six months rate their reading skills and their writing skills as poor. Those on longer sentences generally rate both their reading and writing skills as very good. However, given this, there is still a perception amongst all prisoners that their skills could be improved, with more than half of prisoners in each category wanting to improve their basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics.

Almost one-half of those serving short sentences describe their computer skills as non-existent, compared to around one in three of those serving sentences of more than five years. Curiously though, more of those serving longer sentences wish to improve their skills in this area, than those serving shorter sentences, although the majority of this latter group also want to improve their skills. Those serving longer sentences were also more likely than those on short sentences to have access to a computer in their cell or unit.

Figure 26 Desire for computer training by sentence length

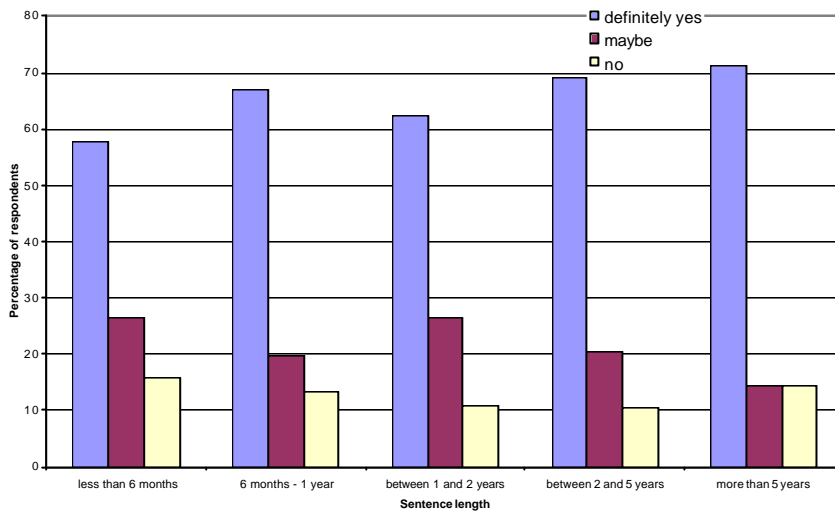
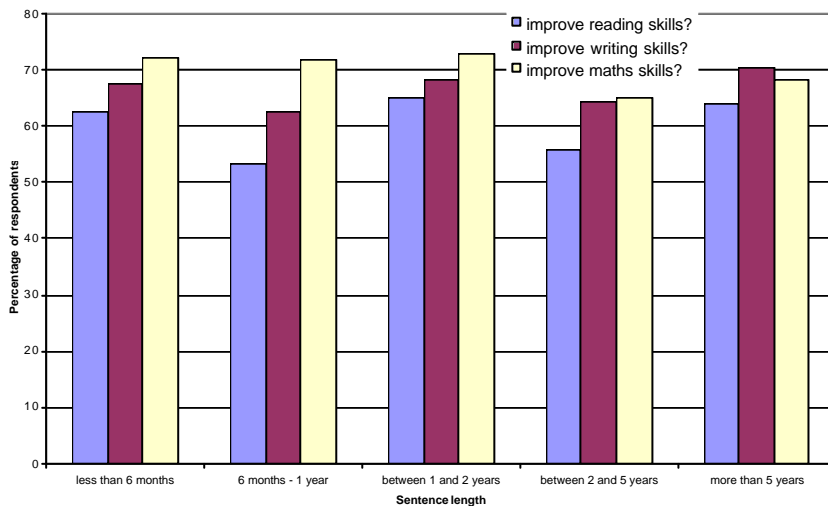


Figure 27: Desire to improve reading, writing and maths skills by sentence length



Not surprisingly, those in prison for longer sentences are more likely to have had contact with the education centre in prison (although half of those with the shortest sentences had also had contact), more likely to be currently doing an education centre course, and more likely to have done other courses in prisons. Most commonly, of those who had participated in educational activities while in prison, respondents had completed between 2 and 5 courses.

Large proportions of prisoners from all groups indicated that they had wished to do a course but been unable to:

- 43 per cent of prisoners with a short sentence and
- 63 per cent of prisoners with a sentence length of more than 5 years)

had been unable to undertake a course that they had interest. The main reason for this inability appears to be that waiting lists were too long, particularly for those prisoners with longer sentences.

Sixty five per cent of prisoners with long sentences indicated that there was not enough information provided about courses. From the survey results, it is unclear as to the reasons for this trend.

These data suggest that there is a need for basic skills courses in English, mathematics and computing to be available for all prisoners, but particularly short courses for those undertaking short sentences.

Finding: In relation to sentence length the following trends are notable:

- ***Basic skills are an issue, and it would appear to be those serving the shortest sentences that are most concerned about their basic literacy, mathematics and computer skills;***
- ***Regardless of sentence length there is a perception amongst all prisoners that their skills could be improved;***
- ***Those serving longer sentences were also more likely than those on short sentences to have access to a computer in their cell or unit;***
- ***Those in prison for longer sentences are more likely to have had contact with the education centre (although half of those with the shortest sentences had also had contact), more likely to be currently doing an education centre course, and more likely to have done other courses in prison; and***
- ***There is a need for basic skills courses in English, mathematics and computing to be available for all prisoners, but particularly short courses for those undertaking short sentences.***

5.10 Conclusion

In conclusion, prisoners are not confident of their literacy, numeracy or computing skills, and even those who think they are very good in these areas seem to think that they still need up-skilling in these areas. Though there are

PUBLIC SERVICES

The Review of Education and
Training Provision in Victorian
Prisons - The Way Forward

31 March 2003



some differences in the population in terms of specific demographic characteristics – gender, age, Indigenous status – all still identify that literacy, numeracy and computing remain key priorities.

There is also recognition that a large proportion of the prisoner population also require social skills development.

In terms of sentence length, those who are serving short sentences identify that they need access to education as much, or even more, than those serving longer sentences.

There seems to be a reasonable amount of publicity about education within prisons, although this is perhaps dependent on the individual prison.

There are a large proportion of prisoners who would like to do a course but have been unable to do so, mainly because of long waiting lists.