

# THE PRISON ADULT LITERACY SURVEY

## RESULTS AND IMPLICATIONS



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and Mary Kett  
Further Education Co-ordinator, Department of Education and Science

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## FOREWORD

I warmly welcome this report on the Prison Adult Literacy Survey. It clarified the dimensions of what many of us have long recognised as the major educational need among prisoners, it teases out the implications of very comprehensive research and it renews a formidable challenge for those of us working in the Prison Education Service.

The quality of the research and report is no less than I would expect given the background, awareness and skill of the authors. Dr. Mark Morgan of St. Patrick's College, Dublin, had a lead role in conducting the International Adult Literacy Survey in Ireland, which was published in 1997 and which determined the extent and nature of literacy problems in the community. So, we now have the benefit of his extensive knowledge and experience from such larger contexts being applied to the particular setting of prisons. Mary Kett is employed by CDVEC and is currently on secondment to the Department of Education and Science. She has brought to the research partnership a great deal of experience as a teacher and manager in prison education, and many years interest in all aspects of adult literacy, within and beyond prisons, in Ireland and abroad.

Literacy difficulties among adults in our society are often hidden and this compounds efforts to address them. There tends to be a similar reluctance among men and women in prison who have such problems to come forward and seek help. But there are many indications that the scale of reading and writing problems is far greater among the prison population than in the community outside. That perception would hold true in Ireland and internationally.

This report now gives us the dimensions of the literacy problem among prisoners. In a way, it simply confirms what many close to the ground always sensed - but now we have in sharp relief what was previously guessed at. Some may be surprised, however, at the more extensive literacy needs of younger prisoners, against the general trend in the outside community where it was found older people tend to have more difficulty. Such stark facts should help focus our efforts.

For decades now, major efforts have been made by prison educators to help those with literacy problems, and this was reflected in policy and strategy.

## THE PRISON ADULT LITERACY SURVEY: RESULTS AND IMPLICATIONS

Some pioneering adult literacy material has been developed in Irish prisons over the years, driven by an adult education philosophy and methodology. Policy documents in the early 1980's spoke of "prioritising in terms of disadvantage"; more recent strategy statements refer to the prioritisation of those with basic education needs. We need to constantly remind ourselves to keep to the fore the needs of those who have missed out most in terms of past educational opportunity.

Attempts in the coming years to reach and teach those in prison who face literacy difficulties will be helped enormously by this landmark research. But there are other current developments which complement this research project. Within prison education we are offering more systematic training in adult literacy teaching and also developing assessment procedures appropriate to adults - both of these developments are deliberately in tune with best practice outside prisons, and both are being worked on in close association with NALA, the National Adult Literacy Agency. A further particularly important initiative is the report recently compiled by prison educators, Guidelines for Quality Literacy Work in Prisons, which in many ways sets out a framework for us for responding more efficiently to the huge problems identified in the Morgan and Kett research.

The extent to which the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Irish Prison Service recognised the importance of, and supported, this research was very heartening from the start. Funding was readily made available by the Research Committee of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. Full backing and co-operation for the project was forthcoming from the headquarters of the IPS, particularly its Operations Directorate which supplied extensive data. Governors and other prison staff invariably went out of their way to facilitate the research - their awareness of the seriousness of the literacy problem among prisoners was striking. The teachers and Head Teachers in prisons (who are employed by ten VEC's across the country) put enormous time and effort into learning, and then conducting in the most meticulous way, their research tasks.

Most impressive of all, however, was the willingness of men and women held in prison to participate so honestly and in such a serious way in the survey, I hope we can further improve the education service we offer them.

Kevin Warner  
Co-ordinator of Education  
Prison Education Service

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study is the outcome of a co-operative research project between two people: Mark Morgan, whose background is in mainstream education and in research on literacy and educational disadvantage, and Mary Kett, whose background is in adult education and the Prison Education Service. The study was made possible through the whole-hearted co-operation of teaching staff in the Prison Education Service who administered the tests, and through the funding from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

The study would not have been possible without the help of a number of people. A particular debt of gratitude is owed to Kevin Warner, Co-ordinator of the Prison Education Service for his guidance at all stages of the project. Frank McDermott of the Operations Directorate of the Irish Prison Service, provided invaluable assistance in relation to computer records that made many of the analyses possible. The Governors of each of the institutions facilitated the smooth administration of the tests. Most importantly of all, a special thanks are due to the respondents who agreed to take the tests and answer the questions. The extremely high response rate is testimony to the spirit in which the study was carried out.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the work of a scholar who had no direct involvement in the present study. Paul O'Mahony has provided the impetus for much of the relevant research regarding the Irish Penal System, as is indicated in the number of citations in our references.

**Executive Summary**

**Chapter**

Chapter

**1**

### 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study examines the literacy levels among the prison population in Ireland. The survey, which was funded by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, was carried out in Irish prisons in May 2001, using materials based on the International Adult Literacy Survey which had been used in a study of the general population of Ireland and other countries beginning in 1995.

The Prison Adult Literacy Survey had a number of aims. Firstly, from the perspective of the Prison Education Service, there was a need to know how prisoners compared with the general population with regard to literacy skills. The need for this information has become more urgent in the context of the Government's White Paper on Adult Education and the top priority that report affords to adult literacy, since more accurate statistics are crucial in planning the most appropriate kind of courses for prisoners. A second aim of the study was to examine the extent to which literacy problems, and factors associated with such problems, might be associated with the development of anti-social behaviours that result in people eventually serving prison sentences. With this in mind information was sought on the nature of the offences for which respondents had been sentenced. A third aim of the study was to extend the research base and knowledge regarding the prison population, in line with earlier studies of background characteristics (*O'Mahony, 1993; 1997*), health (*Department of Health Promotion, NUI Galway, 2000*) and drug use (*Dillon, 2001*).

The results of the study show that a significant number of prisoners have virtually no literacy skills and even by traditional and outdated standards would be considered 'illiterate'. There is also a large number of prisoners who have limited skills of a kind that would be unlikely to enable them to meet the challenges of modern living. This latter group seemed also to have very little involvement or commitment to school even during those years of 'compulsory' schooling. A third group of prisoners have rather good literacy skills and seem able to cope with even complex materials.

One of the most striking findings was that there was a strong relationship between poor literacy skills and certain kinds of crime but not others. Violent offenders and property offenders tended to have major problems of literacy. In contrast those in prison for sex offences and for serious drug

offences tended to have much better literacy scores. It is also of interest that young males tended to have relatively poor literacy scores.

The results of the study emphasise the link between anti-social behaviour and educational disadvantage as manifested in the low literacy level of so many prisoners. In the context of existing studies on this topic, there is no suggestion that the relationship is a simple causal one, i.e. low literacy levels are responsible for all anti-social behaviour. However, there is a considerable body of evidence showing that poor literacy skills restrict a range of life-choices (particularly employment), and thus become a pre-disposing factor in criminal activities. In this regard, we draw attention to the parallel with serious drug misuse, where studies have shown that people with the most serious drug problems are much less likely than others to have acquired qualifications. While there may not be a simple direct relationship with educational failure, poor literacy skills may be an important contributory factor in both cases.

Based on the results of the study, a number of recommendations are put forward including a refocusing of prison education services, in the context of the valuable work that is already being done. Specifically we recommend that the prison education service gives top priority to those prisoners with the weakest literacy skills. We also recommend that the Prison Education Service should introduce a standardised initial screening procedure for literacy as part of the Assessment Framework being developed with the National Adult Literacy Agency, and should promote the implementation of *Guidelines for Quality Literacy Work in Prisons*. Other recommendations include peer 'tutor' training programmes, innovative Information and Communications Technology programmes to attract those most disaffected, and strengthening the link between in-prison provision and education available to prisoners on release.

Suggestions are also made with regard to how addressing educational disadvantage could help prevent anti-social behaviour and crime.

In particular we recommend that the link between educational programmes and those seeking to prevent anti-social behaviour, should be made explicit, so that broadly based and comprehensive initiatives can address the social, economic and educational disadvantage that lies behind these problems.

We also draw attention to some approaches to prevention that are not especially helpful.

**Background and Context to Prison  
Adult Literacy Survey**

**Chapter**

Chapter

**2**

## 2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT TO PRISON ADULT LITERACY SURVEY

Below a number of relevant aspects of the background to the present study are considered. Firstly, the *International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS)* is described with particular reference to the main outcomes for Ireland. Secondly, some recent studies carried out in Irish prisons are described. Thirdly the association between literacy problems and anti-social behaviour is considered, taking into account mainly the international literature on this question.

### THE INTERNATIONAL ADULT LITERACY SURVEY (IALS)

When the results of an international comparison of the literacy skills of Irish adults were published (*Morgan, Hickey & Kellaghan, 1997*), the findings attracted considerable attention and were the subject of much media comment as well as being the focus of the work of an Oireachtas Committee. With regard to the overall results the most striking feature was that nearly a quarter of Irish adults have problems with even the simplest literacy tasks. Specifically, five levels were identified and the survey found that about 25% of the population scored at the lowest level (Level 1) in the document scale, with a further 32% at Level 2. This contrasts with Sweden which has only just over 6% at Level 1 while the corresponding figure for the Netherlands is 10%. However, it is also worth noting that the percentage at this lowest level in the US is very similar to that for Ireland. Similarly, the recently completed figure for the UK is within a few percentage points of the Irish figure, and the figure for Northern Ireland is almost identical to that found here. It also emerged that less than one sixth of the Irish population scores at the highest level. Again this contrasts with Sweden, which has about one third of the population at this level, and with the US which has around 20% at the highest levels.

The IALS also showed that there is a relationship between competence and practice. It is also likely that this relationship is a reciprocal one, i.e., people competent in literacy are more likely to use these skills and those who practice become more proficient than those who do not. In the light of this it is interesting that a large minority of the population never do anything in the literacy area. For example, nearly 30% said that they never write anything substantial (even a letter) and roughly the same number

rarely or never read a book. In other words regardless of whether or not people have competence, they do not engage in literacy activities in everyday life.

This finding has important implications because it turns out that frequency of involvement in literacy activities is related to so many other activities - some of which would not be predicted easily. Those who read and write frequently are also more likely to be attending films, plays or concerts, indicating that their reading enhances their lives as opposed to engrossing them to the point of neglecting other activities. Much more remarkable is the finding that frequency of involvement in literacy activities is also related to participation in sport and even in community/voluntary activities. It could be that literacy activities provide an enhancement and enrichment of people's lives so that they are more likely to have a broad range of interests in film, sport and community.

One important consideration in understanding the adult literacy survey is that it was a study of *literacy*, not a study of *illiteracy*. There are real difficulties about the definition of being 'illiterate' or 'literate'. Traditionally definitions of illiteracy were couched in terms of failure to complete a certain grade in school. This posed the problem of equating years in school with having mastered a certain set of skills - something which cannot be assumed. More recently definitions of people who are 'functionally literate' (or illiterate) have centred around acquisition of those skills which enable people to function effectively in those activities in which literacy is normally required. The problem with this latter definition is that the level of literacy that is required to be 'literate' varies from one social context to another.

For these reasons, recent approaches have moved towards a conceptualisation of literacy in terms of various levels rather than as a dichotomy. This recognises that some minimal definition of literacy in terms of word recognition is not appropriate to contemporary challenges and that many tasks encountered by people require relatively high levels of literacy competence. It is also based on the view that while almost all western societies have eradicated 'illiteracy' as traditionally understood, there is a major problem of a poor quality of literacy skills among a large percentage of the population, who while not being illiterate have only

limited capacity to deal with complex literacy tasks.

Related to this view is the recognition that there are different domains of literacy. The identification of different domains of literacy recognises that reading is carried out in several contexts and for a variety of purposes. Of the various domains of literacy that have been proposed, those of the adult literacy study are the most common. They are: (i) Prose literacy (which is commonly what is meant by literacy), (ii) Quantitative literacy which places a particular emphasis on mathematical operations and (iii) Document literacy, which involves materials that are frequently encountered at work like timetables, graphs, charts, maps and forms of various kinds.

### **IMPLICATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDY (IALS) FOR THE PRESENT STUDY**

One of the findings from the adult literacy survey is that economic, social and educational problems tend to be closely related to each other. This is well illustrated with regard to early school leavers, especially those who left school without qualifications of any kind. As might be expected, early school leavers had much lower literacy levels than those who had completed the senior cycle. Furthermore, they were much more likely to be experiencing unemployment. Obviously it is difficult to say with certainty that their experiences of unemployment were necessarily related to their difficulties in the literacy area. However, in the views of the participants in the survey, there did seem to be some connection. For example, many of the early school leavers rated their literacy skills as either moderate or poor and they were much more likely than those who left school without qualifications to say that their literacy skills were limiting their job opportunities.

What is even more striking is how early school leaving tended to extend its influence beyond the work situation and into areas that involve literacy in everyday life. For example, those who left school without any qualifications had very limited involvement in literacy activities in everyday life. Over four-fifths never visited a public library and nearly half said that they never read anything substantial. Not only did these effects extend to literacy activities but there were also effects associated with early school leaving with regard to non-literacy activities.

Specifically, there were major differences between early school leavers and others in relation to participation in sporting events, community activities and going to plays and concerts. There is no suggestion that there is a simple causal relationship between literacy and these activities. Rather, these results illustrate the variety of ways in which lack of literacy skills may interact with other deprivations to impoverish people's lives and thus bring about even fewer opportunities to improve literacy skills.

The fact that deficits in literacy skills often result in reduced opportunities to participate in other valuable activities was especially illustrated in relation to participation in adult education. There was strong association between level of literacy skills and participation in adult education/training. Individuals who score at the highest levels are much more likely to participate in adult education than are those at the lowest level. As might be expected the pattern is very similar in relation to educational achievement; well over half of college graduates had been involved in adult education in the previous year, while this was true of less than one tenth of those who left school without any qualifications. As has been suspected for some time, the IALS study demonstrated conclusively that adult education is most likely to be availed of by those who have already been relatively successful in the system.

### **IMPLICATIONS OF THE INTERNATIONAL STUDY (IALS) FOR ADULT EDUCATION POLICY IN IRELAND**

The international survey raised concerns about the adult literacy problem in Ireland to centre stage in educational policy. This was reflected in the attention drawn to the issue in the *White Paper on Adult Education* and the increase in the scale of resources directed to it since then. Since the launch of the IALS survey, provision for adult literacy in the community education sector has substantially increased as part of the National Development Plan. Funding has been increased considerably and a range of pilot programmes have been launched, resulting in an increase of participation rates from 5,000 in early 1997 to currently nearly 28,000.

A continuum from one-to-one voluntary tuition to group work to progression to certified learning options is being developed and referral networks with FÁS, Local Employment Services, Local Partnerships and other statutory and community interests are being expanded and

strengthened. A very successful TV series on literacy awareness and tuition for adults has been broadcast in collaboration with RTÉ and NALA. A range of measures to target the literacy needs of the unemployed have also been undertaken.

The White Paper sets *specific targets* for the National Adult Literacy Programme including:

- A continuous increase in the numbers of clients reached;
- Prioritisation of those with lowest literacy levels;
- Implementation of the quality framework that has been developed in order to monitor the effectiveness of the service;
- Development of new modes of targeting potential learners, especially through the use of referral networks;
- A change in orientation of education and training for the unemployed towards more basic levels of skill;
- Expansion of provision for workplace literacy;
- Increased collaboration with the public library service (*Learning for Life, 2000*).

These initiatives are in line with measures taken in other European member states in the wake of the publication of the IALS report. In Britain the Moser Report advocated far-reaching measures to address an adult literacy problem that had not improved despite over 20 years of considerable government investment in adult basic education. As a result a new Literacy Strategy Unit has been established by the Department for Education and Skills, which sets out literacy and numeracy standards and a national curriculum. A national training programme for basic education staff has also been initiated.

France did not publish the results of the IALS survey. However, as a result of other surveys carried out on army conscripts and feedback from its own personnel the prison education service has identified literacy as a top priority and has initiated a national screening programme for all people committed to French prisons, supported by a national database.

### THE IRISH PRISON SYSTEM

The *Irish Prison Service Strategy Statement 2001-2003* lists 17 Prisons and Places of Detention in total, of which twelve are traditional closed institutions (Arbour Hill, Castlerea, Cork, Cloverhill (Remand Prison), Curragh, Fort Mitchel, Limerick, Mountjoy, Midlands, Portlaoise, St Patrick's Institution and Wheatfield). Three open centres with minimal internal and perimeter security are listed (Shanganagh Castle, Shelton Abbey and Loughan House) and one is semi-open with traditional perimeter security but minimal internal security (Training Unit). All women prisoners are accommodated in separate parts of two closed prisons (Mountjoy Dóchas Centre and Limerick).

It is particularly interesting that there has been a substantial increase in the numbers in prison. In the ten years up to 1994 the prison population increased by 29%, while between 1994 and 1998 it increased by 29% (*Aylward, 2002*). There have been further increases since, at least partially due to the decline in numbers on temporary release (*Aylward, 2002, p. 576*).

The *Irish Prison Service Strategy Statement 2001-2003* gives a total of 3070 prisoners in custody on 1 June 2001, within four weeks of the present survey (2639 under sentence and 431 on remand). This document also lists a number of planning assumptions, including the elaboration of positive sentence management, with "a new emphasis on prisoners taking greater personal responsibility for their own development and a prisoner centred, multi-disciplinary approach" (*Irish Prison Service, 2001*).

The *Strategy Statement and Irish Prison Service Annual Report 1999 and 2000* also offers the following explanatory note in relation to education:

"Education in prison is provided in conjunction with a range of educational agencies in the community, including the VECs, Public Library Services, colleges and the Arts Council. Broad programmes of education are made available which generally follow an adult education approach. The Department of Education and Science has provided significant allocations of teachers (215 whole time equivalents in 2001/02). Participation in education in prisons in Ireland is high by international standards: half of all prisoners take part in some classes and outside Mountjoy and Cloverhill where restrictions exist in relation to classrooms,

this rate tends to be higher still." (*Irish Prison Service, 2001*)

There is no specific reference to literacy or basic education in this document, however the policy document published in 1994 *The Management of Offenders* gives detail on the objectives of the prison education service and lists basic education as one of a number of priorities as follows:

- *To develop an education service based on the principles and ideas set out in the Council of Europe report, **Education in Prison** (Strasbourg 1990); in particular by adopting an adult education approach and by encouraging interaction between offenders and the community outside;*
- *To encourage as many offenders as possible to participate in educational activities;*
- *To give special attention to offenders with basic education needs.*

In a document outlining developments planned for 1999-2001, the Prison Education Service again specifies literacy as one of a number of priorities and commits to "*give effect to the prioritisation of the basic education needs of prisoners, a large number of whom have missed out on learning at an earlier stage, via 'Reviews', local plans and by other means*".

The National Economic and Social Forum Report *Re-integration of Prisoners* (2002) stressed the need for radical reform of the planning and provision of services for prisoners so that they are centred on prisoner re-integration. It advocated individually tailored Positive Sentence Management Plans that should be drawn up for, and in consultation with, each prisoner and the development of more planned and integrated after-care for prisoners on release. It concluded that the missing link between policy design and agreement on the one hand, and policy implementation on the other, was the lack of coherent implementation mechanisms or models to be followed.

The NESF Report stressed the need for the upgrading of training and education: focussing on post-release employment, it highlighted the need to incorporate prisoners' training and education needs as part of their

sentence plan and referred specifically to self-development, literacy, numeracy and career guidance.

Finally it suggested that each prison business plan should set targets for training and education services (for example: participation rates; literacy levels and range of services available) and that these targets should be monitored and independently evaluated on a regular basis.

### EARLIER RELEVANT STUDIES

The studies by O'Mahony (1993, 1997) are among the most relevant to the present work. Both of these studies involved a random sample of one-fifth of the prisoners in Mountjoy and focused on a range of information including demographic factors, criminal and penal history and substance misuse. The information was obtained largely through interviews conducted by the author on a confidential basis and the response rate was extremely high.

From the perspective of the present work the information collected on educational experiences is of particular interest. The most striking feature is how limited prisoners' experiences were: in the second study only a small minority (7.4%) had stayed in school beyond the age of 16 years and none had attended a third level institution. In fact one third of the sample had never attended a school higher than primary level. Only one quarter of the prisoners in this study had sat public examinations, and of these only a minority had gone as far as the Leaving Certificate. On the other hand the work training experience of these prisoners was somewhat better than their educational performance with over half having had some form of skills training.

Perhaps the clearest evidence of educational failure among prisoners is the fact that 63% of the sample said that they had played truant regularly while in school. This suggests that the quality of their learning may be even less satisfactory than their schooling would suggest.

More recently a study by the Department of Health Promotion, NUI, Galway (2000) showed that of the representative sample of almost 800 prisoners, 31% had either no schooling or primary school only, while 53% had some secondary schooling and only 16% had completed secondary school.

### SOCIAL BACKGROUND, PERSONAL ADVERSITY AND LITERACY

Poor educational achievement is by no means the only kind of deprivation that prisoners have experienced in their lives. A distinguishing feature of Irish prisoners is that they have experienced severe levels of personal and social disadvantage (*McCullagh, 2002; O'Mahony, 2002*). The vast majority had been unemployed prior to committal to prison and came from backgrounds with no work culture. Only a minority of 20% came from owner occupied housing while about 70% of people in the country fall into this category.

There was also an unusual degree of personal disruption in the family backgrounds of prisoners. In O'Mahony's study 27% came from unconventional kinds of families characterised by separation or desertion. Remarkably 15% had a father who had been imprisoned while 44% had a brother or sister who had been in prison.

Taken in the context of the findings on educational disadvantage, there is substantial evidence that a range of social, economic and educational disadvantages interact in ways that predispose young people towards crime, or at least lessen their choices for employment, thereby contributing to other factors that cause the problems that eventually result in criminality.

The present study is concerned specifically with literacy problems. Because we recognise from the educational literature that literacy problems largely have their origin in social and educational disadvantage, there is no suggestion that we are trying to identify individual characteristics that have a major role in crime. Rather we are seeking to identify the ways in which educational failure resulting in literacy problems contributes to the other influences that result in criminal behaviour.

### LITERACY LEVELS AMONG PRISONERS

The study by *Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins & Kolstad (1993)* is one of the first National Adult Literacy Surveys. This study involved over 26,000 people in the US, aged 16 and over, who responded to a series of literacy tasks and answered questions on their background and various matters to do with literacy. From the present perspective it is of particular interest to note that 1,100 inmates from federal and state prisons also took part. It is also of interest to note that in their sampling, this study included

mainly those prisoners who were serving relatively long sentences. As might be expected the *Kirsch et al* study found that their sample of prisoners was not representative of the total US population. For example, the prison population tended to be younger and less educated than adults in the US as a whole and the majority were males. Specifically males made up 94% of the prison population (compared to 48% of the total population). Similarly only 20% of the prison population had gone beyond high school (compared to 42% of the total population). Finally 80% of the prison population were under the age of 40 years compared with 51% of the total population.

Given the relationship between literacy and level of education it is hardly surprising that prisoners did rather less well on the literacy tests than the total population. Specifically the percentage of prisoners at Level 1 was 31% - 40% on the three scales while the corresponding figures for the general population was 21% -23%. Conversely only 4% -7% of prisoners were at Levels 4/5 compared to 18%-21% of the general population.

An Australian Study by *Black, Rouse and Wickert (1990)* is also of particular interest. This study involved testing of 100 female and 100 male prisoners selected randomly within two prisons. However, it should be noted that the male prisoners were from the Work Release Centre and may not be typical of the general prison population.

It is interesting that for some items the prisoner sample did as well or better than a national sample. Specifically a higher percentage of prisoners could understand instructions on a pharmaceutical package, understand a paint chart, and calculate change based on a menu chart. However, overall the prisoners did less well than the national sample on all three literacy dimensions with relatively greater differences for the prose and quantitative literacy dimensions.

Some of the most interesting work in this area comes from the UK and particularly from the Basic Skills Agency (BSA). Beginning in 1994, that agency has demonstrated that while there is considerable variation in the prevalence of literacy and numeracy problems across prisons, the overall percentage of prisoners with such problems was substantially greater than in the general population (*BSA, 1994*).

More recently an analysis of the literacy scores of 3300 offenders at pre-sentencing stage, showed that more than one quarter of these had literacy skills that were lower than the IALS Level 1 (*Hudson et al., 2001*).

The study of *Parsons (2001)* was concerned not with people in custody but with the cohorts from the National Longitudinal Study born in 1958 and 1970. The most striking finding from the Parsons study was the significant association between contact with police and/or repeated offending and poor literacy scores, especially among younger men. Furthermore, poor literacy scores related significantly with offending even after controls were applied for social disadvantage, poverty and disruptive family environment. Two other interesting points emerged from the Parsons study. The first was that poor mathematical literacy (numeracy skills) seemed to be especially strongly associated with anti-social behaviour. The other point was that truancy and temporary suspension from school were especially strongly associated with criminality and retained the association even after controlling for other measures of educational disadvantage.

In the Irish context, it is interesting that when asked about the extent to which prisoners indicated that they had difficulty reading instructions on medications (*Department of Health Promotion, NUI, Galway, 2000*), 23% of the males and 29% of females said that they had difficulties. As might be expected those with no secondary education had relatively more difficulties with such reading. A number of studies have referred to prisoners' literacy levels but have all been based on 'self report' methods and have not included objective measures or screening. O'Mahony included a question on literacy, asking if the respondent 'could read and write'. It emerged that 29% of the sample said that they were illiterate (or) had some significant difficulties in the area of reading and writing. Other unpublished studies by prison educators based on 'self report' methods produced similar results (*Kett, 1993*).

### ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AND FAILURE AT READING

There are several studies that have identified family variables as consistent factors in forms of anti-social behaviour and later delinquency and adult criminality. It has consistently been found that there is an association between poor academic achievement and anti-social behaviour (*Hawkins & Lishner, 1987*). It is likely that the relationship between anti-social behaviour and academic failure is reciprocal. On the one hand there is evidence that non-compliant behaviour leads to spending less time in school and on relevant learning tasks which impedes learning and results in poor academic results. It is also likely that academic failure results in greater likelihood of lowered self-esteem, association with deviant peers and a lower commitment to conventional goals - all of which have been shown to influence the development of anti-social behaviour.

The evidence on the relationship between school failure (especially reading failure) and subsequent anti-social behaviour is quite strong (*Yoshikawa, 1994*). The indications are that low school achievement and poor verbal scores on standardised tests are strong predictors of later delinquency. There are also indications that low IQ is also a predictor of such behaviour. For example, in a New York study, it was found that IQ scores at age seven years predicted conduct disorder at age 17 years (*Schonfield, Schaffer, O'Connor and Portnoy, 1988*). What is not clear however is how the link between IQ, school failure and delinquency comes about.

There is no suggestion that school failure is the only or even the major factor in the development of anti-social behaviour. There is a large body of evidence showing that poor parental discipline, family violence, marital discord are associated with such behaviour. The point here is that academic failure is an important link in the interacting causal chain (*Patterson, DeBaryshe, and Ramsey, 1989*). Because reading problems are so central to academic failure, relationship between failure at reading and anti-social behaviour is to be expected.

# Chapter

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Chapter

3

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

Below the main features of the methodology of the prison survey are described. In the first section details of the sampling procedure are set out, while the procedures for piloting and scoring the literacy tasks are described in the second section. The third section sets out the main features of the background questionnaire.

#### **POPULATION AND SAMPLE**

The target population was the prison population as of April 2001, which was approximately 3,000. The basic sampling process involved drawing a sampling of 10% of the prison population using the register in each prison as a sampling frame. However, because the number in some prisons is small, it was decided to draw a minimum of a sample of 12 from each prison. Furthermore, because the number of women in prison is small (less than 4% of the total), it was decided to have proportionately more women in the sample.

Of the prisoners who were asked to participate, all except five agreed to participate giving a response rate of over 98%. The high response rate with its implications for validity is one of the strongest features of the present study.

#### **LITERACY TASKS**

The International Adult Literacy Survey proceeded on the basis of the assumption that literacy was neither a single skill nor an infinite number of skills. The following scales were considered to cover the literacy demands in work, home and community contexts. The basic design of the tests was that each member of the sample was given a screening test, which contained six items. They were required to get at least two items correct in the screening test if they were to proceed to the other main tests. Each of the tests is described briefly below.

The purpose of the screening test is to assess that participants can perform tests at the most elementary level. It should be stressed that the tasks used were at a level that is very simple indeed.

Included were items that involved asking respondents to underline the

name of the person who had phoned, given a telephone message, and requiring respondents to underline a sentence indicating who to call for help in a short piece of information about the warning signals of heart attack.

In the IALS the screening test was used strictly for that purpose, i.e., screening. Those people who got less than two items correct in the test were not asked to proceed to other items. However, in the present study, a relatively large number fell into this category and for this reason, they were treated as a separate group for purposes of the analysis.

(See '*Definition of Literacy Levels*' below)

### DOMAINS OF LITERACY

The main literacy test consisted of items of either prose literacy, document literacy or quantitative literacy:

***Prose literacy:*** the knowledge and skills that are required to understand and utilise information from sources like newspapers, fiction and expository text.

***Document literacy:*** the knowledge and skills required to locate and use information contained in official forms, timetables, maps, charts and graphs.

***Quantitative literacy:*** the knowledge and skills required to apply arithmetic operations using numbers in printed materials.

Within each domain a range of cognitive skills were assessed. Those included locating, generating, integrating and computing information. In locating tasks, the reader is required to match information given in the question with either literal or synonymous information in the text. In the case of integrating tasks, the reader is required to bring together two or more pieces of information located in different parts of the text. Generating tasks required the respondent to go beyond the information in the text by drawing on outside knowledge or by making text-wide inferences in order to produce new information. In addition those tasks in the quantitative domain required the reader to perform a variety of arithmetic operations either singly or in combination.

These ranged in complexity from simple whole-number operations to those involving decimals fractions percentages, rations and time. (Examples of the relevant items including the screening test are shown in Appendix 2)<sup>1</sup>. It can be seen from an examination of these tests that they are tests of level of literacy and not of 'illiteracy'.

### SELECTION OF MATERIALS IN IALS

One of the most important features of the IALS is that the tasks were as similar as possible to real life situations. In order to achieve this, the National Study Managers of the IALS had been asked to provide pilot materials from which the test items were written. The final selection of stimulus materials took place after a pilot test in each participating IALS country taking into account the fairness of items (not giving an advantage to any participating country or culture and whether or not the items correlated strongly with the other items in the feature of literacy in question).

### SCORING OF ITEMS

Another important feature of the IALS is that the items were not multiple choice but required scoring to ensure consistency. In the present study, two scorers who were familiar with the procedure in the IALS undertook scoring. A re-scoring of 50 test booklets showed that the level of agreement was 97%.

### DEFINITION OF LITERACY LEVELS

In the IALS the scale scores were calculated based on the difficulty of the various tasks. These scale point scores ranged from 0 - 500. The individual's score is the mean on the various literacy tasks and thus ranges between 0 and 500. However, rather than ordering individuals from 0-500, the scales for each domain were divided into five levels to reflect the underlying complexity of the tasks.

<sup>1</sup> For copyright reasons it is not possible to reproduce all the tests used.. The examples selected are some of those from the IALS international report.

The levels were as follows: Level 1 (0 - 225), Level 2 (226 - 275), Level 3 (276 - 325), Level 4 (326 - 375) and Level 5 (376 - 500). Sample items for the various levels, already published in the IALS reports, are shown in Appendix 2.

The present study adhered to the procedures for identification of literacy levels used in the IALS but with two relatively minor amendments. The first had to do with the addition of a 'level' for those people who did not manage to complete the screening test.

This is because a substantial number of prisoners did not manage to complete the screening test. In the IALS, this group and those scoring at Level 1 were categorised as being at Level 1 - something that may have caused some confusion. A related issue has arisen in the recently completed PISA study involving the literacy achievements of Irish 15 year olds in comparison with other OECD countries (*Shiel, Cosgrove, Sofroniou & Kelly, 2001*)<sup>1</sup>. In this latter study the decision was made to introduce a category called 'Below Level 1' and this practice has been adopted here.

The second modification of the IALS procedure was that instead of having three scales and therefore three scores for each individual, only a single literacy score was computed for each one. In other words, while items from document, prose and quantitative literacy were used in the survey only one score was computed. While this is a slight loss of information, it is striking that in the IALS, there was a remarkably high correlation between the scales. Furthermore, this change allowed the study to be completed without making undue demands on prisoners and prison staff time.

### BACKGROUND QUESTIONNAIRE

The background questionnaire that was administered at the same time as the literacy tasks consisted of five sections. The initial part was concerned with general background information including age and length of sentence. In Section A, prisoners were asked to indicate how frequently they read various materials or wrote anything substantial during their time in prison, while the next section asked similar questions regarding reading and writing outside prison (Section B). In the next part of the questionnaire (Section C) respondents were asked about their experiences in school,

<sup>1</sup>PISA is the Programme for International Student Assessment of the OECD.

particularly how they fared in reading, writing and mathematics, how they liked school, how consistent their school attendance was and the age at which they had left school. In the next part of the questionnaire (Section D), they were asked about how they fared in everyday life with regard to reading, writing and mathematics. Section E was concerned with their perception of how they fared in these areas at work, and particularly whether their basic skills had either prevented them from getting a job or prevented them from applying for a job that was better than the one they held. (The full questionnaire is shown in Appendix 2).

### **ADMINISTRATION OF TESTS AND QUESTIONNAIRE**

The test materials and questionnaire were administered by the education staff in the various prisons. This had a number of advantages including familiarity with prison procedures, ease of access to respondents and interest in the research. To enable the staff to carry out the testing there were two training sessions in which the rationale and procedures for the study were explained and detailed instructions provided on how to administer the tests. These training sessions were similar to those given to the interviewers in the IALS. In addition, a briefing on the study and its procedures was given to all Governors at a Governor Group meeting. The pattern of results, together with the reports from the prisons, indicate that the procedures were carried out in accordance with the instructions.

**Chapter**

Chapter

**4**

## 4: RESULTS OF LITERACY TESTS

As described in Chapter 3, each respondent's literacy score was categorised as Level 1 through Level 5 in accordance with the criteria of the IALS and with the addition of a 'Pre-Level 1' category for those who did not manage to get two items correct on the screening test. Table 4.1 on the next page shows the percentage of prisoners at each level as well as the percentage of males and females at each level. From this it can be seen that more than one-fifth of prisoners scored at Pre-Level 1. Slightly fewer of the female prisoners scored at this level than did males. However, for both males and females this is an extremely high percentage at this level, given that Pre-Level 1 indicates a level of literacy which is so low as to be similar to what was traditionally regarded as 'illiteracy'.

Just over 30% of prisoners score at Level 1. When Level 1 and Pre-Level 1 are added, just over half of the prison sample is in this broad category. In other words, half the prison population are at Level 1 or lower whereas in the general population, less than one quarter of the sample are at this level. Specifically, in the IALS 22.6% of the general population were at Level 1 or Pre-Level 1<sup>1</sup> (prose domain) while the corresponding figure in the present study is 52.8%. In other words, more than twice as many prisoners are at the lowest level compared to the general population.

With regard to moderate levels of literacy, it can be seen from Table 4.1 that about 31% of prisoners are found in Levels 2 and 3 combined. This is dramatically different from the general population which has more than twice as many people in these categories. Finally, with regard to the highest levels, 15% of the prison population is in this category which is rather similar to the general population.

<sup>1</sup>The IALS did not categorise people as Pre-Level 1; rather all such scores were categorised as Level 1.

**TABLE 4.1: PERCENT OF PRISONERS AT EACH LEVEL OF LITERACY**

|                    | Males       | Females     | All         |
|--------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Pre-Level 1</b> | <i>22.7</i> | <i>16.7</i> | <i>22.0</i> |
| <b>Level 1</b>     | <i>30.1</i> | <i>36.7</i> | <i>30.8</i> |
| <b>Level 2</b>     | <i>18.0</i> | <i>16.7</i> | <i>17.8</i> |
| <b>Level 3</b>     | <i>14.1</i> | <i>13.3</i> | <i>14.0</i> |
| <b>Level 4/5</b>   | <i>15.2</i> | <i>16.7</i> | <i>15.4</i> |

It is interesting to note the implications of Table 4.1. It is not simply saying that the average literacy level of prisoners is much lower than the general population. Rather it suggests that the prison population has a much larger group with very poor literacy skills, compared to the general population, a much smaller group with moderate literacy skills and a minority with excellent literacy skills. Thus, in considering the part that might be played by literacy in criminality, attention would need to be given to these different categories of prisoners. Specifically, it is very unlikely to be the case that literacy skills have a major role in the causation of all crime for all prisoners. The task is more to identify the level of literacy difficulties and the kinds of crime in which such deficits play a part. We will return to this issue when considering various kinds of crime.

In subsequent analyses of the data, it is more appropriate to overcome the problem of small numbers at some levels by collapsing certain levels together. With this in mind, Levels 1 and 2 were aggregated as were Levels 3 through 5. This gives the Table shown below (Table 4.2).

**TABLE 4.2. PERCENT OF PRISONERS AT LEVEL OF LITERACY (BROAD CATEGORIES)**

|                    | Males       | Females     | All         |
|--------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Pre-Level 1</b> | <i>22.7</i> | <i>16.7</i> | <i>22.0</i> |
| <b>Level 1/2</b>   | <i>48.1</i> | <i>53.4</i> | <i>48.6</i> |
| <b>Level 3/4/5</b> | <i>29.3</i> | <i>30.0</i> | <i>29.4</i> |

## AGE AND LITERACY PERFORMANCE

In the general population, it emerged that relatively older people (particularly 45 years and older) did rather less well on literacy tests in the IALS. The general consensus was that this effect was due to the improvement in the percentage of the age-cohort attending second level and higher education in recent decades rather than an indication of ageing effects. An important consideration regarding the prison population is that they tend to be young and predominantly male.

**TABLE 4.3: AGE AND LITERACY PERFORMANCE**

|                           | Pre-Level 1 | Level 1/ 2  | Level 3/4/5 |
|---------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>21 yrs and younger</b> | <b>26.2</b> | <b>53.8</b> | <b>20.0</b> |
| <b>22 to 31 yrs</b>       | <b>21.4</b> | <b>53.6</b> | <b>25.0</b> |
| <b>32 yrs and older</b>   | <b>20.7</b> | <b>35.6</b> | <b>43.7</b> |

Table 4.3 shows that there are very striking differences between various age groups with regard to literacy performance. Specifically, the younger age group tends to do rather less well than older age groups. As can be seen, rather more than a quarter of those aged 21 and younger scored at Pre-Level 1 while this was true of only just over one-fifth of those in the older age-groups. The differences are even more striking at the highest levels of literacy performance. Just one-fifth of those aged 21 and younger scored at the highest level while this was the case with one quarter of those in the 22 to 31 years age group. More remarkable was the fact that over two fifths of those in the oldest age group scored at the highest level.

What is most significant about these findings is that the differences were in the opposite direction to what is found in the general population. The IALS showed that older age groups had very substantially lower scores in literacy tests than was the case with younger age-cohorts. The most widely accepted explanation for this is that the older age groups were less likely to have been to post-primary or higher education than were younger cohorts, thus yielding the negative relationship between age group and literacy. Why the opposite is found in the case of the prison population is worthy of further examination. Part of the reason may be that older and younger people are in prison for different kinds of crime. As will be shown later,

type of offence is quite closely related to literacy scores. It is also worth noting that people in prison, as will be shown later, are more likely to be involved in literacy activities than was the case outside prison. This is likely to have a positive impact on their literacy performance, especially where such involvement continues for a number of years.

**RESULTS FOR INDIVIDUAL PRISONS**

The results are presented below for each of the prisons. It should be borne in mind that in some cases the sample was small because of the very small numbers in some of the prisons. In Table 4.4 two prisons are marked with an asterisk and considerable caution should be exercised in interpreting the results for these since the sample was six or less.

**TABLE 4.4: PERCENT AT EACH LEVEL IN EACH PRISON**

|                   | Pre-Level 1 | Level 1/ 2 | Level 3/4/5 |
|-------------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| Arbour Hill       | ---         | 50.0       | 50.0        |
| Castlerea         | 20.0        | 40.0       | 40.0        |
| Cloverhill        | 32.3        | 54.9       | 12.9        |
| Curragh           | 10.0        | 30.0       | 60.0        |
| Cork              | 20.0        | 48.0       | 32.0        |
| Fort Mitchel      | ---         | 80.0       | 20.0        |
| Limerick          | 41.2        | 41.1       | 17.6        |
| Limerick Women's* | ---         | 80.0       | 20.0        |
| Loughan House     | 27.3        | 36.4       | 36.4        |
| Midlands          | 26.7        | 66.7       | 6.7         |
| Mountjoy Men's    | 25.7        | 48.6       | 25.7        |
| Mountjoy Women's  | 20.8        | 45.9       | 33.3        |
| Portlaoise        | 40.0        | 33.4       | 26.7        |
| Shanganagh Castle | 25.0        | 62.5       | 12.5        |
| Shelton Abbey*    | 16.7        | 33.3       | 50.0        |
| St. Patrick's     | 33.3        | 46.7       | 20.0        |
| Training Unit     | ----        | 50.0       | 50.0        |
| Wheatfield        | 13.3        | 43.3       | 43.4        |

A striking feature of the results displayed in Table 4.4 is that there are considerable differences between prisons. In some instances a high percentage of the prisoners are at Pre-Level 1, whereas in others not a single person scored at this level. Part of the reason may have to do with type of offences, since certain types of offenders (sexual offenders) are more likely to be found in some prisons. Another factor has to do with the fact that younger offenders are more likely to be in certain institutions than others and as noted above, younger offenders are more likely to have lower literacy scores than older offenders.

### TYPE OF OFFENCE AND LITERACY LEVEL

An important question concerns the extent to which certain types of offence are more likely to be associated with literacy problems than are other types. With this in mind information was sought on the criminal records of the individuals in the survey. This yielded information at a level of specificity that was greater than could be utilised directly. For this reason, the offences were broadly categorized as follows:

- **Violent offences.** These included assault, manslaughter, murder and weapons offences.
- **Property offences.** These included larceny, burglary and car theft.
- **Drug offences.** In nearly all cases these involved supplying drugs.
- **Sexual offences.**
- **Other offences.** These included a disparate group of offences including fraud and road traffic offences.

As might be expected the offences which characterized many of the prisoners were not easily categorized. The main reason was that in nearly half of the instances, there were multiple offences that did not fall into the same category. These cases were categorized into whichever type of offence was dominant in the prisoner's record.

The coding of offences into the categories was carried out by two researchers (including one of the authors). The level of agreement was 81%. The fact that there was disagreement in nearly one-fifth of the cases indicates the extent to which multiple offences were present. Those cases for which there was disagreement were re-examined and following individual discussion were classified on the basis of the consensus that emerged. The final categorisation of the sample was as follows: (i) violent offenders, 25.2%, (ii) property offenders, 35.7%, (iii) drug offenders, 12.9%, (iv) sexual offenders, 11.9%, (v) other offenders, 14.3%.

**TABLE 4.5: TYPE OF OFFENCE AND LITERACY LEVEL**

|                          | Pre-Level 1 | Level 1/ 2  | Level 3/4/5 |
|--------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Violent offences</b>  | <i>23.6</i> | <i>50.0</i> | <i>26.4</i> |
| <b>Property offences</b> | <i>28.3</i> | <i>54.6</i> | <i>17.8</i> |
| <b>Drug offences</b>     | <i>8.1</i>  | <i>35.1</i> | <i>56.7</i> |
| <b>Sexual Offences</b>   | <i>14.7</i> | <i>35.3</i> | <i>50.0</i> |
| <b>Other offences</b>    | <i>24.4</i> | <i>51.1</i> | <i>24.4</i> |

Table 4.5 shows the breakdown of literacy levels for different types of offences. This shows that there is a remarkably strong association between type of offence and literacy performance. In particular, those respondents who were categorized as violent offenders and property offenders as well as those who were in prison because of other offences tended to have low levels of literacy performance, while those in prison for sexual offences and for drug offences had a substantially higher level of literacy performance.

Some of these differences are remarkably large. For those prisoners with property offences more than one quarter are at Pre-Level 1, and less than one-fifth are between Level 3/5. Similarly, in the case of violent offences nearly one quarter are at the highest level while only about a quarter are at Levels 3/5. In contrast, only 8% of those sentenced for drug offences are at Pre-Level 1 while more than half are at Levels 3/5. In the case of prisoners who were sexual offenders, the pattern was quite similar to that for drug offenders but with the general level being somewhat less good.

**Chapter**

Chapter

**5**

## 5. RESULTS FOR LITERACY ACTIVITIES

It will be recalled that respondents were asked a range of questions about their literacy activities both inside prison and before committal to prison. What is especially interesting about the results shown in Table 5.1 on the next page is that the amount of literacy activity reported by prisoners is much greater in prison than before they went to prison. For example, only 7.8% of prisoners report reading magazines on a daily basis outside prison but more than twice this number said that they were involved in such reading in prison. There were also major differences with regard to writing, with nearly three times as many prisoners saying that they write on a daily basis in prison than before they went to prison. An explanation of this might be in terms of the amount of time available to prisoners. Results corroborate earlier research in Wheatfield (*Kett, 1993*), showing that many prisoners only became aware of their difficulties when they were sentenced and the extent to which adults' attitudes to literacy change with their life circumstances.

It is very striking that a very large number of the respondents seemed to have no involvement in literacy activities especially outside prison. Apart from newspaper reading a very large number (half or more) never participated in any literacy activity before coming to prison. This is an important point since the research in this area shows that there is a strong link between literacy activity and literacy competence (*Morgan et. al. 1997*).

**TABLE 5.1: FREQUENCY OF READING AND WRITING IN PRISON AND OUTSIDE PRISON**

| <i>IN PRISON</i>         |                           |                          |                      |                |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|----------------|
|                          | <b>Reading Newspapers</b> | <b>Reading Magazines</b> | <b>Reading Books</b> | <b>Writing</b> |
| <b>Daily</b>             | <i>61.1</i>               | <i>17.7</i>              | <i>29.0</i>          | <i>19.1</i>    |
| <b>Weekly</b>            | <i>21.5</i>               | <i>45.1</i>              | <i>15.7</i>          | <i>48.5</i>    |
| <b>Monthly</b>           | <i>5.1</i>                | <i>12.6</i>              | <i>20.1</i>          | <i>14.7</i>    |
| <b>Yearly</b>            | <i>0.3</i>                | <i>2.7</i>               | <i>12.6</i>          | <i>4.1</i>     |
| <b>Never/hardly Ever</b> | <i>11.9</i>               | <i>21.8</i>              | <i>22.5</i>          | <i>13.7</i>    |
| <i>OUTSIDE PRISON</i>    |                           |                          |                      |                |
|                          | <b>Reading Newspapers</b> | <b>Reading Magazines</b> | <b>Reading Books</b> | <b>Writing</b> |
| <b>Daily</b>             | <i>50.9</i>               | <i>7.8</i>               | <i>7.5</i>           | <i>7.2</i>     |
| <b>Weekly</b>            | <i>19.5</i>               | <i>28.7</i>              | <i>7.5</i>           | <i>12.7</i>    |
| <b>Monthly</b>           | <i>5.8</i>                | <i>21.2</i>              | <i>13.7</i>          | <i>17.5</i>    |
| <b>Yearly</b>            | <i>2.4</i>                | <i>8.2</i>               | <i>16.8</i>          | <i>17.8</i>    |
| <b>Never/hardly ever</b> | <i>21.5</i>               | <i>34.1</i>              | <i>54.5</i>          | <i>44.9</i>    |

Respondents were asked about the extent to which they had experienced problems in reading, writing and mathematics in school. From Table 5.2, it can be seen that the majority of prisoners had experienced some problems in relation to literacy activities, particularly in the area of mathematics. In fact the picture for reading and writing is similar with nearly half of the prisoners saying that they had no problems and nearly 30% saying that they had problems either 'now and again' or 'serious problems'. In the case of mathematics, the problems were much more serious. Less than 30% said that they had no problems, while nearly 45% indicated that they had problems 'now and again' or 'serious problems'.

It is interesting that the IALS showed broadly the same pattern but with relatively smaller percentages indicating problems. It is especially interesting that problems with mathematics were also reported by a higher percentage in that study compared with either reading or writing. These findings have important implications for understanding literacy as a broad set of skills and indeed for the education system generally.

**TABLE 5.2: PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED IN SCHOOL WITH READING, WRITING AND MATHEMATICS**

|                               | Reading     | Writing     | Mathematics |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>No problems</b>            | <b>49.0</b> | <b>49.8</b> | <b>29.8</b> |
| <b>Some slight problems</b>   | <b>20.5</b> | <b>19.9</b> | <b>25.3</b> |
| <b>Problems now and again</b> | <b>9.6</b>  | <b>11.3</b> | <b>19.5</b> |
| <b>Serious problems</b>       | <b>20.9</b> | <b>18.9</b> | <b>25.3</b> |

*Note: Table entries are the percentage who have experienced problems/no problems with the domain of literacy in question.*

Some broad questions were also asked regarding school and commitment to school. An important matter is the age of leaving school. From Table 5.3 on the next page, it is evident that the vast majority had left school at a very young age. It can be seen that about 40% of prisoners left school at age 14 years or younger while a slightly higher percentage left at age 15 or 16 years. In contrast less than one sixth of the prisoners in the sample remained in school until age 17 years or more. Two other features of Table 5.3 are worth mentioning. The first is that a significant minority of the sample had left school at age 12 or younger. In other words, these had not transferred at all to post-primary school. Another interesting point is that there was very little difference between the pattern of school leaving for males and for females in this sample, despite the fact that in the population generally, relatively more males have dropped out at the earliest ages.

**TABLE 5.3: AGE OF LEAVING SCHOOL**

|                       | Males | Females | All  |
|-----------------------|-------|---------|------|
| Age 12 or younger     | 14.1  | 13.8    | 13.3 |
| Age 13/14 years       | 26.9  | 27.2    | 27.7 |
| Age 15/16 years       | 43.1  | 43.2    | 43.2 |
| Age 17 years or older | 16.9  | 15.6    | 15.8 |

Prisoners were also asked about their attendance at school and how much they liked school. The results for these questions are shown in Table 5.4. From this table it is evident that very few prisoners had good attendance. In fact, only less than one quarter described their attendance as very good, and more than one third missed school either quite often or very often.

The results with regard to liking for school are broadly consistent with the outcomes for attendance. As can be seen in Table 5.4, less than a quarter of the respondents said that they liked school (either a little or a lot), while the others disliked school to various degrees including over one-fifth who disliked school a lot.

The information on leaving school, on attendance at school and liking for school show a remarkable pattern of similarity in that a low degree of involvement with school is shown for each one. Thus, for many prisoners we can conclude that they had very poor attendance, that they disliked school when they attended and that they left school at the first opportunity.

**TABLE 5.4: ATTENDANCE AT SCHOOL AND LIKING FOR SCHOOL**

| Attendance          |      | Liking for School |      |
|---------------------|------|-------------------|------|
| Very good           | 24.7 | Liked a lot       | 15.1 |
| Missed some days    | 18.2 | Liked a little    | 8.9  |
| Sometimes good/ bad | 20.5 | Sometimes/not     | 39.4 |
| Missed quite often  | 16.4 | Did not like      | 14.7 |
| Missed very often   | 20.2 | Disliked a lot    | 21.9 |

As noted above, about half of the prisoners said that they had some problems in school with reading and writing and somewhat more said that they had problems with mathematics. An important issue is the extent to which they had problems afterwards in these areas. This information is shown in Table 5.5.

This shows that the pattern for experiencing problems after leaving school in these areas is broadly the same as for the problems that were experienced in school. In general, there was a tendency for a somewhat smaller percentage to report problems than was the case in school. However, it is striking that close to half of the prisoners said that they experienced problems of one kind or another in reading and writing, while well over half reported problems with mathematics.

**TABLE 5.5: PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED AFTER LEAVING SCHOOL WITH READING, WRITING AND MATHEMATICS**

|                               | Reading     | Writing     | Mathematics |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>No problems</b>            | <i>54.1</i> | <i>52.4</i> | <i>42.5</i> |
| <b>Some slight problems</b>   | <i>21.6</i> | <i>21.9</i> | <i>28.1</i> |
| <b>Problems now and again</b> | <i>9.9</i>  | <i>13.0</i> | <i>14.4</i> |
| <b>Serious problems</b>       | <i>14.4</i> | <i>12.7</i> | <i>15.1</i> |

An important question was the extent to which prisoners perceived literacy problems to come in the way of getting a job or of getting a better job. With regard to getting a *regular* job, more than half of those who did not have a regular job, took the view that reading and writing skills came in the way of getting such employment. Of the others (who had a job at some time) roughly the same percentage thought that reading and writing did indeed prevent them in some way from getting a better job. However, it should be noted that nearly half of the sample thought that these influences were not important in their employment - something that makes sense given that roughly half of the prison sample had at least moderate literacy skills. This information is shown in Table 5.6 on the next page.

**TABLE 5.6: PERCEIVED INFLUENCES OF READING AND WRITING IN EMPLOYMENT**

|                       | Getting a regular job | Getting a better job |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Not really</b>     | <i>46.6</i>           | <i>51.0</i>          |
| <b>In a small way</b> | <i>17.1</i>           | <i>16.1</i>          |
| <b>A good deal</b>    | <i>14.7</i>           | <i>13.4</i>          |
| <b>A lot</b>          | <i>21.6</i>           | <i>19.4</i>          |

6

**Chapter**

Chapter

**Discussion, Implications and  
Recommendations**

## 6. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the present study show that prisoners have a relatively lower literacy level than the general population and that a substantial number of prisoners have no literacy skills. Before considering the implications of these findings a number of considerations should be taken into account.

Firstly, unlike in many studies there was no problem associated with non-response since almost all (more than 98%) of the selected sample co-operated in the study. Another factor that is likely to have enhanced the validity of the data was that the tests were administered by personnel from the Prison Education Service who had gained the trust and confidence of the respondents.

The second point is that the results are broadly in line with findings from other countries. As noted in the literature review the picture is not totally consistent, yet there are indications that prison populations are generally characterised by low literacy levels. The results are also consistent with the Irish studies that have shown that the vast majority of prisoners have left school without formal qualifications.

### CRIME PREVENTION AND REDUCTION

Since we are making a number of recommendations based on the implications of the findings for the prevention of crime, it is worth considering briefly some of the main conclusions of the research evidence on crime prevention. As in other areas of prevention (e.g., drug misuse, *Morgan 2001*) interventions can be divided into those that are primary, secondary or tertiary. Rather than attempt to review all such interventions as has been recently done by O'Mahony (2002, p. 659- 671), attention will be drawn to some interventions that fit especially with the focus of the present work.

Perhaps the most promising area of intervention is in the primary prevention area. What is especially interesting is that a number of well-controlled longitudinal studies have shown reliable evidence for positive impacts. It is especially worth noting that these studies produce

substantial positive outcomes not only in crime prevention but also in drug misuse and long-term educational achievement. The most frequently cited study is the High/Scope Perry Pre-school programme, which followed a group of children from a disadvantaged community who experienced an intensive pre-school programme and compared them with a control group who did not have the experience of such a programme. There were major differences with regard to rates of arrest, substance misuse and educational achievement favouring the intervention group (*Schweinhart & Weikart, 1993*).

There are a number of other programmes with a focus on primary intervention that have shown similar results (*Zigler et al, 1992*). The Parent-Child Development Centre programme in Huston, which focused on mother-child interaction in the family setting involved about 550 hours of family involvement with families of school-age children with a view to reducing problem behaviours and promoting mental health in families. The long-term results indicated that there was a considerable reduction in the behaviours and risk factors that are associated with subsequent criminal behaviour.

There is also evidence that family-based interventions may yield better results than other efforts at intervention (*Alexander et al, 2000*). It is worth mentioning in this context that family approaches to literacy are among the most promising of the interventions that seek to address subsequent literacy problems and educational failure. Thus a strong argument can be made for incorporating a literacy feature into family interventions, whatever the ultimate goal of the interventions might be.

In Ireland, the Springboard interventions are among the best known of the family support interventions (*McKeown, 2000*), while Breaking the Cycle and the home-school-community-liaison programmes are major interventions in the educational domain (*Kellaghan et al, 1995*). A number of questions concern the factors that differentiate between those programmes that are effective those that are less so. A review conducted in the context of drug prevention (*Morgan, 2001*) concluded that effective programmes have the following features: (i) Developmental timing is correct, (ii) Programmes are intense, (iii) Involve direct experiences of children, (iv) are broad and flexible, and (v) have adequate environmental maintenance.

It is also of particular interest to note that prevention methods that take simplistic 'shock-tactics' have been quite ineffective despite their popular appeal. Among the earliest of these was the JOLT programme (*Juvenile Offenders Learn the Truth*), and 'scared straight' programmes. However, evaluations of such programmes show that while they are quite popular with the general public, their effects on young people is negligible or even negative (*Homant & Osowski, 1982*).

It is interesting that the evidence on the effectiveness of scare tactics and similar approaches mirrors what has been found with regard to drug misuse. One of the strongest conclusions emerging in a review of this research show that efforts to frighten young people away from drugs are quite ineffective (*Morgan, 2001*). Simply making young people aware of the hazards of crime or the dangers of drugs makes no contribution to prevention in either area.

### **CURRENT POLICY IN RELATION TO EDUCATION IN PRISON**

Since the publication of the Whitaker Committee's report in 1985 successive policy statements and initiatives have placed emphasis on the crucial role education can play in the management and rehabilitation of prisoners. All these reports, including those produced by the Prison Education Service, explicitly acknowledge the existence of a major literacy problem within the prison system and list basic education as a priority area of work.

This is the first research however that measures the extent of the problem in an objective manner and most importantly compares the literacy levels of prisoners with those of the general population. In this regard, when outlining the implications for the Prison Education Service, account must be taken of broader policy initiatives being taken by the Department of Education and Science in the wake of the publication of the IALS research in 1997 (*see Chapter 2 above*).

In general terms, Education Units devise student-centred individualised programmes for learners, based on the broad adult education orientation advocated in the Council of Europe report referred to in Chapter 2.

Courses include:

- Basic Education: Literacy, Numeracy and ICT;
- Health and Physical Education;
- General Studies, leading to certification where appropriate;
- Practical Subjects such as Woodwork, Metalwork or Horticulture;
- Creative Activities, including Music, Drama, Art, Pottery and Crafts;
- Personal Development Courses.

Literacy tuition is integrated into the context of this broader curriculum wherever possible. Access to accredited courses is generally available, with a significant proportion of prisoners taking modules at FETAC Foundation Level, and others studying for exams at Junior and Leaving Certificate Levels or with other exam bodies. Open University courses are also available. The service offers a well structured broad curriculum and this is evidenced by high participation rates by international standards, with good take-up of accreditation options. An emphasis on the development of the 'whole person' is very much in evidence, through the breadth of the curriculum offered and the approaches to teaching that are promoted. This approach is proposed in contrast to a narrower view as to prison education's role and scope, particularly prevalent in North America, and with a specific focus on basic skills and vocational training. This latter approach, it is claimed, draws fewer prisoners into classes and activities (*Warner, 2002*).

There are many examples to hand of good practice in relation to basic education in prison education units (*Kett, 2001 & Lorenz, 2002*). The Prison Education Service has recently published its own *Guidelines for Quality Literacy Work in Prisons (2002)*, which aims to facilitate education units to reach and retain a larger number of prisoners with literacy problems. This document stresses the pioneering work developed by the education service in relation to adult literacy, particularly in the areas of publishing and materials development, group and team teaching and in-service training. The Guidelines in turn take a 'person-centred

approach' referring to the definition of literacy promoted by the National Adult Literacy Agency: "All good adult literacy work starts with the needs of the individual (...) and goes far beyond the mere technical skills of communication."

The Guidelines also refer to the definitions currently used by the Department of Education and Science in conjunction with VEC literacy schemes:

**Level 1:** - knows alphabet but has difficulties with reading;

**Level 2:** - can read but has difficulties with writing, spelling or grammar;

**Level 3:** - can read and write but needs to improve skills for education or work.

Amongst other recommendations, the document stresses the need for the development of action plans, which are regularly monitored and reviewed, as well as clear targets for the enrolment of prisoners with literacy difficulties. It also outlines measures to develop access routes, ensure regular student attendance and to promote staff training.

### IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH FOR PRISON EDUCATION SERVICE

#### PRIORITISING PRISONERS WITH LITERACY DIFFICULTIES

The research findings show that in comparison with the general population, there is a much higher percentage of people at Level 1 or lower within the prison system.

For example, within the general population approximately 25% of people scored at Level 1 or below, whereas within the Irish prison population 52% of respondents scored at this level. This is particularly alarming given the age profile of the prison population (39.2% aged under 25) and the fact that younger people performed better in the general IALS survey: there were approximately 17% of people aged between 16 and 25 at Level 1 as opposed to 41% of people aged between 56 and 65. In this respect it is worth again emphasizing the impact of the IALS survey on adult education policy, not just in Ireland but elsewhere in the European Union. We would

therefore recommend that there is a need to *re-define* the education needs of those prisoners with low literacy levels in all education units as *top priority*, as well as setting targets for enrolments. In this respect we would endorse the recommendations outlined in the recently published *Literacy Guidelines* but also stress the urgent need to commit specific resources to tackling the issue and monitoring progress.

At present there are no published statistics in relation to the percentages of prisoners with poor literacy skills attending education classes. A first step might be for education units to return statistics using the Department of Education and Science levels detailed above. Despite the general high participation rates in prison, education units should also be mindful of the findings of the IALS survey in relation to participation in adult education that showed that those with higher literacy skills were more likely to attend than those with poor skills.

An initial aim of this research study was to develop a screening instrument for prisoners at the lowest level of literacy. However, during the course of the research the National Adult Literacy Agency, on behalf of the Department of Education and Science, commissioned a major project on literacy assessment for use by all Irish adult literacy providers. It was agreed with NALA that it would be more appropriate for the prison education service to participate in this research process and eventually access the assessment framework, rather than develop a separate assessment tool. At this point a draft framework has been produced and is currently being piloted, and one prison education unit has participated in this process. A further stage will involve mainstreaming the framework and making it available to literacy practitioners generally. The NALA Assessment Framework does not presently include an initial screening tool, but the option of developing such a tool will be considered by the Agency, as the assessment project rolls out, for use in settings such as prisons and vocational training centres. It is recommended that the Prison Education Service co-operate with NALA to develop an initial screening tool for literacy.

### NEGATIVE ATTITUDES TO EDUCATION

The research results also show a low degree of involvement with initial education: poor attendance, dislike of school and departure at the first

opportunity (13.3% left at age 12 or younger and a further 27.7% at age 13/14). These findings pose particular challenges for the prison education service. If so many prisoners have such a negative school experience it will be hardly surprising if prison education units have difficulty in reaching and retaining a significant number of people with basic literacy problems. In the wake of IALS, UK research has underlined the low percentages of those estimated to be in need who attend provision (*Brooks et al, 2000*) and it is widely acknowledged that new, more focused efforts will have to be made to attract many more potential learners.

Other recent research conducted by the Dublin Adult Literacy Scheme sought to identify specific strategies for increasing the participation of marginalized men who do not traditionally participate in literacy education. Focussing on the learning needs of long-term unemployed men in Dublin's inner city, the research report, in line with earlier Irish studies, details negative school experiences and embarrassment as barriers to participation. It also highlights however the influence of male culture on decisions not to participate: "Fear of ridicule by other men emerged as a key concern for the study participants. The work place and the pub were identified as sites of fear for many and as environments wherein harsh treatment was expected and a culture of 'slagging' prevailed.... Some participants suggested that while participation in adult education is acceptable for women, it could sometimes be seen as inappropriate for men (and)... the macho self-image may be threatened by participation in education." (*Corridan, 2002*)

Amongst other recommendations the report proposes a drop-in facility, peer support and peer referral systems and finally family learning programmes, building on men's desire to be involved in their children's education. The Prison Education Service has acknowledged the difficulties inherent in recruiting those with literacy difficulties in its own recent report and outlined a range of useful outreach approaches that if implemented systematically should result in the recruitment of larger numbers of students. Taking on board the recommendations of the Dublin Adult Literacy Scheme's research, it also might build on previous projects involving prisoners working as volunteer tutors, and parenting/family literacy programmes, to develop specific strategies in this regard.

### INTENSIVE LITERACY PROGRAMMES

Research indicates that 2-4 hours tuition a week is insufficient to address the literacy needs of basic learners and that this group "would need many years to get to a threshold basic skills level" (Moser, 1999). Prison education units do provide a comprehensive range of learning opportunities as detailed above and some courses offering more intensive basic education have been organised in the past. Many prisoners do access Further Education Training Awards Council (FETAC) Foundation courses as well as Junior and Leaving Certificate. The results from the current survey and the very significant numbers scoring at Pre-Level 1 indicate that there is a need to provide *intensive courses for prisoners at very basic literacy levels*. One new model might be some of the current initiatives at community level, which are prioritising adults with poor literacy skills, particularly those whose skills are weakest. A range of pilot programmes promoted by the National Adult Literacy Agency, in conjunction with VECs, FÁS and Local Government are providing intensive basic education programmes for participants on Community Employment Schemes as well as local authority employees. Course content includes literacy, communications, numeracy, ICT, personal development and job orientation skills and are run over a set number of weeks for up to 9 hours a week.

Evaluation reports evidence the clear benefits gained by students including educational advances, increase in self-confidence and changes in outlook in terms of further education/training or work (McArdle, 1999).

Consideration should also be given to using ICT as a motivating force, particularly for younger learners and those most alienated from the system. Conclusions from a European Basic Skills project, led by the Basic Skills Agency in the UK, and in which Wheatfield Prison Education Unit was a partner, stressed the powerful motivating role ICT can play with disaffected

learners whose initial experience of education has been extremely negative (Basic Skills Agency, 2001). In this regard, ICT projects such as "It Could Be You" (a series of graded readers for adult beginners with CD-ROM and audiotapes) should be promoted and expanded (CDVEC, 2001).

### LINKING EDUCATION AND TRAINING TO POST RELEASE OPPORTUNITIES

More than half the research sample took the view that reading and writing skills came in the way of obtaining employment and a similar percentage of those who had had a job thought that reading and writing prevented them in some way from getting a better job. A European Social Fund report on training for prisoners emphasised the strong demand from them for training, certification and progression opportunities, as well as skills that can be used for employment purposes on release.

The NESF report also stressed the need to link education and training in relation to post-release opportunities and the Prison Education Service in its current strategy statement commits to working in partnership with other agencies to promote Positive Sentence Management. In this regard it is recommended that the Prison Education Service *builds on and develops strategies to support the literacy needs of prisoners through the Work Training programme that operates in each prison. Such support could include literacy awareness training for all training staff as well as specific support for prisoners, through individual tuition or courses geared to particular areas of work and/or training* (NALA, 2002).

The White Paper on Adult Education stresses that a key priority for the prison education service is to strengthen the linkages between in-prison provision and that available for prisoners on release. As well as a range of pre-release courses organised by Education Units there are currently a number of initiatives offering post-release support and education provision for prisoners in Dillon's Cross and Hope in Cork, and Pathways and Pace in Dublin (*Directory of Prison Education, 2002*). There is also an increasing range of part-time educational opportunities available in VEC Further Education Colleges and Centres, particularly through the expanded Adult Literacy Service and the Back to Education Initiative. The difficulties facing prisoners in the transition back to the community can be enormous and slotting into a new and strange learning environment can be the least of them. In order to promote effective post-release educational opportunities prison education staff need to build close communication with other agencies not just within the prison, but also with further and adult education providers within the community, particularly those promoting social inclusion measures such as Local Partnerships, RAPID Initiatives and Community Drugs Task Forces.

*We therefore recommend that prison education staff liaise more closely with Community Education providers and that post-release educational options be included in individual sentence planning.*

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations set out below are in two sections. The first set of recommendations concern the Prison Education Service while the second set focuses on broad matters of addressing prevention issues.

1. The Prison Education Service should prioritise the educational needs of those prisoners with the weakest literacy skills. All education units should review the emphasis placed on literacy and basic education within their programmes, to give effect to the existing policy of prioritizing prisoners with basic education needs.
2. Statistics returned by education units in relation to attendance should detail the numbers of prisoners with literacy difficulties attending classes, using Department of Education And Science guidelines.
3. The Prison Education Service should explore the possibility of introducing a standardised initial screening process for literacy for all prisoners in conjunction with the National Adult Literacy Agency, as part of its Assessment Framework.
4. There is a need for more work to raise the awareness of other staff within the prison system in relation to literacy issues. education units should offer organised 'Awareness Training' courses.
5. The Prison Education Service should actively promote the implementation of the Guidelines for Quality Literacy Work in Prisons, including all its specific recommendations in relation to:
  - setting targets in line with the findings of this research;
  - developing access routes;
  - retention of students;
  - learning plans for students;
  - staff training;
  - monitoring provision.

6. 'Peer' tutor training programmes, using prisoners as volunteer tutors, should be expanded.
7. Parenting programmes should include a module on family literacy.
8. Learning plans for prisoners with poor literacy skills (IALS Level 1 or below) should include at least 4 hours direct literacy teaching a week, as recommended by the *Guidelines for Quality Literacy Work in Prisons*. More intensive basic education programmes with clear targets should also be implemented, as well as innovative ICT programmes to attract those who are most disaffected.
9. More efforts should be made to link the education and training needs of prisoners than is currently the case. The Prison Education Service should organise literacy awareness training for other prison staff as well as specific courses to support prisoners undertaking training courses.
10. A key priority for the prison education service is to strengthen the linkages between in-prison provision and that available for prisoners on release through liaison with agencies both inside and outside prison.

### PRIMARY PREVENTION OF CRIME

On the basis of the evidence considered here there is a need for a major effort to co-ordinate initiatives that focus on the variety of aspects of social exclusion that contribute to crime. It is striking that the factors that have been shown to be related to crime are also those that have been shown to be associated with drug misuse. It should be stressed that literacy problems and indeed social disadvantage are not critical to all kinds of crime, as was evident from the findings above.

Interventions that are focused on the primary prevention of crime should give attention to the centrality of literacy educational achievement and the importance of literacy in social, emotional and personal development that in turn are important pre-disposing factors in criminality. In this regard, it is particularly striking that serious literacy problems were particularly common among violent offenders and among young male prisoners. It is important that these issues be debated, given the rise in the prison population and the need to explore the reasons for this increase.

### WE RECOMMEND:

- 11.** There should be a recognition of the role of educational disadvantage in general and the significance of literacy problems in certain types of crime.
- 12.** Initiatives that address social exclusion should be recognised for their importance in addressing a range of social problems including drug misuse, anti-social behaviour, unemployment and educational failure. The evidence here and elsewhere shows the strong inter-relationships between all of these.
- 13.** Initiatives to address these problems should be comprehensive, involve inter-agency co-operation and have community involvement. Interventions of this kind have been shown to be quite successful.
- 14.** In devising interventions, it is crucial that they be of long duration, are intense and engaging and that they be maintained over the years. They will necessarily be expensive. However, these costs should be seen in the context of the potential savings.
- 15.** Early school leaving is a critical event in involvement in crime. The prevention of early school leaving should be at the core of intervention.
- 16.** Simple solutions, like 'shock tactics' involving letting young people know the 'real consequences' of crime are unlikely to be effective.

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**Appendix**

Appendix

**1**

## APPENDIX I

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Institution: .....

Sample no (see #5): .....

#### Instructions for Interview Schedule

- 1. You can administer the interview schedule either at the same time or separate from the literacy tests.*
- 2. It is permitted to help the respondent with the interpretation and or reading the schedule.*
- 3. There is no specific time limit.*
- 4. Mark any comments on the schedule as appropriate.*
- 5. The sample number (above) refers to the particular number that the respondent has in this present study.*

#### Background Information

Gender: ( ) Male ( ) Female

Date of birth: ..... Month ..... Day ..... Year

Length of sentence: ..... years ..... months

Below there are a number of questions about your experiences associated with reading and school. Most of the questions just ask you to pick the answer that is closest to what you think.

**SECTION A: EVERYDAY READING AND WRITING IN PRISON**

**A1. How often do you read a newspaper:**

- Everyday or nearly everyday ( )
- About once or twice a week ( )
- About once or twice a month ( )
- About once or twice a year ( )
- Never or hardly ever ( )

**A2. And how often would you read magazines?**

- Everyday or nearly everyday ( )
- About once or twice a week ( )
- About once or twice a month ( )
- About once or twice a year ( )
- Never or hardly ever ( )

**A3. And how often would you read a book of any kind?**

- Everyday or nearly everyday ( )
- About once or twice a week ( )
- About once or twice a month ( )
- About once or twice a year ( )
- Never or hardly ever ( )

**A4. How often would you write something that was a page or more (letter, essay, etc)**

- Everyday or nearly everyday ( )
- About once or twice a week ( )
- About once or twice a month ( )
- About once or twice a year ( )
- Never or hardly ever ( )

**SECTION B: EVERYDAY READING AND WRITING OUTSIDE PRISON**

**B1. How often did you read a newspaper:**

- Everyday or nearly everyday ( )
- About once or twice a week ( )
- About once or twice a month ( )
- About once or twice a year ( )
- Never or hardly ever ( )

**B2. And how often would you have read magazines?**

- Everyday or nearly everyday ( )
- About once or twice a week ( )
- About once or twice a month ( )
- About once or twice a year ( )
- Never or hardly ever ( )

**B3. And how often would you have read a book of any kind?**

- Everyday or nearly everyday ( )
- About once or twice a week ( )
- About once or twice a month ( )
- About once or twice a year ( )
- Never or hardly ever ( )

**B4. How often would you have written something that was a page or more (letter, essay, etc)**

- Everyday or nearly everyday ( )
- About once or twice a week ( )
- About once or twice a month ( )
- About once or twice a year ( )
- Never or hardly ever ( )

**SECTION C: READING, WRITING AND MATHEMATICS IN SCHOOL**

C1. When you were in school did you have problems with reading?

- No problems at all
- Some slight problems
- Problems now and again
- Serious problems

C2. When you were in school did you have problems with writing?

- No problems at all
- Some slight problems
- Problems now and again
- Serious problems

C3. When you were in school did you have problems with maths and calculations?

- No problems at all
- Some slight problems
- Problems now and again
- Serious problems

C4. At which age did you leave school:

C5. Describe your attendance in school before you left school?

- Very good...I missed very few days
- Good I missed some days
- Sometimes good and sometimes bad
- I missed days from school quite often
- I missed days from school very often

C6. Overall how much did you like/dislike school

- I liked school a lot
- I liked school a little
- Sometimes I liked school and sometimes not
- I did not like school much
- I disliked school a lot

**SECTION D: READING, WRITING AND MATHEMATICS AFTER SCHOOL**

D1. After you left school, how often did you experience problems in reading?

- Seldom or never
- Sometimes
- Quite often
- Very often

D2. After you left school, how often did you experience problems with writing?

- Seldom or never
- Sometimes
- Quite often
- Very often

D3. After you left school, how often did you experience problems with maths and calculations?

- Seldom or never
- Sometimes
- Quite often
- Very often

**SECTION E: READING AND WRITING AT WORK**

E1. Have you ever had a regular job (longer than 3 months)

- Yes....go on to E2
- No.....skip to E3.

E2. How much did problems with reading and writing prevent you from getting a better job, at any time?

- Not really
- Yes, in some small way
- Yes, a good deal
- Yes, a lot

E3. How much did problems with reading and writing prevent you from getting a regular job?

- Not really
- Yes, in some small way
- Yes, a good deal
- Yes, a lot

**Samples of Tests from  
International Adult Literacy Survey**

**Appendix**

Appendix

**2**

## APPENDIX 2

### SAMPLES OF TESTS FROM INTERNATIONAL ADULT LITERACY SURVEY

- (i) *Screening test (Pre-level 1)*
- (ii) *Aspirin (Level 1)*
- (iii) *Few Dutch women at the blackboard (Level 2)*
- (iv) *World Producer of Primary energy (Level 3)*
- (v) *The Hiring Interview (Level 4)*

#### SREENING TEST(PRE-LEVEL 1)

Here is a telephone message slip.  
Circle the name of the person who telephoned.

**MESSAGE**

*Scott Murray*  phoned  
NAME OF CALLER OR VISITOR

*Central Car Repair*  visited  
of

Phone number *604 5975*

Please phone     Returned your phone call     Will phone again

URGENT

Message:

*Please Phone before noon.  
 Needs to talk to you  
 before he repairs your  
 car.*

---

MESSAGE FOR *Nancy Mead*

Taken by: *Jac*    Date: *11 / 11*    Time: *9.20 a.m.*

LEVEL 1

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>ASPIRIN</b>   | <b>500</b>  |
| INDICATIONS: Headaches, muscle pains, rheumatic pains, toothaches, earaches, RELIEVES COMMON COLD SYMPTOMS.  |   |
| DOSAGE ORAL 1 or 2 tablets every 6 hours, preferably accompanied by food, for no longer than 7 days. Store in a cool dry place.  |   |
| CAUTION: Do not use for gastritis or peptic ulcer. Do not use if taking anticoagulant drugs. Do not use for serious liver illness or bronchial asthma. If taken in large doses and for an extended period, may cause harm to kidneys. Before using this medication for chicken pox or influenza in children, consult with a doctor about Reyes Syndrome, a rare but serious illness. During lactation and pregnancy, consult with a doctor before using this product, especially in the last trimester of pregnancy. If symptoms persist, or in case of an accidental overdose, consult a doctor. Keep out of reach of children. |   |
| INGREDIENTS: Each tablet contains<br>500 mg acetylsalicylic acid<br>Excipient c.b.p. 1 tablet.<br>Reg No. 88246  |  |
| Made in Ireland by 'NATIONAL LABORATORIES LTD'<br>Roscrea Co. Tipperary.   |   |

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Use the medicine label above to answer questions 1 to 3.

1. What is the maximum number of days you should take this medicine?

.....

2. List three situations for which you should consult a doctor.

.....  
.....  
.....

3. What is the maximum number of tablets that can be taken in 24 hours?

.....

LEVEL 2

Use the chart below about women in the teaching profession in Europe to answer questions 1 to 3.

1. What is the percentage of women in the teaching profession in Greece?

.....

2. Calculate the percentage of men in the teaching profession in Italy?

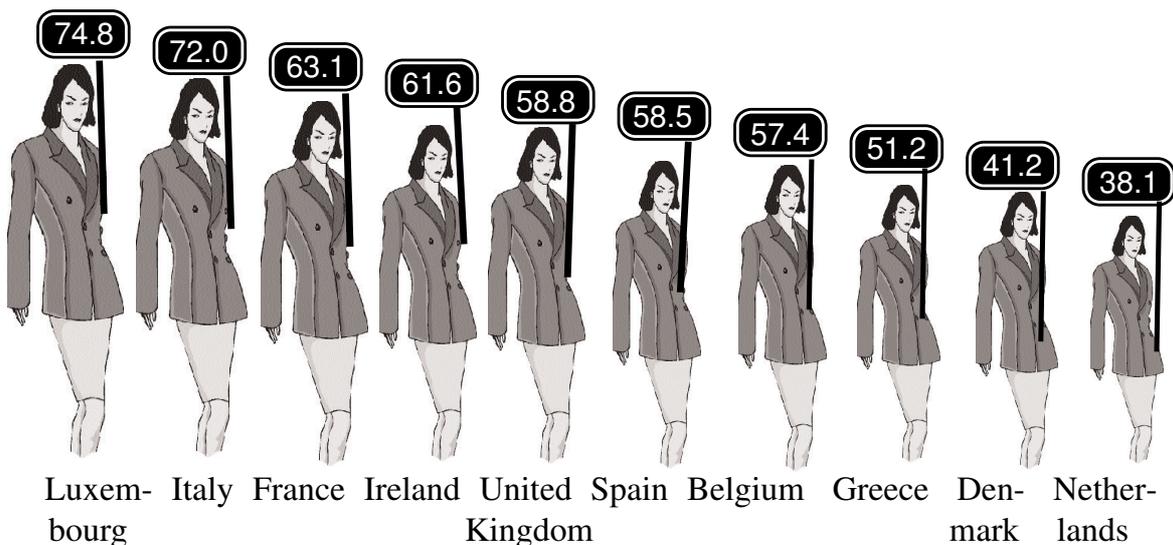
.....

3. In which country, other than the Netherlands, are women in the teaching profession in the minority?

.....

**FEW DUTCH WOMEN AT THE BLACKBOARD**

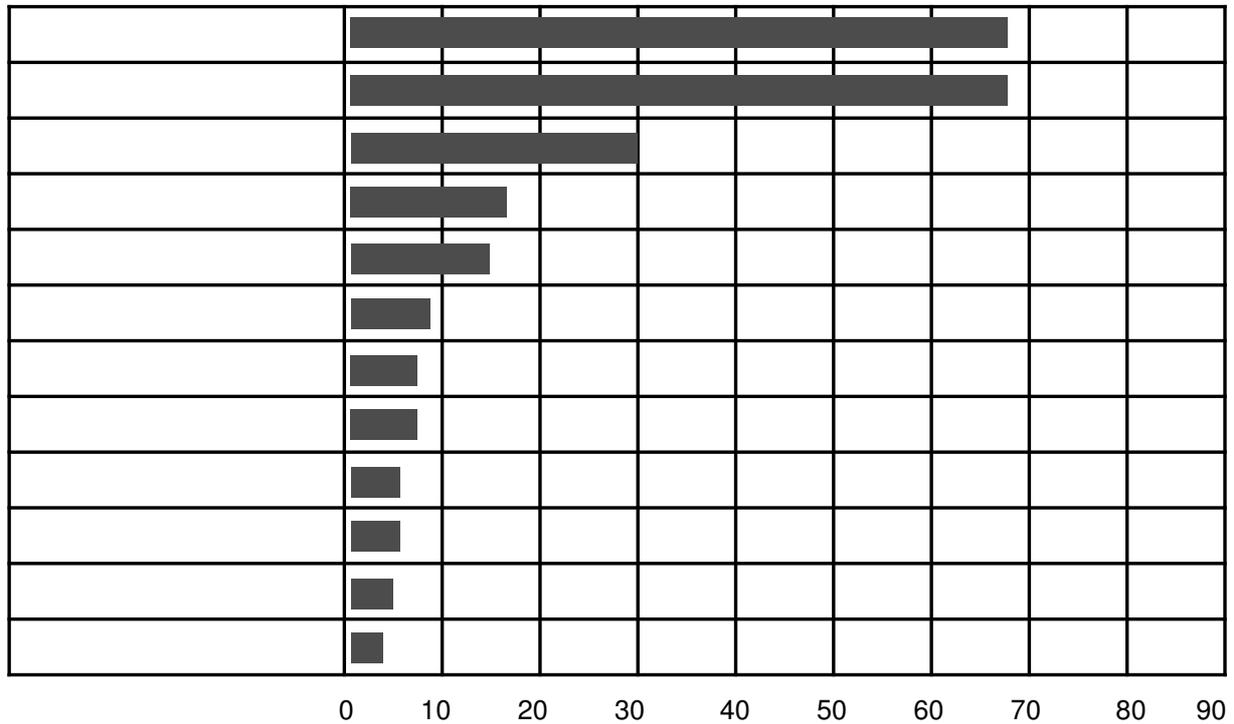
There is a low percentage of women teachers in the Netherlands compared to other countries. In most of the other countries, the majority of teachers are women. However, if we include the figures for inspectors and school principals, the proportion shrinks considerably and women are in the minority everywhere.



Percentage of women teachers (primary and secondary)

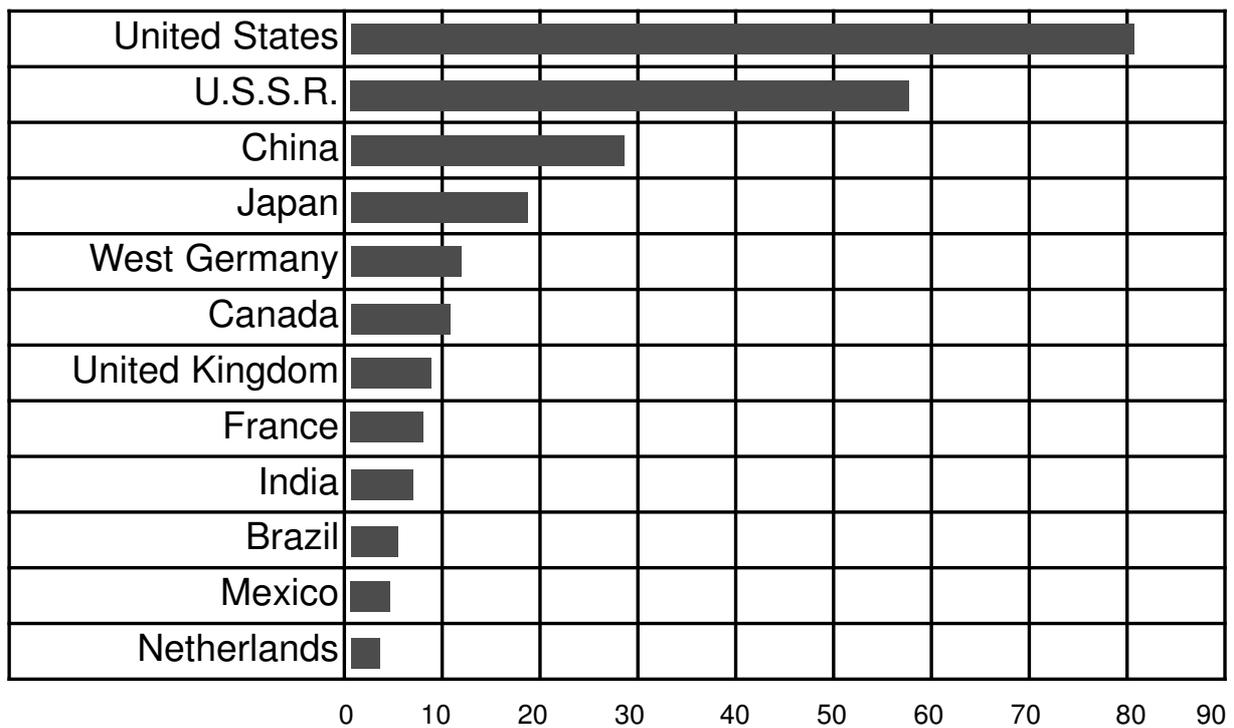
LEVEL 3

World's Major Producers of Primary Energy, 1990



SOURCE: Energy Information Administration; International Energy Annual 1990; Quadrillion( $10^{15}$ )Btu

World's Major Consumers of Primary Energy, 1990



SOURCE: Energy Information Administration; International Energy Annual 1990; Quadrillion( $10^{15}$ )Btu

Use the graphs about producers and consumers of primary energy on the following page to answer questions 1 to 3. These figures are presented in quadrillion Btu, which is a way to measure large amounts of energy.

1. How many more quadrillion Btu of primary energy does Canada produce then it consumes?

.....

2. List all the countries that are mentioned as major consumers, but not mentioned as major producers of primary energy in 1990.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

3. Calculate the total amount if energy in quadrillion Btu consumed by Canada, Mexico and the United States.

.....

**LEVEL 4**

Use the page from an employment pamphlet about the hiring interview on the next page to answer questions 1 to 3.

1. According to the pamphlet, what two things should you do to prepare for an interview?

.....  
.....

2. Using the information in the pamphlet, describe in your own words one difference between the panel interview and the group interview.

.....  
.....

3. According to the pamphlet, what is the main purpose of the post-interview review

.....

## THE HIRING INTERVIEW

### PRE-INTERVIEW

Try to learn more about the business. What products does it manufacture or services does it provide? What methods or procedures does it use? This information can be found in trade directories, chamber of commerce or industrial directories, or at your local employment exchange.

Find out more about the position. Would you replace someone or is the position newly created? In which departments or shops would you work? Collective agreements describing various standardized positions and duties are available at most local employment offices. You can also contact the appropriate trade union.

### THE INTERVIEW

Ask questions about the position and the business. Answer clearly and accurately all questions put to you. Bring along a note pad as well as your work and training documents.

### THE MOST COMMON TYPES OF INTERVIEW

One-on one: Self explanatory.

Panel: A number of people ask you questions and then compare notes on your application.

Group: After hearing a presentation with other applicants on the position and the duties, you take part in a group discussion.

### POST-INTERVIEW

Note the key points discussed. Compare questions that caused you difficulty with those that allowed you to highlight your strong points. Such a review will help you prepare for future interviews. If you wish, you can talk about it with the placement officer or career counsellor at your local employment office.