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**The pre-custody employment,
training and education status of
newly sentenced prisoners**

Results from the Surveying Prisoner
Crime Reduction (SPCR) longitudinal
cohort study of prisoners

Kathryn Hopkins
Ministry of Justice Analytical Services

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Summary

Analysis of the pre-custody employment, training and education status of 1,435 newly sentenced (in 2005 and 2006) prisoners from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) longitudinal cohort study quantified a number of important characteristics of the prison reception population. It compared subgroups of prisoners with each other: men with women; young adults (18–20 years) with older adults (21+); and prisoners from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds with prisoners from non-BAME groups.

Comparisons with the general population were made where possible, and associations with reoffending in the year after release from custody were reported.

The main findings were:

- Around one-third (32%) of SPCR prisoners reported being in paid employment in the four weeks before custody. However, 13% of SPCR prisoners reported never having had a job.
- Although 63% of SPCR prisoners who had been in paid employment in the four weeks prior to custody expected to return to their job on release, many others had already lost their jobs, some reportedly as a direct result of imprisonment. Disclosure of a criminal record was also reported as a trigger for the loss of employment.
- On average, SPCR prisoners who had ever worked reported receiving low pay compared with the general working age population in their last job before custody. Approximately one-quarter (24%) of these prisoners reported having had formal responsibility for supervising the work of other employees. Nearly half (49%) of the prisoners reported frequently working in routine and semi-routine occupations in their last job.
- Around one in five women prisoners (19%) reported being employed in the four weeks before custody, compared with one-third of men, and earned less in their last job (£167 per week) than men prisoners (£250 per week). Nearly two-thirds (64%) of prisoners from a BAME background reported having a qualification, compared to around half (51%) of prisoners from non-BAME groups, but were likely to report earning less in their last job before custody (£230 per week compared with £250). Young adult prisoners reported a lower level of earnings than older prisoners in their last job (£200 per week compared with £250).
- Around two-thirds (64%) of SPCR prisoners reported being in receipt of benefits at some point in the 12 months prior to coming into custody.

- Many prisoners reported needing help finding a job on release (48%), with education (41%) and to improve work-related skills (40%), and agreed that having a job would help them stop reoffending (68%).
- Educational attainment at GCSE level at grades A–C was similar amongst prisoners and the general population (around one in five: 22%), but this may be due to prison education programmes. Educational attainment beyond GCSE level amongst SPCR prisoners was lower than the general population. Just over half (53%) reported having any qualification, compared with 85% of the working age population.
- Prisoners' attitudes towards learning and education showed that they clearly understood the value of education, and were willing to learn. Only one in ten prisoners thought that 'learning was not for people like me'.
- Both having been employed in the year before custody and having a qualification were associated with a lower likelihood of reconviction in the year after release than being unemployed and not having a qualification (40% compared with 65%, and 45% compared with 60%, respectively). Having been in receipt of benefits in the year before custody was associated with a higher rate of reconviction in the year after release (58% compared with 42% for those not in receipt of benefits).

These findings show that the employment status of prisoners before custody is low, and that prison may present a significant opportunity for training, education and gaining employment skills amongst prisoners. However, this must be viewed in the context of the disruptive effects of imprisonment on the employment status of prisoners, who may lose their jobs on entering custody, and whose criminal records may be a barrier to employment.

1. Context

1.1 Background

A report by the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) in 2002, *Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners*,¹ referred to as 'the SEU Report', highlighted the low level of educational achievement and employment that is characteristic of prisoners and ex-prisoners, compared with the general population. The SEU Report demonstrated that prisons can provide education and training opportunities, recognised qualifications, and opportunities to engage in paid work experience. However, time spent in prison can also disrupt education, cause a loss of employment, and can allow existing skills to become outdated.

Employment status before custody and activity during custody are associated with employment and other outcomes on release, including reoffending. Niven and Stewart (2005) showed that prisoners who had a job in the four weeks prior to custody were much more likely to have employment, training and education arranged upon release. May, Sharma and Stewart (2008) showed that attending a prison job club was significantly associated with a reduced likelihood of reoffending.

International studies have also looked at the relationships between education, employment and offending. One set of theories tentatively connects employment problems in the general population with increases in crime. In Australia, a relationship between rising unemployment and increases in crime has been shown to exist, but the relationship is complex (Kapuscinski, Braithwaite and Chapman, 1998). In Canada, unemployment was shown to have a direct relationship with property crime (Baron, 2008). Other evidence suggests that unemployment may be an *indirect* cause of crime, interacting with a variety of other social and demographic factors (Farrington et al., 1986; Tarling, 1982). Many factors could and do affect offending (e.g. police effectiveness, the economy, incapacitation, deterrence, success in rehabilitating offenders, crime prevention activities, improved vehicle/household security, cultural norms, etc.), and the role of education and training is part of this complex set of factors. Field (1990) showed that, when other factors were controlled for, unemployment per se appeared to have no effect on crime rates.

Other research suggests that offending can be the *cause*, rather than the *result* of poor employment status. Kerley and Copes (2004), in the USA, reported a relationship between

¹ The SEU Report used a range of sources to conclude its findings.

contact with the criminal justice system and reduced earnings, but that the degree of disadvantage depended on age and class. Western, Kling and Weiman (2001), also in the USA, found that prison can reduce a prisoner's earnings (by an estimated 10% to 30%), but that this negative effect did not necessarily extend to employment prospects. The negative effect on earnings was greater for older prisoners. Graffam, Shinkfield and Hardcastle (2008), in Australia, showed that those with a criminal background were less likely than other disadvantaged groups (excluding disabled people), to obtain and maintain employment. Ex-prisoners were the least likely group to display employability skills and characteristics. Graffam, Shinkfield and Hardcastle (2008) wrote:

[for] ex-prisoners ... obtaining and maintaining employment is recognised, on one hand, as being very important to successful reintegration and avoidance of reoffending and, on the other, as being very difficult to achieve

It is clear that employment, training and education have a complicated circular relationship with offending and reoffending. These factors also have a relationship with other factors linked to offending and reoffending, particularly accommodation, and drug and alcohol addiction. May, Sharma and Stewart (2008) showed that accommodation and employment pathways interact: it is difficult to get a job without a fixed address, and to get stable housing without a job. Kilmer (2008), in the USA, reported that drug testing has a beneficial effect on parolees' short-term employment and education prospects. In addressing prisoners' problems and needs, therefore, a holistic approach is likely to be more effective than addressing issues separately.

1.2 The current research

This report is based on the results of Wave 1 of a longitudinal cohort study (Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR)) of a representative sample of 1,435 prisoners sentenced to between one month and four years, in 2005 and 2006 in England and Wales. The survey explored prisoner characteristics and needs, the interventions they received in prison and outcomes following release. SPCR Wave 1 consists of representative subsamples of men, women, younger and older prisoners, and prisoners of different ethnic backgrounds, allowing differences between these groups to be explored, subject to sample size limitations.

Some data and analysis from SPCR has already been published, including some of the findings in this research.²

² *Compendium of reoffending statistics and analysis*, Ministry of Justice Statistics Bulletin, November 2010.

Aim

The aim of this report is to:

- provide a detailed summary of newly sentenced prisoners' employment, training and education status before custody, using new and already published SPCR data;
- contextualise this information using national and international evidence;
- provide comparisons with the general population, where possible;
- investigate differences between: men and women prisoners; younger and older prisoners; and those from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) background and prisoners from a non-BAME background, to assess differing needs and to support requirements under the Equality Act 2010;
- indicate associations between employment status before custody and reconviction in the year after release from custody;
- make policy and operational recommendations based on the findings.

Limitations

It is important to note that, although the sample in the current survey is large overall (1,435 prisoners), the numbers of some subgroups are relatively small (132 women, compared with 1,303 men, for example, reflecting the smaller number of women in prison compared to men). Results based on small samples may not be reliable indicators of the wider population, and in some cases the sample sizes may be too small to detect differences which may actually exist. Information on all technical and methodological issues is available in the Technical Reports.³ Comparisons with the general population and other data and surveys are presented where appropriate to contextualise the findings of this survey. These should be treated as indicators rather than direct comparators.

³ Published alongside this paper.

2. Approach

This report is based on the results of Wave 1 of Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR), a longitudinal cohort study which tracked the progress of newly sentenced adult (18+ years) prisoners in England and Wales.⁴ It was commissioned by the Home Office/Ministry of Justice (MoJ),⁵ with fieldwork undertaken by Ipsos MORI. Respondents were sentenced in 2005 and 2006 to between one month and four years in prison. The overall sample of 3,849 prisoners consists of a nationally representative sample (Sample 1) of 1,435 prisoners sentenced from one month to four years, and a second sample (Sample 2) of 2,414 prisoners sentenced to between 18 months and four years. This report only uses data from Sample 1. This is representative of the prison reception population sentenced to between one month and four years in prison. It broadly provides a representative picture of the majority of prison receptions.⁶ The SPCR Technical Reports⁷ provide full details on the sampling and interviewing processes and questionnaires.

The survey was conducted in four waves:

- **Wave 1:** From interviews conducted on reception to prison, information was collected about the cohort of prisoners: their backgrounds and families, their offending history, their educational achievements and employment status, their attitudes and needs, and their plans and expectations upon release from prison.
- **Wave 2:** Data was collected from the same prisoners prior to release from prison (pre-release).
- **Waves 3 and 4:** Information was collected on prisoners' outcomes post-release, including education, employment, health, and family outcomes.

Survey participants were matched to the Police National Computer (PNC), allowing reconviction in the year after release from custody to be calculated. Some prisoners could not be matched to the PNC, meaning that the final reconviction sample for Sample 1 was 1,331 prisoners. Measuring true reoffending (the amount of crime committed after release from prison) is difficult, as only a proportion of crime is detected, sanctioned, and recorded. The PNC records reconviction (in court) for recordable offences, and this paper only reports

⁴ Some of the information in this report was published in the Ministry of Justice Statistics Bulletin, November 2010, *Compendium of reoffending statistics and analysis*.

⁵ Originally commissioned by Home Office Research Development and Statistics (RDS) and transferred to the Ministry of Justice Analytical Services when the Ministry of Justice was formed.

⁶ Less than 10% of prisoners were sentenced to more than four years in prison in 2006: *Offender management caseload statistics (annual)*, available at: <http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/statistics-and-data/prisons-and-probation/omcs-annual.htm>

⁷ Published alongside this paper.

whether an offender was reconvicted or not (yes/no measure) for an offence committed in the year after release from custody.⁸

Results in this report are from Sample 1, and where relevant, comparisons are made between key subgroups (gender, age, ethnicity). Prisoners' ages at interview were calculated by the interviewer entering the prisoners' self-reported dates of birth into a laptop computer, and confirming with the prisoner the age calculated by the computer program. Ethnicity was determined by showing participants a show card with 16 ethnic classifications⁹ (plus 'not stated/refused').

Where comparisons are made between subgroups, only statistically significant results ($p < 0.05$) are presented. The analysis is descriptive rather than explanatory. Areas of apparent difference or similarity between subgroups are noted but are intended to serve only as guides for exploration and analysis in future studies.

The key characteristics of SPCR prisoners, and whether they were reconvicted in the year after release from custody are shown in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: SPCR participants: gender, ethnicity, age and reconviction status

Characteristic	Number	Per cent
Total self-report sample	1,435	100
Male	1,303	91
Female	132	9
Non-BAME background	1,211	85
BAME background	224	15
Young adults (18–20)	174	12
Older adults (21+)	1,261	88
Total reconviction sample	1,331	100
Reconvicted	694	52
Not reconvicted	637	48

Prisoners from non-BAME backgrounds included 'White British', 'White Irish', and 'any other White background'. Prisoners of BAME backgrounds included all other ethnicities. Grouping ethnicities in this way was done to allow comparisons to be made between the majority ethnic group (white prisoners) and all other ethnic groups, but does not suggest that subgroups are similar. Small sample sizes for some ethnicities (Table 2.2) meant that

⁸ Offence must have been committed in the 12 months after release from custody; conviction in court for this offence may have occurred up to 18 months after release. Cautions, breaches, and historic convictions are excluded.

⁹ Based on the 2001 census: see Wave 1 Technical Report.

inferring results from them may be misleading. No prisoners reported being from a Chinese background – hence there are 15 categories reported instead of the 2001 Census 16 categories.

Table 2.2: SPCR participants: detailed ethnicity groupings

Ethnicity	Number	Per cent
White British	1,147	80
White Irish	24	2
Any other White background	40	3
White and Black Caribbean	33	2
White and Black African	7	*
White and Asian	8	*
Any other mixed background	7	*
Asian or Asian British – Indian	15	*
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	22	2
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	8	*
Asian or Asian British – Any other Asian background	6	*
Black or Black British – Caribbean	61	4
Black or Black British – African	37	3
Black or Black British – Any other Black background	8	*
Any other ethnic group	12	*
Total	1,435	100

* Denotes a figure of less than 1%

Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding and removal of small figures.

3. Results

The analysis quantified employment status and earnings before custody, employment expectations upon release, training and education, including level of qualifications, and needs and attitudes towards learning and reoffending. Differences between men and women, younger and older adult prisoners, and prisoners from BAME and non-BAME backgrounds were investigated. Associations between employment status and qualifications pre-custody and reoffending in the year after release from custody were explored.

3.1 Employment

Employment status prior to custody

SPCR prisoners were asked whether they had been in paid employment, including self-employment, and any temporary or part-time work¹⁰ before custody (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: SPCR prisoners’ employment status prior to custody

Employment status	Number	Per cent
In paid employment in the four weeks prior to custody	454	32
Not in paid employment in the four weeks before custody, but in paid employment in the 48 weeks before this	284	20
Not in paid employment at any point in the year before custody, but have had a job at some point	516	36
Never had a paid job	181	13
Total	1,435	100

Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Only around a third of prisoners reported being in paid employment in the four weeks prior to custody. This is consistent with Niven and Stewart’s (2005) finding in their study of 1,945 prisoners released from prison in 2003, that 32% were in education, training or employment in the four weeks before custody (although their inclusion of education and training mean that the figures are not directly comparable). It is also consistent with the SEU Report, which stated that over two in three short-term (under 12 months) prisoners were *unemployed* at the time of imprisonment. Initial findings from the offending, employment and benefits data share between the Ministry of Justice, the Department for Work and Pensions and Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs (MoJ and DWP, 2011) show that a third of all offenders sentenced or

¹⁰ Casual or cash-in-hand work was not included.

cautioned in the year ending November 2010¹¹ were in formal¹² P45 employment at some point in the month before sentence.

When asked about the 12 months prior to custody as well as the four weeks prior, the employment rate of participants increases to about half. This is still considerably lower than the UK general employment rate, which was 75% in 2006 for those of working age (Office for National Statistics, 2006). It is possible that pre-custodial procedures (court hearings etc.) disrupt employment as much as the actual event of incarceration, and these procedures can last for a considerable period of time. Overall, 181 prisoners stated that they had *never* had a paid job: approximately 13% of the sample.

A smaller proportion of women SPCR prisoners (19%) were in paid employment in the four weeks prior to coming into custody, compared with men (33%).¹³ These findings reflect a gender gap in employment in the general population, which is also found across Europe (Office for National Statistics, 2008). However, similar proportions of women and men were likely to state that they had never had a paid job at any point.

Young adult prisoners were more likely than older adult prisoners to report being in employment in the four weeks prior to coming into custody (38% compared with 31%). The SEU Report stated that 63% of young adults were unemployed at the time of arrest, compared with 46% of older adults, arguing that the young adult group was particularly disadvantaged with respect to employment status. The current findings, which refer to 2005 and 2006, do not support this, although employment conditions may be different now.

A smaller proportion of prisoners from non-BAME backgrounds (30%) were in paid employment in the four weeks prior to coming into custody, compared with prisoners from a BAME background (38%).

¹¹ Offenders who were sentenced to prison were least likely to be in some form of P45 employment: it is estimated that only 13 per cent of offenders sentenced to immediate custody were in P45 employment at some point in the month before they started their prison sentence. The linked data does not record the remand period for all offenders in this period so the findings for offenders sentenced to immediate custody may be an underestimate.

¹² Based on P45 forms sent to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs by employers. P45 employment spells do not usually record employment paid at levels below tax thresholds, or self-employment or cash-in-hand work but should provide a useful proxy of employment.

¹³ This compares with 14% of women and 34% of men being in employment, training and education in the four weeks before custody in an earlier study, although the inclusion of education and training means that the figures cannot be compared directly (Niven and Stewart, 2005).

Nature of employment prior to custody

Those who reported having been employed in the four weeks before custody, in the 12 months before custody, or 'ever' – a total of 1,254 participants – were asked whether, in their last job, they had been employed or self-employed, whether they had worked full or part time, and whether they had had any formal responsibility for supervising the work of other employees (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Nature of SPCR prisoners' employment in their last job

Nature of employment (base size)	Number	Per cent
Employed by someone else (not self-employed) (1,246)	1,011	81
Working full time (not part time) (1,252)	1,071	86
Having formal responsibility for supervising other employees (1,252)	295	24

The proportion of women reporting being employed by someone else (compared with self-employed) was greater than for men (94% compared to 80%). Women were less likely to report having worked full time (compared with part time) (71%) than men (87%). This reflects the patterns seen in the general population, where women are much more likely to work part time than men (Office for National Statistics, 2008). Fewer women (14%) than men (25%) reported having had formal responsibility for supervising the work of other employees. This also reflects the patterns seen in the general population, where women are less likely than men to be managers or senior officials (Office for National Statistics, 2008).

The proportion of young adults employed by someone else (compared with self-employed) was greater than for older adults (93% compared with 80%). Young adults were less likely to have had formal responsibility for supervising other employees (10% compared with 25%). Explanations for these differences could be due to their age, being in education and training, and being less experienced. Young adults were equally likely to report working full time as older adults, however.

Prisoners from non-BAME and BAME backgrounds were equally likely to have been employed by someone else (compared with self-employed), and to have had formal responsibility for supervising the work of other employees. However, prisoners from non-BAME backgrounds were more likely to have worked full time (compared with part time) than prisoners from BAME backgrounds (87% compared with 79%).

Occupational status prior to custody

Participants who reported having had a job at some time before custody were asked about the nature of their last job. Using the UK Office for National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) system, including those who had never worked, students, and 'not classified', nearly half (49%) of SPCR prisoners were classified as working in routine and semi-routine occupations. Only approximately one in twenty (5%) were working in managerial and professional occupations. This compares with 22% and 34% of those aged 16–64 in the UK in 2005 (Office for National Statistics, 2006).

Pay and benefits prior to custody

Prisoners who reported having paid employment at some point before custody were asked about their gross weekly pay for their last job, including self-employment, and any temporary or part-time work, but *not* casual or cash-in-hand work. For those prisoners who were able to recall their pay (1,102 prisoners), the average¹⁴ gross weekly pay was £250. Men reported a higher average gross weekly pay (£250) than women (£167). Higher levels of financial difficulty for female offenders than male offenders have been reported in other studies (see Heilbrun et al., 2008).

Young adults reported a lower average gross weekly pay (£200) than older adults (£250). Prisoners from non-BAME backgrounds reported a higher average (median) gross weekly pay (£250) than prisoners from BAME backgrounds (£230).

In the general population in 2006, average gross weekly pay for full-time employees in the UK was around £450 per week, with men's pay around £500 per week, while for women it was around £400 per week (Dobbs, 2009). These figures cannot be directly compared with the pre-custody income of prisoners in the current study, because the latter includes part-time work, and because it could be from a job which was held a long time before custody. Nevertheless, the prisoners' earnings were likely to be lower than the UK average.

Sixty-four per cent of the sample said they had claimed benefits at some point during the 12 months before they went to prison. This is lower than the 72% reported in the SEU Report. However, in the general population, the take-up of key benefits¹⁵ in the UK in 2003 by people of working age was approximately 14% (Office for National Statistics, 2003a), which indicates that take-up of benefits by the prisoners was very high.

¹⁴ The median is reported as the average value throughout.

¹⁵ Key benefits are Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), Incapacity Benefit (IB), Severe Disablement Allowance, Disability Living Allowance, Income Support and National Insurance credits only (through JSA or IB).

Other studies have reported that women prisoners were more likely to have received benefits prior to custody than men (Heilbrun et al., 2008). However, in the current study there was no disparity in take-up of benefits between men and women. Young adults (57%) were less likely than older adults (65%) to have received benefits. Prisoners from BAME backgrounds (45%) were less likely than prisoners from non-BAME backgrounds (67%) to have received benefits prior to custody. This may be related to the higher level of employment found for BAME prisoners pre-custody noted above.

Those who reported having claimed benefits in the 12 months before custody were asked which benefits they had claimed (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3: Type of benefit claimed by SPCR prisoners

Benefit	Number	% reporting	% of total reports
Jobseeker's Allowance/unemployment benefits	510	56	38
Income Support	286	29	20
Sickness/Incapacity Benefit	219	24	16
Housing Benefit	172	19	13
Council Tax Benefit	112	12	8
Other	58	6	4
Total	1,339	147	100

Base size 912

Multiple responses possible

Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

A large percentage of responses (58%) referred to Jobseeker's Allowance/unemployment benefits or Income Support, which is consistent with the employment problems the prisoners reported. Initial findings from the offending, employment and benefits data share between MoJ, DWP and HMRC (MoJ and DWP, 2011) show that 33% of the 1.2 million total Jobseeker's Allowance claims open on 1 December 2010 in England and Wales were made by offenders. Around half (51%) of offenders sentenced or cautioned in England and Wales in the year ending November 2010 claimed one of the main out-of-work benefits¹⁶ at some point in the month before their sentence, including around one-quarter (24%) of offenders who claimed Jobseeker's Allowance at some point in the month before the sentence. These figures were the same for offenders sentenced to immediate custody (prisoners).

¹⁶ Out-of-work benefits includes people on Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Incapacity Benefit (IB) and Income Support (IS), but it does not count people whose primary benefit is Carer's Allowance.

Activity prior to custody if not in employment

SPCR prisoners who said they were *not* employed in the four weeks before imprisonment were asked about how they *mainly* spent this time (Table 3.4).

Table 3.4: SPCR prisoners' activity prior to custody if not in employment

Response	Number	Per cent
Education or training	30	3
Unemployed and looking	367	38
Unemployed and not looking	169	17
Permanently unable to work (long-standing limiting illness)	194	20
Offending	72	7
In criminal justice system	11	1
Looking after home	62	6
Other	65	7
Total	970	100

11 respondents did not answer this question

Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Of the prisoners who were not in employment in the four weeks prior to custody, two in five reported that they were permanently unable to work. Nearly one in ten reported that they were 'offending' or in the criminal justice system. A majority (58%) reported that they were either looking for work or unemployed but not looking, or in education and training, suggesting that more prisoners may be employable, given appropriate support and opportunities.

Employment expectations upon release

Prisoners who reported working in the four weeks prior to coming into custody were asked whether they expected to return to this job on release from prison. Sixty-three per cent of these prisoners expected to do so. This is a more positive picture than that described in the SEU Report, which reported that around two in three of those who have a job before prison lose it permanently upon entering custody. Niven and Stewart's sample of prisoners (in 2003) reported that 59% of prisoners who were in education, training or employment (ETE) in the four weeks prior to coming into custody had ETE arranged on release, which is more consistent with the current results, although not directly comparable.

SPCR prisoners who reported having been in paid work in the four weeks before imprisonment but did not expect to return to their jobs upon release were asked why they would not be returning (Table 3.5).

Table 3.5: SPCR prisoners’ reasons for not expecting to return to old job

Reason	Number	% reporting	% of total reports
Not specified	36	28	25
I was fired because I was sentenced to prison	25	19	18
It was a temporary job	19	15	13
I resigned/left of my own accord	16	12	11
I want to try a different job	13	10	9
I've got another job/job offer to go to	11	9	8
I was fired because I had a criminal record/failed to declare record	8	6	6
Don't know	5	4	4
I want to do a training/education course instead	3	2	2
I was fired for another reason	2	2	1
Not enough work/poor health/pay inadequate/hours unsuitable	4	3	3
Total	142	109	100

Base size 130

Multiple responses possible

Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

Around a quarter of prisoners reported that they were not expecting to return to their old job because of a reason connected with offending (being sent to prison or because of their criminal record). This is consistent with other research which reports that the effects of incarceration on employment, both the stigma and the actual event, are large (Western, Kling and Weiman, 2001).

Nearly half of the sample reported needing help with finding a job on release (48%), with 34% reporting needing a lot of help. This finding is consistent with the low employment levels noted earlier. It was also consistent across the demographic groups, demonstrating that this is a universal need amongst prisoners.

3.2 Training and education

Training and education needs

SPCR prisoners reported needing help with reading and writing or ability with numbers (21%), with education (41%), and to improve work-related skills (40%). Prisoners were then asked how much help they needed: those who reported needing ‘a lot of help’ are shown in Table 3.6.

Table 3.6: SPCR prisoners who reported needing a lot of help with training and education

A lot of help needed (base size)	Number	Per cent
To improve reading, writing or ability with numbers (1,435)	152	11
To improve education (1,435)	295	21
To improve work-related skills (1,428)	298	21

Qualifications

Forty-seven per cent of the SPCR sample stated that they held no qualifications. In 2003, the proportion of the population of working age in the UK holding no qualifications was 15% (Office for National Statistics, 2003b). The higher proportion of prisoners who lack qualifications is important because of the association between qualifications and employment. Government statistics for the general population in 2007 showed that 88% of working age people with a degree were in employment, compared to 47% of those with no qualifications (Office for National Statistics, 2008).

There was no difference between the percentage of men and women in the SPCR sample who reported having no qualifications. The SEU Report also stated that 52% of male and 71% of female prisoners had no qualifications, each of which is higher than the current findings. The SEU Report was particularly concerned with the ‘poor education history and few qualifications’ of female prisoners, a finding which has not been supported here. Similarity in educational background amongst male and female prisoners has been reported elsewhere (Heilbrun et al., 2008).

Young and older adult prisoners were equally likely to have a qualification. Prisoners from BAME backgrounds were more likely to have a qualification than prisoners from non-BAME backgrounds (64% compared with 51%). The SEU Report stated that black prisoners tended to be more highly qualified than white prisoners. Those prisoners who reported having qualifications were asked about the type of qualification awarded (Table 3.7).

Table 3.7: Qualifications obtained by SPCR prisoners

Qualifications obtained	Number	% reporting	% of total reports
Higher degree/postgraduate qualifications	11	1	1
First degree or equivalent	33	4	4
Diplomas or other higher education qualifications	22	3	3
A/AS levels or equivalent	115	15	13
Trade apprenticeships	69	9	8
O Levels/GCSEs or equivalent, grades A–C	310	42	36
O Levels/GCSEs or equivalent, grades D–G	253	34	29
Other qualifications including overseas	58	8	7
Total	871	117	100

Base size 753

Multiple responses possible

Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

Eight per cent of prisoners *with a qualification* (753 prisoners) reported being educated to a level higher than A levels. Of the representative sample, therefore (1,428 prisoners – seven did not answer the question), approximately 5% were educated to a level higher than A levels (with approximately 3% having university degrees). In 2003, the percentage of the population of working age in the UK holding a degree was approximately 16% (Office for National Statistics, 2003b). Other research has found the level of degree-holders amongst offenders to range from approximately 3% to 11% (Kerley and Copes, 2004). The proportion of the entire sample who reported having GCSEs grade A–C or equivalent was the same as in the UK working age population – 22% in 2003 (Office for National Statistics, 2003b).¹⁷ It is not known how much prison education programmes may have contributed to the relatively high level of achievement of GCSEs, because the prisoners were not asked where they achieved their qualifications (the majority of the prisoners in the cohort had served time in prison previously). It is possible that prisoner GCSE education levels are boosted by prison programmes.

Attitudes towards learning, employment and reoffending

Some offenders think crime is the only way to make a living (SEU Report, 2002). These prisoners may see little point in investing in learning and education, or in employment programmes. SPCR prisoners were asked about their attitudes towards learning, employment and reoffending (Table 3.8).

¹⁷ Prisoners as a group are much younger than the working age population as a whole. Therefore this is not a directly comparable figure (older people may have fewer GCSEs at A–C).

Table 3.8: Attitudes towards learning, employment and training: SPCR prisoners who agreed or strongly agreed with each statement

Statement	Number	Per cent
Need qualifications to get anywhere	1,090	76
Employers seldom taking notice of learning, education or training	733	51
Learning being enjoyable	1,233	90
Likely to get a better job if done learning, education or training	1,299	91
Not having the confidence to learn new skills	282	20
Learning not being for people like me	158	11
Not interested in learning, education or training	189	13

Base size 1,435 in each case

These results show a reasonably high level of agreement with the importance of training and qualifications. More notable was the extremely high level of agreement with the statement that learning is enjoyable, and that a person is more likely to get a better job after doing learning, education or training. Also important are the lower levels of agreement with the statements about not having the confidence to learn new skills, that learning is not for people 'like me', and not being interested in learning, education or training. The cohort of prisoners appears to be highly motivated to learn. This is in direct contrast to the findings in the SEU Report:

[many] prisoners will have been turned off education and training by their experience of school. Others may feel too old for the classroom or see education and training as 'not for them'. Many prisoners need persuading of the merits of education and training.

The prisoners in the current research do not need persuading of the merits of education and training, nor do they think that education and training is 'not for them'. These suggest that attitudes which minimise the importance of education and training are not widespread in the prison population.

All prisoners were also asked about the connections between having a job/income and stopping reoffending. Sixty-eight per cent thought that 'having a job' was important in stopping reoffending, and 52% thought 'having enough money to support myself' was important in stopping reoffending.

Women were less likely to consider having a job important in stopping reoffending than men (58% compared with 69%). There was no difference between men and women when asked whether having enough money to support them was important in stopping reoffending.

Young adult prisoners were significantly more likely to agree that having a job was important in stopping reoffending than older adults (81% compared with 66%), but were no more likely than older adult prisoners to agree that having enough money to support themselves was important in stopping reoffending.

Similar proportions of those from a BAME and non-BAME background agreed that having a job was important in stopping reoffending, but non-BAME prisoners were more likely to agree that having enough money to support themselves was important in stopping reoffending (53% compared with 46%).

Overall, emphasis was placed by the prisoners themselves on the importance of employment and its connection to reoffending. This is an acknowledgement which can be exploited in the challenge to reduce reoffending, perhaps by the enhancement of employment interventions both during and post-custody.

3.3 Reconviction

Rates of reconviction in the year after release varied between groups of SPCR prisoners. Men and women, and younger and older prisoners were equally likely to have been reconvicted. Prisoners from a BAME background, however, were less likely to be reconvicted than prisoners from a non-BAME background (42% compared with 54%).

SPCR prisoners who reported having been employed at some point in the year before custody were less likely to be reconvicted in the year after release from custody than those who didn't report having been employed (40% compared with 65%). Those who reported having been in receipt of benefits at some point in the 12 months before custody were more likely to reoffend than those who did not report receiving benefits (58% compared with 42%).

SPCR prisoners who reported having a qualification were less likely to be reconvicted in the year after release from custody (45% compared with 60%) than those who reported having no qualifications.

These results suggest that investment in employment, training and education of prisoners and ex-prisoners may result in reduced reoffending and a reduction in the costs associated with reoffending.

4. Conclusion and Implications

The poor employment and education status of prisoners prior to custody is associated with reoffending in the year after release from custody, and therefore prison-based interventions have the potential to address employment needs and reduce reoffending as a result. Specifically, programmes to improve qualifications at GCSE level and above could help prisoners gain the qualifications necessary to improve their employment prospects on release.

Prisoners are already given opportunities to improve their skills, education and employability in prison. This report emphasises the importance of these opportunities, and provides information to support targeted interventions for men and women, younger and older prisoners, and prisoners of different ethnic backgrounds.

Prisoners from a BAME background are likely to be higher qualified than other prisoners. However, they are potentially likely to need more support in gaining appropriate employment, as they reportedly earned less in their last jobs than prisoners from a non-BAME background – despite being more likely to report having been in employment in the four weeks before custody than prisoners from non-BAME backgrounds, in this study. Women prisoners may need similar support: they were less likely to be employed in the four weeks before custody, and earned less than men prisoners in their last job, despite being equally qualified. Younger adult prisoners may need help with qualifications and training – although they were more likely than older prisoners to be employed in the four weeks before custody, they earned less, and were less likely to have supervisory responsibilities. Older prisoners might need more help in gaining employment.

Prisoners in the study who did work tended to be employed in routine and semi-routine occupations. Improving the level of qualifications of these prisoners may expand the range of occupations open to them.

Most prisoners showed strong motivation to improve their own employment, training and education status, and agreed that having a job would help them stop reoffending in future. Approximately one-third of prisoners reported needing a lot of help with finding a job on release from prison. These motivational aspects could potentially be exploited further in prisons. The disruptive effect of imprisonment on employment status could possibly be countered by investment in prison education, training and employment programmes.

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**The pre-custody employment, training and education of newly sentenced prisoners
Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) longitudinal cohort study of
prisoners**

This report provides a detailed summary of prisoners' employment status and training and education levels prior to coming into custody. It is based on the results of Wave 1 of a longitudinal cohort study (Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR)) of 1,435 prisoners in England and Wales newly sentenced (to between one month and four years) in 2005 and 2006. The study shows that SPCR prisoners experience unemployment, low pay, and low occupational status before custody, and demonstrates differences between men and women prisoners, young adult and older adult prisoners, and prisoners of different ethnic backgrounds. About one-third of prisoners reported needing a lot of help to find a job on release. Prisoners appeared motivated to improve their education and skills. Prison interventions may be able to exploit these circumstances to ensure that the net effect of imprisonment on employment is positive. Reduced reoffending on release was associated with higher education and employment status before custody.

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