



# Education in Nordic prisons

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A Baltic-Nordic seminar on education in prison

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# Thanks to

- Inmates and staff in the Nordic countries
- The Nordic network of prison education
- The Nordic Council of Ministers



## The report

- Eikeland, O.-J., Manger, T. & Asbjørnsen, A. (2009). *Prisoners' Educational Background, Preferences and motivation*. Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers.

# Background

- A fundamental principle of the Nordic prison systems is that prisoners should have the same access to social services as other citizens
- What kind of education do prison inmates have?
- What kind of education do they want to participate in?

# What do we know about the prison population?

- When did their problems start?
- Are they males or females?
- What are their educational background like?



# Has the prison population's educational background changed?

- The traditional educational non-participants (e.g. Forster, 1990; Costello 2003)
- The previously well-qualified (e.g. Forster, 1990; Swedish Prison Board, 1998)

# Antisocial pathways

- Childhood-onset offenders (Life-course-persistent offenders)
- Adolescent-onset offenders

(e.g., Farrington et al., 1990; Ferguson, Horwood, & Nagin, 2000; Kratzer & Hodgins, 1999; Moffitt & Caspi, 2001; Moffitt, Caspi, Harrington, & Milne, 2002; Patterson, Forgatch, Yoerger, & Stoolmiller, 1998)



## **Males on the early-onset pathway: Follow-up at 26 years.**

- The life-course-persistent group (LCP): Most violent and least likely to reform (more than half of the early-onset group)
- The "internalizing" problems group: Misnamed earlier as a recovery group (about one third of the early-onset group)
- Truly "recovered" (15 % of the early-onset group)

(Moffitt et al., 2002)

## Type of offence at age 26

### Life-course-persistent males

- Specialize in serious offenses, such as carrying a hidden weapon, assault, robbery, violating court orders

### Adolescence-limited males

- Specialize in more non serious offenses, such as theft less than 5 dollars, public drunkenness, giving false information on application forms.

(Moffitt et al., 2002)

# Highest completed education: Can it indicate subtype of delinquency?

## Childhood-onset

- Life-course-persistent
- Childhood-limited

## Adolescence-limited

# Studies in the Nordic countries

## 2004

- Norway (3 to 10 February)

## 2006

- Norway (2 to 9 February)
- Sweden (week 46)
- Iceland (20 October to 7 November)
- Finland (week 50)

## 2007

- Denmark (9 to 12 January)

## Method 2006/2007

- A questionnaire to all inmates (Eikeland, Manger & Diseth, 2006, adapted to other countries)

# The Norwegian study in 2004

## Subjects

- Target group: 2 946 inmates over 18 years of age in Norwegian prisons between February 3 and February 10 in 2004 (8 inmates were under 18 years of age). Of several reasons 169 inmates were not included.
- 1 937 inmates, or 69.8 percent of those who received the survey participated.
- 93.4 percent were males; 6.6 percent were females.
- 16.9 percent were foreign citizens (19.8 percent had spent most of their childhood and teenage years in another country than Norway).

## Instrument

- A Questionnaire to all inmates

# Background for the Norwegian study in 2006

- White paper no. 27, 2004-2005 on correctional education (“an other spring...”)
- States there is a need for further studies of prisoners’ educational background and their basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics,

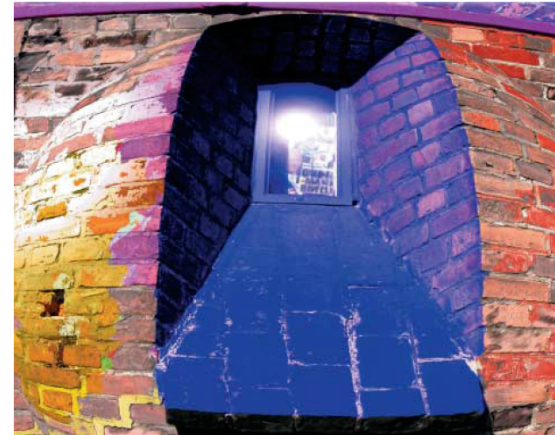
  
DET KONGELIGE  
UTDANNINGS- OG FORSKNINGSDEPARTEMENT

## St.meld.nr. 27

(2004–2005)

Om opplæringen innenfor kriminalomsorgen

“Enda en vår”



## **The Norwegian study in 2006**

- Target group: All 3289 inmates over 18 years of age in Norwegian prisons between February 2 and February 9 in 2006
- 71.1% of those who received the survey participated
- 94% males; 6% females
- 85.7% Norwegian citizens



# The Nordic studies of prison education

	Target group		Response rate	Population
Denmark	3 461*		69.5	5.5 millions
Finland	3 432*		71.2	5.2 millions
Iceland	119*		66.0	0.3 millions
Norway	3 289*		71.1	4.8 millions
Sweden	4 360* → 960**		93	9.0 millions

\*Prison population in that country

\*\*Selected inmates

# Respondent characteristics

## Mean age

- From 31 years (Iceland) to 36 years (Sweden and Finland)

## Gender

- Between 94 and 95 percent were men

# Citizenship

Per cent who were citizens of the nation they were incarcerated in

Denmark	84.3 %	
Finland	92.6 %	
Iceland	90.0 %	
Norway	85.6 %	
Sweden	74.6 %	(62.5 % had Swedish as their native language)

# The Nordic countries: Inmates' highest completed education (per cent)

	Total unweighted
No education	11
1 Primary school/lower secondary school	38
2 Vocational training*, vocational education/upper secondary education	43
3 University or other higher education	9
N	7422



## **Per cent of inmates who *do not* attend schools or educational programs while in prison**

- Denmark: 63
- Finland: 67
- Iceland: 55
- Norway: 67
- Sweden: 62



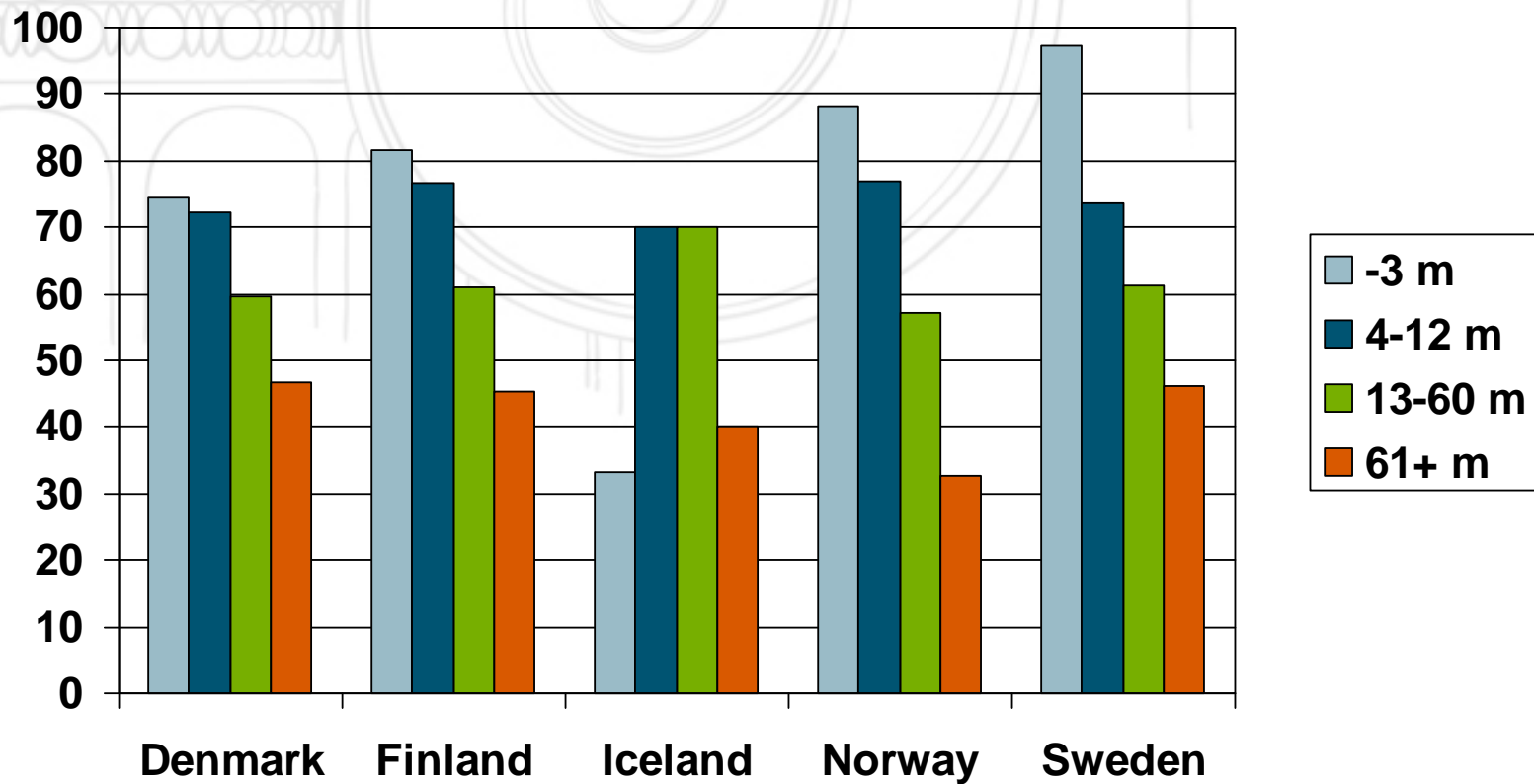
# Reasons for *not* taking an education in prison

## The four most important reasons

1. I don't receive any information about educational possibilities
2. The prison does not offer any educational program suitable for me
3. The prison does not offer any educational program
4. I am not interested in getting an education in prison

Other important reasons?

## Per cent inmates who *do not* take an education in prison by period of time incarcerated

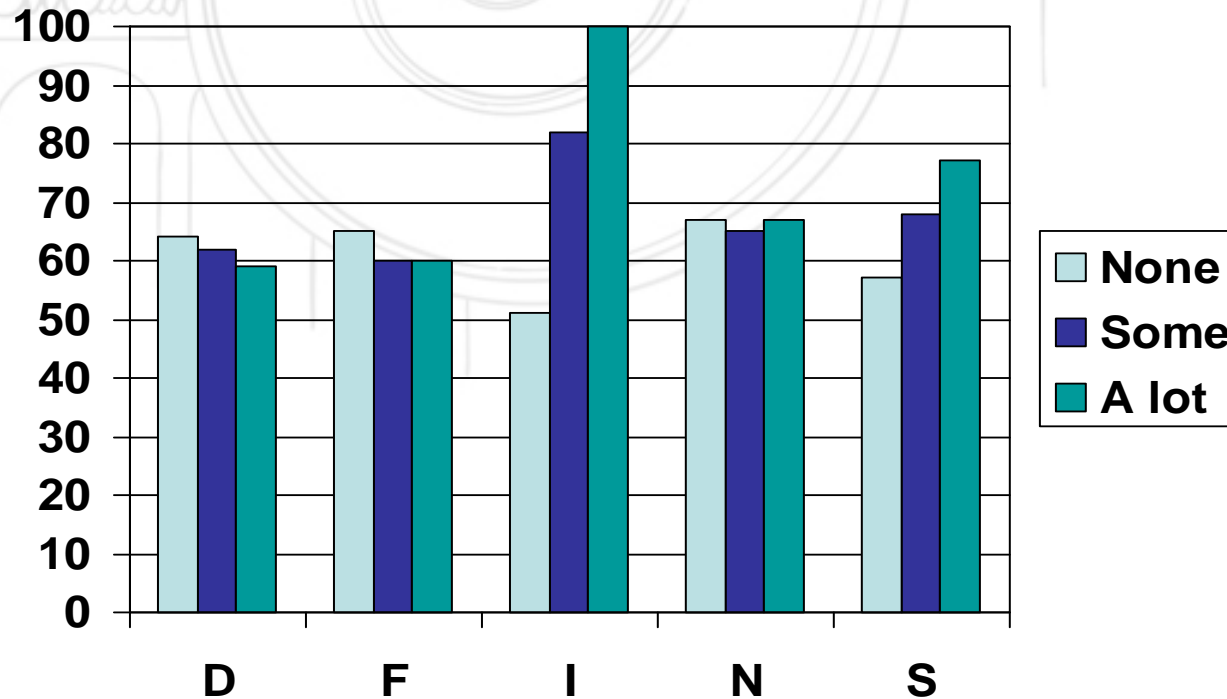




# Self-reported reading and writing difficulties

	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden
No problems	70	77	70	63	65
Some problems	25	20	22	27	30
Serious problems	5	3	8	10	5
N	1 516	1 447	44	1 509	548

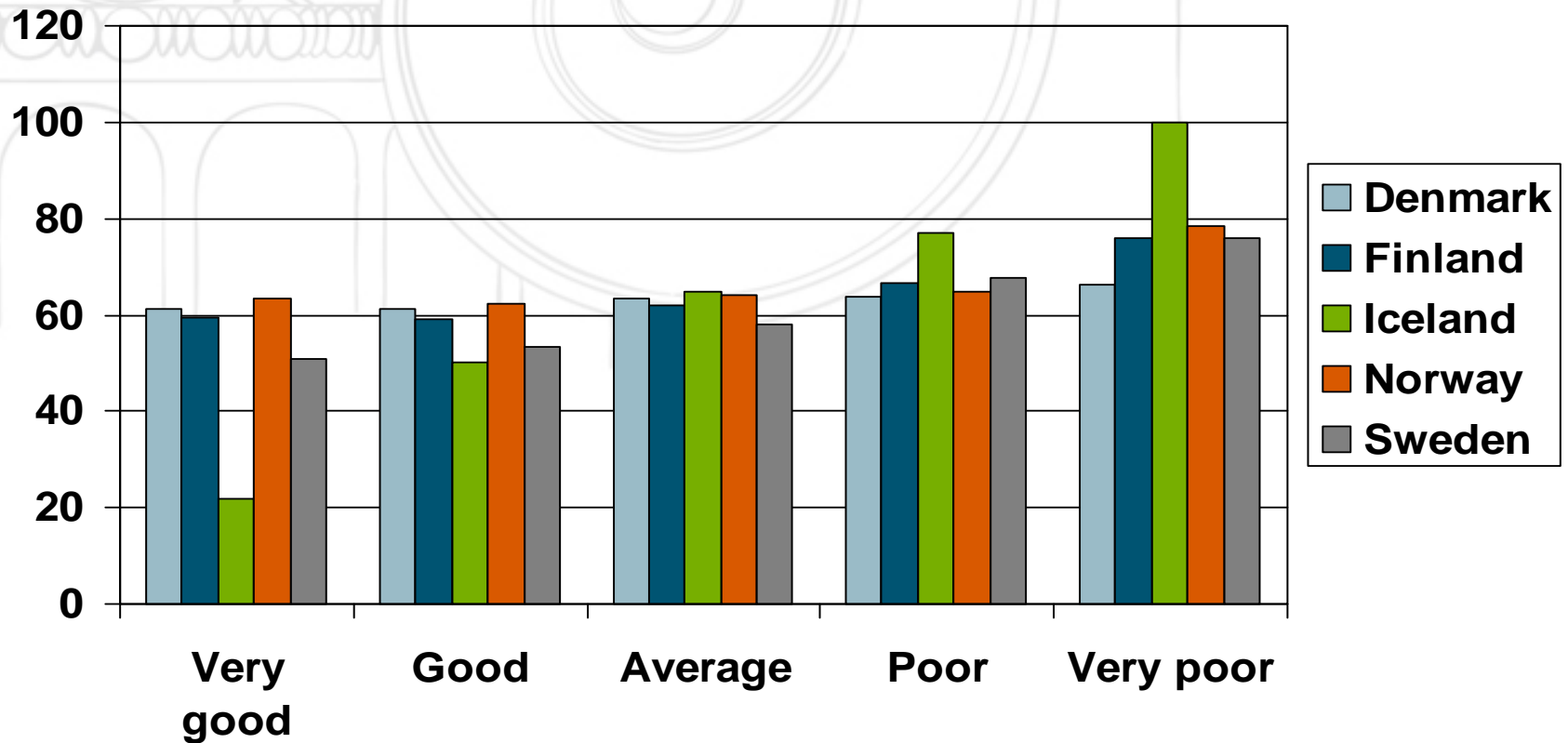
## Per cent inmates who *do not* take an education in prison by reading or writing problems



# Other learning problems

- Mathematics problems
- ICT problems

# Per cent inmates who *do not* take an education in prison by ICT skills





**The four most important reasons for starting an educational program in prison (from a list of 15 reasons). Ranged for each country.**

<b>Problem</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>S</b>
To spend my time doing something sensible and useful	1	1	1	1	1
To learn about a subject	3	3		2	2
To make it easier to get a job after release	3		4	3	
To be better able to cope with life after release	2	2			
To satisfy my desire to learn		3			3
To make the educational program a bridge to more education after release			2		
To make serving time easier			2		
To pass an exam or improve a previous grade				4	4
N	580	812	20	546	301

## The Nordic countries: Educational wishes (per cent\*)

	<b>Total***</b>
<i>Do not want to start an education</i>	<b>24</b>
1. Preparatory Adult Education/General Adult Education**, primary or lower secondary school	<b>6</b>
2a Vocational training**, vocational education/subjects	<b>42</b>
2b. Upper secondary education	
3 University or other higher education	<b>9</b>
No answer	<b>17</b>

\*The sum is not 100 due to exclusion of some educational wishes and due to that the respondents could also tick more than one box; \*\*Denmark; \*\*\* Unweighted

# Educational motives: Why do prisoners start an educational program in prison?

- Are they pushed or are they pulled?

(Gambetta, 1987)

- Are they motivated by a need to get away from mind-numbing prison life (push factors), or alternatively to prepare for life on release (pull factors)?

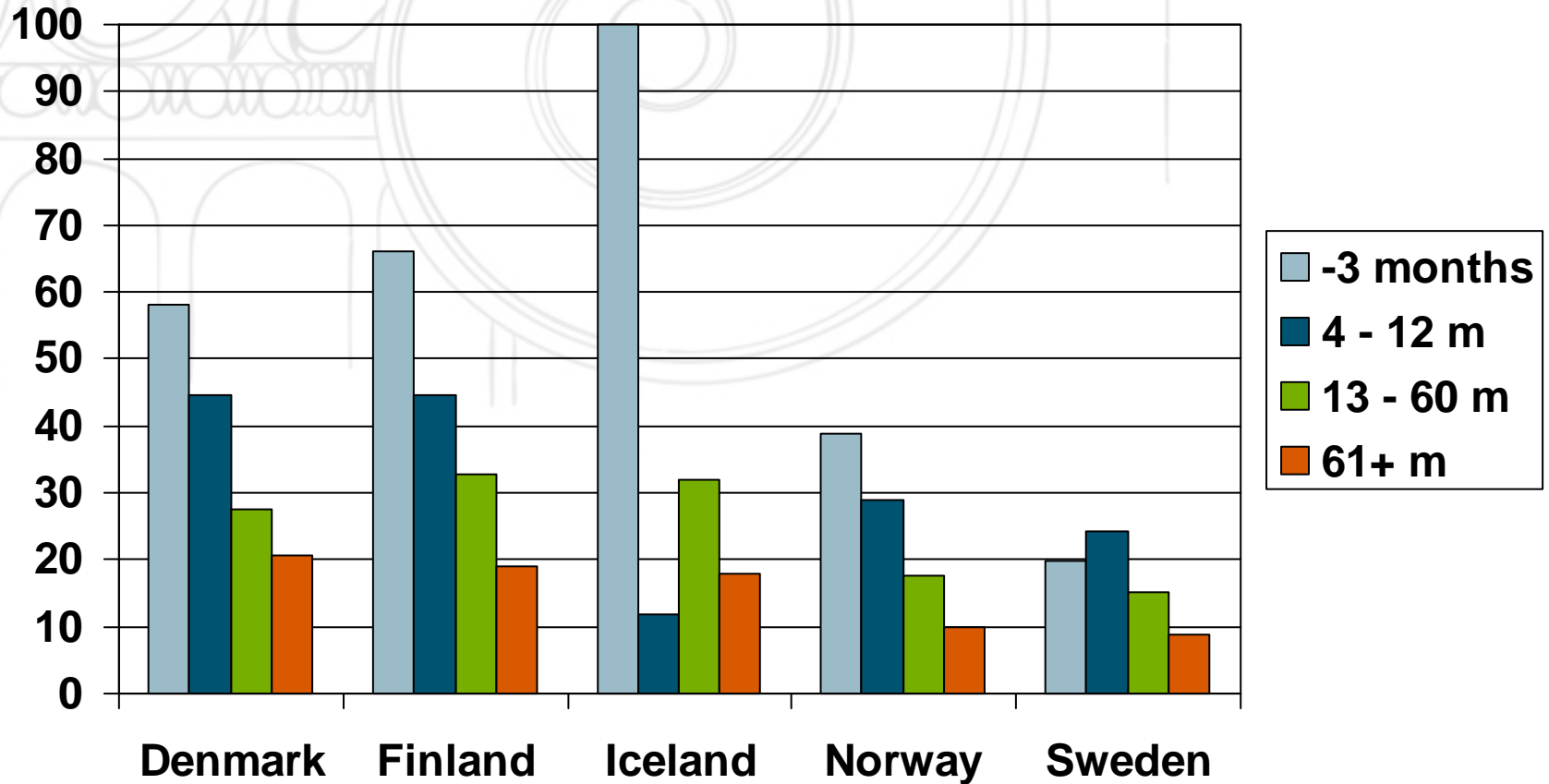
(Costelloe, 2003)



# **Prisoners' educational motives**

- 1 To prepare for life on release**
- 2 Social reasons and reasons unique to the prison context**
- 3 To acquire knowledge and skills**

## Per cent inmates who *do not* wish to take more education by period of time incarcerated



**The four most important factors that create problems for the inmates who are involved in programs of education. Ranged for each country.**

<b>Problem</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>S</b>
Inadequate access to ICT-equipment and facilities	1	1	1	1	1
The security routines in the prison	4	4	4	2	2
Transfer while serving the sentence	3	2		3	4
Inadequate access to literature	4	3	2		
Disturbances in prison	2	4		4	
The inmate will have finished his/her sentence before the education is finished	4	4	3		
The inmates' learning problems			3		
Lack of teachers (only asked in Sweden)					3
N	580	812	20	546	301



# Inmates' evaluation of the prison education.

1="completely disagree"; 5="completely agree". The letters indicate the country that agreed least and most (each statement). Other countries scored between them.

	1	2	3	4	5
I am satisfied with the teaching				D	N
The requirements are too tough		S	I		
The prison makes it possible to take an education			I	S	
The amount of work is just right			D	N	
The requirements are not tough enough		S	D		
Some of the subjects are too hard		S	I		
There are too many lectures		I	F		
The teaching is suited to my needs			I	S	
There is too much group work		S	I		
There is not adequate access to ICT-equipment and facilities			S	F	
The teachers have good computer skills			I	F	
I am pleased with the educational programs				F	N

# A brief summary

- There is a gap between those who have and those who do not have an education
- The educational gap between inmates and the general population is too deep
- The educational level is lower among the youngest age group, compared to equivalent age groups in the general population
- Two thirds of the inmates do not attend an educational program while in prison
- Too many features of the prison system interfere with education
- Inmates who take an education in prison are highly motivated by future concerns
- The inmates evaluation of the prison education is relatively good
- Generally learning problems and ICT competence do not affect the tendency to take an education in prison
- A majority of the inmates want to start a school or educational program

# Why is prison education important?

More specifically

- Improving the employability of offenders
- Reducing the risk of re-offending

In broader terms

- The importance of delivering education in a civilised society
- Education has a value in itself and it is important to develop the person as a whole

(House of Commons – Education and Skills Committee, 2005)

# Practical implications: The right to education must be made clear

- The European Convention on Human Rights: "No person shall be denied the right to education"
- The UN Convention of Children's Rights
- The UNESCO Recommendations for adult education
- The Council of Europe

## **Practical implications: Course variation**

- A number of more varied courses should be offered in prison, including the expansion of vocational training and more emphasis on practical/aesthetic subjects
- The opportunities to study at universities or other higher education must be improved!



## **Practical implications: The reduction of hindrances**

- Features of the prison system that interfere with education must be reduced to a minimum
- ICT with internet access must be a natural part of all learning

## **Practical implications: Inmates who have learning problems must receive help**

- Disabilities must be diagnosed, registered and dealt with
- Time spent in prison can be used to improve reading, writing and mathematics skills
- While reading disabilities are often primarily environmental and experienced based good library services and access to literature are important

# Practical implications: Help upon release

- The planning and monitoring of educational services after release must be more systematic and structured



## **Practical implications: The problem with short sentences**

- Many young prisoners serve short sentences
- Short sentences becomes an hindrance for participating in education
- A short sentence easily becomes a stepping stone to further crime

Implications: *It is particularly important to see to it that short sentence does not imply a disruption of young prisoners' education*