

The Intensive Learning Centres: Staff experiences of implementation and the SILC reforms

Sasha Nahleen & Mark Howard

Aims

This study examined staff perceptions regarding current factors, including organisational or environmental characteristics, that have enabled or hindered ILC program implementation, and the effect the SILC reforms have had on participant enrolment and completion compared to before the reforms.

Methods

A thematic qualitative approach was used to examine staff reflections on their experiences. Data was collected through semi-structured online interviews with 15 ILC staff with teaching responsibilities, including three Education Officers, and six Senior Case Management Officers or Case Management Officers based in Lithgow, South Coast, and Mid North Coast Correctional Centres.

Results

The current study provides a nuanced understanding of factors that influence ILC enrolment and completion. In terms of enrolment, interviewees predominantly focused on barriers, including the restrictive new eligibility criteria, difficulties for S/CMOs to understand and promote the ILCs to students, and possible inaccuracies with the Core Skills Assessment (CSA). Interviewees suggested broadening the eligibility criteria, allowing ILC staff to assess and recruit inmates, and asking inmates to complete an additional eligibility test once they are enrolled.

Interviewees identified facilitators to student completion including having good teaching staff and a suitable physical environment. Recent barriers included student movements out of the ILCs that were largely out of the control of teaching staff, COVID lockdowns, custodial staff shortages, the poor quality of the curriculum, and availability of technology and software. Interviewees suggested holding inmates or moving them to another centre with an ILC, improving the teaching materials and curriculum, and improving technological capability.

Conclusion

Staff identified a number of continuing challenges to student enrolment and completion in the ILCs, as well as various potential avenues for improvement and further reforms under SILC. We acknowledge that implementation of the SILC reforms, and evaluation of those reforms, were complicated by concurrent impacts of COVID-19. Notwithstanding the perceived challenges to implementation, staff identified important facilitators that provide a positive foundation for ongoing development of best practice for the ILCs.

INTRODUCTION

Education is important to the successful reintegration of released offenders into the community (e.g., Borzycki & Baldry, 2003). However, most inmates have limited formal education. One survey found that prison entrants were more likely than the general population to report having an education level of Year 10 or below (63% versus 19%, respectively) and were less likely to have completed the equivalent of Year 12 (19% versus 64%; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2019 and Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Further, 15% of prison entrants reported Year 8 or below as their highest level of education completed and 2% had no formal schooling at all. Educational disadvantages such as low levels of literacy and numeracy are associated with poorer health (Mitrou et al., 2014) and poorer employment opportunities and outcomes. Unemployment, in turn, is a risk factor for incarceration and reoffending after release (Baldry et al., 2018).

As such, it is critical to improve inmates' access to, and participation in, foundational education within the correctional centre itself prior to release. The Intensive Learning Centres (ILCs) provide a flagship program for education within CSNSW correctional centres. The ILCs are adult learning environments which provides education courses designed to teach foundational literacy and numeracy, thus enabling participants to engage in further education and training and build skills underpinning vocational competence. The ILCs also intend to create a supportive environment encouraging transformative change, similar to a therapeutic community. Attendance is full-time, approximately four hours a day, five days a week for at least six months. The program was introduced in 2004 and has since been permanently established in four correctional centres, namely Lithgow, Mid North Coast, South Coast, and Wellington Correctional Centres.

Recent reviews have suggested that the ILCs may not be operating as intended, characterised by lower-than-expected enrolment and completion numbers among inmates. Reviews also identified implementation challenges relating to enrolment practices that may preference inmates' availability over their needs, eligibility and suitability. In response to these identified concerns, a campaign of reforms to ILC operations, known as Strengthening the ILC (SILC), was initiated as part of the Premier's Priority to reduce reoffending among people leaving prison. Under this SILC initiative, a number of recommendations to increase enrolment and completion were made and implemented.

The paramount change from SILC arose from reviewing program eligibility and suitability to ensure the most appropriate cohort is targeted to participate in the program. As a result, the Intervention Pathways model, which allocates inmates to programs and services based on integrated assessments of their risk, needs and sentencing features, was applied to the ILCs. This model automates case management and planning processes by identifying and labelling all ILC eligible participants and properly sequencing the program in case plans. Applying this model re-affirms the importance of education to case managers and ensures that inmates enrolled in one of the ILCs will not be moved out of the centre unless necessary.

The SILC initiative also strove to improve the branding and promotion of the ILCs by developing a new logo, providing students with a 'welcome pack' of ILC branded items (e.g., bag, stationary, and drink bottle), re-introducing graduation for inmates who complete their Certificate, and broadly marketing the program across the system. The purpose of these changes was to increase interest and engagement in the ILCs as well as acting as a motivational tool for inmates to enrol and complete the program.

Other recommendations including re-introducing monthly 'work experience' for students, improving

various aspects of staff training, professional development, and culture, reviewing the technological capability of each ILC with consideration to providing up-to-date IT equipment, and upgrading the ILCs infrastructure and design have been identified as part of the SILC initiative although have not been fully operationalised to date.

Aims

The aim of our evaluation is to explore how the SILC reforms that have been implemented to date have contributed to the intended objectives, thus increasing access to, and participation in, the ILCs. To achieve this, we sought to understand current factors, including organisational or environmental characteristics, that have enabled or hindered ILC program implementation. We then examined current factors in the context of, and in comparison to, previous ILC operations to explore the effect the SILC reforms have had on student enrolment and completion. Study 1 of this evaluation, described in the report, investigated ILCs staff perceptions regarding these issues.

METHOD

Participants

We aimed to interview all Teachers and Education Officers (EOs) in three ILCs located in Lithgow Correctional Centre, Mid North Coast Correctional Centre, and South Coast Correctional Centre.¹ All EOs and all but one Teacher agreed to be interviewed. In each centre, we interviewed four Teachers and one EO, giving a total sample of 12

Teachers and three EOs.² Interviewees had been in their current role between 8 months to 10 years and worked for CSNSW more broadly for a similar amount of time (8 months to 11 years).

We also aimed to interview two Senior Case Management Officers (SCMOs) or Case Management Officers (CMOs) from each of the three centres. We interviewed three SCMOs, two CMOs, and one member of case management who was formerly a SCMO. There were two interviewees per centre. These interviewees had been in their current role between 8 months and 3 years and had worked for CSNSW more broadly for 2–15 years.

Design and procedure

All interviews were semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews involve systematically asking prepared questions encompassing broad themes to help direct the conversation towards topics of interest. This method ensures that there is some thematic consistency between interviews while still allowing interviewers to probe further and flexibly modify the wording, pacing, and ordering of questions to elicit comprehensive responses (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Broadly, our interview guides for Teachers and EOs were thematically focused on the barriers and facilitators to enrolment and completion in the ILCs, broader logistical barriers and facilitators to implementing the program, and changes in implementation from before to after the SILC reforms were applied. Our interview guides for SCMOs and CMOs (hereafter “S/CMOs”) focused on eligibility and suitability factors considered for enrolment, barriers

¹ We opted to exclude evaluating Wellington Correctional Centre from this study because the centre closed in mid-2021 due to the mouse plague, thus severely affecting ILC operations in general but also the implementation of SILC recommendations specifically. Participants from this centre would not have been able to answer a number of our questions (e.g., the ones comparing pre- and post-SILC implementation) and their responses would have been based on pre-SILC operations, making it impossible to group their

responses with those from other centres. The decision to exclude Wellington Correctional Centre from this study does not automatically exclude it from future SILC evaluations.

² Including one ILC staff member who was not in a teaching position but had teaching responsibilities and a Justice staff member who had only recently left the EO position.

and facilitators to enrolment, and comparison of current to pre-SILC processes.

To recruit Teachers and EOs, we contacted them directly via email to set up one-on-one interviews. To recruit S/CMOs, we asked Regional Co-ordinators Case Management (RCCM) in each centre for help with identifying S/CMOs who would be willing to be interviewed. The RCCM in each centre sent out an email requesting volunteers who then emailed us directly to schedule interviews. The interviews in this study were all conducted online via Microsoft Teams to avoid COVID-related delays that would have arisen if we had chosen the face-to-face approach. All interviews were conducted and transcribed by the first author. Interviews were about 43 minutes with Teachers and EOs and 23 minutes with S/CMOs on average.

Coding

All transcribed interview data was analysed using a thematic analysis approach with Microsoft Excel. The data was coded into categories based on themes emerging from the data. Overall perceptions of enrolment, completion, program and centre logistics, and changes in implementation post- vs pre-SILC reforms were high-level codes, under which there were multiple sub-codes corresponding to specific aspects of the ILCs implementation that impacted the higher-level code category. Teachers and EOs were asked many of the same questions, so we often combined data for these two groups in our analyses. Some interviewees chose not to respond to some of the SILC-related questions because they were relatively new in the role and, therefore, found it difficult or impossible to compare current program implementation with pre-SILC implementation. These interviewees were removed from the analyses for those questions (3–7 interviewees per question).

RESULTS

Interviewee roles

We asked Teachers and EOs to describe their role. They reported that their role was to teach foundational Pre-certificate, Certificate 1, and Certificate 2 literacy and numeracy units (plus Information Technology (IT) for some centres). EOs identified performing additional administrative duties such as identifying and enrolling eligible inmates, scheduling and updating the calendar, and creating classes.

We asked S/CMOs about their role in inmate enrolment into the ILCs specifically. Over half the interviewees stated that their role included ensuring that the program was in inmates' case plans if they are eligible. Over half the S/CMOs reported not having any involvement in selection for the ILCs, with many expressing beliefs that it was up to education staff. Half of the interviewees also stated that they did not look at suitability because eligible inmates are now identified automatically with an algorithm, while the other half said that they assessed various suitability factors such as the inmates' classification (including whether they were SMAP inmates), sex, mental health and disability issues, willingness to participate, and literacy issues.

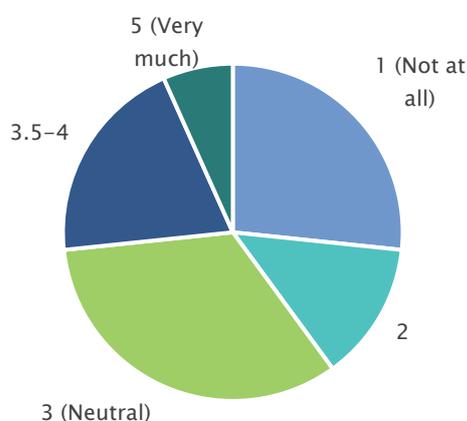
ILC purpose and benefits

We asked all interviewees what they believed to be the main purpose and benefits of the ILCs. The majority stated that the main purpose of the ILCs was to teach inmates foundational education skills, mostly in the way of literacy and numeracy. Almost half also agreed that the main purpose of the ILCs was to prepare inmates for the workforce or further learning. A third of interviewees mentioned that the ILCs allowed inmates to change their own self-perception by encouraging them to see themselves as something other than an inmate.

Perspectives on student enrolment

Both Teachers and EOs were asked to rate the extent to which they felt that the right inmates were currently entering the ILCs, with a specific focus on assessment processes for EOs (1 = not at all; 3 = neutral; 5 = very much). They rated slightly below neutral on average ($M = 2.63$), with 27% rating above neutral and 40% rating below (Figure 1). We also asked S/CMOs to rate, on the same scale, the extent to which they felt that the current suitability process ensures that the right participants are entering the ILCs. On average, they rated 2.95, suggesting that they felt close to neutral about the suitability process (Figure 2). We asked interviewees to elaborate in detail on the barriers and facilitators to enrolment. Overall, they tended to focus on the barriers and provided various suggestions for improvement.

Figure 1. Responses from Teachers and EOs when asked to what extent they felt the right participants are entering the ILC.



The impact of the new eligibility criteria

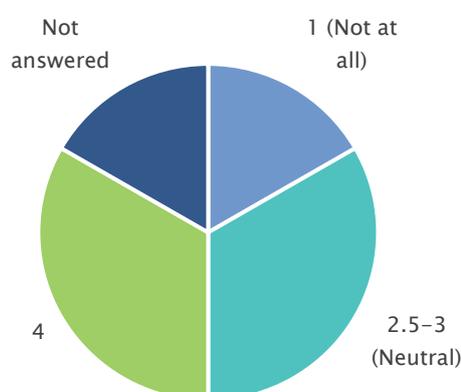
The vast majority of Teachers and EOs surmised that there has been a drastic reduction in ILC enrolment numbers in recent periods, and specifically since the application of the Intervention Pathways model. Over half of the Teachers were concerned that the right inmates were unable to participate in the program because of the new model. Elaborating on this, all

EOs and half the S/CMOs were concerned that the new eligibility criteria are too restrictive, resulting in reduced enrolments. Specifically, feedback suggested that restricting eligibility to only those who are sentenced has had the largest impact on enrolment numbers.

“Before...there were like 30 students here. Now there are nine. And of those nine, only one has been enrolled [in the last eight months]. They changed the way they enrol the students through a thing called Intervention [Pathways] and it takes away all the opportunities for most of the eligible students for learning. ...[T]hat's the single problem here. [For example, a]n unsentenced inmate...could be in remand for two or three years or even more. In that time, he could easily complete the courses...and be in a better position. But those students...are no longer eligible.”

Three-quarters of the Teachers and EOs reported that the declining enrolment numbers was their main negative experience with implementing the program now, compared to before the SILC reforms. Reduced enrolments was also the most commonly mentioned threat to maintaining factors that help facilitate the implementation of the program, with some interviewees even expressing concerns that it may lead to talk about closing the centres.

Figure 2. Responses from S/CMOs when asked to what extent they felt the current suitability process ensures the right participants are entering the ILC.



“...because our numbers are dropping so low and everyone can see our numbers dropping so low, there are a lot of rumours...saying “oh, the ILC is going to close...” I mean when you've got a teacher sitting in...a big classroom with two students sitting down the front, it doesn't send a message of...“this is really a place that's functioning well and functioning effectively.””

Some interviewees also felt that the new algorithm that determines eligibility may not be operating as intended, referring to instances where the ILCs have received names of people who are clearly not eligible for the program (e.g., females, SMAP inmates, etc). However, this negative feedback does not automatically indicate that the general concept of using an algorithm to determine eligibility is a bad one. Half the S/CMOs specified that Intervention Pathways provided a better, more objective method to determining eligibility because it means that only inmates who have an identified need for the program are being enrolled. A small number of Teachers agreed that having a more objective eligibility system was a positive experience in implementing the program now compared to before the reforms. One clarified that the new system also made the process easier because, rather than attempting to recruit themselves, they are simply provided a list of new students.

The impact of S/CMOs' management of enrolments

Interviewees also expressed concern over the fact that case management had taken over the recruitment and enrolment process. They reasoned that these staff may not have the same level of understanding of the ILCs as ILC staff and, therefore, may not be able to appropriately promote the program to inmates. For example, one EO elaborated that some case managers incorrectly believed that the courses provided at the ILCs were at a higher academic level than those provided at FSP.

The impact of CSAs

All inmates are required to complete the CSA, a standardised tool that assesses their educational level and determines whether they are eligible for programs including the ILC program. However, almost half of the Teachers felt that objectives to ensure the right people enrolled in the ILCs were impacted because inmates' CSA scores may not accurately represent their ability. Two out of three EOs and most of the S/CMOs agreed that the CSA was an aspect of the assessment process that could benefit from improvement. For example, some inmates in the past have deliberately performed poorly on the CSA to get into the program or, alternatively, performed well by receiving help from other inmates. The CSA is also often completed soon after coming into custody when inmates may be stressed or lack understanding about why they are being tested, resulting in poor performance.

Perspectives on student completion

Both Teachers and EOs were asked to rate the extent to which they felt current operational processes were able to ensure that participants are retained to completion (1 = not at all; 3 = neutral; 5 = very much). Participants rated slightly below neutral on average ($M = 2.43$), with 20% rating above neutral and 47% rating below (Figure 3). We asked interviewees to elaborate in detail on the barriers and facilitators to completion. Overall, they tended to focus on the barriers to completion and provided various suggestions for improvement. However, they mentioned a few factors that facilitate completion, and felt that the ILC program was well implemented overall at their centre on average (1 = not well at all; 5 = very well; $M = 4.07$; Figure 4).

The impact of factors outside of ILCs' control

When we asked Teachers and EOs about why inmates might fail to complete their Certificate, most attributed these failures to inmate movements that

are outside of ILCs control. These predominantly included inmates being moved to another correctional centre, being allocated to another program, or moves due to reclassification, new sentences, or being released to parole. COVID lockdowns was the second most commonly reported reason and also a commonly mentioned logistical barrier to implementation in general because they prevented classes from running. The third most commonly reported reason for failures to complete was custodial staff shortages as they also obstructed classes from running. Therefore, the three most commonly reported reasons for failures to complete related to factors outside of ILCs control and, in the

case of lockdowns and staff shortages in particular, out of scope for the reforms as well.

The impact of the ILC curriculum

The most commonly mentioned reason for completion failures that can be attributed to the current implementation and functioning of the ILCs themselves is the perceived poor quality of the curriculum. While most Teachers and EOs clarified that changes from SILC itself did not impact how they implemented the ILC courses, a new curriculum was introduced around the same time as the SILC reforms. Many felt that the new curriculum was unsuitable for ILC students.

Figure 3. Responses from Teachers and EOs when asked to what extent they felt current operational processes ensured student retention.

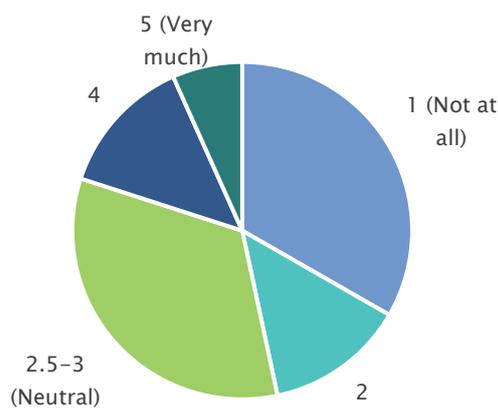
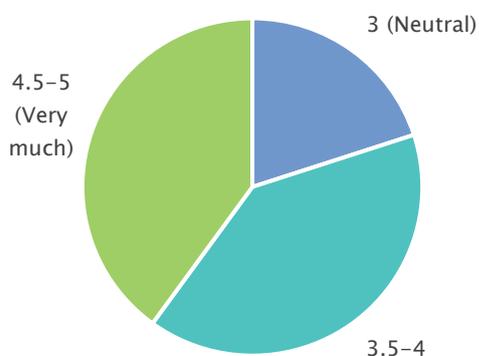


Figure 4. Responses from Teachers and EOs when asked to what extent they felt the ILC program had been implemented well in their centre.



“Our new curriculum...is rubbish. ...I think it is actually boring. I think it's not contextualized to adult men and their interests and their language. It's very poorly structured.... But if you have a look at it, the sentences are nonsensical.”

A couple of Teachers also pointed out that the lack of practical activities or vocational units made the courses unengaging for inmates, thus impacting their motivation to complete.

The impact of technology

Another commonly mentioned reason for completion failures was poor technology and software. Poor technology was also the most commonly mentioned logistical barrier to implementing the ILCs in general as it caused frustration and a loss in motivation.

“I think the IT is causing a lot of frustration in the classroom. ...The software that the inmates have and the software that the teacher has is inconsistent. ...[A]nd it causes frustration. They say, “why? Why do I have an older version than you? Why can't I have what you're doing? Oh, this is different.” So, the teacher is undermined by technology. The systems are very, very slow, often drop out, computers don't work. So, technology makes them lose motivation sometimes.”

The impact of teaching staff

When asked what aspects of the program facilitated completion, many Teachers and EOs brought up the advantage of having experienced and passionate staff who are able to make the learning interesting by creating and delivering material in a meaningful way, creating an environment for inmates that feels positive, safe, and different from prison, and building good relationships with inmates by treating them with respect.

The impact of the physical environment

A few interviewees also mentioned that having a suitable physical environment with comfortable classrooms and facilities fostered learning and motivation and, thus, encouraged students to complete. This was also the most commonly mentioned logistical factor that helps facilitate the implementation of the ILCs.

Interviewee suggestions for continuous improvement

Teachers, EOs and S/CMOs supported their feedback about facilitators and barriers to ILCs' implementation with various suggestions for continuous improvement. These included:

1. All EOs suggested broadening the eligibility criteria to allow more inmates to enrol, for example, remand, shorter sentenced, and marginally illiterate inmates. Allowing remand inmates was especially emphasised. Another suggestion was to create a layered system that still applies the current Intervention Pathways criteria but makes allowances for more inmates to join when there are spaces available. A few also suggested double-checking the accuracy of the eligibility algorithm to ensure that no eligible inmates are being excluded.
2. When we asked Teachers and EOs what processes could be included to ensure the right people are enrolling in the program, over half suggested allowing the ILC staff to assess and recruit participants again.
3. To overcome possible inaccuracy issues with the CSA, some Teachers and EOs suggested that inmates should complete an additional eligibility test that teaching staff can assess to better understand their literacy and numeracy ability and identify which courses they should be studying. Indeed, interviewees from one centre reported that they already ask inmates to complete an additional paper-based assessment before starting the course.
4. Few interviewees provided any suggestions in relation to inmate movements out of the program or hosting correctional centre, perhaps because they felt like they have little control in this area. Some suggested that completions would improve if ILC staff had the power to hold students. Alternatively, a few interviewees suggested that case management should try and send inmates to another centre with an ILC when they are moved so that they are able to continue their course there.
5. Consistent with their criticisms of the curriculum, the most common suggestion from Teachers and EOs to increase completion numbers was improving the teaching materials and curriculum. There were also a few, more specific suggestions such as allowing teaching staff to incorporate practical activities to make the course more engaging.
6. Feedback suggested improving the technology in ILC classrooms to aid the learning process and increase inmates' ability to use technology once they are released. Interviewees specified a range of changes including upgrading software, computers, smartboards, and photocopiers; installing overhead monitors and electronic whiteboards; providing tablets for all students to

use in their cells; and providing a large screen that teachers can move from room to room.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to examine staff views regarding the impact of the SILC initiative on the ILCs implementation. Specifically, we sought to gain a qualitative understanding of current facilitators and barriers to ILC operations and, through this, how the implementation of SILC recommendations has contributed to student enrolment and completion outcomes. Overall, feedback raised a number of implications for the ILCs and ongoing reforms to the program under SILC.

Implications for ILC enrolment

Despite asking interviewees about both barriers and facilitators to enrolment, they predominantly discussed the barriers. These raised implications for continuing best practice in ILC enrolments, in areas relating to eligibility criteria, roles and responsibilities for recruitment, and assessment processes, among others.

Implications regarding the new eligibility criteria

The reduction in enrolment numbers from the new eligibility criteria was a major recurring theme throughout the interviews. One implication based on feedback from interviewees is that the current eligibility criteria may benefit from further refinement to increase enrolments, for example, by 1) allowing a wider breadth of inmates to be eligible (e.g., allow unsentenced inmates to enrol, dependant on their next court date), or 2) applying a layered system where the current eligibility criteria model is maintained but other inmates are allowed to enrol if there are still spaces available.

A few interviewees felt uncertain about the accuracy of the new eligibility algorithm. An implication is that the algorithm behind determining eligibility may

need to be checked to ensure that eligible inmates are not being inaccurately excluded from the final list of names as well.

We want to acknowledge, however, that regardless of changes made by the SILC initiative, enrolment is likely to have been hampered and complicated by the COVID-related lockdowns. A few interviewees, for example, mentioned that they had only recently implemented the new system, instead choosing to enrol the old way, locally, for quite a while, because lockdowns prevented eligible inmates across the state from moving to ILCs as intended by Intervention Pathways. Therefore, while most of our interviewees tended to attribute the reduction in enrolments to the change in eligibility criteria once the Intervention Pathways model was applied, it is difficult to disentangle the effects of SILC from the effects of the pandemic. More time is needed to trial the new model to make firm conclusions about its efficacy, especially with the removal of COVID-related obstructions to implementation.

Implications regarding S/CMOs' management of enrolments

There were indications that S/CMOs and, by extension, the inmates they speak to, may have limited understanding of ILC-related processes and the purpose of the ILCs more broadly. For example, responses varied when we asked them about their role in inmate selection for the program, and feedback from other interviewees suggested confusion in case management about the different education programs. As such, many interviewees believed that ILC staff should oversee recruitment because they would be able to appropriately promote the program and answer any questions inmates may have. However, if it remains primarily up to case management to promote the ILCs to inmates, it may be beneficial for them to understand the ILCs better. A couple of interviewees suggested ideas for raising S/CMOs awareness, including providing familiarisation days for S/CMOs to tour the ILCs, and

creating material for them, like videos, explaining the program and how it differs from other education programs.

Implications regarding CSAs

There were concerns about the overall validity of the CSA and whether it appropriately captures literacy and numeracy ability. Reported problems with the assessment include the fact that its multiple choice structure makes it easier for inmates to manipulate if they want a lower score, inmates can score higher to make them ineligible for the ILCs by receiving help from other inmates or even if they skip a lot of questions, inmates do not always put in effort while undertaking the assessment, and the assessment does not capture writing ability. However, given that all inmates complete the CSA as part of their intake screening, changing to another intake assessment across the entire system is out of scope for the SILC initiative. As discussed by some interviewees, one option may be for inmates to complete an additional eligibility test to assess their true written ability and better identify which course they should be studying.

Implications for ILC Completion

Interviewees discussed both barriers and facilitators to completion. For our synthesis here, we will first focus on the barriers and outline interviewee suggestions for overcoming them before briefly outlining the facilitators.

Implications regarding factors outside of ILCs' control

Most completion failures were attributed to inmates being moved out of the centre before they could complete their course. A few interviewees also reported that COVID lockdowns and custodial staff shortages prevented classes from continuing. Barriers to attending classes were identified as having potentially substantial flow-on effects for students, leading some of them to lose their momentum and motivation to complete. Lockdowns

also reduced the amount of class hours which meant that some inmates simply ran out of time to complete, no matter how motivated they may have been. While interviewees tended to view these factors as outside their direct control, some suggested: 1) being given more power to hold inmates—which the new Intervention Pathways model is supposed to provide—and, 2) that case management should endeavour to place inmates in another centre with an ILC when they are moved.

Implications regarding the curriculum

Many interviewees felt that the new curriculum, implemented around the same time as the SILC reforms, was unsuitable and unengaging. As such, they suggested: 1) choosing, in future, well written units that are relevant to inmates' interests and ability, and 2) allowing practical activities to be incorporated into the teaching. However, it should be noted that the curriculum may not remain a barrier to completion over the long-term or at all centres, as some Teachers reported that they were starting to understand or rewrite the teaching materials. In this case it may be important to accompany these developments with strategic oversight and support to ensure fidelity to the core program objectives of the ILCs.

Implications regarding technology

A few interviewees reported that poor technology and software explained some completion failures, and provided various suggestions on how to improve the technological capability of the ILCs including upgrading computer software and hardware, installing monitors and electronic whiteboards, and providing tablets. The SILC initiative is already slated to review and potentially update the current technological capacity of all ILCs.

Implications regarding the teaching staff

There were a number of reported factors that facilitate implementation and completion, the major

one being the experienced teaching staff delivering courses to inmates. Specifically, interviewees pointed out that their ability to make the learning interesting and create an environment that feels positive and safe for inmates encouraged students to stay and complete their course. From this perspective, an important consideration is how ongoing implementation of the ILCs' and SILC reforms interacts with, or impacts upon, the important roles of teaching staff. During the interviews, concerns were raised that ongoing challenges with enrolment and participant throughput could potentially impact staff retention and turnover in the future. Indeed, feedback about enrolment factors was often associated with expressions of disappointment about the lack of students in their classes and a few also mentioned that there were rumours about the ILCs closing down. It may be beneficial to enact processes to engage ILC staff, including communications about the SILC reforms and their active roles in these reforms, in concert with ongoing activities to increase enrolments over time.

Implications of the physical environment

Some interviewees mentioned that having a suitable physical environment motivated students to complete their course. However, it is important to note that this feedback did not come from across centres, with some interviewees stating that their environment was less than ideal, with small, dark classrooms, no lunch space and so on. We acknowledge that the SILC initiative is already in the process of reviewing and potentially updating ILC infrastructure; interviewee feedback appears to support the value of reforms in this area.

Study Limitations

The main limitation of this study is that interview responses were not corroborated with more objective, quantitative data. For example, we did not compare current versus pre-SILC raw enrolment numbers to determine whether there has been an

actual decrease in enrolments after the Intervention Pathways model was applied. Self-report interviews can also be susceptible to social desirability, which is a tendency to bias responses in order to appear in a more favourable light. Despite these methodological limitations, interviews allowed us to capture in-depth, nuanced views from staff who implement the ILC program. We note that the current study is not intended to be the sole source of evidence to address the effects of SILC on the ILCs; later studies will also include quantitative analyses to examine inmate enrolment and completion numbers.

The timing of our evaluation also meant that it was difficult to separate the effects of SILC from the effects of the pandemic. As such, we acknowledge that more time may be needed to trial the new model in order to substantiate conclusions. As mentioned, we will run further studies in the future to evaluate SILC.

Last, while we approached all Teachers and EOs for interviews, most of whom accepted, we decided to only recruit a small number of S/CMOs. Given the large numbers of S/CMOs at the three centres, a sample size sufficiently large enough to be statistically representative would result in vast quantities of complex data that could not be analysed in depth, thus undermining our rationale for using an interview method (Yardley, 2000). We were also unable to choose at random which S/CMOs to interview because we needed voluntary participants. Inherently, individuals who volunteered to participate may be different from those who did not, a phenomenon called self-selection bias. This bias is not possible to overcome in our research because consent is a critical principle of ethical research practice (Robinson, 2014).

Conclusions

The current study provides a nuanced understanding of factors that influence ILC enrolment and completion, and how they correspond with the

reforms introduced under SILC. Potential barriers to enrolment included restrictive new eligibility criteria, difficulties for S/CMOs to understand and promote the ILCs to inmates, and possible inaccuracies with the CSA. Potential barriers to completions were student movements out of the ILCs, custodial staff shortages, the poor quality of the curriculum, and poor technology and software. We acknowledge that these challenges to implementation likely interacted with, and were complicated by, concurrent effects of COVID-19 during the observation period. It is also important to emphasise that, despite these perceived barriers, many interviewees felt that the ILC program had been implemented well in their centre and identified factors that facilitate implementation, including having experienced staff who make the learning interesting and create a positive space for inmates as well as having a suitable physical environment. These factors provide a positive foundation for ongoing reforms and would benefit from maintenance and support as the ILCs continue to develop principles for best practice.

REFERENCES

- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2020). *Education and Work, Australia*. ABS. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/education-and-work-australia/may-2020>
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2019). *The health of Australia's prisoners 2018*. AIHW. <https://doi.org/10.5ec5c381ed17a>
- Baldry, E., Bright, D., Cale, J., Day, A., Dowse, L., Giles, M., Hardcastle, L., Graffam, J., McGillivray, J., Newton, D., Rowe, S., & Wodak, J. (2018). *A Future Beyond the Wall: Improving Post-release Employment Outcomes for People Leaving Prison: Final Report*. UNSW Sydney. <https://doi.org/10.26190/5b4fd2de5cfb4>
- Borzycki, M., & Baldry, E. (2003). *Promoting Integration: The Provision of Prisoner Post-Release Services* (No. 262). Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi262>
- Mitrou, F., Cooke, M., Lawrence, D., Povah, D., Mobilia, E., Guimond, E., & Zubrick, S. R. (2014). Gaps in Indigenous disadvantage not closing: a census cohort study of social determinants of health in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand from 1981–2006. *BMC Public Health*, *14*(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-14-201>
- Qu, S. Q., & Dumay, J. (2011). The qualitative research interview. *Qualitative Research in Accounting & Management*, *8*(3), 238–264. <https://doi.org/10.1108/11766091111162070>
- Robinson, O. C. (2014). Sampling in interview-based qualitative research: a theoretical and practical guide. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *11*(1), 25–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2013.801543>
- Yardley L. (2000). Dilemmas in qualitative health research. *Psychology & Health*, *15*(2), 215–228. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08870440008400302>

Page intentionally left blank (if needed)

Other CRES Research Titles

April 2023	Five Minute Interventions (FMI): Custodial staff views and experiences of implementing FMI	Dec 2021	The Initial Transitional Support (ITS) program: Implementation evaluation
Dec 2022	Effects of the Workplace Mentor Program on correctional officers' perceptions of workplace culture	Oct 2021	Five Minute Interventions (FMI): Short-term effects of training on staff attitudes towards prisoners, motivation and ability to support rehabilitation, and job stress and satisfaction
Dec 2022	Five Minute Interventions (FMI): Long-term effects of training on custodial staff attitudes towards prisoners, motivation and ability to support rehabilitation, and job stress and satisfaction	Sept 2021	Process evaluation of the Custody Based Intensive Treatment (CUBIT) program for sex offender: Within-treatment change
Nov 2022	Effects of Words @ Work training on perceptions of offender rehabilitation and job experiences among Corrective Services Industries (CSI) overseers	Sept 2021	Impact Evaluation of the Gurnang Life Challenge Specialised Program for Young Adult Male Offenders in NSW
Nov 2022	Implementing digital technologies in prisons: A qualitative study of inmate experiences	March 2021	Evaluation of High Intensity Program Units (HIPUs): Implementation of an innovative intervention model for offenders with short custodial sentences
Sept 2022	Offender participation outcomes and predictors of treatment completion in the High Intensity Program Units (HIPU)	March 2021	Women in prison: An examination of the support needs of women in custody with children
Aug 2022	Staff and inmate experiences of prison social climate at Rapid Build correctional centres: A quantitative evaluation	Feb 2021	The Initial Transitional Support (ITS) program: A profile of offender participation and service delivery
July 2022	Evaluation of the Alternate Sanctions Program (ASP): Within-treatment Change	Oct 2020	Automated assessment of sexual recidivism risk for custody-based sex offenders
June 2022	Implementing digital technologies in prisons: Inmate uptake and perceived value of in-cell digital tablets	Oct 2020	The predictive validity of general risk assessment tools for offence-specific recidivism among domestic violence offenders
April 2022	Actuarial assessment of domestic violence recidivism risk among custody-based males: The Domestic Violence – Triage Risk Assessment Scale (DV TRAS)	Oct 2020	Access to programs and services among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) offenders: The case of EQUIPS
March 2022	A qualitative exploration of factors influencing prison social climate at Rapid Build and traditional correctional centres	Aug 2020	Understanding the spectrum of domestic violence: Risk factors, treatment pathways and recidivism among offenders who commit intimate partner or no-intimate partner violence
Jan 2022	Quality of the therapeutic alliance and associations with program outcomes for offenders participating in High Intensity Program Units (HIPUs)	Aug 2020	process evaluation of the High Intensity Program Units (HIPUs): Within treatment change.



Corrections Research, Evaluation & Statistics
Delivery, Performance and Culture
Corrective Services W
GPO Box 31
Sydney NSW Australia

Telephone: (02) 8346 1556
Email: research.enquiries@justice.nsw.gov.au