

‘SPECIFIC’ LEARNING DIFFICULTIES in PRISONS

Melanie Jameson
Dyslexia Consultancy Malvern
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BOOKLET 8

WORK PREPARATION and RESETTLEMENT

The full set of BOOKLETS comprises

- 1. Introduction and Resources for Specific Learning Difficulties**
- 2. Overview of Specific Learning Difficulties**
- 3. Principles of Support for Specific Learning Difficulties**
- 4. Support for English/Literacy and Maths/Numeracy**
- 5. Support for ICT and Virtual Campus**
- 6. Support for Foreign Nationals who may have Specific Learning Difficulties**
- 7. Specific Learning Difficulties in the contexts of Disability / Equality / Diversity / Accessibility**
- 8. Work Preparation and Resettlement**

The term ‘Specific Learning Difficulties’ refers to a family of conditions, namely Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Dyscalculia

ALL BOOKLETS are available on www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk

WORK PREPARATION and RESETTLEMENT

1. Aspects of the Education & Employment Strategy
2. Skills linked to Employability
3. Getting a Job
4. Support and Reasonable Adjustments

1. Aspects of the Education & Employment Strategy

A stark symbol of the challenges facing our prison system is the Revolving Door: the Ministry of Justice's (prison) *Education & Employment Strategy* puts the cost of re-offending as 'around £15 billion per year'. The designation of resettlement prisons demonstrates a renewed focus on preparing prisoners for employment and reintegration into society to break this cycle.

A key challenge is to equip prisoners with the skills they need to enter the employment market with its requirement for technical know-how and 'soft skills'. A holistic view of the purposes of education has been developed by the **Prisoner Learning Alliance**, outlining a **Theory of Change** process, by which well-being and the building up of individual and social capital are addressed alongside the acquisition of knowledge, skills and employability.

www.prisonerseducation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Theory-of-Change-Report.pdf

The **Reducing Re-Offending Pathways** framework is still seen as useful, with its strands of Accommodation, Education Training & Employment, Health, Drugs & Alcohol, Finance, Families and Attitudes & Behaviour. **Re-connecting with family** has been given particular impetus since the embedding of aspects of the *Farmer Review* (2016, Updates on Implementation, 2017).

However, despite tackling these 'strands', social exclusion is likely – a factor known to link to re-offending – if issues arising out of SpLDs are not addressed. For this reason, the delivery of all rehabilitation programmes should take these widespread conditions into account. Some programme participants will have been identified as having SpLDs, but others may well have slipped through the net. Therefore SpLD-friendly approaches (as outlined in BOOKLET 7) will enable inclusion without disadvantaging the rest of the group. Where delivery methods and training materials are not SpLD-friendly, adaptations may need to be made.

Tutors and trainers require an awareness of different approaches to learning and retaining information. They also need to encourage the development of coping strategies and measures to improve confidence which will lead to self-advocacy. All these elements contribute to addressing the difficulties that accompany SpLDs – this is encapsulated in the following mandation:

Mandation: Education providers' staff, and those prison staff who deliver learning, to be appropriately trained and qualified to develop and meet the additional support needs of prisoners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD).

There is a body of evidence showing that '**Through the Gate**' support is of sustained benefit. This may include mentoring, now recognised as an effective approach, and often involves trained former prisoners. It is regrettable when security measures rule out this source of help which, as peer support, is uniquely acceptable.

The NIACE research report *Vocational Training and Employability Skills in Prisons and Young Offenders Institutions* (Dixon & Casey 2013) identified a combination of factors which contribute to effective provision. But the key to success was seen as working with employers in order to:

- *align provision to relevant skills gaps and growth industries*
- *secure work placements for offenders accessing vocational opportunities in the community*
- *share good practice and develop effective partnerships.*

The Report proposed a national employer forum and drew up draft principles to encapsulate good practice. These covered a wide range of areas, namely: Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG); flexible training tailored to meet a range of individual needs; support for transition from prison to resettlement; training which is comparable with mainstream provision and qualifications; support for learning difficulties and disabilities and language support; use of peer mentors; opportunities to develop life skills; delivery of transferable skills; records of achievement which follow learners into the community and access to apprenticeships for those who can undertake these through release on temporary licence (ROTL).

Many of these elements have now been taken up in the Education & Employment Strategy – especially important is the delivery of a comprehensive IAG service, which currently depends on buy-in through the Dynamic Purchasing System.

An important step was the establishment of the **New Futures Network**, launched October 2018, in which five priority employment sectors were identified, namely: retail, catering/hospitality, construction, manufacturing, agriculture/horticulture. **Ambassadors** in each sector are working with **Employment Brokers** to arrange partnerships. In addition, DWP **Prison Work Coaches** are operating in our prisons. Given the prevalence of Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Dyscalculia and Asperger Syndrome, staff taking on any of these roles need awareness of these conditions in the context of employment. At the time of writing it is too early to evaluate the success of these employment initiatives.

It is worth mentioning problems with numeracy, which crops up in many areas from budgeting/money management to (most) vocational courses; this will affect a considerable proportion of prisoners, however those with SpLDs, especially dyscalculia, will face more intractable difficulties. BOOKLET 4 covers this in more detail, highlighting the impact of the numeracy requirements of Functional Skills.

2. Skills linked to Employability

Custody is the ideal time to work on the skill deficits of prisoners, with the aim of addressing these by their release date. This is clearly more difficult for those with short sentences where a 'crash course' approach is appropriate. Ideally courses begun 'inside' should be continued, post-release, in college settings or through Virtual Campus.

Speaking and Listening Skills

The emphasis on English/Literacy, Maths/Numeracy and ICT can lead to the neglect of two linked areas, essential for reintegration into society, namely Speaking and Listening Skills, also referred to as **Communication Skills**. Their importance was flagged up by inclusion in the Skills for Life curriculum and, later, as components of Functional Skills (English). The government report *Making Prisons Work: Skills For Rehabilitation* (2011) also highlighted the centrality of communication skills, recommending the provision of more materials to boost speaking and listening.

Research undertaken by the **Dyscovery Centre**, Newport, compared the population of a certain prison with a control group, in terms of social & communication skills, co-ordination, literacy and attention & concentration difficulties. The final report states:

The HMP group showed a generally higher score profile (i.e. a greater level of difficulty) across all domains than the control group. The area of social and communication difficulties is the one that stands out and may not have been considered routinely in profiling individuals coming into the prison, but may, in fact, pose the greatest problem when leaving prison.... Social and communication difficulties, coupled with poor literacy skills, may have a cumulative effect on the outcome in a range of settings: socially, educationally and in employment. In the context of this research, these difficulties may have a considerable influence on recidivism rates. A lack of social and communication skills affects individuals in all areas of their lives. Individuals may present as angry, reluctant, aggressive or as loners, because of a lack of understanding of the nuances of their social setting and what is expected of them. This may be misconstrued by others, and this consequently may lead them into further troubles.

(Identification and Implication of Specific Learning Difficulties in a Prison Population, 2005)

The **Communication Trust** highlighted the communication needs of young offenders in its publication *Sentence Trouble* (2009) which breaks down the components of Speech, Language and Communication, as follows:

- SPEECH referring to articulation; fluency; use of pitch, volume & intonation
- LANGUAGE entailing speaking; structuring info; making sense of what others say
- COMMUNICATION including non-verbal communication; using language to suit the situation; turn taking; considering others' perspectives and expectations.

All these elements need to be taken into account in order to develop communication skills.

www.communicationtrust.org

Help with navigation

Orientation and navigation is a daily challenge for people with dyspraxia who have innate difficulties in these areas. This becomes crucial when failure to attend appointments could be regarded as breach of licence conditions. Good practice when providing directions is as follows:

- focus on landmarks rather than deliver a series of left/right instructions
- provide an uncluttered map, with bus numbers, bus stops etc. clearly shown
- ensure they have a contact number in case of difficulties.

In some cases it may be that a taxi is the only way to ensure attendance.

We are familiar with technical solutions such as Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and *Googlemap*, together with *multimap.com* and *streetmap.co.uk* but people who have just emerged from prison, may need to be brought up to date with this technology.



Skills for form filling

Ex-prisoners are confronted with a massive amount of form-filling in order to apply for benefits, grants, accommodation and jobs. This activity impinges on classic areas of difficulty for the adult with dyslexia and related conditions.

The chart below summarises likely problem areas alongside an overview of support strategies. Again, up-skilling should begin well before release.

SKILLS FOR FORM FILLING	STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORT
Comprehension	Discuss reason for filling in form. Look through form to get an overview. Discuss individual questions.
Reading	Read through form with/for learner. Use coloured highlighter for key words.
Writing and spelling	Practise constructing answers on rough paper. Use an electronic spell checker or dictionary. Discuss conventions of form filling.
Clear handwriting in black ink	Photocopy form: they can practise filling in a copy or dictate answers.
Organisation	Provide an initial overview. Help to identify and mark any optional or conditional questions.
Sequencing	Highlight tricky and optional questions with sticky markers.
Information processing	Offer a private, supportive environment so the individual is not under pressure and allow plenty of time for thought.
Visual perception	Photocopy the form, enlarge and print on pale tinted paper.
Attention/concentration	Build in frequent breaks. Encourage them to use coloured highlighter for key words which subsequently helps focus attention.

Calculation aids

Sequencing errors, transposing / reversing numbers or missing lines of calculations are typical SpLD errors. These can have serious consequences in the workplace. Aids include on-screen calculators, which usually allow for adaptations of font and background colour, the layout of calculations and can be switched to speech mode.

Support for reading

Even if reading has been mastered, adults with dyslexia and dyspraxia generally lack the **ability to skim or scan** information – this is a great disadvantage in study and work situations. If coping strategies are underdeveloped and/or assistive technology has not been acquired, ploughing through any documentation is laborious and exhausting.

An approach for those who learn best through listening, is obtaining an audio version of texts – a service which is generally available for the visually impaired. It is helpful to have the written version available at the same time, to enable the reader to highlight key points and mark sections that require further attention.

Readback software, with headphones is the obvious solution to problems getting through documentation / longer texts. Technology aids also include reading and scanning pens, which can be used on the move to tackle short amounts of text or to read back one word that is causing difficulty, and provide a dictionary definition. Scanning pens can operate in conjunction with a computer; some even include diaries and address books.

www.readerpen.com/

Support for writing

Mindmapping can be helpful at many stages of the writing process, as described in BOOKLET 4.

ICT also offers alternative ways of presenting ideas as mind maps or concept maps.

Although **voice recognition software** allows the user to dictate into the computer, s/he needs the ability to dictate clearly, together with knowledge of written language sentence structure, which is different from spoken language. Some understanding of punctuation is also needed. These skills can be taught to some extent. The best use of these aids may be to dictate the initial drafts and any notes or reminders, then move over to the keyboard for the final stages. Training is essential if the learner is to make full use of the range of commands and shortcuts available.

Accurate **proof reading** is still essential, despite the availability of spellchecking, because incorrect words can be missed if they are similar to the intended word. It is important to allow time between writing and checking – otherwise readers only see what they remember they wrote. Although a screen reader can help pick up errors, human assistance can also provide feedback and may be more effective in producing an error-free document.

The following case study illustrates a route to acquiring appropriate technology.

After a long sentence Martin was released from prison. He had done a range of ICT courses then trained to mend computers in a Prison ICT Academy establishment, during which time he was screened as possibly dyslexic. On getting work as a computer engineer, he contacted the local Disability Employment Adviser who referred him to *Access to Work*. Following a workplace assessment of his needs, Martin received a laptop with speech input and a screenreader. In order to assist him with organisation he was given an electronic personal organiser. Martin feels he has been well supported and is working hard to make a success of his job.

3. Getting a Job

The **disclosure of 'unspent' convictions** is clearly an obstacle to gaining employment; the *Ban the Box* initiative (by which some convictions do not need to be shown on job applications) is therefore welcome.

Given the sensitivity of this issue, it is unlikely that ex-prisoners will further jeopardise their chance of employment by disclosing a Specific Learning Difficulty.



Would-be employees, faced with the disclosure of unspent convictions and the issue of disclosing a Specific Learning Difficulty, can be guided through a staged process, as follows. Discussion, in a safe environment prior to any job application, is a good way of

opening up a consideration of disclosure. The potential employee should practice likely questions and work out how they might explain their Specific Learning Difficulty - emphasising how they compensate for problem areas. They should start by answering questions in an informal relaxed way and be encouraged to think aloud. Once they have begun to organise their thoughts and formulate responses, interview practice should become more formal. The 'applicant' and the 'employer' are now seated across a table. Guidance should be given on conventions such as greetings when entering a room, shaking hands at the end of the interview etc.



The **Westminster AchieveAbility Commission (WAC)** on Dyslexia/Neurodivergence (2016-17) was set up to focus on whatever obstacle adults with SpLDs judged to be the most problematic in their lives - this proved to be the recruitment process.

The Commission's report identified ten barriers, which included:

- lack of awareness at all levels
- the consequences of disclosure
- failure to implement the Equality Act and reasonable adjustments
- poorly conceived recruitment practices
- inappropriate performance management processes.

Useful recommendations were made, all of which are being followed up. Case studies of good practice were showcased. The final report includes a useful summary.

www.achieveability.org.uk/files/1516612947/wac-neurodiverse-voices-opening-doors-to-employment-report_2018_interactive.pdf

Another aspect of the recruitment process (also highlighted in the above WAC report) is psychometric testing which is widespread, often computer-based and increasingly administered by a recruitment company. A PhD study formulated the hypothesis '*Dyslexics are disadvantaged if they have to sit psychometric tests as part of the job selection process*' and concluded that this was the case for the obvious reasons of time constraints and lack of breaks, but also because tests probed areas of difficulty but seldom touched on areas of strength (such as lateral problem solving or spatial reasoning). Physical factors such as fluorescent lighting and distractions – especially an open-plan workplace - were also problematic.

The study found that employers like to think they accommodate employees with disabilities, but their lack of knowledge often undermines this aim.

The WAC report recommends testing that relates to the job, is practical and that will evaluate the individual's strengths.

Organisation in the workplace

Adults with Specific Learning Difficulties often state that their core challenge in employment and daily life is organisation. There are a number of ways of tackling this, depending on the employment situation.



Electronic organisers and smart phones have developed into useful organisational tools but are only as good as the information entered into them. Some people function better with wall calendars and/or pocket diaries (which must always be kept up to date).

Digital recorders/phones are useful to record important conversations, phone messages or meetings. They can help to compensate for poor literacy skills and handwriting. These devices then connect to a computer to bring the text up on screen, with the possible aid of speech recognition software. Increasingly, all this technology is now available on a phone.

Mental health challenges

People with enduring mental health problems face particular disadvantages and have one of the lowest employment rates in the UK. Yet the vast majority want to work, and with the right support can gain employment, according to the Centre for Mental Health www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk.

The employability of ex-prisoners with mental health problems is promoted by their **Individual Placement and Support (IPS)** approach. A significant proportion of this population is also likely to have a Specific Learning Difficulty, due to the overlap between SpLDs and anxiety and depression.

Change, Grow, Live (formerly Sova) provide a number of services for ex-offenders; these include drug and alcohol services, together with social care. One of their projects, Support Link–Oxleas, operates across London, working in partnership with the National Probation Service and National Health Service, to support ex-offenders with longstanding psychological needs to reintegrate into the community. Volunteers are recruited, trained and supervised to provide group and/or individual support as required. The usual pattern is to match 1-3 volunteers with an ex-offender whom they meet on a regular basis, in order to provide support and assistance in achieving agreed personal goals.

<https://www.changegrowlive.org/what-we-do/our-services/criminal-justice/prisons>

By taking account of the particular challenges and abilities associated with SpLDs, such projects maximise the chance of long-term resettlement for their clients. In addition, Information, Advice and Guidance services should be aware of disability entitlements for people severely affected by SpLDs, such as Reasonable Adjustments and Access To Work.

Access to Work (AtW) is a government programme aimed at supporting disabled people to take up or remain in work. On the basis of an assessment of needs, it provides personalised support to disabled people who are:

- in paid employment (full or part-time)
- self-employed
- apprentices
- trainees
- supported interns
- doing self-directed work experience
- on Jobcentre Plus promoted work trials

Would-be employees can also apply if they have:

- a job offer letter
- a job start date
- a letter confirming their interview

Full information on www.gov.uk/access-to-work

AtW can pay for human support (as necessary), technological aids and training in their use. This last element is often omitted, with the result that the disabled employee is unable to make full use of the assistive technology s/he has been provided with. Contact should be made with the Disability Employment Advisor at the local Jobcentre Plus or an AtW Contact centre. The enquirer is then linked with an Access to Work Advisor who can provide full information and initiate the process

Access to Work may also be able to fund two further areas, which combine to lead to the best outcomes:

1. workplace skills development session from an SpLD specialist
2. awareness training for colleagues and management.

In conclusion, the best opportunities for successful employment for this population are workplaces where they can deploy their skills and develop coping strategies; this may entail flexibility and understanding on the part of employers. It is worth mentioning that in some areas, such as software development, employees with dyslexia are actively sought, due to the specific abilities they can bring to this task.

The **Dyslexia Adult Network**, a coalition of SpLD charities and organisations, is working to disseminate awareness to IAG providers and Human Resources – two professions where this expertise is still lacking. It is however essential in order for people with Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Dyscalculia and Asperger Syndrome to flourish in the workplace.

www.dan-uk.co.uk

The last sentence of this final BOOKLET relays a message from the charity **Unlock** to employers:

“There’s a talent pool of over 10.5 million people that you might be overlooking. People with criminal records make good employees.”

www.unlock.org.uk