SUPPORT FOR NEURODIVERGENCE in PRISONS

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BOOKLET 3

Principles of Support

The full set of BOOKLETS comprises

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

The Resource covers Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Dyscalculia and Autism without co-occurring intellectual disability

ALL 8 BOOKLETS are available on www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk

PRINCIPLES OF SUPPORT

1. Barriers to Learning – and Talents associated with Neurodivergence

2. The Effects of Stress

3. Improving Confidence and Motivation

4. Overview of Support Strategies

5. Specific Support for Dyspraxia, ADHD and Autism

1. Barriers to Learning

Staff working with prisoners are all too aware of the multiple disadvantages often faced by this population; these can include:

- dysfunctional upbringing
- chaotic and disorganised lives
- lack of educational and training opportunities
- mental health problems and head injury
- emotional and behavioural issues
- addiction
- homelessness.

If dyslexia and/or other cognitive neurodevelopmental difficulties are also present, these disadvantages are compounded. Despite bravado, there is often the issue of low self-esteem which becomes a barrier to progress if unaddressed.

Given the negative experiences of schooling in many cases, it is little wonder that some prisoners avoid class-based learning. However they may be attracted to vocational training and technology courses, if they have the skills to access them. On-course support may make the difference between success and failure; this can be funded through the Additional Learning Support mechanism, as in further education.

Some prisoners may prefer to study on their wing rather than attend classes. Flexible learning opportunities, which are increasingly IT-based, are making this possible in some establishments. The growth of the Virtual Campus provides further opportunities. Studying for self-improvement had been decreasing, due to the emphasis on increasing employability through work preparation programmes. However governor autonomy should now lead to the commissioning of a wider range of provision, to suit different needs.

The extract below illustrates how one individual was helped to overcome his barriers to learning through IT, while serving a term in an open prison. He had always wondered if he could be dyslexic.

> A blow to my self respect was that when I was in school I could never write a story down although I had them in my head. It was something about pen and paper and spelling and handwriting. But I learned to use computers while I was inside. This has changed my life. Now I can get my stories down and get them tidied up. I've even started writing poems.

The course *Get Set For Success* (developed by the Learning & Work Institute in 2014) addresses areas such as dealing with problems, managing social relationships and working with others – all necessary pre-cursors to successful re-integration. Sessions on motivation lead to deeper self-understanding. It is hoped that governors will commission this type of provision now that they are no longer tied to qualification-bearing courses.

Talents associated with Neurodivergence

As the barriers to learning are removed, ND people may well demonstrate a range of abilities, also associated with this family of conditions – but often overlooked.
These could include:

- Creativity & originality
- Visuo-spatial skills
- Visualisation
- Intuitive approaches
- Lateral thinking / problem solving
- Affinity for colour / rhythm
- Entrepreneurship
- Good oral skills (in some cases - but this may be a problem area)
- High attention to detail (particularly associated with Autism
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Since these abilities may be masked by low esteem and unwillingness to risk engaging (due to bad memories of schooling), it is vital to provide a taste of success. This may occur through participation in creative and practical activities, like Art, Music, Drama, Woodwork. The subsequent raising of self-esteem will hopefully lead to engagement with education and/or training courses, possibly for the first time. This, in turn, should improve the chance of gaining skills for employment, leading to successful rehabilitation.

2. The Effects of Stress

As we all know, prison is a stressful environment - and specialists have noticed that the effects of stress appear to be more debilitating to people with Specific Learning Difficulties. One explanation for this is that the operation of coping strategies uses up much of their mental energy, leaving few reserves to draw on in demanding situations. When affected by stress, absorbing new information can become almost impossible, something that prison trainers, educators and officers must take into account.

An expert with experience of dyslexic people in the courts, put it like this:
A dyslexic can appear completely incompetent in situations of stress (Harry Chasty, former Director of Dyslexia Action).



Suggestions for lowering stress levels include yoga, relaxation exercises and meditation. The **Prison Phoenix Trust** supplies free booklets on yoga, relaxation and meditation to people in prison. Research published in 2013 confirms a range of benefits from these practices.
www.prisonphoenixtrust.org.uk

Another option is a support group (such as the Prison Fellowship - a Christian group, contactable through the Chaplaincy). If there is a Quaker chaplain s/he might organise activities that provide spiritual rather than Christian support, such as (non-judgemental)

Active Listening sessions and periods of communal silence which offer much needed peace.

The case study at the end of BOOKLET 6 illustrates the effects of stress

3. Improving Confidence and Motivation

Generating motivation and raising confidence levels are essential ingredients of effective learning and training programmes. A learner who has tasted success in the past will know that to make mistakes is one of the ways we learn and will not be too disheartened by them. But ND learners, especially those in an offender setting, often have little experience of success, feel that they are beyond help and are held back by the fear that they will expose their weaknesses.

Motivation is a very individual aspect of learning. Most learners will have their own ideas of what they want to achieve but not always know how to get there. Many ND people find it very hard to be motivated unless there is an element of personal interest and choice in what they study. In addition, learning based on what is meaningful to the learner is more likely to be retained. A selection of topics should therefore be offered where possible.

Sometimes a different approach to teaching/training is needed, one more in tune with the learner's way of acquiring skills. Some learners have said that they 'cannot handle learning in a group' but will engage with distance learning. Others find the support of peer mentors helps them make better progress.

Confidence and motivation can be promoted in the following ways:

- Listening to the learner and taking their suggestions on board
- Providing encouragement
- Praising effort as well as results
- Guiding the learner towards realistic goals
- Keeping the steps small and attainable
- Celebrating success.

Materials and initiatives that address issues of raising self-esteem and confidence:

1) *Ten Tips* and *Ten Steps*: www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/resources
These two confidence-building handouts are freely available on the Dyslexia Consultancy Malvern website. They encourage people with Dyslexia to take stock and appreciate their own unique way of applying their skills.

2) *Making the Curriculum Work for Learners with Dyslexia* (2002) Jenny Lee
This useful guide contains a helpful passage on raising self-esteem.

3) The *London Shakespeare Workout* https://londonshakespeare.co.uk/
The *Workout* is an outstanding example of motivational experiences which foster self-esteem and trust-building. Prisoners are encouraged to express themselves through the immersive medium of performance.

Dr Bruce Wall, founder and director of the *Workout* initiative (and dyslexic himself) has made the following observations:

"Amazingly it is the most vulnerable that most often come to the fore in the work that the *London Shakespeare Workout* is privileged to undertake on its now world-wide basis."

"The young men suddenly found themselves being respected in a manner none had ever experienced before. Those involved later said I had changed their lives. I hadn't. Shakespeare and their own determination had. They had engaged themselves. Engagement is always key. At best I helped them to help themselves."

"One 19 year old lad, who had always struggled with his dyslexia, and as a result always 'cooped out' from his high school studies, suddenly found himself taking part – and thriving - in one LSW workshop. As a result of that inspiration, he went on to finish his GCSEs in prison, thereafter to university and today writes 'on the out' for a national newspaper."

4. Overview of Support Strategies

This section outlines a range of support strategies which will help neurodivergent people who are engaged in learning or training of some sort.

Please note that related issues are dealt with in separate BOOKLETS, namely:
BOOKLET 1 – includes **Resources**
BOOKLET 4 – Support for English/Literacy and Maths/Numeracy
BOOKLET 5 - Support for ICT and Virtual campus
BOOKLET 6 - Support for Foreign Nationals who may be neurodivergent

An overall benefit of 'dyslexia-friendly' methods is that they are found to assist other learners who have failed to make progress or who have never had the opportunity. Foremost of these techniques is a '*structured multisensory approach'*, a term often quoted in relation to dyslexia support. The two components can be looked at separately:

a) 'A structured approach'
- fostering motivation by achievable 'bite size' targets which are clearly defined
- breaking any task down into the skills and subskills involved
- teaching one thing at a time, then combining the steps in a cumulative way

b) 'A multisensory approach'
This entails presenting the same item(s) in different ways, using different senses, in order to reinforce learning. Ideally visual, auditory and hands-on approaches should all be used.
Visual techniques include colour coding, diagrams, mindmaps (more on this in section on Supporting writing, BOOKLET 4)
Auditory strategies include CDs, DVDs, voice recorders, oral work.
Hands-on learning could include role play, handling or sorting cards/objects or using a computer.
Often ND learners are stronger in one of these modes and very weak in the others.

Providing feedback

Providing feedback on work must be handled sensitively, since self-esteem is usually fragile. If handled well, it can become a source of encouragement and motivation. Errors, rather than simply being wrong, should become something the individual can learn from. In the case of numeracy, it is necessary to discover why the learner has got it wrong – is it a procedural error or a calculating mistake?

It is important to give feedback on work as soon as possible after it has been completed. Many ICT programs have self-checking exercises which provide instant feedback and protect self-esteem. Recommended features of such courses include bite-sized learning, a wide choice of topics, games and quizzes for reinforcement and accessible tutor guides. Customisable options are helpful for ND learners.

Developing organisational skills

Many people with dyslexia, dyspraxia and ADHD find organisational skills challenging, and live chaotic lives. This area becomes crucial for those serving community sentences where 'unacceptable absences' or breaches can lead to prison. The complexity of appointments with a range of agencies in addition to compulsory attendance at drug treatment centres, for example, and rehabilitation programmes or unpaid work commitments, makes considerable demands on organisation abilities.

For this reason, it is vital that support sessions include training in self organisation. Technology solutions (where available), such as electronic organisers and smart phones, will suit some people – but are not generally available in prisons! Teachers and trainers can assist learners/trainees to construct a simple timetable of their activities stating <u>when</u> and <u>where</u> these take place and <u>what</u> is needed. A mindmap, which displays this information visually, will be a helpful approach for some people.

We cannot assume that ND people have an automatic grasp of days of the week or months of the year, especially when these are referred to *out of sequence*, for example knowing which month it will be in three months' time or which was the day before yesterday. A step-by-step way of tackling this is outlined below:

Days: once the sequence is familiar, learners should answer 'before' and 'after' questions relating to the days of the week first <u>with</u> the sequence available in front of them, then <u>without</u> that support.

Months: these can be recited and learned using the rhythm that arises from breaking them up as follows and always stressing the final month in the set:
January, February, <u>March</u> / April, <u>May</u> / June, <u>July</u> / August / September, October, November, <u>December</u>.
August stands on its own and attention should be drawn to the spelling pattern (2 'u's).

Once the list of months has been cut into individual strips, the learner can reassemble the order and answer before/after questions.
It is helpful to bring in various calendars and diaries to look at different layouts.

The **numbers** 1-12 should become associated with the months to assist the learner in recognising and writing out dates in the usual numerical format.
This work can be reinforced by marking birthdays and special events on a calendar.

5a) Support for Dyspraxia, also known as Developmental Co-ordination Disorder

BOOKLET 2 includes 'Features of Dyspraxia and Accommodations'

Dyspraxia is less well known than dyslexia, despite its profound consequences in everyday life. Adult dyspraxia networks provide the following advice:

- Learn about dyspraxia and acknowledge the problems it causes
- Anticipate difficulties in the following areas: manual and practical tasks; work that requires spatial skills and good orientation; operating under time constraints - and make allowances
- Be aware that people with dyspraxia might find it difficult to express themselves, interrupt inappropriately and can seem rude, abrupt or demanding
- Do not overload them with information
- Repeat and summarise the main points of each session
- Allow appropriate help from other learners
- Since producing legible handwriting may be impossible, consider other ways of working such as using a scribe or recording device (if possible).

I got so frustrated on the out cos I could only get menial jobs doing physical work which is the hardest for me cos of my dyspraxia. I decided to go on education and get some qualifications so I could get a job that used my brain.
The tutor did not know about dyspraxia but was helpful and could see I wanted to learn.
Gavin

BOOKLET 5 on ICT and Virtual Campus includes comment on appropriate technology for people who have Dyspraxia.

5b) Support for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

BOOKLET 2 includes 'Features of ADHD and Accommodations'

Progress will be more challenging if learners have attentional difficulties such as high levels of distractibility and a short attention span. The upshot is that they cannot remain focused on any activity for very long.

In order to maximise participation, the following guidelines should be considered:

- Engage with learners' experiences and interests in order to gain and retain attention
- Check frequently, but diplomatically, that learners know how to get started on the task
- Build in breaks, as necessary, rather than risk losing the focus of the session
- Keep instructions to a minimum and provide a written copy that can be referred to
- 'Chunk' the information into shorter sections, don't spend too long on any one item
- Vary the pace, to help maintain concentration
- Link your points and provide memory pegs
- Use humour, where possible.

Minimising distractions helps, since individuals with severe ADHD learn better with the minimum of visual and auditory distractions. Seating should therefore be arranged away from windows, and every effort should be made to reduce background or external noise.

Some learners are able to maintain concentration for longer periods on the computer, especially if they are using headphones, and find this a more productive way of working. Learning programs should incorporate the points of good practice made in the last four bullet points listed above.

Advice relating to ADHD and Technology from BOOKLET 5 is reproduced below
Both *PowerPoint* and speech recognition programs have been found to be particularly appropriate for people with ADHD. In addition, mind mapping software with pictures is useful, helping both with structuring content and retaining ideas.

5c) Support for Autism with co-occurring intellectual disability

BOOKLET 2 includes 'Features of Autism with co-occurring intellectual disability and Accommodations'

Given the complex nature of Autism and individual differences, good outcomes are most likely where there has been a specifically tailored programme, preferably created, implemented and supported by someone with an understanding of Autism. Where this is not possible, a number of principles should be born in mind.

- Any change in routine should be flagged up at the earliest opportunity and reassurance provided. Sudden change can cause a panic response.
- Communications, both verbal and written should be unambiguous.
- Figures of speech may be taken literally or cause confusion eg *we are getting on like a house on fire* and nuances may well be missed
- Thinking is often inflexible; abstract concepts may be impossible to grasp without concrete examples
- Open questions are much harder to manage – closed questions or multiple choice with a selection of responses are less challenging
- Responding to questioning in formal situations, such as adjudications, is easier to cope with if questions are submitted in writing beforehand
- Sensory sensitivity may be causing discomfort – from lights, noise or certain textures.
- They usually demonstrate poor awareness of body language, verbal cues and unwritten social rules – the latter should be made explicit.
- Work on demystification and improving social and communication skills is an essential element of support for these learners
- 'Time out' is needed to recover from any language-heavy sessions or social interaction

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Issues relating to <u>Dyscalculia</u> are discussed in BOOKLET 4: Support for English/Literacy and <u>Maths/Numeracy</u>

BOOKLET 2 includes 'Features of Dyscalculia and Accommodations'

This CASE STUDY illustrates that people often show signs of more than one condition.

CASE STUDY: Maggie

Maggie left school at 14 without taking any GCSEs. She was a persistent truant; this soon led to petty offending. Cautions followed, then short sentences as her offending escalated. While under the YOT, Maggie was assessed as dyslexic but there appears to be something going on in addition to this. She shows a complete lack of awareness of others and often panics in social situations, becoming violent and uncontrollable. On one occasion she was convicted for criminal damage and assault when challenged at the Job Centre.

In prison, Maggie is a loner and has not engaged with any activities. She has lost privileges after verbally abusing her Offender Manager after a meeting was changed without notice.

Though clearly intelligent, Maggie always takes everything literally. She recently disclosed that, despite her dyslexia, she would love to be able to read better and pursue her all-absorbing interest in animals.

Ways Forward and Reasonable Adjustments could include:

- Revisiting her screening results on the database; do these indicate factors that could be consistent with Autism?
- Drawing up an awareness sheet for staff and circulating as necessary, with the aim of minimising incidents arising from unplanned change.
- Trying to give advance notice of any changes in routine and, where not possible, handling the situation with sensitivity.
- Looking into allocation of a peer helper, to monitor Maggie's stress levels and help her cope. (*The National Autistic Society can advise*)
- Keeping verbal and written instructions brief and unambiguous.
- Always allowing thinking time for Maggie to respond verbally.
- Referring Maggie to the Shannon Trust Reading Plan for 1-1 support in developing her reading skills – the mentor would need special briefing.
- Exploring a career path that could lead to working with animals.

Guidance on Learning Disabilities from the Dept. of Health & Ministry of Justice

Positive Practice, Positive Outcomes (Dept of Health 2011)
www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/216318/dh_124744.pdf

HMPPS Guide Supporting People with Learning Disability & Learning Challenges - LDC Powerpoint Toolkit: Making services work for people with LDC (both 2019)