Releasing the Potential of Offenders with Dyslexia & related Specific Learning Difficulties

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR STAFF WORKING WITH OFFENDERS

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2014
This Guide covers not only Dyslexia but the range of Specific Learning Difficulties, namely Dyspraxia / Developmental Co-ordination Disorder, Attention Deficit Disorder, and Dyscalculia. There is some information on Asperger Syndrome.

Thanks are due to Gill Smith for desktop publishing
INTRODUCTION

This publication is a practical guide for anyone working with offenders, in custody or in the community. It covers not only Dyslexia but those conditions which frequently overlap with it, namely Dyspraxia (also known as Developmental Co-ordination Disorder), Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder and Dyscalculia. Together they are known as Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs). There is some debate as to whether Asperger Syndrome, part of Autism Spectrum Disorder, should be included.

Research indicates that a considerable proportion of the offending population faces difficulties due to dyslexia and related conditions, and are unlikely to make progress without appropriate support. An understanding of how these conditions affect adults in education, training and resettlement, together with some knowledge of which methodologies are most effective, will enable staff and management to help this population tackle their difficulties, value their abilities and develop coping strategies – all of which lead to better chances of rehabilitation.

Fortunately an SpLD-friendly approach is also beneficial for other people who have failed to make progress.

This Guide draws on an earlier resource, produced by the same author in 2007, entitled Offending, E-learning and Dyslexia. However there are two key differences:

- There is not an e-learning focus in this resource; ICT is just one of many areas where the difficulties and strengths associated with SpLDs come into play.
- Unlike its predecessor, this resource is not limited to the context of England and Wales. It is hoped that practitioners world-wide can benefit from the information in these pages and apply it to their situations.

Please note:

1. Unless otherwise stated, initiatives, tools and materials relate to practice in England and Wales (apologies to Scotland and N Ireland when the term ‘UK’ is used as shorthand.)

2. Since some users of this Guide will read Sections in isolation, some key points will be repeated each time.

3. Readers are encouraged to feedback suggestions for inclusion in later editions.

Author Profile

Melanie Jameson is a freelance consultant, trainer and assessor. She works across the criminal justice system, conveying the impact of dyslexia and related conditions through awareness training, materials development and committee work with government agencies and departments.

Melanie has worked with the Prison Education Services of England, Scotland and N Ireland and trained contractors for the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and Probation and court staff. She has presented at conferences of the European Prison Education Association, the Youth Justice Board and the Parole Board and been a trainer on the Advanced Judicial Skills course. She was commissioned to provide judicial guidance on Specific Learning Difficulties in the Equal Treatment Bench Book.

The resources she has developed in the course of this work are freely available via the website www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk
This Section explores the nature of Dyslexia and related Specific Learning Difficulties. Appropriate terminology, and issues relating to young people, are discussed. We explore the implications of these conditions in the criminal justice system.

Introducing Dyslexia

Dyslexia has been described as a ‘pattern of difficulties’ which vary from person to person within a recognisable pattern. It is characterised by inherent inefficiency in processing language-based information. There is usually lateness in learning to read, poor spelling, a weak short-term memory, disorganisation and poor time management. Difficulties with sequencing and structuring information are common. Numeracy skills may also be affected. Although some people with dyslexia have good oral skills, others have difficulty expressing themselves. It is quite common to experience a slight delay between hearing what is said and understanding it, which further hinders communication.

People with dyslexia can be seen as inconsistent, because their ability to cope may vary significantly from day to day. The challenges they face will often affect motivation, confidence and self-esteem.

Dyslexia is independent of intelligence, race and social background. However the nature of the home language will be a factor in how it manifests itself: for example, a language with a largely irregular spelling system (such as English) will cause more literacy problems than a regular language like Spanish.

Although previously thought to affect more males than females, dyslexia is equally prevalent in both sexes. It is estimated that dyslexia affects 4% of the population severely, and a further 6% show some dyslexic characteristics. However, research has shown the incidence to be far higher amongst the offending population. A key study, undertaken in 2005, is discussed towards the end of this Section and further projects are listed in the RESOURCE BANK in the reference section of this Guide.

Dyslexia has a physical basis, i.e. the brains of people with dyslexia are found to be different to those of non-dyslexics, both anatomically and in the way they function. In recent years the advantages this can confer have been highlighted - a welcome balance to the ‘deficit model’.

What are these advantages? Skills associated with dyslexia include an enhanced ability to visualise; innovative thinking and creativity; lateral problem solving skills; intuitive understanding of how things work and an ability to see the bigger picture together with an awareness of unexpected links, associations and applications. A range of definitions, theoretical bases approaches to support are outlined in A Framework for Understanding Dyslexia DfES (2004) www.texthelp.com/media/39354/USAAdultLiteracy.pdf
It is most important to stress that the areas of ability and disability vary from person to person. An assessment of individual strengths and weaknesses is therefore a prerequisite to offering targeted support to those who come into education, training and work preparation programmes.

It is always worth checking for Visual Stress – a condition that can undermine the acquisition of literacy and the gaining of fluent reading skills – which frequently co-exists with dyslexia and other Specific Learning Difficulties. Those affected experience some of the following symptoms: repeatedly losing their place, ‘glare’ from the page or screen, headaches, eye strain, blurring or apparent moving of text when attempting to read. Coloured overlays have been found to help but unaddressed eye problems are often the underlying cause.

**An example of Visual Stress**

It is important to bear in mind that the problem may not be Visual Stress but simply the need for reading glasses.

The RESOURCE BANK contains a checklist for Visual Stress and there is further information at [www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/visualstress](http://www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/visualstress).
1 INTRODUCING DYSLEXIA and RELATED CONDITIONS

Terminology and Specific Learning Difficulties

Dyslexia can no longer be considered in isolation. Practitioners are now becoming more aware of a family of overlapping conditions, collectively known as Specific Learning Difficulties, namely:

Dyspraxia – also known as Developmental Co-ordination Disorder (DCD)
Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), which exists with or without Hyperactivity (ADHD)
Dyscalculia – an inherent difficulty with all aspects of number
Asperger Syndrome – part of the Autistic Spectrum but without the accompanying pervasive learning difficulties and impaired intelligence.

Section 2 on Identification includes a description of the conditions listed above. Overviews of each, (known intriguingly as ‘KIWs’) explaining both the difficulties associated with SpLDs and suggesting ways of working with offenders, can be downloaded from the link www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/docs/justice/Resources for justice sector staff - Kiwis.pdf

The term Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs) is not accepted by everyone, owing to the fact that adults may no longer be engaged in learning. One organisation prefers Specific Processing and Learning Differences – this highlights the different approaches to processing information which typify these conditions. The term ‘Neuro-Diversity’ is also used (this originated within the Asperger Syndrome community in the United States; people who are not ‘neuro-diverse’ are described as ‘neuro-typical’).

In the UK, confusion arises due to inconsistent use of the terms Learning Difficulties and Learning Disabilities, both of which indicate, to most people, general intellectual impairment. For this reason it is important to make clear the importance of the word ‘specific’. Another factor you may come across is the use of the term ‘hidden disability’, for example in the screening tool used in a number of prisons in the UK, which is referred to as the Hidden Disabilities Questionnaire, developed by Dyslexia Action. Since a wide range of disabilities could be described as ‘hidden’, it is not obvious who this test is designed for.

The chart below indicates recommended terminology for adults, as opposed to that used in schools or in the medical context.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNACCEPTABLE</th>
<th>ACCEPTABLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mental age</td>
<td>Competent / lacking competency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Educational Needs (SEN)</td>
<td>This relates to children in the context of education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs</td>
<td>For YPs / adults in training or study: refer to someone ‘with (additional) learning needs’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A dyslexic</td>
<td>Someone with dyslexia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A dyspraxia / Dyspraxic diagnosis</td>
<td>A dyspraxia assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention Deficit Disorder symptoms</td>
<td>Characteristics of Attention Deficit Disorder</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A centre of excellence in Wales has studied the overlapping nature of SpLDs, and reports:

There is now sufficient research to recognise that these conditions are not compartmentalised, and the needs of the individual need to be addressed, rather than simply looking at labels alone. Future research specifically in forensic settings needs to identify levels of specific learning difficulties in all sectors of the prison and the implications of these findings. This is essential in order for appropriate rehabilitation packages to be designed and the outcomes of these measured.

(Identification and Implication of Specific Learning Difficulties in a Prison Population, Smith and Kirby, Dyscovery Centre, 2006)

The Profiling Tool, developed by Do-IT Solutions Ltd (Kirby and Smythe) reflects this concept of a family of difficulties with shared characteristics alongside distinct features. It is now used in several prisons across the UK. www.doitprofiler.com

Professor Kirby’s work also confirms the overlap of SpLDs with depression and anxiety; this is apparent in the Do-IT Profiler. Given the high incidence of mental health problems within the prison population, the co-existence of these with SpLDs must be borne in mind.

In most countries there is now information relating to children with dyslexia, but little or nothing on overlapping SpLDs or on post-18 settings. However it is vitally important to understand how SpLDs affect people in adulthood, both in the way in which particular skills operate and how people can be further disadvantaged in certain situations.

Possible Implications of SpLDs within the criminal justice system are considered at the end of this Section.

The issue of Identification of Specific Learning Difficulties is taken up in Section 2. Various aspects of Support are the focus of Sections 3-7.

Young people

Young people who are at risk of offending or who already have a criminal record deserve special consideration. Although 18-24 year olds constitute less than ten per cent of the population, they are found to be greatly over-represented in the criminal justice system.

Half of the young men who receive a custodial sentence are reconvicted within a year, and this figure rises to 75% within two years. (Source: Transition to Adulthood Alliance.)

Two groups are repeatedly highlighted in offending statistics: (1) Children in care (or who have recently left care) and (2) those who were excluded from school. Of course some young people fall into both groups. It is beyond comprehension why the government does not target more of its ‘reducing offending’ resources on these populations, taking particular care at important transition stages such as leaving care and leaving school.
A number of organisations with a concern for young adults (highlighting the issue of immaturity, in particular) have formed the Transition to Adulthood (T2A) Alliance www.t2a.org.uk. Convened by the Barrow Cadbury Trust, the T2A Alliance is a coalition of twelve of the leading criminal justice, health and youth organisations, who have come together to promote, in their own words: the need for a distinct and radically different approach to young adults in the criminal justice system; an approach that is proportionate to their maturity and responsive to their specific needs.

An evaluation of T2A pilot projects showed that after six months, service-users were more than five times less likely to be reconvicted, three times more likely to be in work, and twice as likely to be in education or training. The ensuing report Going for gold: justice services for young adults, formulated a bronze, silver and gold approach, describing what could be done within existing resources (bronze), with a little more (silver) and with enough to commission a unique approach to young adults (gold). www.t2a.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Going-for-Gold-guide.pdf

Some organisations are following Intensive Alternatives to Custody (IAC) programmes; these offer an alternative to young adults on the verge of a custodial sentence, thus diverting them from entering the prison system. Instead they receive help (such as mentoring) in a way which is tailored to their needs from a number of support services. Collaboration involving statutory, private, and the voluntary and community sectors (VCS) is seen as the key to success. This enables strategic joint working across sectors, and between youth and adult services. It is also beneficial for the young person who usually has to access multiple services, especially when there are issues such as homelessness, addiction and mental health problems.

One result of a focus on the varying needs of this age group is that Magistrates are now allowed to take into account a young adult’s maturity when deciding how to prosecute, in a number of offences. A document on Commissioning Intentions 2013-14 from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) outlines a commitment to provide a specific strategy to commission young adult services.

I maintain that, given the expected prevalence of SpLDs in this group, the following measures are essential to maximise success:

- Staff awareness of the family of SpLDs
- Screening for SpLDs and for Visual Stress
- Routes to assessment, for those who screen positive
- Training in SpLD support for those staff who work closely with young people
- Written materials and courses to incorporate good practice associated with SpLDs
- Access to a counsellor with experience of issues arising out of SpLDs
- Careers and vocational training which take account of SpLDs

The necessary expertise has been available for some years but take-up from commissioners of criminal justice services is poor. A supporting argument is that good practice for those with SpLDs is also found to benefit many others who fail to make progress. A further factor relates to the legal requirement to make reasonable provisions for people with disabilities, since SpLDs will often fall into this category. More about this in the final Section.
**Is there a link between Specific Learning Difficulties and offending behaviour?**

It is important to state that SpLDs do not lead to offending behaviour. However there does seem to be an indirect link between unaddressed difficulties and offending. This was explained by Jo Matty, magistrate and dyslexia expert, as follows:

*When dyslexics experience lack of appropriate support from the early years of education, this can lead to*

- poor literacy and numeracy skills
- lack of confidence and low self esteem
- boredom, disaffection
- frustration, anger
- behavioural problems
- truantaing or exclusion from school
- poor employment prospects
*all of which play their part in the climate of offending.*

Another consideration is the escalation from ‘getting into trouble’ to a custodial sentence. Children with SpLDs are more likely than their peers to find school difficult and are therefore more likely to truant. Many children who truant tend to get into trouble of one sort or another. When police investigate, a key criterion is ‘getting the story straight’ but many of these young people find it difficult to remember the order or date of events, so the information they provide seems inconsistent and unreliable, consequently they are more likely to end up being prosecuted. The chart at the end of this Section, **Implications of Specific Learning Difficulties within the Criminal Justice System**, shows how people with these difficulties can be disadvantaged.

A combination of these factors may culminate in a failure to comply with probation programmes, community sentences or licence conditions, leading to a range of penalties.

One of the items in the chart refers to low self-esteem. It has been argued that people with damaged self-esteem are initially unable to take advantage of learning opportunities because of their expectation of failure. This is true of many people with SpLDs. Hopefully, a greater understanding of the conditions, and an increase in ‘SpLD-friendly’ approaches will enable offenders with dyslexia and related difficulties to make better progress and develop useful skills that will open more doors to them on release.

In 2005, in the same year that the prison population in the UK reached 75,000, research funded by the Learning and Skills Council investigated the incidence of Hidden Disabilities across a wide range of penal institutions. Not surprisingly, just over half (52%) were found to have literacy difficulties, but almost 20% were identified as having a hidden disability, affecting learning and employment, such as Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and Attention Deficit Disorder.

Many of the studies listed in the RESOURCE BANK indicate even higher percentages of offenders with dyslexia or SpLDs.
The implications of thousands of offenders with dyslexia/SpLDs are far-reaching for prison services worldwide and for staff tasked with getting offenders into vocational training and employment. I have always maintained that, unless the difficulties and learning differences arising out of SpLDs are taken into account, efforts to reduce offending behaviour and increase employability will be seriously undermined.

Overcrowding, staff shortages and lack of staff development add to the challenges of addressing offenders’ difficulties. Education and training courses can often be disrupted as prisoners are moved from prison to prison, or learning documentation fails to follow the learner systematically. Hopefully this is being addressed in the UK by the P-Nomis data system.

Issues raised by education and training staff

When canvassed by the Adult Dyslexia Organisation in preparation for the Offending, E-Learning & Dyslexia Guide (2007), staff working in prisons expressed a range of concerns. Their comments included:

- Learners are encouraged to declare difficulties and disabilities but staff often have no training on how to follow this up
- Even if we screen for dyslexia, we can’t offer assessments at our prison
- It is difficult and costly to get staff together for training (sessional staff are not paid for extra travel costs nor for attendance)
- Staff turnover is high so we keep having to try and arrange more sessions
- There is not the funding for staff development
- We cannot get hold of appropriate tutor trainers in Specific Learning Difficulties
- Training is needed on how to deal with the emotional issues that can surround a return to education
- We know IT is helpful but there is a poor understanding of what assistive technology is all about and how to decide between similar options
- Some courses and Offending Behaviour Programmes are not ‘dyslexia-friendly’ in their methodology and their testing
- Until the status of education and training is raised, many offenders continue to choose better paid activities such as cleaning or outside contracts, rather than coming onto classes.

At the time of writing, the above concerns are still voiced. Added to these are complaints about the disruption caused by a succession of new initiatives, and concern that the drive to make prisons places of work will ‘downgrade’ the importance of gaining educational qualifications. In some establishments, further casualties are art, music and drama, all invaluable in raising self-esteem as the pre-requisite to self-improvement and developing skills.
The Prison Reform Trust has also investigated staff attitudes (amongst other issues) in a series of reports under the overall heading *No One Knows* (2006 onwards). The Trust chose to combine Learning Disabilities/Difficulties and Specific Learning Difficulties in each of their studies, not always distinguishing clearly between those with specific problem areas (SpLDs) and the very different profile of offenders with impaired intelligence. This was most apparent in the recommendations. Nevertheless *No One Knows* has helped to highlight the lack of awareness across the Criminal Justice System. [www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/uploads/documents/NOKNL.pdf](http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/uploads/documents/NOKNL.pdf)

A promising initiative, commissioned by NOMS and piloted in 2014, again covers both populations. Provisionally entitled *Improving Services for Offenders with LDD*, its stated aims are ‘to assist NOMS in their commitment to improving provision for offenders with learning disabilities and difficulties, through a programme of work including measures to improve staff awareness of evidence-based practice and to ensure that reasonable adjustments are made for offenders with LDD’. This web-based resource flags up Behaviours, Difficulties and Strategies relating to a range of conditions.

- Dyslexia frequently overlaps with other Specific Learning Difficulties and with Visual Stress
- Specific Learning Difficulties affect almost a fifth of the offending population
- Given their negative experiences of schooling, offenders with Specific Learning Difficulties may well avoid anything reminiscent of mainstream education
- Staff have felt that they are ill-equipped to support offenders with Specific Learning Difficulties
## Implications of SpLDs within the Criminal Justice System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIFFICULTIES LINKED TO SpLDs</th>
<th>POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor reading skills</td>
<td>Unable to cope with official letters and form filling. Does not check submissions / documents. Does not heed notices and written advice. Great difficulty locating info during the session. Avoids education &amp; training opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading aggravated by ‘visual stress’ i.e. print seems to become distorted during reading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak / erratic spelling</td>
<td>May not respond to written communications. Anxious about form-filling. Appears uneducated (this may not be the case).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awkward handwriting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor short term and working memory</td>
<td>Forgets information conveyed orally. Unable to hold on to information while considering a response.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor listening skills</td>
<td>Misunderstands all or part of the picture, leading to possible disciplinary procedures. Will need thinking time before responding. Frustration all round!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty expressing meaning clearly &amp; concisely – may use street jargon</td>
<td>Unable to put their point of view over. May appear evasive, uncooperative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor sequencing skills</td>
<td>Gets things in the wrong order (procedures or when relating a series of events). Incoherent. Mistakes with number / letter strings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left / right confusion and disorientation</td>
<td>Trouble locating venues, easily becomes lost. Makes mistakes referring to L &amp; R in interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misinterpreting situations / instructions / body language</td>
<td>Mis-reads situations. Gets into trouble easily. Exacerbates awkward situations. Fails to take account of unspoken rules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short attention span</td>
<td>Cannot sustain attention. Becomes overloaded and ‘switches off’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High levels of distractibility</td>
<td>Distracted by sounds, thoughts. Probably distracts and annoys others. May also be restless and fidgety.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor time management</td>
<td>Misses appointments. Compliance issues. Incapable of prioritisation and estimating how long things take.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor organisation</td>
<td>Fails to turn up at the right place, at the right time with the right papers on the right day. Loses documentation. Compliance issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor spatial skills</td>
<td>Cannot ‘read’ maps, charts, timetables.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clumsiness</td>
<td>Told off for knocking things over or bumping into others. Antagonises people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress and anxiety</td>
<td>Difficulty functioning. Coping skills undermined. May appear angry and/or incompetent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low self esteem</td>
<td>Inability to acquire new skills and benefit from new opportunities. Easily influenced, likely to be bullying target.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of confidence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further factors, such as substance misuse, will also affect behaviour and memory.
THE IDENTIFICATION OF SPECIFIC LEARNING DIFFICULTIES IN OFFENDER SETTINGS

A process for the identification of Specific Learning Difficulties is required in all offender settings. Approaches to screening are outlined. Follow-up assessments of areas of strength and difficulty should inform interventions and lead to appropriate support.

Given the high numbers of offenders with SpLDs, it is clearly advantageous to identify them as early as possible in their progress through the criminal justice system, such as at the pre-sentence report stage.

In custodial settings, an opportunity to check for Specific Learning Difficulties should be integrated into induction programmes, alongside literacy and numeracy tests. Identification of learning needs generally begins with screening. This can be paper-based or computerised. Unfortunately a number of challenges arise, principally lack of expertise, under-staffing and inadequate funding, among others. Some staff maintain that newly admitted prisoners are too distracted to engage with the identification of possible learning difficulties. However, since prisoners are already routinely tested in literacy and numeracy, it should be possible to recall those who show up as having potential problems once they are more settled. In the current funding situation, this is becoming less likely since (in my experience) organisations with contracts for induction are usually not prepared to take on further responsibilities.

A glimmer of hope has emerged at the time of writing, in answer to a parliamentary question. On Dec 17th 2013, the Minister for Prisons & Rehabilitation stated: *In 2014 we are introducing increased assessment for prisoners, including reading skills, to ensure that we maximise the benefits of the literacy support that is available.*

The author of this Guide has sent in Follow-up questions to elicit further information and stress the importance of identifying and supporting the high numbers with Specific Learning Difficulties.

Section 2 has been divided into four parts:

A) Identification of Dyslexia
B) Identification of Other Specific Learning Difficulties
C) The Impact of being ‘diagnosed’ or ‘assessed’
D) Further Issues
A) Identification of Dyslexia

The concept of ‘screening’ implies a preliminary interview or questionnaire which is designed to identify a certain number of indicators. Those individuals who are found to be ‘screening positive’ then go on to further assessment in order to confirm or rule out the condition. In the case of dyslexia, a formal assessment would involve an exploration of aspects of cognitive functioning, in order to obtain a picture of the individual’s areas of strength and weakness.

Within the remit of the Skills for Life initiative (UK, 2001 onwards) a range of materials has been developed, including skills audits. However there has never been systematic provision of formal assessments for offenders who come to education having screened positive for dyslexia, to say nothing of the far greater numbers one would expect (in view of the statistics) to show up as positive, but who choose to steer well clear of classes.

The range of Specific Learning Difficulties which overlap with dyslexia have received even less attention, even though they may actually have a greater impact on anti-social behaviour. Research suggests that individuals with difficulties in social and communication skills may be more disadvantaged, because they fail to pick up social cues and misinterpret instructions. Maladaptive behaviour can develop; when they get into trouble (sometimes for reasons they do not understand) responses of frustration, anger or violence are common. In terms of education and employment, this behaviour becomes more problematic than literacy and numeracy shortcomings.

In 2003 a handbook was provided for prison tutors. Entitled Reaching All, it contained a few pages on each disability group, and generic passages on disabilities and learning styles. The final part, The Way Ahead, recommended the establishment of an inclusive learning policy. It was suggested that prisoners arriving without an evaluation of learning needs should be interviewed during the induction process, prior to basic skills testing. In this way, those who would struggle to take the test could be identified and offered help. Unfortunately the logistics of ‘processing’ increasing numbers in an overcrowded system has undermined these aims.

Why screen for dyslexia?

The reasons why individuals fail to acquire new skills are often complex and vary from person to person. Screening for dyslexia is particularly important in order to discount or consider a widespread condition that has a profound impact on the ability to benefit from education or training. If this is ignored, frustration may be experienced by both learner and tutor/trainer, leading to lack of progress and impaired chances of success.

Adults with dyslexia and related Specific Learning Difficulties are very aware of their difficulties, and approach training and learning opportunities warily. Some are adept at concealing their difficulties; most, if not all, lack confidence in their abilities. Others feel that technology may be the way forward for them and do not expect dyslexic difficulties to impact in this setting. However, as this Guide explains, problems may still arise in ICT and on-line learning.
A trainer or tutor may need to handle the sensitive issue of suggesting that someone could be dyslexic. One way of approaching this is by asking if the individual concerned has considered dyslexia as a possibility and offering to go through a checklist. High rates of truancy amongst offenders in general will make it harder for a trainer / tutor without training in dyslexia to distinguish between the effects of missed schooling and those of dyslexia. Substance abuse can also complicate identification, and it appears that the effect of drugs on the brain may mimic some dyslexic and ADHD indicators.

**Screening approaches for dyslexia**

Methods of screening young people and adults for possible dyslexia aim to identify those ‘who show signs of dyslexia’ or are described as being ‘at risk’ of dyslexia. The methods include self-administered checklists or tools administered by staff who are not necessarily specialist tutors or psychologists. Screening positive may offer an explanation for a range of difficulties, but does not count as conclusive. A clear decision can only be reached through the next stage - assessment or diagnosis – and this is a specialised area. Dyslexia may overlap with other Specific Learning Difficulties such as dyspraxia, dyscalculia and Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder, which have implications for any learning, training or resettlement programme.

There has long been concern about screening for dyslexia in prison and probation settings where a follow-up assessment cannot be offered. To get round this issue, an ‘unobtrusive’ dyslexia screening checklist (Jameson, 1998) was designed which offers the possibility of screening for dyslexia without it actually being mentioned (the approach is one of *Help us to help you*). In this way, the establishment obtains information on the likely prevalence of dyslexia and the needs of those coming on to educational or training programmes are highlighted. Education managers are provided with data in order to advance their case for providing specialist assessment and learner support.

**Established checklists and more sophisticated screening tools are listed below**

1. The *Adult Dyslexia Organisation Checklist* FREE [www.adult-dyslexia.org](http://www.adult-dyslexia.org)
   This is an easily administered tick list. Certain items are weighted, providing a score.

2. The *Dyslexia Adult Screening Test* (DAST) [www.pearsonclinical.co.uk](http://www.pearsonclinical.co.uk)
   DAST claims to be ‘accurate at discriminating between those with dyslexia and others with literacy difficulties, easy-to-use even by untrained nonprofessionals, fast, fun and non-patronising.’ Careful study of the instructions, test administration and marking schemes is necessary.

3. *Hidden Disabilities Questionnaire* [www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk/hdq-training-course](http://www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk/hdq-training-course)
   The HDQ gives ‘factor scores’ which indicate the degree of difficulty in relation to 5 main areas of functioning:
   - General Hidden Disabilities / Specific Learning Difficulties factor
   - Concentration, attention and memory
   - Abilities and difficulties with practical tasks and motor co-ordination
   - Calculation and maths
   - Outlook and confidence.
4. *Lucid Adult Dyslexia Screening (LADS) Plus* [www.lucid-research.com](http://www.lucid-research.com)
This approach takes several key dyslexic indicators (such as word recognition skills, word construction and short-term memory) and presents them as sub-tests on screen. Results are provided in a printout.

The virtues of this test are stated as follows:
- Assesses core cognitive skills that are valid and reliable
- Provides indicators of dyslexia in adults
- A unique profiler indicating personal strengths
- Results are available immediately on-screen and via e-mail
- Includes detailed recommendations and advice on how best to make use of the information provided.

6. *Quickscan* [www.studyscan.com](http://www.studyscan.com)
This tool is designed for use in an educational context.
QuickScan is described as an easy to use, multi-functional questionnaire that takes 10-20 minutes to complete and accurately identifies specific areas of learning strengths and weaknesses. The report generated identifies both a preferred learning style and any indicators of dyslexia.
Information is provided on the need for support in a range of areas:
- Study skills
- General language skills
- Maths
- Dyspraxia
- Visual Stress
- Learning confidence.
A Tutor Report is also provided.

7. *Outsider Software* Learning Styles with Dyslexia Screening [www.outsidersoftware.co.uk](http://www.outsidersoftware.co.uk)
This interactive program has the following features:
- it is free for individuals to use
- takes 5 to 10 minutes
- provides a personalised report to help you build on your strengths
- presents a visual overview of your cognitive style
- it is uniquely based on the social model of dyslexia
- gives you your percentage chance of being dyslexic
[http://outsidersoftware.co.uk/screening-tools-3/about/](http://outsidersoftware.co.uk/screening-tools-3/about/)

There is an alternative version which tailors the feedback more to the workplace:
[www.learningstylesid.co.uk/lsdys_for_workplace/](http://www.learningstylesid.co.uk/lsdys_for_workplace/)
The Outsider Software website also provides a wealth of information on dyslexia, neuro-diversity, SuperReading and more.

8. Jameson Checklists
Two checklists, developed by the author of this Guide for offender contexts, are included in the RESOURCE BANK. The short version, Help Us to Help You, was designed to be administered alongside Literacy and Numeracy screening undertaken during induction. Dyslexia is not mentioned, so as not to raise unrealistic expectations of assessment and support in establishments where these are not available. However it is always useful to evaluate need. A longer checklist, explicitly referring to dyslexia, was developed for a Probation Trust. Both have questions that elicit areas of strength associated with dyslexia.

Assessment of Dyslexia

When it happens at all in prisons, assessment of dyslexia is generally undertaken by a specialist tutor, engaged by the education contractor. Some speech and language therapists have the relevant specialism. A more costly route is assessment by an educational psychologist. In all cases it is essential to ensure that the assessor has experience of adults, not just children.

Testing should cover written, verbal and non-verbal tasks in a range of areas. Following the recommendations of a number of expert bodies, the emphasis is on establishing the individual’s strengths and weaknesses rather than producing an IQ score. Assessment results have often been described as a ‘spiky profile’ with peaks and troughs which highlight the discrepancy between performance in areas of strength and specific areas of weakness. The weaknesses usually fall within the realms of working memory and processing speed. A report should include recommendations for support strategies which are specific to the individual concerned.

Assessment of dyslexia can be more difficult if the individual has very low levels of literacy, has missed schooling, has experience of substance misuse or if English is not the first language.

Assessors must document the individual’s talents, abilities and areas of interest. This is both encouraging for the individual and yields useful information that staff working with offenders can take into account, especially when seeking to raise self-esteem.

It is always essential to be aware of the overlap between Specific Learning Difficulties and mental health problems.
B) Identification of Other Specific Learning Difficulties

Features of Dyspraxia / Developmental Co-ordination Disorder

Dyspraxia, also known as Developmental Co-ordination Disorder, affects co-ordination, organisation and information processing. People with dyspraxia may be clumsy, get lost easily, have trouble following diagrams or maps and sometimes seem abrupt or tactless.

Key areas of difficulty, experienced by people with dyspraxia, are described below:

Social skills: They can find it hard to relate well to others, especially within groups, and may misread social cues and ignore body language.

Manual and practical work: lacking dexterity, they may find it difficult to handle keyboards, tools and equipment safely and easily.

Speech & Language: Speech may be unclear with poor articulation. They may lack control over volume and tone of speech, appearing brusque or rude.

Concentration and short-term memory: They may take a long time to complete a task, be easily distracted and find it hard to retain information.

Writing: They tend to write slowly and untidily or illegibly (giving a misleading impression of their level of education/intelligence). Accurate copying can be difficult and word-processing is often laborious.

Organisation and time management: People with dyspraxia may operate in a muddled way, having little sense of time and lacking organisation. This can result in missed appointments and forgetting or misplacing items.

Flexibility: There is difficulty managing change and new routines, together with anxiety in unfamiliar situations.

All the above can lead to Emotional Problems, causing feelings of depression, anger, frustration and anxiety. These difficulties will become more apparent in times of stress. People with dyspraxia also tend to be erratic and have 'good and bad days' without apparent cause; this is a common aspect of Specific Learning Difficulties.

Features of Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder: AD(H)D

Like all Specific Learning Difficulties, Attention Deficit Disorder – with or without hyperactivity - is on a continuum of mild to severe. An ‘attention deficit’ means an inability to focus attention: whilst many people with ADD seem not to pay attention, they are, in fact, becoming distracted by paying attention to everything going on around them.
There are three major aspects to AD(H)D:

1. **Inattention**
   This is typified by poor listening skills, difficulties staying on task, switching tasks or seeing a project through to completion; appearing ‘spaced out’ or daydreaming; becoming easily distracted by external stimuli or one’s own thoughts.

2. **Impulsivity**
   Characteristic signs include lack of inhibition, failure to take account of the consequences of one’s actions or benefit from feedback, and little sense of danger. Self-regulation is difficult, leading to the blurtling out of inappropriate remarks, interrupting others and poor turn-taking.

3. **Hyperactivity**
   This is hard to ignore and can cause annoyance to others and difficulty becoming engaged. Typical signs include difficulty remaining seated, tapping feet or fingers, fidgeting, restlessness - being on the go at all times - and disorganisation. They may tend to do things to excess e.g. driving too fast, drinking too much.

Although some people develop coping strategies, many continue to live in total chaos and frustration. Some people with AD(H)D are perfectionists with obsessive tendencies. Others will tend to repeat certain actions because they cannot remember if they have done a task or not.

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**Features of Dyscalculia**

Many people with SpLDs have difficulties with numeracy (60% is the figure often quoted) but there are a small number of learners who do not manifest SpLDs in other areas but seem unable to gain number skills.

Three key challenges have been identified:

- difficulty in processing numerical / mathematical information
- an inability to internalise mathematical concepts
- no grasp of the relative size and value of numbers.

Dyscalculia affects many areas of everyday life, these include:

- time telling
- handling money and using pin numbers
- remembering personal dates (such as date of birth, date of marriage)
- recalling personal numbers such as phone numbers, postal code
- travel - mistakes with bus, platform or road numbers
- following a recipe
- dialling phone numbers
- weighing and measuring, DIY
- writing down appointment times and dates correctly
- activities (such as games) involving dice or counting.
Asperger Syndrome – a Specific Learning Difficulty?

Asperger Syndrome lies within the autistic spectrum but does not include the pervasive learning difficulties / disabilities that generally accompany autism. However the three key features of autism are present:

1. **Poor communication skills**, leading to difficulty understanding instructions or retelling an incident; taking words or phrases literally
2. **Impaired social skills**: difficulty understanding socially acceptable behaviour and taking account of the needs of others; failure to foresee consequences; inability to 'read' body language
3. **Inflexible thinking**: difficulty following procedures and coping with unplanned change, over-reliance on routines

People with Asperger Syndrome may be highly intelligent and very able in particular areas but, due to the overall imbalance in skills, they can be regarded as having a specific learning difficulty.

The following features are common:

- Although they may have learned to partially or largely conceal their problems, social interaction remains challenging
- Speed of information processing is slow despite adequate or high intelligence. Due to their highly literal approach they cannot cope with communications which appear to be ambiguous. Their responses seem strange but are usually logical
- High IQ does not correlate with social and emotional intelligence – this leads to misinterpreting the way others respond and can lead to charges of harassment or stalking
- There may be obsessive interests in a limited range of areas and unusual behaviours – these are the two areas which are most likely to get them into trouble
- They live with high levels of stress and anxiety so reach ‘overload’ very quickly; their stress or panic reaction may include verbal or physical abuse
- Some people with Asperger Syndrome have hypersensitive sensory perception, affecting their sense of touch, smell, vision, hearing, balance or body posture and causing discomfort
- They may find it hard to maintain eye contact.

Numbers of males affected by Asperger Syndrome are thought to outnumber females.

Assessment of other Specific Learning Difficulties

At present in the UK, assessments of dyspraxia, AD(H)D, dyscalculia and Asperger Syndrome are rarely carried out in prisons. Even in the community, this service is very patchy due to the lack of available assessors or multidisciplinary teams with expertise across the range of specific learning difficulties. In the case of dyspraxia, for example, there may need to be some Occupational Therapy involvement to assess motor skills.

However, Do-IT Solutions Ltd has developed a profiling tool that identifies barriers to learning across the spread of specific learning difficulties, rather than screening for a particular condition. This is the Do-IT Profiler [www.doitprofiler.com](http://www.doitprofiler.com), described as follows:
The Profiler is a sophisticated modular computerised assessment, providing guidance and tracking systems. It has been developed for different ages and settings (including prisons) to give contextualised advice, presented in different formats to suit both the individual and the organisation. It collates information from multiple sources in order to identify hidden challenges such as specific learning difficulties, mental health, educational and employability barriers. A range of support materials is also available.

C) The Impact of being ‘diagnosed’ or ‘assessed’

Although many people are relieved to have an explanation for their difficulties, being assessed as having dyslexia, dyspraxia, attention deficit disorder or dyscalculia can come as a shock, leading to a range of reactions such as anger, distress or feelings of bewilderment.

A crucial (but often neglected) aspect of the assessment process is providing the opportunity to deal with questions and discuss realistic aims, based on a supportive but honest appraisal of the individual's strengths and weaknesses. Respect must be shown for their culture and preferred ways of learning.

Counselling can be helpful and (ideally) access to an adult support group. Nowadays on-line support is another way to learn more and come to terms with the implications of having a Specific Learning Difficulty. Given that this is unlikely ‘inside’ it is up to SpLD organisations to provide support information – although having this routinely available in prisons is a challenge.

Due to the lack of counsellors, it is tutors, trainers and prison officers who ideally need to take on some aspects of the counselling role. They will need good listening and communication skills to enable offenders with SpLDs to feel ‘safe’ enough to identify and articulate their needs. Staff will probably have to help combat the individual’s negative self-concepts and help overcome a mental block to learning and skill development.

Two resources that staff could print off to encourage those recently assessed can be found on the Dyslexia Consultancy Malvern website [www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/resources](http://www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/resources). Entitled Ten Steps and Ten Tips, they enable the individual to take stock and appreciate their unique way of applying their skills.

The issue of assessing foreign nationals with SpLDs is considered in Section 5.
D) Further Issues

Mental health assessments

A large proportion of the population with SpLDs will not be formally assessed either prior to or during a term in prison. They may, however, be identified as having a mental illness since, according to the Prison Reform Trust, 72% of male and 70% of female sentenced prisoners suffer from two or more mental health disorders. www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/ProjectsResearch/Mentalhealth

Health professionals need to be more aware of the overlap with SpLDs and be on the look out for aspects of this family of conditions.

Please note: Information on mental illness is not within the remit of this Guide

Risk assessments

This author contends that risk assessments and reports (including Pre-sentence Reports) that fail to take account of SpLD factors are flawed. Erratic behaviour, reluctance to ‘engage’, failure to take feedback on board could all be outcomes of someone’s Specific Learning Difficulty rather than indications of non-compliance which might become important issues in a Parole Hearing (for example). For this reason it is most important that anyone assessing offender risk must have awareness training on SpLDs and/or be directed towards official guidance on the impact of these widespread conditions.

Failure to take an SpLD profile into account leads to misinterpretation and misdirection by professionals. This matter has been raised with forensic psychologists working with Probation Trusts in the UK, but the profession which carries most responsibility and exercises most influence on the progress of prisoners through the system is psychologists working in prisons.

- Although screening is now more widespread, many offenders with dyslexia do not have the opportunity of an assessment
- A range of paper-based and computerised tools is available
- Other specific learning difficulties are neglected
- Assessments must record abilities, skill areas and talents
- Counselling and support should be offered to those who are newly assessed
This Section identifies a range of barriers to learning, and explores how they might be overcome by strategies which support people with SpLDs. Raising confidence levels is key to progress in education & training.

Barriers to learning

Staff working with offenders 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
- emotional and behavioural issues
- addiction
- homelessness.

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

Given negative experiences of schooling in many cases, it is little wonder that some offenders 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. In England and Wales this should be funded through the Additional Learning Support mechanism, as in further education.

Some may prefer to study on their wing in prison rather than attend classes; flexible learning opportunities, which are increasingly IT-based, are making this possible in some institutions. The growth of the Virtual Campus (offering on-line learning in over one hundred prisons in the UK at the time of writing) provides further opportunities. Studying for self-fulfilment seems to be decreasing, due to the growing emphasis on increasing (ex-)offenders’ employability, through relevant work preparation programmes.

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.
PRINCIPLES OF SUPPORTING LEARNERS WITH DYSLEXIA DYSPRAXIA AND ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER

Effects of stress

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.

One expert who had experience of dyslexic people in the courts, put it like this: *A dyslexic can appear completely incompetent in situations of stress.* In prison, there are continual causes of anxiety and frustration ranging from problems at home to on-going appeals and applications or awaiting the outcome of parole hearings. In these situations, absorbing new information from education or training can become almost impossible.

A Prison Officer describes an offender under stress:

I'd known Tom for a bit. He was a clumsy lad, big and all over the place somehow. Anyway he'd got quite wound up about the adjudication. When the governor asked him some questions to clarify the situation Tom didn't seem able to answer without striding about the room waving his arms about, as though he had to use his whole body to help the words out.

And I don't know what happened to his volume control. His voice came out very loud and aggressive. He rambled on and on as though he was trying to avoid the question.

I wondered if he was dyslexic or something but I knew he could read, in fact he was often getting stuff from library.

Features of Tom’s behaviour indicate that it was likely he was Dyspraxic

Suggestions for lowering stress levels include yoga, breathing and relaxation exercises. 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. Full details at [www.prisonphoenixtrust.org.uk](http://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.
Support strategies

The focus of this Section is a range of support strategies which will help people with Specific Learning Difficulties who are engaged in learning of some sort.

Please note that issues relating to numeracy, foreign nationals and specialist technology are covered in subsequent Sections.

A key benefit of ‘dyslexia-friendly’ approaches is that they will also benefit other learners. 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 auditory, visual and hands-on approaches should all be used.

Visual techniques include colour coding, diagrams, mindmaps (see illustration in section on Supporting writing)
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.

The Touch-type, Read and Spell package [www.readandspell.com](http://www.readandspell.com) is a proven multisensory approach to learning spelling, reading, touch-typing and computing skills. First tried in Pentonville Prison, it was found to raise skills levels and self-esteem, so was recommended to other institutions. Daily practice is necessary to make progress and initial training on the system is needed. An example of Touch-type, Read and Spell integrated into a wider programme of dyslexia support is given in Section 6.

A range of useful techniques and strategies is presented in A Framework for Understanding Dyslexia: [www.texthelp.com/media/39354/USAdultLiteracy.pdf](http://www.texthelp.com/media/39354/USAdultLiteracy.pdf) Although the Skills for Life agenda has moved on, Access for All remains a helpful manual, linked to the initial numeracy, literacy and ICT elements. At the time of writing, the website hosting this resource was about to change but the manual will still be obtainable on [http://rwp.excellencegateway.org.uk/resource/Access+for+All/pdf/](http://rwp.excellencegateway.org.uk/resource/Access+for+All/pdf/).
### Supporting reading

Dyslexia usually affects the complex processes involved in learning to read. Some learners will not have mastered the underlying sound-letter combinations – especially in English where there are many ways to represent the same sound. Others will have no strategies for working out unfamiliar words so will rely on context to make predictions. Furthermore, there may be difficulties tracking along a line of text and keeping the place, along with other symptoms of Visual Stress.

A tried and tested approach to reading in adult education is to base this on the learner’s own words, which have been transcribed. Reading can also be supported by an introduction to the topic, identification of key words and some discussion after reading.

If a whiteboard or screen is used, it is essential to ensure that everyone can see it properly and that the text is sufficiently enlarged (font size 20 at least). Learners may lack the confidence to draw attention to this themselves. Where the technology is available, smartboards and a computer/projector can be supported by text to speech software and screen-tinters can provide the background colour which is best for those who experience Visual Stress.

Handouts are of limited help to people with severe literacy difficulties. In well-equipped centres there should be the option of accessing information on a computer via a screen reader, and headphones.

Key points of good practice, relating to the features of written materials and minimising Visual Stress, are given at the end of Section 8, An SpLD-friendly learning environment.

A successful and widespread low-tech solution to teaching reading in prison is the Shannon Trust Reading Plan which currently uses Toe by Toe Reading Manual. This is a peer mentoring activity, in which prisoners who are able to read become mentors to those who need help to master this skill. The Reading Plan progresses from individual letter sounds to reading passages of text, following a carefully structured programme which should be delivered in frequent short sessions. It is particularly appropriate to help poor readers who are reluctant to engage in education, since the reading pairs of mentor and learner meet up in various convenient locations. This Reading Plan allows emergent readers to work at their own pace and gradually gain confidence – it is also of benefit to mentors who gain a well-earned sense of achievement. Success is celebrated. Shannon Trust volunteers work with prison staff to train, advise and support. It is hoped that the Shannon Trust Reading Plan will become embedded in all prisons.

![Shannon Trust Logo](www.shannontrust.org.uk)
Supporting spelling

Unlike poor maths, which seems to be almost socially acceptable, poor spelling causes great embarrassment. The issue should therefore be approached with sensitivity.

When teaching a course which contains an element of spelling tuition, it is unhelpful to use one methodology because preferred ways of learning will vary from learner to learner – and an unsuitable approach will make things worse. Again, a multisensory strategy is recommended, together with some demystification of aspects of the English spelling system. Learning is more likely to be retained if it is made relevant to the learner, so choices need to be offered.

Memory techniques need to be taught and then applied according to the individual's specific strengths. The 'Look-Cover-Write-Check method' may be helpful to master those words the individual frequently uses; the first stage [Look] should be accompanied by spelling the word aloud whereas Check can be reinforced by highlighting the difficult part of the word.

Spellcheckers are useful tools (they may need to be set to UK English). If there are problems recognising the correct option when it is presented in a list, text to speech software can read through the proposed choices. Otherwise proofreading will be necessary to spot those words which, though correctly spelt, are not the intended word. Fortunately weak spelling is usually less of a barrier in on-line learning.

Supporting writing

Getting started is often cited by writers at all levels with SpLDs as a real challenge. They should be encouraged to concentrate on capturing their ideas before addressing the writing itself. A good way to get started is a mindmap. This is similar to a spidergram, enabling learners to organise their ideas using a minimum of key words, supported by a visual layout, using colour and, ideally, images. Mindmapping can be a paper based activity or computerised, using programmes such as Inspiration and MindManager.

In order for learners with SpLDs to get the best out of this technique, it should be thoroughly taught and practised.

Mindmapping is one of the many strategies and systems to maximise learning described in detail in Tony Buzan's books, videos, programmes and training courses. [www.tonybuzan.com/about/mind-mapping](http://www.tonybuzan.com/about/mind-mapping)
Coloured post-its can be helpful as they can be moved around as ideas develop. Other approaches at this initial stage include dictating ideas to a scribe via a Dictaphone, or using a voice recognition program on a computer. The theme of personalising learning arises again here: adult writers should learn and practise writing / word processing skills using their own writing as source material.

In situations where learners have to copy down information, there is an additional problem due to limited memory capacity. Looking up at the board or screen, reading then retaining the information while copying it down, and then trying to find the place, all takes time and a great deal of concentration. Alternatives such as handouts or IT options are preferable.

Where assistive technology is available, such as spell checkers, predictive word banks or computer screen-readers, this should be presented as skill acquisition rather than a learning aid.

Once barriers to achievement have been largely overcome and the individual has settled into learning/training, he or she could well demonstrate some of the abilities associated with SpLDs.

Embedded learning

A key message from studies commissioned by the National Research & Development Centre is that contextualised or embedded literacy and numeracy tend to be associated with higher levels of learner engagement. (Research Resources: Working with Young Offenders, 2006). The example is given of a joint session delivered by an IT tutor and a personal & social skills tutor in a community setting. This involved discussion and literacy and numeracy work, together with the use of technology. Combining ICT with elements of embedded learning can contribute to successful outcomes. The other key factor is the context: this should be of interest/relevance to the learners or chosen by them.

Providing feedback

Providing feedback on work must be handled sensitively since self-esteem is usually fragile. If handled well, it becomes a source of encouragement and motivation. It is important to give feedback on work as quickly as possible after it has been completed. 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? (Section 4 is devoted to Numeracy.)

Many 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 learners with dyslexia.
Supporting organisational skills

Many people with dyslexia, dyspraxia and AD(H)D 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. (In the UK, this trend has contributed to over-crowding in the past, leading to criticism from the Chief Inspector of Prisons.)

The complexity of appointments with a range of agencies in addition to compulsory attendance at drug treatment centres, for example, and probation 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 and have the advantage of appearing ‘cool’ – but are not generally available in prisons! Teachers and trainers can assist learners/trainees to construct a simple timetable of their activities stating what they need when (and where). A mindmap, which displays what is needed visually, may be a helpful approach for some people.

We cannot assume that people with SpLDs 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 with the sequence available in front of them, then without 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, March / April, May / June, July / August / September, October, November, December.

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.
Supporting learners with Dyspraxia/ Developmental Co-ordination Disorder

Dyspraxia is less well known than dyslexia, despite its profound consequences in everyday life. (The condition is described in Section 2)

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).

Advice relating to technology is given in Section 7.

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 she was helpful and could see I wanted to learn.

Gavin

Supporting learners with attentional difficulties / AD(H)D

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.

The following guidelines help to cater for this population:
- 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 and do not 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 AD(H)D 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 of the guidelines listed above.

**Supporting learners with Asperger Syndrome**

Improving social and communication skills will need to be part of the support for learners with Asperger Syndrome. Due to individual differences, generic programmes are usually of limited success. Good outcomes are reported where there has been a specifically tailored programme, preferably created, implemented and supported by someone with an understanding of Asperger Syndrome. The key message, therefore, is that staff will need to consult someone specialising in the condition.

**Promoting 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 learners with SpLDs, 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. As mentioned, many dyslexic 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 offenders have said that they ‘cannot handle learning in a group’ but will engage with on-line 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
- Offering incentives, if appropriate
- Guiding the learner towards realistic goals
- Keeping the steps small and attainable
- Celebrating success.

One particular course, which used to run in a number of prisons, had confidence and motivation at its core. *Learning to Succeed* was developed by the (former) Dyslexia Advice & Resource Centre to encourage dyslexic coping strategies and foster skill development.

Jenny Lee’s *Making the Curriculum Work for Learners with Dyslexia* contains a helpful passage on raising self-esteem.

Two confidence-building handouts are referred to in the previous Section: *Ten Tips* and *Ten Steps* are available on the Dyslexia Consultancy Malvern website. [www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/resources](http://www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/resources)

Perhaps the best examples of truly motivational experiences, which did wonders for self-esteem and building trust, is the *London Shakespeare Workout*, described in Section 6.

- Offenders often face multiple barriers to learning
- Raising self esteem is a pre-requisite of learning and progress
- A range of approaches and options is needed since people learn in different ways
- The various aspects of Specific Learning Difficulties need to be taken into account, in order to maximise chances of success and avoid reinforcing failure
Numeracy skills can also be affected by Specific Learning Difficulties. At the severe end of the spectrum, some people are found to have Dyscalculia. Numeracy features in Functional Skills qualifications and vocational training as well as being a key factor in employability and coping with everyday life.

The need for numeracy

Everyday aspects of prison life require basic numeracy skills and the ability to retain number sequences: in the UK these include the canteen form; numbers relating to meal choices; financial aspects of Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEPs); your pin number for phoning out and the numbers you wish to call. The combination of digits and letters that make up your prison number must be entered correctly on all forms. Most offenders in the community have to tackle numerous forms to claim benefits and grants, requiring a range of calculations.

At the time of writing, Functional Skills are included in many learning programmes such as Apprenticeship schemes and may be the gateway to further progress. On the numeracy side, Functional Skills recognise the ability to represent, analyse and interpret numerical data. Vocational courses may well require a combination of arithmetic, manual dexterity and reading skills, any (or all) of which can be challenging for learners with dyslexia or dyspraxia. It is therefore necessary for workshop instructors, as well as tutors in educational settings, to be able to support these trainees / learners and understand their difficulties.

The following example, taken from an Industrial Cleaning course, illustrates a range of numeracy tasks.

*The skills you will need for this Activity are:*
- designing a data collection sheet
- reading and calculating quantities
- calculations of ratio, fraction or percentage
- drawing a line graph

Back in 2003 the government Skills for Life Survey reported that: *the connection between numeracy skills and earnings is more significant than the connection between literacy skills and earnings......difficulties with numeracy impact more negatively on job prospects than literacy difficulties. Maths certainly does matter. By supporting dyslexic learners who have maths difficulties we will be improving their life chances, earning potential and career opportunities.*
Key aspects of support for numeracy

The following components, the first of which was highlighted in Section 3, are crucial when supporting learners with SpLDs on numeracy tasks:

- Structured multisensory techniques
- Concrete learning
- Identifying and teaching all relevant subskills
- Exploring the language of maths
- Providing memory support
- Drawing on areas of strength

These areas will be considered one by one.

Structured multisensory techniques

The following important strategies will assist the acquisition of numeracy skills: The term **Structured** entails breaking mathematical operations down into small steps so that learners are not overwhelmed and demoralised but gain a sense of achievement along the way.

There must be a logical progression between these steps.

In the numeracy sphere, **multisensory** techniques include verbalising the activity, encouraging learners to use their own voices, making use of rhythm where appropriate.

Colour can be used to distinguish between, or to highlight, different features. Working with learners to highlight key factors, and/or important numerical data, enables them to focus their attention.

Another way of focusing attention is to screen off / cover up questions not being worked on with a card that can be moved down as work progresses.

A hands-on element, using concrete learning (see next sub-heading), is helpful.

A whole-group discussion is often useful to enable students to share difficulties and solutions, thus learning from one another.

Concrete learning

Concrete learning (as opposed to abstract learning) is most likely to benefit learners with SpLDs. This approach entails learning by doing, ideally with visual or auditory support. New concepts should be introduced in a practical way, such as undertaking a survey within the group to illustrate **ratios**. The topic therefore becomes meaningful – an important aspect of adult learning. Real life situations are always preferable, as recognised in the Functional Skills curriculum.
A wide variety of concrete, educational, numeracy materials are available to illustrate basic concepts. The *Skills for Life Numeracy Core Curriculum* has good examples of concrete approaches across its Entry level sections.

Support is needed when moving from the concrete to the abstract and symbolic. A 'worded' problem can be turned into a sum with digits and sufficient practice given by means of graded exercises. An example of a useful technique is colour coding to aid understanding of place value; consistent use of colour can be carried through from concrete materials to abstract calculations.

**Identifying and teaching the subskills**

This can be summarised as follows:

- Track back to the most basic area of difficulty
- Provide plenty of 'over-learning' in each of the relevant subskills
- Combine subskills carefully, checking understanding before proceeding to the next stage
- Alternative names for the same operation should be grouped together
- Start with everyday language then introduce mathematical terminology alongside it
- Link visual images and symbols with language terms.

Remember to revisit what has been covered in previous sessions.

**Exploring the language of maths**

Numeracy vocabulary is inherently confusing with different words being used for the same operation, for instance, *plus, add, the sum of* all relate to addition. Discussion is a good way to explore this language. Rephrasing a question will open up meaning to those who have not understood the format or language used.

It is important to check comprehension before the learner attempts a written numeracy task, in order to lessen the chance of error. The best way of doing this is to aid learners to talk through the steps of a task and to encourage them to think aloud. This has several benefits, namely:

- revealing whether they have understood / read the task correctly
- helping to develop organised thinking
- providing auditory feedback.

Retaining number sequences is a common dyslexic difficulty. When copying or learning a sequence of numbers, the learner should always break them up into small chunks (no more than 3 or, when doing postcodes, separating the letters from the numbers). S/he will need to read them aloud prior to and during copying, then check back carefully.

Another thing to check: can large numbers, such as £10,567.50, be deciphered?
Knowledge of the 24 hour clock may be not be secure (i.e. operating at an automatic level); this can be practised via a teaching clock, with 24 hour equivalents shown next to their 1-12 counterparts. The learner should note and learn some fixed points such as 6pm = 1800 and 10pm = 2200. Work on simple timetables helps to familiarise the 24 hour format – something that is needed both for daily living and in employment contexts.

Providing memory support

‘Overlearning’ is necessary to support a weak short-term memory. One way to do this is through games. These can provide a welcome break, while reinforcing aspects of numeracy. There are suggestions in the Skills for Life Learner Materials Packs for Numeracy which are available at various levels from the Excellence Gateway archive: http://rwp.excellencegateway.org.uk/Diagnostic%20Assessment/Numeracy/

Memory cards are a good support strategy; these consist of small cards or index cards on which to write the numerical information the learner needs to access frequently, but has difficulty remembering. The cards can then be used for practice between lessons. Learners will retain information best if they make their own associations and memory aids.

Checklists and reference sheets are also helpful as a means of lessening the load on the working memory. Working memory refers to retaining information in memory while engaged on a task. It is worth noting that research has found that good working memory is the most reliable indicator of academic success.

Free downloadable exercises are available on the internet to improve working memory.

Drawing on areas of strength

Due to the variety within Specific Learning Difficulties, it is not possible to make assumptions about what will work best for any individual, but the areas of strength discussed below are often associated with dyslexia (in particular).

Providing an overview is an approach which acknowledges a holistic way of learning, common to many people with dyslexia. In this way, learners can see what they are aiming for without getting bogged down in the mechanics of maths.

Guiding learners to make associations which are meaningful to them will aid recall.

Encourage them to look for links or patterns. If learners are helped to see how different pieces of information are connected and start to recognise mathematical patterns, they may well find that this is the most natural way into understanding the concepts of maths.
An affinity for making links and recognising patterns has been a key quality leading to important breakthroughs by scientists, engineers and entrepreneurs with dyslexia.

The example below brings out the practical implications of numeracy activities

Wormwood Scrubs runs Active Learning Sessions in ICT which incorporate practical aspects of everyday life into the training. One example of an activity is using spreadsheets to determine the learner’s canteen for the coming weeks. In this way numeracy is seen as a useful skill with practical applications linked to the ability to produce professional looking spreadsheets which help build confidence. *Information provided in 2007*

**Support for dyscalculia (described in Section 2)**

Dyscalculia is a Specific Learning Difficulty typified by intractable difficulties with numeracy which affect many aspects of daily life. The key challenges have been listed as:

- difficulty comprehending information containing numbers
- an inability to internalise mathematical concepts
- no grasp of the relative size and value of numbers.

Guidance on this specialist area is poorly disseminated but, in general terms, techniques used for dyslexic learners are helpful. However progress will be slower because the difficulties are more deep-rooted.

Suitable approaches include:

- associating the name of the number with the symbol
- matching cards with the same numbers
- counting with adult ‘tools’ e.g. dominoes, and objects, such as money
- matching the words *first, second, third* with *1st, 2nd, 3rd*
- developing ‘numerosity’ by simple number sequencing activities, e.g. identifying every *fifth* item on a till receipt
- linking coins with numbers, by looking at the number written on the coin.
- sequencing coins according to value.
There are issues to be borne in mind when selecting equipment, such as calculators.

**USE OF CALCULATORS**

Choose calculators that display the calculation that has been input.

Draw attention to symbols which are visually similar, e.g. + and x, minus sign and division sign.

If possible, colour code the 4 operations by using coloured stickers on the operation keys with the symbol written on them.

Speaking calculators provide helpful audio feedback on which key has been pressed.

Advise learners to cross each item off the page when transferring it to the calculator.

Learners with visual perceptual or spatial problems will have to take extra care when transferring information from the page or when dictating to the calculator.

Learners should initially verbalise the operation they are performing with the calculator, so that the tutor can check their understanding.

Learners with poor co-ordination/dyspraxia require a calculator with larger keys.

Teach estimation – this can be very helpful in real life situations (such as budgeting).

**Consequences of poor numeracy**

Mistakes with aspects of number cause prisoners frustration and inconvenience but may have serious consequences, with the result that staff could need to mediate on their behalf.

Typical scenarios include:
- missing a health appointment because of confusion over the time on the slip (24hr system) and the date (expressed in numbers rather than words)
- errors with meal choices and canteen options, where these are entered as numbers on forms
- miscalculations of the financial implications when privilege status changes (this can become a compliance issue)
- difficulties transferring credit onto your phone account
- failure to keep track of your personal cash.
Summary of learning and teaching styles for numeracy

- Work at a level where success is likely
- Progress in very small steps, always building in ‘over-learning’
- Clarify the language of maths
- Encourage the learner to talk through numeracy tasks in order to develop organised thinking and reveal any difficulties
- Use concrete materials (such as blocks or coins) when a learner is unsure of, or still mastering, a new numeracy skill
- Work with concrete materials before tackling paper-based tasks
- Use real life situations as much as possible to aid understanding of concepts

Numeracy Access For All [www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/1521](http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/1521)
http://rwp.excellencegateway.org.uk/Diagnostic%20Assessment/Numeracy/
This Section focuses on foreign nationals whose language problems may mask Dyslexia or other Specific Learning Difficulties.

In the UK, there is a confusing array of acronyms for foreign learners studying English
- ESL learner (English as a Second Language, now less common)
- EAL learner (English as an Additional Language)
- ESOL learner (English for Speakers of Other Languages).

The final option reflects the fact that English may be the third or even fourth language – this is the term used in the Skills for Life initiative (UK, 2001 onwards) and in this Guide.

The Skills for Life initiative highlighted the specific needs of this group by devising an ESOL curriculum, laid out like its basic skills counterpart for native English speakers. It may be that some learners in custody are inappropriately working through the Skills for Life adult literacy curriculum unaware that ESOL programmes are available. Some Skills for Life ESOL courses are available on-line.

For offenders in community provision, it is worth checking what courses are available at local colleges. In some countries it is possible to study with the English Language Learning Instruction System (ELLIS), a comprehensive syllabus offered at several intermediate levels with multimedia support in a wide range of languages. [www.learndirect.co.uk/wales-eng/ellis](http://www.learndirect.co.uk/wales-eng/ellis)

The communication issues facing foreign nationals and prison staff have given rise to the Language Behind Bars project showcased near the end of Section 6. [www.LBB-Project.eu](http://www.LBB-Project.eu)

Factors for consideration

It is all too easy to attribute the difficulties of ESOL learners to their incomplete grasp of English, plus various cultural, educational and emotional factors, rather than exploring whether there might also be complications such as dyslexia.

Lara’s situation illustrates this point.

Lara is from the Ukraine and regards herself as an entrepreneur. Her spoken English is adequate for everyday purposes but she never acquired written English at school and was unsuccessful academically. In the literacy class, she seemed unable to retain the letter symbols and would often produce a mirror image when copying letters – not only ‘b’ and ‘d’ but ‘m’ and ‘w’. This was put down to differences between the Russian and English alphabets but further dyslexic indicators emerged such as muddling number sequences, including her prison number. A simple checklist showed that several key dyslexia indicators applied to Lara.
Identifying the dyslexic ESOL learner

Dyslexia / SpLD screening and testing materials that refer mainly to the reading and writing of English skills are clearly not appropriate for foreign nationals. Instead, tutors and trainers need to consider indicators that relate to performance in the first language.

Progress may be affected by three factors:
1) the level of literacy in the home language
2) ‘language interference’, i.e. features of the individual’s own language which can contribute to the difficulties mastering another language
3) the nature of the first language; for example there are language skills required in English (such as rhyming) which do not arise in the same way in other languages.

In conclusion, these factors may mask dyslexia, compound it or simulate it.

This is clearly a specialist area. A start can be made by using a checklist, but care must be taken because the majority of screening and assessment tools are designed solely for native English speakers. Ideally screening / testing should be carried out both in English and in the home language: if the individual is dyslexic the underlying cognitive difficulties remain the same, though the way they show in reading and writing will depend upon the language (and script) used.

Useful guidance is provided in *Dyslexia and the Bilingual Learner*; this publication includes the following features:
- a checklist, suggesting the questions that tutors should pose
- a ten page diagnostic interview format
- graded reading passages for miscue analysis
- diagnostic spelling dictations and sample assessment reports.

Further sections cover approaches to teaching and strategies for learners.

If learners find that the majority of the dyslexia checklist items relate to them, they are regarded as ‘showing signs of dyslexia’. Only a full assessment will confirm whether dyslexia is indeed an issue. For those with weak English language skills, the assessment should ideally be carried out in the home language. Unfortunately this service is seldom available in offender settings.

One group of foreign nationals that had been growing in Women’s Prisons is Jamaican women, convicted of bringing in drugs (sometimes referred to as ‘drug mules’). Although they would not seem to fit the ESOL category, their language clearly differs from Standard English in many respects; the grammar, phonic system, pronunciation and spelling all demonstrate this fact. Where there are difficulties in gaining English literacy skills amongst this group, are they automatically attributed to differences between Jamaican and Standard English, or could dyslexia also be a factor, in some cases?
What does ‘Dyslexia’ mean to foreign nationals / ESOL learners?

The terms ‘dyslexia’ or ‘Specific Learning Difficulties’ may have different implications in other languages and cultures. In Russia, for example, ‘dyslexia’ and ‘dysgraphia’ refer to the reading and writing abilities of slow learners – the term ‘secondary dyslexia’ is often used to convey what we mean by dyslexia. Left-handedness is treated as a disability in some foreign countries, and ‘corrected’. Specialised programmes are available.

Useful guidance on these differences in approach is given in the following publications:

- NIACE e-guidelines 8: *E-learning for teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages*
- *It’s Not as Simple as you Think; Cultural viewpoints around disability (Learning for Living Pathfinder, 2006)* - archived publication from [www.excellencegateway.org.uk](http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk)
- [www.eurydice.org](http://www.eurydice.org) (European Commission website on education systems and policies)

It is important to be aware of the stigma surrounding learning difficulties and disabilities in many countries. For that reason it may be better to refer to a ‘learning style’ or ‘differences in learning’ when discussing learning problems with individuals who display characteristics associated with dyslexia or other SpLDs.

Support for ESOL learners

Many of the principles on supporting learners with dyslexia apply to foreign nationals with SpLDs but some additional points are worth noting. Information on why language is the way it is, sometimes referred to as metacognition, can be helpful.

It is important to correct faulty sound patterns in pronunciation because these can affect spelling. Letter names, sound symbol relationships, common blends, segmentation skills and rhyming skills need to be taught systematically. Flashcards or other types of visual prompts are also useful, in order to introduce new learning items and recall known vocabulary. Culturally relevant images have a greater impact on learning than non-relevant material.

ESOL learners should be supplied with reference materials of various types, such as charts containing grammatical information and bi-lingual lists of sequences such as months of the year (since they may not be secure with these in their own language). Building up a personal dictionary will help reinforce the spellings they need to master in everyday life.
It is important to ‘overlearn’ items of personal difficulty, and more interesting if these are presented in a variety of ways. Games are often incorporated into language teaching programs for reinforcement. Computer programs allow for individual progression rates and the option of revisiting difficult language items.

The Shannon Trust Reading Plan, which starts from the very beginning with letter sounds, is appropriate for prisoners with very poor English. It should always be offered to those who are not currently receiving education, with careful thought given to who would make a good mentor (this is a paired reading scheme currently using the Toe by Toe manual).

Another initiative, with a European dimension, is Languages Behind Bars - a multi-lingual, inter-cultural learning programme for foreign national offenders and prison staff. This is one of the projects described in Section 6. www.LBB-Project.eu

In conclusion, it is clearly more difficult to separate out the underlying causes of difficulties with learning in the multilingual individual, than in the native English speaker. But with the appropriate expertise and assessment tools it is possible to determine key areas of difficulty, and provide a suitable learning support programme.

- It is possible to identify Specific Learning Difficulties in foreign nationals
- Screening and assessment materials must be appropriate
- Materials designed for ESOL learners will be more effective than adult literacy resources
- Be aware of a possible stigma associated with learning difficulties in the home culture
A number of projects over the years highlight what can be achieved. These snapshots are inspiring and offer useful contacts to colleagues considering projects in this area.

Before embarking on this Section, I would like to draw the reader’s attention to the fact that the next Section of this guide (Section 7, dealing with on-line learning) opens with a further three ground-breaking projects which enjoyed success in English prisons:

1. The *learndirect* pilots, enabled by the European Social Fund.
2. The Programme for Offender Learning And Resettlement – **POLARIS** - which operated in a number of London prisons.
3. The **Grundtvig Pipeline** project - a Europe-wide ICT initiative, which had the aim of developing and delivering a ‘socio-technical’ system.

The above have all fed into the **Virtual Campus**, which, from 2012, has enabled prisoners in well over one hundred prisons in the UK to participate in on-line learning. But we begin with a well-established success story - *Touch, Type, Read and Spell*.

**Touch, Type, Read and Spell**  [www.readandspell.com](http://www.readandspell.com)

Good practice has long been exemplified in *Touch, Type, Read and Spell* (TTRS), now available in many countries. The Times Educational Supplement describes TTRS as follows:

*The scheme uses a variety of strategies to break the cycle of failure. By the end of the course, students have improved their spelling, reading, short-term memory, co-ordination and concentration....They see that they are mastering the computer but what really encourages them is the improvement in their spelling.*

This multisensory combination of hearing, seeing and the kinaesthetic approach of ‘doing’ is ideal for learners with SpLDs. Reading and spelling are taught in a structured way and essential word-processing skills are gained. The IT approach also has the advantage of enabling learners to progress at their own pace and helps improve concentration by focusing attention on a single task.

Feedback from a couple of TTRS students at HMPYOI Rochester underlines further benefits:

*It’s interactive learning. It allows you to learn actively. I like computers and learning on the computer is easy for me. I now do other IT courses as well.*

*I like T.T.R.S. because it helps my typing skills. It also helps me to spell words and pronounce them properly. It has made me more confident with my reading. In the sessions I have also learnt about punctuation, for example, commas, full stops and where to put exclamation marks. With all these skills I find it much easier to read and write letters to my friends and family!*
The Cascade Foundation  www.thecascadefoundation.org

The Cascade Foundation is a charity with the aim of preventing reoffending by targeting and educating disengaged prisoners with dyslexia. It was set up by dyslexic special needs teacher, Jackie Hewitt-Main, following the success of her *Dyslexia Behind Bars* project in Chelmsford Prison. Everyone who took part in Jackie’s project left prison able to read and write, and the reoffending rate of participants after 4 years was 6%, well below the national average. The Cascade Foundation’s vision is to revolutionise the support offered to offenders with dyslexia both in and out of the custody system, and to set up their innovative mentoring programmes to cascade the project throughout the wider prison population.

Jackie describes her teaching programme as follows:
*We want to cut re-offending rates and help dyslexic prisoners turn their lives around by realising they are not stupid, they just learn differently. We believe our programme does exactly that. If you have had a bad time at school, you leave being unable to read and write and you slip into crime, in most cases the last thing you want is to go back into the classroom environment in prison. We go onto the wings to find those prisoners and we use multisensory learning and prisoner peer mentoring to teach them the literacy skills they need to survive and thrive in daily life when they have finished their sentence. Building on their own experiences, an individual learning plan is formulated, allowing learning techniques to be tailored to each prisoner. Within just a few days, positive changes in attitude and enthusiasm have become obvious and learning is in full swing.*

At the end of each session, the prisoners fill in a Feedback sheet to assess how well both learner and coach are doing.

At the time of writing, Jackie has started work in HMP Doncaster, a privately run prison.

NEARIS / Back on Track (Manchester)  www.backontrackmanchester.org.uk

Formed in 1992, the Northern Education & Resettlement Information Services (NEARIS) was involved in a variety of outreach activities to engage with people who would not normally attend an adult education centre. Ten years later they were running computer courses in hostels and day-centres in Manchester, Bolton, Oldham.

NEARIS worked in partnership with agencies providing help to adults undergoing some form of resettlement or rehabilitation process - ex-offenders made up a sizeable proportion of their client base. This outreach work extended to 30 different locations providing courses for over 700 learners. Some of their stories have been published as *Opening Windows Opening Doors.*
I am 36, sitting at a table with the laptop writing you this script. For me, an achievement, a very big one. I told NEARIS…, ‘I haven’t got a clue about computers’. My first session was for two hours, felt like one. I’m really interested to improve and move on and learn….. I’m hoping to get some kind of certificate at the end. The things I’m doing now make me want to learn. There’s so much I thought had passed me by. I WAS SO WRONG! Never mind WINDOWS, I have loads more DOORS opened for me.

Renamed Back on Track in 2009, the organisation gained staff qualified in careers guidance, mentoring and befriending. Courses were often offered as a series of tasters, with learners coming in to see the Back on Track team for the final session.

Support into employment for offenders with Mental Health needs

The Individual Placement and Support model (IPS) has been used in various settings. At the time of writing the Centre for Mental Health (www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk) is involved in a three-year project, funded by a coalition of charities and supported by an expert reference group.

The project is designed to test whether IPS can improve employment prospects for ex-offenders with severe and enduring mental health problems. This cohort is often regarded as a neglected (and expensive) sub-group. The following establishments have been selected to test the model:

- HMP Featherstone: a category C male resettlement and training prison
- HMP Drake Hall: a closed women’s prison that provides resettlement and training
- HMPYOI Brinsford: a young offender institute for young adults (18-21 years)

Three employment specialists, trained in IPS, work both with the prison mental health teams and in prison resettlement departments. They engage with prisoners at least four weeks prior to the earliest date of release and offer through-the-gate support. The specialist continues to work with both the released person, the receiving community, the mental health service and with employers. Over the three years of the project it is anticipated that around 200 released prisoners will be supported.

Due to evidence which flags up mentoring as a key component of successful resettlement, this project includes mentoring support for some of the people receiving this intervention, in order to gauge the added value of using mentors.

Good practice has also been explored by a partnership programme: Beyond the Gate. The partner organisations, all of which have demonstrated a commitment to supporting offenders and ex-offenders into employment, were a mixture of government agencies, a Probation Trust, a prison, a secure mental health unit, and the well-known charity and employer, the St Giles Trust.
As a result of in-depth interviews, studies of current ways in which offenders with mental health problems are being supported into paid work, and the results of earlier research, five key elements of effective practice have been drawn up, which have general applications beyond support for ex-offenders with mental health difficulties.

**The five elements of effective practice**

1. Employers should play an instrumental role in creating and developing opportunities for paid work for offenders.
2. Recruitment needs to be pragmatic, on the basis of attitude and 'character' rather than qualifications or health status.
3. Support should be offered to employees and their managers for as long as they need it.
4. Opportunities for 'pre-employment' and 'in work' skills development should be linked to realistic employment opportunities, not training for its own sake.
5. Criminal justice and other statutory agencies should facilitate effective pathways and access to real work and appropriate skills development while offenders are in the criminal justice system.

**Timpson Prison Workshops**

The longstanding vocational training and employment programme provided by Timpsons [www.timpson.com](http://www.timpson.com) (which offers a range of services from shoe and watch repairs to dry cleaning) exemplifies many of these factors. In his blog, John Timpson writes:

*We have seen some real successes. We are about to open our fifth prison workshop and 16 of our shops are now managed by people recruited from prison. Out of nearly 300 men and women who have joined us over the last four years we only know of seven who have re-offended.*

*But it isn’t just the statistics that tell me we are making a difference, I receive regular evidence during my shop visits whenever one of our recruits from prison talks about their life-changing experience.*

*The scheme has worked better than I ever imagined, but we still face a major challenge. So far, we have only persuaded a very small number of companies to follow our example.*

The rest of this Section is dedicated to showcasing the work of European Prison Education Association members in this field. Initiatives across Europe are described which support offenders with SpLDs, either directly or indirectly.

*Further content will be added to the PDF version of this guide as it is received.*
The PriMedia Network www.pri-media.eu

For a number of years European-funded projects have been exploring aspects of prison arts education across Europe, including the PAN European Network, The Will to Dream, Movable Barres and Art and Culture in Prison. One aspect which has emerged is the frequent use of websites and videos to identify and disseminate current practice, confirming the increasing availability of new media technology in the prison context. This led to the creation in 2012 of the PriMedia Network, funded through the Grundtvig strand of the Life Long Learning Programme, with 15 partners from prisons, justice ministries, educational centres and ICT companies in 11 European countries.

The Network focuses on identifying and promoting effective practice in ICT & multimedia within offender learning, alongside exploring innovative ways of using new technologies in different contexts and with different target audiences. Its main activities, focused around the use of ICT & multimedia in prison, include an annual international conference on a key thematic aspect, background research into the use of new media, the creation of a comprehensive permanent online database of good practice, a regular online journal and a series of practical workshops in countries with limited experience of using new media in prison education.

The PriMedia coordinator, Dr Alan Clarke, working for The College of Teachers, London, describes the importance of establishing such a Network: Digital competencies are increasingly being recognised as fundamental to contemporary education and skills development. Such skills are equally important for those currently in prison, and it is essential that ICT & multimedia form a key part of the offender learning programmes offered in Europe’s prisons. Given the overall poor level of literacy amongst prisoners, ICT, if properly used, can also provide an alternative learning tool for offenders, many of whom reject the more traditional teaching approaches. It is crucial therefore that those unfortunate enough to be incarcerated are able to access training in this area, both to improve their chances of rehabilitation and to enable them to find employment in the outside world.

The Netherlands Dyslexia Pilot www.valkenuil.nl and www.alippe.eu

The Dyslexia Pilot in the Netherlands grew out of the Grundtvig European project Breaking Barriers (2010-2012). It was delivered by the Dyslexia Consultancy and Training agency Valk&Uil and began with the intensive training of prison educators. Three prisons were selected to run the pilots; the offenders invited to take part were identified via an established dyslexia screening checklist and follow up materials.

The course comprised six 2 hour workshops with two over-arching aims: (1) to provide insight into past frustrations and a distorted self-image, and (2) to reveal the potential of the participants’ individual learning styles. This combination enabled participants to ‘reframe’ their identity as someone with dyslexia, within a safe, supportive environment. The final component of the course was a presentation by each prisoner on a topic he had chosen; this generated a new self-esteem and empowerment, shared by the group.
The comment below gives some idea of the impact of this approach.

I have a lot of prison experience; I’ve known that I am dyslexic for a long time, but I never thought to find such a group somewhere in a prison-setting. To see that there can be so many variants of being dyslexic, but see so much recognition between us all together, I find this amazing. I have great admiration for it. We all started and finished this course as a group together. Just deep respect for each other.

Both teachers and librarians noticed a difference in behaviour and new ambition for learning or reading in most of the participants. For the first time these men were able to accept praise and greatly valued the compassion and understanding they experienced from fellow members of the course.

Jan van Nuland of Valk&Uil describes the components of his course as follows:

1. Direct a spotlight on the special talents, and focus on things which they feel passion for.
3. Shed new light on what formerly could be called strange, chaotic or disruptive thoughts.
4. Reduce frustration, related behaviour and aggression.
5. Focus on dyslexic talents for remembering, gathering information and presenting information.
6. Give them dyslexia-friendly tools to improve these talents.
7. Use these tools to reframe what reading and writing is all about.
8. Do this in the company of other dyslexics and show how other people struggle too.
9. Let them show off the best of their abilities in a presentation to their peers.
10. Accept praise and gain the confidence to start a new life.

Learn for Life received the national prize for the best Dutch Adult Education European Project of 2012, and this raised national awareness substantially. As a result, Valk&Uil were granted a Grundtvig EU subsidy to organise a workshop for European Prison Educators, free of charge, in March 2014 to fully disseminate the benefits of the Netherlands Dyslexia Pilot.

Free from Learning Difficulties, Finland – OPPIVA Project

Grundtvig was also responsible for funding the project Free from Learning Difficulties (2007-2011) administered by Krits, a Finnish charity involved in the aftercare of prisoners and their families. The focus of the project was the learning difficulties experienced by prisoners and ways of constructing ‘pathways to rehabilitation’.
Like the Dyslexia programme in the Netherlands, an important aim was to improve the individual’s understanding of their learning difficulties. This project focused on under 30s and reached 311 offenders, 181 of whom were involved long-term, receiving advice on college applications and support in everyday activities. 1200 professionals, who worked with offenders in a variety of ways, were trained. It was also seen as vital to bring the issue of learning difficulties to the attention of the authorities.

An important tool was the *Free From Learning Difficulties* Handbook which contains individual reflective exercises and group activities around a number of important areas: Learning Disabilities (what we call in the UK Specific Learning Difficulties), Learning Styles, Attention, Memory, Self-Esteem & Learning, The Relation of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Problems to Learning, Vocational & Work Activities and a Completion Certificate (Diploma).

Examples from the Memory section include creating a mental map, using associations to recall names, building up mnemonics to remember to do certain tasks and a discussion on storing things using the auditory or visual memory.

Further information including a pdf of the handbook are available at [www.krits.fi/fi/krts_in_english/free_from_learning_difficulties/](http://www.krits.fi/fi/krts_in_english/free_from_learning_difficulties/)

**Languages Behind Bars** [www.LBB-Project.eu](http://www.LBB-Project.eu)

*Languages Behind Bars* (LBB) is a response to the communication difficulties faced by foreign nationals in European prisons. Again funded by the Grundtvig programme, part of the EU Lifelong Learning Programme, it describes itself as a multi-lingual, inter-cultural learning programme that engages both foreign national offenders and prison staff in order to promote better communication and cultural understanding, help prevent unnecessary additional psychological and emotional stress, and facilitate more effective rehabilitation.

Between September 2012-14 LBB has undertaken a range of activities; these include:

- Comprehensive desk research to investigate the current state of prison education, staff training, European and national policy, and the results of previous prison education projects.
- An in-depth focus group study to measure current needs and perspectives on communication difficulties in prison.
- The development, piloting and evaluation of a cross-cultural prison communication programme for prison staff and foreign national offenders, using a mix of classroom instruction, ICT and workbook-based activities.
- Establishing assessment and accreditation methods for the certification of foreign language and inter-cultural competences of prison officers working with foreign-national offenders and setting new European benchmark standards.
- An inter-prison language and cultural written exchange to help inmates practice language skills and reflect on their own cultures, in which prison staff take an active and encouraging role.
In order to maximise its reach, LBB is working with prison education departments, prison staff vocational academies, senior prison management and international organisations / NGOs concerned with prison reform and education. The project is co-ordinated from Vienna (www.dieberater.com) with partners in Bordeaux (www.insup.org), Göttingen (www.bupnet.de) and Sofia (www.pfi.org).

The results of evaluation and feedback from the pilot will contribute to the final design and publication of a Good Practice Guide, to enhance communication between prison staff and foreign national offenders. The project is to be presented at European events and conferences.

The London Shakespeare Workout comes to Malta

The London Shakespeare Workout (LSW) was founded in 1997. Its stated purpose is: ‘To employ the works of Shakespeare alongside contributions from other dramatic / cinematic /musical writers and thinkers as a tool towards effective interaction in order to (a) create new work and (b) promote confidence through the Will to Dream for ALL.

The first major LSW production of Shakespeare in a prison was The Wax King (Henry VI, Part III) in HMP Pentonville. LSW has since run Workouts all over the world.

Dr Wall, LSW Founder and Director, describes how he came to Malta in 2011 to take part in a conference of the European Prisons Education Association (EPEA).

“Having participated in a vast multitude of similar undertakings internationally I said I’d only do so if my contribution could be practical and only if it included one session to be held inside a prison.

“Thus it was that I was privileged to lead a team of fourteen European prison educators in a truncated ‘Shakespeare Workout’ within the Corradino Correctional Facility’s Young Offender’s Unit in Paola. This led to a return visit for a ground-breaking project with the young offenders themselves.

“Never have I worked ‘inside’ with such a committed team. Team work is, of course, not something globally celebrated within prisons. Often a culture of isolation persists. But together and apart these lads would promote confidence in themselves and each other. They learned to respect the multitude of languages spoken by the group. Each became a part of the fabric of our whole. Following Shakespeare's example we moulded a tongue. That tongue itself taught inclusion. It lived it.

“Making up this particular international ‘band of brothers’ - young offenders all - were two lads from Britain; two from the USA; a gloriously talented Estonian boy (‘My name is Aulis and I am an actor’ he'd proudly proclaim); a young Portuguese who at first could not raise his eyes to meet mine; another from Ethiopia who was so delighted to be able to respectfully share his native Amharic with any and all comers, and a 19 year old Spanish boy who initially spoke not a word of 'Ingles' but proudly finished celebrating the fact he could ‘even joke in English now’.
“The resulting performance was aptly entitled WHEN YOU HEAR MY VOICE. For a brief but magical moment these young men allowed themselves (and therefore all of us) to forget that we, too, might be imprisoned in our own minds. They’d found a key and they were willing to share their escape.

“One of the Prison Officers commented: ‘This has taken all of us out of ourselves.’ ‘I’m glad I got arrested,’ Solomon would say. ‘It gave me a chance to do this.’

“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.

‘This project succeeded beyond all expectations,’ said Joanne Battistino, the Director of Operations at the prison, ‘It’s changed both our prison and our nation’s culture.’

Dyslexic himself, Dr Wall turns to the issue of dyslexia and prisoners:

“It boils down – as do most things – to confidence. Education can, itself, only ever test application. It has never failed to amaze me that for a world of people for whom conventional education has already failed, the establishment insists on tossing it back into their face as ‘the only way’.

“I’ve lost track now of the number of times I’ve had a prisoner say to me: ‘I can’t do this.’ ‘Why?’ I ask. ‘Because I’m dyslexic.’ ‘Good,’ I respond. ‘So am I. We will do it together.’

“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.

“LSW exercises include playing with lines of Shakespeare - reassembling them, proclaiming them. Suddenly not only the dyslexics themselves – but crucially those around them – can see that theirs can be a special ability. This is also made vitally clear when running (as we sometimes do) a digital shooting and editing training programme. A cinematic time line can be paradise for dyslexics. You can see a physical order in front of you, yes, but here the dyslexic already has the advantage of being able to visualise – to play – with different combinations within his/her own mind’s eye. Often others sit back and simply marvel at how lucky they are to have such members working with them.

“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.

“So many think of Shakespeare as a foreign language … or at least a jumble. It puts us all – no matter what our failings may be – on an equal level. That is part of its joy. Don’t make your thoughts your prisons, Shakespeare instructs us.

www.lswproductions.co.uk
(archived) www.londonshakespeare.org.uk

Contribution from Bruce Wall 5.11.13
Addressing Social Exclusion

Many of us who engage in working with offenders are motivated by the desire to give this largely excluded population the skills they need to find employment and re-integrate into society. The final quotation for this Section sums up our obligation to help those less lucky than ourselves. It comes from: Reaching Out: An Action Plan on Social Exclusion, 2006.

‘No civilised country should ignore the plight of the most excluded from society and no-one should be shut off from opportunities, choice and options in life that most of us take for granted. We know that once people are given the chance to excel, they often do.’

- Individual support is needed to break the cycle of failure
- Mentoring, especially peer mentoring, is often a component of successful projects
- Offenders with Specific Learning Difficulties need to understand and value their learning difference
- Management and staff should be made aware and involved
On-line learning is available in some establishments, whereas other prisoners are ‘digitally excluded’. Three key projects are outlined. This Section also describes a range of technological aids appropriate to SpLDs which give rise to various considerations.

Although there are issues of security when delivering on-line learning / training in prisons, these have been overcome to some extent by pioneering project work, both in the UK and other areas of Europe. First and foremost were the learndirect pilots (described below), supported by the European Social Fund, which brought the resources of learndirect centres into prisons.

Another trailblazer was the Programme for Offender Learning And Resettlement – POLARIS - which enabled prisoners to use a secure IT network to access on-line learning and job-hunting resources in eight London prisons. The provision of laptops made this programme expensive, but the benefits have informed later initiatives. Information on POLARIS (2008) is available from the site Core Knowledge, Subset: Resettlement:

http://cip.org.uk/iom-elearning/my-iom-e-learning-portal/knowledge-repository/core-knowledge/core-knowledge-subset-resettlement/

Lessons have also been learned from the Grundtvig Pipeline Project - a Europe-wide ICT initiative, running until the autumn of 2007. Their literature outlines its scope:

The main aim of this project is to improve prison education in Europe by making ICT available to learners and teachers in prisons. By preparing prisoners for e-citizenship and bridging the gap between prison and life in the community, the project aims to reduce re-offending. People need to be multiliterate in today’s society, this includes the ability to navigate within and locate digital resources for professional as well as private use.

**Target groups**
The primary target group is prisoners. Prison teachers will also benefit by developing their professional expertise in this area and the prison will benefit by engaging with ICT.

**Main Activities**
These are as follows: developing a socio-technical system, developing ICT-based educational activities, engaging prisons and prisoners in learning and teaching that looks to the future, and producing dissemination materials.

**Expected outcomes**
These include a socio-technical system comprising Virtual Private Networks, a Learning Management System, firewalls and dedicated servers adapted to organisational and educational needs while complying with security requirements. Examples of good practice, teleteaching material, manuals, a project website and dissemination material will be produced.
The European Social Fund (ESF) Pathways Project (learndirect)

Returning to learndirect: the ground-breaking ESF Pathways Project was established to set up a network of learndirect centres in prisons, partnered with established local centres, so that learners could access their courses locally on release. The Project worked with prisoners due for release within two years and focused on delivering qualifications in Skills for Life and IT.

For the first time, learners had the opportunity to work with the same tutor both pre- and post-release, in order to ease transition into the community. Also new was the fact that learning records were transferred to the offender on release, along with a user identification name and password, enabling them to continue to access their learning on-line.

The Project also had the advantage of enabling prisoners to continue to learn and progress if they were moved to new locations within the prison estate. Within the lifetime of this initiative (Jan 2005 – Dec 2006), over 300 learndirect courses were delivered to learners in 12 prisons and a number of probation offices.

Dennis took Skills for Life courses alongside his workshop training at HMP Swaleside. I left school early, and by that time I was already in trouble with the police. I know what I’m capable of, but the fact is if you’ve not done it since school you get rusty. Besides, you need good maths and English to get anywhere now – and you need to know about computers.

I was in air conditioning maintenance before, and I’d like to go back to it, maybe set up my own business. I first wanted to come along when I saw learndirect did a waste management course, which would be relevant, and I’d like to go on to do web publishing so I can build a business website.

I didn’t think I’d like being stuck in front of a computer, but it actually suits me to go at my own pace. It’s not like any learning I’ve done before, and at the end of the day I’m getting something out of it. You’ve got to think about getting out and what you’re going to do differently, and you’ve got to grab whatever you can to help you do it.

Staff found that this provision was an ideal fit for learners at very different stages who progressed at different speeds. The modular structure of courses gave quick results and the all-important sense of achievement. The Head of Learning and Skills at HMP Swaleside commented: We hope the informality of learndirect will make it a first step back into learning which many might not otherwise have taken.

An evaluation of the learndirect pilots in prisons concluded: A robust, secure internet-based e-learning solution for offenders is possible – if managed correctly.
(An Evaluation of the learndirect ESF Pathways Project in Prisons & Probation, D Wilson and M Logan, 2007)

Happily this has proved to be the case, with all three projects feeding into the Virtual Campus which is rapidly becoming established in UK prisons.
The Virtual Campus

The Virtual Campus is a secure web-based system that allows learners to access a range of resources, courses and other information to support learning within prisons. It is described as ‘a key tool to drive change’ in the Offender Learning Review, Making Prisons Work, Skills for Rehabilitation.

The system also allows those in custody to take induction skills tests and on-line examinations, recording the results on the Management Information System. Young Offender Institutions are included. When offenders are transferred to other establishments or are released, they can continue to access the work they have undertaken and stored on the Virtual Campus.

At the time of writing the Virtual Campus had over 25,000 registered users and was installed in 117 establishments. Further expansions and installations are taking place in the remaining establishments, where it is technically possible.

Benefits of using technology

Technology is regarded by some as a more sophisticated way to learn, particularly attractive because it does not bring the previous ‘baggage’ associated with failure. The link between learning and technology was stressed in a survey which found a correlation between access to / use of technology and participation in education. (Participation in Learning, NIACE, 2003).

How does this relate to people with SpLDs?

The NIACE e-guidelines booklet: Supporting adult learners with dyslexia: harnessing the power of technology lists some of the benefits of using technology to support learning as:

- attracting learners
- creating a positive learning environment
- extending the range of teaching and learning methods
- motivating and empowering learners
- giving learners transferable skills
- offering extra skills for employment.

This NIACE publication encompasses a range of good practice. Chapter 6 contains examples of activities which familiarise learners with the tools available on computers. Chapter 8, Good Skills for Learners, provides clear guidance on e-learning tools and stresses the importance of moving learners on, once they have found confidence in their ability to handle ICT. A chapter is dedicated to Making Reading Easier, and the booklet itself is an model of accessibility and clear presentation.
Computer-mediated learning is particularly appropriate for people with SpLDs, enabling the individual to move at their own pace rather than worry about falling behind. Users are liberated from considerations of handwriting and spelling. The chart **ADVANTAGES OF USING ICT** summarises these factors. Technological tools for planning, organisational and navigational assistance can provide further assistance, but only if they have been chosen with the specific requirements of that particular individual in mind and he or she has gained adequate skills to make the most of these programs.

A computer should never be regarded as a replacement for human learning support – and it is worth emphasising that some people simply fail to take to technology and need to be guided to other ways of compensating for their areas of difficulty.

**ADVANTAGES OF USING ICT**

→ **ICT can be interactive**
  - this is good for those with a kinaesthetic/hands-on preference
  - it helps to keep the learner actively engaged
  - it can provide instant feedback

→ **ICT can be multisensory**
  - multisensory learning is recommended for dyslexia
  - words, sound, graphics, colour can be presented simultaneously
  - auditory, visual and hands-on learning styles are catered for

→ **ICT can enable you to work at your own pace / preserve self esteem**
  - it is non-critical and patient
  - you can work at your own pace, taking breaks as necessary
  - you can repeat sections as often as you like

→ **ICT can provide compensation for poor literacy skills**
  - via read-back software and/or speech input
  - via text highlighting
  - via automatic spell-checking
  - via predictive software

→ **ICT can help with organisation**
  - through use of electronic organisers and smart phones
  - by drafting and re-drafting facilities such as cut and paste
  - by mind-mapping programmes

→ **ICT can accommodate individual learning preferences**
  - by adapting background and foreground colours
  - by changing font size and type
  - by increasing line spacing
  - via a range of personalised settings and adaptations
Assessing technology needs

Assistive technology is never a 'one size fits all' solution for people with SpLDs, it is more a case of 'Horses for Courses'. ICT is appropriate only if it can enable or enhance the learning experience or task, and 'fit' the learning style of the user. Inappropriately used technology can actually form a further barrier to learning.

At the time of going to press, technology assessments were unlikely within prison settings, but offenders in the community, especially those taking college courses, should have the opportunity to visit an Assessment Centre in order to explore different types of assistive technology. It is always advisable to check which programs / tools will work with any planned on-line course.

Restrictions, linked to security issues, continue to hinder the move towards greater access to a range of technologies in prisons. Which equipment is allowed in prisons seems to vary from establishment to establishment, according to accounts from tutors, who relate instances of being able to take more items of technology into a high security establishment than a Category D open prison.

It must be stressed that there is an obligation on education and training providers to ensure accessibility for learners with disabilities, under UK equality legislation, as far as is 'reasonably possible'. In probation programmes, provision of assistive technology currently depends on the ETE provider. Where assistive technology and accompanying training in its use is not available, certain learners are bound to be disadvantaged and fail to reach their potential. Unfortunately at the present time, mandated funding cuts will increasingly result in the failure to provide the sorts of assistive technology that are needed.

Since vocational training and work in prisons relates to employment, the Disability Employment Adviser from Jobcentre Plus should become involved. There should be consideration of assistive technology via Access to Work (designed to assess and provide for the needs of people with disabilities in the workplace). Section 10 contains information on the Access to Work programme.

Technology considerations and options

(i) Reading from the screen

Reading in itself may no longer be a major challenge to all people with SpLDs but reading from a computer screen can cause some individuals particular difficulties: they find the screen too bright and the slight flicker becomes uncomfortable after a time. Since the screen is at a different angle to paper, it may prove difficult for their eyes to track along the text - and adults feel embarrassed if they have to follow along the screen with their finger.
An ex-offender describes her problems

I have some difficulty reading the computer screen. It seems too bright and my eyes get really sore and I have to stop working after a very short length of time. If the letters are too small then I find it difficult to keep the place and have to put my finger on the screen to help. These problems affect my concentration. The other trouble I have is that once the text has left the screen I can not remember it so I have to print everything out. I keep forgetting what’s on all those pop-down menus which is really frustrating.

Once brightness and text size have been optimised, the next consideration is the colour of the text and background. Individuals with SpLDs and Visual Stress vary in what they find most comfortable, but usually they will end up with reducing the contrast one way or another. Poor readers will find text-to-speech programs invaluable; these can be set up to speak each word, sentence or paragraph. Speech can be switched on and off at will in some programs (useful for those who prefer to view text without the distraction of speech unless they encounter difficulties) and the selected text can be highlighted as it is voiced.

It may be that the major difficulty is retaining what is read, in which case additional strategies must be considered, such as highlighting key points and reinforcing the content by one means or another.

The Reading Pen is a hand-held device which provides a definition of a scanned word or line of text. Individual words are enlarged on the display and may be spelled out, or broken into syllables. Scanned words and definition can be read aloud with the product's miniaturised text-to-speech facility. Another option, which many people find easier to use, is the Franklin Speaking Dictionary.

(ii) Word-processing
Some individuals find the tactile nature of spelling through keyboard patterns provides helpful reinforcement, and helps them to retain the location of the letters in a word. Touchtyping is an invaluable skill that can be gained through on-screen tutorials or touchtyping manuals – the latter should be placed on a copy holder beside the screen.

Others find that their poor typing skills hold up their thought processes - whilst searching for the correct letter keys on the keyboard they have forgotten what they wanted to write. Dictation via a speech recognition program is the preferred method of text input for those whose thought processes are clear and structured.

If computer-mediated learning programs do not support on-screen spellchecking, a handheld spellchecker will be needed. But it is always necessary to proofread text that has been created via speech recognition, since the program may substitute words that sound similar but are not those intended by the user.
When working at a more advanced level, outliners and brainstorming software can be used to collect and organise ideas alongside study with on-line materials. Programs should allow for the content to be exported into a word processing package and some provide an outline version to shape the form of a project or essay. PowerPoint can also be used in this way; the slides can be shuffled and re-arranged to help sort ideas and prioritise.

However it is important to be aware that the 'high tech' options may not suit all dyslexic learners, as Gina explains.

Someone suggested that I tried voice-activated software but I found that far from easy. I found it quite difficult to slow down my thoughts to speak them clearly enough into the computer and it was a further ordeal trying to remember all the commands. In the end I decided that I would persevere with the typing. Although I still get many of the letters jumbled and out of order, I can usually spot my mistakes with the aid of a spell checker and by reading my work out aloud afterwards.

(iii) Dyspraxia and technology
On the whole, hardware is more important than software when it comes to dyspraxia. Having the correct ergonomic keyboard with large keys, (ideally) at least a 17inch screen, the right chair and the right mouse for a particular individual can make a lot of difference. All the equipment needs to be placed in the right position for the individual concerned; feet should be able to touch the ground and the monitor should not be too high or low.

Those engaged in study who are handling a lot of information often benefit from using two screens: one for material they have researched and one to display their work.

Mice can be slowed down to make them easier to control, especially when highlighting a piece of work. Some people may find it easier to control a roller ball mouse, and others an Anir Mouse (shaped like a joy stick). If such equipment is hard to procure, staff must make a case for them as disability aids which will be required by a number of offenders over the years.

Since organisation and structure are key areas of difficulty associated with dyspraxia, mindmapping software may help at the initial stages but 1:1 assistance will probably be needed to move from the ideas stage to producing a structured piece of work.

(iv) Technology and Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder
Both PowerPoint and speech recognition programs have been found to be particularly appropriate for people with AD(H)D. In addition, mind mapping software with pictures is useful, helping both with structuring one’s thoughts and retaining ideas.
(v) Calculation Aids
Individual preferences should determine whether someone works with a handheld calculator or an on-screen version. The latter will generally offer speech, colour and magnification options. Unfortunately it is often the availability of equipment and programs that is the determining factor, rather than preferred ways of working.

Further Factors
An important consideration is the layout of rooms containing banks of computers. Often there is little desk space and some users are not facing the front, so it can be difficult to see the tutor clearly or take notes easily. This will change as laptops become prevalent.

Lighting also needs consideration: some individuals find reading from a screen difficult because of glare or reflections, whereas ambient lighting is more beneficial.

Most learners with SpLDs find interruptions or extraneous noises highly distracting, preferring to work with headphones or in their own surroundings. They may be able to work for short periods only and need some way of relaxing or ‘chilling out’ between tasks.

There is a wealth of information on accessibility and technical support on the TechDis and Emptech websites, focusing on education / training and the workplace. Transition into work is also covered. SEE www.jisctechdis.ac.uk and www.emptech.info/ Further sources of advice are given in the RESOURCE BANK.

- Assistive technologies are not an instant solution to difficulties arising out of SpLDs
- It is vital to match the technologies both to the user and to the tasks to be undertaken
- The provision of assistive technology is a disability issue; failure to do so may breach disability and equality guidelines
- Consideration should be given to the learning environment, where learners have SpLDs

An exercise follows on devising strategies and technology solutions for difficulties experienced by people with SpLDs when working on computers.
Readers of this Guide are invited to consider the Problems on Chart 1 and formulate possible solutions before they look at the Strategies suggested on Chart 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SpLD DIFFICULTY</th>
<th>PROBLEMS USING COMPUTERS</th>
<th>POSSIBLE STRATEGIES???</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problems tracking / keeping the place</td>
<td>Losing the place on the screen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak short-term or working memory</td>
<td>Remembering info. on previous screen</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Retaining instructions</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sequencing difficulties</td>
<td>Remembering the order of operations</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Entering web addresses incorrectly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meares-Irlen Syndrome / Visual Stress</td>
<td>Finding the screen too bright, glare of black text on white background or background colour 'uncomfortable'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-ordination problems (linked with Dyspraxia)</td>
<td>Difficulties moving the mouse. Hitting the wrong key, problems double-clicking. Slow work speed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of confidence Low self-esteem</td>
<td>Fear of failure and of being shown up</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SpLD DIFFICULTY</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems tracking / keeping the place</td>
<td>Losing the place on the screen</td>
<td>Readback software (which highlights word being read) and headset. Screen post-its</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Losing the place on the screen</td>
<td>Adam and Eve software. Readscreen. Screen reader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak short-term or working memory</td>
<td>Remembering info. on previous screen</td>
<td>Print out key information. Take screen grabs of useful menus and options available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Retaining instructions</td>
<td>Retaining instructions. Print out key information. Take screen grabs of useful menus and options available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sequencing difficulties</td>
<td>Remembering the order of operations</td>
<td>Go through the sequence with the learner. Print off instructions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Entering web addresses incorrectly</td>
<td>Use voice recognition software, a headset and a little scripting, to enable the individual to speak in words to prompt the website/web address which then appears automatically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Stress / Meares-Irlen Syndrome</td>
<td>Finding the screen too bright, glare of black text on white background or background colour 'uncomfortable'</td>
<td>Dim screen brightness. Adapt the background / foreground colours, according to the learner's preferences. Ideally, Omniread solution to select best colour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-ordination problems (linked with Dyspraxia)</td>
<td>Difficulties moving the mouse. Hitting the wrong key, problems double-clicking. Slow work speed</td>
<td>Adjust speed of operations. Try different types of mouse e.g. rollerball. Use a larger keyboard. Try voice recognition software to minimise mouse and keyboard use. Headset needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of confidence Low self-esteem</td>
<td>Fear of failure and of being shown up</td>
<td>Solutions to the above problems would help with confidence. Highlight positive aspects of SpLDs eg creativity. Explain they are simply different rather than less able.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This Section looks at ways in which procedures and interactions can be SpLD-friendly, benefiting many who are struggling in various ways. A linked issue is the accessibility of written communications, web-based materials and presentations.

The benefits of an SpLD-friendly environment

It is now appreciated that features which make for an SpLD-friendly environment also benefit other people. These approaches increase accessibility overall, improving chances of success for many offenders both in learning / training and in aspects of daily life.

Kathy describes the devastating effects of a non SpLD-friendly approach in her IT class.

I did some computing inside but was released before I could get very far so I decided to join an IT class. It was the most embarrassing thing in my adult life. I found it quite hard to keep up and remember what to do from one week to the next.

I asked the teacher to jot down the list of the keys I needed to press but he did not give me the list I needed so I tried to keep up by scribbling everything down but he went far too fast. When I asked for help he told me it was quite obvious and logical. I could see nothing obvious or logical about which function keys to press or keeping track of when to click on the right or left side of the mouse. Indeed working out which side of the mouse was right or left took me a few seconds, as I had to look at my watch and wedding ring to work out left or right.

By the third session, I was so lost that I asked the tutor if he would go through everything with me so that I could write down the instructions. I thought no-one would notice cos everyone else seemed to be finishing off ready to go for coffee. “But it’s so obvious,” he said in a loud voice which caused everyone to stop and stare, “all you need is some common sense”.

I walked out of that class and have never returned to college, I felt so embarrassed. All the memories of the times I had struggled in my childhood came back. It took me days to feel more confident and I would not wish a similar experience on anyone.

The main features of an SpLD-friendly learning environment

Although focusing principally on aspects of learning, many of the techniques and advice in this Section have wider applications. ‘Listening to the learner’ is flagged up as a key issue, explored in *Time to Learn: Prisoners’ Views on Prison Education* (Prison Reform Trust, 2003). Research has also pointed to the importance of breaking down negative associations with school experiences; this can be fostered by relaxed and informal learning environments reflecting a more adult status.
We shall consider the following areas:

(i) Staff awareness
Adult learners canvassed by the Adult Dyslexia Organisation reported that classes / courses which do not show awareness of dyslexic difficulties and strengths were a waste of time and could further damage learners' confidence. It is therefore important that staff have an awareness of likely problem areas and suitable approaches to accommodating them.

SpLD-friendly approaches
Staff (in general) and tutors / trainers (in particular) require training on SpLDs in adults - both the difficulties and the strengths - and how these can affect learning, training and everyday life.

(ii) Giving instructions
People with SpLDs often have difficulty retaining long or compound instructions – whether spoken or written. This can result in embarrassment, mistakes, apparent failure to pay attention, forgotten passwords and user names when working on-line.

SpLD-friendly approaches
When giving spoken instructions, break them down into logical blocks rather than giving them all at once. Reassure the individual that it is fine to come back and check as necessary.

Give positive rather than negative instructions, for instance:
- "Don't forget to turn the computer off at the wall" becomes: Remember to turn the computer off at the wall.
- "Make sure you don't leave your folder in the workshop" becomes: Remember to take your folder back to your cell.

Use specific questions to check that the listener has retained key information, rather than asking "Any questions?"

Use a buddy system where appropriate, so peers can provide discreet support.

Record passwords and user names on a card which can be produced as necessary.

Write down all important names, times and addresses.

Written instructions should be clearly displayed, following the guidelines for Minimising Visual Stress (at the end of this Section). Use icons in addition to written descriptors.
(iii) Administrative procedures and induction
Most adults with SpLDs dread having to complete forms - especially in front of others. From canteen forms to various application forms, this is an increasing requirement. On release, there are forms to complete which cover many aspects of life. Those who opt for classes will find that the drive to improve standards has led to an increase in documentation such as learner contracts and induction paperwork which must usually be completed before the course starts.

SpLD-friendly approaches
Routinely ask (discreetly) whether help is needed with form-filling. Have a sample form on show, with the answers completed for a 'MR/MRS SMITH'. Encourage students to come back to you as questions arise, providing privacy if possible.

(iv) Providing support in learning
Support may be needed in a range of learning environments: classes, workshops, open learning, distance learning and on-line study. The suggestions in this Guide should promote good practice.

SpLD-friendly approaches
Aim to ensure an element of early success to build up confidence.

Be prepared to explain terminology (possibly more than once)

Break complex tasks into shorter chunks.

Students with SpLDs will probably need more practice than their peers before procedures become automatic.

Check whether their learning program will need customising, for example, in terms of adjusting fore- and background colour on their computer. Individual preferences should be saved so they do not need to be set up anew every session.

Aim to build in elements of personal choice.

Where possible, encourage flexibility in ways of working so that learners can take breaks and implement coping strategies.

Provide headphones for those who wish to listen to text as they read it, in order to protect privacy and avoid disturbing others.
(v) Features of Learning materials
The following recommendations relate to paper-based and on-line learning materials. The issue of learning styles also arises here, as learners will vary considerably.

SpLD-friendly approaches
Content must be sequential and progress logically from one stage to the next.

Language should be straightforward, concise and non-patronising; children’s materials must be avoided at all cost!

Contextualised materials are generally more interesting - as long as learners can relate to them.

All materials should follow guidelines for minimising Visual Stress and be free from distracting features. (Do’s and Don’ts are summarised in the chart on Minimising Visual Stress, the last item in this Section.)

Due to different styles of learning, some people prefer a divergent format, such as a mindmap or spidergram, others find a linear format more helpful, incorporating flow charts, bullet points and listed procedures.

Consistent use of graphics / icons provides a useful marker, enabling learners to anticipate what is coming next and find their way round materials more easily.

Web-based materials: issues of accessibility

- A clear site map should be available, to provide an overview of content
- Navigation mechanisms should be consistent
- Large blocks of information should be divided into manageable sections
- The target/destination of each link should be clearly identified by a highlighted label
- Language should be clear and straightforward
- Multimedia presentations should include an audio description of any important written information
- Interactive content should be compatible with assistive technology (such as screen readers)
- If a page cannot be made accessible, a link should be provided to an alternative page that has equivalent information
(vi) Accreditation and testing

Staff must bear in mind that many learners with SpLDs become very anxious about taking tests. They will often have had past experiences of failure, and fear that their difficulties will continue to handicap them, as Ed explains:

I feel I am very disadvantaged if I am given tests or have to complete timed exercises on the computer. I failed my very first exam (about spreadsheets) because I had to copy numbers across and place them in the right column - I kept losing the place and having to start again.

Now I realise I can have extra time, I ask for it. It means I can go really slowly and not start to panic and make mistakes.

SpLD-friendly approaches

We owe it to those who have failed first time to do all we can to ensure success.

The following matters should be considered from the start of any course:

- Is there flexibility in the method of accreditation, for students with disabilities?
- Are ‘access arrangements’ permitted, such as extra time or the use of a reader?

If so, the issue of providing a separate room will arise so the student is not disturbed by the comings and goings of other candidates and does not disturb them if a reader is used.

Unfortunately some courses and qualifications are not SpLD-friendly. The main complaint from candidates is that they are not tested on what they had expected from the content of the course. An example at the time of writing is Functional Skills in Numeracy where students may have to undertake calculations in vocational areas with which they are unfamiliar.

SpLD-friendly features of testing include:

- self-checking exercises, which protect self esteem
- tick boxes
- matching exercises (which can draw on the skill of word recognition rather than the more demanding skill of recall)

All the above can be welcome features of on-line learning.

It is now established that a multiple choice format does not generally suit learners with SpLDs who tend to find it tricky to distinguish between deliberately similar options. Furthermore they struggle to hold the question in their head while considering the alternative responses and may make errors when tracking across to the answer grid (i.e. enter their answer in the wrong place).
(vii) Making a presentation accessible to people with SpLDs
This item is particularly relevant to Induction and Resettlement staff, Information Advice & Guidance personnel and trainers.

The following aspects of good practice should be borne in mind:

- make the presentation multisensory i.e. spoken information, reinforced by visual input and, if possible, a participatory element
- provide a simple handout, containing the main features and follow-up information
- use graphics as well as words on slides and handouts
- use a dyslexia-friendly font such as Arial, 12 point (minimum) for handouts and as large as possible for slide
- 'chunk' the information, i.e. give a bit at a time, then summarise or check with questions before continuing
- make it personal - use a case study they can identify with
- invite queries as you go along rather than at the end
- draw on any experience from within your audience in order to involve them
- don’t rush, give your listeners time to take in what you are presenting to them.

All sources of support should be emphasised and written down, such as the Jobcentre Plus personal adviser, Probation Officer, Citizens Advice Bureau.

The chart overleaf shows which features aggravate Visual Stress and how to improve accessibility.
MINIMISING VISUAL STRESS: ISSUES of GOOD PRACTICE and ACCESSIBILITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incorporate, where possible:</th>
<th>Avoid:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>adequate spacing</td>
<td>small fonts (below size 12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>justify left (leave an unjustified right margin)</td>
<td>‘fancy’ or unusual fonts and italics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>selective use of bold and bullet points</td>
<td>whole words or phrases in capitals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diagrams, charts</td>
<td>bright white or shiny paper - cream, or pale blue-grey are popular shades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pictograms and graphics for signposting</td>
<td>text in either red or green - this is also an issue for colour-blind readers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>illustrations which enhance meaning</td>
<td>illustrations which distract the reader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aim for a clear, uncluttered page</td>
<td>Avoid a busy, over-crowded page or notice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- SpLD-friendly features will tend to benefit other learners
- An early taste of success is essential to build confidence
- Staff training must include awareness of likely problem areas for SpLD learners
- Course induction sessions require particular sensitivity
- Opportunities must be made to listen to the learner
Vocational training and employment are key focuses of strategies to reduce re-offending.

Specific Learning Difficulties must be taken into account, with particular attention paid to communication and organisational skills. Support strategies are outlined.

A stark symbol of the failure of our prison system is the revolving door, whereby prisoners are released only to re-offend and be returned to custody. Back in 2002 the Social Exclusion Unit report *Reducing Re-offending by Ex-Prisoners* estimated that re-offending was costing the UK £11 billion a year – recent figures still quote this amount.

Governments have tried to reduce re-offending but seem unable to get a grip on the various factors involved. However a useful framework was developed: *the Reducing Re-Offending Pathways*, which consists of the following strands: Accommodation, Education Training & Employment, Health, Drugs & Alcohol, Finance, Families and Attitudes & Behaviour.

The *Transforming Rehabilitation Strategy* (from 2012) focuses on a *Payment by Results* (PbR) model whereby the full amount of contracts are payable to service providers only if reducing re-offending targets have been met.

Various pieces of research have highlighted parts of the resettlement picture:
- Employment can reduce the risk of re-offending by between a third and a half. (Offenders’ Learning Journey 2004) BUT…..
- Only 25% of men leave prison into some form of employment and the statistic for women is even lower, at 20%.
- Half of all prisoners do not have the skills required for 96% of jobs and only one in five is able to complete a job application form (Prison Reform Trust: Prison Factfiles).
- 90% of all jobs now require ICT skills (figure from NIACE).

There is an emerging body of evidence that additional support, particularly that which begins ‘inside’ and follows a released prisoner through the prison gate, is more likely to be of sustained benefit. This may include mentoring, now recognised as an effective approach.

The NIACE research report *Vocational Training and Employability Skills in Prisons and Young Offenders Institutions* (Dixon & Casey 2013) identifies a combination of factors which contribute to effective provision. But the key to success is 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 proposes a national employer forum and draws up draft principles which encapsulate good practice. These cover 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).

One group which faces particular disadvantages is people with enduring mental health problems who have one of the lowest employment rates in the UK. Yet the vast majority want to work, and with the right support it is possible to gain employment, according to the Centre for Mental Health [www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk). An approach to promoting the employability of ex-prisoners with mental health problems is showcased in Section 6, using the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) approach. A significant proportion of this population is also likely to have a Specific Learning Difficulty.

The worsening employment situation affects all ex-prisoners disproportionately since ‘unspent’ convictions must be declared, according to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act. In this environment, ex-offenders are less likely to further jeopardise their chance of employment by disclosing a Specific Learning Difficulty.

**Rehabilitation**

Rehabilitation is more than just ‘employability’; it includes changing undesirable habits, participating in the community, most of all, re-connecting with one’s family. However if SpLDs are still unaddressed, social exclusion is likely. This is why rehabilitation programmes in prison should include the identification, assessment and support of the large numbers with SpLDs. The development of coping strategies, training in self-advocacy, knowledge of entitlements and an awareness of how you learn best are all part of addressing SpLDs. The reduction of re-offending, which we know to be linked to exclusion, is the stated goal of government and one which requires initial investment but saves money overall.

It is often quoted that ‘resettlement begins on day one of the sentence’. Unfortunately (in the UK at least) the crucial involvement of employers, providing on-the-job training and ‘real’ work in prisons, has largely not materialised. Thus, a central plank of the resettlement process is not in place.

Support for people with SpLDs in a learning context is also essential for settings such as workshops and vocational training. If the delivery methods and training materials are not SpLD-friendly, adaptations may need to be made, as outlined in Section 8. Section 4 highlighted the impact of Functional Skills requirements on weak numeracy skills; this will affect a considerable proportion of offenders, but those with SpLDs, especially dyscalculia, will face more intractable difficulties.

Over the years, a large range of courses have been developed to improve the employability skills of learners with basic skills needs. Where good practice for people with dyslexia is built in, the benefits are found to spread to a much wider cohort.
Developing Speaking and Listening Skills

The relentless emphasis on literacy, 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, more recently, as components of Functional Skills (English).

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)

A further report has highlighted the benefits of speech and language therapy but unfortunately this expertise is rarely available in prisons (however, at the time of writing, there is a project for Speech & Language Therapists to work with the Youth Justice Board in Wales).

The Communication Trust has 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

Courses by the English Speaking Board used to be popular in offender settings as a way of improving self-expression. At the time of writing only Full Sutton prison was following the Speaking and Listening syllabus. Other courses on offer from the Board include Oral Skills for Adult Learners, Interview Skills and ESOL: Skills for Life. The English Speaking Board describes itself as a national awarding organisation offering qualifications focused on communication skills.

www.sentencetrouble.info

www.esbuk.org
Disclosure

Learners who are 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. Discussion, in a safe environment prior to any job application, is a good way of opening up these areas. The potential employee should practice likely questions and work out how they might explain their Specific Learning Difficulty - emphasising how they compensate for their difficulties. 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.

Another aspect of the recruitment process is psychometric testing which is increasingly widespread and often computer-based. 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 / 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 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.

It is worth knowing that employers displaying the Two Ticks symbol should offer an interview to anyone with a disability who has the minimal qualifications for the post.

Issues relating to disability provisions in legislation and employment, such as Reasonable Adjustments and Access To Work, are covered in Section 10.

It may be useful to refer to Sections 3 and 4, which describe how to build up skills in a wide range of areas.

The rest of this Section focuses on specific skill areas in the context of employment or job seeking.
Skills for form filling

Ex-offenders 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.

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

Help with navigation

When providing directions to venues it is good practice to focus on landmarks rather than deliver a series of left/right instructions, in addition to providing a clear map. It is important to bear in mind that people with dyspraxia have innate difficulties with navigation – a taxi is their best solution.

We are familiar with technical solutions such as Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and Googlemap, together with multimap.com and streetmap.co.uk which provide precise details of a building’s position, with aerial views as well as maps. People who have just emerged from prison where internet access was limited, may need to be brought up to date.
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, a layout of sums and can be switched to a talking mode. Options for free downloadable talking calculators should be explored.

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 there is no support strategy, ploughing through any documentation is laborious and exhausting. One approach, for those who learn through listening, is obtaining an audio version – this service 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.

IT solutions 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, together with a dictionary definition. Scanning pens can operate in conjunction with a computer; some even include diaries and address books.

Support for writing

Mindmapping can help at many stages of the writing process, as described in Section 3. ICT also offers ways of presenting ideas in graphical rather than written form 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 reading – otherwise readers only see what they remember they wrote. Although a screen reader can help pick up errors, human help is preferable.
The following case study illustrates a route to acquiring appropriate technology, which will be picked up in Section 10.

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 and underwent an assessment by an Occupational Psychologist. The process included a workplace assessment of his needs.

Under Access to Work, Martin received a laptop with speech input and a screenreader. In order to assist him with organisation and orientation he was given an electronic personal organiser and a satellite navigation system.

Martin feels he has been well supported and is working hard to make a success of his job.

**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 be kept up to date without fail).

Digital recorders are useful to record important conversations, phone messages or meetings and have the advantage of being discreet. 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.
Women into Work

A series of projects by SOVA (Supporting Others through Volunteer Action) supported by the European Social Fund, focused on identifying barriers to employment for female ex-offenders through peer research. Key factors in addressing multiple disadvantages emerged as empowerment, an early start to resettlement work, partnership working, engaging employers and recruitment issues. A toolkit was produced to highlight different aspects of the work.

Full details of SOVA’s work in different parts of the UK can be found at www.sova.org.uk. The organisation has now merged with CRI (Crime Reduction Initiatives) www.cri.org.uk.

Conclusion

The Social Exclusion Unit report, Reducing Re-offending by Ex-Prisoners (2002) states that becoming employed is the biggest factor in ‘positive community re-integration’. Research from the National Research and Development Centre (Research Resources: Working with Young Offenders) confirms that employment is a key aim for young offenders but notes that a lack of skills is as much of a barrier to an ex-offender gaining employment as his/her criminal record.

Unless staff have the training to engage with the particular challenges and abilities associated with SpLDs, this large (ex-)offender population will be failed again. It is surprisingly difficult to convince government criminal justice agencies and private providers of this fundamental fact.

- Reducing re-offending by promoting employability is a government priority
- Attention must be paid to spoken communication skills
- Disclosure of Specific Learning Difficulties must be carefully considered
- A wide range of technologies and support strategies are available to assist people with Specific Learning Difficulties in vocational settings
We need to be aware of our obligations to offenders with dyslexia and other Specific Learning Difficulties under Disability, Equality and Human Rights legislation.

When do dyslexia and related conditions count as ‘disabilities’ and what should be provided as a consequence of a Specific Learning Difficulty which amounts to a disability? This will vary from country to country but one unfortunate fact remains: despite various provisions being outlined in legislation and policy documents, there is usually inadequate support ‘on the ground’ and little understanding of the disabling effects of SpLDs in offender settings. Some prison education departments may prove the exception but, as we all know, many prisoners choose to avoid education rather than risk repeating the humiliations they experienced in school.

In the UK, a move from the concept of disability to wider considerations of equality and diversity is now reflected in most aspects of policy. It is typified by the replacement of the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) by the Equality Act in 2010.

The major change in the Equality Act is the concept of protected characteristics; these include race, gender, age, religion or belief, sexual orientation, pregnancy & maternity – and disability.

Some things remain unchanged. First and foremost is the definition of disability, which remains as follows: a person has a disability if he has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his ability to carry out normal day to day activities.

Since Specific Learning Difficulties always have a long term effect, usually adverse, the only issue is whether the problems are substantial. I usually find that if someone with SpLDs has come to staff’s attention due to their difficulties (such as on-going problems gaining literacy) their difficulties are substantial and they should be considered as having a disability and therefore be covered by disability provisions.

Reasonable Adjustments in Employment

The second feature carried over from the Disability Discrimination Act is the requirement to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities, in so far as the accommodations are reasonable. These arrangements are referred to as reasonable adjustments. The Equality and Human Rights Commission distinguishes between reasonable and unreasonable adjustments, providing the following instance of an employee with dyslexia:

A small manufacturing company usually hands out written copies of all its policies by way of induction to new employees and gives them half a day to read the documentation and to raise any questions with their line manager. A new employee has dyslexia and the employer arranges for her supervisor to spend a morning with her talking through the relevant policies. This is likely to be a reasonable adjustment.
Psychometric testing is often part of the recruitment process. It would be reasonable to allow extra time (normally fifteen minutes per hour of the test), breaks, and documentation reproduced well-spaced and on tinted paper.

Sometimes reasonable adjustments are paid for by Access to Work - a partnership between Jobcentre Plus and the Employer. This 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. Assistance is dependent on an appraisal of workplace needs which is generally carried out via one of the regional Access to Work Business Centres. The Access to Work Advisor is able to provide information about the process involved and about appropriate support / equipment. Access to Work applies to any paid job, part-time or full-time, permanent or temporary. In the case of those who have dyslexia, the support is likely to include technology.

A key issue in determining what resources are supplied is the extent to which the employee is able and willing to work with technology. Some will prefer to use calendars, diaries, sticky notes and lists, whereas others are ready to embrace technological innovations and find that the ability of technology to assist with reading, writing, calculations and navigation suits them well. The multi-sensory approach of hearing and seeing text is an appropriate way for adults with dyslexia to cope with various aspects of their work.

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

The contexts of SpLDs in education and training

In the context of dyslexia, the following provisions are appropriate:

- Providers of services (this can be interpreted widely) must make an effort to find out about learners’ disabilities and learning difficulties.
- These difficulties should be assessed and outcomes should feed into a learning plan.
- Classes, learning programmes and training should be accessible to learners with SpLDs.
- On-course support and reasonable adjustments should be available.

Examples of reasonable adjustments might include assistive technology such as readback software with headphones, extra time in tests and/or the availability of test papers in alternative formats. Unfortunately these are unlikely in prisons, but should be available in community settings.
Disability provisions in Criminal Justice processes

These issues are covered in greater detail in the following publication:
[www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/docs/justice/Coping With Courts & Tribunals.pdf](http://www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/docs/justice/Coping With Courts & Tribunals.pdf)

The various stages of the criminal justice system, from questioning by police, legal interviews and court processes through to parole hearings and compliance on community programmes, all present challenges to offenders with SpLDs due to their communication, short term/working memory and organisational difficulties. Often a bad situation is exacerbated by misunderstandings, inconsistencies and loss of concentration at vital points. In most cases, someone with SpLDs should be regarded as vulnerable and allowed the support of an Appropriate Adult during police questioning, as laid down in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, 1984.

The Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act of 1999 established that *special measures* should be provided for young people under 17 (following a court judgment this is changing to include 17 year olds) and those suffering from a mental disorder or who have a *significant impairment of intelligence or social functioning*.

This would seem to cover conditions that come under Mental Health such as Attention Deficit Disorder and Asperger Syndrome. A case would have to made for other SpLDs but it is worth knowing that guidance on the Act has established that it is not necessary that the person in need of support be diagnosed as suffering from a particular condition – the key issue is whether the court will need to appoint a specialist, known as a *Registered Intermediary*, to facilitate communication. On enquiring I was informed that ‘communication’ should be given a wide interpretation.

*Registered Intermediaries* are often Speech and Language Therapists. Regarding the conditions covered by this Guide, I have only ever come across one being appointed - in a case of Asperger Syndrome. Since she knew nothing about Asperger Syndrome nor its impact on coping with court hearings in this particular case, it was necessary to provide specific information for her on Asperger Syndrome in general and on the client’s particular issues.
Reasonable adjustments are appropriate in court hearings where the SpLD amounts to a disability. A formal assessment of dyslexia, dyspraxia etc. provides useful evidence of impairment but it is insufficient in terms of guaranteeing accommodations to offset the effects of the disability in court hearings. The adjustments and accommodations have to be requested in writing and agreed, ideally, at a pre-trial management session. The individual should state their disability and list the reasonable adjustments they require. A specialist can provide an accompanying page endorsing the person’s disability status.

If the judge seeks further information, the following format is suggested for the document:

1. the legal definition of disability and a short description of relevant SpLD/s
2. a brief summary of the individual’s previous assessments
3. a list of his/her disabling factors
4. a corresponding list of how these difficulties should be accommodated
5. references to official guidance such as the Equal Treatment Bench Book, which has a section on Specific Learning Difficulties and a disability glossary containing the family of SpLDs [www.judiciary.gov.uk](http://www.judiciary.gov.uk)
6. an accompanying document, stating the credentials of the person who has prepared the submission.

A template is provided on the Dyslexia Malverrn website, for the consideration of SpLD specialists who take up work in this area. [www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/docs/justice/Accommodating SpLDs in hearings.doc](http://www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/docs/justice/Accommodating SpLDs in hearings.doc)

Parole hearings

Prior to a parole hearing, prisoners have the opportunity to go through all the documentation in advance (with the probable exception of the victim statement). This is quite a challenge for anyone with poor literacy and/or SpLDs and they may need to request help. If they strongly disagree with any of the reports in the dossier they must immediately contact their legal representative.

At an oral hearing, the Parole Board can choose to question prisoners on any aspects of their reports, allowing them a slot to speak at the end. This may not work so well for people with SpLDs who will have become mentally overloaded by the end of a long and demanding session. A question to the Parole Board on this matter elicited (as a response) the example of a prisoner who, aware that he would find himself in this situation, wrote to the Board asking if he could make a statement at the start. This was agreed and did not affect his right to speak at the end of the session. However, it is essential to make this request in advance in a letter to the Board (giving reasons) and not to expect to be able to change the expected procedure on the day.

During the process, it is usual for prisoners to make their remarks and responses via their representative, consulting with them as often as is necessary. It is also possible to request breaks; people with SpLDs are advised to avail themselves of this provision.
Anticipatory duties

The Equality Act stipulates that reasonable adjustments should be anticipatory. Given the proportion of offenders with a combination of SpLDs, every prison is bound to contain a significant number of people with these conditions and should therefore plan to accommodate their additional needs.

What should education departments, probation staff, tutors and trainers do to comply? A useful checklist is provided in Supporting adult learners with dyslexia (NIACE e-guidelines, 9), pp.18,19. The role of differentiated learning is stressed, together with the preparations that practitioners and managers can make to support these learners. Examples of preparation include looking up websites about dyslexia and ensuring that tutors can change the background colours in Word and Powerpoint. These measures will be helpful but an effective response must incorporate an SpLD-friendly environment (see Section 8).

Two different ways of getting to grips with the issues are showcased below.

In the Education Department of HMP Maidstone a full time member of staff was appointed to ensure appropriate identification of and provision for offenders with specific learning difficulties. All education staff attended ‘in house’ dyslexia awareness training and some have taken the CfBT Supporting Dyslexic Learners course which has an offenders section [unfortunately this course is no longer available]. This training, together with a well-stocked bank of dyslexia-friendly resources, was the basis for a wealth of good practice.

At HMYOI Rochester, all offenders were routinely screened for dyslexia during the induction process. Those considered to be ‘at risk’ were then directed to the computer-based LADS Plus screening tool. If their risk of being dyslexic came out as moderate or above, they were offered a place on Touch Type Read and Spell (TTRS) together with weekly individual tuition with a specialist tutor. Rochester also arranged for an OCN accredited course on supporting the dyslexic learner to be run for a group of its staff. TTRS also features as an example of good practice in Section 6

The Equality Duty

Since April 2011, the Equality Duty has placed an obligation on all public bodies to consider how people with protected characteristics would be affected by their activities and, in particular, by any changes they might introduce. An exercise known as an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is undertaken to assess potential impacts, but this usually focuses on physical features of premises. (At the time of writing, the Prime Minister is considering abolishing EIAs.) In addition, public bodies are charged with having due regard to the elimination of discrimination and advancement of equality of opportunity.

I welcome examples of how this obligation is being discharged in offender settings.
Prison Service Instruction (PSI): Ensuring Equality

Within the English prison service, PSI 32/2011: Ensuring Equality, has replaced the previous Prison Service Order: Prisoners with Disabilities; this is typical of the new emphasis outlined at the start of this Section. The PSI, due for review in 2015, contains the following entry on Disability:

**Governors must ensure that efforts are made to identify whether a prisoner has a mental or physical impairment in any form. Governors must ensure that prisoners are encouraged to disclose their disability status and that procedures are in place to record this information (both on reception and subsequently) and to treat it confidentially. Not all prisoners will be aware of their disabled status and staff must be proactive in identifying the specific needs of all prisoners.**

This a comprehensive document with sections on Reasonable Adjustments, Monitoring, Discrimination Reporting, Procurement & Partnerships and Equality Impact Assessments. Annex H is devoted to Learning Disabilities; this does not appear to include Specific Learning Difficulties since the appropriate staff to handle the situation are named as health professionals (always a sure sign that the population under consideration are those with impaired intelligence who would struggle with independent living). A person with dyslexia would be mortified if staff communicated with him via visual aids (H6) or offered help with daily routines (H11).

PSI 32/2011 gives the offender population with Learning Disabilities (i.e. not SpLDs) as between 7% and 14% (compared to 2% in the general population); this compares with almost 20% of offenders affected by SpLDs who are not catered for in this Instruction.

A link is provided to *Positive Practice, Positive Outcomes* (2011) in which pages 7 to 9 outline SpLDs. They are then mentioned sporadically throughout the guide, but the main emphasis is on the far smaller Learning Disability population.


**Human Rights legislation**

Some legal specialists argue that accommodating disabilities is a human right rather than an equality issue and that challenges need to be made which will ‘flesh out’ Human Rights legislation.

The Human Rights Act 1998 brought into UK law a number of rights established in the European Convention on Human Rights of 1950. Several of these are particularly relevant to the criminal justice system, namely:

- the right to liberty and security
- freedom from torture and degrading treatment
- the right to a fair trial - *special arrangements* may have to be made for some parties
- the right not to be punished for something that wasn’t a crime when you did it
- the right to respect for private and family life.
It is worth stressing that the Human Rights Act does not protect people with disabilities from discrimination in all areas of life, it relates to the enjoyment of those human rights protected by the European Convention of Human Rights. The Convention sets out a general prohibition on discrimination in Article 14, stating that discrimination occurs when you are treated less favourably than another person in a similar situation and this treatment cannot be objectively and reasonably justified.

In conclusion

This Section has explored potential support for people with SpLDs in the criminal justice system. It is not always clear which is the most appropriate provision at various stages of the ‘offender journey’, and this gives rise to a number of questions:

- *Which term is the most helpful: ‘disabled’ or ‘vulnerable’?*

- *Which entitlement is appropriate: ‘special measures’ or ‘reasonable adjustments’?*

- *Is it a disability or equality issue? Or is it a matter of ‘accessibility’?*

The RESOURCE BANK in this Guide lists SpLD and disability organisations who may be able to advise, together with useful materials and further information.

The voice that is often missing is that of the person with SpLDs within the criminal justice system, who should be encouraged and enabled to articulate his or her needs.

- Various pieces of legislation address disability and vulnerability
- There is an obligation on education and training providers to ensure accessibility for learners with disabilities, as far as is reasonably possible
- Provisions should be made in anticipation of learning needs
- People with SpLDs should be involved in all discussions on provisions for their needs
**A) Specific Learning Difficulties & Disability Networks**

1. Organisations for Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs)
2. Disability Organisations
3. Other organisations referred to in the Guide

**B) Publications and Materials**

1. Resources on Specific Learning Difficulties
2. Identification, Screening and Assessment
3. Screening Tools
4. On-line or E-learning

**C) Checklists for Dyslexia and Visual Stress**

1. Screening checklists for adults with dyslexia: Guidelines
2. Screening checklist for adults with dyslexia (long version)
3. Screening checklist for adults with dyslexia (short version)
4. Checklist for Visual Stress

**D) Projects on Dyslexia and Offending**

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1. Organisations for Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs) and providers of services linked to SpLDs

**Dyslexia**
- Adult Dyslexia Organisation [www.adult-dyslexia.org](http://www.adult-dyslexia.org)
- British Dyslexia Association [www.bdadyslexia.org.uk](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk)
- Dyslexia Action [www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk](http://www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk)
- Dyslexia Assessment & Consultancy [www.workingwithdyslexia.com](http://www.workingwithdyslexia.com)
- Dyslexia Foundation (North West) [www.dyslexia-help.org](http://www.dyslexia-help.org)
- The Cascade Foundation [www.thecascadefoundation.org](http://www.thecascadefoundation.org)

**Attention Deficit Disorder**
- Adult Attention Deficit Disorder–UK (AADD-UK) [www.aadduk.org](http://www.aadduk.org)
- Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder, ADDISS [www.addiss.co.uk](http://www.addiss.co.uk)
- UK Adult ADHD Network (UKAAN - Network for professionals) [www.ukann.org](http://www.ukann.org)

**Dyspraxia**
- Dyspraxia Foundation [www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk](http://www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk)
- Dyspraxia UK [www.dyspraxiauk.com](http://www.dyspraxiauk.com)

**Dyscalculia**
- [www.dyscalculia-zone.com](http://www.dyscalculia-zone.com/) / A ‘first-stop’ resource, which leads to further information
- [www.dyscalculiaforum.com](http://www.dyscalculiaforum.com)

**Autism / Asperger Syndrome**

**Specific Learning Difficulties**
- The Dyscovery Centre (resources / research & training on a range of SpLDs) [www.dyscovery.info/](http://www.dyscovery.info/)

**Communication Issues**
- The Communication Trust [www.sentencetrouble.info](http://www.sentencetrouble.info)

**Assistive technology**
- [www.dyslexic.com](http://www.dyslexic.com)
- [www.bdatech.org](http://www.bdatech.org)
- [www.microlinkpc.com](http://www.microlinkpc.com)
- [www.jisctechdis.ac.uk](http://www.jisctechdis.ac.uk)
- [www.emptech.info/](http://www.emptech.info/)
A) Specific Learning Difficulties and Disability Networks - cont.

Visual Stress
Cerium Visual Technologies www.ceriumoptical.com
Society For Coloured lens Practitioners www.s4clp.org
Omniread www.omniread.org

2. Disability organisations
Disability Rights UK (formerly RADAR) www.disabilityrightsuk.org
Disability Law Service www.dls.org.uk
Mental Health Foundation www.mentalhealth.org.uk
Mind www.mind.org.uk
The Care and Treatment of Offenders with a Learning Difficulty network
www.ldoffenders.co.uk
The Centre for Mental Health www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk

3. Other organisations referred to in the Guide
Back on Track (Manchester) www.backontrackmanchester.org.uk
Crossbow reading rulers www.crossboweducation.com
English Speaking Board www.esbuk.org
Languages Behind Bars www.LBB-Project.eu
London Shakespeare Workout www.lswproductions.co.uk
(archived) www.londonshakespeare.org.uk
Mindmapping www.mindmapping.com and www.thinkbuzan.com/
PriMedia Network www.pri-media.eu
Prison Phoenix Trust www.prisonphoenixtrust.org.uk
Shannon Trust www.shannontrust.org.uk
Timpsons www.timpson.com
Touch-type, Read & Spell www.readandspell.com
Women into Work www.wiw.org.uk/

Equality & Human Rights Commission - Equality Advisory Support Service:
www.equalityhumanrights.com

European Prison Education Association www.epea.org
This association now includes practitioners beyond Europe
1. Resources on Specific Learning Difficulties

www.texthelp.com/media/39354/USAAdultLiteracy.pdf

Accommodating Specific Learning Difficulties in Hearings, M Jameson (2011)
www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/docs/justice/Accommodating SpLDs in hearings.doc

www.autism.org.uk

Basic Topics in Mathematics  A Henderson and TR Miles (2001) Routledge


Coping with Courts & Tribunals: A Guide for People with SpLDs, M Jameson (2011)
www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/docs/justice/Coping With Courts & Tribunals.pdf


Education and Training for Offenders  T Uden (2003) NIACE

Equal Treatment Bench Book (2013 revision)


Identification and Implication of Specific Learning Difficulties in a Prison Population, Dyscovery Centre (2005) Forensic Update 84

Improving the literacy and numeracy of disaffected young people in custody and the community National Research and Development Centre (2005) www.nrdc.org.uk/publications_details.asp?ID=28


KIWI Resources for Justice Staff  M Jameson (2014) available via link
www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/docs/justice/Resources for justice sector staff - Kiwis.pdf

www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/docs/justice/Resources for justice sector staff - Kiwis.pdf

Living with Dyspraxia M Colley (revised 2006) Jessica Kingsley Publishers


Making the Curriculum Work for Dyslexic Learners J Lee (2002) Basic Skills Agency

Mathematical Solutions: an introduction to dyscalculia J Proustie Next Generation Books


On-line learning and social exclusion A Clarke (2002) NIACE

Sentence Trouble The Communication Trust www.sentencetrouble.info


2. Identification, Screening and Assessment


Diagnosing Dyslexia C Klein (1993), Basic Skills Agency,


National Network of Access Centres (technology assessments) www.nnac.org

3. Screening Tools:

DAST The Psychological Corporation www.pearsonclinical.co.uk

Hidden Disabilities Questionnaire www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk/hdq-training-course

LADs Plus (Lucid Adult Dyslexia Screening) www.lucid-research.com

Outsider Software (Learning Styles and Dyslexia Screening) www.outsider.co-uk

Revised Adult Dyslexia Organisation Screening Checklist www.adult-dyslexia.org

Spot Your Potential British Dyslexia Association www.spot-your-potential.com

**QUICKSCAN** Pico Educational [www.studyscan.com](http://www.studyscan.com)

Information on assessment of autism / Asperger Syndrome from [www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)

4. On-line learning or E-learning

E-guidelines series, NIACE publications [www.niace.org.uk/publications](http://www.niace.org.uk/publications), in particular:

E-guidelines 3: *Developing e-learning materials*

E-guidelines 7: *Attracting and Motivating new learners with ICT*

E-guidelines 9: *Supporting adult learners with dyslexia: Harnessing the power of technology*
1. GUIDELINES FOR USE

The purpose of these checklists, developed by M Jameson for an offender context, is to screen for dyslexia. Both have been distributed widely. **It must be stressed that only an assessment can confirm whether or not the individual is dyslexic.**

Two versions are provided: a short version and a long version. The short version was part of a pilot project at Lancaster Farms HMYOI to evaluate the need for a dyslexia input in prison education. 60% of those screened were found to have 5 or more dyslexic indicators. It was later recommended for adoption by the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

The long version was developed for Greater Manchester Probation Service and incorporated into the Scottish Prison Education Service's Dyslexia Project.

It is now well documented that people with dyslexia often show great ability in creative and practical spheres, hence the final question in both checklists. Other items focus on well established areas of difficulty for people with dyslexia.

In the short version dyslexia itself is not referred to, so as not to raise unrealistic expectations of assessment and support. It is designed to be administered alongside the Literacy and Numeracy screening undertaken during induction. With the exception of question 1 "Did you miss a lot of school?" and the first item of the final question "Are you good at ...sports?" all the questions relate to dyslexic indicators. **Questions 4 & 5:** these 2 aspects of reading difficulty have been found to be very prevalent in dyslexic people. **Question 10:** it is also accepted that dyslexia often overlaps with attentional dysfunction, sometimes referred to as Attention Deficit Disorder, a syndrome which includes poor impulse control and a limited attention span; this also has major implications.

The long version aims to identify dyslexic indicators overtly. **Questions 6 & 7:** Although hearing may be good, there may still be problems processing what is heard efficiently. **Questions 17 & 18:** visual processing problems are common in the dyslexic population. **Question 20** (see comment on **Question 10** in the short version checklist)

**Screening Positive**
The higher the number of relevant items, the higher the likelihood that the individual is dyslexic. A ✓ (meaning "yes") or a ? (meaning "sometimes") are equally valid since a feature of dyslexia is that the effects can vary on a day to day basis.

In the short version, screening positive has been provisionally set at ✓ or ? for 5 out of the 12 items, ignoring question 1 but including, as one point, any ✓ or ? placed in the final section on talents with the exception of ‘sport’. (Although these 2 items have been included as 'distracters', both yield useful information about the individual).

In the long version, 10 or more ✓ or ? responses out of the 22 items are regarded as screening positive.

The learning needs of those who show up as ‘positive’ will need to be examined in greater detail if they come on to educational or training programmes. Offenders who choose not to follow either path should be offered guidance and information.
“HELP US TO HELP YOU” CHECKLIST

Some people find it harder to learn. Others have not had the chance. You can help us to help you by filling in the boxes below. We also want to know what you are good at.

Read through the list below carefully. Put your response in one of the columns: YES, ? for unsure or sometimes, NO

1. Did you miss a lot of school? [ ] [ ] [ ?]
2. Do you (or did you) have to think about getting letters the right way round e.g. b/d? [ ] [ ] [ ?]
3. Are you forgetful? [ ] [ ] [ ?]
4. Do you often lose your place when reading? [ ] [ ] [ ?]
5. Does white paper ever seem to ‘glare’ too brightly when you read? [ ] [ ] [ ?]
6. Is it hard for you to remember several instructions together? [ ] [ ] [ ?]
7. Do you have problems recalling everyday words? [ ] [ ] [ ?]
8. Do you muddle left / right and find it hard to give directions? [ ] [ ] [ ?]
9. Do you ever mix up numbers e.g. when dialling telephone numbers? [ ] [ ] [ ?]
10. Do you easily become distracted and lose concentration? [ ] [ ] [ ?]
11. Do your words sometimes come out wrong when you speak? [ ] [ ] [ ?]
12. Do you sometimes mix up dates or times (and miss appointments)? [ ] [ ] [ ?]

Are you good at any of the following:

- sport [ ]
- music [ ]
- art [ ]
- mechanics [ ]
- electronics [ ]
- woodwork or metalwork [ ]

Write down any other skills you have .........................................................
3. SCREENING CHECKLIST for ADULTS with DYSLEXIA (long version)

Read through the list below carefully. 
Put your response in one of the columns: YES, ? for unsure or sometimes, NO

1. Do you ever muddle left and right? 
2. Do you sometimes read the time wrongly from a clock face? 
3. Is it hard to remember 2 or 3 instructions together?
4. Do you trip over longer words? 
5. Do you sometimes confuse words when speaking? 
6. Is there any delay between hearing something and understanding it?
7. Is it hard to follow the thread of a conversation or joke?
8. Do you ever confuse number order e.g. when dialling telephone numbers?
9. Do you mix up dates and times (and miss appointments)?
10. Do you find it hard to organise yourself?
11. Is it hard to work out money / sums in your head?
12. Can you pick any month and state which months come before and after it?
13. Do you have to think about getting letters the right way round e.g. b/d?
14. Does your spelling get worse if someone is watching you?
15. Do you have good ideas but find it difficult getting them down on paper?
16. Do you only read when it is absolutely necessary?
17. When reading, do you lose your place a lot?
18. When reading, does the print ‘move’ or the page become too bright?
19. Did you have problems with spelling and reading at school?
20. Do you easily get distracted and have difficulty concentrating?
21. Do you have days when it is almost impossible to work things out?
22. Do other members of your family have reading/spelling problems?

Are you good at making things, mechanics, electronics, art, design, music?

Circle any of the above. Other skills? ..................................................
Visual Stress is linked with dyslexia, dyspraxia, migraines and epilepsy. It may be due to undiagnosed or unresolved eye problems.

Solutions include spectacles, eye exercises, a coloured overlay or tinted spectacle lenses.

Where options are limited, a good quality coloured overlay may be helpful (see NOTE 3)

Read through the list below carefully.
Put your response in one of the columns: **YES, ?, NO**

1. Have you ever been prescribed glasses? [If YES, why?]
2. Do you often lose your place when reading?
3. Do you use a marker / your finger to keep the place?
4. Do you ever read numbers / words back to front?
5. Do you get headaches when you read?
6. Do your eyes become sore or water?
7. Do you screw your eyes up when reading?
8. Do you rub or close one eye when reading?
9. Do you read close to the page?
10. Do you push the page away?
11. Do you prefer dim light to bright light for reading?
12. Does white paper seem to glare?
13. Does print become distorted as you read? (how?)
14. Do your difficulties increase the longer you read?
15. Do you have difficulties reading from a computer screen?

This CHECKLIST will flag up difficulties associated with Visual Stress.
The completed checklist should become the property of the individual.

NOTES
1. Check out whether the individual is simply in need of a standard eye test or reading glasses.
2. Overlays may be available in Education departments. By experimenting with a selection of good quality coloured overlays the reader can select the most ‘comfortable’ shade. These are better supplied cut in half, A5 size, to fit in books or over handouts.
3. If problems have been identified, opticians specialising in Visual Stress can be located on release via [www.ceriumoptical.com](http://www.ceriumoptical.com) or at [www.s4clp.org](http://www.s4clp.org)
4. Those who find that a screen ‘gles’ will need to dim the brightness and should be helped to customise the background colour on their monitor / screen to a shade that is easier to read from.
5. Visual stress is exacerbated by certain features of text. **Accessibility** issues are discussed in Section 8
D) Projects on Offending and Specific Learning Difficulties

   Original findings: 52% of the sample of offenders found to be dyslexic.

   31% dyslexic people amongst their sample of offenders.

3. Uppsala County, Sweden (1996): investigation of reading/ writing difficulties in prisons
   31% of the sample showed qualitative and quantitative indications of underlying dyslexic problems.

   Screening found that 42% of the sample of offenders had clusters of significant dyslexic indicators. Report entitled ‘Towards Identifying Offenders with Dyslexia’ 1998.
   This led to: Dyslexia project (2000) Greater Manchester Probation Service
   An information pack and training were developed for Probation and ETE workers, showing how dyslexia can affect the ability to complete probation orders and how procedures can be modified. www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/docs/justice/GMPS information sheets.doc

5. University of Cambridge Institute of Criminology Reading Study (1998) M Rice
   Rice asserts that dyslexia is not more prevalent amongst offenders, figure of 5%.

6. Study of YOs at Polmont, Scotland (1999, shown on Channel 4) Reid and Kirk
   50% of a sample of 50 young offenders screened positive for dyslexia using an adapted computerised screening programme and were then assessed.

   38% of Young Offenders found to have specific phonological deficits associated with dyslexia. Poor early language skills link with later reading impairments and attentional difficulties.

   www.dyslexiaaction.org
   Random testing of cognitive, literacy and information processing skills in 97 Young Offenders led to 17.5% of the sample showing up on a Dyslexia index.

   This Pathfinder Project works with all basic skills clients. Key elements are Volunteer Mentoring, screening, assessment, on-going support including post-release, involvement of Disability Employment Officers.

    British Dyslexia Association + YOI Wetherby. CONCLUSION: 31% showed signs of dyslexia.
LSC funded work: Dyslexia Action + 8 prisons in Yorkshire and Humberside
Covered the range of Specific Learning Difficulties.
CONCLUSION: 52% have literacy difficulties and 20% have a hidden disability, affecting
learning/employment, such as Attention Deficit Disorder.

12. ESF Pathways Project (Jan 2005 onwards)
A learndirect/ESF project to deliver 300+ learndirect courses to offenders in 12 prisons
and county-based probation offices via a secure web connection to the learndirect
domain. Features included continuity in e-learning as offenders move from custody to
community and electronic transferral of learner records.

www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/nok
A study of the prevalence and associated needs of offenders with learning difficulties and
disabilities, with the aim of making recommendations for change. The study found that
these offenders were more likely to be victimised and less likely to benefit from Offending
Behaviour Programmes. This project was extended to include police custody & court
settings.

A project which enabled prisoners to use secure IT network to access on-line learning
and job-hunting resources in eight London prisons.

Preceded by the Behind Bars project in Chelmsford Prison, The Cascade Foundation is
working at HMP Doncaster to screen and train prisoners with dyslexia; this includes
mentoring and community support.

Comments on RELEASING POTENTIAL

The explanations of SpLDs, suitable resources and ways of supporting individuals are
thorough and offer a variety of easy and affordable solutions.

*Literacy Programme Manager, Dyslexia Action*

Many thanks for signposting us to your Releasing Potential document. I particularly like the
examples of good practice. I’m sure it will be well received by practitioners.

*Offender Engagement Manager*

This document looks wonderful. I will inform the prison educators at our workshops.

*Consultant and trainer with dyslexia, European Prison Education Association*