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**Title: Crossing the Communication Divide:
A toolkit for prison and probation staff working with offenders who
experience communication difficulties**

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SYNOPSIS (press F1 for guidance)

How was this developed?

This was commissioned by NOMS Offender Management Team as one of a series of development projects, producing tools and products developed by managers and practitioners across probation and prisons to improve practice in Offender Management. Kent Probation undertook a 6 month Offender Management Development Project commissioned by NOMS. Kent Probation took the lead on the project, 'Crossing the Communication Divide'.

The work was overseen by a Project Board comprised of Prison and Probation representatives and drew heavily on the knowledge and skills of internal and external specialists. The overall aim of the project was to produce guidance for practitioners involved in offender management and develop a toolkit to support their work with offenders with communication difficulties.

Purpose

The toolkit has been developed for all staff working with offenders to provide the following:

- Guidance on different types of communication difficulties, including learning difficulties, learning disabilities, literacy difficulties and language difficulties to help staff recognise these
- Top tips and principles to guide good practice in working with people with communication difficulties
- Easy read versions of common forms and documents such as an appointment letter, final warning letter and offender self-assessment questionnaire
- A list of resources and organisations that can provide more detailed information

It is intended to help break down barriers to communication, which can help to engage the offender and promote compliance.

Materials available

- Crossing the communication divide toolkit

Index and Validation

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Ministry of
JUSTICE

National Offender
Management Service

Crossing the Communication Divide

**A toolkit for prison and probation staff working with
offenders who experience communication difficulties**

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Acknowledgements

Promoting Diversity within the Offender Management Project: Improving access to interventions for offenders with communication difficulties was a six month project commissioned by the National Offender Management Service in 2008.

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Contributions were gratefully received from representatives of National Offender Management Service:

<p>Probation areas:</p> <p>Cambridgeshire Probation Gwent Probation Hampshire Probation Kent Probation Manchester Probation Surrey Probation Sussex Probation Thames Valley Probation</p>	<p>Prison service:</p> <p>HM YOI Aylesbury HMP Bullingdon HMP Canterbury HMP Coldingley HMP Humberside HMP Huntercombe HMP Kingston HMP Maidstone HMP Parkhurst HM YOI Rochester HMP Send HMP Springhill Sheppey Prison Cluster</p>
<p>Specialists/Specialist Agencies</p> <p>Civic Participation Network Project, Communication Forum Scotland Guy Offord, Clinical Behaviour Therapist Val Levens, Speech and Language Therapist Skillnet Group Signalong Michelle Valentine, Disability Forward Neisha Betts, Learning Disability Awareness Training Project Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists</p>	

Foreword

In 2008 Kent and Sussex Prisons and Probation were successful in winning a bid to undertake a 6 month Offender Management Development Project commissioned by NOMS. Kent Probation took the lead on the project, 'Crossing the Communication Divide'.

The work was overseen by a Project Board comprised of Prison and Probation representatives and drew heavily on the knowledge and skills of internal and external specialists. The overall aim of the project was to produce guidance for practitioners involved in offender management and develop a toolkit to support their work with offenders with communication difficulties.

From the very start of the project we knew that it had to be cost neutral – there are no extra resources. The strength of the toolkit is that it provides information that is easily accessible and will make a real impact on practice. By enabling Offender Managers to recognise and understand the needs of offenders with communication difficulties, it is much more likely that they will get it right the first time. This will help to ensure that offenders are targeted with the most effective interventions with better outcomes. The toolkit would not have been possible without input from practitioners and specialists – it is an outstanding example of what can be achieved by working collaboratively together.

Whilst the toolkit is aimed at work with offenders, good communication should form part of good practice in all areas of Prison and Probation business.

I am grateful to everyone who has taken the time to contribute their ideas and opinion, which has helped shape the toolkit.



Sarah Billiald
Chief Officer – Kent Probation

Section 1

Introduction

Introduction

The project, Promoting Diversity within the Offender Management Model: Improving access to interventions for offenders with communication difficulties was commissioned by the National Offender Management Service in 2008. Staff in both prison and probation were interviewed about their experiences working with offenders with communication difficulties. They gave examples of difficulties engaging with offenders or enabling offenders to access offending behaviour programmes. Staff identified a lack of knowledge and experience working with communication difficulties but also the inaccessibility of information presented to these offenders.

This toolkit has been developed following discussions with staff in both the prison and probation service. Specialists were also consulted to give expert guidance. However, the information in this toolkit does not necessarily represent expert opinion. It identifies some of the barriers that may make it difficult for staff and offenders to communicate with each other. The toolkit aims to raise awareness of some of the communication difficulties of offenders who come into contact with criminal justice agencies. It provides some guidance on how to respond to the communication needs of offenders and tools to aid more effective communication.

This toolkit identifies a range of people who may have communication difficulties. For example, people with learning disabilities and people who do not speak English. People who have a learning disability will have different support needs to those who have communication difficulties because their first language is not English. However, some solutions may be transferable; for example, creating easier reading versions of information should make it easier for translation or interpretation into a different language.

The toolkit should not take the place of any training available to enable staff to work more effectively with a range of offenders with different needs, including communication needs. It has been developed to provide quick and easy access to support practice. At the time of writing this publication, the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) had commissioned the Learning Disability Awareness Course for staff working with prisoners. It is understood that this awareness programme is being adapted for staff working within the probation service and is being led by Mark Freeman, Offender Health Learning Lead.

Whilst this toolkit does offer some strategies for working with offenders with it does not provide an assessment tool for screening offenders.

Who should use this Tool Kit?

This toolkit should be used by any prison and probation staff in contact with offenders across all aspects of the prison regime and probation activities. It should also be used by staff responsible for producing information and the training material used in offending behaviour programmes.

Examples include:

Offender Managers Offender Supervisors Probation Officers Probation Service Officers	Personal Officers Prison programme facilitators/Tutors, Education staff Trainee psychologists
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Case Administrators	Psychologists
Receptionists	Mentors
Senior Probation Officers	Health Care staff
Programme facilitators	Gate staff
Key workers	Programme managers
Community Payback Officers	Resettlement managers
ETE Officers	Induction staff
Literacy tutors	Senior prison Officers
Business Managers	Principle officers
Senior Managers	Operational Support Grade staff
	Visits staff

This is not an exhaustive list.

Whilst this toolkit is aimed at work with offenders, good communication should form part of good practice in all areas of prison and probation business.

Why use this toolkit?

How do you check that the offenders you are working with understand what you are saying or asking them to do? Even when you suspect that someone may not fully understand you, how do you find out their support needs?

Some offenders you work with may have:

- Learning disabilities
- Learning difficulties
- Literacy difficulties
- Difficulty speaking English, for example Foreign Nationals
- Sensory difficulties, for example visual or hearing impairment
- Speech and language difficulties. These can include speech problems such as a stammer and language processing problems such as difficulties understanding what has been said to them.

According to the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, more than 60% of the 11,000-plus young offenders in institutions today lack the communication skills to take part in educational programmes, courses in behaviour and anger management, and initiatives designed to improve their thinking skills. Whilst these statistics refer to young offenders, a proportion of them will grow up to become adult offenders. If their communication needs have not been addressed it is unlikely that they will be able to benefit from adult programmes.

It is important to be aware that some offenders that you work with may have difficulty either understanding you or expressing themselves. In these cases you need to be able to make adjustments to your practice so that you can communicate more effectively. Not addressing these needs could result in non-compliance by the offender, which leads to additional work as well as less satisfactory outcomes for offenders. Good communication can lead to better compliance and ultimately reduced reoffending. Implementing some of the suggestions made in this toolkit will not take any extra time. However, where extra time is needed up front this is likely to lead to saved time later on.

Legal responsibilities

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and the amendment Act 2005 places a duty on all Criminal Justice agencies to eliminate discrimination and harassment of disabled people and to promote greater opportunity for disabled people. This also means making reasonable adjustments where necessary for those offenders who have a disability. This does not just refer to the physical environment but includes enabling access to people with hidden disabilities such as learning disabilities and difficulties, including conditions such as Autism, Asperger Syndrome and Dyslexia.

The Race Relations Act 1976 and its amendment Act 2000 places a duty on statutory agencies to be aware of the equality needs of people and provide racially, culturally and linguistically appropriate services. This Act applies primarily to Foreign National Offenders who may require the services of an interpreter.

How to use this toolkit

This toolkit is designed to be used by prison and probation staff in their day to day work to support the work they do with offenders.

The information in this toolkit does not have to be read in order and may be read selectively.

There are four sections which you can go straight to:

Section 2 “**What does it mean to have a communication difficulty?**” will raise your awareness of some of the issues affecting people with communication difficulties. It also offers tips on how to respond or overcome some of these difficulties.

Section 3 “**How do I communicate more effectively?**” introduces a set of principles to underpin good practice and reiterates actions from section 2.

Section 4 “**How do I make information easier to read?**” provides you with some examples/templates that you can use or adapt to create your own easier read documents.

Section 5 “**What resources and information are available?**” identifies some useful organisations and contacts. It is important that you find out about local resources and add this to your list. There is also a list of some of the documents specifically targeted at criminal justice workers referred to in this toolkit, which you can obtain direct either by post or downloading it from the internet.

Section 6 “**Service checklists**” are tools to assist prison establishments and probation areas to identify what is already available. The suggested checklists can also be used as a tool in evaluating your service.

Once you have read the toolkit you will want to refer back to sections and specifically any top tips when necessary. The key below is to help you to locate information you need more easily.

Key:



Top Tips



Key Points to remember



Tool that you can use and adapt

Section 2

**What does it mean to
have a communication
difficulty?**

What does it mean to have a communication difficulty?

Contents:

Introduction

1. Speech and Language difficulties
 - 1.1 Expressive Language Disorder
 - 1.2 Receptive Language Disorder
 - 1.3 Stammering
 - 1.4 What is a speech and language therapist?
2. Offenders with Learning Disabilities and Learning Difficulties
 - 2.1. What does it mean to have a Learning Disability?
 - 2.2. What does it mean to have a Learning Difficulty?
3. ADHD and ADD
4. Dyslexia
5. Dyspraxia
6. Autism and Asperger Syndrome
7. Literacy difficulties
8. Difficulty communicating in English
9. Sensory difficulties
 - 9.1. Deafness or hard of hearing
 - 9.2. Blindness and partial sight

Introduction

Having a communication difficulty could mean not being able to express yourself, or not understanding information that is said to you or which you read.

We all experience this when in another country with no knowledge of the language, but try to imagine what it feels like to constantly:

- Be unable to tell someone about something important.
- Be unable to find the words you need to say something.
- Have words coming out jumbled up.
- Have sentences getting muddled or stuck and someone jumping in, saying words for you.
- Be speaking but people not being able to understand what you are saying.
- Have people ignoring what you are trying to say, feeling embarrassed and moving away.
- Not understand what is said to you.

- Be unable to join a conversation.
- Being unable to read.
- Be unable to write down your ideas.

(Source <http://www.communicationsforum.org.uk>)

Some offenders who have problems communicating may find it difficult to express themselves through speech, writing and non-verbal communication and likewise have difficulty understanding other people. They may also have difficulty understanding and retaining information. Some offenders may have problems with speaking and understanding. Others may have problems in using language to convey information.

Research has indicated that children, adolescents and adults who exhibit challenging or anti-social behaviours are more likely to have language and communication difficulties. We do not know if one causes the other but it is clear that many offenders have unrecognised language and communication difficulties.

These difficulties are often labelled as behaviour problems. It is possible that some offenders who exhibit aggressive behaviour may in fact be expressing feelings of frustration at not being able to express themselves or not being understood.

The following chapters in this section identify some of the communication difficulties that offenders that may possess. These include communication difficulties associated with:

- Speech and language difficulties, for example, difficulties processing language information, stammer
- Learning disabilities and difficulties
- Literacy difficulties
- Difficulty communicating in English
- Sensory difficulties; visual or hearing impairments.

You would not be expected to diagnose these problems, but over half of your caseload is likely to have communication difficulties. If possible obtain information that may help you to be aware of communication issues e.g. medical reports, school reports, statements of educational need and court reports.

However, the 2008 Bercow Review of children and young people with Speech, Language and Communication Difficulties has highlighted the frequent lack of diagnosis and support for communication problems. Therefore it is likely that some younger people on your caseload may have communication difficulties that are not documented. Factors that should make you consider whether there could be a communication difficulty are:

- Difficulty coping at school
- Poor school achievement
- Attendance at any sort of special school
- Difficulty managing processes such as benefits and housing
- Not understanding court or probation processes
- Avoidance of situations that require communication such as attendance at support groups
- Difficulty giving you information even when you are clearly there to help.

1. Speech and Language difficulties

- **Research undertaken by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) has shown that more than 60% of the 11,000 plus young offenders lack the communication skills to take part in educational programmes, courses in behaviour and anger management. (www.rcslt.org)**

Case Study

Paul is an offender resident in a special hospital who has a severe stammer. He controlled his stammer carefully by speaking slowly and by pausing for an extended period before starting to speak. His stammer was not recognised and his style of speech caused other staff to question his motivation to engage with treatment. (From an article written by Karen Bryan on Stammering in prison)

Case study

Malcolm is an 18 year old, serving a 10 month sentence with a history of violent behaviour and is frequently involved in fights. He had difficulty engaging in discussions or groups. Assessment showed that Malcolm's understanding was only equivalent to age 11 and he had difficulty using language to convey meaning and difficulty communicating in social situations. Once he received support for these problems, incidents involving aggressive behaviour decreased markedly and staff commented that he was much easier to manage and more able to engage with addressing his pattern of offending behaviour.

Offenders with a communication disorder may have difficulty:

- Understanding the spoken or written word, or other non-verbal communication.
- Expressing themselves through speech and writing or non-verbal communication.
- Expressing all they want to get across in a meaningful and appropriate way.
- Interacting with others in a socially acceptable way.

(<http://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmeduski/170/170we09.htm>)

1.1 Expressive Language Disorder

Expressive language disorder is a language or communication disorder that makes it difficult for individuals to express themselves in verbal communication.

Signs and symptoms of Expressive Language Disorder

- Hesitation when speaking.
- Trouble putting words together to complete a sentence or thought.
- Problems finding the right vocabulary, proper grammar, correct verb tenses and phrases
- Avoidance or lack of engagement in situations where communication is involved.

1.2 Receptive Language Disorder

Receptive Language Disorders are a type of language disorder in which an individual has difficulty understanding spoken, and sometimes also written, language. These

disorders are sometimes also referred to as learning disabilities, and they are related to an individual's inability to efficiently process language.

Signs and symptoms of Receptive Language Disorder

- Will not appear to hear others when they are being spoken to.
- Will struggle to understand spoken instructions.
- Will struggle to understand complicated sentences.
- May repeat or parrot words or phrases back to person who has spoken to them (without understanding the meaning).



Be aware that some offenders with a communication difficulty may avoid situations where they are required to communicate verbally. This could include attending education classes in prison.

1.3 Stammering

Stammering or stuttering is a problem with the normal flow and timing of speech. Attempts to say something may be interrupted by repetition of a syllable, prolongation of the sound or a complete block on speech.

There is often embarrassment about having a stammer. People who stammer may find that they are quite fluent if they sing or whisper as part of a group.

Recent research has found that people who stammer have difficulty coordinating the muscles for speaking and breathing and need more time to speak.

Some people avoid and substitute words to such an extent that others may not realise they have a stammer. This is known as "covert stammering" and may result in them not being able to say what they need to say.

(Source www.bbc.co.uk and www.stammering.org)



Supporting an offender with a stammer

- ✓ Be positive and keep eye contact
- ✓ Give the person plenty of time to express themselves
- ✓ Be patient and give the person time to finish
- ✓ Resist finishing off words or sentences
- ✓ Ask the person what helps them to speak more fluently
- ✓ Do not answer for the person.
- ✓ Do not interrupt when the person is trying to finish their sentence.

1.4 What is a speech and language therapist?

Speech and language therapists work with children and adults who have difficulties with communication, or with eating, drinking or swallowing. A person can make a self referral or through a professional such as a GP.

Some Speech and Language therapists have undertaken work in Young Offender Institutes, where they have carried out assessments.

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) is the professional body that represents all speech and language therapists across the United Kingdom. It has undertaken research and published reports on the experiences of offenders who have a communication disability. The RCSLT is working towards creating closer links within the criminal justice service.

You may be able to access speech and language therapy for your clients via the local Primary Care Trust or via the local YOI if there is a service. It is important that referrals are made and that lack of service provision that impinges on your work is highlighted.

2. Offenders with Learning Disabilities and Learning Difficulties

- **20-30% of offenders have learning disabilities or learning difficulties that interfere with their ability to cope within the criminal justice system. (Loucks, 2007)**
- **7% of prisoners have an IQ of under 70 and a further 25% have an IQ of under 80. (Mottram, 2007)**

Case Study

John was sentenced to supervision and unpaid work for an offence of common assault. He was suspended from unpaid work due to his behaviour. He would not follow instructions and swore at the supervisors. His offender manager undertook some research and discovered that he had been identified as having learning difficulties at school. He seemed to display this behaviour then. It was also recorded that he had difficulty in understanding what others say to him. As a result he was unable to follow direction at work. The offender manager thought that John may be falling foul of the rules because he did not fully understand the instructions being given to him.

People with a learning disability find it harder than others to learn, understand and communicate. A learning disability affects all areas of a person's learning and functioning. A learning difficulty affects a certain area, for example, someone with dyslexia has trouble with spelling, writing and reading but is likely to have a good memory and be able to learn skills normally.

No One Knows, a UK wide programme led by the Prison Reform Trust reported on the experiences of prisoners with learning difficulties and learning disabilities within the criminal justice system. Prison officers were given an opportunity to express their views on provision and support for the above group of prisoners. Prisoners with learning difficulties and learning disabilities are often excluded from accessing information and offending behaviour programmes.

“As a result they are unable to progress through their sentence plan, which in turn may impact on parole dates and resettlement opportunities. Reducing re-offending is a central aim of the government's national strategy against crime; however, conventional offending behaviour programmes are not generally

accessible for offenders with an IQ of below 80. There is a mismatch between the literacy demands of programmes and the skill level of offenders, which is particularly significant with respect to speaking and listening skills. (Home Office Findings 233, 2004) Around 40% of young offenders might find it difficult to benefit from verbally mediated interventions such as anger management and drug rehabilitation courses. (Bryan 2004). Although there is an adapted sex offender treatment programme it is not readily available across the prison estate.” (Prisoners Voices, 2008)

Practitioners sometimes worry about the differences between learning disability and difficulties. Essentially, a learning disability is a global disorder of learning and a learning difficulty is a more specific difficulty (although this may have widespread effects for the individual). It may be more useful for you to focus on the problems that an individual is experiencing and the support that he or she needs.



Do not be quick to pigeon-hole people. Offenders are often worried about being labelled and so are reluctant to disclose they have a learning disability or learning difficulty. They may also get the two terms mixed up.

2.1. What does it mean to have a Learning Disability?

People with a learning disability may have developed it before birth or during birth or have had a serious illness in early childhood. They will find it harder than others to learn, understand and communicate, and this affects all aspects of learning. (Source: www.mencap.org.uk)

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines learning disability as ‘a reduced level of intellectual functioning resulting in diminished ability to adapt to the daily demands of the normal social environment.’



Just because a person has a low IQ it does not mean they will have a learning disability, however, it may suggest that they need some support.

2.2. What does it mean to have a Learning Difficulty?

The term 'learning difficulty' covers a wide variety of difficulties that affect particular aspects of learning, these may include:

- Dyslexia
- Dyspraxia
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)
- Autism and Asperger Syndrome

The problems vary greatly with no two people presenting in exactly the same way. More detail is given later in this chapter.

These difficulties typically affect an individual's motor skills, information processing and memory. For example, someone with Dyslexia may have difficulty using both written

and oral language. Every individual will have developed a strategy to cope and this will bring with it stress and anxiety.

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has developed a learning difficulties screening tool, the Hidden Disabilities Questionnaire. The Offender's Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) providers will be responsible for working within the partnership to introduce the Hidden Disabilities Questionnaire for offenders who are referred to LSC-funded learning and skills provision, in line with training delivered with the support of the LSC. It will be important for you to be aware of any issues identified through the screening tool when working with offenders with learning difficulties or disabilities.



Some simple questions to find out additional information

- ✓ Ask person about if they lived in a hospital or residential home, if not: ask if they have received support to live independently.
- ✓ Ask person if they went to a special school. If not, ask if they ever received support from social services.
- ✓ Ask person if they can tell the time. Ask them to tell you the time rather than accepting a 'yes'/'no' response.
- ✓ Ask person to tell you their date of birth and how old they are.

(Adapted from 'Positive Practice Positive Outcomes: A handbook for Professionals in the Criminal Justice System working with Offenders with Learning Disabilities.' Feb 2007. Dept. of Health (csip).



Practical tips and techniques to help you establish more effective communication with offenders with Learning Disabilities and / or Learning Difficulties:

- ✓ Use the person's name at the start of each sentence.
- ✓ Explain to the person why they are in a new situation, what they should expect and when this will happen. Keep this information, simple, concrete and immediate. Explain each part of a process as it happens not all at once at the beginning.
- ✓ Avoid jargon- use clear, simple, and focused language.
- ✓ Do not rush any discussion and try to accept any responses and discuss any concerns the person raises
- ✓ Use visual aids, for example, photos, calendar for dates.
- ✓ Use concrete terms rather than abstract, for example, "At breakfast time" rather than "early on".
- ✓ Break information into small chunks and give the person time to understand the information.
- ✓ Prepare the person for each stage of the communication, for example, "David, I will now ask you some questions" or "David, I will now explain what we are going to do."
- ✓ Be patient and allow the person to process the information.
- ✓ Avoid double negative statements and vague questions, for example, "You were not in the shop, were you?"
- ✓ Be careful about repeating questions as this may suggest that the person did not give the right answer the first time round.
- ✓ If contradictory information is given, do not assume that the person is being

manipulative, this may indicate that they don't understand or can't remember.

(Adapted from 'Positive Practice Positive Outcomes: A handbook for Professionals in the Criminal Justice System working with Offenders with Learning Disabilities.' Feb 2007. Dept. of Health (csip).

3. ADHD and ADD

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) refer to a range of problem behaviours associated with poor attention span. The term ADHD is now preferred.

Children with ADHD appear restless, inattentive, hyperactive and impulsive. These problems often prevent children from learning and socialising well. These problems persist into adulthood.

ADHD behaviours

- Carelessness and lack of attention to detail.
- Continually starting new tasks before finishing old ones.
- Poor organisational skills.
- Inability to focus, or prioritise.
- Continually losing or misplacing things.
- Forgetfulness.
- Restlessness and edginess.
- Difficulty keeping quiet, and speaking out of turn.
- Blurting responses, and poor social timing when talking to others.
- Often interrupting others.
- Mood swings.
- Irritability and a quick temper.
- Inability to deal with stress.
- Extreme impatience.
- Taking risks in activities, often with little, or no regard for personal safety, or the safety of others.

(Source: <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder>)



Positive traits of ADHD are creativity, enthusiasm, a quick mind, high energy level, and hyper focus.

4. Dyslexia

- **Offenders are 3 to 4 times more likely to have Dyslexia than the general public. (Rack, 2005)**

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability which affects the development of reading skills. Many children with dyslexia also struggle with aspects of language development. These problems persist through adulthood.

People with dyslexia vary greatly in their problems and in the ways that they have developed to try and cope with the problems. People with dyslexia may be very creative, good at lateral thinking and many are very intelligent.

Possible difficulties

- Reading hesitantly
- Misreading information which affects understanding
- Difficulty with sequences, for example, getting dates in order
- Poor organisation or time management
- Difficulty organising thoughts clearly
- Erratic spelling
- Difficulty remembering written information.

5. Dyspraxia

Dyspraxia is a difficulty with motor movement. Speech dyspraxia involves faulty signals from the brain to the muscles. This affects speech production and makes it difficult for people to use language to convey information

Symptoms of Dyspraxia of speech

- Not able to string together sounds and syllables to make coherent words.
- Individuals may say a word correctly and then mispronounce it later.
- May have varying rates, rhythms and stresses in their speech.
- You may find the speech difficult to understand
- The person may appear very frustrated or may avoid speaking.



Do not be quick to pigeon-hole people. Offenders are often worried about being labelled and so are reluctant to disclose they have a learning disability or learning difficulty. They may also get the two terms mixed up.

6. Autism and Asperger Syndrome

Autism and Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are developmental disorders, affecting how a person develops, but continuing through their adult life. This includes a spectrum of disorders. The terms high functioning Autism and Asperger refer to people with autism who have a higher IQ. All people with ASD struggle with communication and social interaction to some extent.

Case Study

“I recently found myself in court opposite a 15-year-old with Asperger syndrome and it was obvious how difficult he was finding the whole thing and how his behaviour might influence the view the magistrates took of him. For example, the lack of eye contact

can be interpreted as a person telling lies. Magistrates have been trained on the eye contact issue in connection with certain cultures but I am not sure that they have been made aware of how it is also the case in people with Asperger syndrome.” Solicitor, Brighton and Hove
(Autism: A guide for criminal justice professionals)

People with ASD have three main difficulties:

Social interaction

- Appearing to be indifferent to others or socially isolated.
- Being unable to read social cues.
- Behaving in what may seem an inappropriate or odd manner.
- Appearing to lack empathy.
- Avoiding eye contact when under pressure.

Communication

- Having difficulty in understanding tone of voice, intonation, facial expression.
- Making a literal interpretation of figurative or metaphorical speech. The phrases “has the cat got your tongue” or “he’d make mincemeat of you” would be alarming to a person with ASD.
- Finding it difficult to hold a two-way conversation.
- Becoming agitated in responses, or coming across as argumentative, stubborn, or as over-compliant; agreeing to things that are not true.
- Using very formal, stilted or pedantic language.
- Having poor concentration and thus poor listening skills.
- Being honest to the extent of bluntness or rudeness.

Imagination

- Having difficulty in foreseeing the consequences of their actions.
- Becoming extremely anxious because of changes in routines or unexpected events.
- Liking set rules, and overreacting to other people’s infringement of them.
- Often having particular special interests, which may become obsessions.
- Finding it difficult to imagine or empathise with another person’s point of view.



Some people with Autism (including Asperger syndrome) may carry the Autism Alert card. It is a credit sized card with a leaflet with information about Autism and may include emergency contact details.



Questioning and interviewing people with autism

- ✓ Be prepared to hold several sessions to build up familiarity with the individual.
- ✓ Talk to the individual’s parents, carers or professionals involved with them.
- ✓ Seek the advice of a psychologist or a social worker who specialises in the field of Autism.
- ✓ Find out if the person has any preferred routines that may help you- eg an individual who likes to know the number of questions in advance and who is reassured by questions being numbered.

- ✓ Keep the interview as short as possible.
- ✓ Explain how long the interview will take and what will happen when it ends.
- ✓ Keep the environment as calm as possible.
- ✓ Use the person's name at the start so that they know you are talking to them.
- ✓ Talk calmly and keep language simple.
- ✓ Keep language concrete and direct.
- ✓ Avoid using irony or sarcasm.
- ✓ Keep gestures to an absolute minimum.
- ✓ Use cues to prepare the person for the next question eg state directly that you are moving on to the next question.
- ✓ Be patient and give the person time to respond.
- ✓ Avoid vague questions. For example, the question "Tell me what you saw yesterday". Better to say "Tell me what you saw happen in the shopping centre at about 10 o'clock."
- ✓ Find out whether visual aids or support such as keywords will help the person.

(Source Autism: a guide for criminal justice professionals. The National Autistic Society)

7. Literacy difficulties

- **Over 74% of prisoners taking part in enhanced thinking skills programmes do not have the listening and speaking skills of level 2 or 3 that the programmes demand. ((Learning and Skills Research Centre for the Prison Service)**

Case Study

Henry has just started a prison sentence. He wanted to speak with a probation officer and approached his personal officer. He was told that he needed to write his request onto a General Application Form, which would then be sent to the appropriate department. He chose not to take the form because he did not want the personal officer to know that he could not read or write. He did not want to ask another prisoner for help as he did not want anyone else to know about his problem and he already felt vulnerable in the prison.

Implications for offenders with literacy difficulties

Offenders may have specific learning difficulties that affect literacy (see dyslexia above) or may have lost out on opportunities for learning due to lack of school attendance.

There is a framework that is used to classify adults into literacy abilities. Entry level 1 is divided into 3 sub-levels and then the levels increase in line with ability; level 1, level 2 and so on.

Given the statistics there is a significant proportion of offenders, who will not have even achieved level 1 (equivalent to a GCSE pass at grade D-G), which is the minimum level that most employers feel that an employee needs to do a job.

Offenders who have limited skills in reading and writing will have difficulty accessing information presented in a written format. Even if staff explain information verbally it cannot be assumed that the information will be understood or processed appropriately. This has implications regarding the information contained in warning letters, parole dossiers, pre sentence reports and so on, which often contain complex terms.

Generally within prisons, prisoners are expected to make written requests if they want to access certain departments, for example, see a probation officer, see healthcare. Unless there are prison officers or if appropriate fellow inmates available to offer assistance, some prisoners will miss out on the support they need.

Offenders will be better able to cope with prison life or with offending behaviour programmes, whether one to one or group work, if their literacy needs are identified and relevant support offered.

The definition of adult literacy from the Skills for Life Standards is:

“the ability to read, write, and speak in English (or Welsh), and to use mathematics at a level necessary to function at work and in society in general”.

Literacy covers the ability to¹:

- ✓ Speak, listen and respond
- ✓ Read and comprehend
- ✓ Write to communicate

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) provides the funding for Skills for Life training. The Offender’s Learning and Skills Service (OLASS), which is funded by the LSC, is the process by which offenders in custody access Skills for Life training.

All Skills for Life training for those in custody is free of charge. In the community, literacy and numeracy up to level 2 is free of charge to the learner. ESOL is free to vulnerable and excluded groups; however there is the requirement for a learner contribution for those with the ability to pay as outlined in the LSC eligibility criteria.

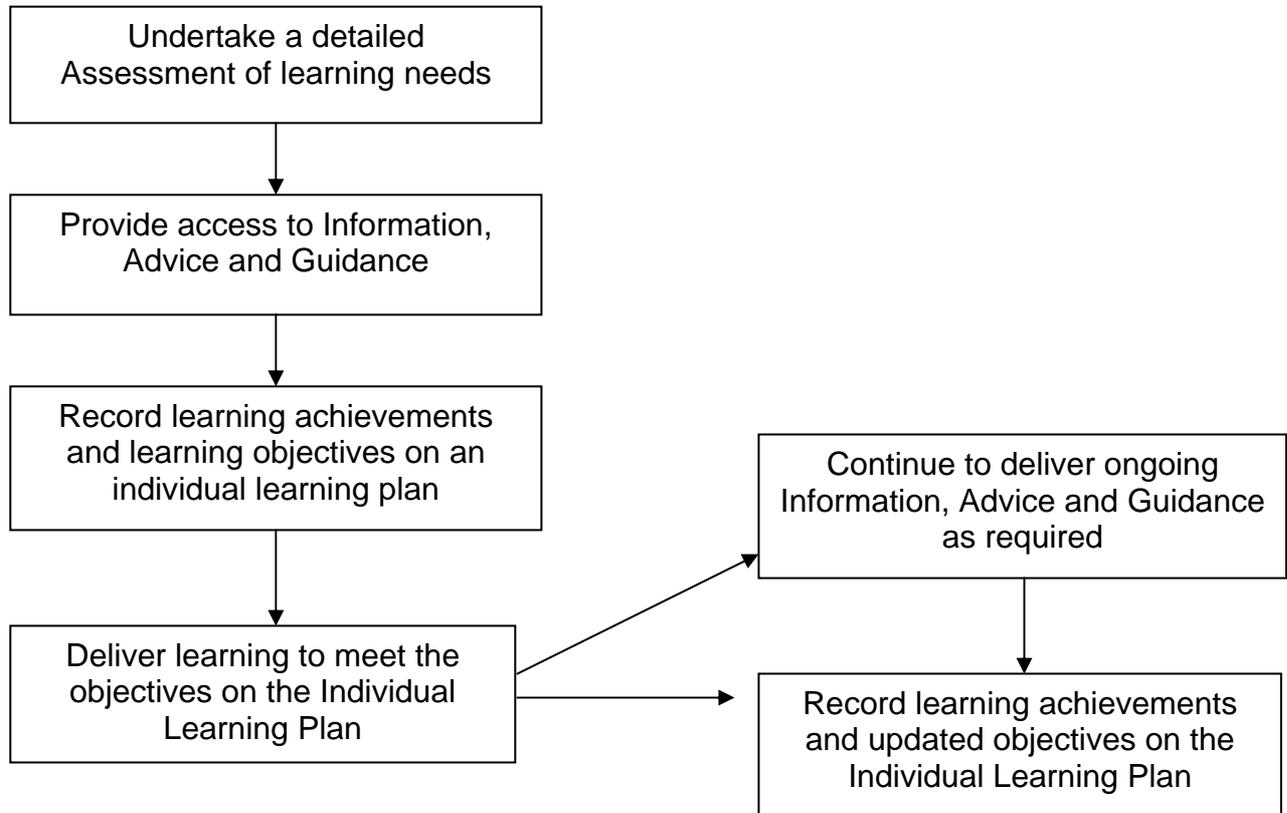
There are a number of LSC funded programmes onto which offenders can be referred. These programmes offer learners the opportunity to gain qualifications which motivates them to progress further, and are delivered using a variety of methods appropriate for adult learners.

The Employment Skills Programme funded by LSC/JCP provides learners with the opportunity to complete an employability award alongside Skills for Life qualifications which helps to prepare them for work. Skills for Life is also increasingly embedded into programmes which support employability, such as the Skills for Jobs programme.

¹ Source: South West Skills and Learning Intelligence Module

1. Identifying offenders who have literacy needs

The OLASS Process²



2. Assessing the literacy needs of offenders

All offenders should be assessed to identify their basic skills needs. This is a three stage process.

Stage 1 Screening	Stage 2 Initial Assessment	Stage 3 Diagnostic Assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Screening to find out literacy, language and numeracy needs Literacy and numeracy screening tool e.g. Fast Move Most offenders are screened at the pre sentence stage Record of assessment should be available to the Offender Manager Offenders learning journey – assessment travel with the offender 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detailed assessment of literacy, language and numeracy skills In line with the levels in The National Standards For Adult Literacy And Numeracy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In-depth assessment process Carried out by trained teachers Outcome used to inform and structure an individual learning plan and learning programme Should have access to a trained specialist dyslexia assessor

² Source: The Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) In England: A Brief Guide



Understanding the literacy levels so that you understand what someone is able to do

3. Literacy levels³:

National Standard	At this level, adults will be able, for example, to:	School level equivalent
Entry 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read and obtain information from common signs and symbols 	Level 1 (age 5)
Entry 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use punctuation correctly, including capital letters, full stops and question marks 	Level 2 (age 7)
Entry 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organise writing in short paragraphs 	Level 3 (age 9)
Level 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the main points and specific detail in texts 	Level 4 (age 11) and GCSE D-G (age 16)
Level 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read and understand a range of texts of varying complexity accurately and independently 	GCSE A*-C (age 16)



It is important to check that local provision will meet the needs of offenders at all the literacy levels.



How to support offenders with literacy difficulties to engage in one to one or group work programmes.

Giving information

- ✓ Be clear.
- ✓ Emphasise or repeat the main points.
- ✓ Use everyday language.
- ✓ Check understanding frequently during the session. People are often embarrassed to ask for help in a group setting.
- ✓ Give one instruction at a time.
- ✓ Give information in small chunks.
- ✓ Introduce keywords and phrases on flash cards – they can be displayed throughout the session with frequent reminders. Use pictures if possible.
- ✓ Don't assume previous knowledge. For example some people may not previously have come across the word programme in the context of an offending behaviour programme (i.e. where 'programme' means 'course').

Writing

- ✓ Consider whether a written handout is really feasible or necessary
- ✓ Handouts and cards should be clear and simple
- ✓ Avoid using handwriting – it is often more difficult for people with poor literacy skills to read handwritten text.
- ✓ Do not use block capitals as the shape of a word helps in reading.
- ✓ Use a typeface that is clear for example Arial, which is a sans serif font.
- ✓ Keep flip charts clear and simple.

³ National Literacy Trust website

- ✓ Avoid using words of three or more syllable as this makes it harder to decode.
- ✓ Encourage people to jot down things without worrying about spelling.

Reading

- ✓ Do not ask people to read aloud.
- ✓ Keep specialist language to a minimum
- ✓ Have notes and handouts at different levels according to offenders' needs
- ✓ Avoid acronyms - use symbols where possible.

Managing group room activities

- ✓ Give people time to discuss in pairs before group discussion so that those with speaking and listening skills below level 2 can practise.
- ✓ Make sure individuals with low levels of literacy are paired or work in groups supported by their peers.
- ✓ Use activities that are more interactive and allow movement.
- ✓ Consider using mentors to support individuals with poor speaking skills.
- ✓ Use pictures to tell a story rather than words and use multi-sensory materials and 3D models where possible.

(Adapted from Supporting the Literacy Needs of Offenders on Offending Behaviour Programmes. A guide for Programme Tutors, Facilitators and Treatment Managers. March 2005)

8. Difficulty communicating in English

This includes Foreign Nationals and UK residents whose first language is not English.

Case Study

Claude is a Foreign National who was sentenced to 4 years imprisonment for a sex offence. He has been assessed as high risk and there is a possibility that he could be deported when he is released in seven months time. The offender manager assessed that Claude is not suitable to participate in the accredited Sex Offender Treatment Programme (SOTP). He found out that the prison offers English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses. The offender manager decided that Claude should participate in ESOL whilst in prison with the view to undertaking the Sex Offender Treatment Programme (SOTP) upon his release. The offender manager admitted that he was not confident that Claude's English would be at the level required to participate in the SOTP programme.

Where Foreign National Offenders are assessed as not suitable for supervision with an accredited group work programme, some are directed to unpaid work, which means their offending behaviour is not addressed.

Others risk being sentenced to a term of imprisonment. In custody, again they may be precluded from attending offending behaviour programmes. Even though ESOL is provided in some prisons, there may not be sufficient time for an offender to learn English to the required level to participate in an offending behaviour programme.

The Offender Assessment System (OASys) asks about the preferred language of the offender and the need for an interpreter. Whilst this process identifies the need for an interpreter it does not necessarily pick up other language needs such as difficulties in

written language. In this situation ESOL is more appropriate than the standard basic skills provision.

If staff are not aware of ESOL provision locally or how to gain access for offenders, it will prevent them from developing their English skills sufficiently to then participate in offending behaviour programmes.

Additionally, staff are concerned that when using interpreters who have no knowledge of the work of the prison or probation service, there is a risk the information will not be conveyed accurately to the offender. Most staff have never undertaken training on how to work with an interpreter.

It is not uncommon that prisoners are used to interpret for their fellow inmates. These will normally be untrained and non-professional interpreters.



The following problems could occur when using untrained or non-professional interpreters:

- Inaccurate messages
- Lack of familiarity with the agency vocabulary, system, concepts and procedures
- Bias and distortion
- No explanation of cultural differences
- Collusion
- Lack of trust
- Exploitation

(Source: Adapted from Draft Communication Guidance interpreting and Translation Service, Accessing interpretation and Translation Services Staff Guidance)

The difference between an interpreter and a translator

A **translator** translates written material from one language to another.

An **interpreter** works orally translating back and forth between two or more individuals. Whilst it is usual for the service to be offered “in person”, there are examples of the service being delivered over the telephone. You need to agree with the interpreter that they will convey information verbatim and you need to agree how culturally sensitive information will be handled.



Some initial screening questions to find out about language needs

These are questions that could be asked during prison or probation assessment or induction.

- ✓ Is English your first language?
- ✓ Did you go to school in this country?
- ✓ Would you like support with your English language?
- ✓ Do you get help from family or friends with letters or forms?

- ✓ Can you always say what you want to say in English?

(source Final Report on ESOL good practice project. Browne Gary)

Finding out what support is available to assist offenders who have difficulty communicating in English

All offenders including Foreign National Offenders should be assessed for basic skills as described in the section about offenders with literacy difficulties.

You will need to find out if ESOL screening is available and how to refer offenders for assessment.

At the pre sentence stage consider adapting and delivering accredited group work content one to one.

9. Sensory difficulties

People who are blind or visually impaired may have difficulty accessing information in written format. People who are deaf or hard of hearing may have difficulty accessing information that is conveyed verbally.

9.1. Deafness or hard of hearing

Hearing can be lost in a number of ways:

- Some people are deaf from birth.
- Some people gradually lose their hearing as they get older.
- Some lose their hearing suddenly through illness or accident.

Dependent on the level of hearing loss, people will have different needs:

- Some people with a mild hearing loss might use a hearing aid or find lip-reading helpful.
- People with moderate hearing loss will have difficulty hearing what is said without a hearing aid and may not hear particularly somewhere noisy.
- People who are severely deaf may have difficulty following what is being said even with a hearing aid. Many lip-read and some use sign language or speech-to-text.
- Some, but not all, people who are profoundly deaf may find that hearing aids are of little benefit to them. They may use sign language, speech-to-text or lip-reading.



Suggestions to help you communicate with someone who is deaf or hard of hearing and how to make it easier for someone to lip-read you:

- ✓ Find a suitable environment with good lighting, away from noise and distractions.
- ✓ Sit or stand at the same level as the person, and three to six feet away (one to two metres).
- ✓ If possible make sure the light is on your face and not behind you and try to keep your hands away from your mouth.
- ✓ Make sure the person is looking at you before you speak.
- ✓ Introduce the topic of conversation.

- ✓ Speak clearly at a moderate pace without raising your voice or over-emphasising your speech. Speaking too loudly can distort your speech.
- ✓ Do not speak with anything in your mouth.
- ✓ Use natural facial expressions, gestures and body language.
- ✓ Keep your face visible. Do not put your hands near it or wear sunglasses - and do not turn away while you are talking.
- ✓ Use plain English and repeat or rephrase something if the person finds it difficult to follow.
- ✓ Check that the person can follow you
- ✓ Do not be afraid to write things down if you cannot make yourself understood.
- ✓ Do not presume that if a person is wearing a hearing aid that they can hear perfectly.
- ✓ Never say “it doesn’t matter” when asked to repeat anything.
- ✓ Even if an interpreter is present always address the deaf person directly.
- ✓ When communicating via an interpreter do not speak too quickly and allow time for translation. Interpreters are very skilled but would appreciate this.
- ✓ Remember that even skilled lip readers often only get 1 in 3 words so make sure they have understood.
- ✓ Be patient and take time to communicate.

(Adapted: http://www.leedsdeafandblind.org.uk/sensory/sensory_deafness.asp)

9.2. Blindness and partial sight

Cataracts, glaucoma and age related macula degeneration are very common in older people. There are also a number of causes of blindness and visual difficulty in younger people.

The 2008 National Offender Management Service (NOMS) Equality Impact Assessment of the implementation of Offender Management highlighted that paperwork and documentation were not available in Braille.

Case Study

Peter is a partially sighted offender subject to a community penalty. His offender manager wanted to use exercises from Targets For Effective Change, an offending behaviour programme manual. She considered reading the worksheets out loud to him but realised that this may not suit his learning style. After some research she found out that the Royal National Institute of Blind People will produce documents in larger print. This was funded by the probation service.



Suggestions to help you communicate with someone who is blind or has partial sight

- ✓ Make sure that the person you are speaking to knows your name, who you are and that you are actually speaking to them. Blind people have embarrassing moments when they join in other conversations because it is not clear if they are being spoken to.
- ✓ Talk to a blind person as you would anyone else. Do not be afraid to say “see you later”.

- ✓ Always try to give clear instructions or directions when acting as a guide and describe what is happening and what is around them.
- ✓ A bowl of water should be available for guide dogs. When a guide dog is wearing a harness it is 'on duty' and should not be made a fuss of.
- ✓ Remember to say goodbye or let them know you are walking away when you leave a blind person so that they are not left talking to themselves.
- ✓ Red bands on a cane or dog harness indicate a hearing impairment as well.
- ✓ If offering a seat, place the person's hand on the back of the chair so that they can sit down themselves.
- ✓ If appropriate, place any items in front of the blind person and explain where they are in relation to their hands.
- ✓ If appropriate provide written information in Braille, large print or in audio format.

10. Thinking about support within your service

As noted earlier, the LSC has developed the Hidden Disabilities Questionnaire, which is a learning difficulties screening tool, which OLASS providers will be responsible for introducing. However, support for people with other forms of communication disabilities is very variable. It is important for you to find out what systems are in place within your service or establishment to identify possible learning disabilities or difficulties of offenders you work with, and to pick up on any issues identified through the Hidden Disabilities Questionnaire where this may be relevant to your work with that offender. Also support needs associated with any communication difficulty should be considered.

Checklists are tools to assist prison establishments and probation areas to identify what is already available. By identifying the gaps it is hoped that services will consider putting together an action plan to improve provision. Suggested checklists for you to use in evaluating your service are given in Section 6.

Section 3

**How do I communicate
more effectively?**

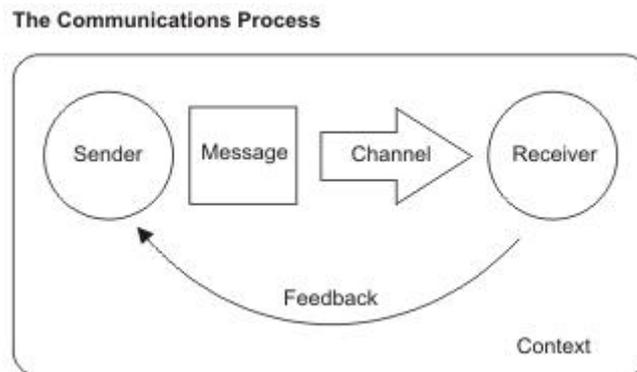
1. What happens when we communicate?

Communication is: “the passing on of information from one person to another using any means possible⁴.”

When we communicate with another person, we exchange our thoughts, messages or information by speech, signals, writing or behaviour.

Communication is all about the person you are communicating with.

Communication is a two way process.



The above communication process breaks down effective communication into the following steps⁵:

- Step 1 **Sender** - The sender or communicator is the person who sends the message.
- Step 2 **Message** – Communicating in speech, writing or symbols.
- Step 3 **Receiver** – The receiver is the person who receives the message and has to make sense of it, understand it or translate it into something that has meaning for them.
- Step 4 **Feedback** – Feedback is the reaction from the receiver. It can be verbal or non-verbal. Feedback allows the sender to know whether their message has been understood.

It is the sender’s responsibility to ensure that the message is understood. If the message or information is not received exactly, you have partial communication or no communication.

Partial and no communication can create confusion, misunderstanding and arguments between people.

⁴ Mencap’s definition of communication

⁵ Adapted from Community Partnerships for Adult Learning

2. Barriers to communication

At any point in the communication process a barrier can occur.

2.1. Internal barriers

- Poor listening skills
- Poor attitude toward sender or the information
- Lack of interest in the message
- Fatigue
- Fear
- Mistrust
- Past experiences
- Problems at home
- Lack of common experiences
- Negative emotions can create negative thoughts

2.2. External barriers

- Noise
- Distractions
- Bad telephone/mobile phone connections
- Time of day e.g. some people may perform better earlier in the day
- Sender using jargon
- Environment

Imagine these barriers on top of some of the communication difficulties that some people experience, as identified in Section 2 What does it mean to have a communication difficulty? Knowing how to communicate effectively will help in all communications and ensure that when one person communicates with another person the message is both received and understood.

3. Six Communication support principles that underpin good practice

The 6 communication support principles aim to set a general standard of good practice when working with any offender, who comes into contact with the criminal justice system.

To help you implement these principles it will help to ask yourself these two questions anytime you are preparing to communicate with an offender.



“If I had difficulty understanding, what would help? What would not help?”

“If I had difficulty expressing myself, what would help? What would not help?”

The 6 Communication Principles

Principle 1: Recognise that every community or group may include people with communication support needs.

Principle 2: Find out what support is required.

Principle 3: Match the way you communicate to the ways people understand.

Principle 4: Respond sensitively to all the ways an individual uses to express themselves.

Principle 5: Give people the opportunity to communicate to the best of their abilities.

Principle 6: Keep trying.



Principle 1. You recognise that every community or group may include people with communication needs by:

- ✓ Providing easier read versions of documents.
- ✓ Adopting a policy of using clear, simple verbal and written language and design. This will make it easier for offenders to access information and engage in programmes.
- ✓ Attend any training that develops your awareness of the needs of offenders with communication needs.
- ✓ Routinely ask offenders if they have communication support needs.



Principle 2. You find out what support is required by:

- ✓ Asking the offender (or their support worker, if they have one)
- ✓ How they prefer to communicate.
 - by the spoken word
 - by the written word
- ✓ Where and when they find communication easiest.
- ✓ Whether they like to be accompanied by someone.
- ✓ Whether they need specific support to:
 - understand what people say or write
 - express themselves verbally and/or in writing



Principle 3. You match the way you communicate to the ways offenders understand by:

- ✓ Using the person's name.
- ✓ Looking at the person.
- ✓ Making sure your face can be seen and your mouth is not covered.
- ✓ Giving people time to understand what you are saying.
- ✓ Using short, simple and clear sentences.

- ✓ Using open questions where possible (except with offenders with autism, where closed question should be used).
- ✓ Avoiding jargon (i.e. words that are not used every day) and explaining abbreviations.
- ✓ Slowing your speech down, speaking clearly and regularly summarising what is said.
- ✓ Matching the expression in your voice to what you are saying.
- ✓ Supporting what you are saying with gestures and facial expressions.
- ✓ Using photographs, drawings and symbols to illustrate what you are saying.
- ✓ Offering to write down key words as you talk.
- ✓ Offering audio/video recordings for people to take away with them.
- ✓ Finding out if people have understood.
- ✓ Being aware of your tone and body language.



Principle 4. You respond to all the ways an offender uses to express themselves by:

- ✓ Recognising and giving people time to use:
 - Body language, facial expressions and gestures
 - Signing
 - Speech
 - Picture boards or other communication aids
 - Sounds, such as laughing or groaning
 - Writing
 - Drawing
 - Pictures, photos, symbols or objects
- ✓ Checking you have understood correctly.
- ✓ Not attempting to speak or finish a sentence for the person you are speaking to.



Principle 5. You give offenders the opportunity to communicate to the best of their abilities by:

- ✓ **Adapting the environment by:**
 - Choosing a quiet space with minimum distractions.
 - Laying out the room so that people can see you and each other.
 - Having tables for people to put papers on.
 - Having clear signage.
- ✓ **Adapting the timing by:**
 - Sending out information in advance.
 - Considering a pre-meeting to help participants to prepare.
 - Scheduling meeting times to suit participants (where appropriate).
 - Ensuring the meeting/session does not go on too long. Some people can only concentrate and communicate for short periods at a time.
 - Allowing plenty of time for people to:
 - Understand what is being said.
 - Read and understand any written information you circulate.
 - If time is an issue, identifying other people who could also offer support, for example, education providers or volunteer mentors.
- ✓ **Adopting a positive communication style by:**
 - Using a positive and encouraging manner.

- Not showing impatience or putting pressure on people.
- Avoiding hogging the conversation.



Principle 6. Keep trying

- ✓ Remember that communication is important in building relationships with people.
- ✓ Don't worry about not getting it right all the time.
- ✓ Be creative.
- ✓ Ask people what they think.
- ✓ Ask for support.
- ✓ Be ready to change.

(These 6 communication support principles were developed by Communication Forum Scotland's Civic Participation Network project, funded by the Scottish Government www.communicationforumsotland.org.uk)



4. How do you ask questions in a way that makes it easier for people to respond?



How to make it easier for people to answer your questions

When we communicate with each other, we use questions all the time. For example:

- 'Do you have anything you want to say?'
- 'What do you mean by that?'

The way a question is asked may affect whether someone can:

- Tell you what they think.
- Give you the information you require.

There are generally two ways of asking questions either open or closed questions. These are discussed below in further detail.

4.1. Open questions

An open question cannot be answered with just 'yes' or 'no'. For example:

- 'What do you think about the point Mr. Smith just made?'

The person who answers can give as much or as little information as they want or are able to.

4.2. Closed questions

A closed question can be answered with 'yes' or 'no'. For example:

- 'Do you agree with the point Mr. Smith just made?'

Some people with communication support needs will find closed questions easier to understand and answer.

Closed questions focus on one piece of information at a time. They offer a clear choice. They can be answered with a single word. If only 'yes' or 'no' is required, the answer can be given:

- Verbally
- With a shake or nod of the head
- By pointing to a word or symbol written on a piece of paper.

4.3. Questions offering two alternatives

Questions can also be easier to answer if just two alternatives are given at one time. For example:

- 'Do you want to sit by the window or the door?'

Just by changing the way you ask a question, you can enable an individual to take a more active role in a variety of situations.

4.4. Examples of open and closed questions

Below are some examples of open and closed questions⁶ you can use in a variety of situations, including:

- on the telephone
- face to face
- In written or online documents.

Open:	'When shall we arrange your next appointment?'
Closed:	We can meet again on Thursday. Is that OK? I can ring at 3 o'clock. Is that OK?

Open:	What special requirements do you have?
Closed:	Do you need help finding the meeting room? Do you need a pen and paper?

Open:	What is the problem?
Closed:	Do you have a problem with your health?

Open:	How would you like the session to be recorded?
Closed:	Would you like the session recorded in writing? Would you like the session recorded on tape?

Open:	What did you think about today?
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⁶ Adapted from the Civic Participation Network Project, Communication Scotland Toolkit

Closed:	Did the session go on for too long? Did you understand what was said?
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Open:	What do you think about arranging another meeting?
-------	--

Closed:	Shall we meet again next Month? Would you like to meet here?
---------	--

Open:	What issues concern you?
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Closed:	Are you concerned about getting a job? Are you worried about where you are going to live? Are you worried about your children?
---------	--

Open:	What court did you attend?
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Closed:	Did you attend (name of court)?
---------	---------------------------------

Open:	Which documents did you bring with you?
-------	---

Closed:	Did you bring a letter from your employer?
---------	--

Section 4



**How do I make
information easier to
read and understand?**

1. How do I make information easier to read and understand?

Most of the information that offenders need to know whether in prison or subject to a community order will be in a written format. This includes written notices, official forms, leaflets, educational material, court reports, parole documents and so forth. By making information more accessible, that is easier to read and understand, you give people a better chance of succeeding through their sentences.

Easy read documents benefit everyone. It is not only more accessible to people who have learning disabilities but will make information easier to understand for people who rely on information being translated for them.

There are a number of specialist organisations including Mencap, People First and Skillnet Group, who produce guidance on how to create easier read information. The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists also advises on how to make information easy to read from people with communication disabilities. The Plain English Campaign advises official organisations and government departments produce clear and concise information in plain English.

We are grateful to The Skillnet Group for their assistance in creating the following easier read examples of documents demonstrated in this toolkit:

- Example of an easy read Reporting Instructions letter
- Example of an easy read Final Warning letter
- Example of an easy read Prison General Application Form
- Example of an easy read Offender Self-Assessment Form
- Example of an easy read Offender Management letter – prison to offender



Minimum Standards for Accessible Writing

Mencap has produced some very good guidelines on accessible writing. (Am I Making Myself Clear? March 2000).

People First have also produced a guide. (Access First – A guide on how to give written information for people with learning difficulties).

The following standards refer specifically to the Skillnet Group (an advocacy organisation supporting people with learning disabilities).

Font:

- Preferably Comic Sans.
- Alternatively use Arial or Tahoma – fonts that are clear and easy to read
- Minimal use of *italics*, underline, or **bold**
- Use a minimum font size of point 12. If your audience is mainly people with a learning difficulty then the font size should be at point 16.

Space:

Use the space well. Try to space paragraphs according to different subjects. Have clear spaces between each topic.

White space refers to the amount of background on a document. It does not mean that the background must be white; rather it is free from visual information. Pages that look too 'busy' will put most people with learning difficulties off before they start reading.

Try using different coloured backgrounds – for example some people with visual impairments find white text on a black background easier to read.

Do use:

Text Boxes for summarising key points

- Bullet Points.

Do not use:

- CAPITALS unless they are needed for names or at the beginning of sentences etc.
- Too much punctuation, for example - , ; ; ! ”
- Long sentences with no breaks.

Graphics:

- Use pictures, photographs and some symbols. Make sure pictures and photos explain the text and are not just there to make it 'look' accessible.
- Do not simply use widget software throughout a document as this only makes writing look messy and more complicated.

- If using symbols make sure they are relevant and understood by your audience. Simply adding a line of widget symbols does not make a document easy to understand.
- For more information about widget contact: www.widget.com

Avoid:

- Jargon.
- Abbreviations (DPG, PCP, ILP).
- Acronyms (UNICEF, FACE – abbreviations that sound like real words).
- Over-complicated words and complex language (for example clichés and metaphors).

Do:

- ✓ Keep to the point.
- ✓ Always check with your audience that they understand.
- ✓ It is always best to involve people with a learning difficulty when you are producing material.

Think about using other formats depending on your audience. For example:

- Audio-tape.
- Video-tape, DVD, CD Rom.
- Objects of Reference – actual objects that may remind people of things.
- Other sensory stimuli – e.g. smells, tactile objects etc.

Skillnet Group review Date: July 2009

Example of an easy read reporting instructions letter following sentence (Skillnet Group)

Name		Date of Birth	
Where to go		Date	
Your punishment			

Today you have been given a *Community Order* because you committed the following offence: (enter the offence).

The *Community order* has requirements (things you have to do for your punishment).

You will need to have a meeting to talk about this.



Day and date of your meeting	Time of your meeting	Office where your meeting will take place	The Officer you will meet

You are not allowed to bring children to the meeting.



You are not allowed to bring dogs.



Guide dogs are allowed.

You must switch your mobile phone off/silent



If you miss this meeting you will be taken back to court and be re-sentenced. (You will get a worse punishment)

If you get benefits bring 1 of these things with you:

- Payment Book
- Signing on card (ES40)
- Recent benefits letter with your address on it.



If you have a job you need to bring a:

- Pay slip
- Letter from your employer (boss)

I agree that I have understood and been given a copy of this form.

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Date:

Example of an easy read Final Warning letter (Skillnet Group)

This is your Final Warning Letter

Dear

You have been given this **Final Warning** because you did not come to your meeting at (insert Venue).



The date of your meeting was (insert date).



The time of your meeting was



Your Court Order says that:

- You must attend (go to) (insert venue)
- If you can not go you must have a good reason.

You have not given a good reason for not going to your meeting.

This is why you have this letter.



If you have a good reason for not coming, please tell us.

We can then take away this final warning.



If you miss your next meeting you will go back to court for:

- Breaking the rules of your Court Order
- To be re-sentenced (You may get a worse punishment)



Your next meeting is at (insert venue)



Date:



Time:



Yours Sincerely

Example of an easy read Prison General Application Form (Skillnet Group)

Prison Application Form for Your Issues and concerns



Please fill in this form to explain any problems you have.

Your Name:	
Prison Number	
Your Location	

Tick the box of the person you want to help with your problem.



Please tick just 1 box and write about 1 thing.

Bail / Legal	<input type="checkbox"/>	CARATs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Chapel	<input type="checkbox"/>
Education	<input type="checkbox"/>	Employment	<input type="checkbox"/>	Finance	<input type="checkbox"/>
HB SO/PO	<input type="checkbox"/>	I.A.G	<input type="checkbox"/>	Lifers	<input type="checkbox"/>
O.C.A	<input type="checkbox"/>	O.M.U	<input type="checkbox"/>	Parole Clerk	<input type="checkbox"/>
Probation	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pin Clerk	<input type="checkbox"/>	Reception	<input type="checkbox"/>
Custody	<input type="checkbox"/>	Foreign Nationals	<input type="checkbox"/>	Library	<input type="checkbox"/>
P/monies	<input type="checkbox"/>	Security	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Please write about 1 issue or concern in this box:



Once filled in please hand into your Spur office.

Offender self assessment

Please complete this form



Name		Case reference number	
Age		Address	

Please tick the box



Did you need support to complete this form?	Yes		No	
Date you completed this form				

- Please read the questions below
- Tick the correct box



Are any of these a problem for you?	Is this problem linked to you offending?			
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Finding a good place to live 				
Understanding other people's feelings 				
Keeping to my plans 				

	Yes	No	Yes	No
Speaking to people who set rules 				
Gambling 				
Mixing with others who get in trouble 				
Being bored 				
Being lonely  				
Going to places which can lead me in to trouble 				
Taking drugs 				
Drinking too much alcohol 				
Losing my temper 				
Doing things without thinking 				
Repeating the same mistakes  				

		Yes	No	Yes	No
Getting violent when annoyed					
Reading					
Writing and Spelling	abcd efg				
Numbers					
Getting qualifications/ passing exams					
Getting a job					
Keeping a job					
Managing money, dealing with debts					
Getting on with my husband/wife/partner					
Looking after my children					

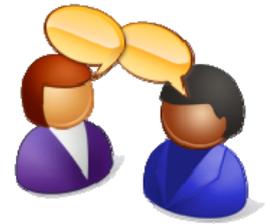
		Yes	No	Yes	No
Worrying about things					
Making good decisions					
Feeling depressed					
Feeling stressed					
Not having a partner					

Do you think you are likely to offend in the future?	
Definitely not	
Unlikely	
Quite likely	
Very likely	
If you answered quite likely or very likely, why do you think this?	
Any other comments:	

Who will support you with your Sentence Plan?

Name	
Prison Number	
Prison Location	
PNC Number	

Your Offender Manager is a person who will make sure you have someone to support you to follow your Sentence Plan.



Your Offender Manager's name is:

His/her address is:

Your Offender Supervisor is the person who will support you to follow your Sentence Plan.



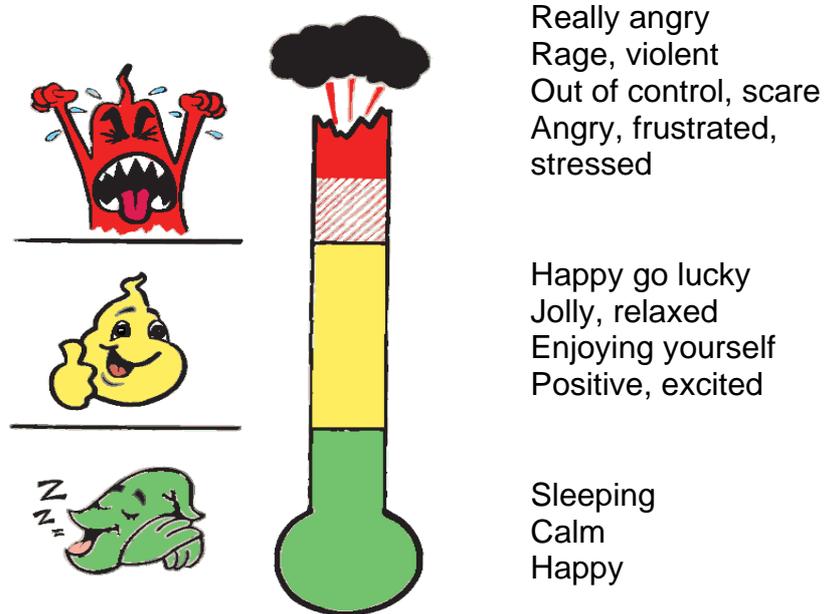
Your Offender Supervisor's name is:

His/her contact details are:

Date this letter was sent:

How to use images to represent feelings

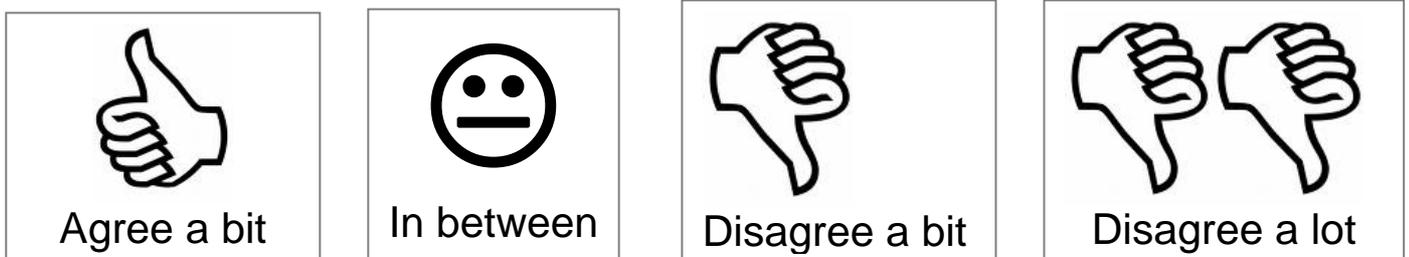
1. Anger thermometer



The anger thermometer is a visual scale to enable someone to express their emotions. People are encouraged to point to where they were on the scale when a particular event occurred. This technique is interactive and participative. This allows comparisons to be made between events and promotes discussion about how the person felt and behaved. It can be useful to develop the descriptions and drawings with the individual to personalise the scale to them and to develop an understanding of how quickly their anger escalates.

[Adapted from a tool used by the Kent adapted Sex Offender Treatment Programme. Original source: Anger Treatment for People with Developmental Disabilities – A Theory, Evidence and Manual Based Approach (8 April 2005) John L. Taylor and Raymond W. Novaco]

2. Images that could be used to replace text in evaluation forms



Difficult probation words

Empathy - To be able to sense and understand someone else's feelings as if they were your own.

Compliance - Following the rules that have been set for you.

Disinhibitor - Not being able to control your actions.

Mediation - Being supported to sort out an argument or disagreement by someone who was not involved.

Reparation - Putting things right that you have done wrong.

Offending - When you break a law or rule.

Victim - A person that suffers harm by another person for no reason.

Breach - When you break a law or rules you have promised to keep.

Induction - When you are new to a place and are shown how things work.

Self Certification - To fill in a form yourself to say you missed an appointment because you were sick.

Reflect - Looking back on what you have done and how it has affected yourself and others.

Offence Focus - Looking into what crime you committed and why.

Impulsive - Doing something without thinking about what may happen.

Intervention - When someone steps into a situation to try and changes what is happening.

Motivation - To give someone encouragement to do something.

Consequential Thinking - To think of different things that might happen in certain situations.

Enhancement - To make things better.

Section 5

**What resources and
information are
available?**

1. Some useful Organisations

Skillnet Group

The Skillnet Group is a not-for-profit organisation working with people with learning difficulties and learning disabilities. They provide a range of support including self advocacy, ASDAN and NIACE awards and qualifications, person centred planning , G.P training, maths and money skills, computers and ICT.

Floor 2, Maybrook House
Queen's Gardens
Dover, Kent CT17 9AH

Website: www.skillnetgroup.co.uk
Telephone: 01304 242 316
Email: info@skillnetgroup.co.uk

Mencap

Best known campaigning and support organisation for people with learning disabilities.

England
123 Golden Lane
London EC1Y 0RT

Website: www.mencap.org.uk
Telephone: 020 7454 0454
Fax: 020 7608 3254
Email: help@mencap.org.uk

The Signalong Group

Is a sign supported communication system based on British Sign Language. It is designed to help people with communication difficulties mostly associated with learning disabilities.

Stratford House,
Waterside Court
Rochester, Kent ME2 4NZ

Website: www.signalong.org.uk
Telephone: 0845 4508422
Email: info@signalong.org.uk

Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists is the professional body for speech and language therapists and support workers. We promote provide information on communication difficulties and the impact of these for people in the criminal justice pathway. Out SLTs work in the justice pathway and provide training.

2 White Hard Yard
London
Se1 1nx

Website: www.rcslt.org
Telephone: 020 7378 3000
Email: info@rcslt.org

Prison Reform Trust

The Prison Reform Trust is an independent charity. The charity undertakes research into prison regimes and provide advice and support to prisoners and their families.

15 Northburgh Street
London EC1V 0JR

Website: www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk
Telephone: 020 7251 5070

British Institute of Learning Disabilities

Source of information, particularly around challenging behaviour.

Campion House, Green Street
Kidderminster, Worcestershire
DY10 1JL

Website: www.bild.org.uk

Valuing People Support Team

Has lots of information about what's happening in the sector plus some resources.

London Office
Wellington House, 3rd Floor,
Room 313,
133-155 Waterloo Road
London SE1 8UG

Website: www.valuingpeople.gov.uk
Email: valuing.people.info@dh.gsi.gov.uk

Other regions:

Yorkshire and the Humber
North East
North West
South West

East Midlands
West Midlands
Eastern
South East

VOICE UK

Supports people with learning disabilities and other vulnerable people who have experienced crime or abuse.

Rooms 100-106
Kelvin House
RTC Business Centre
London Road
DERBY DE24 8UP

Website: www.voiceuk.org.uk
Telephone: Phone: 01332 291042
Fax: 01332 207567
Email: voice@voiceuk.org.uk

British Dyslexia Association

Is an organisation that aims to make society dyslexia friendly and help dyslexic people reach their full potential.

Unit 8, Bracknell Beeches
Old Bracknell Lane
Bracknell RG12 7BW

Website: www.bdadyslexia.org.uk
Helpline: 0845 251 9002
Telephone: 0845 251 9003
Fax: 0845 251 9005

Dyspraxia Foundation

Supports individuals and families affected by developmental dyspraxia.

8 West Alley
Hitchin
Herts SG5 1EG

Website: www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk
Helpline: 01462 454 986
Admin: 01462 455 016

National Autistic Society

Offers a wide range of services for children and adults with an autism spectrum disorder and their families in England. Includes UK-wide Autism Services Directory, professional research tools, and an online shop selling books, leaflets, DVDs and CD-ROMs.

Autism Helpline
National Autistic Society
393 City Road
London
EC1V 1NG

Website: www.nas.org.uk
Telephone: 0845 070 4004

Royal National Institute for the blind (RNIB)

The RNIB is the UK's leading charity offering information, support and advice to people with sight problems.

RNIB
105 Judd Street
London
WC1H 9NE

Website: www.rnib.org.uk
Helpline: 0303 123 9999
Telephone: 020 7388 1266
Fax: 020 7388 2034

Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID)

The RNID is the largest charity offering services to deaf and hard of hearing people in the UK.

RNID
19-23 Featherstone Street
London
EC1Y 8SL

Website: www.rnid.org.uk
Telephone: 020 7296 8000
Textphone: 020 7296 8001
Fax: 020 7296 8199

2. Some useful publications**Positive Practice Positive Outcomes**

A handbook for Professionals in the Criminal Justice System working with Offenders with Learning Disabilities. Feb 2007

Care Services Improvement Partnership (CSIP) national programmes Health and Social Care in Criminal Justice and Valuing People Support Team
Written by Neisha Betts and Barbara Zammit

Can be downloaded free from a variety of sites including:
<http://kc.csip.org.uk/viewresource.php?action=viewdocument&doc=98519&grp=1>

Speaking out: Young offenders with communication difficulties

RCSLT briefing, 2008

This can be downloaded from http://www.rcslt.org/government/RCSLT_-_young_offenders_with_communication_difficulties_briefing.pdf

Meeting the speech language and communication needs of vulnerable young people

A model of service delivery for those at risk of offending or re-offending. This document was produced to influence the Bercow review of speech language and communication

A copy can be downloaded from the website

http://www.rcslt.org/government/young_offenders

Prisoners Voices: Experiences of the criminal justice system by prisoners with learning disabilities and Learning difficulties

This is the report and final recommendations of the No One Knows UK wide programme led by The Prison Reform Trust. Written by Jenny Talbot.

Copies of the report can be downloaded from the Prison Reform Trust website.

<http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk>

Identifying and supporting prisoners with learning disabilities and learning disabilities: the views of prison staff

No One Knows UK wide programme led by The Prison Reform Trust. Written by Jenny Talbot. Website: <http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk>

Autism: A guide for criminal justice professionals.

The guide provides background information about autistic spectrum disorders. A copy can be downloaded from this website <http://www.autism.org.uk>

Reaching All An inclusive learning handbook for Prisons and Young Offender Institutes.

This handbook looks at the wide range of disabilities and learning difficulties that prisoners can experience.

Department for Education and Skills. 2003
<http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/>

Straight Talking: Citizenship and Offender Learning.

Provides information and advice on how to introduce citizenship to young offenders.

The Disability Communication Guide. A guide produced by The Employer's Forum on disability.

It is a quick reference guide that helps staff communicate with disabled people with advice on language and etiquette, preferred modes of assistance and how to avoid attitudes and behaviours which can create misunderstandings and barriers. It can be customised with your organisation's logo or licensed for use on your intranet site. More information on their website: www.efd.org.uk/publications/disability-communication-guide

Foreign National Prisoners Resource Packs.

Available on the HM Prison website at <http://www.hmprisonerservice.gov.uk>
The pack in 23 different languages can be downloaded from this site.

Straight Talking: Citizenship and Offender Learning.

Provides information and advice on how to introduce citizenship to young offenders.

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Foreign National Prisoners Resource Packs.

Available on the HM Prison website <http://www.hmprisonerservice.gov.uk>.
The pack in 23 different languages can be downloaded from this site.

Talk for Scotland: A practical toolkit for engaging with people with communication needs.

Produced by Communication Forum Scotland with funding from the Scottish Government. Available free on www.communicationforumscotland.org.uk

3. Local Resources

This space is for you to add information about any local resources.

Section 6

Service checklists

6. Service checklists

The following checklists are tools to assist prison establishments and probation areas to identify what is already available. By identifying the gaps it is hoped that services will consider putting together an action plan to improve provision.



1. Checklist for Prison Staff

	Yes	No	Action
Is there a way of screening prisoners to identify possible learning disabilities or difficulties on arrival into prison?			
Are information sharing protocols in place, including with healthcare and education, to ensure that appropriate information is shared for the benefit of the prisoner?			
Is prison information and are prison forms accessible, for example 'easy read'?			
Are arrangements in place to support prisoners unable to read and/or write?			
Is the prison regime accessible to all prisoners?			
Are adapted accredited cognitive skills programmes available?			
Are there links with local adult social services and learning disability services?			
Are adult social services alerted at least 12 weeks in advance prior to a prisoner with learning disabilities leaving prison?			
Do prison staff undertake awareness training on learning disabilities / difficulties?			
Are there good links with your local Learning Disability Partnership Board for help with clients with learning disabilities?			
Prisoner learning: Are staff qualified in special educational needs and does provision match the population profile of prisoners? Do staff have ready access to a dyslexia specialist?			
Prisoner learning: Are shared strategies in place with prison staff to help prisoners unable to read and write very well to cope better with reading prison information and filling in prison forms?			
Are staff provided with a matrix clearly stating what support is available and the referral process?			
Are copies of Positive Practice Positive Outcomes readily available?			



2. Checklist for Probation Staff

	Yes	No	Action
Do you have a system of screening to find out whether an offender has learning disabilities or learning difficulties?			
Do you have effective information sharing protocols in place with, for example, prison, young offender teams, courts?			
Is information accessible, for example 'easy read'?			
Are arrangements in place for offenders unable to read any written information or to write?			
Are adapted accredited cognitive skills programmes available?			
Are there good links with your local community learning disability service for help with clients with learning disabilities?			
Are adult services alerted at least 12 weeks in advance prior to a prisoner with learning disabilities leaving prison?			
Do probation staff undertake awareness training on learning disabilities/difficulties?			
Offender learning: Are assessment procedures, inclusive learning and additional learning support readily available?			
Are there good links with your local Disability Partnership Board?			
Is action being undertaken to ensure that all activities and opportunities are accessible to all clients?			
Are staff provided with a matrix clearly stating what support is available and the referral process?			
Are copies of Positive Practice Positive Outcomes readily available?			