Provider Information
Leaflets

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Introduction

This publication has been produced for OLASS providers working with offenders in custody with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. It reminds providers of their duties towards those learners under the Disability Discrimination Act; it gives examples from prisons and young offender institutions (YOI) who are already seeking to meet needs; and it suggests sources of further information.

To accompany this publication, there is an “Offender Learner Leaflet” which aims to support learners with learning difficulties and disabilities to understand their rights and empower them to seek the support they need.

The structure of the publication is as follows:

- What legislation covers disability and education
- Listening to Learners
- Assessment
- Responding to support requirements
- Modifying Curriculum design and delivery to develop inclusion
- Measuring Success
- Moving On
- Disability and Ethnicity

Each of these is ‘free standing’ so can be read on its own – read together the sections follow the key stages of the learner journey.

Many committed and experienced staff in prisons and YOIs have contributed generously to this publication. Their work is testament to the fact that there is some good quality provision and support for these learners – however it is also clear that such provision is patchy and can be fragile. One of the challenges that face the LSC and providers is to ensure that effective practice is shared more widely and that information about resources and training opportunities are made available.

In some ways the DDA issues for providers in an offender setting are similar to those encountered by all other providers:

- the need not to discriminate
- the need to provide appropriate adjustments to enable access to education.

However there are also ways in which the approach is different and more challenging:

- the brief time offenders might be with a provider
- the difficulties in accessing information and data
- the complexity of offender needs
- the difficulties with a holistic approach in a custodial setting

Whatever these challenges, it is important that those with learning difficulties and disabilities in prisons are not treated less well in the delivery of education
and other services than their non disabled peers. It was disturbing to hear of learners with sensory or physical impairments being turned away because of poor access and lack of facilities – equally it was heartening to hear from sites which had gone to great lengths to ensure such access.

The basic skills agenda has had a huge impact, and awareness of dyslexia is particularly high. Many concerns were expressed however that this profile could actually mask other types of learning difficulty. It was also of concern that the advent of the dyslexia specialist had led some providers to believe that without such input little support could or indeed should be offered. The publication shows that many steps can and should be taken even where resources may not involve specialist provision.

There are also major issues in relation to learners with less overt disabilities - mental health difficulties, ADHD, poor concentration etc. Providers need to be clear about how to assess the requirements of these learners and to ensure that curriculum delivery allows them to access the curriculum and make the most of their learning opportunities. Learners with these difficulties will often require a multi disciplinary response. While there are excellent examples of a holistic integrated approach, particularly with health, this is not widespread and in some areas no relationship exists.

Another concern expressed to us was that the emphasis on the terms ‘learning difficulty and disability' were not always helpful to those working within prisons and YOIs. Learners in these organisations often experience a range of diverse difficulties with learning that cannot be neatly encapsulated within a ‘disability' label. Education providers spoke of the importance of focusing above all on creating an inclusive approach for all learners rather than simply attempting to address specific requirements of those with identifiable learning difficulties or disabilities.

Our thanks go to staff and learners in prisons who responded to questionnaire, who were interviewed by phone and who took part in group discussions. We particularly want to thank those prisons and YOIs whose examples of good and interesting practice we have recorded in the leaflets although we also acknowledge that good practice is not limited to these organisations and that many other prisons and YOIs are taking part in similar, exciting developments.
Disability and Education Legislation

What legislations covers disability and education?

The major piece of disability legislation in the UK is the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The original 1995 Act gave disabled people a general right not to be discriminated against and covered employment rights (Part 2). In 1997 the Act was extended to cover Goods and Services (Part 3) and in 2001 the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) brought education under the Disability Discrimination Act as Part 4. In 2005 the DDA was further amended. The definition of disability was widened and all public bodies (which includes the Prison Service) were given a General Duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote equal opportunities for disabled people. In addition certain bodies, including the LSC and further education colleges, have specific duties which require them to produce a Disability Equality Scheme. This must be drawn up with the active involvement of disabled people; it must set out how they will assess the impact of their proposed activities on disabled people; be accompanied by a three year action plan which must be reviewed every year. The 2005 amendments also brought general examination bodies under the DDA.

In addition to this the Learning and Skills Council under the Learning and Skills Act (2000) has a duty to promote equality of opportunity between disabled and non-disabled learners.

The appended table (Appendix 1, Rights and Duties by Offender Age Group) summarises legislation, Code of Practices and Prison Service Orders by age group relating to offender learners.

What learners are we talking about?

DDA Part 4 (Education) describes disabled learners as those who have ‘a physical or mental impairment which has substantial and long term adverse affect on your ability to carry out normal day to day activities’. This includes a wide range of individuals and can include people with physical and sensory disabilities, some people with learning difficulties and specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, people with mental health difficulties and those with long standing disabling health conditions. In the 2005 amendment the DDA definition of disability has been considerably broadened. Previously mental health difficulties had to be ‘clinically well recognised’ but this qualification has now been removed. In addition to this, conditions such as cancer, HIV and multiple sclerosis are now covered from the point of diagnosis, i.e. before they might have an affect on day-to-day activities.

The Learning and Skills Act has an even broader definition of disability than that covered by the DDA as it covers those learners who have ‘a significantly greater difficulty in learning than others of his or her
‘age’. This definition covers those people who have social barriers to learning and may include a large number of offenders.

What if a learner does not tell us that he or she has a disability?

Some disabilities are visible, however, many are unseen, for example, dyslexia, mental health difficulties, certain health conditions. Many learners who might fall under the definitions mentioned above may not see themselves as having a ‘disability’. Their particular difficulty might never have been diagnosed; they may come from a culture where a certain condition is not recognised, they might feel that their particular condition is just a part of them and understandably might not want to be given a disability label. It is therefore very important not simply to focus on whether or not a learner has a particular condition but to adopt a wider person centred approach which looks at the particular blocks to learning an individual might have and what adaptations might best support him or her.

DDA Part 4 is clear that if a learner has been given the opportunity to disclose a particular disability or difficulty and has chosen not to then the educational provider is not liable for not having offered them requisite support. However, it is also clear that there is a need to be supportive and provide ongoing opportunities for disclosure, not simply a written yes/no question on a form at the beginning of their learning programme.

Can we share information that a learner might have given us with other staff?

The DDA states that information about a learner’s disability and the arrangements which must be put in place for support should be shared with other staff who might be teaching that learner. This applies to both juveniles (under the age of 16 years old) and adults. Learner should not have to renegotiate support needs with every different member of staff who might teach them. However, the passing on of this information should only be done with the active consent of the learner. Under the Data Protection Act you have a duty not to share sensitive personal information without the active consent of the individual provided this does not contravene your ‘duty of care’. You also need to discuss with the learner what information might be usefully shared and what does not need to be passed on.

What duties do we as educational providers actually have towards disabled learners?

Under DDA Part 4 you have two major duties towards disabled learners. These are:
Offender Learning and Skills Directorate
Guidance for LSC Providers staff in the LSC Offender Learning and Skills Service

- Not to treat a disabled learner less favourably for a reason related to their disability

- To provide reasonable adjustments when a disabled learner is likely to be at a substantial disadvantage in relation to a learner who is not disabled

Does not treating a disabled learner less favourably mean that we have to treat all learners in the same way?

No. Ensuring equality is not the same as equal treatment. Some learners, because of their disability or learning difficulty, will require different approaches from others. Some will require additional support. Your aim should be not necessarily to treat all learners identically but to ensure that they all have an equal opportunity to access learning.

What might constitute a reasonable adjustment?

Reasonable adjustments can take a huge variety of forms depending on the nature of the individual’s disability or difficulty and the nature of the class you are teaching.

Some might require changes to physical infrastructure – for example ensuring your room is arranged so it is easy for a disabled learner to move from one place to another or organising special seating for a learner with chronic back pain. Ideally organisations should be working towards a situation where all buildings are accessible to all learners but in the interim a reasonable adjustment for a learner who cannot climb stairs might be to relocate a class to a ground floor room. For example at HMP Hewell Grange, all ground floor classrooms have been redesigned and equipped to replicate facilities on the upper floors.

Many reasonable adjustments require changes to the content and delivery of your teaching and a flexible approach which can accommodate to different learning requirements in the same class, for instance, adapting a particular exercise so it is understandable for a learner with a learning difficulty or organising your session into smaller units in order to accommodate to the short attention span of learners with mental health difficulties. Examples of such practice in offender organisations include:

- HMP Nottingham where peripatetic staff work on the wings with individual learners who have very short concentration span sometimes for as little as 20 minutes at a time. One learner said – ‘My head is shot to bits – I can’t cope in a classroom but I can manage 1:1 for a short time’.
- HMP Camp Hill where there are special classes on the wings for those who are heavily medicated
- HMP YOI Hindley where there are two classes on the residential wings with a
regular teacher and LSAs who carry out a three week programme designed to develop self esteem and address individual needs at a time of vulnerability. The aim is to return people to vocational education once the crisis has reduced.

Some adjustments require adaptation of materials and many prisons reported for example ensuring handouts are printed in a larger font for a learner who is partially sighted or having different coloured overlays if that is what best suits a particular dyslexic learner.

Others require additional personnel, for example an interpreter for a profoundly deaf learner or the services of someone to transcribe text for a visually impaired learner. Many prisons can provide the support of someone trained in dyslexia either to give individual learner support or in order to help you plan the most appropriate approach for your dyslexic learners.

Many examples of reasonable adjustments are given in the DDA Part 4 Code of Practice. However, it is important to recognise that there is no neat checklist of what adjustment will be required by all learners with a particular disability as the way in which the disability affects an individual and the consequent support required is likely to differ.

It is also important to realise that adjustments for disabled learners in many cases do not require either expensive adaptations or special expertise. Of course there are times when that is the case, but in many instances quite small changes can make big differences to individuals.

What if a learner refuses to accept a particular adjustment I feel they need?

Some learners might feel embarrassed about their disability and not want it publicly acknowledged – for example a learner who is partially sighted might not want large print handouts as he feels they make him stand out from others in the class. You need to discuss with the learners the benefits of the adjustment and also whether there might be alternative, less obtrusive ways of him being given support. However, ultimately it is up to the individual learner whether or not they make use of an offered adjustment.

What if other learners complain that a disabled learner is getting more attention than them?

Some prisons say that learners can become jealous of others appearing to get more attention. Equally learners can be embarrassed at receiving special attention. As was said above enabling equal access does not necessarily mean treating people identically. You will need to explain this to other learners so that they recognise why particular learners might be having certain
adjustments made for them. Some practitioners report that the use of peer mentors helps lower the visible profile of support for learners who are embarrassed at being singled out for additional teaching.

**What about when a disabled learner is having a negative affect on the learning of others in the class?**

There can be times when certain disabilities, for example some mental health difficulties or autistic spectrum disorders, can cause an individual to behave inappropriately or aggressively. A reasonable adjustment for such learners might be to acknowledge this and develop, with the learner, strategies for dealing with it. For example, Stoke Heath YOI, when working with an autistic learner who can become very agitated, has developed a simple Traffic Light system to help him to recognise and communicate his emotional state to others. The learner has a red, yellow and green card and if he feels he is becoming agitated he changes the card on his table to a yellow or red one so that the teacher can be aware of this and allow him to go to a quiet part of the room to cool off. The system allows him to go straight to the re-focussing or inclusion area immediately for 10 minutes without the need for discussion.

However, it is also important to remember that having rights under the DDA does not exonerate a learner from general classroom rules of behaviour or from disciplinary procedures. You have a duty to all your learners; not just to those with a disability.

**How do my duties under the DDA fit in with other initiatives, for example, Inclusive Learning, Personalised Learning or ensuring the learners I teach follow the guidelines laid down in the Offender’s Learning Journey?**

An Inclusive Learning approach, as described by John Tomlinson in the FEFC Committee’s report on post school learning for learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties, is described as a process in which the learning environment is shaped around the learner’s needs and aspirations, not the other way round. It seeks to ‘avoid a viewpoint which locates the difficulty or deficit within the student’ and ‘focus instead on the capacity of the educational institution to understand and respond to the individual learner’s requirements’.

Personalised learning or person centred approaches to learning, while not necessarily focussing solely on learners with disabilities and learning difficulties, also emphasise an approach whereby learning is based around individual’s needs and aspirations. Learning situations are created which respond to the learner rather than the learner having to fit into a pre-determined construct.

The DDA, on the other hand, is a legal Act which gives rights to disabled learners and duties to
providers. The rationale for this specific piece of legislation was that discriminatory attitudes and a lack of understanding of the requirements of disabled people were so embedded that specific legislation was needed in order to ensure that people with disabilities or learning difficulties had equal access to education. However, the DDA does not in itself describe the approach required for inclusion to occur. It is only if it is seen in the context of inclusive and personalised learning approaches that the rights which it gives to learners will be implemented.

Responding to the DDA does not simply require providers to focus on a learner’s disability or learning difficulty. Instead it demands a personalised approach to learning which recognises individual's disability related requirements alongside all their other learning needs and aspirations. Such a holistic approach is essential particularly in offender organisations where learners are likely to experience a complex range of needs which cannot be neatly encapsulated under the terms ‘disability or learning difficulty’.

Both Inclusive Learning and Personalised Learning will only occur when there is a consistent approach to learning across an organisation and a commitment to ensure quality standards at every stage of learning. The Offender’s Learning Journey documents seek to define this context for offender organisations by stating the aims of offender learning and the requirements expected of educational providers at every stage of the offender learner’s journey.

The other leaflets in this booklet seek to show how a person centred approach to learning can be developed which takes into account the requirements of the DDA while being situated within the framework of an Offender’s Learning Journey.

The appended table (Appendix 1, Rights and Duties by Offender Age Group) summarises legislation, Code of Practices and Prison Service Orders by age group relating to offender learners.

Further reading related to the DDA

DDA Part 4 Code of Practice post 16
This outlines education providers duties under the DDA Part 4 and gives many examples of what might or might not constitute a ‘reasonable adjustment’.


Offender Learning and Skills Directorate
Guidance for LSC Providers staff in the LSC Offender Learning and Skills Service

This LSC publication gives guidance on how to ensure disabled learners have the opportunity to disclose their disability within a confidential and supportive environment.
Listening to learners

Some disabilities and learning difficulties might be visible but many others, for example mental health difficulties or certain learning difficulties, are not immediately apparent. Learners who might have unseen disabilities will not be presenting themselves with a neat diagnostic label. In addition to this many learners in an offender context will have had negative experiences of learning or may have missed out on learning altogether. In this context you will not simply be dealing with a particular disability or learning difficulty but with the cumulative effects of ongoing difficulties with learning and past learning experiences. Teachers in custodial provision need to try and find ways to understand the complexity of individual learner’s attitudes towards learning. This requires developing skills in listening to what learners are telling you and building in opportunities to actively listen to all learners.

The other leaflets in this series look in greater detail at what this listening might require at various points in the offender’s learning journey and will expand on issues touched on here. This introductory leaflet shows some of the different ways in which listening to learners can happen and how it needs to form the basis of working with learners with disabilities and learning difficulties at every stage of their learning programme. Finding out about how an individual learner regards learning and how they regard both their learning strengths and their learning blocks is more important than identifying a particular disability or learning difficulty label.

On first meeting a learner

Learners with disabilities or learning difficulties might initially appear withdrawn, anxious, aggressive, resentful, bored. Learners in your organisation might well resist disclosing a particular disability or learning difficulty and these behaviours may mask other underlying concerns.

How can you go about trying to get behind this initial presentation so as to understand whether this reaction is masking other, underlying feelings about or difficulties with learning?

Other information

There might be other information, either written or verbal, which could help you to understand a particular learner better:

Is there any written record of a learner’s past learning experiences?

Who might you ask to find out if this is the case?

However, it is a fact that often in an offender situation these records do not exist and you will be starting with a blank sheet. Even when
there is it does not in any way preclude the need for active listening. As a practitioner from Stoke Heath YOI said:

‘There may be records of previous assessments or there may not –

Listening to what learners say about their experiences at school

Getting learners to talk about their learning experiences at school can often be a very revealing way of finding out more about their attitudes to learning. They will often reveal ways in which they hated school, ways in which they felt picked on by teachers or other students, ways in which they felt they could never keep up and so dropped out of learning and then felt embarrassed because they felt less able than others. Returning to a learning situation might bring back these earlier negative experiences. Also learners who have difficulty with learning might feel resentful that returning to a learning situation makes them feel they are being treated like children.

At HMP Winchester part of the initial verbal interview includes encouraging learners in assessing their own strengths and weaknesses, and in exploring their own view of themselves as learners.

How can you find out more from learners about their previous learning experiences?

Are there ways you can build this into your learning programme, for example through individual writing exercises or group discussion?

How can you use this information to try and make learning experiences different from school?

Observing learners

Some learners may be very reluctant to talk about their learning at all. However, listening to what learners say is not the only way of learning more about them. Observation can be a particularly powerful tool in understanding learners better.

How can you take time to stand back and observe an individual learner, for example:

How do they approach tasks?
How do they relate to others in the class?
How do they relate to you?

Do they appear to like to work in a group or alone?
What ways of learning do they appear to prefer, e.g. oral work, written tasks, practical learning?
What does their body language tell you?
Do they get easily distracted or lose concentration? etc.

The next stage of this observation is to think about:

What do some of these observations tell you about how they learn and the kind of
approaches or support they might require?
How can you modify your approach to respond to what you have observed?
If learners appear to respond more positively to working in a group how can you encourage this?
If they appear to much prefer individual work are there ways you can support this by giving them tasks they can do alone outside the class?
If they find concentration hard how can you provide smaller chunks of learning?
How can you build on their learning preferences? etc.

Learning from their writing

Some learners, for example autistic learners, might reveal more in their writing than they do in speaking.

If your curriculum area involves writing have you given learners the opportunity to carry out some personal writing, e.g. their attitudes to school?
Does this give you clues about what their emotional blocks to learning might be?

Have you looked carefully at what an individual learner writes?
What might this tell you about their support needs?

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Involving others

Learners might find it easier to speak to a particular person. In an offender learning or custodial context it is not always easy to create a team approach, however:

Are there other members of staff, either other teaching staff or prison officers, who might be able, while respecting confidentiality, to help you to understand a particular learner better?

Recognising the stage a learner is at

Some learners with disabilities or learning difficulties, particularly those with mental health difficulties or those with a learning difficulty, might be considerably traumatised at the beginning of their sentence. This will be exacerbated if they are also experiencing withdrawal from drug dependency. It might be that they are not at a stage where they can at present cope with learning. Teaching staff may have little control over who they have in their class but it might help to think about:

How can you ensure time to speak confidentially to a learner who may seem quite unable to respond to a learning situation?
Are there ways you can develop a gradual introduction into learning for such an individual?
Who might you speak to if you feel a particular learner is really not yet able to benefit from learning at all?
Building on particular strengths and interests

Everyone learns better when they feel that what they are learning is relevant to them.

How can you begin to find out a learner’s particular interests or aspirations?

Although your role is probably to teach a particular curriculum area are there ways you can build this interest or aspiration into your programme for that particular learner?

All learners also need to know that they are good at something.

How can you find out what particular strengths an individual learner has by talking to them, observing them, listening to their peers etc., then build on this in your approach to that learner?

Planning a support programme

Learners with disabilities or learning difficulties may well require some additional support. However, they also might find it very difficult to acknowledge their need for support feeling this marks them out as being different and maybe less competent. Although ideally a support programme should be put in place early on in fact it might take some time for you and the learner to find the most appropriate way forward.

How can you work with a learner over time so that they create a support programme with you and do not feel that it is being imposed upon them?

Other learners might also feel resentful that a particular individual is getting more attention.

How can you try to prevent this, maybe by creating group tasks where learners support each other?

Acknowledging success

All learners need to feel they are achieving in learning, particularly those learners who have had little experience of prior success.

How can you find out what an individual learner would recognise as success?

How can you help them work towards this building in small and frequent acknowledgment of success along the way?

Sharing what you have learnt

Learners are not only learning with you, nor will they always be with you.

How can you record, with an individual learner, what you have
learnt about their approach to learning? passed on to others either within the organisation or to other organisations when they move on?
How can this information, with the learner’s consent, be usefully passed on to others either within the organisation or to other organisations when they move on?

Useful reading on developing person centred approaches


DfES website on personalised learning www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/personalisedlearning
Assessment

Effective assessment is particularly important if a learner has a disability or learning difficulty, as without this you will be unable to identify the ways in which you intend to meet your duties towards disabled learners under the DDA. Assessment in a learning context will enable you to get to know a learner, understand his or her attitudes towards learning, what he or she wants to achieve through learning, a learner’s particular strengths or learning blocks and what kind of support a learner might need. This leaflet will look at initial assessment and also at how assessment needs to be an ongoing part of any learning programme. Issues related to summative or end of course assessment will be covered in the leaflet on Measuring Success.

Assessment in offender organisations

Different organisations have different ways of carrying out initial assessment of offenders’ learning and other requirements. All organisations are likely to carry out a ‘Skills for Life’ assessment. However, although this is useful in recognising where a learner is in terms of literacy and numeracy skills it will not, on its own, enable you to gather a full picture of a particular learner’s learning requirements. Often initial assessment is carried out during induction as soon as an individual arrives in an organisation and can include a range of different tests which may often take place when an individual is extremely anxious and uncertain. It is of course important that you as a teacher receive results of these assessments.

Some of these assessments might have been carried out by staff other than education staff, e.g. health staff, yet contain information which is highly relevant to you as a teacher, e.g. whether or not an individual is on medication which might affect their learning. Passing on such sensitive information requires the active consent of the learner. However, provided this consent is obtained, there is nothing in the DDA which prevents such relevant information being passed on to teaching staff.

Are you provided with any written records?
Who might you ask to obtain these?

However, finding out the results of any such assessment will not provide you with a full picture of who a learner is and what their requirements might be. You will also need time to work with individual learners to find out more how you can support their learning in your class.

Are you able to make time to work with learners on what their particular learning needs are?

Is individual assessment recognised as an essential part of your teaching role and, if not, who might you discuss this with?
Assessing learners in your class

Effective assessment needs to ensure that the learner is placed at the centre of the process. It will involve many of the elements covered in the **Listening to Learners** leaflet:

*Have you listened to what learners hope to get out of learning?*
*Do you listen to their views on their past experiences of learning?*
*Are you aware of how they feel they learn best?*

Have you talked to them about what aspects of learning they find particularly difficult?

Learners will not always be willing or able to reflect on their learning in this way:

*Do you build in times to observe learners and to reflect on this observation in order to try and adapt to their individual requirements?*

Your role in assessment and drawing up a learning plan

Learning is a partnership between teacher and learner. Assessment should not merely be one way process that is done to learners:

*Do you ensure that, when assessing learners, you make clear to them what you can offer them and how your work can complement theirs and contribute to their goals?*

Is this recorded?

Learners who may not be ready for formal learning

Some learners with disabilities or learning difficulties might not yet be at a stage where they can think about how they might contribute to a learning programme. One offender organisation HMP Styal has developed a CALM Centre (Care, Assessment, Learning and Motivation), which takes people in their initial days in prison and helps them settle for longer periods until they are eventually able to join the main department. Your organisation might not have this facility, but:

*Are you able to give learners who do not yet appear ready for the more formal structure of learning an initial, differently structured time to prepare them for more formal learning?*

Assessment as an ongoing process

Assessment, particularly for learners who have more complex needs, cannot take place in a one-off session.

Do you ensure that assessment is part of an ongoing process in your teaching strategy?

Involving others
Ideally assessment should be a team process between the learner, yourself and others who know the learner. It may be that a learner is more ready to talk about their learning aims and needs with someone other than you, for example a prison officer.

Are there opportunities for you to involve other staff in your assessment with a learner?

‘Diagnostic’ assessment

Currently there is much attention paid to ‘diagnostic assessment’ which includes finding out if a learner has a particular condition which might affect their learning and require some kind of specialist support. Of course there are many instances where it is important to recognise such conditions. It is important to know, for example, that a learner whose behaviour may appear very rigid, who finds it hard to adapt to new situations, who might never make eye contact, may not simply be being withdrawn or difficult but might have an autistic spectrum disorder. Reaching All gives many examples of the range of difficulties which learners might have and how you might recognise these.

Have you looked at Reaching All in order to understand more about the range of disabilities or learning difficulties which a learner might be experiencing?

Many offender organisations also ensure that learners can carry out a dyslexia diagnostic test so that teachers can be able to adapt to their particular requirements:

Are your learners able to be screened for dyslexia?

However, while acknowledging the value of diagnostic assessment, it is important that other aspects of assessment are not lost. It is important always to remember that the prime purpose of any assessment should be to make things better for the learner, not to fit them into a particular label:

At HMP Kirklevington Grange and HMP Holme House, the education staff have challenged themselves to consider the purpose of screening and assessment, particularly in terms of benefits to learners. They want to avoid an over dependence on labels and focus instead on how and what the individual is learning now.

‘Medical’ and ‘social’ models of disability

The word diagnostic implies a medical approach to disability. For several years now disabled people have been trying to ensure that disability is not seen simply as a medical condition and have been advocating a ‘social model’ of disability. In brief, while a medical model of disability locates the problem within the individual a social model shifts the emphasis from what is wrong with the individual to what is wrong with the attitudes, systems and practices of society which prevent a person with disability being fully included in
society. While it is important to recognise how a learner with a disability or learning difficulty might require some additional support or adaptation, it is also important to ensure that a social model perspective is not lost by over emphasis on an individual’s particular impairment or learning difficulty:

How can you ensure that your assessment of learners is in accord with a ‘social model’ of disability, for example by focussing not simply on their blocks to learning but on the attitudinal and practical blocks which the classroom or curriculum might bring to them?

Looking at the whole person

Learners in prisons or YOIs are likely to experience a range of issues which make learning difficult for them. While some of these might be related to a particular disability or cognitive learning difficulty there may well be several other social, emotional and educational factors which affect their learning. Diagnostic tests which focus on one particular aspect of learning can have the unintended consequence of masking other essential learning difficulties and needs. It is important that, by placing learners in a distinct category, we do not lose sight of the complex agglomeration of difficulties they face and requirements they might have. Several sites in our initial questionnaire commented on the need to ‘de-mystify’ dyslexia. While acknowledging that identifying dyslexia could be useful they were also concerned that merely labelling a learner as dyslexic was not a sufficient response and how it was essential to focus on a wider understanding on how a particular learner approached learning. They were also concerned that there could be an over-emphasis on dyslexia to the exclusion of other types of learning difficulty.

When assessing learners how can you ensure that you are continually aware of all their needs and do not simply place them in a ‘disability’ or ‘learning difficulty’ box?

Are you aware of the danger of focusing on dyslexia at the expense of looking at other difficulties in learning?

The issue of diagnosing and labelling is a complex one. On the one hand having a certain disability or difficulty recognised can at times be liberating for an individual; this has been seen to be particularly true of adult offenders with dyslexia who welcome the way that their specific difficulties are finally being recognised rather than it being assumed that they are simply ‘slow’ or ‘stupid’. However, labelling can also reinforce discrimination and segregation. Some YOIs have pointed out that young people who are identified as having Special Educational Needs can become isolated from and ostracised by other young people:

What can you do to try to ensure that identification of particular disabilities or learning difficulties does not result in greater exclusion rather than inclusion?
The role of the ‘expert’

Another potential danger of an over emphasis on diagnosis is that it can result in regular teachers believing that they do not have the expertise to assess or teach learners who may have a disability, dyslexia or a learning difficulty. Of course there are instances when these learners can benefit from specialist, expert assessment and support, for example if you are faced with a deaf learner who can only communicate through sign language your assessment will of course be very difficult without a sign language interpreter. However, there is a danger that we can exaggerate the need for special expertise and in this situation teachers can lose confidence in their own ability to assess learners. Thomas and Loxley (Deconstructing Special Education and Constructing Inclusion) in a book which is concerned with children but which is equally relevant to adult learners, express their concern that there is a growing impression that ‘for some children a separate set of procedures are needed to assess and help them’ whereas in fact ‘for all children the best way to assess them is quite simply to look at what they are doing and talk to them about it’.

How can you make positive use of specialist assessment or checklists but not let them override the central role of your own listening to and observation of learners?

Disclosure

The DDA is clear that learners have a right to disclose their disability and organisations will need to ensure that opportunities for disclosure occur. However, offender learners with disabilities or learning difficulties are likely to cover a wide range of different attitudes towards their disability. Some might be very up front about it; others may well wish to keep it as hidden as possible; some, especially older learners and those recently arrived from another country, might be unaware of their particular possible condition (e.g. never been seen as having dyslexia or being autistic); some might not recognise their condition as a ‘disability’. Some learners, as we discussed above, might find it a comfort or a liberation to be recognised as dyslexic; others might react with anger at any assumption that they might have a ‘disability’.

You need to be aware of this range of different attitudes and recognise the need for sensitivity in raising issues around disability or learning difficulty.

When assessing learners are you able to do this in confidence without other people around?

If not, who might you talk with to see whether this is possible?

How can you bring up issues around disability or learning
difficulty in a ‘social’ rather than ‘medical’ model way – e.g. focusing on the barriers a learner may face rather than on ‘what is wrong with them’?

Some learners will take time before they feel confident enough to raise issues of disability or learning difficulty with you:

Do you build in ongoing opportunities for disclosure?

Learners are more likely to disclose a disability if they see why it is important for you to know this and the potential benefits for them as learners:

Do you make clear why certain information is important for you?

Confidentiality

Particularly in the closed environment of an offender organisation, learners will be very wary of sharing personal and sensitive information with you if they feel it will then become common knowledge around the organisation. Learners have a right to have personal information they share with you kept confidential providing this does not contradict your duty of care.

When talking about their disability or learning difficulty do you explain to learners how this information will be kept confidential?

If you feel it is important to share information with other teaching staff, do you ensure that you discuss this with the learner first and make quite clear why you feel sharing this information would be positive for the learner, what information could usefully be shared and what does not need to be?

Recording Information

Results of learner assessment need to be recorded stating clearly what the learner and teacher have agreed, whether there are any particular support needs or approaches which need to be followed, what the learner’s goals are and how the teacher will try to support these. It is likely however that this initial record will need to be revised as you get to know more about the learner and as he or she gets to know more about the particular learning context:

Do you ensure that you revise your initial assessments when relevant?

Information gleaned at initial assessment needs to become part of an individual’s ILP. The content of their ILP needs to be worked out with individual learners. Teaching staff do not always have control over the format of their ILP. However, with learners with disabilities and learning difficulties, it is essential that an ILP should include details of the support and approach which have been agreed to address individual learners’ particular requirements, and that this support should be regularly monitored. It is also important that learners own learning goals and aspirations should be clearly
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indicated on their ILP with a recognition that these might change and develop as the learning programme proceeds. It is important to remember that, particularly for some learners with disabilities and learning difficulties, personal and social goals might be as important, or more important than more formal curriculum targets:

Are support needs for learners with disabilities or learning difficulties included in these learners’ ILPs?

Do your learners feel they own their ILP or do they see it merely as a tool for teachers?

Are these regularly monitored?

Do ILPs include ‘soft’ as well as curriculum targets negotiated with individual learners?

Passing on Information

The DDA is clear that relevant information on the support requirements of a learner with a disability or learning difficulty should be passed on to other teaching staff who work with the learner so that consistency of support can be achieved. However, the learner must be at the centre of any sharing of information and agree what information should be shared:

Are results of your assessment passed on, when applicable and with the learner’s consent, to other members of teaching staff?

It is particularly important that records of assessments should travel with the learner if they are moved to another establishment or on release. They need, with the learner’s consent, to be available to relevant personnel – probation Service, YOTs, new education provider etc. If this does not happen vital information on approaches and support needs can be lost and the new provider has to start again from scratch:

Are there systems in place to ensure that relevant information is passed on when a learner moves on from an organisation?

Further reading on assessment

Developing Access to Skills for Life for Offenders with Learning Difficulties or Disabilities: Guidance for practitioners and providers (especially Chapter 4) This is part of Learning for Living guidance materials www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus

Person Centred Approaches and adults with Learning Difficulties (especially pp.25-69) This is part of Learning for Living guidance materials www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus

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This LSC publication gives guidance on how to ensure disabled learners have the opportunity to disclose their disability within a confidential and supportive environment.


Just Learning? Promising Practice in Offender Learning and Training  
This includes case studies on assessment.

http://www.lsneducation.org.uk/justlearning/about/index.html

Department for Education and Skills, 2003  
Reaching All: Inclusive Learning Handbook

Thomas and Loxley, 2001,  
Deconstructing Special Education and Constructing Inclusion

Jenny Talbot, 2007,  
No One Knows: Identifying and supporting prisoners with learning difficulties and learning disabilities: the views of prison staff. Published by the Prison Reform Trust

Department for Education and Skills et al, 2004a,  
The Offenders' Learning Journey  
This includes sections on assessment and Individual Learning Plans.

Department for Education and Skills et al, 2004b,  
The Offenders' Learning Journey (Juveniles)  
This includes sections on assessment and Individual Learning Plans.
Responding to support requirements

The DDA is clear that learners with disabilities and learning difficulties are entitled to receive ‘reasonable adjustments’ to support them in their learning. It is important to remember that the more inclusive teaching and learning is the less need there will be for individual adjustments – to take a simple example if all your handouts have been designed in clear and reasonably large print they will be accessible for learners who have poor vision, if they have been written in straightforward language they are more likely to be accessible to dyslexic learners, hence these learners will not require specially adapted handouts. However, there are still likely to be individual learners who will require you to make certain adaptations in order for them to access learning.

There is a huge range of possible adjustments which might be required to support disabled learners. Many of these are detailed in Reaching All. The DDA Post 16 Code of Practice is also helpful in outlining possible kinds of adjustments. Some of these entail significant additional resources, for example ensuring that a deaf learner receives the support of a sign language interpreter; many others require very little or no additional resources (research carried out in the US during the implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act found that by far the majority of additional resources cost $30 or less).

Identifying and meeting specific requirements

When identifying the specific requirements that a learner may have and how you might respond to these it can help to ask the following questions:

Have you listened to what the learner says about his or her requirements? Learners are the experts in managing their own condition.

Have you observed the learner and thought about what kind of support might best respond to his or her needs? For example, if a learner appears to have a very short attention span and constantly need to change tasks, how might you arrange his learning programme to respond to this?

Do you need to make changes to the physical organisation of your room? This might be as simple as ensuring a learner who is partially sighted sits where there is most light or that you do not stand with your back to the light if there is a learner in the class who needs to lip read.

Are there relatively easy adaptations you can make to ensure physical access? For example, a learner at HMP Styal was able to access the Hair and Beauty provision in spite of the premises not being easily accessible for her wheelchair. Staff devised portable ramps and looked at other ways of enabling her to work around the fixed furniture and equipment.
Do you need to adapt your learning materials?
For example you may have a dyslexic learner who can read much better on a grey rather than a white background?

Are there any specialist adaptations which might help support a particular learner?
This might be as simple as a rubber grip around a pen for a learner who finds hand manipulation difficult or seating at a particular level for a learner with chronic back problems.

Are there ways, within the parameters of your curriculum area, you could make some adaptation to curriculum content?
For example, ensuring that a learner’s specific aspirations are addressed in his learning programme.

Do you need to adapt your delivery?
For example, ensuring that you make clear what exactly will be covered before a lesson starts if you have a learner with autistic spectrum disorder in your group; creating more practical activities if you have learners who respond best to active learning; identifying clearly understood rules and boundaries particularly if your class contains several learners who have emotional and behavioural difficulties etc.

Do you need to adapt your own attitudes?
Have you checked your own attitudes towards people with disabilities or learning difficulties? It is easy to make assumptions about what someone with a particular disability might require whereas in fact requirements even of people with the same disability can be very different and depend on individual experiences and attitudes. It is also easy inadvertently to patronise people with disabilities – check your own responses.

When asking each of the questions above you need to think:

What can I do?

How can I best use my existing resources to make this adjustment?

Does this adjustment require additional resources?

If so who should I approach about this?

Support for learners with learning difficulties or with dyslexia

Many learners in prisons or YOIs have difficulty with learning. The reasons for this may vary. They might be dyslexic. They may have a cognitive learning difficulty. It might be that they have missed out on earlier schooling or it might be because they have experienced a range of social and emotional difficulties. Whatever the reason for their difficulties it is certainly true that a higher staff student ratio, which will allow more personal attention, will be beneficial for these learners. Different offender organisations have very different levels of staff support. Several of them, particularly YOIs, employ
Learning Support Assistants. Learning Support Assistants can be an immense source of support for these learners. However, it is important to think about the best way to use this support.

**Individual or group support**

Think of the learners who require additional support:

*Is it best to use LSA’s to carry out one to one support, to work with a small group, or to work alongside you with the whole group?*

*What are the advantages of each method and what are the disadvantages?*  
e.g. one to one gives dedicated individual work but for a shorter period of time – it can also isolate learners from the group; small group work could be positive in enabling students to gain support from each other; working within the whole group takes away from stigmatising but may not allow so much attention to individual difficulties etc. It is likely that different learners may respond better to different patterns of support and it is important to move away from an assumption that there is only one way of using LSAs.

**Specialist support or developing in house expertise**

There is sometimes an assumption that learners with learning difficulties and learners with dyslexia can only be given proper support by staff who have a particular expertise in this area. This is not necessarily the case. The most fundamental requirements for support staff is that they understand the particular difficulties which the learner faces, that they are committed to help the learner to succeed and that they are someone trusted by the learner. Of course there are particular skills they may need to learn in relation to learning difficulty or dyslexia, but it might be far more appropriate and cost effective if this can be done by them attending a focussed training programme rather than looking for external support:

*How can you enhance the skills of your Learning Support Assistants so that they can best support learners with learning difficulties or dyslexia?*

*Who can you discuss this with?*

**Other ways of providing support**

Several offender organisations speak very positively about the ways they have encouraged peer support in order to ensure additional support for learners with learning difficulties: ‘The major resource is peer support’ (HMP Leyhill). There are different patterns of doing this. Sometimes offender organisations run formal training programmes whereby learners who are competent in one particular area of study can follow an accredited programme on how
to support those who may have difficulties. Sometimes peer mentoring is developed more informally, for example at HMP Littlehey one member or the Adult and Continuing Education programme has been appointed as the official ‘welcomer’ for new students. Several organisations have made use of the Toe by Toe Manual (supported by The Shannon Trust) which shows ways in which peer support can be used to develop literacy skills. Those who have instigated these programmes have often found that some learners with learning difficulties find it easier to receive support from another prisoner than from a member of staff.

In some organisations, for example HMP Highpoint, programmes have been established to train volunteers who then work on a one to one basis with offenders who have learning difficulties or dyslexia.

**What might be the benefits of establishing some kind of peer mentoring or volunteer programme?**

**Who could help you to learn more about this and get it started?**

**What might be some of the advantages?**

**What might be some of the difficulties you would need to be aware of?**

**Learners who present behavioural difficulties**

Some learners in custody will exhibit behavioural difficulties which may be due to a specific mental health difficulty, an accumulation of various emotional issues, withdrawal from drugs, anxiety or a combination of all of these and other factors. Behavioural issues are particularly challenging for teachers who are not only faced with the question of how best to support these learners but also with the fact that these learners’ behaviour may also negatively affect the behaviour and learning of others.

Some offender organisations have developed specially designed provision to support these learners (this is discussed in more detail in the leaflet on **Curriculum Design and Delivery**).

Others are fortunate in having somewhere learners can go in order to cool down and work through their particular outburst or anxiety, for example HMYOI Feltham has a Phoenix Centre which caters for learners who are vulnerable and have specific needs. If a learner is unable to cope with lessons they can use this quiet room which is staffed by two Learning Support tutors who support them until they are ready to return to the regular class.

Some have specific workshops to support disruptive learners – for example HMYOI Feltham has started a ‘Reflective Workshop’ where those who become disruptive or violent can receive some one to one psychological support before returning to the classroom situation.

Support for these learners works best where there is a multi-disciplinary approach to providing
support and where prison officers and other prison staff can work with educational staff in developing and delivering shared approaches.

Is there a multi-disciplinary approach to supporting learners?

Sources of Support

Many staff in offender organisations who responded to our questionnaire were concerned about where they could go if they needed specialist staff or equipment for their disabled learners. There is no universal response to such a query. In some instances you might be able to tap into the resources of your local further education college, for example HMP Camp Hill spoke highly about the way in which they were able to get support from Isle of Wight College. It might be that your local Social Services Department might be able to arrange to loan specific pieces of equipment or alternatively local voluntary organisations might be able to assist. Many of the major national disability organisations such as Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) or Royal National Institute for the Deaf (RNID) have local branches and you could contact them if a learner has a particular requirement which your organisation cannot meet. Reaching All has a long bibliography listing contact details of specialist disability organisations.

Further reading on responding to support requirements

Supporting young people with ADHD/ADD, Oxfordshire Educational Psychology Service and Huntercombe YOI, (www.oxfordshire.gov.uk) Contact Linda Johnston, Senior Educational Psychologist for further information

Supporting young people on the autistic spectrum, including Aspergers, Oxfordshire Educational Psychology Service and Huntercombe YOI, (www.oxfordshire.gov.uk) Contact Linda Johnston, Senior Educational Psychologist for further information

Department for Education and Skills, 2003 Reaching All: Inclusive Learning Handbook

NACRO, 2007, Effective Mental Health Care for Offenders: the need for a fresh approach
Braggins and Talbot, 2005, Wings of Learning: the role of the prison officer in supporting prisoner education. This publication looks at the role of prison officers in supporting learning.

**Specific disability organisations**

- RNIB  [www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)
- RNID  [www.rnid.org.uk](http://www.rnid.org.uk)
- MIND  [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)
- RADAR  [www.radar.org.uk](http://www.radar.org.uk)
- MENCAP  [www.mencap.org.uk](http://www.mencap.org.uk)

All of the above organisations have useful websites and provide information services and leaflets. They also all have local branches.
Modifying curriculum design and delivery to develop inclusion

The DDA Code of Practice makes it clear that many of the reasonable adjustments required by disabled learners will be made through adaptations to the design and delivery of the curriculum. Both what you teach and how you teach it are key to developing greater inclusion of learners with disabilities and learning difficulties. As a teacher in an offender organisation you might have little control over what you teach – you are likely to be employed to deliver a specific subject and may also be required to prepare learners for some kind of external accreditation. However, there are still many ways in which you can have a certain degree of flexibility both in content and delivery. This leaflet gives many examples of how staff in offender organisations have found ways of presenting learning so that it becomes more inclusive of a wider range of learners.

Designing individual or group learning programmes

**Building on learners’ interests**

Learners with disabilities and learning difficulties have, in many instances, become disenchanted with learning hence it is essential to find ways of engaging them which help them to see that learning can be both interesting and relevant to their lives. It is important to involve learners, both as a group and as individuals, in designing a programme which they believe holds value for them.

Do you involve learners when drawing up both group and individual plans?

Are there further ways in which you can ensure that programmes are relevant to their own interests and aspirations?

**Embedding learning in practical activities**

Learners who find learning difficult generally respond far better to learning if the core skills of literacy and numeracy are embedded in practical activities. There are many creative examples of different ways this has occurred:

At HMP Bullwood Hall the YOI, developed a joint programme with the National Gallery in which learners studied individual paintings. Learners who were seen as being particularly vulnerable and lacking in confidence became very enthusiastic about this programme which led to them not only developing their skills in art but also their literacy and communication skills and their sense of community involvement.

HMYOI Huntercombe supported learners in running their own radio
station. Literacy skills were embedded within the programme and were assessed during it at the same time as enabling learners to work towards OCN Level 1 and 2 accreditation in radio production.

NACRO Sandwell developed a programme of literacy and numeracy skills and wider key skills around the local go-karting track – for example numeracy skills were enhanced by learners working out lap times.

HMP Leyhill embedded literacy and numeracy activities in humanities projects – the learners wrote to the company responsible for the design and build of Blackpool Leisure Roller Coaster receiving information for follow up maths and literacy work.

HMYOI Thorn Cross have made use of enrichment activities of the PLUS programme which allows for integration of skills for life into other activities, e.g. circus skills!

A music project at HMP Nottingham involved a group of musicians and DJs who deliver maths and English work through music technology. This has proved hugely popular.

Many organisations spoke about the importance of art programmes both as therapy and as an introduction to learning for those who otherwise would not participate.

In these examples and many others like them teachers found that an embedded approach to the teaching of skills for life worked particularly well in developing the motivation and success of learners who had learning or behavioural difficulties.

You may not be fortunate enough to work in a context where you can develop programmes as flexible as these, but:

Are there ways you can combine practical activities with more formal learning skills either within your classroom situation or by making links, e.g. with vocational or other tutors?

Developing communication skills

Learners with learning difficulties, with mental health difficulties or with autistic spectrum disorders all tend to have greater difficulty than others with communication. Discussion with a range of learners with disabilities and learning difficulties during a recent evaluation of the Skills for Life Curriculum showed that these learners placed the development of communication skills very high on the list of areas they wished to improve and that they saw improved skills in communication as key to improving both their self confidence and their quality of life. However, teachers also felt that Speaking and Listening tended to be seen as less valuable than other aspects of the curriculum. It is important to remember that Speaking and Listening is a key aspect of Skills for Life and to continually look at ways of addressing it in all teaching sessions. Access for All has useful advice on how to ensure that
the full range of disabled learners are included in any speaking assignments.

Is there more you can do within your teaching to ensure that all learners have ongoing opportunity to develop their communication skills?

Developing skills of working together

Communication inevitably involves working with others. Learners with certain disabilities and learning difficulties can find working with others in a group situation extremely challenging. HMYOI Stoke Heath addressed this by setting up a six week rolling programme in which six to eight young people take part in a Breakfast Club. The young people selected tend to be those with both learning difficulties and challenging behaviour. They are often young people who have spent time in the segregation unit. A similar arrangement takes place at HMYOI Thorn Cross.

During the programme they plan, cook and share eating breakfast sometimes with invited guests. The programme covers a range of literacy, communication and also wider key skills of working together. Staff recognise that one of the major positive facts about this programme is the way the learners begin to work together and overcome difficulties together. Young people too are very positive about the Breakfast Club particularly in the way it helped them to share as a group.

Are there ways you can structure situations in your lessons so that learners are able to work together taking shared responsibility for developing a finished product or outcome?

Creating an adult context for learning

Learners who feel they have failed at learning because of a disability or learning difficulty are often acutely embarrassed by what they see as personal shortcomings. This sense of failure may show itself in a variety of ways – anger, disengagement, withdrawal etc. These learners are often further embarrassed by having to return to a learning situation which they perceive as ‘childish’. There is a real challenge in how to address their learning needs at the same time as respecting their status as adults. Sometimes this is achieved by choice of topics. For example, one tutor working with adults said that there had been real interest in a topic on The British Legion, which was based around a map indicating areas of conflict. Discussion covered miles travelled, impact on families, cultural difference experienced by armed forces etc.

Family support and involvement can be a very valuable motivator for learners. Although it is an area requiring great sensitivity, it is important to remember the family roles of offenders and to see the potential of linking learning activities to those roles. The Storybook Dads scheme (at HMP Onley) and many other prisons
enables offenders to maintain contact with their children through reading, recording or writing stories.

Have you asked your learners how they feel about the age appropriateness of the curriculum topics they are following?

Addressing issues of disability and learning difficulty within the learning context

People with particular impairments will often speak about how one of the most difficult and disabling things about their condition is the attitudes of other people. Staff in offender organisations speak about how learners with disabilities or learning difficulties can have their situation exacerbated by the ostracisation or ridicule of other inmates. There is a danger that openly raising issues of disability awareness could only worsen this situation. One would also of course need to be very sensitive to individual learner’s right to not disclose a disability they might have. However it may be that you have a group you feel would take the issue on board positively or that you have a particularly confident disabled learner in your group who would feel positive about leading in a discussion. More objective ways of raising disability issues might be to bring in newspaper articles and for learners to examine stereotypical attitudes towards disability, or to have them write about an instance of disability in their family. This might lead onto a group production of a disability awareness or mental health awareness leaflet. Several offender organisations now have a Prisoners’ Learning Forum and your discussion might lead on to learners raising issues of disability and learning difficulty in this forum.

Most prisons have offenders within their Equality and Diversity Committees. Prisons like HMP Stocken are keen to use this as a vehicle for reflecting on the learning experiences of prisoners with disabilities.

Do you feel it could be beneficial to include disability as a topic within your curriculum offer? If so how might you go about this?

Curriculum Delivery

How do individual learners in your group learn best?

The sections above looked at involving learners in curriculum design. It is also important to look closely at how you deliver your curriculum. In order to best match your own delivery with learner requirements you will need to try to find out from learners how they learn best. Different learners have different learning preferences.

Some people are very verbal and are happier working logically through a problem. Others are far more visual and like to receive information as a picture or diagram. Some are kinaesthetic – that is they learn better through practical activities. Finding out how a particular learner prefers to learn is particularly important for learners.
with disabilities or learning difficulties who can often have learning preferences which may be different from the way you as a teacher prefer to learn.

For example, one tutor recognised that a proportion of his learners were continually becoming disengaged and exhibiting challenging behaviour in his sessions. He carried out a 'visual verbal' learning preference test with them and found that these learners tended to be the ones who had strong visual learning preferences. He adapted his teaching so that learning did not just follow a logical, progressive sequence but there was more emphasis on giving the class the whole picture of what he would cover at the beginning of a session with positive results.

Another teacher was working with a group of young learners and finding huge difficulties with keeping their attention. She assessed their learning styles and found that the majority of them were very active learners. At the same time she assessed herself and found she had preferences which were far more reflective. Recognising this mismatch she tried to develop far more active learning into her sessions.

Recently there has been some scepticism about 'learning styles' in research carried out in further education and it is true that there is a danger of glibly labelling learners as being 'active' or 'reflective' or 'visual' learners. However carrying out exercises with learners to try to establish how they learn best can be both illuminating and rewarding. It gets learners thinking about the ways in which they learn hence involves them in the process of learning rather than simply seeing learning as a case of absorbing content.

Have you talked to learners, particularly those who are disengaged or experiencing difficulties, about how they learn best, maybe using some of the learning style tests which are available as a starting point?

Have you matched this against how you learn best?

Responding to different learning preferences

Several pieces of research have shown that learners who can be very disengaged from learning or who exhibit challenging behaviour are often those who are very kinaesthetic in their learning preferences and who learn much better through active and practical learning experiences. Many examples of successful learning in prisons or YOIs involve improving basic skills through practical activities – sport, cooking, music, dance, drama etc. Within your particular situation opportunities to create practical activities may be limited.

However, even within a traditional basic skills class, there are ways you can try to build in more of these learning situations – e.g. in a numeracy class getting learners to cut out and make three dimensional shapes; in a literacy class cutting out and organising words or phrases or planning the lay out of a newspaper etc. Many
prisons spoke about the value of games - card and board games – and the same on the computer. Most of these games appear to have been customised by tutors to meet specific needs, although there are of course ready made materials which can be used, provided the style reflects an adult approach. The interactive whiteboard which a few prisons are now using provides the novelty of technology while allowing literally a ‘hands on’ approach.

Some learners are strongly visual in their approach. In addition to this learners with learning difficulties may feel very turned off printed words and relate these to past failures. You need to think about how, while always remembering the importance of adult content, you can bring more visual material into your classes e.g. discussing the impact certain pictures have, looking at images in different newspapers and what they say, showing videos etc.

The overall aim is to match delivery to how learners learn best. This needs to happen both in your overall lesson plan design and also in developing individual plans of work. For example one teacher spoke of how she matched spelling to individual preferences by asking learners to create their own mnemonics for personal spellings.

How can you adapt your teaching style to better match the learning preferences of your group?

What new approaches could you develop in group teaching?

How might you work differently with individuals as you get to know more about how they feel they learn best?

Organising time and space

Many learners with mental health difficulties, emotional and behavioural difficulties and some with learning difficulties find concentration for a long period of time very difficult. This can be greatly exacerbated if they are on medication or if they are experiencing withdrawal from drug dependency. Ideally you need to be able to negotiate with these learners how long they feel they can attend a session, but in reality teachers often have learners in a class for a fixed period of time. In such a situation you need to organise sessions so that there are a number of short activities so these learners can experience learning in short bursts with breaks in between different activities. This enables these learners to gain the satisfaction of completing a task within their own personal concentration period.

Think of different ways you can plan short, self contained chunks of work for learners who require this approach.

You may also have very little control over the physical space of your teaching room. However, it is important to use this space as productively as possible. Classrooms that are arranged in traditional desk format can be an immediate turn off to learners who have very negative experiences of school.
Are there ways you could rearrange furniture to create a less formal environment?

Have you discussed with learners different ways the room might be organised?

Learners with various disabilities or learning difficulties might find sitting still for long periods extremely taxing either because of physical or emotional difficulties. Simply walking to another part of the room, for example to look at books on a bookshelf, might help to alleviate this.

Are there ways your space is organised so that they can do this?

Other learners who become extremely anxious or who have very short attention span might have periods when they need to have time away from the formal part of the room.

Is there an area of your room where learners can take some ‘time out’?

Opportunities for informal learning

Learning does not just take place in a classroom. For all of us a large part of our learning takes place in semi formal or informal contexts with others or on our own. One of the major benefits which can occur through formal learning is to help learners develop into independent learners and the context of a residential situation has the potential to enable this to happen. This development is particularly important for learners with disabilities or learning difficulties many of whom will never have been perceived or have perceived themselves as people who could learn on their own. In addition to this some learners with a learning difficulty who have very poor formal skills may welcome the opportunity to study, at least initially, in a private place where they do not feel exposed to peers. Several prisons have created opportunities for independent learning:

HMP Albany has set up a programme whereby offenders with good basic skills are trained to act as volunteers to learners who have basic skills difficulties. The time and place of sessions is jointly negotiated between volunteer and learner. Prisoners who feel embarrassed about their low level of basic skills and so are reluctant to come to class particularly welcome the informality and privacy of this programme. They also appreciate the way it gives them some control over learning within a regime where most aspects of their lives are heavily controlled.

At HMP Norwich and YOI Norwich the potential for independent learning has been addressed by providing video access within cells. Prisoners have the potential to follow established learning programmes based on prescribed videos and workbooks.

Your organisations may or may not have programmes like this which your work could link into, but:

Are there ways in which you could develop independent learning opportunities for learners with
disabilities or learning difficulties within your group?

Using IT and other technology to enhance the learning of offenders with disabilities or learning difficulties

Information Technology can be a very valuable tool for helping to provide access and improved learning opportunities for learners with disabilities and learning difficulties. Blind or visually impaired learners can access and input text without the need for Braille by using speech based software. Such software has also proved very positive for some learners with physical difficulties or severe dyslexia. Learners with learning difficulties who are embarrassed about their poor basic skills can often feel liberated in their writing when using a computer as they know they can rectify mistakes and make a piece of work look good. Learners who enjoy using a visual approach can become fascinated with programmes which allow them to present work in an interesting way using visual additions. Several prisons and YOIs make use of teaching software programmes – for example Touch, Type, Read and Spell – a multi-sensory touch type programme which helps with spelling. They find programmes like these very valuable for a range of learners with learning difficulties or dyslexia. They enable them to move away from the failure they associate with pen and pencil approaches and to approach tasks independently.

Learners at HMP Littlehey were extremely positive about LEXIA, an IT word and phonic recognition programme which allows learners to work independently and monitor their own progress.

Some organisations, for example HMP Norwich, spoke very positively about the difference that Interactive Whiteboards had made to their teaching in allowing learners to take greater ownership of lessons. Others (HMYOI Hindley) were involved in a prisons’ video project (Inside Out) which they found had attracted people who would not take part in other activities:

Have you explored IT software which is especially designed to support learners who have difficulty with basic skills?

How else could you make use of IT in order to develop your work with learners with disabilities or learning difficulties?

Who might you approach to see if you could get access to video or an interactive whiteboard?

Further reading on curriculum design and delivery

Developing Access to Skills for Life for Offenders with Learning Difficulties or Disabilities: Guidance for practitioners and providers
Offender Learning and Skills Directorate
Guidance for LSC Providers staff in the LSC Offender Learning and Skills Service

(eespecially Chapter 5) This is part of Learning for Living guidance materials
www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus

Access for All This is part of Learning for Living guidance materials
www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus

Person Centred Approaches and adults with Learning Difficulties
(eespecially Chapters 2 and 3) This is part of Learning for Living guidance materials www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus

Just Learning? Promising Practice in Offender Learning and Training
This includes case studies on delivery.
(http://www.lsneducation.org.uk/justlearning/about/index.html)

Department for Education and Skills et al, 2004a, The Offenders’ Learning Journey
This includes sections on curriculum.

Department for Education and Skills et al, 2004b, The Offenders’ Learning Journey (Juveniles)
This includes sections on curriculum.

Department for Education and Skills, 2003, Reaching All: an inclusive learning handbook (especially Part 2)

The DfES Raising Standards website
This contains a useful checklist of what adult learners can expect if following skills for life programmes and what a learning organisation for learners in a prisons context should provide
http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/raisingstandards/prisons/prisonscontext/skillsforlife/
This contains a corresponding checklist for adult learners with disabilities and learning difficulties.
http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/raisingstandards/learnerswithlearningdifficulties/context/skillsforlife/

Skills for Life Quality Improvement website
Creating Learning materials level 3 and 4 – www.sfqi.org.uk
Measuring Success

Under the DDA learners with disabilities and learning difficulties are entitled to equal access to the ways in which success is measured. Recent amendments to the DDA that came into force on 1 September 2007 mean it is now unlawful for general qualifications bodies to discriminate against disabled people. Importantly for disabled learners this means that they are entitled to reasonable adjustments in the assessment of any general qualification they are taking. General Qualifications include GCSEs, A-Levels and GNVQs, but providers should consult Skill or the awarding body for full details of what is covered and what disabled learners are entitled to.

This is a very important step in legislation and a later section of this leaflet will look at what it means for education providers in offender organisations. However, it is also important to remember that there are many ways of recognising success and, important as they are for all learners, tests are not necessarily the most important particularly for some learners with disabilities or learning difficulties.

Recognising Success

Teachers tend to be successful in the area they are teaching; if they were not they would not be in that role. Many of your learners, on the other hand, may have experienced ongoing lack of success. It is important as a teacher of learners who may have real difficulties with your subject to think about situations which do not come easily to you – it might be a class you have taken in a subject that you know you do not excel in; it might be sport; it might be in a certain type of social situation; it might be trying to learn a new language. Recalling such situations makes one realise how important it is to receive positive encouragement both from teacher and peers, even when progress is very small, and how without this it is so easy to get negative or demoralised and drop out. You will also recognise how important it is that this encouragement is genuine and how easy it is to feel patronised. Many of your learners with disabilities and learning difficulties will feel all of the same frustrations and needs that you do when learning skills you find difficult.

How can you ensure you build in positive and genuine recognition of success for all your learners?

How can you create situations where learners who have difficulty with many areas of work are sometimes able to show their particular strengths – e.g. a learner who is good at design taking on that role in creating a group newspaper?

Making targets manageable

Working with learners on creating mutually agreed targets is very important for learners. When working with learners with...
disabilities and particularly with learners with mental health difficulties or learning difficulties, it is particularly important that targets are small and distinct enough to be able to measure frequent indicators of progress. Targets such as ‘improve my spelling’ do not necessarily work in this way whereas ‘learn five new spellings each week’ does.

Do you make sure that targets you work out with learners are ones which can have quick, short term, positive results?

**Formative assessment**

Formative assessment, which goes on throughout a learning programme, can be particularly beneficial to learners who have difficulty in learning or learners with mental health difficulties who can easily become discouraged about progress. However, formative assessment is often misunderstood and seen simply as a series of summative assessment checks. In fact formative assessment is different in nature from summative assessment. While summative assessment tests what a person has learnt and can do, formative assessment also looks at what can be learnt which can inform future learning. Questions asked in formative assessment are not simply the closed questions of summative assessment but open ones such as ‘How does this compare to where you were before?’, ‘What helped you to improve?’ ‘How does this effect what you do next?’, ‘What have you learnt about your learning?’ etc.

Do you ensure that your learners are assessed in formative as well as summative ways?

**Measuring success in all areas**

Some of the most valuable skills for learners with disabilities and learning difficulties to acquire are those which cannot be assessed by a written test, for example, increased confidence, an ability to increasingly play a part in group work, more tolerance of others, greater confidence in working independently etc. For many learners these areas cannot be separated from improvements in more formal skills as they provide an essential underpinning on which new skills can be developed.

Do you ensure that ILPs include targets for ‘soft’ areas such as those listed above?

How do you try to ensure that these are given as much value as other more formal skills, and how do you and the learner assess progress in them?

**Acknowledging different measures of success**

Currently learning is becoming more and more dominated by measurement through externally validated tests. These can be valuable and it is important to acknowledge the status which learners themselves often give to them and recognise how important
it is for a learner who has never before gained any accreditation to receive this kind of award. However, there are also other, equally tangible, measures of success. Offender organisations involved in dance or poetry writing projects speak of how significant it is for vulnerable learners to realise they are able to take part in a public performance. Those involved in art projects say the same when learners see their work exhibited.

As well as preparing learners for tests are you also able to ensure there are other tangible markers of success, e.g. publication of a group newsletter, poems, autobiographical stories etc.?

**Recording success**

Success needs to be recorded. Learners need a tangible record of the progress they have made not just in order to make sure information is not lost but also so they can look back and trace their progress. It is very disheartening than having a target written down and it to remain unmonitored. It is important that learners are actively involved in recording their progress – some organisations working with learners with learning difficulties have developed creative ways of doing this through using photos, IT etc.

Do you ensure that a learner’s success is regularly monitored in ways which are meaningful to him or her?

**Measuring the effectiveness of individual support arrangements**

Learners with disabilities or learning difficulties may be receiving some kind of additional support. This might be technical support, e.g. using a Brailler or speech based software. It might be personal support, e.g. working on a one to one basis with an LSA. Whatever the type of support it needs to be regularly monitored. Questions to ask will be:

Is the support really working?

Are the learner’s needs the same or are different kinds of support required?

Is the learner ready to move, e.g. from one to one to group support?

**Formal tests and examinations**

*Under the DDA, general qualifications bodies and (vocational) qualification bodies cannot discriminate against exam candidates with disabilities or learning difficulties. Exam candidates can expect general qualification bodies to make reasonable adjustments, such as allowing extra time or providing exam materials in alternative formats.*

Any reasonable adjustments required by candidates in formal assessment must be applied for in advance of any exam. Candidates will be registered at an Exam
Centre, which will normally be considered to be the OLASS/LSC provider. The awarding body will normally require evidence of disability and details of the reasonable adjustments recommended by the Exam Centre.

The Exam Centre has a duty to identify any candidates that may require reasonable adjustments for reasons relating to a disability. The Exam Centre has a duty to apply for any reasonable adjustments on behalf of candidates that they know may require them. The OLASS/LSC provider also has a duty themselves under Part 4 of the DDA to ensure that reasonable adjustments are implemented.

The cost of most reasonable adjustments will be minimal, for example the use of a computer instead of handwriting an exam, additional time to complete an exam or a modified paper (papers are normally modified by the awarding body, rather than the Exam Centre). If there is a cost associated with a reasonable adjustment, then the OLASS/LSC provider that is the Exam Centre will have to meet this cost.

RARPA

The RARPA (Recognising and Recording progress and Achievement) project was instigated as a joint venture between LSC, NIACE and LSDA (now LSN). It gives detailed advice on how to capture learner achievement in non-accredited programme focusing on the five areas of:

- Setting the aim of the programme
- Initial assessment
- Identification of learning objectives
- Formative assessment
- End of programme review of progress and achievement

Although specifically designed for measuring learner success in non-accredited learning programmes the principles of RARPA can also be used alongside formal accreditation. The RARPA process can be particularly valuable when working with learners with disabilities and learning difficulties. NIACE has also produced the results of a Scoping Study, Achievement in non-accredited learning for adults with learning difficulties, which looks at how the processes of RARPA can be applied when working with adults with learning difficulties.

Have you looked at RARPA materials to see how they might be appropriate to support you in assessment of offender learners with disabilities or learning difficulties?

Ensuring your methods of assessment and delivery are in line with the Common Inspection Framework
With the current Government concern to ensure that as many learners as possible succeed in formal accreditation, many providers are worried that more informal methods of assessment will not be acceptable to Inspectors. The **Pathfinder Learning for Living Offenders** guidance document has produced a useful table matching statements in The Offenders Learning Journey, Person Centred Approaches, RARPA and demands of Inspection, which shows how in fact there is accord between these four different sets of demands:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offender’s Learning Journey</th>
<th>Person-centred approach</th>
<th>Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement (RARPA)</th>
<th>Common Inspection Framework (CIF) Key Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information, advice and guidance, in a form appropriate to the individual, to support the choice of learning programme and provide continuous guidance throughout their learning to maintain commitment.</td>
<td>The learner is presented with a range of options and given support to make choices about their future.</td>
<td>Learners are encouraged to express their desires, interests, motivations and support needs.</td>
<td>5. How well do the programmes and activities meet the needs and interests of learners? 6. How well are learners guided and supported?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective approaches to screening and assessment in which gateways focus on learning and employment needs.</td>
<td>The learner’s needs and aspirations are identified.</td>
<td>Initial assessment to establish the learner’s starting point.</td>
<td>1. How well do learners achieve? 2. How effective are teaching, training and learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A programme designed to enable each person to realise their potential, to provide opportunities for personal development and a chance to change behaviour and make a more positive contribution to society.</td>
<td>The learning programme is designed to meet the needs and interests of the learning.</td>
<td>Identification of appropriately challenging learning objectives: initial, renegotiated and revised.</td>
<td>1. How well do learners achieve? 2. How effective are teaching, training and learning? 5. How well do the programmes and activities meet the needs and interests of learners?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountabilities, targets and rewards, inspection and performance management which emphasise the importance of learning and employment</td>
<td>The learner is presented with opportunities to reflect on their progress and achievements.</td>
<td>Recognition and recording of progress and achievement during programme (formative assessment): tutor feedback to learners, learner</td>
<td>1. How well do learners achieve? 2. How effective are teaching, training and learning?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Offender Learning and Skills Directorate  
Guidance for LSC Providers staff in the LSC Offender Learning and Skills Service

| outcomes for offenders. (NB: this could also relate to CIF question 5). | reflection, progress reviews. | Measures to improve the skills of offenders and improve performance in placing offenders in sustainable employment. Support for offenders at all stages of their sentence, and once it has ended, so that more of them...are encouraged to start or continue their learning journey. | Learners are encouraged to continue with their learning and have access to a choice of progression routes. | End-of-programme learner self-assessment, tutor summative assessment; review of overall progress and achievement. | 1. How well do learners achieve? | 2. How effective are teaching, training and learning? | 6. How well are learners guided and supported? |

| | | This table provides a clear and useful way of measuring your own programme against these four approaches: | Can you match your approaches towards learners with disabilities or learning difficulties in your learning programme against the headings listed above? |

Further Reading on Measuring Success

RARPA  
http://www.niace.org.uk/Projects/RARPA/Default.htm  
http://rarpa.lsc.gov.uk/  
Achievement in non-accredited learning for adults with learning difficulties, 1998, NIACE  
Person Centred Approaches and adults with Learning Difficulties (especially Chapters 4 and 5) This is part of Learning for Living guidance materials www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus
Moving On

Both policy makers and providers have become increasingly concerned about how best to ensure positive transition for offenders. Transition is of course a complex issue for all offender learners but can be particularly problematic for learners who have disability and learning difficulty related requirements. This leaflet will look at some of the additional factors which you need to think about to try and ensure positive transition for learners with disabilities and learning difficulties.

The rights of learners with disabilities or learning difficulties extend beyond their time in offender organisations. Under DDA Part 4 they also have rights to receive reasonable adjustments when studying in any further education college or adult education organisation in the UK. Under DDA Part 2 (Employment) they have the right not to be discriminated against on account of their disability and to receive reasonable adjustments in employment.

To accompany this publication a brief guide for learners with disabilities is being produced. Its purpose will be to support and empower them to disclose their need for support in future learning and to understand their rights under the DDA.

How might you use this resource with your learners?

Are your learners with disabilities or learning difficulties aware of their wider rights under the DDA?

Progression into further learning

The period they spend in custody/prison might be the first time an individual has actually spent a focused period of time in a learning context. This is likely to be particularly true for many learners with learning difficulties or with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Some learners you work with might have no interest in continuing with their studies on release or when they move to another prison or YOI. However, others might have begun to alter their self perception and recognise that they are able to succeed in learning and that it is something they enjoy and want more of.

How do you encourage your learners with disabilities or learning difficulties to see learning as an ongoing process?

Learners need to be aware that there should be opportunities for ongoing learning support for their disability or learning difficulty whether they are moving onto another offender organisation or to an educational establishment outside. All colleges have either an individual or a department which organises appropriate support for learners with disability or learning difficulty although titles for these posts may vary – Inclusive Education Co-ordinator, Learning Difficulty and Disability Co-ordinator etc. Student Services Departments in colleges should be able to advise on what type of
learning programmes and what kinds of specialist support are available. Most Connexions Services have a specialist Connexions Adviser who works with young people with disabilities or learning difficulties.

**Passing on Information**

Much vital information can be lost if the particular information you have gained about a disabled learner is not passed on to future providers. This does not only include formal records but also individual ways of working which have benefited a particular learner and any records of work or progress files which a learner may have built up during their time with you. Of course passing on written information must involve the agreement of the individual learner who may not want certain confidential details to be shared. Many learners may wish to take control of their own information and be the person who passes it on.

*Have you spent time with learners drawing up clear information about their support requirements in a learning situation and how these are best addressed?*

*Do these include not just support for their particular disability but also preferred ways of learning etc.?*

*Have you discussed with your learners what other records of work they would like to be passed on?*

Who do you need to talk to ensure that these documents reach the right people?

If a particular learner does not have a clear progression route is it possible for him or her to keep a copy of relevant information to produce when needed in the future?

While written records are very important they are not the only way in which information can be passed on. Disabled learners need to recognise that they can ask for support.

*Have you talked to disabled learners who are leaving about the importance of them asking for appropriate support?*

Are they aware of their rights to this support?

*Have you helped them to prepare how they might best request further help if they decide to carry on with learning?*

**Progression to employment**

Many offender organisations are increasing the ways in which they try to help offenders make the transition from offender organisation to employment. Sometimes this involves direct collaboration between prisons and YOIs and employers; sometimes it
is organised by local Probation Services or the YOT. It is important that offenders with disabilities and learning difficulties are also included in these programmes. Rates of employment of disabled people are far below national averages despite the fact that employment was the first sector to be addressed by the DDA in 1995. Employers are still often wary of employing people with disabilities and disabled people too, while often stating that they want to work, can also feel negative about the chances of this becoming a reality. Of course offenders in your organisation should have the option to discuss employment possibilities with Advice and Guidance workers. However, it may be that particular learners have built up a relationship which makes it easier to use you as a first step:

Do you make opportunities to talk with your disabled learners about possible employment options?

Some offender organisations also run social enterprise programmes designed to help offenders learn the skills required for self-employment. Self-employment can be a positive option for some disabled people whose disability or health difficulty makes travel or being out for long periods of time difficult. They can also be a positive option for some people with mental health difficulties.

In your discussions about employment do you include the possibility of self employment?

The Government recognises the extra support which disabled people may require if they are to gain and maintain employment. Every Local Authority employs a Disability Employment Adviser whose role is to support disabled people in finding work. DEAs can be contacted through local Job Centre Plus offices. A Government funding stream ‘Access to Work’ provides additional resources to cover the additional costs that a disabled individual might need if they are to work effectively. This can include travel costs, additional equipment or personal support. DEAs will be able to give details of Access to Work funding. In addition to this there are local voluntary organisations which specifically work at supporting people with learning difficulties into work.

Are you aware of some of the support which is available to disabled people who want to enter employment so that you can make your disabled learners aware of it and suggest who they might contact if they wish to look for employment in the future?

Emotional support in transition

There have been certain positive developments in ensuring that offenders move on to either further study or employment when they leave prison or YOI. However, many still are leaving without a positive future option. You will also have offenders leaving your class to move onto another prison. Some learners may feel very positive about their next step; others may be extremely apprehensive. Leaving, even when you very much want to leave, is not always an easy process and that is likely to be particularly true for offenders who
have some kind of mental health or emotional difficulty or for learners on the autistic spectrum who find changes of routine very hard. Learners may have felt particularly secure and valued in your class and be uneasy about leaving it. Such unease may manifest itself in a variety of different forms.

You and the learner may have very little or no time to prepare for leaving. However, if you do it is important for learners with disabilities and learning difficulties if there is some way of marking the end of their time with you. This may include them being given an internal certificate of achievement or being presented with a card signed by everyone in the group. These learners may also have built up important friendships within the group during their time in your class. You could facilitate the option of these continuing by ensuring they know how to contact each other in writing or by phone when one has left.

If you know a learner is leaving are there ways you can mark this event to provide a positive ending for the learner?

Further reading on Moving On

Developing Access to Skills for Life for Offenders with Learning Difficulties or Disabilities: Guidance for practitioners and providers (especially Chapter 6) This is part of Learning for Living guidance materials www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus

Learning for Living and Work, 2006, Learning and Skills Council
There are also regional Learning for Living and Work strategies in each LSC region.

Just Learning? Promising Practice in Offender Learning and Training
This includes case studies on transition. (http://www.lsneducation.org.uk/justlearning/about/index.html)

Department for Education and Skills et al, 2004a, The Offenders’ Learning Journey
This includes sections on moving on.

Department for Education and Skills et al, 2004b, The Offenders’ Learning Journey (Juveniles)
This includes sections on moving on.
Disability and Ethnicity

Disabled learners from minority ethnic communities have rights not to be discriminated against both through the Disability Discrimination Act and the Race Relations Act. It is acknowledged that people from black communities are over represented in offender organisations as well as being over represented in certain disability services in particular mental health services. Concern has been expressed that both the Criminal Justice System and the mental health system can exhibit ‘institutional racism’ and a propensity to assume a greater degree of deviant or dangerous behaviour within certain ethnic groups. It has also been stated, for example by NACRO, that when in offender organisations black people particularly those with mental health difficulties can experience prejudice and a lack of understanding of their particular situation.

Perception of disability in different ethnic groups

Implications for assessment

There are of course certain universal facts about disability. Being unable to see or unable to hear have certain implications which hold true whatever country a blind or deaf person is from. However, it is also the case that the concept of ‘disability’ is different in different cultures. The way in which we regard disability depends upon many different cultural influences and histories. This can show itself in many different ways:

Different definitions of disability

Different cultures have different ways of defining disability. Many countries do not have, in their language, a word for the all-encompassing term ‘disability’. They may make use of the English word ‘disabled’ but in their languages there are often only words for specific impairments, e.g. deaf people, blind people. In many countries people with mental health difficulties or learning difficulties are not regarded as being in the same category as people with physical or sensory disabilities. Also in many countries there is no clear distinction made between those with a learning difficulty and those with a mental health difficulty. In addition to this many conditions which are covered in UK and other northern countries’ legislation under the definition of disability – for example dyslexia, autism or ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) which make up a substantial proportion of recognised disabilities in offender organisations– are simply not recognised in many countries.
Are you sensitive to the fact that disabled people you teach may have different understandings of what constitutes a disability? What implications might this have when you are assessing learners?

Causes of impairment

The desire to try to find a reason for an individual having a particular disability tends to be very strong. In the north we see continual probing into possible genetic or environmental reasons. In some southern countries this desire can at times show itself in different ways. Perceived causes of disability can be based upon religious beliefs, for example in Hindu or Buddhist countries where there is a belief in reincarnation, there is sometimes also a belief that disability is the result of sins in a past life or of wrongdoings of parents particularly during pregnancy. In some religions disability is perceived as a reflection of divine influence, for example Muslim parents will often explain a child’s disability in terms of ‘it is Allah’s will’. In some instances a disabled child, particularly a child who has epilepsy, will be seen as a special child with extraordinary gifts. In certain cultures, for example some African countries, some disabilities can be perceived as being the result of sorcery or a curse. Disability can also sometimes be explained as the result of contagion, for example that the mother came into contact with disabled people when pregnant. However, it is also important to understand that such beliefs are not universal within any one culture.

Such causal explanations can often appear shocking to people who have been brought up in a northern environment and they are often seized upon as negative universals with statements being made such as ‘They believe that people become disabled because of sins they have committed; no wonder disabled people are treated so badly’. Of course some of the examples shown above do result in enforcing extremely negative perceptions, but it is an over simplification to believe that they automatically lead to ill treatment. They need also to be looked at in the context of the universal desire to try to explain the reason for a child being born different.

When discussing possible requirements of a disabled learner from a different culture are you sensitive to the fact that different cultures might have different beliefs in the causes of an impairment?

Attitudes towards disability

Attitudes towards people with disabilities vary enormously both between and within cultures. There can often be an assumption that people in other cultures treat disabled people very harshly. While there may be instances where this is true it is certainly not universally the case. Different societies may give importance to different issues and this can affect the way in which disabled people are treated – for
example in northern countries we tend to place issues of independence very high hence educational programmes often stress the need to develop independence skills in people with disabilities or learning difficulties. In more sociocentric and family orientated cultures independence might not be seen as so important.

When dealing with disabled learners from different cultures are you sensitive to different cultural attitudes towards disability?

Are you also careful not to make generalised assumptions about how a particular culture regards disability?

First and second-generation disabled learners

Some of your learners with disabilities who are also from a different ethnic background might have arrived in the UK very recently. Some of these might be asylum seekers who could be experiencing extreme isolation and depression as a result of being displaced from their home culture. Others might be people whose disability or learning difficulty has never been recognised in their home culture. Others still may have received support relevant to their cultural context, for example, learnt sign language in their mother tongue. On the other hand several learners might have been born in the UK, speak fluent English and have absorbed concepts of disability prevalent in the UK. ‘It’s not as simple as you think’ (part of the learning for Living Pathfinder materials cited below) has several examples of different ways that different cultures perceive disability.

When assessing learners do you make sure you talk to them about their past learning experiences and are you aware of the way in which the time they have spent in the UK might make a difference to how they regard their disability?

Confidentiality

In all cultures there can be stigma and prejudice around issues of disability. In some cultures disability can be seen as something shameful and hence a disabled learner might feel very reluctant to discuss their impairment or learning difficulty with you.

How can you be sensitive to the difficulty a learner may have in talking about their particular disability and how can you assure them that information they may share with you will be dealt with confidentially?

Curriculum design and delivery for disabled learners from different ethnic groups
Recognising identity

Many learning organisations recognise the importance of creating learning opportunities which respond to a learner's individual cultural background, for example recognising different cultural festivals. Some offender organisations have established groups which aim to combat racism and provide regular debates on topics connected to ethnicity. It is important that such approaches and groups are equally open to people with disabilities. Disabled people from different ethnic groups have sometimes commented that professionals tend to regard them first and foremost as a 'disabled person' and that such an approach can at times over-ride recognition of the important part which their ethnicity plays in their identity. For example, research carried out with young people with a learning difficulty from Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities showed how even those with severe learning difficulties saw themselves first and foremost as ‘Pakistani’ or ‘Bangladeshi’ whereas parallel interviews with professionals showed that they regarded them primarily as young people with a ‘learning difficulty’ (Aasha report cited below)

How can you ensure you pay due attention to the importance of ethnic identity of your learners with disability or learning difficulties from different ethnic backgrounds?

Do you offer approaches which respond creatively to different cultural backgrounds?

ESOL learners with disabilities or learning difficulties

ESOL learners in offender organisations are likely to cover a wide variety of backgrounds. Some of them may be asylum seekers who may be experiencing various mental health issues due to isolation and dislocation from their home country. Some may have conditions which might be recognised as a disability or learning difficulty in the UK but have never been acknowledged as such in their country of origin. Some may be established learners and have studied to a high level in their country of origin; others might never have had the opportunity to go to school.

In such situations it is not always easy to distinguish between a particular ‘learning difficulty’ and difficulties in learning because of lack of prior learning experience or current trauma. There is no easy way of making a ‘learning difficulty’ diagnosis. However, what is important is to keep listening to individual learners and, wherever possible, to bring together both additional language support (for example where possible to involve local community or faith organisations and/or an interpreter) and also those who have understanding of people with a learning difficulty. Where this is not possible you need to look at the resources which might be available within your own organisation. Many offender organisations speak very positively of the benefits which can be gained through peer mentoring and it might well be that you can
use other offenders to act as interpreters.

Do you spend time talking to ESOL learners about their prior learning experience?

Are you aware of the range of possible reasons for ESOL learners having difficulty in learning?

Moving On

Passing on of good, informative records is of course extremely important for all learners when they move from your organisation to another offender organisation or to learning or employment outside. This is particularly true for disabled learners from different ethnic backgrounds. During your time working with an individual learner you may have managed to establish ways of working which respond to the complexities of his or her particular requirements and it is extremely important that this information should not be lost and that, in conjunction with the learner, you find ways of recording and transferring it.

Transition for a learner who has a disability or learning difficulty and is from a different cultural background is likely to be particularly difficult. Learners need to know that they have ongoing rights in further education and in employment under the DDA and the Race Relations Act. They need to be informed about Learning Support teams in colleges and be prepared to request relevant support from staff in this team. They also may well wish to contact local community or faith groups who might be able to offer ongoing support.

Do you ensure that you provide, with an individual learner’s consent, clear records on the approaches that you have found successful when working with disabled learners from different ethnic groups?

Are you able to discuss with learners whom they might approach to ensure that both their disability requirements and any issues related to their ethnicity are responded to appropriately?

Further reading on disability and ethnicity

Aasha: working with young people with a learning difficulty from a South Asian background, 2002, Maudsley, L. with Rafique, A. and Uddin A. This is published by Skill.

It’s not as Simple as you think
This is part of Learning for Living guidance materials www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus
Making it Happen: An inclusive approach to working with people with learning difficulty and ESOL needs
This is part of Learning for Living guidance materials
www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus

ESOL Access for All
This is part of Learning for Living guidance materials
www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus

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