Skills for Life:
The national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills

ESOL Access for All

Guidance on making the adult ESOL curriculum accessible

Part 1

department for
education and skills
creating opportunity, releasing potential, achieving excellence

read·write·plus

read·write·plus

ESOL Access for All

Guidance on making the adult ESOL curriculum accessible

Part 1

Contents

Part 1

Skills for Life: The national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills

Skills for Life, the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills, was launched by the Prime Minister in 2001 and sets out the government's plans to help 2.25 million learners improve their skills and gain a national qualification by 2010.

Since 2001, a massive 3.7 million adults across England have taken up 7.8 million courses in literacy, language and numeracy. 1,130,000 of these learners have gone on to achieve nationally recognised qualifications – and government is on track to meet the commitments made in the *Skills for Life* strategy.

Since the launch of *Skills for Life*, we have gained an even greater insight into the effect low levels of literacy and numeracy skills have on individuals, their families, on the economy and on society. For example, adults with poor literacy and numeracy skills could earn up to £50,000 less over their lifetime and are more likely to have health problems, to live in disadvantaged communities or to be unemployed. They and their children risk being cut off from the benefits of a world increasingly linked through information technology. Additionally, poor literacy, language and numeracy skills have been estimated to cost the country in excess of £10 billion a year.

Skills for Life is an ambitious strategy that is designed to address literacy, language and numeracy needs of adults and young people. It covers all post-16 learners on learning programmes at levels from Pre-entry up to and including Level 2. These programmes range from discrete to embedded courses, and from classroom and community provision to voluntary and work-based learning. Achievement and progress in *Skills for Life* is recognised through certification of Key Skills, GCSE Maths and English, and adult literacy and numeracy national qualifications. It is therefore crucial that the strategy supports and reflects the successful implementation of all other post-16 strategies.

Every organisation and individual has a contribution to make. We believe that the most important element for successful delivery of *Skills for Life* is partnership, together with the ownership of the strategy by all our key supporting and development partners.

Government departments, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), Jobcentre Plus, the Prison and Probation Services, development and learning providers in the post-16 learning sector, businesses, the CBI, the TUC, Sector Skills Councils and many other organisations are working together to improve the literacy, language and numeracy skills of adults through:

- **learner and employer engagement**, to engage and increase participation of young people and adults from priority groups in literacy, language and numeracy learning, through targeted activities within and across government and its agencies, the work place and the community;

- **ensuring capacity**, to improve the planning and funding of literacy, language and numeracy provision so that learning provision is effective and well coordinated;

- **improving quality**, to improve standards and quality in teaching and learning in literacy, language and numeracy and to remodel and professionalise the *Skills for Life* workforce;

- **improving achievement and progression**, to improve outcomes in literacy, language and numeracy provision and progression onto further learning and assess impact on social inclusion and economic outcomes.

The work of the Learning for Living Consortium has made a valuable contribution to the strategy through producing these guidance documents for those working with adults with learning difficulties or disabilities.

We recognise their importance in providing opportunities to change the culture of learning, change for the learner, and change for their life chances. For this group of learners, tangible changes in their skills, their quality of life and their confidence in their abilities continues to be one of our priorities in creating an inclusive society.

Neil Robertson
Head of the Skills for Life Strategy Unit

Learning for Living

This document is one of a suite of guidance documents developed by the Learning for Living Consortium[1] for anyone working with adults who have learning difficulties or disabilities in the areas of literacy, language (ESOL) and numeracy, and also in the area of the Wider Key Skills.[2]

It has been accepted, after wide consultation, that it is impossible to find a terminology to suit everybody. The term learning difficulties or disabilities is used to include learners with:

- clearly identified learning difficulties;
- physical and sensory impairments – for example those with mobility difficulties or hearing or visual impairments;
- unseen disabilities such as health conditions, mental health difficulties and dyslexia;
- those whose disrupted learning experiences (for example those in offender establishments) and difficulties with learning have led them to work at a significantly lower level than the majority of their peers.

The guidance documents have been developed primarily as a response to requests from those in the field that more guidance is needed on working with learners with learning difficulties or disabilities. In producing these documents a number of pathfinder sites throughout the country have provided ideas and tested the materials.

Some of the documents provide practical material; others provide advice on general principles of organising learning effectively. You are encouraged to use them in different ways from skimming to get an overall idea, to detailed reading for examples of approaches and strategies or as a resource for professional development activities. Each document has a specific focus, as indicated in the diagram on the following page. However, what is common to all of the guidance documents is that they are:

- complementary (with cross references provided between them);
- underpinned by a common set of values and principles for effective learning;
- intended to encourage reflective practice, providing:
  - examples of practice, with which to compare and contrast your own
  - theories to help you in your analysis of 'What works – and why?'; 'What doesn't work – and why not?'
  - advice on action planning – taking account of your learning from experience, to improve your future practice and provision.

The following symbols have been used to help you cross reference to other documents in this 'family' of materials:

1	Reference to a section within a guidance document.	⊙	Reference to material on CD-ROM
	Reference to another guidance document in the Learning for Living suite.	🌐	Reference to a useful Website.
DVD	Reference to a DVD clip.	📖	Reference to the Appendices.

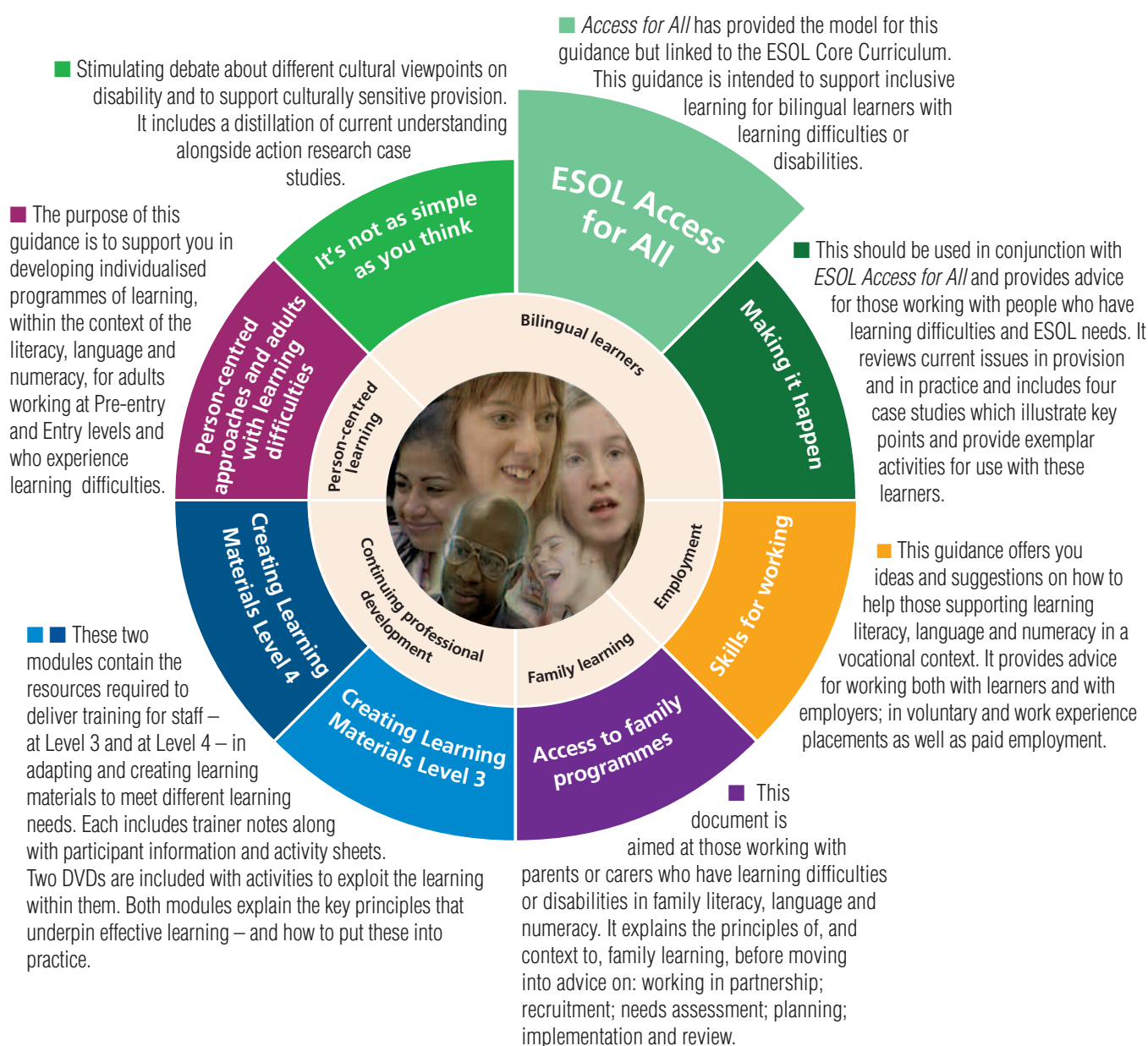[1] A group of key national organisations in the fields of literacy, language and numeracy and learning difficulty and disability, lead by NIACE: Basic Skills Agency, Big Picture Interactive, BILD, Birmingham Rathbone, Ufi learndirect, Learning and Skills Development Agency, LLU+ at London South Bank University, Skill, and University of Cambridge.
[2] Working with Others, Problem Solving, and Improving Own Learning and Performance.

It is hoped that they will help you to ensure that all your learners feel included in, and are able to succeed in, post-school learning. An extended version of this introduction to the whole suite of guidance documents – spelling out the background to the work and the underpinning values and principles in more detail – is obtainable, quoting ref: ITLFL, from:

Department for Education and Skills Publications
PO Box 5050
Sherwood Park
Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ

Tel: 0845 60 222 60
Fax: 0845 60 333 60
Textphone: 0845 60 555 60
Email: dfes@prolog.uk.com

■ *Access for All* has provided the model for this guidance but linked to the ESOL Core Curriculum. This guidance is intended to support inclusive learning for bilingual learners with learning difficulties or disabilities.

■ Stimulating debate about different cultural viewpoints on disability and to support culturally sensitive provision. It includes a distillation of current understanding alongside action research case studies.

■ The purpose of this guidance is to support you in developing individualised programmes of learning, within the context of the literacy, language and numeracy, for adults working at Pre-entry and Entry levels and who experience learning difficulties.

■ This should be used in conjunction with *ESOL Access for All* and provides advice for those working with people who have learning difficulties and ESOL needs. It reviews current issues in provision and in practice and includes four case studies which illustrate key points and provide exemplar activities for use with these learners.

■ This guidance offers you ideas and suggestions on how to help those supporting learning literacy, language and numeracy in a vocational context. It provides advice for working both with learners and with employers; in voluntary and work experience placements as well as paid employment.

■ ■ These two modules contain the resources required to deliver training for staff – at Level 3 and at Level 4 – in adapting and creating learning materials to meet different learning needs. Each includes trainer notes along with participant information and activity sheets. Two DVDs are included with activities to exploit the learning within them. Both modules explain the key principles that underpin effective learning – and how to put these into practice.

■ This document is aimed at those working with parents or carers who have learning difficulties or disabilities in family literacy, language and numeracy. It explains the principles of, and context to, family learning, before moving into advice on: working in partnership; recruitment; needs assessment; planning; implementation and review.

It's not as simple as you think

ESOL Access for All

Person-centred approaches and adults with learning difficulties

Making it happen

Creating Learning Materials Level 4

Skills for working

Creating Learning Materials Level 3

Access to family programmes

Bilingual learners

Person-centred learning

Continuing professional development

Employment

Family learning

Acknowledgements

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES), NIACE and the Learning for Living consortium would also like to thank those organisations and individuals who contributed to the draft guidance and responded to the consultation, in particular the pathfinder sites.

For a full list of those pathfinder sites involved in the Learning for Living project please see *Introduction to Learning for Living* available from Department for Education and Skills Publications, quoting ref. ITLFL (contact details on back cover).

Introduction to ESOL Access for All

Skills for Life, the government's strategy for meeting the needs of the seven million adults in England with low literacy, language and numeracy skills was launched in 2001.

As part of this strategy, the core curricula for adult literacy, numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) are based on the national standards for adult literacy and numeracy at Entry level, Level 1 and Level 2. There is also a curriculum framework for literacy, language and numeracy learners at Pre-entry level. The adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL core curricula were published in 2001. The adult ESOL core curriculum was published in December 2001 and the adult Pre-entry curriculum framework was published in February 2002. The relevant curriculum documents are available free to all adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL tutors, and to tutors and others who work with learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

In March 2002 *Access for All* guidance was published by the Department for Education and Skills. It is available to support practitioners in making the adult literacy and numeracy curricula accessible to learners with learning difficulties and disabilities (see www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus).

Following *Access for All's* favourable reception and accompanying national training, here is the Department for Education and Skills' *ESOL Access for All*. It offers support for ESOL practitioners in making the ESOL curriculum accessible for learning difficulties and disabilities. It completes the suite of support documents for the literacy, language and numeracy curricula.

The term 'bilingual learners' is used throughout this document to mean anyone who uses more than one language in their daily life. It does not imply a particular level of competency in either language. This particular use of the word bilingual is current in post-16 education in the UK.

> *It is a term that has been much debated and arose as part of the equal opportunities and anti-racism debates of the late 1980s. Clearly many learners speak more than the two languages that the prefix –bi implies. However, the alternative, which is to refer to individuals as 'ESOL learners' has been rejected by many as labelling individuals by what they can not do well (i.e. speak English) rather than what they can do (i.e. speak more than one language.)* (Spiegel and Sunderland, 2006)

Talking about ESOL rather than bilingual learners also implies that learners are only to be found within ESOL provision, which is clearly not the case.

This introduction to *ESOL Access for All* updates the content of *Introducing Access for All* (Department for Education and Skills, 2003), expands it, and includes issues that are particularly relevant to bilingual learners and their teachers.

The structure of the guidance

This guidance is published in two parts. Part 1 contains sections 1 to 3:

Section 1: Background and key issues

This section includes information on the current policy and legislative background, key issues in curriculum delivery, principles when working with learners with learning difficulties or disabilities, terminology, learning styles, specialist support and support staff, and technology for learners with learning difficulties or disabilities.

Section 2: Effects of learning difficulties or disabilities on learning

This section gives crucial information and examines issues relating to particular learning difficulties or disabilities, including the impact of a particular impairment on learning, the use of technology and helpful approaches to consider when working with this group of learners. You should read this section before dipping into the relevant curriculum sections of the guidance (see section 4 in Part 2).

The section focuses on learners:
- who are deaf or hearing impaired;
- who are blind or visually impaired;
- with physical impairments;
- with long-term health difficulties;
- with acquired brain injury;
- with memory difficulties;
- who have mental health difficulties;
- with dyslexia and related specific learning difficulties;
- with learning difficulties;
- with autistic spectrum disorders.

Section 3: Inclusive learning – meeting the challenges

This section presents brief case studies of different bilingual learners with learning difficulties or disabilities, describing aspects of their language learning journey and case studies of organisations working towards inclusion.

Part 2 contains sections 4 and 5:

Section 4: The adult ESOL core curriculum and barriers to learning

This is the main part of the guidance and contains five main sub-sections reflecting the five levels and content (listening, reading, speaking and writing) of the ESOL curriculum, indicating where learners with learning difficulties or disabilities may encounter barriers to learning and suggesting strategies for addressing these.

Additional information boxes: throughout section 4 you will find additional information boxes on issues relating to learners with learning difficulties and disabilities. An index of these can be found on Part 2, p. 97.

Section 4 will only make sense if read alongside the relevant part of the *Adult ESOL Core Curriculum* (page references to the curriculum are given on every page of these sections). Not every descriptor (curriculum element) in the core curriculum is mentioned in the sections – only those that the authors feel will create barriers to learning for learners with learning difficulties or disabilities, and which may require an alternative teaching approach or strategy.
See 'Format of section 4' overleaf.

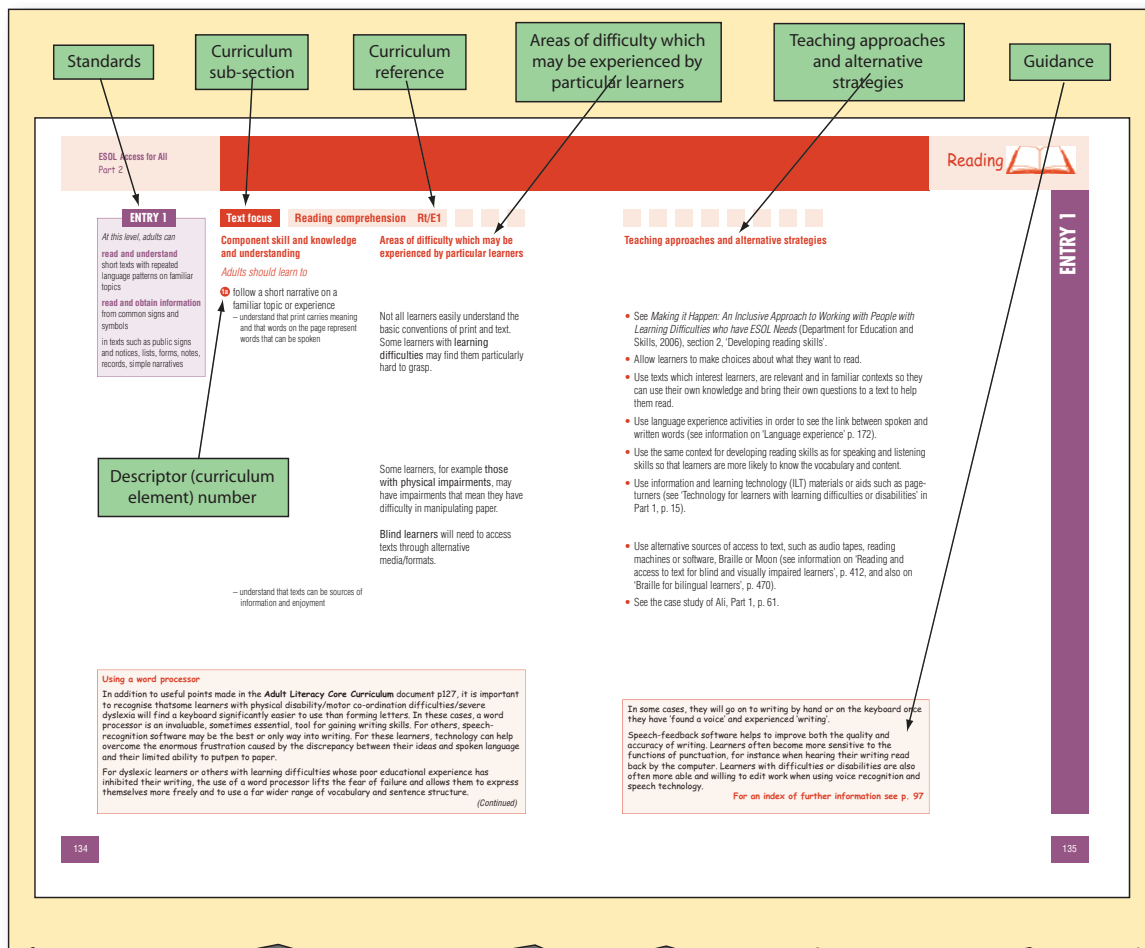### Section 5: Appendices

This section covers Part 1 and Part 2 and includes:

- **Bibliography**

- **Resources** – This includes sub-sections on a) suppliers, b) books and other print materials, c) tactile and other multisensory resources, d) software and suppliers.

- **Useful organisations and Websites**

- **General interest** – This includes subsections on books, and films and documentories.

Format of section 4

Section 4 (Part 2) is organised across double pages as follows:

Standards

Curriculum sub-section

Curriculum reference

Areas of difficulty which may be experienced by particular learners

Teaching approaches and alternative strategies

Guidance

ESOL Access for All
Part 2

Reading

ENTRY 1

Text focus   **Reading comprehension**   **Rt/E1**

At this level, adults can

read and understand short texts with repeated language patterns on familiar topics

read and obtain information from common signs and symbols

in texts such as public signs and notices, lists, forms, notes, records, simple narratives

Component skill and knowledge and understanding

Adults should learn to

① follow a short narrative on a familiar topic or experience
– understand that print carries meaning and that words on the page represent words that can be spoken

Areas of difficulty which may be experienced by particular learners

Not all learners easily understand the basic conventions of print and text. Some learners with **learning difficulties** may find them particularly hard to grasp.

Some learners, for example **those with physical impairments**, may have impairments that mean they have difficulty in manipulating paper.

Blind learners will need to access texts through alternative media/formats.

– understand that texts can be sources of information and enjoyment

Teaching approaches and alternative strategies

- See *Making it Happen: An Inclusive Approach to Working with People with Learning Difficulties who have ESOL Needs* (Department for Education and Skills, 2006), section 2, 'Developing reading skills'.
- Allow learners to make choices about what they want to read.
- Use texts which interest learners, are relevant and in familiar contexts so they can use their own knowledge and bring their own questions to a text to help them read.
- Use language experience activities in order to see the link between spoken and written words (see information on 'Language experience' p. 172).
- Use the same context for developing reading skills as for speaking and listening skills so that learners are more likely to know the vocabulary and content.
- Use information and learning technology (ILT) materials or aids such as page-turners (see 'Technology for learners with learning difficulties or disabilities' in Part 1, p. 15).
- Use alternative sources of access to text, such as audio tapes, reading machines or software, Braille or Moon (see information on 'Reading and access to text for blind and visually impaired learners', p. 412, and also on 'Braille for bilingual learners', p. 470).
- See the case study of Ali, Part 1, p. 61.

ENTRY 1

Descriptor (curriculum element) number

Using a word processor

In addition to useful points made in the **Adult Literacy Core Curriculum** document p127, it is important to recognise that some learners with physical disability/motor co-ordination difficulties/severe dyslexia will find a keyboard significantly easier to use than forming letters. In these cases, a word processor is an invaluable, sometimes essential, tool for gaining writing skills. For others, speech-recognition software may be the best or only way into writing. For these learners, technology can help overcome the enormous frustration caused by the discrepancy between their ideas and spoken language and their limited ability to put pen to paper.

For dyslexic learners or others with learning difficulties whose poor educational experience has inhibited their writing, the use of a word processor lifts the fear of failure and allows them to express themselves more freely and to use a far wider range of vocabulary and sentence structure.

(Continued)

In some cases, they will go on to writing by hand or on the keyboard once they have 'found a voice' and experienced 'writing'.

Speech-feedback software helps to improve both the quality and accuracy of writing. Learners often become more sensitive to the functions of punctuation, for instance when hearing their writing read back by the computer. Learners with difficulties or disabilities are also often more able and willing to edit work when using voice recognition and speech technology.

For an index of further information see p. 97

134

135

The curriculum content is presented in exactly the same way as in the *Adult ESOL Core Curriculum* (Department for Education and Skills, 2001), although not all component skills, knowledge and understanding have been included (see above). The skills, knowledge and understanding are presented in the second column on the left-hand page. The third column on the left-hand page (barriers to learning) lists the barriers faced by particular learners in relation to particular skills, knowledge and understanding, and briefly states and explains why these may prove to be so.

For each barrier there are suggested teaching approaches and alternative strategies on the right-hand page. There is therefore a close alignment between the approaches suggested and the particular category of learners for whom an element of the curriculum may raise a difficulty. This correspondence between the left- and right-hand pages is shown in the illustration by the dotted lines and dotted arrows.

Sometimes the barriers and difficulties posed by particular elements of the curriculum, and the recommended approaches and strategies, closely resemble those already mentioned in the document. Where this occurs, readers are sometimes referred to the page or curriculum reference in question; when it has seemed appropriate to do so, however, both the description of the barrier and the approaches have been repeated.

Further guidance on approaches, difficulties or specific characteristics of particular learners is given in section 2, pp. 19–59.

1 Background and key issues

Policy and legislative background

This section, like a similar section in *Introducing Access for All,* aims to give you practical information and strategies to help you implement the vision spelt out in *Inclusive Learning* (FEFC, 1996). It will also ensure that you fulfil the requirements of the Learning and Skills Act and the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) Part 4. It is crucial for practitioners, working with learners with learning difficulties or disabilities, to keep themselves fully updated on current policy and legislation.

What follows is an overview of the main developments in government policy and legislation, in relation to post-16 education, since the DDA 1995 was passed by Parliament.

Learning and Skills Act 2000

The Learning and Skills Act 2000 states that the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has a duty "to have due regard to promote equality of opportunity between disabled and non-disabled learners". The Act recognises the need to include those learners who, because of their learning difficulty or disability, have often been excluded from education.

> *A person has a learning difficulty if:*
>
> a. *he has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of persons of his age, or*
> b. *he has a disability which either prevents or hinders him from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided by institutions providing post-16 education or training.*
>
> (Learning and Skills Act, 2000, section 13, paragraph 5)

This duty will include many learners who might not be covered under the DDA.

Disability Discrimination Act Part 4

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) 2001 brought education under the DDA Part 4. The Act states that providers of post-16 education have a duty not to treat disabled learners "less favourably" for any reason related to their disability and 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. These duties apply to all staff in the organisation, not just the teaching staff. The definition of disability in the DDA is:

> *… a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on your ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.*

This can include:
- *sensory impairments, e.g. individuals with visual or hearing impairments*
- *learning difficulties, including specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia*
- *mental health conditions*
- *severe disfigurements*
- *progressive conditions, such as multiple sclerosis, cancer and HIV*
- *conditions which are characterised by a number of cumulative effects such as pain or fatigue*
- *a past history of disability*

(SKILL, 1995)

An individual does not have to be registered as a disabled person to be included by the Act.

Making "reasonable adjustments" means that if a disabled person is at a substantial disadvantage, the education provider must take reasonable steps to alleviate that disadvantage. This might include:

- changing admissions, administrative and examination procedures;
- changing course content, including work placements;
- changing physical features and premises;
- changing teaching arrangements;
- offering information in alternative formats;
- providing additional teaching;
- providing communication and support services;
- training staff.

The first duties to make reasonable adjustments under the DDA Part 4 came into force in September 2002. The requirement to provide additional auxiliary aids and services (such as note takers or specialist equipment) came into force in September 2003. The need to make adjustments to the physical environment became a requirement on 1 September 2005.

The duty to make reasonable adjustments is a duty to disabled individuals generally, not just to particular individuals. This means that providers must anticipate what sort of adjustments may be necessary for disabled individuals in the future and, where appropriate, make adjustments in advance.

The Disability Discrimination Act 2005

In April 2005 the government passed new legislation that amends the DDA. Most of the changes are expected to be implemented in 2006. At present, mental health conditions are required to be "clinically well recognised" in order to be covered by the DDA. This requirement has been removed in the new Act.
As a result of the new Act, cancer, HIV and multiple sclerosis will be covered from the point of diagnosis, i.e. before the condition has an effect on normal day-to-day activities. This is because of the stigma that can be attached to individuals who have these conditions, for example in applying for jobs.

These areas will provisionally be implemented in December 2005 (SKILL, 1995).

Disclosure, confidentiality and bilingual learners

Education providers have a responsibility to do what they can to find out whether individual learners have disability-related needs in order to make appropriate provision. However, this is not always a simple thing to do.

Some disabling conditions are visible. Others, such as mental health difficulties or dyslexia, are not. Also, the difficulties of some learners, for example those with dyslexia, may not have been previously identified and these learners may not realise that they have a disability to disclose.

Another factor related to disclosure is that many bilingual learners may not understand the terminology or the concepts that underpin terms such as *learning difficulty*. They may not have equivalent terms in their own language. Organisations need to guard against assuming that learning difficulty and disability are culturally neutral concepts. The aims and needs of learners with a learning difficulty or disability from different ethnic groups may or may not be different from other sections of society. Bilingual learners with learning difficulties or disabilities will not necessarily define themselves according to Western models of disability.

See It's Not As Simple As You Think: Cultural Viewpoints around Disability.

Bearing in mind the above, organisations need to take reasonable steps to encourage disclosure. This means that you, as the provider of learning, need to create an atmosphere, at initial interview, induction and as the course proceeds, in which any learner feels that they can talk in private to a member of staff if they feel that they have needs which are not being addressed. Language, in more than one sense, is extremely important here. Even when learners do not see themselves as having a 'disability', they may recognise that they have particular requirements. They may well need to talk about their needs in a language in which they are fluent. The use of interpreters may be critical with learners whose spoken English is limited if a real discussion is to take place.

If a learner discloses a disability or an additional need to one individual, the whole institution is, under DDA Part 4, deemed to know. This means that you need to think about how, with the learner's consent, you can pass on information about support needs to the appropriate person or team in your organisation.

Some individual learners may not want anyone else to know about their disability. In such cases it may be impossible for staff to put in place the most appropriate 'reasonable adjustment'. If an organisation has made reasonable attempts to find out whether an individual learner has disability-related needs and the learner has chosen not to make a disclosure, the institution may not be liable for any failure to make specific individual adjustments. In general, however, learners with disabilities are far more confident about disclosing a disabling condition if they feel that both the organisation as a whole and individual staff have a positive and supportive attitude towards anyone who might have additional requirements.

Inclusive Learning

In 1996 the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) produced an influential report, *Inclusive Learning*, written by a committee chaired by Professor John Tomlinson. In essence, this report shows how learners with disabilities or learning difficulties do not solely or necessarily require specialist additional support in order to gain access to the curriculum. Rather, the whole process of teaching and learning needs to be broadened to include the full range of learners:

> *There is a world of difference between, on the one hand, offering courses of education and training and then giving some students who have learning difficulties some additional human or physical aids to gain access to those courses, and, on the other hand, redesigning the very process of learning, assessment and organisation so as to fit the objectives and learning styles of the students.* (FEFC, 1996, p. 4)

Inclusive Learning states that all learners are entitled to a learning environment that matches their individual requirements. For this to occur there has to be a match between how the learner learns and how he or she is taught.

In 2005, a steering group chaired by Peter Little OBE produced a report called *Through Inclusion to Excellence* which built upon Tomlinson's work. The report states, "that the focus must be on the learning organisation's capacity to respond to the needs of the individual learner rather than locating the difficulty or deficit with the learner." The report continues by saying that, "the key issue now is to ensure equitable access and quality of experience for these learners across the full range of LSC-funded provision."

Who are the learners?

Bilingual learners with learning difficulties or disabilities are found on courses at all levels and in every curriculum area, and their needs vary enormously. The Learning for Living introduction document gives more detail on who the learners are.

Learners are individuals first and foremost, and they have their own personal interests, goals, ways of relating, and likes and dislikes.

Bilingual adults with learning difficulties or disabilities are not necessarily 'new' learners. They may have been successful in some aspects of learning, either in this country or abroad, and less successful in others. For instance, for a bilingual learner who has dyslexia, some aspects of written language may remain difficult, even though the learner may have acquired considerable accuracy and fluency in spoken English.

Adults with learning difficulties or disabilities may also have developed a number of effective practical and 'life' skills.

In general, many learners, whether on ESOL literacy or numeracy, or other programmes, have a 'spiky' profile of skills (see example below). This profile may cross several levels and is determined by the learners' sensory, motor, perceptual and cognitive strengths and weaknesses. Consequently, adult approaches that respect and use learners' strengths and weaknesses to help learning are likely to be the most effective.

It is important to address the individual strengths and weaknesses of learners in planning learning and in determining teaching approaches. There are common profiles for learners with certain difficulties, but there is also great variation between individuals. This individual learning 'style' should influence teaching and learning. Motivation is particularly important for adults who experience a number of barriers to learning. The barriers are the result of others' responses to the person,

Example of a learner with a spiky profile

Ali is a 16 year old, originally from Bangladesh, who has spent most of his life in Britain. He lives with his father and three brothers in south London, and speaks Sylheti with his father and older relatives, and English with his brothers and friends. He has plenty to say on a variety of subjects; he enjoys reading in English, though finds it very hard, he has a keen sense of humour and is good with his hands and with creative tasks. After a slightly disrupted early education, when he spent a year in Bangladesh at the age of 9, he has spent most of his education years in British schools. Nevertheless, he finds himself in an ESOL Foundation class at his local college. Though his academic vocabulary is limited, he speaks London English relative fluently, The main reason seems to be that he has severe difficulties reading and writing English, and would not be in a position to follow a vocational course because of this.

His reading is halting and at a very basic level. He has good strategies for using context to decode unfamiliar words, and can guess but not always accurately (for instance reading London for England in a text about immigration), but he cannot tackle new words by sounding out. Ali's writing is very basic, his written vocabulary and organisation of ideas much less sophisticated than his spoken English. His spelling can be bizarre and poorly related to the sound of the word, for instance writing lanleg for language, soct for store. In other cases he reverses letters, for instance writing fuor for four. It seems he has always found reading and writing difficult, including learning Bengali which he tried to learn at Saturday classes. However, his brothers do write both standard Bengali and English without apparent difficulty.

Ali is easily distracted, with a short concentration span. Because of this, he plays the class clown, a role he has taken since primary school, as a way of distracting attention from his literacy and other difficulties. When questioned,

> *other problems with learning emerge. Ali has a poor short-term memory, he cannot remember telephone numbers, even his own. He could never learn his times tables and was late learning to tell the time. He has difficulties with sequencing – he can name all the months of the year, but ask him to say them in order and he gets in a muddle. He is left-handed, and holds his pen awkwardly. However, when the reasons for his difficulties are explained to him, his preferred learning style discussed with him and a structured programme of work which matches this style is followed, he is very eager to learn and begins to make progress.* (Sunderland, 1997)

their learning difficulty or impairment. Poor self-esteem and low confidence can be attributed to prior experience of failure and/or negative perceptions and low expectations. For all these reasons, it is vital to give learners a successful experience of learning. To do this, it is important to find approaches that suit learners' preferred ways of learning and reduce the psychological and emotional barriers to learning.

Practitioners who have had no previous experience of working with bilingual learners with a learning difficulty or impairment may feel unsure about how to respond to that individual. They may feel that they cannot teach this learner without some special expertise. In general, however, effective teaching approaches – which offer variety in the presentation of material, engage learners in active learning, structure the development of skills, and are flexible in addressing individual needs and preferred ways of learning – will help all learners.

Terminology

There are often concerns about the appropriate terminology to use when speaking to and about individuals with disabilities. This is understandable, considering that terminology is continually changing.

See It's Not as Simple as You Think: Cultural Viewpoints around Disability

Some learners who have worked with social services self-advocacy groups may prefer the term 'learning disability' to 'learning difficulty'. Check with individual learners how they wish to define themselves. In doing so, however, it is important to remember that for many bilingual learners, Western concepts of learning difficulties or disabilities may be new to them, as well as the accompanying English terminology. The use of trained interpreters may be vital to enable you to communicate effectively with your learner.

The table on p.8 is a guide to commonly preferred words and phrases to use with post-school learners. Individual learners may have individual preferences: for example, some people may prefer the term 'disabled person' and others 'a person with a disability'. Currently certain groups, for example the Disability Rights Commission, are advocating the use of the term 'impairment' to describe particular

conditions, seeing it as separate from 'disability', which is the effect this impairment can have in certain situations. Wherever possible has been adopted this approach.

The table is adapted from the original *Access for All* guidance and we acknowledge that the terminology may change. While it is important to keep up to date with accepted terminology, it is always important to ask the individual how they wish to be referred to.

Use	Terms to be avoided because they may offend or have a pejorative connotation
Individual learners with... (e.g. diabetes)	Never use the adjective as a noun, e.g. the disabled, a diabetic
Learners/students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (as a general term)	Never individuals suffering from/afflicted with, etc. (implying victim role) Never SLDD or SEN or special educational needs
Person with disabilities (if the person prefers it and/or for variety)	Never cripple(d), invalid, handicap
Person with a learning difficulty (in any education or training environment) or learning disability (in health or social services context)	Never SEN, ESN, mentally handicapped, person with a mental age of…, retarded
Wheelchair user	Never wheelchair bound
Person with partial sight, or blind person, or partially sighted person, visually impaired	Never visually handicapped person
Deaf, deafened, hard of hearing or partially hearing, person with partial hearing, hearing impaired, pre-lingually deaf	Never deaf and dumb or deaf mute
Person without speech	Never dumb
Hearing aid	Deaf aid
Person with mental health difficulties/issues or a mental health service user	Never psychiatrically disturbed person, mental patient, sufferer or mental health problems
Person with additional support needs in a learning context	Special needs person
Child with special educational needs (only in a school context)	Special needs student/person/trainee or person with special needs SEN pupil
Person with autistic spectrum disorders	Autistic individuals
Toilet/facilities that are accessible/accessible toilets/facilities	Never disabled toilets/facilities, etc.

Principles for working with learners with learning difficulties or disabilities

In recent years many individuals with disabilities have tried to change the way in which disability is perceived. Put simply, this change constitutes a shift from seeing disability as an individual's intrinsic problem that is bound to cause difficulties (medical model), to seeing that it is often society which disables an individual by not adapting to the full range of physical and learning diversity (social model).

For example, a deaf learner who lip-reads is not at such a disadvantage in a well-lit room, where the practitioner faces the front and articulates clearly, and where learning activities with peers are designed to maximise the use of visual cues. If these factors are not in place, barriers are created.

When working with learners with a learning difficulty or disability, it is important not to focus on the specific disability, but to follow certain generic principles.

Ethos and attitudes

- Focus on what makes people individuals, not on their individual condition.
- Don't assume you know what the implications of an impairment or disabling condition are; ask the learners themselves, and listen to what they say – they are the experts on the effects of their learning difficulty or disability (how their impairment or learning difficulty affects them).
- Understand the social dimension of disability – the implications of an impairment are the effects it is allowed to have in current circumstances, and these circumstances can change.
- Be aware of your own attitudes – it is often staff attitudes (such as patronising behaviour, pity or embarrassment) rather than an individual's impairment that can create barriers.

Learning environment

- Foster a learning environment that encourages all participants to respond to the range of learning needs, aspirations and difficulties in the group in positive, frank, supportive and creative ways.
- Take time to observe what works for a particular learner and what does not, including observing his or her strengths as well as the things he or she finds difficult. There may also be emotional issues that create a barrier to learning; you will need to address these before learning can take place.
- Don't be afraid of trying things out. Sometimes it is necessary to explore different ways of working to find out which way is the most effective; this is fine as long as you and the learner work through the issues and decide on the strategy together.
- Ensure that the range of resources is appropriate and adequate to meet the needs of all learners.
- Include all learners fully in any group activity, unless they specifically wish not to be part of a group discussion. Be aware of how group dynamics or an

impairment can exclude an individual, for example not being able to see other learners in the group. Adopt appropriate strategies, such as everyone saying their name before making their point.

Institutional access and support

- Remember that some learners may need extra support in areas outside the classroom, for example in using the canteen or other facilities.
- Learners with disabilities may need to have individual arrangements for examination or assessment; for example, extra time, a separate room, a reader or a scribe, or breaks in the middle. Make these arrangements in good time.
- Make sure your organisation is aware of the particular needs of individuals with disabilities when drawing up its health and safety procedures (for example, having places of safety clearly marked for wheelchair users in case of a fire) and ensure that you know these procedures.

Learning styles and learning difficulties or disabilities

The term 'learning styles' tends to be used as an umbrella term for a wide range of different things, such as learning preferences, cognitive styles, learning strategies and the need to avoid barriers to understanding that can arise when you ignore such things as perceptual processing difficulties or indeed sensory impairment. It may be easier to reframe this approach pedagogically as 'meaning-based' learning. This allows us to reconsider learning style models and strategies from the perspective of meaning.

Meaning-based teaching and learning

When teaching any learner, it is important that their learning is meaningful, rather than dependent on merely memorising, particularly when rote learning proves problematic. While all individuals may find particular approaches more meaningful than others, specific approaches can be *essential* for learners with learning difficulties or disabilities who may be able to use only some approaches to learning. This gives learners fewer strategies and less flexibility in their learning. Some disabilities, such as dyslexia, may be partially defined by the 'cognitive style'. For example, learners with dyslexia experience difficulties in what are characterised as 'left-brained' processes such as language and sequencing, so may rely on what are characterised as 'right-brained' approaches, such as imagery and holistic, non-sequential methods.

Cognitive style

Some models for a learner's cognitive style can be related to the characteristic differences between the way the two hemispheres of the brain appear to process information.

The **left** cerebral hemisphere usually specialises in:	While the **right** hemisphere specialises in:
• verbal function; • verbal thinking. It is analytical, breaks things down into parts, and processes sequentially.	• visual–spatial meaning; • visual thinking. It makes connections, sees patterns, and is involved in holistic processing.

From understanding cognitive styles to integrating understanding

The hemispherical specialisation model can be useful to understand cognitive style differences, but should not be interpreted too literally. It is also important to recognise that the model can help to identify the initial approach needed to develop new learning, while recognising the benefits that can be found by integrating this understanding with other processes, once new concepts have been grasped, can be beneficial.

Key elements in meaning-based learning

There are many models of 'learning styles', but the key elements needed to ensure that learning is taken beyond the classroom can be identified as:

- the need to feel safe and comfortable in the learning environment, which can be affected by more than just social relationships, including environmental factors, such as light, noise and space to move around. For some learners, the presence or lack of specific factors can act as significant barriers to learning. How learners feel in the learning environment is important and needs to be taken into account;
- whether information makes most sense all at once (holistic) or step by step (sequential). This is an element that is often subsumed in models of left and right hemispherical preferences. As mentioned in the previous section on cognitive style;
- whether the learner thinks visually or verbally, which can affect how easily they access different kinds of information, including feedback.
- perceptual differences. These can be a consequence of a specific processing difficulty or sensory impairment, which can mean that particular modalities of communication can be meaningless. Alternatively, they can be positively linked to a preference related to cognitive styles.

Learners also have other preferences in how they learn; for example, some learn better through working with their peers than working directly with a practitioner. Talk with your learners to find out what is important to them.

You can find an example of a session plan, drawing on the different modalities, in Access to Family Programmes*, p.40, and spelling strategies orientated to these different styles on pp.44-6*

Examples of activities to use with visual learners and kinaesthetic learners can be found on pp. 78-82 of Creating Learning Materials: Level 4 *(see www.sflqi.org.uk)*

Perceptual modalities

It can be useful to draw on a range of learning style models, and think in terms of four perceptual modalities, or ways of taking in information:

- *visual* – many learners respond well to pictures and diagrams and often prefer to get information through reading, if reading is not too great a struggle and the content is of interest;
- *auditory* – some learners learn best through listening;
- *tactile* – many learners learn by touching or manipulating materials: they need to use 'real', three-dimensional resources;
- *kinaesthetic* – many learners need to experience things for themselves, and to be actively engaged in doing things in order to learn.

Most learners have one or two perceptual preferences for taking in information, but many successful learners do not have strong preferences – they can learn in a variety of ways. Less traditionally successful learners often have more limited preferences and requirements; for example, many poor readers are highly tactile/kinaesthetic learners. They find auditory methods difficult and find reading easier if they are physically involved as they read, by highlighting and making notes. Learners who struggle with the auditory modality do not respond well to verbal explanations and find it hard to listen for any length of time. Those with learning difficulties, sensory disabilities and dyslexia frequently have strong preferences, and may have additional problems in using one or more perceptual modes. Consequently, relying on a limited range of modalities of communication can create severe and unnecessary barriers to learning. These combinations of factors are the main reason that 'dyslexia-friendly' teaching is generally agreed to be 'user-friendly' teaching.

Example

V is a deaf Iraqi learner whose first language is Arabic. He studies on a full-time ESOL course and has studied British Sign Language (BSL) since arriving in the UK. He lip-reads a little and uses speech a little too. He has a communication support worker (CSW) who supports him in class and also works with him on a one-to-one basis for two hours per week. He finds it more meaningful to see information than to try and listen. Consequently, he finds it much easier to take in information if he can have handouts to read before a class. He finds it helpful when certain things are translated into Arabic (for example, grammatical explanations). He finds information on 'posters' around the room and diagrams and charts helpful. He likes to learn with his peers and participates actively in a small group in a quiet environment when others take turns to speak, so he can take in everything. He loves to use computers and surf the Web. He will spend hours working on reading comprehensions, which are based on texts found on the Web, particularly if they are about politics and the Middle East.

Learning to learn

Some learners, often as a consequence of poor experiences in education, have come to rely on particular strategies or approaches that do not suit them. For example, learners who find visual information most meaningful may assume they will get all the information they need by listening, or learners who find a visual overview most meaningful may try to take linear notes. In these cases, when the strategies are not working for learners, you need to give clear explanations about the reasons for a change of approach.

You need to encourage learners to try new methods and approaches and to experiment with these. This is most effective when approaches are structured and regularly evaluated with learners, and when learners are encouraged to become aware of their own learning preferences, strengths and weaknesses.

A meaning-based approach can help with planning for both individuals and groups. Introducing an understanding of learning styles to learners through discussion, and offering a range of teaching approaches and learning strategies, can be a helpful starting point since it also helps to create a supportive learning environment which values diversity. The underlying purpose is to increase all learners' self-awareness about how they make meaning and learn most successfully. Questionnaires can be helpful to raise issues, but there is a danger that those with low self-awareness will confirm their own misconceptions about themselves and pigeon-hole themselves unnecessarily. When drawing up individual learning plans and lesson plans, learners' style preferences and requirements can be taken into account. Learners can then be effectively involved in evaluating which methods work best for them.
Exploring different strategies can help learners understand that there are different ways of learning and enable them to share strategies, such as:

- spelling strategies (for example, highlighting words within words);
- exam study strategies (for example, making vocabulary cards or posters of key topics or listening to pre-recorded tapes);
- strategies for writing essays (for example, scissors and paste, dictating into a tape recorder or using colour-coded index cards).

Learners will gain confidence in their own ability to learn if they are taught in a way that suits them. A meaning-based approach also helps learners become independent learners by helping them develop successful strategies. It is an effective way of creating a successful learning experience and counteracting previous failure. The essence of inclusive learning lies in offering learners opportunities to learn in the way that is most meaningful.

Specialist support and support staff

Learners with learning difficulties or disabilities may require specialist support. Details of the support that learners with specific disabilities may require can be found in section 2.

Types of specialist support

You may feel that a specialist assessment could be of benefit to learners who are not making satisfactory progress, for example:

- a learner who has dyslexia or may have dyslexia but has never been formally assessed;
- a learner with learning difficulties who would benefit from an assessment by a specialist in this area;
- a visually impaired learner who may require additional technical equipment.

Many colleges have in-house staff who can carry out assessments. Other, smaller organisations may need to arrange this or buy in external expertise (see also section 3: Inclusive learning, 'Meeting the challenges').

Once the learner has been assessed, you need to be aware of the recommendations made by the specialist assessor and look at the implications for classroom teaching. Some learners may need additional support outside the class. For example, a learner with dyslexia may benefit from sessions either in a small group or one to one with a practitioner who is trained in working with learners who have dyslexia. Other learners may require in-class support, for example:

- a one-to-one worker for a learner with learning difficulties;
- an interpreter (who translates speech into BSL and vice versa) or a communicator (who acts as an interpreter but also helps translate written passages into language that can be understood by a BSL user) for a deaf learner;
- a technician who can train a blind learner to use specialist voice-activated software or screen reading software.

Specialist in-house practitioners or staff from local organisations or support services can also be used in other ways, particularly in staff development, for example in:

- conducting sessions on deaf awareness for practitioners and other staff prior to the arrival of a deaf learner in the class;
- conducting sessions on working with individuals with mental health difficulties;
- providing disability or dyslexia support services for individual learners, carrying out awareness sessions and speaking to learners.

You can find action points for managers about working with support staff on p. 34 of Making it Happen.

One of the activities in Creating Learning Materials: Level 4 *encourages you to identify ways of maximising the impact of support workers.*

Working with support staff in the classroom

The role of support workers, who accompany some learners with impairments, varies considerably. Learners with a physical impairment or learning difficulty may have an individual support worker to help them with personal care needs or with the journey to and from class. Deaf learners could have the support of a sign language interpreter, a note-taker, a communicator or a lip-speaker.

The support worker is not there to teach; the specialist ESOL teacher is responsible for the learning and progression of the learner. However, do not expect the support worker to be completely detached from the lesson. Even when they are not there to act in a more narrowly prescribed way (for example, as an interpreter), they are there to facilitate the learner's access to the class. There needs to be a balance, ensuring that the support worker is supporting the learner's access but not doing the work for the learner. This needs to be reflected in the planning and delivery of learning.

In addition, it is important to:

- ensure that you always address the learner, not the support worker. Be clear about the specific role of the support worker;
- remember that the support worker is there for that individual learner, not as a general class assistant;
- recognise that in some cases, particularly with interpreters, the support worker needs to have notes and handouts in advance;
- remember that interpreting is very tiring and interpreters need regular breaks (these do not necessarily mean stopping the lesson, but making use of times when the learner is doing activities that do not require the interpreter);
- leave sufficient time for the interpreter to translate for the learner.

Technology for learners with learning difficulties or disabilities

Technological advances have made an enormous difference to access to learning for learners with learning difficulties or disabilities. This is particularly true for learners who have physical or sensory impairments and also for those who have dyslexia or learning difficulties. However, in the use of technology to support access to education or employment, it is the appropriate match of technology and associated study strategies to the needs of the learner that is the most crucial factor in being able to make an effective difference for these learners. Therefore the effective use of technology hinges on detailed and effective assessment, followed up by reviews at appropriate stages.

Learners also need training in how to use technology effectively from basic ICT (information communication technology) skills to the use of any assistive technologies within the context of their own study. This could include using their technology in conjunction with information learning technologies (ILT), such as with e-learning materials, an electronic whiteboard, and so on.

An important additional component of any support provision is the use of human support through enablers, technicians and scribes. The management of these practitioners is an essential part of planning learning programmes.

Remember that new technology is emerging all the time; however, the following five elements illustrate how you might use technology effectively within the context of a learning programme.

Standard packages

Here are a few examples of how the access needs of many learners may be met by using the standard facilities on software programs:

- Simply changing the background colour of the page, or the colour, size and style of font, may make text more readable.
- Using the 'Zoom' facility magnifies the onscreen text – usually found within the 'View' menu of Microsoft Office programs.

These facilities may be of benefit to learners who have a visual impairment, or who have dyslexia:

- Using the spellchecker or thesaurus may help those who need to work on their spelling.
- The AutoCorrect facility within Microsoft Word enables learners, in effect, to type in a form of shorthand: the learner types the first few letters, and the program 'predicts' the rest. This means that learners can write without becoming exhausted if they have a physical impairment or fatiguing health condition. An additional advantage of this facility for learners is that it may help them to develop literacy skills beyond spelling.

Internet accessibility

It is important that you ensure that all Websites and intranets are as accessible as possible. The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) has a Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI), which, in coordination with organisations around the world, pursues accessibility of the Web. Visit their Website at: www.w3.org/WAI.

The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) conducted a report into Web accessibility in 2004, titled *The Web – Access and Inclusion for Disabled People*, which contains lots of useful advice for Website commissioners and developers. The report can be downloaded from www.drc.org.uk

It is important that you consider the accessibility of any e-learning materials, multimedia resources, VLEs (Virtual Learning Environments) or online communication services (such as message boards and forums, Wiki, chat, and so on). You should consider their accessibility from the perspective of making the learning experience accessible, rather than evaluating the materials out of context.

Assistive technology

Assistive and enabling technology can provide a means of access to literacy, and to learning in general. Assistive technology often requires the use of specialist equipment or programs or adaptations to standard hardware and software. Learners will usually have undergone a specialist assessment for assistive technology.

Examples of assistive technology include:

- mobile phones and portable computing devices for anywhere, anytime access to information and learning. For example, text messaging is now used extensively, and is a particularly useful tool for learners who are deaf or hearing impaired, but also as a means of providing prompts for those who have difficulties with short-term memory; and with photos, video clips, animations and interactive materials becoming increasingly commonplace on these gadgets, there is now much wider access to information for those with different learning preferences;
- text-to-speech software (often called 'screen-readers'), which uses a synthesised voice to read out text onscreen for learners for whom keyboards are not appropriate. There are also switches, adaptive keyboards, alternative pointing devices (such as tracker balls), or other adaptations.

Technology can be a very powerful and empowering tool for accessing learning. For example:

- Technology can be used to produce diagrams, charts and illustrations in tactile forms for learners who cannot access the visual form or who would benefit from multisensory approaches. A new form of multisensory technology that was designed for learners who are blind but which can benefit all learners is the Talking Tactile Tablet (www.talktab.org), which combines a visual and tactile diagram with interactive audio experiences.
- Alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) with speech output programs can be used to synthesise speech. This is particularly helpful to any learner who has difficulty in speaking, whether this is caused by physical or sensory impairment or a learning difficulty.
- Optical character recognition (OCR) software programs (such as Kurzweil 3000 and 1000, among others) can, when used with a scanner, scan or read text to produce voice output or text to be then converted into alternative formats such as large print or Braille. These can benefit any learner who has difficulty in gaining access to written text, including those who have learning difficulties and those who have dyslexia, or are blind or visually impaired.

Multimedia

The use of multimedia can support multisensory and person-centred approaches and produce exciting and imaginative teaching and learning materials. Tools such as digital cameras, video cameras, mp3 recorders, Microsoft PowerPoint, electronic whiteboards and data projectors can provide learners with the

opportunity to plan, record and share their interests and experiences in a very accessible way. Animated diagrams can help learners in visualising spatial concepts such as the properties of shapes.

For learners who have difficulty in reaching learning venues or who experience difficulties in interacting, technology-based learning can be crucial. And some learners, particularly younger learners, may be competent in using technology and may take delight in the status this gives to an area of work that they had previously found tedious and time-consuming. Writing on a computer can help to take away fear of failure and encourage learners to become more adventurous in the words they use, because they know that mistakes can be easily rectified.

However, technology is not always the answer for all learners. Some learners may experience difficulties in using technology. For example, older learners may never have used a computer before, and some may find it intimidating or difficult to remember how to use icons or sequence procedures to open programs. Learners who experience epilepsy may need regular breaks from a computer screen. It is essential that you are sensitive to situations like these, when learners may experience difficulties in the use of technology.

Low-tech support

While high-tech solutions are immensely important in giving learners greater access to learning, it is also important not to underestimate the value of low-tech support.

Simple adaptations can often make all the difference to a particular learner. Examples include:

- appropriately coloured paper and thick black felt-tip pens for doing 'rough' work in maths for a learner with visual impairments;
- arranging seating at a different height;
- raising the height of a computer;
- providing a hand-held magnifier;
- placing cardboard at the sides of a screen to alleviate glare;
- triangular pens or pens with rubber bands around them to form a gripholder for learners with dyslexia or dyspraxia;
- printing handouts on coloured paper (ask learners for their preferred colour), using a sans serif font.

Further details on how technology can support particular learning difficulties or disabilities are included in section 2.

2 Effects of learning difficulties or disabilities on learning

Disabling conditions and impairments affect individuals in different ways: generalising about them is impossible. Some conditions are permanent and stable; others fluctuate, with individuals having good days and bad days. Two individuals with the same disabling conditions can experience different effects. However, learners may experience similar barriers, for example learners with hearing impairments and learners who have autistic spectrum disorders may both experience difficulties in using abstract language. In many ways it is more useful to look at a continuum of learning need, with individuals placed at different points on it.

There is thus a real risk that to describe and attempt to identify appropriate responses to learning difficulties or disabilities is, inadvertently, to encourage stereotyping. However, because there are so many myths about the implications of different disabilities the following pages provide a brief overview of some of the main factors that might affect learning. You should nevertheless always bear in mind the diversity of learner need when reading this section.

Learners who are deaf or hearing impaired

Learners may be described as deaf or hearing impaired. Older individuals with hearing impairments may describe themselves as hard of hearing. Some deaf learners are born deaf or deafened before they acquired their first language (pre-lingually deaf); others will have acquired hearing impairments later in life, after the acquisition of a first language as an older child or an adult. Many, but not all, deaf individuals use a sign language as a first language. The Ethnologue report (www.ethnologue.com) lists 121 deaf sign languages used worldwide. It is important to realise that all these languages are different from each other; there is no universal 'deaf language'.

Impact on learning

The distinction between pre-lingual and post-lingual deafness is an important one. Additionally, some pre-lingually deaf individuals who learned to sign late in childhood or as adults are unlikely to be fluent in their own sign language. Deaf learners who have no fluent first language will often find it difficult to get beyond the elementary stages of English grammar. However, pre-lingually deaf learners need not have difficulty acquiring vocabulary. Pre-lingually deaf ESOL learners may have a sign language from their own country, and possibly American Sign Language (ASL) if they have attended a mission school. They may acquire a knowledge of BSL fairly quickly when they arrive in the UK if they live in an area where there is a deaf community.

Some pre-lingually deaf learners may have attended a school for the deaf in their home country or have been sent to one in another country; others may not have had any schooling. They may therefore have a working knowledge (rather than a fluency) in more than one written and signed languages; or may have no linguistic communication at all.

Many deaf individuals find the experience of working in a hearing setting isolating because of communication difficulties. Some individuals may prefer to learn where there is a significant community of sign language users, and a practitioner who signs. This gives a signing learner direct access to the practitioner and other learners, rather than asking them to work through an interpreter or CSW.

Within a signing group, learners may also be able to develop higher level interactive ('listening and speaking') skills in BSL, which they can later transfer to discussion in spoken English, using an interpreter if necessary.

Deafened learners may have become deaf through trauma, accident or illness. Acquired deafness in adults may bring its own problems of stress, loss of identity and trauma.

Ways of communicating

Deaf learners may use speech, lip-reading, sign language, a hearing aid or a mixture of some or all of these in day-to-day communication, depending on the situation and on personal preference.

Deafened and hearing impaired learners may rely on lip-reading, while pre-lingually or profoundly deaf learners may prefer to sign.

Sign language

BSL is a language in its own right, with its own grammar, syntax and vocabulary, which is markedly different from English grammar, syntax and word order. There are other sign languages with which learners may be familiar or which they may use, for example ASL. Standard English will need to be taught specifically, in a similar way to that in which English is taught to ESOL learners. BSL classes can be very useful to deaf ESOL learners as they can develop more sophisticated communication skills and then transfer them.

Deaf individuals whose first acquired language was standard English may use Sign Supported English (SSE), a form of visual English using BSL vocabulary. If a learner uses sign language as his or her main method of communication, a trained sign language interpreter or CSW can interpret the speech of practitioners and other individuals. Learners who use sign language will need to be taught both vocabulary and grammar that are unfamiliar to them.

For further details, see information in Part 2 on 'BSL in relation to ESOL', p. 499, and 'Working with support staff: sign language, sign language interpreters, communication support workers or other support staff', p. 118.

Lip-reading

Lip-reading is an art, not a science. It is an extremely complex and difficult practice, which may take years to perfect. It relies heavily on:

- a knowledge of the language;
- an understanding of the context;
- good lighting;
- good acoustics and a quiet environment;
- an awareness of lip-reading ambiguities;
- clear speech delivered at a natural, if slightly slower pace.

Lip-reading is not a straightforward activity: it is difficult or impossible to 'read' some sounds, some grammatical structures and some individuals. Exaggerated lip patterns and shouting aggravate communication problems and are offensive. Learners with hearing impairments in particular may benefit from lip-reading classes, which can enable them to develop coping strategies as well as lip-reading skills in a relaxed and supportive environment. However, the teaching methods in these classes often make use of a lot of written English and assume fluent first language skills.

Lip-readers may need to use a lip-speaker, in the same way as BSL signers use an interpreter/communication support worker. For further details see 'Lip-reading and learners who are deaf or hearing impaired', Part 2, p. 446.

Note-takers

Some learners will also use note-takers in addition to or instead of, communication support. Some note-takers are trained in preparing notes for BSL users.

Hearing aids

Many deaf or hearing impaired individuals use hearing aids even if they also use other means of communication. Hearing aids do not compensate for hearing loss; they operate by amplifying sounds, but in doing so they amplify all sounds equally, including background noise, which can be problematic. Although hearing aids are becoming more sophisticated, it is important that you are aware of the effectiveness and limitations of the aid used by a learner and that you design learning activities with this in mind.

Digital hearing aids are becoming more common, though they are much more expensive than conventional analogue hearing aids. Digital hearing aids provide much better noise reduction and amplification of speech sounds rather than amplifying every sound indiscriminately. However, digital hearing aids are not suitable for all learners with impaired hearing and choosing the right aid depends on the specific type of hearing loss and hearing profile, as assessed by an audiologist.

Telecommunications

The range of telecommunications available to all learners has dramatically increased over the last few years with the surge in developments in mobile technologies, increased accessibility to Internet services, mobile phones and personal digital assistants (PDAs) – portable computing devices.

All these technologies can be particularly helpful in a number of ways for learners who are deaf or hearing impaired.

- e-mail is used extensively by many learners and particularly by those who are deaf.
- Mobile phones are extremely popular for text messaging and modern mobiles can send and receive multimedia (images, video, audio, and so on), e-mails and faxes, or access the Internet.
- Hybrid PDAs and mobile phones (such as a BlackBerry or Nokia Communicator) are particularly useful for deaf learners as they combine the anywhere, anytime access of a mobile (particularly when equipped with GPRS[1] always-on connections) with the advanced facilities of a PDA, including word processing, time management software and better Internet surfing.
- The use of videoconferencing via the Internet is increasing as bandwidth increases and the quality of images improves. This is particularly true where learners have access to sites with high-speed connection to national networks.

Many learners (particularly older learners new to education) may be relying on older forms of technology such as:

- a Minicom – a text phone that can be coupled to a conventional phone or plugged directly into a phone socket. It can only communicate with other Minicom users or through TypeTalk, the national telephone relay service;
- fax – still a useful means of communication, for quick copying of non-electronic materials, or short texts;
- pagers – still useful for some learners to initiate contact, or to transfer short messages to keep learners informed or alerted during emergencies in environments where mobile phones may not be allowed (for example a fire alarm).

Conventional telephones may be used with a telecoil and/or amplifier.

Most modern telephones can achieve a clearer reception if the personal hearing aid is switched to the 'T' setting, and there are models that have a volume control for the receiver.

---

[1]General Packet Radio Service – a protocol for passing data over a mobile phone network (see www.filesaveas.com/gprs.html

You may also need to learn, or at least be aware of, the text message dictionary and the language of abbreviations used in texting or other forms of shorthand communication.

Amplification

A means of amplifying sound may help some deaf learners. As with hearing aids, it merely makes sounds louder and does little to clarify the distortion. There are several means of amplifying sounds, and the chosen method will depend on the deaf learner's preference. These include:

- a personal hearing aid, which is usually behind the ear and has a 'T' setting for use with loops and telephones. Although it is discreet, it picks up all background noise indiscriminately and is less useful over distances greater than six feet from the speaker. It can also be linked to a radio-aid;
- a radio hearing aid, which requires the practitioner to wear a transmitter and microphone. The learner wears the receiver linked by either a personal loop or direct input to the personal hearing aid. It may also be possible to link it to video and audio cassette players, depending on the make and model. It gives priority to the practitioner's voice/sound source, can operate at a distance and is battery powered – it can therefore be used on visits, but the batteries need regular recharging, and it is not very discreet;
- a conference microphone linked to a radio aid, which can be useful for discussions or seminars. It needs to be on a padded surface so that it does not pick up unnecessary vibrations. It is good if the group is sitting in a circle for discussion, as it is multidirectional, but it can cause confusion if more than one person speaks at a time. Like the radio hearing aid, it is not discreet;
- several varieties of loop including:
  – a fixed loop, which is a permanent fixture 'hard wired' into the room
  – a portable loop, which can be set up in any suitable room
  – a personal loop, which is connected to a radio-aid and worn around the neck.

  A loop cuts down on background noise, giving an advantage to the speaker's voice, but the practitioner may be 'on a lead' if it is hard wired. Loops can pick up interference from other loops, neon lights and computers in the building, and also cut out other speakers' voices. All types of loop require the practitioner or speaker to wear or use a microphone. The microphone may be connected to the system through a hard wire or by radio. Practitioners and learners need to take care when moving around the room where there are trailing wires and that they are aware of any radio reception black spots that might cause the system to 'shriek' or go silent when passing.

Learners who are deaf and have difficulty with the English language may well, with other non-deaf learners, find spell-checkers, computer-based dictionaries and a thesaurus helpful to support them in written work. Certain computer operating systems, like Microsoft Windows, allow the user to configure the set-up so that the borders of the windows pulsate (flash) to warn the user of an error, as an alternative to sound.

Approaches to consider when working with deaf or hearing impaired learners

Environment

- Arrange lighting and seating so that everyone's face is well lit. Avoid standing in front of a window or light: this will place your face in shadow.
- Make use of as much visual information as possible, such as pictures, labels, diagrams and key words written up. Electronic whiteboards can have a positive effect because they grab the attention of learners who are deaf and cast enough light for signing or lip-reading to be seen clearly, even from the back of the class.

Speaking

- Face the learner at all times when speaking. Speak clearly and encourage other learners to do the same. Speak at a measured but normal speed. Speaking slowly distorts lip patterns, which become impossible to read.
- Approach a deaf learner who is working from the front or side to avoid startling him or her.
- Do not talk and demonstrate at the same time.
- Group work can be difficult for deaf learners. Get learners into the habit of indicating when they are speaking. Giving them a brightly coloured card to raise is useful. Alternatively, gesture towards the person speaking.
- In group work, repeat questions when giving answers.
- Try to keep background noise to a minimum.
- Be aware that loud noises can be distressing when amplified through a hearing aid.
- Take care not to speak while writing on a board or chart. Learners cannot lip-read while your back is turned.
- Repeat the beginning of an utterance and not just the end, and do not change the wording. Learners who are deaf and who are hearing impaired may 'tune in' late to the fact that they are being addressed and miss the beginning.
- When working with interpreters make time for them, and always address the learner who is deaf, not the interpreter.
- Interpreting is tiring: do not speak too quickly. Allow interpreters to have breaks (every 20 minutes). There may be times when two interpreters are needed.

Teaching

- Learners who depend on using their eyes to obtain information will not be able to take notes at the same time, so prepare notes in advance.
- Lip-reading is very tiring: learners will need to have periodic rests from lip-reading.
- Unknown vocabulary is hard to lip-read. Write vocabulary down and check that it is understood.
- It is difficult to lip-read if the context is not known. The better a talk is structured, the better it is followed. Handouts and overheads can be very

helpful to complement spoken instructions and descriptions, but provide these in advance, as learners cannot lip-read at the same time.

- Use short, clear statements and vocabulary, avoiding or explaining abstract concepts or jargon. If you find you have not been understood, think of a different way of explaining the same idea.
- Video cassettes and DVDs should be captioned wherever possible and you should seek out any TV programmes or video cassette copies that provide closed caption (CC) support, or for computer-based video provide captions through the use of SMIL (Synchronized Multimedia Integration Language) which can be accessed using multimedia players like RealPlayer or QuickTime. DVDs are more likely than video cassettes to have subtitles.
- Write down statements wherever possible, but check that these have been understood.
- For sign language users, many of the techniques used for teaching grammar to ESOL learners may be appropriate, especially for language functions or colloquialisms.
- Make (and encourage learners to look for) direct and explicit comparisons between the different grammars and forms.

Additional information related to learners who are deaf or hearing impaired can be found in Part 2, section 4:

- 'BSL in relation to ESOL' (p. 499).
- 'Finger spelling chart' (p. 130).
- 'Lip-reading and learners who are deaf or hearing impaired' (p. 446).
- 'Spelling and deaf learners' (p. 248).
- 'Text messaging' (p. 245).
- 'Working with support staff: sign language interpreters, communication support workers or other support staff' (p. 118).

See case study of Fahim in the research document It's Not as Simple as You Think: Cultural Viewpoints around Disability

Learners who are blind or visually impaired

Some learners will have been born blind or with visual impairments. A far larger number acquire visual impairment in later life. There are many myths around blindness. Many people assume that there is a distinct line between seeing clearly and seeing nothing at all. In fact, visual impairment covers a whole spectrum from individuals who are only slightly affected to the very small proportion who are totally blind and cannot distinguish light from dark. Also, everyone experiences deteriorating vision with advancing age. ESOL learners may have lost their sight through trauma, as a result of war or through disease, rather than gradually deteriorating over time. Sensitivity in exploring the reason and how learners are taught must reflect the root cause of the sight loss.

Impact on learning

An obvious impact of blindness or partial sight on learning is that learners cannot access standard 'written' text or numbers. You need to ensure that suitable alternative formats are available. Remember, the larger the print size, the

more time learners will need to assimilate the content and meaning of the text (see 'Reading and access to text for blind and visually impaired learners', p. 412). Time is a key factor, as accessing materials is more time consuming than for a learner without a visual impairment. The layout of material is also important and all essential information should be given in the left-hand margin unless the impairment needs a right-hand margin.

Learners with visual impairments may be more dependent on their hearing for information gathering. Those who have been blind since birth may have missed out on informal opportunities to learn to read, for example through the experience of signs and labels in everyday life. They will also have a conceptual framework for such concepts as distance, dimensions and scale that is not drawn from visual images. The basis of direct experience, on which individuals who have been blind since birth must build their understanding, will not include perspective drawings or images such as logos, famous faces or landmarks (such as Big Ben). They may also have missed out on gathering everyday practical information about the world around them, which individuals without visual impairments take for granted. They may therefore need to be introduced to new situations in a practical experiential manner before moving on to form concepts. Realia (real objects) and sound pictures are extremely important to reinforce described imagery.

There is a particular difficulty in making tables, pictures, diagrams, graphs and maps accessible to visually impaired individuals. Work has been done in producing raised images, particularly for those who are Braille users (the Royal National Institute for the Blind [RNIB] produces information on this; also the National Centre for Tactile Diagrams, www.nctd.org.uk). It should be noted that often tactile diagrams are a sighted person's solution to a blind person's 'problem', and in many cases it is preferable to present information in an alternative format, for example using a model or a verbal description. Over elaboration can render diagrams worthless – simplicity is the key. When learners are using speech-based software, it is easier if information is given in a non-tabulated form, as speech recognition packages have difficulty identifying columns, boxes and other graphical conventions.

Access to visual information

Most adults with visual impairments will have a preferred system of accessing information. The most common are:

- large print – either enlarged on paper or via a closed circuit television providing screen magnification. Establish the optimum text size (in points) and select a clear sans serif font, with strong contrast, such as Arial. If print is larger than needed, learners will be dealing with unnecessarily cumbersome amounts of paper. Wherever possible, text should be reformatted onto A4 with page breaks at sensible points. Learners with some forms of visual impairment such as tunnel vision can see better if print is kept small;

- colour of print and paper such as black on white, black on yellow, white on black. Experiment with learners to find the optimum contrast;
- audio tape, also video and DVD. These need markers and audio transcriptions;
- Braille. Computers can include Braille displays or specialist portable Braille note-takers, which can interact with standard computers enabling printouts in both Braille and print (see information on 'Braille for bilingual learners', Part 2, p. 470);
- Moon (a tactile system based on letters of the alphabet, along Braille principles);
- personal computer so that information can be accessed via a screen-reading program such as Jaws or textHELP, or a magnification program such as Supernova;
- reading stands;
- CCTV;
- a combination of those listed above.

It is often assumed that all or many blind learners use Braille. In fact, that is far from the case. Approximately 3 per cent of individuals registered blind and visually impaired use Braille. Individuals who have been blind since birth may have learned Braille. However, learning Braille is a lengthy process, and those who have lost their sight later in life may feel that other options, such as Moon, are more suitable. Individuals with tunnel vision, astigmatism and even some users of bifocals may have a problem holding in view enough text for fluent reading.

Technology and learners who are blind or visually impaired

Technology has had a huge impact on the capacity of blind and visually impaired learners to access information.

The following technologies may be useful to a blind or visually impaired learner.

- Screen readers are a special form of text-to-speech technology that provide the user with access and control of onscreen text and navigation systems. Common programs include: *JAWS*, *WindowEyes*, *Hal* (part of *Supernova*), and *LookOut*.
- Screen magnifier software provides visually impaired learners with a magnified screen view. Using whole-screen magnification or using a variety of on-screen 'lenses' the learner views the screen at high magnification from 2x to extreme magnification levels.
- Braille users can access text on a computer using a refreshable Braille display. They have a panel of raised dots, known as a 'soft Braille line', that provides a Braille version of what is displayed on screen. Braille can also be entered using an electronic chord keyboard similar to that used to produce manual Braille (for example on the Perkins, which is a manual Brailling machine).

- Optical character recognition (OCR) software is most commonly used with a scanner (rather like a photocopier), on which printed materials are placed. The printed material is read into the computer, which, with the appropriate hardware and software, delivers the output in a chosen format. A scanner is used in conjunction with a computer, but reading machines are available which carry out the whole process. These are particularly useful in libraries. Word search and other facilities that help to navigate or highlight texts are also useful for those who cannot scan or speed-read material.
- Voice-recognition software can be useful which allows learners to dictate to the computer.
- Closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras can be used in a variety of learning situations, and portable versions are now available, which can have a portable battery pack and LCD monitor. Systems are also available that are simply a portable CCTV camera that can be plugged to a computer monitor or TV. You can set up CCTV to display a clear close-up view of a demonstration on a large screen for everyone to see, or on a separate monitor for a visually impaired learner to view.

The correct use of lighting is important for visually impaired learners who read visually, whether on paper or from a computer monitor. Task lamps can provide intense light on the work surface (for the keyboard or reading material), while not over-illuminating the rest of the room. Fluorescent lights are usually best, as they don't tend to overheat, which can be important if they are used close to paper or the body. Some learners find daylight blue lamps provide a more comfortable working environment.

As technology advances, new products are becoming available on the market. The RNIB provides fact sheets on all types of access technologies, as well as Website guidelines, and can help you with assessment of equipment needs. They also have a Brailling service that can translate text, grids and diagrams into Braille. For more information visit www.rnib.org.uk

Strategies to enhance learning

Assessment

- Learners who are blind or visually impaired may need particular assessment or examination arrangements such as a separate room, extra time, readers or scribes for written tests. Awarding bodies produce guidelines on assessment for learners with learning difficulties or disabilities.

Environment

- Some learners may need extra help in understanding the layout of the classroom. Room layout should not be changed without warning.
- Adjust lighting for individuals. Generally, good lighting is helpful, but for some learners too much light can be a hindrance, and glare from shiny

surfaces can be very distracting. Many learners who are visually impaired are photophobic, that is, they cannot tolerate bright light.

Speaking

- When talking you need to make sure you stand in a well-lit place, facing learners, but not directly in front of a window, as your face will then be in shadow.
- Eliminate background noises as much as possible. Speak clearly.
- Ask speakers to introduce themselves by name in group discussions. Agree turn-taking signals. Non-verbal communication should be reinforced by intonation, touch (if and when appropriate and culturally and personally acceptable).

Teaching

- It is particularly important to ask visually impaired learners what helps them most, because the support they require may be very different.
- Produce materials in advance if they need to be put into Braille, modified print or onto tape.
- Written materials are easier to decipher if they are clear and simple, on non-glossy paper and with strong contrast in colour and tone.
- An uncluttered layout without too much on one page is helpful.
- Avoid placing text over a background illustration or pattern.
- Some learners find it easier to use an audio recorder, as it may be the most efficient way for them to review materials and ideas. Arrangements should ensure the best possible sound reproduction.
- Prepare handouts in advance so that learners who are blind or visually impaired have diagrams and so on to hand.
- Provide key information at the left-hand margin unless a learner's visual impairment requires otherwise.
- Always read out what is written when using a whiteboard, overhead transparency or PowerPoint presentation, and explain fully any diagrams, illustrations, acronyms or videos you use.
- Use black or blue pens and not red or orange on a whiteboard. A screen can cause physical pain if it is too bright.

See also Part 2, Section 4 for additional information boxes: 'Braille for bilingual learners' (p. 470), 'Reading and access to text for blind and visually impaired learners' (p. 412), 'Comprehension and visual processing difficulties' (p. 162), 'Concepts and vocabulary of blind and visually impaired learners' (p. 433), 'Screen reader' (p. 398), 'Spatial representation and blind and visually impaired learners' (p. 486), 'Speech/voice recognition software' (p. 156), and 'Working with support staff: sign language interpreters, communication support workers or other support staff' (p. 118).

Learners with physical impairments

Bilingual learners with physical impairments attending ESOL and vocational courses have the same range of intellectual abilities as the population as a whole. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the proportion of bilingual learners with physical impairments, caused by the effects of war and socio-political upheaval, is higher than among other groups of learners.

Physical impairments can take many different forms and have varying degrees of impact on the individual. They can affect their ability to walk, sit, move, talk, remember, read and write. They can also affect the individual's ability to manipulate and control small or larger objects. Some learners may use a walking aid, wheelchair (manual or motorised) or other aids to sit comfortably. In addition, an individual may also experience pain, fatigue, stamina difficulties and physical discomfort. The use of medication to treat physical impairments can cause side effects like drowsiness and difficulty in concentrating for prolonged periods.

Physical impairments can be temporary or permanent, fluctuating, stable or degenerative, and may affect parts of the body or the whole of it.

Access to the environment

Impact on learning

The initial barrier experienced by some individuals with physical impairments is getting to the place of learning. For many the inaccessibility of buildings is a problem, so there are important questions to ask:

- Do bilingual learners have access to an interpreter trained in community interpreting if they need to communicate with you or the organisation in relation to access to the learning environment or other matters?
- Do the learners have access to appropriate transport to get to the learning provision?
- Do they know the journey well enough to travel independently?
- Is the learning environment accessible?
- Can learners get into the building?
- Can they get around when in the building?
- Is the learner comfortable?
- Is there somewhere for learners to rest or take breaks?
- Would using a different chair or ergonomic cushion be better?
- Is the table height appropriate?
- Is the learner able to reach the teaching and learning materials?

For some individuals with medical conditions, having to walk long distances can be tiring and affect learning. Others who have visual impairments may experience difficulties in navigating their way around or locating learning materials or resources. There can be subtle but significant differences in impact.

Strategies to enhance learning

- Wherever possible, ensure that the preparatory work on access to the learning environment is undertaken before the learner starts the learning programme.
- Think carefully about the location where the learning takes place in addition to any ongoing programme of improvements to access.
- Plan the arrangement of, and adaptations to, furniture and learning resources.
- Organise orientation sessions for learners; to help them with navigation around building(s), materials and learning resources. Arrange for trained interpreters to be present to facilitate two-way communication if learners are below Entry 3 in terms of spoken English language skills.
- Structure learning sessions so that they incorporate short breaks, according to the individual needs of learners.
- Low-tech aids, such as cereal packets, can be used to cut out glare on a visual display unit, or use thick books or telephone directories to adjust the height of visual display units.
- Ensure the learner has access to personal, assistive technology.

Difficulties with fine movement

Impact on learning

Individuals who want or need to develop their ability to write in English and who experience difficulties when holding or using a pen or pencil may have difficulty with producing handwritten work.

Strategies to enhance learning

- Establish whether handwritten work is a significant feature of the programme requirements, and the extent to which handwriting is a priority for each learner. For some individuals it might be very important to be able to improve their writing and produce handwritten texts. This may be particularly true if they have limited literacy in their first language or are literate in a non-Roman script (and so have not only to learn the English alphabet but change the direction and flow of the writing).
- Work with the learner to consider solutions.
- Experiment with different styles of pen design, in order to find what works most effectively for the individual learner.
- Explore simple adaptations, such as a grip placed around a pen.
- Assess or refer individuals for assessment for other writing communication aids, such as a specially adapted keyboard.
- Apply to the validating body for the necessary examination or assessment adjustments. This may include permission to use an amanuensis.

Speech impairments

There may be a range of reasons why bilingual learners have difficulty in communicating through speech. These may be physical impairments such as a cleft palate or neurological impairment or other brain injury. Physical impairments may be generic or pre-birth and caused by trauma, an accident, or

effects of war or torture. Neurological impairments may be brain injuries caused at birth or acquired, for example through having a 'stroke', by trauma, an accident, and effects of war or torture. Psychological impairments may manifest in the form of stammers, or other speech difficulties, also caused by trauma, an accident, and effects of war or torture.

Impact on learning

There are some important principles to consider:

- Learners with communication difficulties are sometimes thought to be far less able than they really are. It is very important to check your own response to see whether you are automatically making assumptions about learners' intelligence and ability because they are difficult to understand or their speech is very slow or slurred. The potential of these learners has often gone unrecognised.
- Individuals listening to a learner with a speech impairment may find it embarrassing. Remember this is not the learner's problem. Make sure this does not lead you to avoid including the learner in discussions or 'switching off' from what they are saying to you.
- Group work can be challenging and stressful.
- Differentiate and scaffold activities that involve learners having to produce stretches of extended speech.

Strategies to enhance learning

The strategies outlined below are important for you the practitioner, and all members of the group.

- Establish whether a learner who experiences communication difficulties has established a successful alternative system of communication, for example:
  - using an assistant to act as communicator;
  - using a communication board (with letters and words on it) or a computer with a speech synthesiser;
  - using handwritten notes.
- Be sensitive about the use of direct *wh-* questions (such as *what…?*, *where…?*). They do not always encourage the sharing of information. Inviting comments rather than directing specific questions may be more appropriate.
- Encourage comments from all the learners but initially, limit the number of direct questions you ask a person with speech difficulties so that they are not put under pressure.
- Allow learners to show and demonstrate, for example ticking answers rather than saying them aloud.
- Ensure you do not exclude a learner with a speech difficulty from any group activities, and manage the pace of the discussion to ensure that other learners do not interrupt inappropriately.
- Allow time for learners to make their contributions. Where appropriate give the questions before the input to facilitate selective attention.
- Give learners an opportunity to prepare their answers and views in advance of

general discussion and to write down some of their opinions. Do not keep learners who stammer waiting too long to have their 'turn' as this can be very stressful.

- When working with learners who stammer, slow down your own rate of talking to convey that there is plenty of time and reduce communicative pressure on the learner. Do not hurry or force individuals to respond within a certain time. Some activities – language games, quizzes – can be daunting and affect the self-confidence of a learner who stammers.
- Encourage learners to use visual planning strategies to support them in producing expressive language and more extended oral contributions.
- Listen closely to what learners say; always respond to the content of what someone is saying, and do not be misled by the style of delivery.
- When it is difficult to understand learners, keep calm, watch their lips, and take account of facial expressions and body language. Try to avoid guessing or completing sentences for them, unless learners want you to do this, to speed communication. Always check with the learner.
- Sometimes another member of the group can understand a particular individual's speech patterns very well and the person with speech difficulties may want to use them when other people find it hard to understand what they are saying. If this is the case, then make use of other learners in this way.
- Learners with a cleft palate may need to be encouraged to slow down and focus on accuracy. They will often need to learn to check that they have been understood. Additionally, they may need differentiated practice in the production of certain sounds (see the case study of Kai on p. 66).
- If you have not understood what someone has said, ask him or her to repeat it. Do not just nod and assume that it was not important, but repeat back to the learner what you think he or she has said, to confirm understanding.
- Be aware that there is technology that can help; for example, learners can use speech software on a laptop to read out their work to the rest of the class. This technology is highly manageable but many practitioners are not aware of its existence. (See the next section on 'Technology and learners with physical impairments').
- Learners with speech or communication difficulties may use a digital communication board (AAC device) that allows them to communicate through a choice of words, letters or symbols depending on their literacy level. Some devices provide a synthesised voice, while others may have a simple visual display.
- A speech therapist can provide invaluable support. Some NHS Trusts provide support to learners.

Technology and learners with physical impairments

There is a range of multimedia technologies available that can help support learners with physical impairments.

- Standard keyboards may be sufficient for some learners, such as those with dysgraphia. The addition of a keyguard can be a very simple but very useful

tool as it can help a variety of learners with coordination and dexterity dificulties.

- Speech recognition can be very useful for many learners and, with effort, the systems can be trained to work with learners with speech impairments.
- Touch-screens can be a useful tool for engaging learners. An on-screen keyboard can provide access to standard controls.
- 'Switch access' uses buttons, switches or controls activated by simple body movements that can be used to control a special on-screen keyboard, usually with scanning or tracking facilities that allow the user to access all the controls through a series of simple single clicks.

Furniture and low-tech devices are also a consideration, such as adjustable furniture, wrist rests, copyholders, glare guards and page-turners. Portability can be very important – it is helpful if computers are on trolleys. The advent of wireless technology is very significant for all learners, avoiding, where possible, the need for trailing cables.

See the case studies of Raed and Hayat in the research document in this series, It's Not as Simple as You Think: Cultural Viewpoints around Disability

Perceptual difficulties

Learners with physical impairments, neurological conditions or acquired brain injury may have perceptual difficulties. Perceptual difficulties may take different forms. Some learners have difficulty receiving information by seeing or hearing, while others can see or hear, but cannot process the information they receive.

Impact on learning

Difficulties can arise with auditory, visual, spatial perception and/or processing. This may cause learners to have difficulty in finding their way around a building with a complicated layout, and may also lead to difficulties in reading and writing, for example in locating the correct place on the page, or moving from left to right when reading or writing. Learners may have difficulties in doing tasks that require precise tracking, particularly where information is displayed in tables or multiple-choice grids. These difficulties may also affect the learners' ability to carry out practical tasks, especially those requiring location of objects in space or correctly placing objects in relation to one another.

Strategies to enhance learning

- Explore with the learner techniques that help to compensate for perceptual difficulties. For example, discuss ways of isolating lines or blocks of information, possibly using windows cut out of card.
- Provide clear visual guidelines. For example, ensure there is a bold margin drawn on the left side of the page and highlight or embolden the first word of a sentence.
- Use a frame or ruler to identify the line of text and to help move the eye to the next line.
- Add small symbols to a page to indicate left and right.
- Experiment with different ways of presenting information and organising activities to maximise understanding – in negotiation with the learner.

- Clearly chunk processes and information: signpost important facts.
- Provide small-step instructions.
- Provide explicit, logical links using different colours, cue lines, diagrams and known symbols when appropriate. Ensure the learner is familiar with the symbols as these may be culturally specific.
- Use auditory back-up/support/alternatives.
- Give learners plenty of time to do tasks requiring visual–spatial skills and ensure they have support where needed.

See also Part 2, section 4 for additional information boxes:

- 'Speech/voice recognition software' (p. 156)
- 'Switch access' (p. 323)
- 'Working with support staff: sign language interpreters, communication support workers or other support staff' (p. 118)

Learners with long-term health conditions

The Disability Discrimination Act (1995, 2005) recognises that some long term and persistent health conditions are disabling. Some conditions have been specifically recognised and these include multiple sclerosis, cancer and HIV. There are other recognised health conditions that also impact on the individual's ability to access and participate in learning; these include ME (myalgic encephalomyelitis) and diabetes.

Torture, chemical warfare and other violent trauma can result in injuries which cause long-term health problems, for example muscle weakness, pain, cancers and permanent physical disability.

Each of these conditions will not be described, but highlighted are some of the unseen consequences that you will need to consider when planning and delivering your sessions.

Impact on learning

The impact of long-term health conditions on learning may be quite varied depending on the nature of the symptoms. The learners themselves are the best experts on how their health condition is affecting their learning. It is, therefore, important that organisations use trained interpreters to enable effective communication to take place, if the learner's level of spoken English is basic. Some of the more common impacts are on attendance, retention, achievement, memory and concentration.

Learners with some long-term health conditions may not be experiencing any discomfort or other effects, but may require time to attend medical, other health appointments or treatments. These appointments may disrupt their attendance or private study times. It may also affect their availability as they may not be able to attend at certain times of the day.

Medication invariably presents side effects that may or may not be experienced by learners. The side effects that most commonly affect learning are nausea, fatigue and tiredness, dizziness, memory and concentration difficulties, and sleep disturbances. Learners will know how their medication is affecting them.

A common consequence of long-term health conditions is often fatigue, either that brought about by the condition itself or the treatment for it. For example people with ME often experience fatigue that varies from severe to mild, and which can be constant or irregular. The learner may not know from day to day how they will feel and so cannot predict when they will be too tired or fatigued to attend or engage with their learning.

Concentration difficulties can occur because learners are tired, in pain, worried about their health, or experiencing medication side effects. If they experience difficulties remembering, this may be down to the same causes, but could equally be as a direct result of a deteriorating neurological condition. These difficulties may be compounded for bilingual learners, particulary asylum seekers and refugees, who have experienced severe trauma and loss.

Many learners who have long-term health conditions experience pain to varying degrees. The pain may be related to the condition itself, for example cancer pain or pain related to fatigue and tiredness. People with ME often experience muscular pain. The pain itself may be regulated by medication; however, the medication itself may have a negative effect on the individual's quality of life.

Strategies to enhance learning

- Identify with the learner where they think they might experience difficulties with their learning and ensure that this is regularly reviewed.
- Ensure that there are breaks in your session for learners to rest and relax.
- Identify and agree the best time of day for learners to learn.
- Find out if there is provision closer to where they live.
- Consider the strategies mentioned in the section on 'Learners with memory difficulties' (p. 38).
- Identify how learners can access learning if they miss sessions.
- Make learning materials fully available and accessible – ensure handouts are forwarded if necessary and that notes are available to those who may feel too fatigued to write.
- Allow learners to record sessions to listen to when they are feeling 'learning-ready'.
- Ensure that learners are able to move around to relieve muscle or other pain when they need to.

It is suggested that you search the Web for any specific conditions you are interested in, as there are a number of support groups.

See also the case study of Raed in the research document It's Not as Simple as you Think: Cultural Viewpoints around Disability

Visit the useful website **www.dh.gov.uk** *and search for 'long-term conditions NSF'.*

Learners with acquired brain injury

Brain injuries can happen to anyone at any time. An acquired brain injury is an injury to the brain that has happened since birth. External forces or internal disorders cause them.

External forces may include road traffic accidents, torture, other violent trauma which involves severe shaking or hitting of the head, conflict and fighting. There is a high incidence of acquired brain injury in young men between ages 17–24, caused by road traffic accidents and fighting.

Internal or non-traumatic brain injuries include those caused by strokes, brain tumours, infectious diseases and the effects of toxic substances that have entered the body, either ingested through the mouth or inhaled, such as carbon monoxide or other chemicals, including chemical weapons.

Impact on learning

The impact of brain injury on learning can depend on the severity of the injury and where the brain has been injured. Different parts of the brain control different bodily, memory and personality aspects of individuals; learners with brain injuries will be affected differently.

Learners with acquired brain injury may experience memory loss, which could be very unpredictable as the learner may remember some of their previous learning very clearly and have loss in other areas. Their knowledge and skills will require careful assessment, as these learners are very likely to have a spiky profile.

Some individuals with acquired brain injuries experience a loss of coordination and motor control. Frequently people with brain injury will experience cross-lateral physical impairments. For example, damage to the right hemisphere of the brain can result in physical difficulties on the left side of the body, face and limbs.

Again, depending on which part of the brain has been injured individuals may experience sensory loss including to their vision, hearing, taste, smell and sense of touch. Many brain injuries impact on the physical ability to speak as well as conditions associated with memory and recall of words – asphasia. Similarly, injury to specific parts of the brain can lead to specific difficulties (including acquired dyslexia) which may take very different forms depending on the nature of the injury.

Learners with brain injury may experience pain and fatigue as well as acquire other conditions such as epilepsy. Medication prescribed to treat any of the effects of acquired brain injury can also affect the learners learning (see 'Learners with long-term health conditions', p. 35).

Other impacts on learning could be changes in the way the individual normally behaves or reacts to situations around them. Individuals with brain injury may experience mental health difficulties either brought about directly by the injury or by depression because of the injury.

Strategies to enhance learning

- Identify with the learner where they might experience difficulties with their learning.
- Work in collaboration with any recovery programmes initiated by health professionals.
- Consider the strategies, including over-learning, mentioned in the 'Learners with memory difficulties' section (below).
- Consider the strategies mentioned in the sections on 'Learners with physical impairments' (p. 30), 'Learners who are deaf or hearing impaired' (p. 19) and 'Learners who are blind or visually impaired' (p. 25) These may include techniques to stimulate sensory awareness by using smells in cooking or food activities, colours in writing and reading activities and different sounds and tones in speaking and listening work
- Consider the strategies mentioned in the 'Learners with mental health difficulties' section (p. 40).
- Consider the use of multimedia as a support and as a way of access to learning. See p. 15.
- When brain injury leads to acquired dyslexia it is particularly important that compensatory strategies are developed based on the learner's strengths rather than attempts made to 'remediate' acquired weaknesses.

We suggest you search the web for specific conditions as there are a number of support groups. Useful web address: www.dh.gov.uk (search for 'long-time conditions NSF').

Learners with memory difficulties

Memory difficulties may be one of the major issues faced by those individuals who have neurological impairments, acquired brain injury, or have long-term fatiguing health conditions or mental health difficulties, in common with some learners with dyslexia or those with learning difficulties. Responses will need to relate directly and explicitly to individual learning goals, learning programmes and contexts. Early guidance should be given in relation to alternative ways of learning and assessing.

Impact on learning

Memory is fundamental to learning, and memory difficulties will have an impact on learning literacy, language and numeracy. It can affect long- or short-term memory. Learners with short-term memory difficulties may find it very hard to remember instructions, particularly multiple instructions or words previously learned. Some learners may have 'fluctuating memories'. They may be able to complete a task in one session, but be unable to do it in subsequent sessions.

This causes difficulties when recording progress on the acquisition of skills. Memory also affects learners' ability to sequence. Some learners with long-term memory difficulties may not learn even after many repetitions and much practice, and appear to start again each time. It is important to recognise that this is due to 'perseveration', which is a specific memory difficulty. Memory difficulties do not correlate with an individual's general intelligence.

Strategies to enhance learning

- For some learners with memory difficulties, the use of bilingual approaches can be helpful, for example encouraging learners to devise their own bilingual vocabulary and phrase books. This strategy will vary from learner to learner and should be discussed with them, wherever possible.
- Work with learners on finding memory strategies or 'triggers' that are effective for them (for example, visual cues or the initial sound of a word).
- Try learning in small chunks (not *mnopqr*, but *mn*, *op*, *qr*).
- Find alternatives where necessary, such as an alphabet card (where learners cannot remember alphabetical order), key words and word banks, and post-its and prompt cards for tasks. Tape record important aspects of study.
- Ask questions to help learners to retrieve information; do not expect spontaneous recall.
- Do not persist with memory-based activities and practice where these are not working.
- Use models as memory prompts and, where appropriate, encourage learners to make links to their knowledge of other languages.
- Use cue cards and posters with, for example, multiplication tables and abbreviations.
- Responses will need to relate directly and explicitly to individual learning goals.
- Encourage the habit of using other kinds of individualised aids, such as: a diary; personal dictionaries; audio instructions on personal stereo; topic-based vocabulary lists; number aids; and wallets with personal information such as address, next of kin, and so on.
- Use specialist support, not just to diagnose, explain or define where the difficulty lies, but also to build up a bank of learning strategies.

Learners with memory difficulties might find the following technologies useful:

- using an audio recorder for short memos or session notes;
- writing a 'to do' list or using organisation software to help with time management;
- using mind/concept mapping software or an outline tool to help store notes in easy-to-remember format;
- a PDA (personal digital assistant) or personal organiser to give them a daily timetable, reminders on coursework deadlines and a source of their own notes or study materials.

A large amount and increasing range of assistive technology is available. See the appendices, Part 2, p. 503.

Learners with mental health difficulties

Mental health is about the capacity to live life to the full and the ability to cope with life's difficulties. It can be described as having two components: the psychological, i.e. how we think and feel about ourselves and our existence; and the behavioural, which relates to our functioning in activities that form part of daily living, such as eating, working and sleeping. It is influenced by our experiences and expectations as well as by cultural, social and religious beliefs. It affects our capacity to learn, to communicate, and to maintain relationships with others, and our ability to cope with change and life events.

When defining mental health difficulties doctors generally focus on both the psychological extent to which someone experiences severe distress or emotional pain, and how the individual functions in daily life, which is often based on observations of others.

Mental health difficulties are very common: about one in four people in Britain have this diagnosis (Mind, 2004). Psychiatrists classify mental health difficulties in different categories or diagnoses. These can range in severity from mild to severe. Schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders are generally thought of as the most chronic and debilitating. These are relatively rare, affecting around one in 200 adults each year. The majority of people who see their GP as a result of mental distress (80 per cent) experience depression and anxiety-related disorders (James, 2005).

The causes of mental health difficulties are not yet fully understood. They are influenced by genetics, childhood experiences, life events such as bereavement, and social determinants such as poverty, housing, and access to health care. Most researchers agree that stress can trigger or make individuals more vulnerable to mental health difficulties.

Many individuals recover completely from mental distress; most live productive and fulfilling lives. For some individuals medication and other forms of treatment can help. However, seeing mental health difficulties solely as illnesses that require medical treatment is too narrow a view. There are many different influences on an individual's life that can cause mental distress and there are, therefore, also non-medical ways of supporting individuals with mental health difficulties.

Mental health and culture

Concepts of mental health are constructed within the context of a particular society and culture. Our understanding of mental health "will depend on our values, preconceptions and assumptions for example about the nature of health and illness, the nature of society, the place of the individual within society, what constitutes normality, desirable behaviour and attitudes" (Weare, 2000). Our

understanding of what constitutes mental health in the UK is not, necessarily, applicable everywhere. For example, there is no word for stress in Kinyarwanda (a Bantu language spoken in Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Uganda) and what is considered healthy functioning in an individualistic culture where people are encouraged to be independent and self-reliant may be very different from behaviours expected in more collectivist societies.

A diagnosis of a mental health difficulty may help to assess what treatment is needed and to predict what is likely to happen, but different doctors can give completely different diagnoses. Cultural differences and difficulties with language can affect the interpretation of behaviours. "Individuals from minority ethnic groups in the UK are more likely to be diagnosed with a mental health difficulty, more likely to be sectioned under the Mental Health Act and more likely to experience a poor outcome from treatment" (Mental Health Foundation, 2004). The difference may result from poverty, racism or the failure of mental health services to understand or meet the needs of minority communities.

Also, Western models of mental health care, which have developed in stable and affluent societies and are based primarily on talk therapies, may not always be culturally appropriate. Within Western culture, it is believed that victims of adverse events should work through what has happened to them, but many non-Western cultures place little value on discussing intimate information outside the family circle. Summerfield (1999) describes a strategy of active forgetting used by some Mozambican and Ethiopian refugees as a way of coping with traumatic experiences, and in some cases there may be religious or cultural taboos regarding talking about topics such as self-harm, sexual violence and rape.

Stigma

Mental health difficulties are some of the least understood conditions. Despite a number of campaigns, a high level of stigma and fear still accompanies mental health issues in all areas of society, including educational institutions. Negative views about individuals with mental health difficulties can lead to blatant discrimination, lack of confidence on the part of practitioners in their ability to deal with learners with mental health difficulties, or over-protectiveness when considering learners' needs (James, 2004).

Media reporting does not help these views. The proportion of individuals with mental health difficulties likely to display violent behaviour is small, yet two-thirds of British press and television coverage on mental health includes an association with violence (Social Exclusion Unit, 2004).

Research carried out by the Mental Health Foundation shows that individuals who experience mental health difficulties are heavily discriminated against and stigmatised in society. Respondents talk of the fear of having a diagnosis of mental illness. Sixty-six per cent of respondents said the risk of discrimination would prevent them from telling some individuals about their own or another's

mental distress and 74 per cent said they would not disclose details of their mental health on application forms (Mental Health Foundation, 2000b). In other cultures, too, mental illness carries stigma and this may further deter ESOL learners from seeking help.

The lack of understanding by others about mental health issues is a key cause of isolation for those with mental health difficulties.

Mental health and the prison context

Research for a report of the government's Social Exclusion Unit found that 72 per cent of male and 70 per cent of female sentenced prisoners have two or more mental health disorders (Social Exclusion Unit, 2004). This is 14 and 35 times the level in the general population respectively.

ESOL practitioners working in this context are very likely to encounter learners experiencing extreme distress, including those who self-harm and are coming to terms with drug or alcohol withdrawal. ESOL learners are likely to feel extremely frightened. They may have little understanding of the legal system in the UK and their language difficulties are likely to add to their difficulties in coming to terms with imprisonment.

The learning environment is one where learners have no family, friends or support systems. You need to be especially careful regarding contexts for learning and to be aware of systems that exist within the prison to ensure those at risk are referred to appropriate services.

Impact on learning

There is no such thing as a typical learner with mental health difficulties. Each individual's experience of mental health is unique and the way mental health difficulties affect ability to participate in learning will differ from individual to individual, even among those with the same diagnosis.

Learners with mental health difficulties may have greater anxieties than other learners about accessing learning or about their ability to learn. They may feel more fearful about failure and may have difficulty receiving feedback. Anxiety may make it difficult for some learners to cope with changes, such as to the practitioner or room, and they may find busy or noisy environments difficult. For some learners making eye contact, taking part in social interaction and asking questions in class can cause anxiety (Atkinson and Hornby, 2002).

Some learners may have a short attention span and difficulties with memory; this may be as a result of anxiety or as a side effect of medication. Medication can also have other side effects that impact on learning. For example, learners may experience restlessness and agitation, fatigue and lethargy, shaking and muscle spasms.

For many individuals mental health fluctuates, with good and bad days. This may affect their attendance, punctuality and ability to participate in class activities. Some conditions may have particular symptoms that can impact on a learner's ability to concentrate, such as obsessional thoughts (see additional information on 'Obsessive-compulsive disorder', p. 363) and auditory hallucinations (see additional information on 'Schizophrenia', p. 226).

Research has shown that education can have a positive impact on an individual's mental health and well-being (James, 2005). Apart from the more tangible benefits gained from acquiring new skills to cope with life and improving life prospects, many learners report a greater sense of hope and purpose, improved confidence and self-esteem, new friendships, more access to leisure activities and less time to dwell on difficulties.

Education can help to provide a feeling of being wanted and included as well as giving learners a chance to do something about their situation.

Technology and learners with mental health difficulties

Learners with mental health difficulties may experience difficulties as a direct result of their condition or as side effects from medication. There are a variety of technologies and strategies that could be used to support them.

To support short-term memory or concentration, the following strategies can help:

- using an audio recorder for short memos or session notes;
- writing a 'to do' list or using organisational software to help with time management.

To support muscular control and strength:

- using an alternative to a mouse, such as a tracker ball;
- using an ergonomic keyboard.

To support visual sensitivity:

- using an LCD or TFT flat screen monitor can avoid visual flickering;
- using anti-glare screen coatings or monitor filters.

Electronic communication through emails and discussion boards may help some learners keep in contact with practitioners and their peers when unable to participate in the class, as will providing class material online.

Strategies to enhance learning

General points

- Think about the learner as a whole person and in relation to the other individuals in the group. Be aware of their abilities when planning sessions. Remember individuals experience mental health differently, and mental health conditions are different. It is important to be flexible in response to this.

- Initial assessment is important. An inappropriate class can have a demoralising effect on a learner.
- Smaller groups (ten to 12 learners) enable you to spend more time with each learner.
- An awareness of some of the manifestations of mental health difficulties – such as withdrawal from participation, lack of attention, sleeping in class, frequent crying, challenging behaviour, noticeable change in mood or behaviour which is out of character – can help you respond appropriately.
- Ensure that learners have information about support and pastoral systems within the organisation. Appropriate interventions can prevent anxieties and difficulties from escalating, but be aware that counselling may be an unfamiliar concept for some learners and they may be concerned about confidentiality.
- Listen to the learner. Some learners wish to talk about their experiences but not everyone needs or wants to do this. Be clear about the extent of your role and make use of organisational support, such as mentors or mental health support workers, where available and with the learner's agreement. You need to be mindful of your own mental health and consciously utilise support systems and strategies to alleviate stress.
- Develop good communication with line managers and support staff and, working with the learner, identify how other professionals and carers can collaborate to deliver effective services.
- Make use of planned tutorial times so that learners can raise issues, or for discussing progress and how things are going.
- Some learners may experience changes in behaviour that may create an uncomfortable situation in the learning environment. Providing a private space where learners can go when they are feeling anxious, upset or angry is extremely useful for some learners.
- Encourage the learners to return to their course after absences.

The class

- Establish positive learning environments that foster high self-esteem. An environment that is most appropriate for the development of mental and emotional health is one in which the learner feels safe, valued, respected and cared for, and one where they are able to achieve success.
- Have a positive attitude towards learners. Developing a caring, empathetic and genuine relationship with learners may help to overcome misunderstandings and difficulties that may arise.
- Encourage a supportive, flexible environment that can accommodate learners if they experience difficulty with social interaction or with particular activities. For example, working in pairs or small groups, participating in games or role-play can be stressful for some learners with mental health difficulties. Informing learners how long particular activities are going to last may help some learners.
- Create conditions to enhance mental health. Use health and cultural content relevant to the learner's particular needs to help them cope with the new cultural and linguistic environment and to increase their resources to deal

with the stresses involved in establishing a life in the UK. For example, issues related to living in the UK such as employment or education. When working in a prison context, include topics that will help learners come to terms with imprisonment, such as understanding courts or working in prison.

- For some groups, it may be appropriate to include topics such as ways of relaxing/de-stressing, coping with anxiety, support groups, and so on. Be aware of topics that may add to a learner's distress, particularly when teaching in situations where learners are extremely vulnerable, such as in prisons.
- Have realistic expectations and provide the right balance between supporting learners and enabling them to reach their full potential.
- Plan activities based on the learners' interests that are both challenging and achievable. Break tasks into small steps. Encourage learners to take each task in turn.
- Encourage positive thinking. Focus on what a learner has achieved and provide praise and encouragement.
- For some learners, at the beginning the most important part of attending an ESOL class may be the regular routine and social aspect. Allow sufficient time for learners to settle.
- Be aware that noise levels in classes may be stressful and distracting for some learners. Keeping noise levels down is helpful. Providing earphones for listening activities can also help some learners.
- Allow learners the choice of where to sit and work throughout the lesson. Some learners need a certain amount of personal space and can become anxious if they feel hemmed in. Offering learners the choice can help to reduce anxiety.
- Provide opportunities for regular breaks. It may also be helpful for particular learners if they know they can go out quietly, for a break, whenever they need to.

See also additional information in Part 2 on: 'Addiction and dependency' (p. 202), 'Anxiety' (p. 132), 'Asylum seekers, refugees and mental health' (p. 146), 'Bereavement' (p. 378), 'Depression' (p. 288), 'Handling crisis situations' (p. 216), 'Obsessive-compulsive disorder' (p. 363), 'Post-traumatic stress disorder' (p. 276), 'Schizophrenia' (p. 226).

See the case study of Emilia in the research document in this series It's Not as Simple as You Think: Cultural Viewpoints around Disability.

Learners with dyslexia and related specific learning difficulties

Dyslexia can be defined as a difference in cognitive style. Learners with dyslexia can often perform a range of complex tasks, such as solving complicated problems in electronics or design, yet have a range of difficulties with reading and spelling, ordering and organising writing, copying from the board, learning word order in a foreign language, remembering instructions or new vocabulary. This is thought to be because of difficulties with processing language, mainly written language but also, in some cases, spoken language too.

Dyslexia is independent of intelligence and is thought to affect at least 10 per cent of the population, 4 per cent severely. There will undoubtedly be learners with dyslexia in ESOL courses, and they may be undiagnosed. In many cases, learners

from overseas will not have heard of dyslexia and will not have been diagnosed. They may recognise, but not understand why they appear to have more difficulties with reading and writing and learning a new language than their peers.

A range of other difficulties are associated with dyslexia:

- dysgraphia – handwriting difficulties;
- dyspraxia – poor motor coordination;
- dyscalculia – difficulties with maths.

These are part of the syndrome of dyslexia, but may in some cases function as a primary disability.

What is dyslexia and how does it impact on learning?

When we speak, listen, read and write, we process language using auditory, visual and motor pathways. When we read and write we also use what has been termed 'phonological processing' – the breaking down of speech streams into individual sounds or phonemes and the blending of these phonemes to form words or part of words. Though researchers do not yet agree on why this happens, current research into dyslexia suggests that individuals with dyslexia often have difficulties with one or more of these processes.

Probably the most significant area for language learners is difficulty with auditory processing. Learners with dyslexia who have difficulties in this area are likely to have a poor auditory memory and difficulty discriminating sounds. They will have difficulties with associating letters with particular sounds, which is likely to result in bizarre spelling, and difficulties reading. They may have difficulties retrieving vocabulary (i.e. finding the 'right' word) and in reproducing sounds, particularly pronouncing multi-syllable words. These are all difficulties that can affect learners with dyslexia, in their first language. When their difficulties transfer into learning subsequent languages, it can be easily imagined that they will bring substantial added difficulties, for instance remembering unfamiliar vocabulary or word order. Phonological difficulties are usually associated with auditory processing difficulties and would exacerbate them – readers would not be able, for instance, to break down unfamiliar words in order to decode them when reading or to put sounds together to spell regular words. Each word has to be learned anew, both for reading and spelling.

Individuals with visual processing difficulties may find that print blurs or moves around on the page. This makes reading extremely laborious and slow and they may find they get headaches or become very tired when reading. They often also have difficulties in ordering and sequencing, which for language learners may translate into difficulty with sentence structure and word order. They may have poor visual perception of, and memory for, sequences of two-dimensional symbols, meaning that they cannot remember what words look like and have to rely more on 'sounding out' when reading. This slows reading down, and delays

understanding. By the time they have worked out what a word is, they may have forgotten the other words in the sentence; so overall comprehension and recall may be poor. Copying from the board will prove very difficult, as the letters and words need to be held in the short-term visual memory before being transferred on to paper. Both sequencing and poor visual memory affect spelling, letters are often mis-sequenced and words spelt phonetically. This is a strategy which may have worked in the past if the language learner's first language is phonetically regular, but will not work with the English spelling system.

Motor processing difficulties are often associated with visual ones and many of the above difficulties, such as sequencing, apply. Individuals affected may lose their place on the page, read or write backwards (from right to left), or find it difficult to articulate words accurately (they know what the word is, but cannot seem to 'get it out right'). Individuals with motor processing difficulties have problems controlling the pen, producing even and tidy handwriting, and often find writing very tiring. Lack of fluency in writing affects spelling, which is partly learned and retained through the motor memory, and learners may 'forget' where they were in writing and re-write part of a word, or finish it prematurely. Learners with motor integration difficulties may have particular difficulties with orientation, finding their way, and with organisation. These difficulties will occur in learners' first languages, and if the script of subsequent languages is different then their difficulties will be exacerbated.

How to tell if a learner has dyslexia

For a full *diagnostic assessment*, learners need to go to a professional; a practitioner or educational psychologist who is qualified to diagnose dyslexia. What you can carry out is *initial screening*, the purpose of which is to inform teaching, or to suggest when it is worth referring a learner for a full assessment. This can be helpful to you and the learner as you then have some idea of why a learner is not responding to a particular teaching method or activity, and is finding some language and literacy skills more difficult. You can then look again at the learner's preferred learning style or try out 'dyslexia friendly' teaching methods.

Common indicators of dyslexia include a history of difficulties (in learners' other languages as well as in English) in the following:

- learning to read, even with extra help;
- spelling, including erratic and 'bizarre' spelling, not related to the sound of the word;
- word retrieval;
- learning a foreign language;
- learning number facts, such as tables;
- copying;
- messy or laborious handwriting;
- remembering oral instructions or messages;

- telling the time on an analogue clock;
- tying shoelaces or playing ball games.

See *Dyslexia and the Bilingual Learner* (Sunderland *et al.*,1997) for a more exhaustive list.

These indicators, taken together, form a pattern that is typical of learners with dyslexia. One or two on their own would not suggest dyslexia.

As the above list relies on the learner having spent some time in education in order to build up a history, this list will not help those who have had very little previous education and who read and write very little in any language. With these learners, it is very difficult to screen for dyslexia (see the information box 'Assessing: good practice', Part 2, p. 131) and you may find it best to try out a variety of teaching methods until you find ones that suit your learners. You can also observe closely and see if learners appear to have particular difficulties compared to their peers at a similar level.

Interpreters may be helpful if learners speak very little English. However, be aware of the challenges of working with interpreters who have little knowledge of dyslexia themselves. Also be aware of the learner giving what they consider the 'right' answer (for instance, that they had no trouble at school) because they think this will be considered more desirable by you. It is important to recognise that it is likely to take time to understand the nature of a bilingual learner's strengths and weaknesses in relation to possible dyslexia.

The dyslexic cognitive style

Individuals with dyslexia often have a very distinctive cognitive style and you can support them by adapting your teaching to suit this style. Their language processing and short-term memory difficulties are often compensated by very good long-term memories and individual approaches to learning. This demands:

- a highly personalised approach to learning;
- the learning process and conventions to be made explicit;
- an understanding of 'how' and 'why' in order to learn.

For these reasons it is particularly important for you to avoid making assumptions about why learners behave as they do, to take time to make sure that learners understand what they are supposed to do and why, and to help learners find for themselves the way in which they learn best.

Many, but not necessarily all, of the following characteristics of cognitive styles and learning strategies 'fit' most learners with dyslexia. Learners with dyslexia:

- think holistically (all at once) rather than step by step;
- need to see the whole picture first, before they can learn the steps or details;

- are poor at remembering sequences but good at remembering patterns;
- are good at seeing how lots of things are connected and how things work;
- are poor at rote memory tasks but remember well when they really understand something;
- learn by experience, not from being told;
- are often concrete, tactile learners;
- are not good at learning or applying rules or generalisations but instead learn from the particular to the general;
- need to make personal connections to remember things;
- learn to read and write by having a personal interest in the subject matter;
- learn better with the help of colour, humour, stories and images;
- can often understand concepts in maths but have trouble with calculation processes or symbols and the language of maths.

Technology and learners with dyslexia and related specfic difficulties

The use of computers may minimise spelling and handwriting difficulties for learners with dyslexia, allowing them to express themselves more freely in writing and thus significantly improve the quality of their writing. Computers can also help enormously with the difficulties of planning and organising, reducing the frustration of writing.

For many learners, a keyboard makes a sufficient enough difference, as learners do not have to form the letters. Specialist keyboards and mice are also available, as are larger, coloured key-tops that can be stuck onto the keys of any keyboard. You need to make sure that background colour, colour and type of font, and spacing between letters are adjustable to suit individual needs. Arial, Comic Sans MS and Tahoma fonts are commonly preferred by learners. Others, however, may benefit from voice recognition (speech) and reading software. This is especially useful for learners with severe reading and/or writing difficulties. As well as giving the experience and pleasure of 'reading' to those who have never had it, reading software can be effectively combined with voice recognition technology, enabling a technological version of scribing/language experience, which gives the learner more autonomy. Learners need to 'train' the software, but this can be done through introducing their own words and reading their own writing. Voice recognition technology can also help in developing writing skills, such as written expression, sentence structure, punctuation and proofreading.

Other useful hardware includes spell checkers, dictionaries and thesauruses, many of which have a speech facility.

Audio recorders such as cassette recorders, MiniDiscs, and digital and mp3 recorders can be a great help with comprehension for those learners with poor word recognition who find it difficult to take in what they are reading. These can also be used to record important information or to record ideas when planning writing.

A reading pen (see additional information on 'Technology for learners with learning difficulties or disabilities', (Part 1, p. 15) can be especially useful for those with auditory processing problems. It scans and pronounces individual words and sentences and defines words. This is particularly helpful when the learner is introduced to new or unfamiliar words.

Also available is software that adds speech output and has word prediction and spell-check facilities. Word prediction helps develop language, as it is based on units of meaning. Other software can be used for mind mapping, drafting and making notes. The non-linear nature of mind maps is particularly helpful to those with a holistic, non-sequential cognitive style.

Strategies to enhance learning
- Observe closely to see what does and doesn't work. Discuss what approaches have worked for the learner in the past and help learners to understand their own learning styles.
- Encourage learners to find their own strategies so they become independent in their learning. Offer memorising techniques such as mnemonics, visualising techniques, tape recorders, posters and cards (with illustrations). Help them make connections between what they know and any new language. Encourage them to make visual representations of information, for instance through mind maps. They may then be able to recall them more easily.
- Always teach grammar, phonology and lexis in contexts of interest to the learner. Use role-play, simulations, guided discussions, drama, narratives, literature, songs and games. Avoid de-contextualised grammar exercises, drills and vocabulary learning tasks.
- When addressing language difficulties, such as poor auditory memory, 'scaffold' the skill by breaking the task down. Often processing difficulties *cannot* be overcome by practice, so recognise when techniques such as repetition are not working and try other strategies to support the learner.
- Give learners time to copy from the board, or prepare handouts with the information. When preparing handouts, pay attention to layout and clarity. Avoid putting too much text on one page and use colour to highlight key points.
- Offer a range of lined coloured paper for learners to write on (this may have to be photocopied or specially ordered). If learners have a preferred colour, ensure all handouts for them are printed on it.
- Sometimes learners need to 'overlearn' (i.e. practise even after they seem to have learnt something) to help transfer learning into long-term memory. Use a multisensory approach to reinforce language – allow learners to hear, read, speak and write it. However, do this in the order that suits their learning style. If they prefer to write something down before saying it, give them opportunities to do this.
- Make technology available wherever possible – for word processing, spell-checking, and dictionary work.
- Support learners in developing strategies to organise their folders and manage their time, for example by 'staging' assignments.

See additional information boxes in Part 2, section 4:

- 'Brain Gym activities' (p. 452);
- 'Coloured acetate overlays' (p. 117);
- 'Comprehension and visual processing difficulties' (p. 162);
- 'Multisensory approaches to teaching' (p. 384);
- 'Speech/voice recognition software' (p. 156).
- 'Spelling: individualised programme' (p. 326);

See also the case study of Jalal, p. 64.

Learners with learning difficulties

The term 'learning difficulties' is used in post-16 education to refer to individuals who have a general cognitive difficulty that affects their ability to learn. It is used to describe learners with a wide range of very different learning needs. These learners, like any other learners, will have spiky profiles.

The concept of learning difficulty may be different depending on the context and values of a particular society and culture in a specific point in time. For example, a study of South Asian communities (Maudslay, Rafique and Uddin, 2003) found no direct translation for the term 'learning difficulty'. This was also found to be true for the Turkish and Eritrean communities and in the Sikh community (Learning and Skills Development Agency, 2004). Terms used to describe individuals with learning difficulties translated into 'simple' and 'slow'.

Thus, many learners from overseas will not have heard of learning difficulties and may well come from countries with limited provision for individuals with disabilities or learning difficulties. There are likely to be learners with learning difficulties (particularly those with mild learning difficulties) in ESOL classes. Until very recently, little research had been done in this area and practitioners have highlighted the lack of resources and information to support ESOL learners with learning difficulties.

See It's Not as Simple as you Think: Cultural Viewpoints around Disability.

Making it Happen: An Inclusive Approach to Working with People with Learning Difficulties who have ESOL Needs *has begun to address this situation.*

Recognising learners with learning difficulties

There is no one formal assessment method used in post-16 education to assess individuals with learning difficulties. Good practice when assessing is based on a variety of approaches and involves the learner as well as other people who can contribute information (such as past practitioners, social workers, specialists including speech therapists, educational psychologists and physiotherapists). It is an ongoing process carried out over a period of time and focuses on what the learner can do. (See additional information box on 'Assessing: good practice', Part 2, p. 131.)

Accurate identification of support needs for bilingual learners who have learning difficulties and language needs can be difficult, particularly where learners have had very little previous education and are at beginner level both in terms of oracy and literacy.

Interpreters may be helpful if learners speak very little English, particularly when trying to ascertain the learner's first language level to see whether a learner has general communication difficulties or difficulties specifically with English.

Impact on learning

Learners with learning difficulties vary as widely in development and progress as their peers. Some learners may have experienced considerable sense of failure and may feel reluctant to try anything new. Others may have developed strategies to hide from or avoid things that they find difficult.

Learners with learning difficulties may have difficulties with:

- *Fine and gross motor skills*. Learners have difficulties controlling the pen, producing even and legible handwriting, and often find writing very tiring. They may need activities to develop the strength of the wrist and fingers. Specialised or modified equipment may be helpful, for example triangular pens and pencils.
- *Short-term memory, consolidating and retaining information*. Some learners may find it difficult to hold, process, understand and assimilate spoken language long enough to respond. Providing support when giving oral instructions or information, for example visual timetables or cue cards, can help. The use of multisensory approaches, 'over-learning ' (i.e. practise even after they seem to have learnt something), and systematic reviews can help transfer learning into long-term memory.
- *Conceptualising and understanding abstract concepts*. Learners learn better by experience and are often tactile, 'concrete' learners. New language needs to be taught in contexts of interest to the learner. Use role play, drama, songs and games.
- *Sequencing*. Learners may need support with remembering sequences and instructions, for example by using visual prompts or providing one instruction at a time.
- *Concentrating*. The context needs to be of interest to the learner. Breaking the task down into smaller steps can help.

Technology and learners with learning difficulties

Technology can be a very powerful tool in engaging adults with learning difficulties and teaching literacy, language and numeracy in an 'adult' context. Learners with learning difficulties, particularly those in the younger age range, may be very competent in using technology and may enjoy the kudos that technology gives to an area of work that may otherwise have been tedious and time-consuming for them. They may respond to, and be highly motivated by, certain software programs that make learning more interesting.

The use of multimedia, such as digital cameras (stills and video) and mp3 recorders can be highly motivating and empowering, and the outputs, such as multimedia stories and video diaries, can provide a great sense of achievement and boost confidence.

Using a computer to write takes away the fear of making uncorrectable mistakes and so helps learners to be more adventurous in their use of words. Simplified word processors that might include text-to-speech or word prediction might be useful. Symbol software, such as *Widgit*, is also useful for some learners who want to work on their reading and writing skills.

Some learners may benefit from a simplified or enlarged keyboard such as BigKeys or IntelliKeys. A tracker ball may be a suitable alternative to a mouse to help with coordination.
Touch-screens can be a useful tool for engaging learners.

Practitioners need to be very clear about the purpose and expected outcomes of activities, particularly when these are computer-based. Be explicit about the transference of computer-learned skills to daily tasks.

Strategies to enhance learning

- In section 2 of *Making it Happen: An Inclusive Approach to Working with People with Learning Difficulties who have ESOL Needs* (see above), there are detailed suggestions on approaches to consider when working with learners with learning difficulties.
- Observe closely to see what does and doesn't work. If learners have sufficient language, discuss what approaches have worked for the learner.
- Contextualise new language to help learners understand why and how the language is used. Use contexts that are real and relevant to learners.
- Establish realistic goals that relate to what the learner can and wants to do so that they feel a sense of achievement.
- Create an atmosphere of safety and respect. Provide encouragement and positive feedback on the learner's achievements to develop their confidence and self-esteem.
- Break tasks into small steps appropriate to the level of the learner's concentration.
- Check understanding of instructions; reinforce instructions with visual input, for example demonstration, using pictures or objects.
- Give the learner time to process information and respond to questions.
- Use games and strategies to help improve memory, such as Kim's game, and repetitive stories or situations.
- When using visual materials, it is best to use photographs. Line drawings and symbols may be difficult for some learners to interpret.
- When preparing handouts, pay attention to layout and how easy they are to read. Use a minimum of font size 14. Avoid putting too much on one page and use colour to highlight key points
- Copying from the board is difficult and tiring for learners who have difficulties with fine motor skills. Provide alternatives.
- Use a multisensory approach to reinforce language – allow learners to hear, read, speak and write it.

See the additional information boxes in Part 2, section 4:

Learners with autistic spectrum disorders and Asperger syndrome

An autistic spectrum disorder is a lifelong, complex developmental disability that affects the way a person communicates and relates to people around them. The disorder has only been recognised for the last 40/50 years, and the causes of autism are not yet clear. There are several different terms used to describe autism:

- *Kanner syndrome and classic autism*: Characteristics are variable intellectual ability – from severe learning difficulties to above average intelligence, individuals may be delayed in learning to speak or speech may not develop at all.
- *Asperger syndrome and high functioning autism*: The main features are that individuals have average or above average intellectual ability and good spoken language, language development is not delayed.
- *Atypical autism*: When some but not all of the criteria for autism are met.
- *Semantic pragmatic disorder*: When an individual has good language skills in terms of structure and vocabulary but has difficulty with pragmatic meaning and in understanding how language is used in social situations.

Autistic spectrum disorder is an umbrella term used to describe these conditions because it groups together all the different variations of the disorder. The idea of a spectrum is useful because it shows that there is a range of characteristics, indicating that individuals with autistic spectrum disorders differ from each other in terms of the severity of their autism and their intellectual ability. No two individuals are affected in exactly the same way. It is a complex condition that is not yet fully understood. There is, at present, relatively little research evidence on which to base educational practice. It is believed to affect one in 110 people and is at least four times more common in men (www.autismwestmidlands.org.uk).

The criteria for a diagnosis of autism are based on a triad of impairments in:

- social interaction;
- social communication;
- imagination and flexible thinking.

Individuals with autism often have remarkable strengths in particular areas and there are many examples of individuals who are extremely successful.

Asperger syndrome is sometimes known as high functioning autism. It includes individuals with average or above average intelligence. The condition falls within the autistic spectrum and the 'triad of impairments' that characterise autism. However, the difficulties are generally more subtle, and, unlike autism, those with Asperger syndrome have fewer problems with language development and are less likely to have learning difficulties. There is considerable variation in the overall severity of the difficulties experienced and the way in which the difficulties show themselves will vary from one individual to another.
There may be learners with Asperger syndrome in ESOL classes; however, the condition is unlikely to be diagnosed unless the learner has completed part of their education in the UK.

Impact on learning

Each of the criteria mentioned above may have a significant impact on learning. Social interaction is probably the most defining feature in autistic spectrum disorders. Common features include the following:

- Learners may prefer their own company and social situations can cause anxiety. This may be linked to not being able to understand what is expected in particular situations. They may lack empathy with other people and can appear rude or tactless.
- Predicting other people's behaviour, understanding the motives behind their behaviour or reading their intentions can be a challenge. Learners may find it difficult to anticipate how their actions might affect other people and may experience difficulties in reading a listener's level of interest in what is being said.
- Individuals with autistic spectrum disorders are unable to deceive or understand deception and may have difficulty distinguishing fact from fiction. Understanding emotion – their own and that of other people – can also be challenging.
- For some learners these difficulties lead to fear and avoidance of others. The social demands of others can cause distress. However, others want to make friends and have social contact but do not always understand the social rules and others people's behaviour and feelings well enough.

Some of the common features of social communication are that:

- for some learners speech may be delayed or may not develop at all; but others may have fluent speech. Some individuals may have a formal and pedantic way of speaking – their voice often lacks expression;
- learners can have difficulty interpreting and using non-verbal communication features, such as facial expression or eye contact. They may also find turn taking and topic maintenance difficult in conversation;
- interpreting intonation can be very difficult. Some learners might find it difficult to show interest in another person's views or may be unaware if they are dominating conversations;

- individuals tend to understand language in literal ways and may not grasp the implied meaning of language. Idioms, metaphors and expressions such as: 'I will look at it over lunch' or 'Can you close the window?', can all cause difficulties.

Common features relating to the third criteria, imagination and flexible thinking, include the following:

- Learners develop strong interests in a narrow range of topics and have high motivation and knowledge in their own fields of special interest. This can result in a range of all-absorbing interests, for example computers, science fiction, or particular TV programmes.
- Learners often have extraordinarily good rote memory and many learners are highly skilled in particular areas, such as technology, science, and drawing.
- Learners prefer to stick to what is familiar and known. They may resist new topics, and change, particularly unplanned change, can cause distress and anxiety.

Individuals with autistic spectrum disorders find it easier to see the parts rather than the whole picture. The implications are that they may have an idiosyncratic focus of attention for example seeing the wheel rather than the car; they can find it difficult to organise themselves and their materials as they lack a guiding principle or overall plan. Learners often have great aptitude in some areas but find it difficult to see connections and to transfer skills and knowledge from one setting to another. Learners with Asperger syndrome are rarely slow learners. They generally have high levels of academic competence and need tuition at the appropriate level.

Individuals with autistic spectrum disorders can be hypersensitive or hyposensitive to tastes, smells, colours and touch. This can lead to extreme reactions, though it is less marked and less frequent in individuals with Asperger syndrome. Learners may have poor motor coordination. They can appear clumsy and handwriting may be illegible

Learners with autistic spectrum disorder may also develop strategies to help calm themselves and control stress and discomfort. This may include rocking, arm flapping, humming or tapping themselves. For others, it might involve carrying something around with them. Echoing (echolalia) is also thought to be an indication of anxiety or stress.

Technology and learners with autistic spectrum disorders and Asperger syndrome

The following technologies may be useful for those with autistic spectrum difficulties:

- Diary and planning software might be useful for some learners who wish to build up a strong study routine and ensure that course deadlines are anticipated in time.
- Some learners may find that they like high contrasting or unusual colour combinations of text and background colours, while others may prefer to avoid high contrast and prefer low contrast combinations.
- Some learners may experience a high sensitivity to their environment and may wish to use a task lamp or daylight lamp for visual comfort when reading.
- Word processing may allow the learner to initially communicate more effectively and with more confidence than they might orally, though it can be important to set a maximum number of words for some learners who may overproduce.
- The general provision of desktop computing facilities at home, or with a laptop, might provide the learner with sufficient private space and time to study when and where they choose.

Communicating by e-mail or using other communication services might be liberating for some learners who wish to avoid direct social interaction, while for others the use of online communication may pose a barrier and they may prefer the security of face-to-face communication with a trusted support worker.

Strategies to enhance learning

General points

- Provide stability and consistency and give warning of any changes, such as to the room or practitioner, and be alert to possible signs of stress and anxiety.
- Provide learners with a named person to whom they can go with any concerns.
- Provide a space or room for learners to go when they are feeling stressed or overwhelmed and need quiet. Some educational institutions have set up a staffed 'safe haven' for learners with autistic spectrum disorders (Tarleton, 2004).
- Use consistent specialist support workers, if available.
- Use tutorials to check how things are going for the learner.

In the classroom

- Use concrete, direct, explicit instructions supported by visual prompts. Don't rely on whole class instructions; be sure to get the individual's attention.
- Some learners are able to listen better if they don't look at the speaker – don't insist on eye contact.
- Break tasks into clearly identifiable steps. Make the beginning and end points of tasks clear, for example by using a list of steps, pictures, or prompt cards. Avoid ambiguity and make connections with previous skills and knowledge explicit.
- Give the learner time to process information and respond to questions.
- Avoid end-of-term deadlines for assignments. Provide more structure and regular checks.

57

- Be sensitive to the fact that some individuals find it very difficult to work in a group: do not force participation. Some learners want to spend their time alone while others may need help to make contact.
- Create a calm learning environment with clear structure and consistency. Keep down noise levels, which can be extremely distracting for some learners.
- Do not allow unusual behaviour to distract you from recognising ability. Individuals with autistic spectrum disorders can have very high ability in certain areas of learning.
- Create a supportive environment that encourages the valuing of individuals and the acceptance of difference. Agree 'rules' with the whole group on acceptable behaviour.
- Avoid putting pressure on learners and be alert to the possibility of stress. If left unrecognised stress can lead to anxiety, aggression or withdrawn behaviour. Providing regular breaks helps individuals sustain personal stress or information overload.
- The causes of obsessional and ritualistic behaviour, such as arm flapping, are highly complex. It is thought that, for some individuals, it may help to keep fear and anxiety under control. Asking the learner to stop the behaviour is likely to be counterproductive and may cause them to become more agitated. Simple relaxation techniques, such as breathing, looking at a photo, or taking a short walk, can be helpful.
- Always teach new language in contexts of interest to the learner. The use of role play, drama, and social stories can be particularly effective for learners with autistic spectrum disorders. See the case study on Shaheed, p. 69, and the additional information box on 'Social Stories', Part 2, p. 302.
- Learners may need support to understand social interaction, for example they may need to be asked not to interrupt or to pause to allow others a turn. However, it is not always easy to formulate rules to guide social interaction and 'learning' social skills can be extremely demanding and stressful for individuals with autistic spectrum disorders.
- Establish clear rules, where these might help the learner. For example, avoid interruptions in group situations by using an object – only the person holding it is allowed to speak.
- When learners have obsessive topics of conversation, it may be useful to have special times when the learner can talk about their subject. It may act as an incentive to do other things.
- Draw attention to emotions, gesture, facial expression, eye contact, and so on, when relevant. Photographs, videos, television soaps, or watching others in the group role play situations, can all be a useful source of material around the communication of feelings and emotion.
- Also, those who are competent readers sometimes prefer to be given information/instructions in written form. But where learners may be hypersensitive to visual stimuli, provide uncluttered worksheets with clear signposts as to where to start.

See additional information boxes in Part 2, section 4:

- 'Asperger syndrome', (p. 370)
- 'Social Stories' (p. 302)

See the case study of Shaheed (p. 69).

3   Inclusive learning: meeting the challenges

Effective strategies for inclusion rely on identifying individual needs, planning to meet these and providing appropriate teaching, learning opportunities and support. These are not easy tasks, but the information in this guidance about particular learning difficulties or disabilities – both their range and how they affect learners – along with the practical suggestions for meeting learners' needs will help you and other practitioners to be successful in meeting these. To quote Tomlinson:

> …*teacher expectations and attitudes are as influential as technical equipment and individual ability*. (Further Education Funding Council, 1996)

However, creating learning opportunities for learners with learning difficulties or disabilities is not just a matter for individual practitioners, or those who provide learning support. It requires a whole-institution response to create an appropriate learning environment to maximise success and give access to all.

The case studies in this section are from both the learner and the organisation perspective. The first set of case studies is about bilingual learners with learning difficulties or disabilities, describing aspects of their language learning journey and the second set of case studies is about different organisations describing how they are trying to meet the challenges of inclusive learning. They do not attempt to give definitive solutions but aim to illustrate different approaches and to reflect on the impact of these strategies on the learners involved.

We acknowledge that the terminology used may be different from case study to case study, depending on what is accepted as common usage in each organisation.

Learner case studies

Ali – Case study of a learner who is blind

Ali came to England at the age of 20. He was extremely depressed. He thought his life was shattered. He was in a foreign country, had recently lost his sight and was unable to understand or speak any English. Eventually his sister managed to persuade him to apply for an ESOL course at the local further education college. The college arranged for the ESOL teacher to visit Ali in his home and discuss the provision available and his needs.

Ali started a beginners ESOL class. He also received two hours of support (shared with another learner who is visually impaired) in addition to the class. His learning support tutor felt it was important for Ali to become an independent learner rather than using the additional support time to go over class work. She began to research what IT systems were available to support learners who are blind and visually impaired, and taught Ali to touch type so that he would be

able to access IT. His dedication was impressive. After only three weeks he had mastered all the letters on the keyboard. However, he had not seen written English and also needed to learn to spell. The practitioner used the typing exercises to focus on vocabulary building and spelling as well.

In the class, Ali worked with other learners completing the same activities. When this involved written documents other learners provided support by reading what was written and when writing on the board, the practitioner explained what she wrote. At the beginning the focus was on speaking and understanding. The practitioner used real objects to explain vocabulary and also drew the object on Ali's hand with her finger.

Ali was a determined and fast learner. After two years he completed an Entry 3 level course and enrolled on a foundation course that covered communication, application of number and keyboard skills. The Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) provided advice on equipment and Ali bought a ruler with serrated edges, a talking calculator and a talking dictionary and thesaurus. It was extremely important that Ali had access to specialised talking IT equipment. At the RNIB exhibition, the support tutor and Ali discovered talking scanners, voice synthesisers and screen readers. The college purchased a screen reader and speech synthesiser. During this time Ali learned to use a white stick, thereby increasing his mobility and independence, although he was still relying on the mobility bus or a member of his family to bring him to and from the college. He also began to teach himself Braille, having been refused a place in a class because his English was not considered good enough.

Ali found it useful to carry a micro audio recorder to class. He used it to record new words, sentences, spelling and new phrases. He would record things to memorise, such as regular and irregular verbs, and grammar points. In fact, he still carries a recorder today in order to make a note of important points.

Ali completed the foundation course and achieved his first externally accredited qualifications. The support tutor acted as his reader and amanuensis for the assessed assignments. This involved describing diagrams, charts and tables, as well as reading the text. Ali had decided he would like to study law at university and so progressed to the English for Academic Purposes humanities course. The accreditation was IELTS. The college upgraded the IT equipment. They obtained *JAWS*, a screen reader that gave Ali access to the computer as soon as it was switched on, and also *Kurzweil*, which enables text to be scanned into the computer using a standard scanner. The text is then opened into a file where it is spoken out loud using the computer's sound card and speakers.

Ali had never used computers and IT when sighted. However, he learnt how to use these systems with a speed that was quite incredible. He then went on to teach other learners and support tutors.

Ali obtained the certificate in Bilingual Skills in English and Turkish with five distinctions and achieved a 6.5 in the IELTS exam despite difficulties in accessing the visual materials for the written exam. He was then able to progress to an Access to Social Science course. The pass needed for entry to university was 12 credits at level three and four at level two; Ali achieved 20 credits at level three and eight at level two.

Two years ago Ali finished university with a first class degree in law. In just eight years Ali progressed from an "absolute beginner" ESOL learner to a law graduate. This was the result of his application and dedication to study and his determination to overcome all obstacles to achieving his goals.

Points to consider

- Access to the educational system. The institution provided an outreach worker to explain provision, discuss individual needs and encourage individuals to join a class. In Ali's case an interpreter was also available. This helps to encourage learners who might feel reticent about joining a class. It also shows commitment on the part of the institution and helps to allay concerns of the learner as well as family members. Further, it means that the institution is able to provide the support and facilities as soon as the learner joins the class.
- High level of determination and motivation. Practitioners can help by recognising learners' aspirations, providing encouragement and not having low expectations for the learner.
- Educational institutions often ask learners with learning difficulties or disabilities what support they feel they need. This can be difficult for ESOL learners who may have no idea about what is available and may have limited language and limited experience and knowledge of the education system in the UK as well as the wider society. It is, therefore, important that institutions are proactive and inform learners about resources available. As in the case study above, this may mean that staff in the institution need to research what is available.
- Learning support is important, both in and outside of the classroom situation. The learning support practitioner can provide a flexible and tailored approach to address the individual learner's needs. For Ali, learning support was invaluable. The learning support tutor fulfilled a number of functions, such as reviewing learning from the classroom situation, providing pastoral support, developing the learner's language skills in English and, in particular, providing an opportunity for the learner to use English in real communication, acting as an advocate for the learner in their support and learning needs and researching what resources are available.
- Assistive technology was essential. It gave Ali access to texts and the Internet and provided him with the means to write and produce his own texts. The electronic speaking dictionary and micro recorder are also invaluable tools for visually impaired learners.

Jalal – Case study of a learner with dyslexia

Background

Jalal arrived in the UK four years ago, aged 32. He joined his local college and after an initial assessment was placed in an Entry 1 (beginner) level class. He had very little English at that stage.

He attended the Entry 1 class for three years. Each year he was re-enrolled for the same level because he did not make any progress in reading and writing. His speaking and understanding of English improved, he obtained work in a takeaway restaurant and he used English in his daily life but, as time went on, Jalal became increasing frustrated with his inability to make progress in the ESOL class.

His ESOL practitioners, too, were becoming more frustrated with what they considered was his lack of commitment and motivation. Jalal's attendance was poor, he did not complete homework and he often gave reasons for having to leave the class early, particularly when the class were doing literacy work. The practitioners began to feel that he was wasting his time.

Towards the end of his third year of ESOL, Jalal joined a writing class in addition to the Entry 1 ESOL class. The class was taught by an ESOL practitioner with literacy training. Again, Jalal's attendance was not good. On seeing Jalal in the college, the practitioner questioned him about his lack of attendance and, finally, he was able to communicate how fed up and frustrated he felt about his inability to learn to read and write. He said he "hated himself".

The practitioner encouraged Jalal to attend class and began to get to know him. She believed that he might have dyslexia. Jalal was unable to have a full dyslexia assessment at that time. However, the practitioner managed to organise one-to-one sessions until the end of the academic year and also arranged for a colour assessment. The dyslexia specialist found that yellow filters helped to prevent letters jumping.

Jalal had never heard of dyslexia. He had not had a positive experience of school and left when he was aged 12. His teacher said he was stupid and could not learn. The teacher would beat him or send him on errands. Jalal was good at mathematics but he found school very difficult and by the age of 12 he had lost confidence, so he left school and went to work.

Present situation

Jalal now receives a one-hour, one-to-one session each week in addition to the ESOL class. He never misses this session and would prefer more than one hour. Having one-to-one support has made a significant difference to Jalal and after

less than three months he is able to read simple texts. He is much more positive and recognises the progress he is making:

….with one to one I am learning. We do practise of sounds to help with reading. I copy the letters and can write them. I tell teacher and she writes [language experience]. *I like this. I can read. Now I can break words – before seemed too long now can break into syllables. At home or when I walk around I try to read the words I see. I read signs. Now I am always trying to read.*

Though Jalal prefers one-to-one support, his attendance on the ESOL class has also improved dramatically and he does not find reasons to leave the class early. The reasons for his preference for one-to-one work are that:

- the work can be tailored to his needs;
- noise in class affects his ability to concentrate;
- he finds it difficult when the practitioner writes on the board;
- he feels stressed when a passage is too difficult for him or has small print.

The support practitioner is also pleased with Jalal's achievements and is impressed with his commitment to learning to read and write. Some of the strategies that have been particularly useful for Jalal are:

- language experience;
- teaching recognition of phonics and key words in context;
- developing an individual spelling plan using look, say, cover, write, check.

She says, "it is important to try different strategies and find out what works".

Points to consider
- ESOL learners may not know about dyslexia and are, therefore, unlikely to be able to identify and request support for themselves.
- It is difficult to pick up difficulties related to dyslexia at initial assessment. It is important that ESOL practitioners have an awareness of dyslexia and are familiar with possible indicators of dyslexia (see p. 47).
- ESOL learners may try to hide the fact that they are experiencing difficulties, particularly when they feel others might think them stupid. Raising awareness of these issues can prevent practitioners responding inappropriately, for example assuming a learner is lazy or lacking motivation.
- Observe closely to see what works and what doesn't. Help learners find for themselves the way in which they learn best.
- Give learners time to copy from the board, or prepare handouts with the information.
- When using handouts, pay attention to layout and how easy they are to read. Avoid putting too much on one page and use colour to highlight key points.

Kai – Case study of a learner with speech impairments

Kai is a Chinese learner from Hong Kong in her early 50s, who has a badly repaired cleft palate caused by a congenital malformation. She has been in the UK for 15 years and in my graded E2 class for two. She went to school in Hong Kong, up to secondary level. She says she was lucky to have a repair, her father knew someone at the hospital. Many people with cleft palates of her generation did not have repairs.

The issues for Kai revolve mainly around intelligibility. The badly repaired cleft means that the passage between nose and mouth is not properly closed so there is an escape of air during speech through the nose. As a consequence sounds are muffled and nasal. Palatal sounds become slushed. She also has a very dry mouth, caused by the destruction of salivary glands, and this affects her articulation.

The issue for me as a teacher is striking the balance between correction and confidence building. Kai often talks quite quickly and this can make her difficult to understand. However, over-correction is very destructive of her fragile confidence, so I have to be very careful with this, even after two years in the class.

Kai has an outgoing personality and receives a lot of support from her family, the local church, fellow learners and teachers. For example, she goes to a dance class with two friends from the ESOL class. She does not feel isolated. The class meets twice a week in a community-based centre. There is a close-knit, supportive group of eight/ten regular learners and I sometimes have Cert Ed learners on placements. Kai never misses a class. Despite being quite gregarious by nature, Kai tells me that she is always very nervous with people she does not know and that she lacks confidence to do things on her own, even simple things like going shopping for shoes. She says that she can tell that people often 'switch off' when they realise she has a speech difficulty and she finds it very frustrating.

Strategies

Over the last couple of years, Kai and I have talked a lot about what strategies have helped her self-confidence and the clarity of her extended speech.

In class

- In each class I ensure that Kai has opportunities for interaction with other learners. This is important from a confidence-building perspective and gives her an opportunity to develop communicative strategies. Her classmates are very supportive.
- I make sure that Kai gets opportunities to work on all four language skills, not just speaking. This is very important. She is actually very good at listening and loves the Internet (she has a computer at home). She finds this

quite motivating. She helps other learners who are not very IT literate and this is very good for her confidence.

- We have discussed as a group why it is important that the learners in the class say if they cannot understand each other. Kai is by no means the only person who is difficult to understand in the group, so this was discussed without Kai being singled out. Strategies that help Kai include:
  – consciously working on slowing down the speed at which she speaks, beating discreetly on her knee to keep to a slower but even pace;
  – taping herself in dialogues and role plays so that she can listen back and try to self-assess where she is successfully slowing down and producing clearer sounds and where she isn't.
- I plan differentiated activities most weeks so that either I or the classroom assistant can do some regular one-to-one pronunciation work with Kai; it is usually about 15 minutes per week. This may not sound very long, but it is because it is tiring. I vary the activities – bingo games, matching letters to sounds, sentence reconstruction using words that contain sounds that the learner needs to practise – but they involve sound discrimination as well as production.
- I get Kai to practise the articulation of sounds. We use small mirrors so that she can look at lip and mouth shape, and tape recorders. I get a lot of ideas from books like *Sounds English,* by Claire Fletcher. Kai practices particular sounds (hard consonant sounds: palatals but also fricatives) then tries sounds in words and then uses the words in sentences. We go over work done previously in class – vocabulary and structures. A good quality tape recorder and microphone are essential equipment. We bought a Coomber (a tape recorder) with lottery funds.
- I make multisensory resources because Kai really enjoys tactile and kinaesthetic activities, but they benefit everyone in the class. We found out that she enjoys practising new words while pacing up and down in her sitting room at home. The pacing helps to slow her down. I feel it is very important to encourage learners to learn through their preferred learning style, to work from their strengths.

Outside the class
- I made contact with a local speech therapist not long after Kai was first referred. It was the best thing I could have done as she has taught me a great deal and helped my confidence, as well as Kai's! After the initial contact Kai was formally referred for speech therapy assessment and now goes every two to three weeks for one-to-one speech therapy. The speech therapist introduced me to a number of the strategies that I now use regularly in class. Kai is currently waiting to be seen by a facio-maxillary specialist at the local hospital, thanks to her speech therapist. This should lead to her having a properly fitting bridge, which will make a notable difference to the clarity of the sounds she produces.
- Although the speech therapy really helps, I also feel that Kai should be getting one-to-one support through ALS [additional learning support] but at the moment this is proving very difficult to arrange.

Sarwan – Case study of a learner with learning difficulties

Sarwan is from India and speaks Punjabi. She is in her mid 50s and has lived in the UK for many years. She did not attend school in India and has been attending a part time, community based ESOL (Entry 1/Entry 2) class for several years. Sarwan has made progress in speaking and understanding but finds reading and writing much more difficult. Last year the college began providing one hour a week additional support to help Sarwan make progress in reading and writing. She has not had a formal assessment, however, the college recognises that she has support needs.

There are eight/ten regular learners in the group. The group is supportive and meets twice a week. Sarwan enjoys the class and very rarely misses it. A volunteer attends for one of the sessions.

The issue for me as a teacher is adapting learning activities to accommodate Sarwan's needs and enable her to make progress and also to provide sufficient one-to-one support for her in the class. It is very important for Sarwan that the class offers lots of opportunities to repeat and review the work as she tends to forget from one session to the next. It is also important that I control how much new language is introduced each time and that I set differentiated learning objectives so that Sarwan is able to achieve them.

Strategies

In class
- In each class I ensure that Sarwan has the opportunity to work and interact with other learners. This is important as the social aspect of the class is valued by Sarwan and working with others helps to maintain interest and motivation as well as building confidence.
- We begin by working on speaking. This helps all the learners and especially Sarwan as when we come to reading she is more likely to remember the vocabulary that we have used for speaking and listening.
- Visual aids are extremely helpful for Sarwan, especially when reinforcing new vocabulary and introducing the context of the sessions. I use photographs as much as possible. I take pictures of people, objects, places that learners know and this helps to make the context meaningful to all learners, in particular to Sarwan. I have also started to encourage learners to take photographs themselves using our digital camera.
- I try to use contexts which interest Sarwan (and the others in the group) as they are more likely to want to read the text because of this. For example a learner mentioned watching a documentary about a famous person. The group were interested in this so I used the topic as a way of talking and reading about lifestyles.
- I plan differentiated activities so that I can spend some individual time with Sarwan. I also make use of the volunteer to work with Sarwan. I plan activities to develop literacy skills but also to reinforce what Sarwan

already knows. I vary the activities – matching pictures to words, bingo games, finding words in a short text, using the Speaking Language Master (talking dictionary/thesaurus) to practice words, following a short text on tape, forming letters, copying words and short sentences.

- I use language experience as the main way of producing reading texts for Sarwan to work with. I generally use very short texts. It is important to be realistic about the objectives set for Sarwan. It may be that she is able to recognise or remember one or two words. I often use the same text for lots of activities and try to ensure I recycle the same vocabulary and language.

Outside the class

Sarwan has one-to-one support once a week. I liaise with the support teacher and give her copies of the texts, etc. that I use in the ESOL class. The teacher who supports Sarwan has used the following activities:

- A multisensory software package for reading and spelling. This involves Sarwan seeing and reading words on screen, hearing the words via headphones and then repeating and recording the word. She then hears her own recording and writes/copies the words.
- A tactile activity for building CVC (consonant – vowel – consonant) words. Sarwan has to build words with different coloured tiles, i.e. the initial phoneme is on green, medial phoneme on yellow and final phoneme on red.
- Matching a sound/phoneme to a picture.
- Using the words Sarwan can recognise in sentences.
- Games – five in a row. Sarwan gets a green counter if she correctly identifies the word.

Shaheed – Case study of a learner with traits associated with Asperger syndrome

This study describes the work covered by Shaheed, a bilingual learner. Shaheed was born in Pakistan but attended secondary school in England. He is in his early 20s. He speaks Urdu at home. Shaheed is a Level 1 learner and his spoken English is Level 1 or higher; writing he finds more difficult. Shaheed attends a Return to Learning course for ten hours per week. He is passionately interested in clothes, music and books.

Language topic and activities

Shaheed had been working on an abridged version of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. He read the story without difficulty, but in his responses to certain pictures he was concerned with the superficial details such as manners and conventions rather than the deeper emotions shown by the characters.

The practitioner decided to use the film version of the book. She thought that if they watched the film together, Shaheed might begin to understand how we can interpret emotions through people's body language as well as their words.

Prior to watching the video for the first time Shaheed worked out what the opening camera shots for the film might be. This required very close reading of the first few pages, which helped the learner become more focused and also more attentive once the video started. He then compared the opening sequence to the one he had visualised and discussed the differences. Consequently, he was more critically aware and less likely to let it all 'wash over him' once they started to watch the whole film. While watching he began to notice eye contact and fidgeting.

They then discussed the film with other members of the group and the subject of body language was taken up by a small group of four, who acted out situations and over-emphasised the use of eye contact. This arose as a natural extension of the conversation, but proved to be an effective strategy for Shaheed.

Points to consider

- Use role play and drama for examining social conventions and codes of behaviour.
- Use video in class to explore body language and make the bridge to feelings and attitudes.
- Use books that have been made into films or television programmes, so that texts, language, emotions can be explored through drama. This would also be useful for exploring genre this way and for comparing film and book genres.

Organisation case studies

Support provision within a large college of further education

This case study analyses how a large college of further education, located in a densely populated, multi-ethnic, inner city area, is attempting to meet the challenges of inclusive learning. A member of staff who has an ESOL management responsibility has drafted it.

The college has over 18,000 learners, 65 per cent of whom come from homes where English is not spoken as a first language. During its 2004 Ofsted inspection, one of the college's strengths was identified as "outstanding

---

[2]SKILL is the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities. In 2003 SKILL, in collaboration with the Disability Rights Commission, NIACE and LSDA, ran a series of regional training events funded by the LSC, to raise awareness of the implications for providers of the DDA Part 4. They produced an excellent delegates pack.

provision for students with learning difficulties and disabilities" (college inspection report). The college's disability statement demonstrates that the organisation supports a social model of disability, shifting the focus from what is 'wrong' with the learner with disabilities, to what is wrong with attitudes, systems and practices that prevent learners with disabilities from being fully included into the institution. In discussing the DDA Part 4 and its impact on the policies and practices of the organisation, one college manager states:

Placing legal requirements on institutions and teachers makes inclusiveness less of an abstract idea or concept and makes it more of a practical reality. It forces institutions to put into place policies and practices that assist learners to reach their educational goals. It makes teachers reflect on their lessons and teaching to take into account the individual needs of every learner in the group.

College policies, procedures, provision and premises are in the process of being audited in line with recommendations put forward by a range of agencies, including SKILL[2] and the Disability Rights Commission. This includes auditing the college's admissions and enrolment policies, the disability statement, the equal opportunities policy and disciplinary and exclusions policy. It also includes setting up and monitoring new systems to ensure availability and effectiveness of support and carrying out an access survey.

The following is a reflective analysis of the current procedures and practices within the college.

Admissions, enrolment and disclosure

The college online and paper application has a section where learners can disclose a range of individual needs such as physical impairments, mental health difficulties or other learning difficulties such as dyslexia. Depending on the disclosure a certain procedure is followed. Inevitably many learners fail to disclose at an initial interview or assessment stage, often fearing that they may be discriminated against. This can create difficulties. A tutor at the college states:

In my own experience as a personal tutor I have discovered that many ESOL learners will only divulge their personal circumstances much later in the course and only then can they begin to take advantage of the support systems that are in place. This can be a problem because late disclosure can sometimes hamper the support that can be given. Many of the ALS (additional learning support) hours and tutors may have been allocated. It can often be difficult to timetable the support and find ALS tutors at this stage. Also, for some (learners) there may be a number of cross-cultural issues and linguistic barriers which hamper the idea of disclosure.

Therefore, it is important that an institution establishes a feeling of support and confidentiality early on (either at induction or as the courses continues) so that a learner can discuss their needs with a practitioner. Significantly the wording of the application form in terms of 'disability' or 'learning difficulty' may be the issue here, with many learners failing to identify with these terms. In order to find a way around some of this terminology, the college has included another box on the application form called 'other special needs' so that learners feel they can register requirements early on.

Additionally, at the initial assessment interview all ESOL tutors try to encourage disclosure. Interviews are private, and practitioners try to create an atmosphere of trust and confidentiality. Once disclosed, a learner's needs can be addressed either through a simple noting down of special needs in the comments box in a group profile so the teaching team can take into account individual requirements, or a referral to a specialist within the college can be made.

Providing support
Dyslexia support
The college has a well-defined dyslexia support service with a respected specialist coordinating the team. Learners with dyslexia can be referred at various stages throughout the year. Depending on needs, following a diagnostic interview and test, learners can be offered various levels of support. In the recent Ofsted inspection this service provided by the college was praised for its effective provision.

Support for learning difficulties and mental health difficulties
The college has a clear and effective system of ALS for learners progressing from a discrete LDD [learning difficulty or disability] to a mainstream course where learners are supported depending on identified needs.

For learners on mainstream courses with disclosed mental health difficulties, on an application form there is a designated manager and lecturer who will meet with the learner at a pre-arranged interview stage of assessment, or soon after. Following the interview a report is written and presented to the receiving tutor and the support arrangements are discussed with the learner, tutor and ALS manager/coordinator at the centre. This system works well if a learner discloses their disabling conditions near the beginning of the course.

However, the drawback to this system is that early on in the academic year the managers/coordinators for ALS can be overwhelmed with applications and it can take a long time to actually get to see an ALS coordinator and then get a report.

Support for language, literacy and numeracy
Following a college initial assessment some learners placed on mainstream courses may require support with language, literacy and numeracy. In such

cases, they are usually referred to small, specialist workshop sessions to support them outside the vocational course hours. In some circumstances, one-to-one sessions are also provided.

I have seen how one particular student facing a mental health [difficulty] *due to his experiences of civil war in his home country has successfully received additional learning support. He was on medication to help him sleep. He was assessed and then assigned one hour of support from an ALS tutor to help him review and make progress on his course by assisting him with his assignments and homework at times when he felt less tired. In theory these workshops were designed to support learning, but reports back from the ALS tutor suggest that it was as much about giving the learner moral support as he was more than capable of completing the assignments without assistance. More significantly, following this student's interview and disclosure with the ALS tutor, information was passed on to the course tutor and teaching team, who could then plan and take into consideration this student's sometimes unusual behaviour in the classroom at times, such as tiredness and irritability.*

The ALS system is coordinated by the Head of School for Basic Skills, working together with an ALS (literacy, language and numeracy) support manager at each college centre. This system often works well, with all mainstream vocational courses offering support workshops to learners. Each learner negotiates an individual action plan and identifies support requirements for the timetabled sessions. However, attendance at the ALS sessions can be erratic as they are frequently timetabled to fit in with rooming or staffing availability and do not always match individual needs.

One drawback to this ALS system is that there is limited potential for one-to-one support outside of the timetabled hours for a course or group of learners identified with language, literacy or numeracy needs. There is no provision for learners wishing to see a tutor for a one-off or special occasion, to gain support for assignment completion, for instance.

A positive aspect of provision is that in each study centre, there are a number of self-access worksheets and other materials, such as CALL [computer-assisted language learning] programmes, that a learner can use to support their learning. However, once again there is a limited amount of support in providing learners with opportunities to develop learner independence. As one of the ESOL practitioners states:

In my experience learners need to be guided towards developing independent study skills – just providing materials does not mean a learner will use them – unless she knows how to. Therefore, in my opinion, for this system to be more successful, there is a need for personal tutors to incorporate skills that promote learner autonomy into their schemes of work. This is not done consistently within the college.

Exam concessions

Once a learner has been identified with particular needs the college has a set of mechanisms in place to support learners in examinations by offering a variety of concessions. Provided the relevant documentation is in place the ability to offer examination concessions is straightforward and can be effective.

In the case of most bilingual learners this concession is often gained in the form of extra time or enlarged papers. These measures have satisfied learners in the past and have worked well ensuring their true abilities are better reflected in formal assessments and exams.

SENDA champion

In addition to the well-defined policies and procedures for the college as a whole, each faculty in the college has an appointed SENDA champion whose job it is to provide advice and support to tutors or course managers to meet the needs of the individuals identified with ALS and receiving support. This works well as an initial point of contact for tutors and course managers who are unsure about the level of support that may be required by a learner.

The SENDA champions hold regular meetings with Heads of School for Basic Skills and Learner Support to discuss general issues while individual cases can be taken up with the relevant course manager. The champions are an effective mechanism for keeping tutors informed of SENDA developments. For instance, the termly faculty meeting has a standing agenda item to discuss SENDA issues and also levels of support being received. SENDA champions also instigate professional development sessions and short courses for staff across the college. They are responsible to a vice-principal who has a responsibility for inclusive learning.

From policy into practice

This year two of the ESOL students studying on the [young adult] *courses I teach have benefited from ALS support. One student with partial sight has benefited from a loan of IT equipment and the computer screen changes automatically when he logs on to an enlarged format. He also uses a special keyboard in IT sessions. He also has a regular termly meeting with an ALS tutor to discuss any other practical means of support that may be given. Another learner who has a speech impediment has benefited from an hour's extra one-to-one support with an ALS tutor to work on pronunciation. The SENDA champion has sent me regular updates from the ALS tutor and Learner Support on the impact of the support and has regular contact with the course tutors to discuss progress in class.*

Most significantly, in line with the Tomlinson recommendations (FEFC, 1996), these learners are not hidden away in a special class, but included in the main teenage ESOL groups. They are provided with an opportunity to learn alongside their peers and experience from mainstream education. It is a signal of how far

education within the college is moving towards an inclusive model that neither of the course teams have experienced any real difficulties adapting activities and resources to ensure the two learners are integrated and included.

Following disclosure to the tutor, the rest of the teaching team were informed (with consent from the learners) of the learners' special requirements through the group profile compiled by the tutor, which identified the adjustments required. Practitioners then made modifications and adaptations to materials and activities to fit the needs of these learners. These modifications were made in consultation with the learners. For instance, for the visually impaired learner simple modifications such as placing him closer to the whiteboard, using slightly enlarged handouts, a reading lamp, and OHTs, has made the learning accessible to him.

Practitioners use the guidelines in *Access for All* (Department for Education and Skills, 2002) as a first stage in planning lessons and taking into account individual needs. Furthermore, the SENDA champion is always on hand to give advice while the ALS tutor sends regular updates to tutors and if possible has meetings to discuss the learner.

Ethos and attitudes

The need for inclusiveness does not just apply to practitioners, but also to other workers in the institution and as a result inclusiveness is not just a set of policies, but an ethos that runs through an organisation.

Although the college is rising to the challenge of SENDA by raising awareness of inclusiveness in the classroom and seeing a culture shift with many teachers responding to individual needs through differentiation, other aspects of the college may not be as advanced. The physical environment may have changed to incorporate the needs of learners, but there is also need for all staff, all teachers and all non-classroom-based staff to shift their practices and beliefs to incorporate individual needs. While SENDA may have started to have been embraced by teaching staff, it is less clear within the college whether administrative, admissions and security staff are fully conversant with the implications of the Act. This remains a significant area for staff development.

Conclusion

Policy, theory, intention and practice can be very different things. The original radical intention of Tomlinson to reshape the world of education away from a deficit model to a socially inclusive one has led to a situation where a learner with special needs still has to be frequently labelled or diagnosed before being included. However, largely due to the issues raised by SENDA, there is a sense of willingness and cooperation. Adaptations to planning and materials to serve the needs of the learner are taking place as part of regular classroom practice. There is the possibility that theory, policy and practice has begun to combine into a successful amalgam.

Support provision within a small community-based training provider

This case study considers how a small community-based organisation, located in an area of high social deprivation, is attempting to meet the challenges of inclusive learning.

The organisation opened in 1991. Its purpose, as described in the mission statement, is "to create supportive pathways towards social inclusion for inner city families. We provide education, training and personal and social development for women and girls". The organisation has an intergenerational approach. It provides services for three age groups: the early years, youth and adults. The centre has mixed groups, in terms of gender, from ages 0 to 5 years, but beyond age 5 it supports women and girls only. The organisation is a project of a non-profit-making charity; raising funds is a constant challenge and, at present, its main sources of funding are the local further education college, the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Adult Learning Fund (ALF).

The organisation is based on the main high street in a two-storey building. Its facilities include seven classrooms, a computer suite, a conference room, gym, canteen and crèche. There is a lift and the organisation recently had the front entrance redesigned in order to improve access to the building. There are 34 staff employed by the centre; the ESOL department is the largest department within the organisation, with four tutors and one coordinator.

In respect of the training and education provided for adults, courses are offered in IT, ESOL (up to Entry 3), numeracy and literacy. During the academic year 2004/5 the organisation worked with 225 learners; the vast majority of these attended ESOL courses. Of the 225 learners, four declared a disability; three had a physical disability and one a learning difficulty. The majority of ESOL learners are refugees and asylum seekers. Individuals are also referred to the centre by women's refuges, the Refugee Council and a local rehabilitation centre for individuals with mental health difficulties.

Ethos and attitudes

The organisation prides itself on providing an atmosphere of care and respect. The publicity emphasises the underlying values of the centre: care and respect for individuals, the dignity of the whole person and the value of daily work. As the director says, "The ethos ... gets expressed in how we deal with the beneficiaries, how we market, how we recruit, how we take care of them…". Both the users of the centre and staff identify the welcoming and friendly atmosphere as a strength. Many of the centre's learners would find the prospect of attending a large, mainstream educational establishment daunting and the fact that institutions such as the women's refuge and the rehabilitation centre refer vulnerable women to the organisation is a sign that they feel the individuals are likely to get the support they need.

The size of the organisation helps to create this friendly environment as individuals can get to know staff members and other users fairly quickly. The receptionist of the centre explains this:

It's a relaxed place. They don't put you under any pressure … when people come I can put them at ease … you greet them and you smile … I always treat people how I'd want to be treated or how I want to treat my sons … this is what I do to make them feel welcome and then they'll come back.

Some women have problems … in my drawer I keep things about finding a nursery, EMA grant … sometimes people come and ask me, sometimes the teacher says go and ask Carol … if I don't know I'll do my best to find out.

This environment and the values that underline it are key features that the organisation takes steps to maintain. It does this in a number of ways. First, when recruiting staff, the organisation makes clear the ethos of the centre to employment agencies and at pre-interview induction events. During interview the principles of the centre are discussed and those employed need to understand and share them:

There are two sides of the ambience. The people are very important … the verbal and the non-verbal … especially the non-verbal and you cannot impose that. It comes from the person's heart and it comes from compassion for people.

Second, by providing a clean and attractive environment:

And the other one is the physical environment, the cleanliness, the respect. You know, the moment they come in, they can see the warmth of the place and they can sense it. The physical environment respects their dignity, the tidiness, the flowers… .

Another reason we changed the façade is to make students more proud. We have chosen bright colours, very cheerful because that is what we want to pass on to people, that cheerfulness.

Third, the values of the organisation are emphasised to all users of the centre through the initial interview and induction events:

We emphasise not just the academic part, the respect for each other, the cleanliness, the values of the centre… .

Admissions, enrolment and disclosure
The centre tries to ensure that the initial contact a potential learner has with the centre is a positive experience. All potential learners are given a one-to-one interview that is conducted by an experienced member of staff, for example

those applying for ESOL courses are interviewed by the ESOL coordinator. An application form is completed at the interview by the interviewer through discussion with the learner. For those applying for ESOL courses, the assessment of the learner's level of English also takes place. The interviews are private and the interviewer tries to create an atmosphere of trust and confidentiality to encourage individuals to discuss the needs they have.

The form (and interview) covers personal details, why the learner wishes to attend a course and what they hope to gain, childcare provision, education and employment experience and whether they have any health problems, disabilities or learning difficulties. The questions regarding disability and health are within the 'monitoring' section of the form. The form does not mention mental health difficulties. This may explain why records regarding numbers of learners with disabilities or learning difficulties does not identify any with mental health difficulties, despite the fact that teachers have learners in their classes with a range of mental health difficulties. Mentioning mental health is important, given the stigma that persists in society and the fact that individuals with mental health difficulties face considerable discrimination.

Inevitably many learners fail to disclose needs that they may have, at the initial interview stage. This might be because they fear discrimination, do not understand the questions or may have a different cultural understanding of the concepts of 'disability' and 'learning difficulty':

> *In my experience ESOL learners often don't really understand what is meant by learning difficulty or disability. With mental health difficulties it's usually only put on the form if it is diagnosed. Sometimes people tell you they feel depressed or that they are taking medication which might make them drowsy. We ask if we can put it on the form.*

Providing support

Once disclosed, the organisation and teachers consider adaptations that need to be put in place:

> *We had a learner who experienced severe depression. She came with her daughter who was able to explain how the condition might affect her. The main thing was that she could not stay in class for the whole time and she didn't feel able to work with others. Also she was absent a lot and sometimes had to go into hospital. We talked about how long she could stay and arranged it so that she could work individually when there was group work though sometimes she could take part in group work. If the teacher was worried or the learner was absent for a while we would ring the daughter and find out how she was.*

Teachers report that many of the learners in ESOL provision experience mental health difficulties. The most common difficulty is depression and anxiety.

Teachers try to address the needs of their learners in the classroom and through individual tutorials. Often teachers or the ESOL coordinator will have established contact with the individual's social worker, particularly when concerned for the learner. The ESOL coordinator provides support for teachers through weekly meetings. At these meetings tutors can raise concerns that they have and discuss the progress of individual learners.

We support them in a sense. … The way we find quite helpful is to make them feel at ease, to make them feel welcome. You don't hear anyone shouting or being aggressive … . When they come here they should feel at peace so they don't feel anyone looking over their shoulder or giving them pressure.

Many of the learners attending ESOL provision have had little or no experience of formal education and many are not literate in their first language. The organisation has set up literacy support sessions for these learners. However, the centre does not have an additional learning support service and does not have the resources to provide support workers in classes or to arrange additional one-to-one support outside of class time. The ESOL teachers do not have dyslexia training, though all have attended *Access for All* training. Learners with dyslexia and those with learning difficulties are supported by teachers in class, sometimes with the help of volunteers.

We have a learner … . Her mother wanted to join an ESOL class but didn't want to leave her daughter … she has Down syndrome and so they both joined the class. At first, the aim was to let the mother join but the daughter also learnt ESOL and so they both became learners. They have now progressed to the next level.

We don't have any extra support. The teacher plans activities that the learner enjoys – she likes tactile activities with lots of visual support.

With regard to specialist resources, the organisation is fairly limited. It has computer equipment including large letter keyboards but does not have assistive technology, such as voice recognition software, roller ball mouse, etc. The centre managers feel that they would endeavour to obtain resources if needed by an individual learner but if they were unable to do so then they would have to consider referral to another organisation. This has not happened so far.

We have used resources with large print for some learners. … If we had a blind learner and needed IT equipment we would try to get it but we don't have money available.

The centre has made efforts to establish links with organisations in the local area that can support their learners. For example, a careers adviser from the local careers office attends once a term. Learners also have access to a welfare

adviser, again from the local authority. The welfare adviser arranges one-to-one meetings with learners if requested. Further, a local optician attends each term to provide free eye tests and glasses if needed.

The franchise arrangement with the local further education college means that learners from the community centre can access the library and study centres at the college. However, few learners make use of these facilities. This may be due to a lack of confidence. Visits to the college are arranged each year to support the transition to a larger establishment as learners wishing to progress on to higher level courses will need to attend the college. The college also has a dyslexia support service and learners from the community centre can be referred for assessment. However, this has not yet taken place due to the long waiting periods.

From policy into practice

One of the senior managers has responsibility for ensuring that the organisation keeps up to date with developments in relation to disability and inclusion. They attend training events and advise and support the management team accordingly. The DDA helped the organisation obtain funds to improve access for learners with physical disabilities. The result was a wider and easier entrance with a whole new façade.

A case study of good practice at the Mary Ward Centre, London: a small adult education centre. Anticipating and responding to the needs of bilingual learners with disabilities or learning difficulties

The Mary Ward Centre occupies two adjacent, interconnecting houses in Holborn, in the heart of London. It offers a range of part-time courses for adults. The centre has four departments: Computing, English and Other Languages, Humanities and Visual and Performing Arts. It also has a widening participation programme.

When the Centre was inspected by the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) in 2003, leadership and management were given a grade 1 (outstanding). Equality of opportunity and quality assurance were given a grade 2 (good). The English and Other Languages department also received a grade 2. ESOL provision is part of the English and Other Languages department at the Centre and has expanded significantly in the last seven years. Two years after the inspection the centre was awarded Beacon Status by the Department for Education and Skills.

This study was conducted over a number of months by one of the Mary Ward Centre's part-time teachers and involved extensive interviews with key members of staff.

Ethos and attitudes

There is a personalised service to learners, good communication between members of staff and a sense of collegiality. For instance, during busy times of the year, such as at enrolment and the beginning of terms, the senior management team, including the principal, have a rota for standing in the reception area, to welcome individual learners, help direct them to their classrooms and answer their questions. Senior managers make themselves available to both learners and staff at short notice. Staff commented as follows:

I think our ethos is our great strength … the friendly, warm, open, can-do attitude – to all students – means that people feel comfortable enough to disclose their disability/ask for help. If people don't say at the beginning, things usually emerge as a result of the quality of the relationship with the tutors … Evidence for this is anecdotal but nevertheless feels significant …. Things happen a lot informally as well as formally. Part of the ethos is to empower people. Although on paper the structure is hierarchical, in practice it is a fairly flat one, e.g. the principal's office isn't along a long corridor that nobody goes down. You don't have to make an appointment to see him. [This ethos enables us] *to respond effectively. And we listen.*

Students with mental health difficulties do find it a friendly place to learn…. [people] give warmth … you feel welcome … you are not put off … some colleges are awful. There are no security guards [here].

Management structure

There is direct communication between all parts of the staffing/management structure, for example a tutor might discuss a matter directly with the principal, vice-principal or student services manager, as well as discussing it with her/his head of department. This might happen on the stairs, in the queue for the café or as an arranged appointment. For instance, an ESOL tutor needed immediate advice on behalf of a learner with mental health difficulties. Her line manager was not in the centre that day. She asked the principal if she could talk with him and he was able to set aside time that afternoon.

The physical environment

The building contributes significantly to the non-institutional feel of the Centre. It is a small, welcoming place to learners generally, and individuals who have been traumatised or have mental health difficulties especially appreciate the informality and warmth of its atmosphere.

While the building is very attractive aesthetically, most of it is not accessible. The centre goes to considerable lengths to try to make sure learners with physical impairments have equal opportunities. However, access is severely restricted to those with mobility difficulties as there is no lift. It is an issue that has been raised repeatedly in self-assessment and inspection reports.

Access to facilities for learners with restricted mobility is poor. The centre's listed building status limits the changes that can be made to improve access. There is access for people with restricted mobility to the ground floor rooms of the building. Wherever necessary, staff at the centre work hard to reschedule lessons to the ground floor, provide equipment for learners with physical disabilities and give personal support. There is no access to computing facilities for wheelchair users. The centre succeeded in its campaign for kerbside car parking spaces for disabled people, but these parking spaces are not exclusively for the use of the centre's learners and there are insufficient spaces to meet their demands. (2002 inspection report)

Fulfilling the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act

Issues connected with inclusive learning have always been very important at the Centre and it has always sought to make any 'reasonable adjustment' to try to meet the different needs of all its learners, including those with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. The importance given to this issue is illustrated by the fact that both the principal and the vice-principal (curriculum and quality) sit on the Equality Assurance Committee.

In other ways, the DDA has provided a welcome opportunity and stimulus to keep issues of disability and learning difficulties high on the agenda at the centre. The implications of the DDA for the Centre remain a high priority for the principal.

- A very detailed access audit report was commissioned in 2002 (Radar Promotions Ltd.). Many of the recommendations have been carried out.
- In 2003, the Centre commissioned Kirsten Hearn (Whole World Design) to carry out 'The Disabled Student Consultation and Disability Policy Review'. Her report was very useful.
- The implications of the DDA for the Centre remain a high priority for the principal. He has personally run all six DDA training sessions for staff at the centre.

General policy and procedures

- *Welcoming leaflet*: this is sent to all new learners. It is written in a friendly, informal style and although it does not mention disability or learning difficulties directly, it encourages learners to talk to their tutors about any adjustments or support they may need.
- *Information leaflet for ESOL students:* this is available in 20 community languages.
- *Absence enquiry procedure/student feedback sheet:* the Centre contacts learners who have missed more than three sessions and have not contacted their tutors. This is part of the quality assurance processes at the Centre and has on occasion enabled the Centre to respond better to the needs of a learner with a learning difficulty or disability. The student feedback sheet has sometimes served the same function.

- *The disability statement,* which includes statements of ethos such as, "The centre aims to create an environment in which all learners and staff feel comfortable and free from oppressive attitudes and surroundings". It is a clear and positive statement that has a personal, enabling approach despite being an official document.

There is a very good list of ways in which the Centre has been able to meet the needs of different learners.

There is a useful appendix, listing each room in the building, whether the room has a specific function or is multi-purpose and whether the room is accessible to individuals with physical and sensory impairments or not.

- *Booklet for tutors*: the Centre has produced a very useful booklet for tutors, *Students with Disabilities: Useful Information for Tutors.*
- *Library of materials:* the member of staff responsible for learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties has a library about different impairments and learning difficulties. If a learner has asked for her/his tutor to be informed, she will offer the tutor relevant information from the library.
- *Enrolment*: the centre has amended the disability/learning difficulty section of the enrolment form to make it easier for bilingual learners with a level of English below Level 2, to read and understand it.
- *Letter to students who declare a disability and/or learning difficulty:* this letter gives an indication of ways the Centre may be able to help/adjustments which could be made, and encourages learners to get in contact if they think the centre could be of assistance. While it is a standard letter, it is written in an open, approachable style. Additional comments, relevant to an individual learner, are sometimes added.

The last inspection report stated, "Wherever necessary, staff at the centre work hard to reschedule lessons to the ground floor, provide equipment for learners with physical disabilities and give personal support".

How bilingual learners declare disabilities and/or learning difficulties and access support

Since September 2004, prospective ESOL learners have been asked, at their initial interview, whether they have any relevant health or mobility issues.

There is a very clear and useful interview pack for tutors interviewing potential ESOL and literacy learners. There are several questions on the ESOL checklist that do or could relate to disability or learning difficulties.

The ESOL department gives priority to certain prospective learners, for example learners who are homeless, learners who have disabilities and/or learning difficulties, learners who are seeking asylum or are refugees, learners who have had disrupted or no previous education, and learners who are unemployed.

The department offers help to tutors working with the Entry levels 1 and 2 curriculum, in class, when learners are filling in enrolment forms and offers to provide interpreters for learners in such classes during their induction sessions.

Assistive technology

The Centre has a range of assistive technology available for use by learners or tutors with disabilities and/or learning difficulties:

- large-letter keyboard (for learners with visual difficulties);
- rollerball mouse (for learners with limited mobility, repetitive strain injury);
- reading pen (this can scan a word and give a definition of the word);
- Megastick (this is used instead of a cassette recorder. It is digital. It can record a class as a computer file which can then be downloaded for learners with visual difficulties);
- interactive whiteboards (the centre has these in several classrooms now; more are planned. Many learners find them useful, including those with sight difficulties and those with dyslexia. The whiteboard can act as a large screen for the showing of videos);
- software:
  – *MIND Genius* – mindmap software for learners with dyslexia;
  – *Dragon Naturally Speaking* – voice recognition software for learners with dyslexia;
  – *Texthelp Read & Write* – a toolbar learners can use over the top of *Microsoft Word*. It can read words back to learners as they type. It is particularly useful for learners with dyslexia.

The Centre always welcomes suggestions for further assistive technology that would be useful. The lecturer in computing is responsible for the ILT training needs of other tutors in the centre. She runs group training and tutors are also able to book one-to-one sessions with her. She is able to give advice to tutors, tailored to the specific needs of a particular learner or tutor with a learning difficulty or disability. This flexible attention to an individual's needs (the needs of an individual learner and/or an individual tutor) is very good practice.

Concessionary fees

The Centre has a policy of maintaining low concessionary fees for its fee-paying courses.

Heads of department are able to exercise discretion about fees if a learner does not come into one of the concessionary fee categories but is unable to afford a course. In the Disability Statement, it says "The centre has a policy that no person will be turned away on the grounds that they cannot afford the tuition fees".

The Hardship Fund

The Centre is successfully encouraging some of the learners who most need grants from the Hardship Fund to apply. Over 30 per cent of grants made in 2003/04 were to bilingual learners. Of these learners, about one in five has a learning difficulty or disability.

Liaison between staff members is good. For instance, a learner's application for support that was not within the remit of ALS was passed to the Hardship Fund staff who were able to make a grant. To purchase some software, the member of staff responsible for learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties liaised with the staff responsible for the Hardship Fund who then liaised with the computer network manager.

Additional learning support

The provision of ALS is seen as one of the strengths of the centre. One member of staff commented:

> *ALS* [here] *is very impressive. It is genuinely able to support people.*

Two out of three of all learners who received ALS (in terms 1 and 2, 2004/05) have a learning difficulty or disability. Ten out of 36 learners who received ALS are bilingual. Six of these have a learning difficulty or disability. The ALS is likely to be related to a learner's learning difficulty or disability. ALS at the Centre is making a very significant contribution to meeting the needs of learners with learning difficulties or disabilities.

The ALS coordinator has a detailed knowledge of all the learners receiving ALS and knows how many learners are bilingual and how many have a learning difficulty or disability. This attention to and knowledge of individual learners enables the coordinator to match learner and learning support tutor appropriately, and contributes significantly to the quality of support offered.

The Centre has learning support practitioners who are trained in assessing specific learning difficulties. Occasionally, the Centre refers the learner to an external educational psychologist for an assessment of a learning difficulty. This is paid for by ALS.

Some learners with specific learning difficulties are referred to a private company for a diagnostic assessment to see if they would benefit from a prescription of a particular overlay colour. This is paid for by ALS.

A new study support workshop has been developed. Most learners will be referred to the workshop by their subject tutor, but learners will also be able to self-refer. It is thought that it might be less daunting for some learners to go to a study workshop than to ask for one-to-one support.

Provision of ESOL classes for learners with additional literacy needs

In the daytime the Centre provides main ESOL courses at Entry 1 and 2 specifically for learners with additional literacy needs. This is good practice. These classes have also been able to meet the needs of some learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. Sometimes the fact that a learner has extra literacy needs may be related to their disability. Some learners with a disability, who do not have extra literacy needs, may choose one of these classes because they prefer the slower pace of the class and the smaller class size.

Tutorials for ESOL learners

Each learner has a tutorial each term. Practitioners (who are all sessional and part time) are paid an extra eight hours per course per term, at the teaching rate, to have the tutorials and complete the paperwork. Practitioners are given flexibility about how they organise these tutorials; in or outside class time.

The introduction of regular tutorials has been significant in improving the quality of the practitioner–learner relationship and therefore the learner's learning experience. The opportunity to speak in confidence has enabled learners to discuss concerns they have about their learning. These may include issues related to disabilities and/or learning difficulties.

Use of interpreters

The availability of interpreters contributes significantly to the quality of provision for bilingual learners with learning difficulties or disabilities. The Centre runs accredited community interpreting and translation courses and a further specialist qualification is available, 'Interpreting in the Education System'.

The Centre has access to an extensive pool of interpreters and translators it can call on. Trained interpreters are paid.

Interpreters may be used at the initial interview session, for induction sessions, during tutorials and at any other time when a practitioner or learner feels it would be useful. Having an interpreter at a tutorial enables lower-level practitioners to discuss issues relating to learning difficulties and disabilities – something that would be impossible without an interpreter.

It was wonderful to be able to talk to each other in detail after so long! Having an interpreter was very helpful at many levels; getting to know the student, being able to respond to their worries/questions, being able to discuss their progress, being able to talk about disability and learning difficulties. The only problem was in trying to keep the tutorial to a reasonable length of time – there was so much to say!

If a lower-level learner is referred for a specialist assessment, through ALS, the Centre arranges an interpreter to accompany her or him.

Training can be arranged for tutors on how to work with interpreters.

When recruiting staff to fill vacancies for the educational advice assistants in reception, the Centre has been aware of the benefits of reception workers being able to speak community languages. Current workers at reception can speak Bengali, Cantonese, French, Italian and Spanish. Reception workers are also aware of the languages other full-time members of staff speak. These include Mandarin, Portuguese and Serbo-Croat. Good communication and cooperation between staff, and flexibility about roles, enables brief, impromptu interpreting sessions. These contribute towards a good quality service to learners, and a feeling that they are being treated as individuals.

Support for tutors

I have asked for support when trying to respond to students with complex needs. My line manager has spent considerable time with me talking through the needs of individual students, liaising with key workers, seeking advice and talking with officials where necessary.

Practitioners are paid for any extra meetings they need to attend, such as a meeting with a learner's key worker.

Community outreach

- The centre has a full-time community outreach worker who develops and sustains the work of the Centre in the local community. Most learners at off-site classes are bilingual.

- Advantages of off-site classes for some learners with learning difficulties or disabilities (and those without) include, for example, being familiar with the venue and knowing some people there already.

- Courses are bite-sized and therefore more achievable – this may be particularly important for learners with learning difficulties.

- Most of the off-site venues are wheelchair accessible. Indeed, sometimes a learner with learning difficulty or disability has only been able to reach an off-site class because it is so near his/her home and accessible.

- ALS is available off-site, as at the Centre.

Staff training

The list of training events staff have attended related to learning difficulties and disabilities and the needs of bilingual learners, shows that there is a wide range

of training, and that that training is flexible enough to respond to the needs of individual learners and practitioners.

- Training events have ranged from training on Asperger syndrome to disability awareness for crèche workers.
- Management is very responsive to requests by staff for training on learning difficulties or disabilities. It is also proactive in suggesting training sessions to staff. For example, one ESOL practitioner was paid to attend a one-day training course on schizophrenia. Cover was arranged for the affected classes.
- Another form of training at the Centre is the series of think tanks. These bring teaching staff from different departments together. A tutor or head of department leads each think tank, acting in their capacity as a tutor. Topics have included 'Stress management in the classroom' and 'Boosting student confidence in the classroom'. Tutors receive payment at the training rate for attending these think tanks.

Issues

One theme in this study is that the true number of learners with a disability or learning difficulty at the Centre is 'hidden' in statistical terms. The study confirmed that the number of learners with disabilities or learning difficulties is higher than the number of learners who declare a learning difficulty or disability on their enrolment form. This may be, for example, because learners do not feel comfortable declaring a learning difficulty or disability, they may have missed the question because of the old design of the form, or they may not understand the question. The study found that the number of learners with a learning difficulty or disability is further under-represented in the Centre's figures because the computer program automatically enters 'No' if a learner does not give an answer to the question, 'Do you have a learning difficulty/disability?' on the enrolment form. The current programme does not offer a 'Not known' option.

The true number of learners with a learning difficulty or disability is 'hidden' – for both native speaker and bilingual learners – and maybe more so for bilingual learners.

It seems likely that a higher proportion of bilingual learners have a disability, and possibly a higher proportion of bilingual learners have a learning difficulty, than the learner body as a whole. In 2003/04, 5.5 per cent of all learners at the centre declared a disability on their enrolment form and 1.3 per cent of learners declared a learning difficulty. However, out of 143 learners in a sample of ten ESOL classes (in term 1, 2004/05) 9.6 per cent of learners declared a disability on their enrolment form and 2.8 per cent declared a learning difficulty. According to their tutors, 12.6 per cent of ESOL learners in the sample had a disability and 4.2 per cent had a learning difficulty.

Partnerships offering discrete provision

Some educational institutions have set up ESOL classes specifically for individuals with mental health difficulties. In most cases the provision is set up in response to a request from a community organisation or local Mind group and the collaboration and joint working of the two organisations can benefit some learners. The two case studies below give examples of this type of initiative:

An adult education institution (AEI) was approached by the local Mind group to set up a class for a number of women with mental health difficulties who were living in isolated circumstances. Their limited level of English exacerbated the women's sense of isolation. The women wanted to develop their English, particularly speaking, but did not feel sufficiently confident to join an ESOL class.

The AEI agreed to provide an ESOL course once a week for the group. The class was set up in one of their centres but was based near offices and a kitchen. This meant it was quieter and learners could take a break when necessary.

Learners were referred by Mind. There was no formal assessment of English until the learners joined the class and the practitioner planned for a mixed level group. Mind also provided transport for many of the women who had age-related mobility difficulties

A further education college was asked to provide ESOL classes by a voluntary sector organisation established specifically for Asian women with mental health difficulties. The organisation provided a number of services for these women and found that though many wanted to improve their English, they did not feel able to join a class in the college. The Asian women's group felt it was important to set up ESOL classes in a setting with which learners were familiar and where they would not feel under pressure.

The college agreed to provide ESOL classes at the organisation's venue. They began by providing one class per week but soon decided it was important to offer a class for women with beginner level literacy and another for learners at Entry levels 2 and 3. The classes were two hours long but learners could begin by attending for a shorter time, such as half an hour or an hour, and gradually build up to two hours as they grew in confidence and felt able to concentrate for longer periods.

The practitioner provided an official break in the middle but learners could stop and take a break whenever they felt necessary. There was a kitchen and additional room adjacent to the main teaching room. A mental health support worker was available throughout the session. She worked with individual learners and was also on hand to support learners if they were feeling stressed.

These classes were set up to meet the specific needs of particular learners in order to support or 'scaffold' their entry or re-entry into education. However, it is important not to make assumptions about what type of provision individuals with mental health difficulties will want or need. This type of discrete provision can enable some learners to access education but it is essential that we recognise and respond to the needs of individuals and do not assume that separate classes are needed or are the most appropriate in all cases. It is important to consult learners and ascertain what they feel and want for themselves.

An initiative within a prison context

Although prisons vary from each other in terms of the education they offer, many ESOL practitioners working within prisons and Young Offender Institutions (YOIs) identify a number of challenges and limitations to the way they can work which relate specifically to the prison learning environment. These challenges include:

- working with very mixed level groups, often with a high turnover of learners;
- limited provision for assessment of language needs or particular needs related to learning difficulties or disabilities;
- lack of specialist support, for example sign language interpreters, dyslexia specialists;
- no additional learning support in the class or one to one;
- very limited resources – a dearth of ESOL materials relevant to the needs of those in prison.

Additionally, the proportion of learners with learning difficulties or disabilities within prison is high, in particular those with mental health difficulties. The following excerpt from a letter to *The Times* by Mal Gillan, a grade 2 prison governor, demonstrates just how critical the situation has become:

> In the unlikely event that a place is available in a psychiatric ward, the detainee … will end up in a prison somewhere, to become part of the 70 percent of prisoners with mental health issues … As a governor, I, and more importantly frontline prison officers, see the consequence of this in self-harm, damage to property and severe, sometimes violent behaviour, for which the punishment we have is inappropriate. (Gillan, 2005)

This case study recounts how in one prison, HMP Holloway, the ESOL coordinator initiated a project to provide prison-related teaching and learning resources appropriate to the needs of the learners.

Holloway is a women's prison based in North London. Many of the women speak and understand little English and there is considerable demand for ESOL provision. The prison context itself plays a major role in determining the communicative situations, activities and strategies teachers are able to use.

The women are without family, friends or support systems. They are often frightened and many have little understanding of the legal system or process in the UK. For a considerable number the situation is made worse by their lack of English, their anxiety over their children and fear that they will be taken into care. There are also pregnant women in prison as well as those with young babies. Many of the learners experience mental health difficulties and some are extremely vulnerable and at risk of self-harm or suicide.

The teachers working in Holloway found that most ESOL resources tend to deal with everyday activities not appropriate for individuals detained in prison, for example shopping or talking to a children's schoolteacher. The role of ESOL provision within Holloway is to develop the learners' level of English in order to help them cope with life in prison, to prepare for release and also to give learners relief from the prison context.

The ESOL coordinator was successful in bidding for funding to produce ESOL learning materials that relate specifically to the context of being in Holloway prison. Together with Hibiscus (an organisation within Holloway that provides support, guidance, advocacy and counselling for prisoners) resources were developed for learners working at Entry 1, Entry 2 and Entry 3. They cover listening, speaking, reading and writing, and focus on topics relevant to life within the prison, such as 'asking for things on the wing', 'using the dentist', 'working in the kitchens', and 'people in court '. Packs of materials were developed for teachers to use in the classroom, as well as self-access materials for those learners who prefer to work on their own, at their own pace. The materials have been well received by the learners and ESOL practitioners working in the prison.

Pathfinders
learning for living

LEARNING FOR LIVING CONSORTIUM

niace — promoting adult learning

The Basic Skills Agency

BIGPICTURE interactive

bild

learning and skills development agency

ufi · learndirect

LLU+

LONDON SOUTH BANK UNIVERSITY

Rathbone Birmingham

Skill

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

ISBN number: 1-84478-665-X

department for
education and skills
creating opportunity, releasing potential, achieving excellence

read·write·plus