New rights to learn

A tutor guide to teaching adults after the Disability Discrimination Act Part 4

July 2003

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Part 4

Contents

Foreword

The Disability Discrimination Act Part 4 gives all providers of post-school education a legal duty not to discriminate against disabled students, either by treating them less favourably for a reason related to their disability or by failing to make a reasonable adjustment for them. The Department for Education and Skills has already produced *Guidance for LEAs and Adult Education Providers* on the Act. This booklet complements the original Guidance in that it is written specifically for full- and part-time tutors in adult and community education who are not specialists in working with disabled students, but who may well have individual students with disabilities or learning difficulties on their courses.

The Guidance begins with a brief summary of the Disability Discrimination Act Part 4. It then goes on to describe how different disabilities can affect learning. This is followed by practical advice on how tutors can best work with students with a range of different disabilities in order to ensure that they gain access to learning and are given appropriate support.

This booklet is freely photocopiable (on condition that the source is acknowledged) and has been produced in a format designed to facilitate this.

The Department for Education and Skills would like to thank Liz Maudslay, NIACE Consultant, who wrote the booklet.

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Peter Lavender, Director for Development, Research and Information at NIACE, for support and advice;

Who this booklet is for and how to use it

This booklet is for any tutor working in adult and community education. It is written specifically for tutors who might have individual disabled students on their courses and not primarily for tutors who specialise in working with students with disabilities or learning difficulties.

Staff working in the field of adult education are familiar with the legal obligations they have to students in the areas of race and gender. Under the Disability Discrimination Act Part 4 all staff now also have duties in relation to disabled students. Adult and community education has a long history of supporting learners with disabilities. The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) does not demand a radically different way of working, but it does give learners with disabilities new rights to ensure that best practice is in place. Section One of this booklet describes briefly what the new duties under DDA Part 4 are. Section Two examines general principles for working with any student who has a disability or learning difficulty. Section Three looks in more detail at how staff can work with students with particular disabilities in order to ensure they are given appropriate support.

You may want to read through the booklet as a whole. You could also use it as a reference book to ensure you are providing appropriate support for a particular disabled student. If it is being used in this way, it is important to look at Section Two on general principles first.

Of course there will be times when you wish to get specialist support from the person who coordinates work for disabled students in your organisation. However, the booklet hopes to show you how there are several small adjustments and approaches

that you might need to put in place as a matter of course when you have a disabled student in your class.

Section One
Disability Discrimination Act Part 4

Learners with disabilities often face discrimination. Sometimes this is overt, often when staff assume that they are less able to learn than others:

> *I had to fight to get what I wanted. So it was quite a struggle. They (teachers) discouraged me: 'You'll have difficulties doing some things because of your disability.' I had to argue with them all the time: 'No, it won't put me off because I'm determined to do this.'* (Disabled student talking about the difficulty she had convincing her teachers she could study for GCSEs)

Sometimes it is more subtle, for example when staff patronise or pity a disabled learner. Sometimes it happens because staff are just not aware of the importance of making certain small changes:

> *I'm dyslexic and that makes it hard for me to read black print on white paper. All I needed was for handouts to be printed onto pale grey paper, but no-one ever seemed to get around to doing that even though I asked them.* (Dyslexic student at college)

What constitutes discrimination under DDA Part 4?

There are two ways in which you might discriminate against a disabled learner.

The first is by treating someone 'less favourably' for a reason related to his or her disability. For example:

A woman with a severe facial disfigurement is taking an evening class in t'ai chi. The tutor for the class spends time with all the students individually helping them with their technique. The tutor does not spend any time individually with the disabled student because he feels uncomfortable with her. Because no other student has been treated in this way, and because the less favourable treatment is related to her disability, the treatment is likely to be unlawful. (Example taken from *Code of Practice* which accompanies the Act)

The second is by failing to make a 'reasonable adjustment' for a disabled student. The *Code of Practice* which accompanies the Act has many examples of what these might be. Some adjustments do require additional resources but many simply require an understanding of an individual's particular requirements. For example, if you have a student in your class who lip-reads you need to ensure that you do not spend time talking as you write up notes on the white board with your back to the class, or, if you have a student who needs large print you need to ensure that any handouts you use are produced at the requisite size. In many cases these changes to your practice will benefit all students.

It is important to remember that the Act does not just apply to teaching staff but to any staff in the organisation, for example senior managers, security guards, or canteen workers.

Disclosure and confidentiality

Some disabilities are visible. Others, such as mental health difficulties or dyslexia, are not. If a learner has not disclosed a disability they might not be able to prove they have been discriminated against. However, the organisation does have to take 'reasonable steps' to encourage disclosure.

This will mean that you need to create an atmosphere, both at 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 they have needs which are not being addressed. The language used is important here. Some students may not see themselves as having a 'disability'; however, they may recognise that they have particular requirements.

If a learner discloses a disability or additional need to one person, including you as a tutor, then under the Act the whole institution is deemed to know. This means that you will need to think about how, with the student's consent, you can pass on information about support needs to the appropriate person or team in your organisation.

There might be times when an individual learner is clear that they do not want anyone else to know about their disability. In such instances it might be impossible for staff to put in place the most appropriate 'reasonable adjustment'. However, in general, disabled learners will feel far more confident in disclosing a disability 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.

Section Two
General principles

Before looking at particular disabilities it is important to examine certain overriding principles. These principles will probably be familiar as, fundamentally, they represent the essence of inclusive learning which show how learning needs to move away from a viewpoint which sees 'the difficulty or deficit in the student' to one which 'fits the objectives and learning styles' of every student.

As a general rule:

❑ Treat people first and foremost as individual learners. No learner wants to be labelled as being 'the deaf one' or 'the one with a learning difficulty'.

❑ Do not automatically assume that a disability will mean that a person is unable to do something.

❑ Ask learners what works best for them and listen closely to what they say. They are the experts on the effect of their particular disability on how they do things.

❑ Look at how your own practice or the practice of the institution might be making the disability a problem – for example, how a partially deaf person might not be understanding you because you never face them directly when you talk to them.

❑ Reflect on your own attitudes – it is often staff attitudes (such as embarrassment, patronisation, fear or irritation) rather than an individual's disability that can cause barriers.

❑ Make sure your organisation has been aware of the particular needs of people 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 are aware of what these procedures are.

In planning your sessions:

❑ Plan to use a variety of styles, for example visual and verbal cues, practical and theoretical approaches; when you write something down read it out as well. Be aware of different learning preferences, e.g. verbal, visual, etc.

❑ Build in moments when you can just observe what works well for a particular person and what doesn't – and make sure this includes observing strengths as well as things that a person finds difficult.

❑ Ensure that all learners are fully included in any group activity and be aware of how group dynamics can sometimes exclude an individual.

❑ Remember that some students may need extra support in areas outside the classroom, for example in using the canteen or other facilities.

❑ Disabled learners may need to have individual arrangements for examination or assessment, for example extra time, a separate room, a reader or a scribe. These will need to be arranged in good time.

In class:

❑ Encourage an attitude where all differences and difficulties in learning are openly discussed (not just those of a person with a particular disability) and where all learners have the opportunity to discuss the ways in which they learn best.

❑ Build on learners' strengths and individual interests and enthusiasms.

❑ Do not forget to celebrate the value of having learners with a range of skills and interests in your group.

❑ If a learner comes to your class with a support worker, be aware that the role of that worker is to support that individual, not the whole class. Also, when speaking to the learner, always address the learner directly and not the support worker.

❑ If you are working with disabled learners who are also from a different minority ethnic group, do not forget that their ethnicity is an important aspect of their identity as well as their disability.

Terminology

People are often worried about the correct words to use when referring to disabilities. This is not surprising, as the terminology keeps changing as groups of disabled people try to establish terms that are free from negative images. Currently, the terms approved by groups of disabled people themselves are:

- **People or person with a disability or disabled people or person**.
  Not 'handicapped' or 'the disabled'

- **Person with a learning difficulty or a learning disability**.
  Not mentally handicapped.

- **Wheelchair user (with some mobility or without).**
  Not 'wheelchair bound' or 'confined to a wheelchair'.

- **A person who is blind, partially sighted, or visually impaired**.
  Not 'visually handicapped'.

- **A deaf person or person who is partially hearing, and a person with a speech difficulty.**
  Not 'deaf and dumb'.

- **A person with mental health difficulties**.
  Not 'psychiatrically disturbed', with 'mental problems' or 'mentally ill'.

When referring to non-disabled people avoid using the word 'normal' as this implies disabled people are abnormal. Remember that everybody is different.

Section 3
Particular disabilities

This section will look at particular disabilities, beginning by looking at how the disability might affect learning and then going on to look at certain approaches or adjustments that might support the learner. It is not meant to act as a tool which allows teachers to diagnose particular disabilities, for example to tell someone you think they might have an autistic spectrum disorder, but rather to point out the difficulties which some learners can have and to suggest strategies for supporting them.

It is also important to bear in mind that two learners may have the same disability but might have different learning needs. Do not make automatic assumptions about what a particular learner might need. Always ask the learner first.

People who are deaf or partially hearing

Some people may have been born deaf, while others may become deaf either gradually or suddenly. Most have some residual hearing. For a large proportion of the population hearing tends to become harder as people get older.

People who become deaf before they learn to speak may have difficulty in speaking clearly. Language acquisition can be much harder for people who have always been deaf, in particular an understanding of abstract concepts or of word play such as metaphors or puns.

People who have been born profoundly deaf may well have learnt to use sign language. British Sign Language (BSL) is a language in its own right and has its own grammar, syntax and vocabulary. Learners who use sign language will need to be taught both grammar and the vocabulary that is unfamiliar to them. If you do not use sign language, deaf learners will need to have their own sign language interpreter (who will interpret information presented by staff or other learners into sign language), or a communicator (who will also give support in translating spoken or written information into syntax which will be more easily understood by a deaf person). They may also require a note-taker. Your organisation will need to ensure it knows how to book the services of a trained interpreter or communicator.

People who are partially deaf may rely on lip-reading. Lip-reading is not a straightforward activity as it is very difficult or impossible to read some sounds or grammatical structures. Some particularly difficult sounds to read are **r**, **s**, **z**, **g**, **ng**, **t**, **d**, **n**, and **l**. Word endings can also be difficult, for example differentiating between walk**ing**, walk**s** and walk**ed**.

People who are partially deaf, in particular older learners, may never have had their hearing loss fully recognised at school. It might have been assumed that they were being inattentive or had a learning difficulty, when in fact the problem was that they were not able to hear what the teacher was saying.

Technology can enhance deaf people's access to language. This can include:

❑ E-mail and text messaging on mobile phones or a minicom, which is a text telephone.

❑ Hearing aids. These work by amplifying sounds which means that all sounds are amplified so that background noise can be a real problem.

❑ Radio hearing aids that require the teacher to wear a transmitter and microphone.

❑ Loops which can either be a permanent fixture of a room, or be a portable loop which can be set up in any suitable room and worn around the neck.

Some ways of working with people who are deaf or partially hearing

As a general rule:

❑ Face the person at all times when speaking to them and do not speak to the group when your back is turned. Also ensure you have the attention of the learner before speaking.

❑ Make sure that everyone's face is well lit and avoid standing in front of a window or light which puts your face in the shadow

❑ Speak clearly and at a normal speed but do not shout. Use short clear statements and vocabulary. Repeat if necessary using the same words but, if something does not seem to have been understood, find a different way of saying it. Be clear when you are going to change a subject.

❑ Keep background noise to a minimum. If possible, use a carpeted room as this absorbs sound.

❑ Remember that loud noises can be very distressing for someone using a hearing aid as the hearing aid amplifies all sounds.

❑ Be aware of how much background information we all pick up through hearing and remember that deaf people will not have access to this way of receiving information.

❑ Do not assume that certain subject areas will be impossible for deaf people. Remember Evelyn Glennie, a world famous percussionist, who has been profoundly deaf since she was a young child and 'hears' music through feeling vibrations.

In class:

❑ In group work, establish clear ground rules to ensure that all learners are included, for example, make sure only one person speaks at a time and get learners to indicate when they are speaking.

❑ Use visual information such as pictures, labels, diagrams, key words written up, and objects.

❑ When using an overhead projector or PowerPoint presentations make sure the information is clear and key points are prioritised.

❑ Write down words or statements whenever possible and check that these have been understood.

❑ If you are working with an interpreter in the room allow time for them to interpret and ensure that you always direct your comments to the deaf person and not the interpreter.

❑ Interpreting and lip-reading are both very tiring. Make sure you allow sufficient breaks.

❑ If you are working with someone who uses BSL, check out how comprehensible your handouts and assessment questions are to someone who is used to BSL grammar and syntax.

Quick tips

o *Find out how you can obtain an induction loop – either one for the room or a personal one.*

o *Always face the learners.*

o *Speak clearly using clear language.*

o *Use visual information where possible.*

o *In group work remember to lay down clear ground rules to ensure that all learners are included.*

Useful resources

□ **Royal National Institute for the Deaf (RNID)
(www.rnid.org.uk)**

The RNID runs a telephone/teletext help line and also produces information leaflets and fact sheets.

Its most recent publication on post school education is *Deaf Students in Further Education.* This is a very comprehensible and clear account of what deaf learners might need when studying at college. Although written specifically for college staff the issues raised in this book are equally relevant for those working in adult and community education.

Contact:
19–23 Featherstone Street, London EC1Y 8SL.
Tel: 0808 808 0123 (freephone); Textphone: 0808 808 9000
(freephone); Fax: 020 7296 8199;
e-mail: informationline@rnid.org.uk

People who are blind or partially sighted

Some people will be born blind or with partial sight but a far larger number will acquire a visual impairment later in life. The term 'blind and partially sighted' covers a whole range of impairments from people who are only slightly affected, to the very few people who cannot distinguish dark from light.

The needs of people who are blind or partially sighted will vary according to the degree of their sight problem. Many of them will require print that is larger than usual and text that is clearly laid out. However it is important to remember that a few people have what is called 'tunnel vision', which means that they can only see a small range of print at a time and so can manage better if print is kept small. The colour of the paper will also affect some people's ability to read text.

Some blind people may require information in other formats, in particular on tape or via some kind of speech software that works in conjunction with a personal computer.

It is often assumed that most people who are blind will use Braille. In fact only about 3 per cent of those who are registered blind and partially sighted actually use Braille and these are usually people who have been blind since birth or early childhood.

Some ways of working with people who are blind or partially sighted

When preparing your work:

- ❑ Ask people what adaptations help them most. Different learners can have very different needs.

❑ Some learners might need additional help to get used to the layout of the centre and classroom.

❑ Ensure that lighting is good, but without glare, and that people with sight impairment can choose where they sit so the light is best for them.

❑ Produce materials in an uncluttered layout with a clear typeface (a sans serif font like Arial is usually good) in 14-point size. This is good practice for all learners although some might need a larger print. Black print on white or yellow is usually effective, although some learners may have individual preferences.

❑ Ensure that any handouts you use are distributed in advance in the learner's preferred format.

❑ If a learner needs key texts in Braille, large print or on tape discuss this with your specialist worker for disabled students. Some people might also benefit from a CCTV (closed circuit television) that allows information to be dramatically increased in size. These can be used for craft sessions as well as written information.

❑ If you are using computers ensure that they are accessible to blind or partially sighted learners. Some learners may need a specially adapted keyboard with larger letters. Others may need to use speech software.

During classes, remember:

❑ If learners have real problems with print or with recording information allow them to hear material on a tape or to tape your lesson. If you are doing question and answer sessions it

might help to have two tapes – one for listening to the questions and the other for recording the answers – as constantly having to stop and change tapes can break the flow of the lesson.

❑ Use blue or black pens rather than red, orange or green on a whiteboard and remember that the glare of a whiteboard can be difficult for some learners. Always read out what you have written on a board or put on an overhead projector or PowerPoint presentation.

❑ If you are using visual aids, e.g. a video, make sure the content is clearly explained.

❑ Group discussion can cause difficulties for blind people. Encourage other learners to identify themselves by name before speaking.

In general:

❑ Don't feel embarrassed at using phrases with a visual connotation (for example, 'see you'). Phrases such as this have a meaning beyond their literal interpretation and will be used by many blind people.

❑ If a learner brings a guide dog make sure the learner has the opportunity to say how the dog should be treated in class, e.g. not being distracted or fed titbits, etc.

❑ Do not assume that blind people will be unable to access certain areas of the curriculum. Many blind learners have successfully taken part in 'visual' or movement classes. Learn about ways this has happened, for example, one learner distinguishes between different coloured paints by

adding various scents to them. Another learner in a basic skills class took part in a session about geography by tracing her hands along a tactile map, while other learners looked at a map and talked through the different places and features.

Quick tips

o *Make sure students tell you about best seating, lighting, etc.*

o *Work with learners on ways of making visual material accessible.*

o *Make sure you know how to enlarge handouts or print them on different coloured paper.*

Useful resources

❑ **Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) (www.rnib.org.uk)**

The RNIB produces a huge range of resource materials. It runs a telephone information service and supports this by a range of fact sheets. Local branches can also loan equipment.

Contact:
RNIB Customer Services, PO Box 173, Peterborough PE2 6WS.
Tel: 0845 702 3153, for the price of a local call;
Minicom: 0845 58 56 91; Fax: 01733 37 15 55;
e-mail Customer Services: CServices@rnib.org.uk

People with a physical disability

When people think of physical disabilities they often automatically think of people in wheelchairs. In fact, only a very small proportion of those with a physical disability are actually wheelchair users. Physical disabilities can be temporary or permanent; they can be stable or changing, they can affect one particular part of the body or the whole body, they can be pain-free or they can cause an individual considerable pain.

The effects of physical disabilities will vary according to the kind of disability a person has. Some people might have a condition where sitting still for long periods is impossible. Others might have a difficulty with hand use which makes handwriting particularly hard. Some people who have a physical disability caused by a neurological condition may also have difficulties in the way they perceive things, for example they can find it hard to locate the correct place on a page or to move from left to right when reading or writing. They might also have difficulty recognising faces or finding their way around a building. Their impairment might cause them to have difficulties with short-term memory, with understanding the information they have received and with speech (see the section on speech difficulties below).

Some ways of working with people with a physical disability

In preparation:

- ❑ Make sure you always discuss with an individual what is difficult for them and what helps them. Certain simple adjustments might make a lot of difference, for example seating at a different height, some kind of an arm rest, or

thick books under a computer to raise its height. Some people may only be able to sit comfortably for a certain length of time and need to stand up and move a little at regular intervals.

❑   You may need to alter the layout of the classroom, for example to allow space for a learner to manoeuvre a wheelchair.

❑   Remember that the learner will need to be able to go to other parts of the organisation and ensure they have support for example in using a specialist parking space, accessing the coffee shop, etc.

❑   In practical sessions, explore the possibility of making simple adaptations. For example, hand rests or frames can sometimes help individuals to carry out manual tasks; left-handed or sprung scissors can make a difference to the level of independence in some craft classes; a learner who uses only one hand can be helped by non-slip fabric under a note pad; and a support tutor working with a learner in a pottery class made a template with the student she was working with so the learner could decorate her pots independently.

In class:

❑   If a student has difficulties with handwriting, explore possible solutions with them. Certain simple adaptations such as a grip around a pen can make a significant difference. Also look at alternatives to writing by hand and the possibility of using a computer with a specially adapted keyboard or speech-activated software.

❑ If a person has perceptual difficulties, explore techniques to compensate for these with them. These might include providing clear visual guidelines such as a bold line drawn on the left hand margin, a frame or ruler to help identify the line of text, or small symbols to indicate left and right.

❑ Some students may be able to access classes if they come with a support worker, for example a student in a pottery class who can instruct the worker on how they want their design executed. Remember that the support worker is there to follow through the instructions of the learner.

❑ If a student has difficulty in remembering, ensure that you provide instructions in small steps and work with the student on developing individual techniques which will help them to remember things.

Finally:

❑ Do not assume that a student cannot participate in physical activities. There are many physically disabled dancers and athletes. Ask the learner.

Quick tips

o *Be aware of classroom and institution layout.*

o *Look into simple adaptations that might help. Ask the learner what these might be as they may well use things at home which could be useful in a class.*

o *Get advice, if appropriate, on assistive technology.*

Useful resources

❑ **Scope (www.scope.org.uk)**

Scope is the national organisation for people with cerebral palsy. However, the information it produces may well be relevant to other people with a physical disability. The Scope website offers a large quantity of useful information on-line but it also provides a large index of additional publications that colleagues working primarily with disable students will find very useful.   The site is large and it may be helpful to go directly to the publications catalogue with the web address: http://www.scope.org.uk/action/publications/index.shtml

Contact:
Scope, 6 Market Road, London N7 9PW.
Helpline, Tel: 0808 800 3333.

❑ **RADAR (Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation) (www.radar.org.uk)**

RADAR provides information and advice on all aspects of disability and have also compiled a list of recommended Disability Awareness or Equality trainers.

Contact:
12 City Forum, 250 City Road, London EC1V 8AF.
Tel: 0171 250 3222; Fax: 0207 2500212;
e-mail: radar@radar.org.uk

People with a learning difficulty

There is no exact dividing line between people with a learning difficulty and those without. Everyone learns in different ways and at different rates.

Some people will have difficulty with learning because, for a variety of reasons, they have missed out on certain key elements of learning. Some will have specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia (see below). Others may have a cognitive learning difficulty, and it is these learners that this section is about. People with learning difficulties often have uneven learning profiles – that is, they may find certain areas of learning very hard but be very good at other things.

Sometimes tutors feel that people with a learning difficulty should only be taught in a specialist class for people with learning difficulties. A blanket statement like this is unlikely either to conform to DDA Part 4 or to result in best practice. There may be times, particularly when a person is new to adult learning, that they may wish to experience the security and specialist teaching available in a class specially designed for people with learning difficulties. However, individual people with learning difficulties often say that they want to move away from a purely segregated environment and take part in the full range of classes.

Some ways of working with people with a learning difficulty

In planning your work:

- ❑ Find out what the person is interested in and work from this. Do not underestimate the learner. Many people with

learning difficulties can achieve real success when tutors are able to discover what they really want to learn.

❑ Talk to individuals and groups about their past learning experiences, both what has worked and what has failed. There is no point in repeating past failures.

❑ Make sure learning is age appropriate. All adult learners need to feel that they are not being treated like children and that they are not endlessly repeating things they have done at school.

❑ Make learning as practical as possible and not too worksheet-based. Use a range of materials (visual and spoken as well as written). Some learners with learning difficulties have experienced years of elementary reading and writing classes. Remember there are other ways of approaching the curriculum.

❑ Find ways to raise the status of learning – for example many people who have found writing extremely difficult may feel very differently about it if they can begin to use a computer rather than a pen and paper.

❑ If learners have difficulties with concentrating, plan lessons so that there are a variety of short activities.

In class:

❑ Always explain things clearly and check that they have been understood.

❑ Be careful not to be too directive; some people with learning difficulties may say what they think you want to hear.

❑ When people have difficulties with remembering things work with them on creating strategies which they feel might help them to remember.

❑ Encourage all learners in the group to ask for help so that this is seen as an important part of learning and not a sign of failure.

❑ Help learners to record progress and successes, maybe by using pictures rather than words.

❑ Some people with a learning difficulty might require the assistance of a one-to-one support worker. Ensure that you always speak directly to the learner and not via the support worker. However, there might also be ways, with the learner's involvement, that the support worker can provide important information on the best ways of working with a particular learner. They can also help to ensure that strategies learnt in class are reinforced in other areas of a person's life.

Quick tips

o *Find ways of exploring learners' own interests.*

o *Ensure learning is always age appropriate.*

o *Think of ways of differentiating learning.*

o *Use a variety of teaching styles and materials, for instance use pictures and symbols in handouts or on overheads.*

Useful resources

- **BILD (www.bild.org.uk)**

  BILD is the British Institute of Learning Disabilities, a not-for-profit organisation with charitable status, which exists to improve the quality of life of all people with a learning disability. BILD provides information, publications and training and consultancy services for organisations and individuals.

  Contact:
  British Institute of Learning Disabilities, Campion House, Green Street, Kidderminster, Worcestershire, DY10 1Jl.
  Tel: 01562 723010; Fax: 01562 723029;
  e-mail: enquiries@bild.org.uk

- **CHANGE Picture Bank**

  The CHANGE Picture Bank CD-ROM and pack is for people with learning disabilities, people who work with people with learning disabilities and people who provide services. You can use the pictures to help make your information easier to understand. The pack also gives lots of ideas on how to make your information easier to understand, including drawing your own pictures or adapting ours, using easy words and writing and writing in easy ways.

  Contact:
  CHANGE, Units 19/20 Unity Business Centre, 26 Roundhay Road, Leeds LS7 1AB.
  Tel: 0113 243 0202; Fax: 0113 243 0220; Minicom: 0113 243 2225;
  e-mail: change.north@tesco.net

❑ **Mencap (www.mencap.org.uk)**

Mencap is one of the major organisations for people with learning difficulties. Mencap has produced several documents looking at the learning needs of people with learning difficulties attending further or adult education. The most recent of these is the recent *Essential Skill Curriculum* produced for learners with learning difficulties.

Contact:
123 Golden Lane, London EC1Y 0RT.
Tel: 020 7454 0454; Fax: 020 7696 5540;
e-mail: information@mencap.org.uk.

❑ **NIACE (www.niace.org.uk)**

NIACE is a national organisation that promotes adult learning. It has published several packs that are accessible for people with learning difficulties and books on different aspects of education for adults with learning difficulties.

Contact: Renaissance House, 20 Princess Road West, Leicester LE1 6TP.
Tel: 0116 204 4200/1; Fax: 0116 285 4514;
Minicom: 0116 255 6049;
e-mail: enquiries@niace.org.uk

People with dyslexia

It is thought that about 10 per cent of the population may have some degree of dyslexia and 4 per cent have difficulties which are severe enough for them to require some specialist support.

Dyslexia is not related to intelligence and people with dyslexia possess the full range of abilities. People with dyslexia have difficulties with processing written language, i.e. they find it difficult to make the link between spoken words and their written form. Consequently, dyslexic people have significant difficulty with reading and writing. Sometimes this is caused by 'auditory processing' difficulties, for example they have difficulty in learning the sounds which letters make although they may be very good at remembering the way words look. Sometimes it is caused by 'visual processing' difficulties, i.e. they have difficulty in recognising words, even very common words, when they see them in written form. Some dyslexic people have 'motor integration problems', for example they may have difficulty forming words on the page when writing and following a line of print. Many dyslexic people have a combination of all these difficulties.

There is often a mismatch between what dyslexic people can do and what they cannot. For example, they might be very good at performing certain skills yet still have enormous difficulty with simple reading and writing. Dyslexic people are often 'lateral' thinkers; that is they may approach a problem in a different way than a step-by-step, logical approach.

It is not the responsibility of a tutor to attempt to diagnose dyslexia. However, you do need to be aware of specific difficulties a student may be having and seek advice from specialist staff if you feel a particular student might benefit from an assessment.

Some ways of working with people who are dyslexic

In planning:

- ❑ Talk to learners about what they find difficult and what methods have worked or have failed in the past. Do not repeat strategies that have already failed.

- ❑ Remember that dyslexic people often find white paper difficult to read from and write on. Help them to investigate whether another colour might be better, for example light grey or cream. They might also find coloured overlays helpful.

- ❑ Recognise the importance of technology. Using a computer allows the learner to produce a piece of work that looks good and to try out spellings knowing they can always delete them if they get it wrong. Some dyslexic people may always have great difficulty with spelling and should be encouraged to learn to use technical aids such as spell checks.

- ❑ Recognise that learning may need to be broken down into small, achievable units and allow time for repetition and reinforcement.

- ❑ Some learners may benefit from additional one-to-one specialist support. Talk to your coordinator or senior manager about how to obtain this.

In class:

- ❑ Help learners to understand their own ways of learning and encourage them to create their own strategies, for example for remembering sequences.

❑ Use teaching strategies which match the individual's learning style – for example if a learner thinks very visually use a highlighted or bold typeface for certain words.

❑ If learners tend to confuse letters, work with them specifically on learning to recognise the difference between the sounds made by different letters.

❑ Encourage learners to make visual representations such as mind maps (where information is set out in a visual format often using different colours, so that the learner can see it all at once rather than having to follow through sequentially).

Finally:

❑ Do not make assumptions about a person's intelligence because they are dyslexic. Many dyslexic learners can be extremely successful when their particular difficulties are understood and they receive appropriate support.

Quick tips

o *Deliver the curriculum in a variety of styles, for example presenting information both verbally and visually, reading out handouts, etc.*

o *Develop individual strategies.*

o *Check if a learner works best with different combinations of print and paper rather than the standard black on white.*

o *Find out how to get hold of specialist computer software.*

Useful resources

Dyslexia organisations

❑ **British Dyslexia Association (www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk)**

The BDA is a membership organisation for dyslexic people. It offers advice, information and help to families, professionals and dyslexic individuals. It works to raise awareness and understanding of dyslexia, and to effect change. BDA provides a range of useful resources related to dyslexia.

Contact:
The British Dyslexia Association, 98 London Road,
Reading, RG1 5AU.
Tel: 0118 966 2677; Fax: 0118 935 1927;
e-mail: admin@bda-dyslexia.demon.co.uk;
Helpline: 0118 966 827 Monday to Friday, 10.00am–12.45pm and 2.00–4.45pm, e-mail: info@dyslexiahelp-bda.demon.co.uk

❑ **Adult Dyslexia Organisation (www.futurenet.co.uk/charity/ado/adomenu/adomenu.htm)**

The ADO is an organisation of dyslexic adults. It provides support for dyslexic adults and resources for those working with dyslexic adults.

Contact:
Admin: 0207 737 7646; Helpline: 0207 924 9559;
Fax: 0207 207 7796; e-mail: dyslexia.hq@dial.pipex.com

❑   **The Dyslexia Institute (http://www.dyslexia-inst.org.uk)**

The Dyslexia Institute (DI) is a charity that specialises in the assessment and teaching of people with dyslexia and is now the only national dyslexia teaching organisation in the world. It seeks ways to improve the effectiveness of teaching and also focuses on the development of teaching materials.

❑   **The London Language and Literacy Unit (LLLU) (http://www.sbu.ac.uk/LLLU)**

LLLU aims to help organisations improve the quality of education and training by pioneering and disseminating innovative approaches and good practice, so that individuals with a wide range of language and learning needs can achieve success. It has produced several useful publications.

People with mental health difficulties

There is no clear dividing line between people who can be described as having a mental health difficulty and those who do not. Most of us will, at some point in our lives, experience times when we are particularly upset or anxious. However, there are times when these feelings can become more acute and affect our ability to carry on normally with life. Sometimes this is triggered by a particular event although some people can develop mental ill health for no obvious external reason. Anybody can experience severe mental health difficulties at any time. You may well have a learner in your class who has achieved high qualifications and held down a professional job and may be returning to learning to regain skills and build up confidence. Alternatively, you may have a learner with mental health difficulties who also experiences learning difficulties.

While some mental health difficulties can cause people to behave erratically, the most common symptoms are depression, stress and anxiety. People who experience these feelings at a severe level may have fewer coping strategies than other people and can think there is no way of escaping from the state they are in. Learners may find it difficult to engage in any new activities either because they are afraid they will not be able to cope or because they feel there is no point. They may also be very anxious and need more reassurance than other people. Many people with mental health difficulties internalise their difficulties and see their feelings as being 'their fault' which can further knock their confidence and make it even harder for them to access learning.

Mental health difficulties tend not to be static. Individuals might have very markedly good and bad days, or a period when they feel depressed and unable to do anything followed by a period when they feel very active. This can make it difficult for other people to relate to them and for them to engage in group activities.

Sometimes they can be very reluctant to interact in any way, while at other times they may be very keen to talk and tend to dominate the conversation.

There is a lot of stigma about mental health difficulties. People can feel more comfortable if they think there is a 'normal' type of behaviour and feel easily threatened when other people behave in ways which are markedly different from this norm. Because of this, many people with mental health difficulties feel ashamed of their condition and this may result in them lacking confidence and feeling anxious or vulnerable.

People who have been diagnosed as having mental health difficulties might be on some kind of medication. Although this can help them with some of the more acute symptoms the medication itself can often have side affects. It can make concentration and memory very difficult and can also make people feel very tired or have other side effects such as feeling very thirsty or becoming shaky. All of these things can affect a person's learning.

Some ways of working with people who have mental health difficulties

In planning:

- ❑ Recognise that some learners may need considerable time to settle into a class and feel comfortable enough to begin to address their learning. Recognise too that 'ice-breakers' may be threatening for some learners.

- ❑ Learners may wish to start with only a small number of hours each week and then build this up gradually (e.g. term-

by-term) so opportunities need to be in place to allow this to happen.

❑ Recognise that some people with mental health difficulties might have days when they are just not able to come to class and try to find ways to compensate for these absences.

❑ Remember that anxiety can mask true ability, therefore a learner's potential may not be apparent until several weeks into a course when they have relaxed.

❑ Plan flexible learning situations which include a variety of activities.

❑ Understand that some individuals might have real anxiety about trying new activities and include activities in which people can experience immediate success.

❑ Encourage a supportive environment which is not too judgemental. Give reassurance and honest feedback. Sometimes not saying anything about a perfectly acceptable piece of work can be construed as disapproval.

In class:

❑ If someone has particular difficulties with remembering, discuss different memory strategies with them and see what might work best for them.

❑ In group discussions, accept that an individual might have times when they feel unable to participate and allow them to withdraw.

❑   In discussions, establish clear ground rules, for example one person speaking at a time. Also recognise that some individuals might feel threatened by some discussions and respect their wish for privacy.

In general:

❑   Recognise the boundaries of your own role as teacher and be clear when there is a need to refer to a disability specialist.

❑   Occasionally, people with mental health difficulties can behave erratically, in ways which can upset other learners. This can be difficult for tutors as they do of course also have duties towards their other learners. In such situations you will need to seek specialist advice, but try not to make snap decisions. It might be that someone else who works with the learner in another setting can give advice on strategies that might help, or there might be the opportunity to have a specialist support worker who can attend with the student. Institutions need to work out their own strategies for dealing with instances of erratic behaviour (which may of course just as well occur with other learners who do not have mental health difficulties).

❑   Remember that mental health difficulties are not static and than many learners can and do move on from their illness. The fact that someone has a mental health difficulty is certainly not an indicator that they will not be able to progress and succeed.

Quick tips

o *Talk to learners in a sensitive and discrete way about what their needs are and how you can best meet them in class.*

o *Don't make assumptions.*

o *Allow learners time and flexibility.*

o *Give supportive reassurance.*

Useful resources

❑ **The Mental Health Foundation and Foundation for People with Learning Difficulties (www.mentalhealth.org.uk)**

The Mental Health Foundation produces many publications on mental health. It also produces a newsletter, monthly updates and fact sheets.

Contact:
Mental Health Foundation, 7th Floor, 83 Victoria Street, London SW1H 0HW.
Tel: 0207 802 0300, Fax: 0207 802 0301
e-mail: mhf@mhf.org.uk

❑ **(MIND) The Mental Health Charity (www.mind.org.uk)**

Mind is a mental health charity in England and Wales. Their aim is to advance the views, needs and ambitions of people with experience of mental distress, promote inclusion by challenging discrimination, influence policy through campaigning and education, inspire the development of quality services which reflect expressed need and diversity, and to

achieve equal civil and legal rights through campaigning and education. Fact sheets can be downloaded from their website on issues such as mental health problems and learning disabilities, by visiting the search page.

Contact:
Mind, 15–19 Broadway, London E15 4BQ.
Tel: 0208 519 2122, Fax: 0208 522 1725,
E-mail: contact@mind.org.uk,
Information helpline: Mindinfoline@mind.org.uk

Other publications

Wertheimer A (1997) *Images of Possibility: Creating Learning Opportunities for Adults With Mental Health Difficulties*. Leicester: NIACE. This book looks at key features and innovative practice in LEA and college provision.

Skill (2002) *Students with Mental Health Difficulties: Your Questions Answered*. London: Skill. This gives an overview of the specific issues related to working with learners with mental health difficulties in a further education context.

People with autistic spectrum disorders

People with autistic spectrum disorders have difficulty with communicating and can have particular difficulties with social relationships and making friends. The autistic spectrum includes people with Asperger's syndrome. People may be at varying points on the spectrum with some people experiencing greater difficulties than others. People with autistic spectrum disorders display the complete range of abilities, from those with severe learning difficulties to those with average or above average intelligence. The nature of their difficulty is often misunderstood, leading to inappropriate treatment, bullying, social isolation and depression.

People with autistic spectrum disorders find it very hard to understand the social rules that most people automatically follow and so can find it difficult to join in with conversation, make small talk, or know when to allow someone else to speak. This difficulty can also mean that they do not always pick up on subtle social cues, for example a change in the tone of someone's voice which means they are about to leave. People with autistic spectrum disorders may be described as 'socially odd' and sometimes make remarks which seem perfectly appropriate to them but can appear quite inappropriate to other people, and be unaware of the effect that their words or actions have on other people. They may ask repetitive questions, seeming to take no notice of the answer. They may also have great difficulty in making eye contact or their eye contact can be unusual.

People with autistic spectrum disorders can have great difficulty with understanding abstract concepts. They may use language very literally and so find it extremely hard if other people use language loosely or metaphorically.

Their difficulty with generalising can mean that they find it hard to transfer from one situation to another and so may be described as 'rigid' or 'inflexible'. They are often very reliant on a fixed routine and find even very small changes to this extremely disconcerting. They may have obsessive or stereotypical behaviour such as extreme orderliness or tidiness, or always wanting to sit in the same seat, and become very upset when this cannot happen. They may be very preoccupied with and knowledgeable about a particular subject and spend hours studying everything about it or talk about it regardless of the interest of the listener. This can be a source of conflict and annoyance for those around them.

A further difficulty experienced by people with autistic spectrum disorders concerns the way in which they receive information and respond to sensation. They may find certain sounds, touch or smells very disconcerting. They may also take a long time to make sense of information.

Some ways of working with people who have autistic spectrum disorders

In general:

- ❏ Understand that behaviour which may seem bizarre or rude to you is not a deliberate attempt to offend but stems from a person who sees the world in a different way.

- ❏ Be careful to use clear and unambiguous language. Avoid language which could be misinterpreted, such as metaphor. Remember that people with autistic spectrum disorders may find it hard to elicit meaning from the tone of your voice.

- ❏ Remember that even good natured teasing can be misinterpreted as criticism.

- Do not allow unusual behaviour to detract you from recognising ability. People with autistic spectrum disorders can have extreme ability in certain areas of learning.

In class:

- Try to provide a calm environment with as few distractions as possible and a clear routine to sessions. Establish with the group ground rules such as agreed times for breaks. Be very clear in advance if there are going to be changes to this, for example if there is going to be a different teacher or a visitor.

- Ensure consistency of approach and make sure that you explain at the beginning of a class what is going to happen during that session.

- Always use clear language. Some people may prefer written to oral instructions.

- Provide a visual timetable with work organised from left to right and from top to bottom.

- Make sure the person understands what work they are meant to do, how long they are to do it for, when it has finished and what happens next.

- Be sensitive to the fact that people with autistic spectrum disorders might find group work extremely challenging or may be disturbed by background noise or an excess of visual information.

- Do not ignore people in class just because they do not always answer questions appropriately.

Quick tips

o *Remember that autistic spectrum disorders are on a continuum and that many people who lead very successful lives can exhibit behaviour which could be seen as 'autistic'.*

o *Acknowledge the learner's different perspective rather than just dismissing it as odd.*

o *Ensure consistency of approach.*

o *Use clear and unambiguous language.*

Useful resources

❑ **National Autistic Society (www.nas.org.uk)**

The National Autistic Society supports families of autistic children and adults but also helps other professionals working with autistic people. The complexity and variety of the condition is not widely understood and their website provides an enormous amount of information ranging from introductory information to links to research sites.

Contact:
393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG.
Tel: 0207 833 2299; Fax: 0207 833 9666.

People with speech difficulties

Speech difficulties can have a range of causes. Some people who have a neurological disability such as cerebral palsy or multiple sclerosis or people who have had a stroke can have difficulty with speaking clearly. People who have been born deaf or with partial hearing may have never been able to hear words in a way which has allowed them to learn to speak clearly. There are also people who have no other disability but who find speech difficult and often stammer.

Speech difficulties can result in individuals becoming very isolated because other people become impatient and do not give them the time to communicate properly. Speech difficulties can often cause considerable embarrassment to other individuals and to staff, hence they avoid asking questions and entering into dialogue. People also often assume that someone who has a speech difficulty is less intelligent than other people and can patronise them or leave them out of discussions. Consequently, the potential of people with speech difficulties has often not been recognised.

People who are close to someone with a speech difficulty have often found ways of understanding their speech. Sometimes a person with a speech difficulty will use someone who knows them well to interpret their speech to others. Other people may choose at times to use hand written notes, specialist speech software or a communication board with words and pictures on it.

Some ways of working with people who have a speech difficulty

In general:

❑ Establish whether individuals with speech difficulties have their own strategies of alternative communication, for example using hand written notes.

❑ Take time. Speech which can appear very hard to understand when you first hear it can become much easier as you spend more time with the person and begin to understand their individual speech patterns.

❑ Check your own responses. People often make an automatic assumption that people who have difficulty with speech are less intelligent. Focus on what a person is saying and not how they say it.

❑ People listening to someone with a speech difficulty often feel embarrassed. Remember this embarrassment is your problem and not theirs and make sure it does not lead to you avoiding asking them questions and leaving them out of discussions.

❑ Initially ask questions that require short answers, although avoid being patronising by only asking questions that require a yes or no answer.

❑ Try to avoid guessing or completing people's sentences for them, unless they want you to do this to speed up communication.

❑ When it is difficult to understand a person's answers, keep calm and look at their body language and expression as these might help your understanding.

❑ If you have not understood what someone says, ask them to repeat it. Do not just nod and assume it was not important, but repeat back what you think they have said and confirm understanding

In class:

❑ Sometimes one other member of the group can understand a particular individual's speech patterns very well and the person with a speech difficulty might wish to use them when other people find it hard to understand what they are saying. If so, make use of this.

❑ Accept that learners may find group situations stressful but do not exclude them from groups unless they expressly want this. Allow time for their contributions and follow ground rules to ensure that other learners do not interrupt inappropriately.

❑ Some people will find it much easier to speak in some situations than others, for example when they are feeling relaxed and are not being put under pressure. People with a stammer sometimes find it much easier to speak on the telephone than in face-to-face dialogue. Learn from the people you work with what situations are preferable to them.

❑ Be aware that there may be times when technology can help, for example a learner in a creative writing class used speech

software on a laptop to read out his work to the rest of the class.

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Quick tips

o *Explore with the learner alternative strategies which might work for them.*

o *Take time and never give up and say 'It doesn't matter'.*

o *Don't make automatic assumptions about intelligence on the basis of someone's speech.*

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Useful resources

Both Scope and RNID (both listed previously) will cover information regarding people who have speech difficulties.

Conclusion

This booklet only covers some of the more frequently experienced disabilities and learning difficulties: there are many others (for example specific medical conditions) which are omitted. However, the basic principles of seeing the person first and foremost as an individual learner and working with them on how you can best support their learning still apply.

The booklet is intended to give you an initial outline both of the effects that some learning difficulties and disabilities can have on learning and some strategies to support learners. Of course there will be times when you might feel you require more specialist help, in which case you should seek advice from the named person in your organisation who is responsible for learners with disabilities and learning difficulties.

You might want to enlist the help of a specialist tutor to work in more depth with a particular individual. You might also want to seek their advice in arranging more general staff development. This could take the form of general disability awareness training. It could also focus on a particular disability, for example training on how best to work with deaf learners or learners with mental health difficulties. Remember that such training is important not just for teaching staff but also for other members of staff, for example front line reception staff or those who work in other services such as the canteen.

Finally, many of the good practice ideas in this booklet represent good practice for all learners. Equal opportunities in learning does not mean treating all learners identically, but giving all learners equal opportunities to access and succeed in learning.

Organisations which could offer general advice and guidance

❑ **Skill, the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities (www.skill.org.uk)**

Skill is the only organisation which works specifically to further the interests of disabled learners in post-school education. It covers the areas of policy development, research and information.

Skill runs an information service, produces regularly updated information leaflets, and also produces a regular journal and newsletter.

❑ **NIACE, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (www.niace.org.uk)**

NIACE is the leading national organisation for adult education. Its work includes policy development, research and the creation of resources. It produces a monthly journal *Adults Learning*. NIACE has a dedicated team of staff working on issues related to disability and learning difficulty.

❑ **Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) (www.lsda.org.uk)**

The Learning and Skills Development Agency is a strategic national resource for the development of policy and practice in post-16 education and training. The Agency was previously known as the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA). It produces a wealth of publications, many of which can be downloaded from the LSDA website.