

# **Interim Study for HMPPS POELTS Scanning Pen Intervention Research**

## **“Prison Officer Training Programmes - Introducing Assistive Technology into the Adult Classroom”**

### **Research conducted by Christine Franklin (Christine Franklin Consultancy)**

#### **Scanning Pens Support and Implementation Findings Her Majesty’s Prisons and Probation Service**

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Research Review of the finding from Christine Franklin’s Study  
A Study of Prison Officer Entry Level Training supported with  
ExamReader and ReaderPen

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# LEARNING SUPPORT IN PRISONS FOR PRISON OFFICER LEARNERS

## Opportunities, Obstacles and Solutions

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This guide was developed from the research undertaken by Christine Franklin:

### **Prison Officer Training Programmes - Introducing Assistive Technology into the Adult Classroom**

**2020** (Christine Franklin Consultancy) This research study review is written by Julia Clouter – Scanning Pens Head of Education services, who also supported Franklin’s study in the initial phase of training and resourcing. The term ‘Prison Officer learner’, has been used in this report to describe any Prison Officer undertaking studies at any stage of their careers with HMPPS.

Links to documents and research referenced can be found in Appendix A.

## HMPPS OPPORTUNITIES

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Prison Officers in HMPPS are fully supported and encouraged to work towards promotion and commitment to equal opportunities is embedded across the Prison Officer training services. Professional development opportunities for both new and long-term serving Prison Officers is well established and well resourced. The support of learning and career development is viewed as crucial to maintaining staffing and developing the workforce. HMPPS support additional learning needs and emotional well-being is a high priority of the service.

### **HMPPS Challenges**

- To improve employee retention and reduce burnout in an environment of elevated occupational stress
- To improve levels of job satisfaction
- To better support the promotional aspirations for officers with literacy difficulties
- To encourage disclosure of learning needs during recruitment and to anticipate and facilitate provision of academic support through all training and development phases in the officers’ career
- To reduce perceived barriers to promotion arising from academic learning and reading anxiety

## POELTS EXAM AND READERPEN INTERVENTION STUDY

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Franklin’s research focus this study is with Prison Officer Entry Level Training Services. (POELTS). The research took place across eleven UK-based HMPPS learning centres for operational staff. It also included centres for vocational, compulsory, voluntary and initial training.

Research on the use and educational impact of Scanning Pens assistive technology for reading support was initially established in HMPPS prisons. Groundwork for Franklin’s research study series “Supporting the Prisoner with Assistive Technology” can be found in Appendix A. HMPPS national research committee, ethics board, education team, individual governors and security teams, have all been involved in providing approval for Franklin’s studies. Franklin, ‘Fire and Compliance’ is also available in Appendix A.

Following previous research conducted by Franklin, ExamReader (ER) was identified an appropriate strategy for reading administrative documents by Prison Officer staff. The ExamReader is GDPR compliant and operates securely. It does not retain the information that it scans and reads. As such, it is an appropriate aid to support reading tasks undertaken by staff requiring reading support.

ExamReader is an approved access arrangement for examinations and tests, It is used widely to support learners with literacy difficulties in schools and workplace settings to achieve greater success in examinations by making reading accessible. Important factors for HMPPS, that supported the adoption and approval of ExamReader for this study were GDPR compliance, secure Wi-Fi free reading support and as a JCQ approved access arrangement for exams.

ReaderPen (RP) support was also identified as an appropriate strategy for Prison Officer learner completing professional development and learning activities involving reading where a support need was identified. The dictionary support tool was found to enable both reading fluency and to provide helpful vocabulary support while learning. The advantage of the ReaderPen is that it reduces reliance on support for reading from a HMPPS tutor or peer and increases learning independence. The discreet nature of the ReaderPen also makes it possible for a Prison Officer learner to listen privately to the learning support for reading that they are receiving via headphones. Both of these functions were found to be important in reducing the visibility of a learning need and increasing learning capacity for participation in learning.

Feedback from both tutors and Prison Officer learners in the study has been very positive. The most important features described by them, included ease of reading independence, privacy of support through the use of the headphones and that a Scanning Pen was discreet and portable. Franklin's study is still ongoing at the time of writing this interim report. The observations that she has made over the past twelve months have shaped the following recommendations made for best practice for HMPPS when adopting Scanning Pen technology.

The study also highlights challenges to positive adoption of Scanning Pens, and the potential strategies that increase the confidence of Prison Officer learners to seek support and self elect to use a Scanning Pen. Below are a number of key points to consider when cascading a Scanning Pen strategy to HMPPS staff with responsibility for training, staff well-being and professional development.

## **GUIDANCE THAT SUPPORTED SUCCESSFUL INTERVENTION OF SCANNING PENS:**

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- Prior to the physical introduction of Scanning Pens, an in-depth introductory e-mail was sent introducing the ER and RP to staff teams explaining the study and intervention.
- Video links with training on how to use the Scanning Pens were provided in introductory information.
- Implementation guidance was provided through small group training sessions that outlined potential challenges and opportunities during the roll out of the Scanning Pens.
- Teaching teams provided feedback to confirm their understanding of RP and ER functionality, their understanding of best practice and to request further support if needed.
- Tutors highlighted that a valuable part of the introductory session was provided by Scanning Pens Education Services. These sessions explored how to introduce Scanning Pens to Prison Officer learners while minimising the worry of not being publicly identified as having learning need. Strategies to encourage positive adoption and regular use of Scanning Pens were also provided and found to be helpful.

Preparation and training also included:

- Demonstration of positive modelling and the use of help scripts for regular demonstration of the pens' functions, e.g. "just to remind you that the ReaderPen has a dictionary, you can find it by ..."

- Help scripts that describe getting support without feeling shame e.g. “Some of the technical words in this document may be unfamiliar to you. The ReaderPen has dictionary definitions that can help with this, scan and listen to the definition for clarification or you can use the paper-based dictionary provided.”
- Recognition of low-level peer teasing and how to minimise and challenge negative attention from peers, e.g. “This is a supportive learning environment; keep your comments supportive and positive.”
- Recognition of overt discriminatory language and how to challenge this to stop further instances, e.g. “We operate under the equalities act, use of derogatory and discriminatory language will not be tolerated and is taken very seriously.”
- Training included approaches that support the andragogy of teaching adult learners with a reading difficulty. The andragogy approach focused on motivation, readiness and orientation to learning. It also acknowledges the learner’s previous experience and ability to take control of their own learning behaviours and choices.

A number of requests were made for this support session to be made available as an online training module by Scanning Pens for future use. It was also requested for this session to be accredited as CPD for tutors. Staff who participated in these training sessions described them as being highly effective in supporting their understanding of the Scanning Pens and adult learning issues.

- Scanning Pens were subsequently introduced to Prison Officer learners at the start of the training course as part of the introductory unit of work being undertaken. This introduction was delivered to all participants in the study and described as part of the package rather than as a new or additional learning support tool. All Prison Officer learners were offered the opportunity to explore using a ReaderPen. Access and use of a wide range of support tools were also presented and encouraged.
- Scanning Pens remained visible and available during subsequent sessions. In a number of centres a system for signing out pens for regular use was implemented. In other centres pens were assigned to officers who requested them and agreed to participation in the study on a long-term loan.
- A recommendation was made that staff routinely modelled the use of Scanning Pens during learning sessions.
- All Prison Officer learners were encouraged to request additional information both during the learning session and privately to break down the cultural norm of not requesting support.
- A paper-based implementation and support guide for Scanning Pens was available to Prison Officer learners. This guide contained advice, approaches and frameworks for use within the classroom and for home/private learning. QR codes to Scanning Pen short learning support videos for quick access to independent training was also contained in the guide.
- Feedback questionnaires for tutors and learners were provided to gather any additional information about learning needs and support requirements.
- Posters and information about RP and ER in an easy to read format were displayed near vending machines, smoking sites, toilets and break out areas.
- Supportive training videos with the voice of adult learners who have achieved learning and exam success with RP and ER were made available via QR codes both on posters and user guides.

## CHALLENGES TO SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION AND SOLUTIONS EXPLORED:

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- Resistance to indicating a need for learning support is a norm.
- Staff modeled use of learning support tools and discussed equal opportunities through the course and encouraged use of learning support tools for all participating officers without identifying individuals.
- Resistance to completing written feedback about the Scanning Pen learning intervention blocked progress.
- Feedback is imperative. Problems are often simple to resolve. Where feedback was provided it was often around simple procedures such as being able to switch a Scanning Pen from right to left-handed mode.
- Peer mentoring of dyslexic learners by more experienced dyslexic learners is a proactive and empowering approach. The creation of and use of video support and learning blogs by Prison Officer learners could be a strategy to further empower individuals as learning champions. This would also provide recognition for supporting others, positive behaviour modelling and sharing strategies towards learning success.
- Opportunities to talk to staff, managers, TEAs and tutors via email, phone or in person greatly improves the sharing of feedback about learning needs and the success of interventions.

Positive implementation approaches in a nutshell:

- Thorough planning and preparation prior to introduction of Scanning Pens by all stakeholders
- Positive adoption of the strategy and willingness to support the project is implicit from the top down
- Engagement of tutors with training and preparation work
- Good use of publicity materials and learning support materials at the Learning Centres
- Ongoing support, positive modelling and encouragement by tutors

The study indicated that another potential strategy that could be used prior to the recruitment phase would be a video that explored the positive impact of disclosing a learning need or reading difficulty. This would sit alongside information about all the support strategies that are in place at HMPPS. The voice of peer learning mentors who have achieved success with a learning difficulty would be a very valuable resource.

Significant quotes and feedback from the study to date:

Senior management, learning centre managers and trainer expert advisors have shared their visions and positive hopes for the use of ReaderPens as a 'normal way of working', to remove stigma and support learning outcomes and future career confidence.

Barriers to successful adoption of Scanning Pen technology in the study:

- On the whole adoption and feedback from tutors was very positive.
- There was a lack of understanding by a few tutors who perhaps did not fully understand or value the Scanning Pen intervention and work of the study. This was at one study location and was perhaps, due to lack of planning preparation and positive engagement.

- A few tutors questioned the need to support adult learners with reading difficulties. This is because they believed that adult learners would have already developed strategies for learning.
- A few tutors described seeing no learning difficulties in their class and that Prison Officer learners did not identify their own learning needs. Subsequently no support was provided.
- A few tutors indicated that the use of ReaderPens did not have a place in their training programmes.

## **Understanding the Adult with Learning Difficulties – An Andragogical Approach**

Feedback provided to date:

A TEA identified the importance of striking a balance as a teacher and the importance of using adult approaches to learning support when the adult has a learning difficulty. During an interview, a TEA gave the following example:

**“I introduce the use of the pens at the beginning of the session, however I noticed in the afternoon session a learner having reading difficulties, but he hadn’t said anything”.**

Learners with reading difficulties stated that they were worried they would be treated like a child by the tutor supporting their learning need. This ongoing stigma can be the true experience of the adult learner and a barrier to their learning. Often this stigma arises from a prior experience of adult learners who have lived through traumatic or negative learning experiences at school or home. It is particularly difficult where when a learning need was never formally identified or supported. A coping strategy often developed by adult learners is to shield themselves from being in visible need of support. Overcoming the barriers adult learners experience with reading difficulties can be achieved with an andragogical approach. Understanding previous experiences, stigmas and embarrassment that is being experienced by an adult learner is a valuable skill for tutors to appreciate and ameliorate.

Franklin provides a list of recommendations for subjects to be discussed and reflected upon at diversity and inclusion meetings in her full report. In brief, these include study of stigma, camouflage and obfuscation of learning needs, anxiety around hidden agendas and entrenched coping mechanisms.

### **Help Script to support Implementation:**

Scanning Pens introductory help script:

- “One tool we now offer are these ReaderPens, which help with finding the definition of words you may not have come across. They also help with reading and pronunciation. Please feel free to pass them around; everyone should have a go while you are here today”.

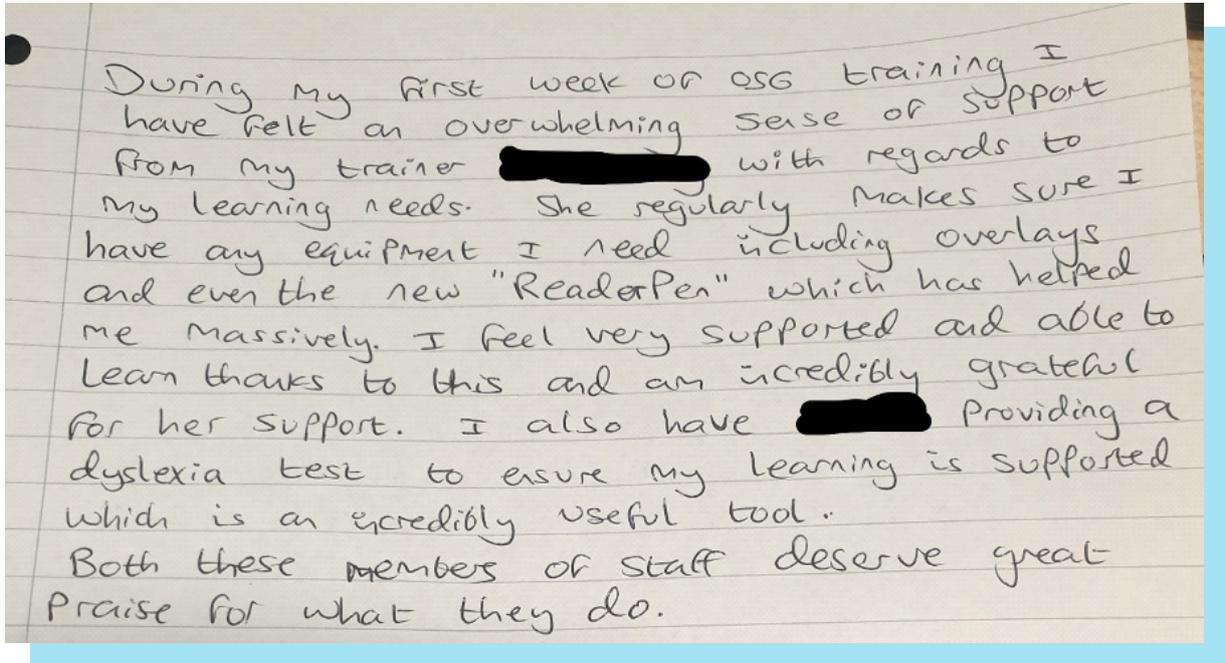
### **Other key points to support Implementation:**

- Identify Scanning Pens’ champion tutors who are able to provide additional training and support for this learning intervention. Tutors may face uncertainty themselves or have little or no experience of working with adults with a learning difficulty.
- The ‘identity’ of the ReaderPen: Promote the understanding that ReaderPens support many learning needs, including dyslexia, poor reading skills, poor vocabulary and communication skills. Also sight and hearing difficulties, and also supports Prison Officer learners using English as a second language.
- Promotion and reward of officers who make use of introducing and/or using the pen, to have this added towards their own personal development record.
- Provide a training session specifically on an introduction to resources available and include how to use the ReaderPen for all Prison Officer learners. This training should not be attempted to be delivered during a lessons where the key focus is on delivery of lesson content.

- Assumptions or suggestions by tutors that adult learners should either share their difficulties or get on and cope without support should be challenged when observed and supported with further training.

### Feedback from POLETS who took part in the study:

Hand-written feedback from a Prison Officer learner. This is an example of good practice and the impact of recognising and supporting reading difficulties.



### Extracts from an interview conducted with POELTS trainee PT1:

PT1 was asked his age and background and the outcomes of the final test he had recently sat. He had just been informed he had passed with 85% and was understandably emotional and overcome by this result.

*"I'm 30, well I've no GCSEs or anything. I've nothing..."*

*...that was my final test, apart from the mid-term, I've failed every test and had to do it again, but I passed the mid-term first time and just passed the final, first time".*

***"I am proud of myself."***

### Extracts from an interview conducted with The Learning Support Manager (LSM)

*"It (the pen) enables us to see the real potential, and the person to find their own potential, see what they are capable of and that can be quite a shock..."*

*...PT1 was the only person to speak out in his class about dyslexia, PT1 was brave enough to put his hand up and acknowledge a learning need. You were very brave, others aren't..."*

*...we will be using PT1 as an example of the impact on asking for help, he used the pen to great success and been able to recognise his own abilities and had a far much easier and smoother journey, gaining a really good score".*

## Thanks:

Scanning Pens would like to thank all of the student officers, tutors and managers who have taken part in this study. You have provided us with valuable feedback that will improve outcomes for many more learners. Our knowledge of how to support training and implementation for HMPPS has grown greatly. We also give our thanks to Christine Franklin, who is a member of the Prisoners Learning Alliance and continues to research and support the work of HMPPS to improve learning outcomes and opportunities for all.



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Scanning Pens

## Appendix A

Prison Research by Christine Franklin (Christine Franklin Consultancy)

<https://www.christinefranklinconsultancy.com/research-articles>

### **Prison A - Functional Skills - Supporting the Prisoner Learner with Assistive Technology**

We followed the journey of prisoners undertaking Functional Skills in a Category C prison in the South West of England.

### **Prison B - Peer Mentors and Workshop Courses in Prison - training peer mentors with Assistive Technology to support learners in Workshop Courses**

We engaged with tutors on the peer mentor training course to empower and support peer mentors having access to Assistive Technology to support prisoner learns with poor or no reading skills or foreign national prisoners for whom English is a second language.

### **Prison C - Pre-Functional Skill Prisoners - Introducing Assistive Technology to Prisoners with no reading skills.**

We met a group of prisoners, including one foreign national prisoner, who were unable to read and write. We introduced reading pens to them to explore empowerment within a difficult environment.

### **Prison Officer Training Programmes - Introducing Assistive Technology into the Adult Classroom.**

We explored the importance of inclusive and equality practices within the complex world of Prison Officers training programmes - what technology can cross the boundaries of outside and inside the prison environment.

### **Fire and Compliance Document.**

Bringing Assistive Technology into the prison environment can be a fraught experience. With the support of Prison D's Security and Intel Manager we have put together this overview of the introduction of ReaderPens into the prison environment.