



# Christine Franklin Consultancy

Educational Research

## Interim Report – ReaderPens and ExamReaders – Prison Officer Study

### Abstract

Diversity, equality and inclusive learning are core values for today's companies. The level of engagement in supporting such values will be dependent on the sector and ethos of each company.

For Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), these core values enable a directed focus on promotion, supportive learning and career choices, and the emotional development and well-being of new and long-term serving prison officers.

In my previous studies I worked with prisoners for whom core value identification included achieving a transferrable skill, to reduce reoffending. This study considered the other side of HMPPS; prison officers. I was made aware management identified the importance of increasing job satisfaction, promotional aspirations and reducing staff turnover. Recently, there has been a recruitment drive from HMPPS to increase the number of prison offices in 2020/21.

Training establishments for POELTS and additionally, learning centres for operational staff undertaking vocational compulsory and voluntary courses were the areas of focus for this study.

Unfortunately, we had not foreseen the impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) at a mid-point of the study; the research project has not 'ended' but in limbo due to this unprecedented event. We wished to share the outcomes, data, findings and concepts which are presented in this interim report.

We have identified difficulties which manifested during the study, and how such can be avoided when undertaking future large study projects within work-based environments. The report acknowledges the input and support of the Skills for Life team. However, we also encountered barriers created by adult assumptions, not only from participants but also those supporting and leading the research.

Finally, we would like to thank the management team, who have helped put this report together. They were both supportive and proactive in identifying positive outcomes, proposed solutions to the difficulties found at this point, and therefore have set achievable goals to ensure an inclusive approach is offered to all those working and joining HMPPS.

*Christine Franklin, April 2020*

## Introduction

The initial concept to undertake a study with prison officers occurred during a visit to HMP Norwich. Christine Franklin was undertaking ReaderPen research within prison education departments, with tutors and prisoner learners (Franklin 2018, Franklin 2019, Franklin and Latham, 2019). Franklin noted a group of prison officers and was informed they were attending a training course. Franklin requested information about prison officer training and was introduced to the Skills for Life Manager, Brett Stringer, whom she entered into discussion to undertake a study with those undertaking training for a career in the prison service.

Franklin was invited to attend a senior management meeting and the following research ideas and questions began to take fruition.

1. The importance of inclusion, diversity, equality and supporting learning needs. The prison officers are encouraged to achieve their best during basic training. To date the service felt their capacity to support learning difficulties had been limited. **Would the provision of ReaderPens and ExamReaders help increase confidence and exam outcomes for adults with learning and reading difficulties?**
2. The importance of long-term investment and support of prison officers returning to courses and training throughout their career, to increase promotional aspirations of those officers with learning difficulties. A goal for the service is to actively offer supportive tools to those who may benefit from such. In turn this promotes inclusion, equality, and diversity. The prison service wished to advocate supporting prison officers throughout their career, to reduce stigma and tackle ingrained assumptions of adult learning needs including the well-being, mental health and career longevity of their staff and to create a culture of acceptance and openness. **Which approaches would be required to gain acceptance to the introduction of ReaderPens and ExamReaders for those attending operational, training, voluntary and compulsory short to long courses by management, tutors, and learners?**
3. The provision of a supportive reading tool to cross the boundaries of prison security needs and to have access not only within learning and training centres but also within working environments. **Can the ReaderPen studies undertaken within the prisons serve to support the concept of the use of ReaderPens and ExamReaders by prison officers in their working environment?**

## Method

A timeline of the research project can be found at **Appendix 1**.

**Appendix 2** names the prison officer management who joined the research project.

Neil Ryland, Business Development Manager at Scanning Pens Ltd, Julia Clouter, Head of Education for Scanning Pens Ltd and the lead researcher, Christine Franklin of Christine Franklin Consultancy, undertook training and supportive sessions at nine identified learning centres throughout the UK (**Appendix 2**).

ReaderPens and ExamReaders were allocated to the Lilleshall Team who deliver two of the identified training elements for the research project. PE Training Course and POELTS Training Course; Lilleshall was provided with 20 ReaderPens and 10 ExamReaders.

Each Learning Centre was allocated approximately 2 ReaderPens and 2 ExamReaders.

Provision of posters to advertise the study and availability of the ReaderPens, sent to the Learning Centres and Jackie Cooper, either in physical or pdf form.

Provision of two leaflets, one for tutors and one for learners, were designed and sent in a pdf format to Jackie Cooper to distribute to the learning centres and to Howard Masters (PE) and Brett Stringer (POELTS) at Lilleshall.

An Implementation Guide, specifically for work-based studies, was developed and produced to offer supportive advice, approaches and frameworks for use within the classroom and home/private learning. The guide included QR codes to enable quick access to the feedback questionnaires for tutors and learners. One Learning Centre Manager (LCM) identified a need for the questionnaires to be in paper format, a pdf was supplied via email.

Consent forms for all lead management co-ordinators involved in the study, were signed and returned to Franklin. Consent forms of all tutors and participants would be held at Lilleshall or the training centres to ensure adherence to confidentiality and data protection guidance.

Sarah Wetton shared an introductory email about the study to all tutors who may have visited one of the participating learning centres during the study timeframe.

Jackie Cooper acted as a point of contact to share all research materials including the implementation guide, the 'how-to' leaflets, consent forms, questionnaire and feedback forms and answer or direct any questions to Franklin.

Due to Coronavirus (COVID-19) Franklin quickly developed email questionnaires to replace the planned March and April interviews. A remote online interview was conducted with Gary Reed, furthermore phone and email contact has continued with those managers who were furloughed or on restricted duties.

## March 2020 - Outcomes and Reflections to date.

### Unforeseen difficulties

- A change of venue relating to the PEOLTS phase. **Reflection:** this was an unforeseen difficulty; however, Brett Stringer re-arranged for this phase of the study to be moved to Lilleshall.
- A proposed future structural change of the PEOLTS course; training is to move from classroom-based to an apprenticeship. The new course will involve part classroom, part work-based learning and further ongoing training at learning centres during the year apprenticeship. **Reflection:** We had considered waiting for the start of an apprenticeship course but due to the format not quite being finalised we decided to follow the traditional training programme to provide some evidence of impact.
- Time between delivery of information, training, and receipt of pens in the Learning Centres. **Reflection:** The Learning Centres are divided geographically. A webinar approach would have enabled all centres to receive the training at approximately the same stage. This issue is directly my responsibility and therefore future studies/research will involve the offer of webinar training to overcome geographical difficulties.
- Tutor/Trainer Expert Advisor (TEA) involvement: At an initial introductory session Clouter and Franklin encountered some resistance to the introduction of assistive technology. Gary Reed, (Lead Project Manager & Diversity and Inclusion Lead) returned to this theme in his interview (**Appendix 3**). Reed (2020) identified resistance as a norm. He suggested inviting representatives from the ground team, to be part of the initial research planning stage, may have addressed potential difficulties and concerns to be resolved before the introduction of ReaderPens into the classroom.
- Coronavirus (COVID-19). **Reflection:** this was an unforeseen element for the whole of the UK however, the use of remote interviews and conferencing have enabled the research to be discussed and evaluated.
- Resistance to completing feedback questionnaires. **Reflection:** One tutor suggested TEAs, face time restrictions when delivering courses and therefore a reluctance to complete additional paperwork may explain the lack of returned questionnaires. Offering the staff an opportunity as to how they would like to share information could have been resolved if they had been party to the initial meetings. Feedback is imperative and therefore resolving blocks to achieving this would have ensured a proactive and empowering approach was undertaken.

### What has worked?

- Opportunities to talk to staff, managers, TEAs and tutors via email, phone or in person has improved the sharing of feedback.
- A 'thank you' letter (**Appendix 4**) explored the empowerment a ReaderPen can offer during a training course. The tutor's comments can be found at Appendix 4. It is worth noting neither participant completed a feedback questionnaire. However, their method of sharing their experiences provides a workable solution as to how to gain feedback.

## Positive approaches.

A variety of approaches and methods undertaken by the Learning Centres to promote and share information has been successful. Good use of publicity materials and support offered by Learning Centre staff has been shared with the research team.

- Production of an accessible 'learning folder' (figure 1). One LCM has put together all the materials, including introduction, consent forms, questionnaires, and data into a binder in her office to cover any periods of absence.

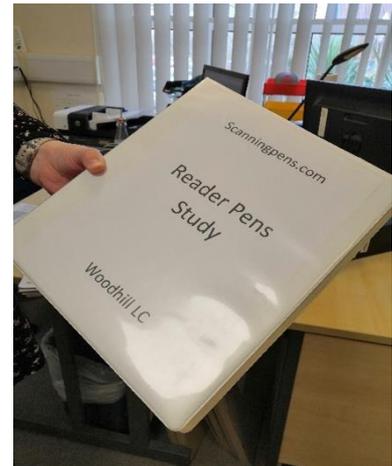


Fig 1: Example of 'learning folder'

- Identified 'key' sites for advertising posters (Figures 2). The posters were not only placed on information boards throughout the learning centres but were strategically placed near gathering points (Figure 3), including refreshment break out areas, smoking areas, back of toilet doors etc.



Figs 2: Information sites and information boards displayed details and posters about the reading pens study.

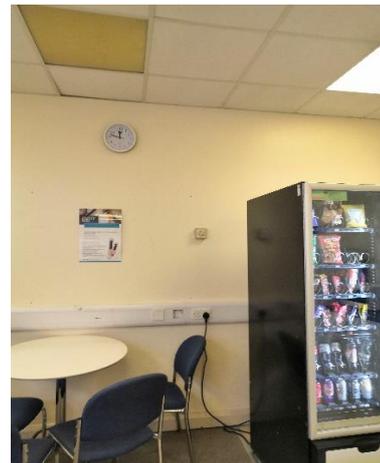


Fig 3: Refreshment areas displayed information introducing the ReaderPen

- LCMs requested feedback forms were produced in paper form, to enable participants to use the ReaderPen to complete questionnaires.
- Sarah Wetton emailed all tutors to introduce them to the research and reading pens before their arrival at the learning centres who were engaged in the study.
- The PE course at Lilleshall offers a pre-assessment element which involves the introduction of support for those with learning difficulties. This includes an introduction of skills, strategies and tools that are readily available for the trainees. Introducing the ReaderPen availability, at this time, would enable future trainees to consider if a ReaderPen may support them during the 16-week course. Having the opportunity to self-reflect may alleviate embarrassment, offer confidentiality, and provide the learners the opportunity to indicate their interest in having a ReaderPen before the commencement of the course.

- Difficulties for trainees who are expected to self-identify their learning needs. Learning Centres have an identified Learning Development and Support Manager on hand to help and offer assessments to those with learning difficulties. Part of this role includes the offer of any support strategies that may assist the trainee throughout their course. **Reflection:** Offering an information leaflet of all the equipment and strategies available to those due to join a course may enable the trainee to ask in advance about equipment or share their learning needs in confidence.

Those who have used the pen have reported positive experiences.

See Appendices for interviews and feedback from those who have shared their experiences 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.*

## Discussion

Senior Management, Direct Line Managers and those involved from the initial research process have been engaged and enthusiastic as to the hopes of achieving identified objectives.

### Tutor Assumptions

An incidence of difficult communication and lack of engagement occurred as follows:

1. Tutors who attend an introductory session to the ReaderPen study informed the research team of their uncertainty as to why there were asked to attend the training. Their manager did not accompany them.
2. Tutors indicated the use of ReaderPens did not have a place in their training programmes.
3. Tutors inferred it was a learner's responsibility to identify their own learning needs and therefore would have skills to request materials and tools to support their learning, the tutor's role was to deliver the course.

However, other tutors at the same introductory session engaged with the process and identified positive strategies to engage with ReaderPens in their training courses. These tutors engaged in dialogue and put forward concepts to support the removal of stigma for the learner who has learning difficulties. A multi-disciplinary team of advisors including a representative from these positive tutors, will help with any ongoing research processes and dissemination.

Additionally, the research team met Pat Rowbottom who self-declared as a severe dyslexic. His enthusiasm and interest led to him being asked to be a 'case-study', as a Trainer Expert Advisor (TEA) but also as a user of reading pens to aid his own coursework, position and learning needs.

### POELTS Apprenticeship

During the initial stages of the research meetings there was discussion as to a change of direction in the delivery of future POELTS training to that of an apprenticeship approach. Rather than wait for this to commence the research followed the traditional POELTS. However, interest and supporting the future POELTS Apprenticeship has enabled the research team to identify the use of TEA mentors during the operational side of the future apprenticeship course.

TEA mentors will be available at satellite stations to support POELT apprentices. The following strategies may support the use of ReaderPens, particularly if a POELT has used the ReaderPens in the initial class-room element of the course:

1. To produce and introduce a training framework for the TEA mentor. TEA's to gain understanding and knowledge of the ReaderPen and the functions which can promote and support independent validation when reading course material and to support a variety of learning disabilities/difficulties and needs.
2. ReaderPens to be made available in the centres the TEA mentors will visit. To include access to information pertaining to ReaderPens.
3. To provide apprentices, identified at initial training courses, a ReaderPen for the duration of their course. To enable the learner to bring their allocated pen to TEA mentor sessions, training courses and, in the future, whilst at work in prisons.

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

A TEA identified several difficulties when teaching adults, and the importance of striking a balance. This balance is particularly difficult when the adult student 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".

The tutor reflected the assumption that adults have capacity to declare a learning need or will be confident to use supportive tools and strategies in the classroom. However, on speaking with adult learners the fear of 'stigma' continues to exist. Initially a pedagogy approach may assist the tutor to explore and identify the student's learning difficulty. After a pedagogy supportive approach has been taken then an andragogy approach (Knowles, 1980, 1984) can occur. The method of adult teaching approaches to the course content can then be undertaken as the students will be self-directed and interested in the subject matter.

We would recommend the following subjects are discussed and reflected upon at diversity and inclusion meetings:

- Stigma – historic experiences of having a learning or reading difficulty create blocks to an adult who is expected to self-declare a learning need.
- Camouflage – years of hiding your learning need becomes a normative behaviour which will prove difficult to change when entering a classroom environment. The classroom environment is a 'space' which enhances those past difficulties.
- Agenda – fears of management having a 'hidden agenda' and trying to gather evidence to prove the learner is incapable of undertaking their job.
- Coping mechanisms – the learner has managed to this point, why announce a learning difficulty at this stage?

The following framework of supporting and removing stigma through a pedagogy thought process to ensure consequent adult teaching approaches may be considered.

- When introducing the use of Assistive Technology to encourage inclusive approaches, take a few ReaderPens into the lesson to pass around. Use of a script such as:  

"One tool we now offer are these ReaderPens which are great to use for finding the definition of words you may not have come across and to help with pronunciation, please feel free to pass around and have a go whilst I explain the course and general information to support you whilst you are here today".
- Identified champion tutors – discuss and communicate with tutors who feel confident and knowledgeable about the advantages of having access to ReaderPens. Often tutors may face uncertainty themselves or have little or no experience of working with adults with a learning difficulty. Assumptions that an adult can cope or will choose to share may create blocks. The Skills for Life team offer training to support and understand teaching those with learning difficulties.
- Exploring communication and insight as to the difficulties an adult may face when self-declaring may require further in-depth training support.

- The 'identity' of the ReaderPen. We met emotively attuned tutors who tap into their learners needs. Furthermore, these tutors understand and support different learning needs. However, some assumptions were made of the ReaderPen fitting one type of learning need, dyslexia. Subsequently the potential of the ReaderPen may be lost, previous research evidence indicates ReaderPens support a myriad of learning needs, including dyslexia, poor reading skills, poor vocabulary and communication skills, sight and hearing difficulties, and English as a second language (Franklin, 2018 and 2019, Franklin and Latham, 2019).

### Feedback Difficulties

Time constraints, it has become apparent TEA are struggling to engage with feedback/questionnaires but are willing to use ReaderPens.

How to gather feedback that will be efficient and easy? One TEA offered the following advice:

“Honestly? I feel that the advertisement and info on the ReaderPens could be more. Often trainers and learners are usually focused on the learning. I'd recommend sending a follow up email, focusing on the pen's functions and integration into the classroom. I'd recommend asking trainers and learners to send feedback to help demonstrate its success rate. I'd also consider asking for meaningful feedback i.e. a letter or a comment from a learner. Finally, I would suggest promoting any who make use of introducing and/or using the pen, to have this added towards their own personal development record”.

Feedback approaches:

- Share any positive data to LCMs as to successful approaches when introducing the ReaderPen to learners. Such information will lead to identification of positive approaches and a framework of engagement.
- If a tutor is having no success could this be due to delivery style? Tutors may assume there are no students with a learning need but become aware later in the day of some blocks to learning. This may indicate a continuance of stigma or embarrassment.

Both suggestions enable the importance of feedback to have a purpose, to support development and understanding of delivery and need.

### Learning Centre Manager Feedback

The voices of the LCM. **Appendix 5** shares three Learning Centres responses to a questionnaire sent out at the early stages of the Coronavirus lockdown. The following suggestions are based on the received responses and an interview at one other Learning Centre:

1. **Communication:** An imperative element of the study. Evaluating the three responses: two LCM appear to have had positive communication and information, the third appears to have received little support or misinterpreted the strategies of the research.
2. **Participation/Involvement:** The LCM involvement had been decided for them, they were informed of the study as opposed to being part of the initial concept and asked to be participants. Many of subsequent questions and concepts they offered would have alleviate some issues and offered resolution before the ReaderPens were sent into the learning environments. The LCM's infinite wisdom and understanding of their working

environment, which is invaluable, may have encouraged positive engagement in the promotion and use of AT.

3. **Training/Information sharing:** One LCM has reported a positive interaction with one of the research team, which enabled the LCM to gain full understanding as to purpose of the study. The research team would benefit in delivering the same 'session' to each learning centre. The framework used at LCM 3 establishment is the 'bases' of good practice and should be developed into the most effective training delivery approach.

Overall, of the five LCMs who responded to our question all but one identified a positive need for having accessible tools to support those with a learning need. We await feedback from four further centres.

### Positive Examples

We would like to end with some positive examples of Learning Centres, TEAs, the support teams, tutors and learners all working together to ensure inclusion, equality, diversity and a positive assistive technological tool, the ReaderPen, can work:

- Confident learners will admit to a learning need, leading to empowerment and outcomes beyond their experiences. POELT Trainee One (PT1) was interviewed at the end of his training course. PT1 is 30 years of age and has never passed an exam, he achieved an 85% pass in his final exam. PT1 found the course difficult; he is severely dyslexic. He had explored and discovered strategies during his course, including the use of a ReaderPen and turning to trusted adults to aid him. To experience his journey please read **Appendix 6**.
- A TEA with dyslexia was asked to undertake a questionnaire interview. His comments and that of another operational staff member, both using ReaderPens in their working environment, can be found at **Appendix 7**.
- Supportive and encouraging management approaches. In a recent interview Brett Stringer, Howard Masters and Nicky Volley shared their comments and thoughts in **Appendix 8**. Furthermore, Stringer kindly offered some additional views in **Appendix 9**.
- Sarah Wetton has been an advocate of this study from the initial concept. Her interview can be found at **Appendix 10**.
- Finally, Gary Reed has been mentioned in the body of this report, his full interview is at **Appendix 3**.

## **Appendix 1:**

Timeline:

March 2019 Franklin invited to Newbold Revel to give a presentation on ReaderPens and a study concept. The audience included management, training and support staff.

May 2019 – Julia Clouter (Scanning Pens Ltd) and Franklin attend the Equalities Day, an inhouse conference, to share and demonstrate ReaderPens with management and POELTS at Newbold Revel.

June 2019 – A draft outline of the identified participant teams to be involved in the study was drawn up:

1. POELTs at Newbold Revel.
2. Learning Centre managers throughout the UK.
3. PE training course at Lilleshall.

July 2019 – Meeting at Newbold Revel with management to discuss the delivery of a training session to tutors who would be involved in the research project.

August 2019 – Delivery of training session at Newbold Revel and Lilleshall from Clouter and Franklin. Unforeseen issues pertaining to PEOLTs phase saw this study moved to Lilleshall.

October – December 2019 – Learning centres visited, training and discussion with Learning Centre Managers – Clouter, Ryland (Scanning Pens Ltd) and Franklin.

January 2020 – Interview at Lilleshall, Franklin.

February 2020 – Interview Milton Keynes, Franklin.

March 2020 – COVID-19 interrupts study.

## Appendix 2

Prison Officer management involved from the initial concept and introduction of the study:

Sarah Wetton, Delivery and Development Co-Ordinator to support Learning Centres.

Brett Stringer, Skills for Life Manager was identified lead manager for the POELTs training element of the study.

Howard Masters, Delivery and Development Manager for the PE Courses.

Gary Reed, Lead Project Manager for the Professional Development and Capability department point of contact for senior management support.

Pat Rowbottom, Trainer Expert Advisor, identified tutor with dyslexia.

Prison Officer management who joined once study was being rolled out:

Jackie Cooper, Venues Hub Manager, line manager of all learning centre managers and supported the dissemination of study materials to Learning Centre Managers.

Learning Centre Managers based at:

HMP Guys Marsh

HMP Swaffield

HMP Hewell

HMP Holme House

HMP Pentonville

HMP Ranby

HMP Thorn Cross

HMP Usk

HMP Woodhill

### **Appendix 3: Interview with Gary Reed, 30<sup>th</sup> March 2020. Via Zoom.**

*What is your role?*

G: Lead Project Manager for Learning and Development (L&D). Lead for Diversity and Inclusion within the Prison Officer Service.

*How did you become aware of the study?*

G: The Equalities and Inclusion group were introduced to Christine in Autumn 2018. This was after some correspondence between Christine and Brett Stringer, our Skills for Life Manager.

I was interested in assistive technology and trying to make sure everyone involved in L&D and HMPPS access equal opportunities, including the learners coming through the doors.

My own personal experience has included witnessing those who have struggled within the learning environment. This can lead to none-engagement as they are struggling to read the course work, however they don't put their hands up and say something because they are embarrassed. I wish to consider how we can overcome that barrier.

The group attending the meeting were really impressed by the presentation Christine delivered on the use of ReaderPens. Once the Senior Management Team had approved the use of the pens as part of a study, we were up and running.

*Who did you anticipate the research supporting now and in the future?*

G: I see it not only supporting our learners but also our Training Expert Advisors (TEA), introducing the use of assistive technology into the classroom. I hope this will aid their understanding as to some of the disabilities people experience, such as dyslexia. The research isn't just about the technology, but also giving TEA's insight and understanding to some of the struggles people have.

I therefore expect not only the learners and TEAs to share their experiences but to pass this onto management to enable senior managers, who must sign off on any investment made by the company, to understand why such an investment will impact on everyone. Ultimately the outcome is ensuring we are complying with the Equality Act, which you could argue we have not done so in the past, we were not offering any assistance to anyone with learning disabilities.

Learning disabilities impact right across HMPPS and I know from talking to Christine how much this impacts upon prisoners too. I spent 27 years working in prisons, before I came into L&D, and I would say 60-70% of prisoners whom you met on a daily basis, were struggling with reading and writing. This may be due to missing school, or their upbringing, or lots of reasons, not only medical but also social reasons.

*You are aware prisoners have been part of a long-term study with ReaderPens. If prison officers are leaving training and are now aware of ReaderPens could this pave the way for a common ground and help to relieve tensions? Prison officers having used the pen or been made aware of it, provides them with knowledge, and being able to support and understand its use within the prison system?*

G: Yes, it is normal to be suspicious in the prison system so if you see something like a ReaderPen, which is a technology tool, then thoughts may turn to it being used as a tattoo gun or made into a telephone or another device. However, with our staff understanding this technology and its restrictions, how the device is put together, what software, if any, is required, once our prison

officers understand this, due to them being part of the study, when they go back into prisons they can impart their knowledge to security departments. They share their knowledge, of the study they are involved with and the nationwide prison study Christine has also done, explaining the benefits of the ReaderPen.

*Have you recognised or has anyone shared with you any positive frameworks that can be used in the prison service when using ReaderPens or assistive technology?*

G: I've received some anecdotal information from Sarah and Pat. Pat is using the pens and is a big advocate of the pen, it would be great to get him on the front page of the intranet when we wish to promote and discuss assistive technology in the future, including ReaderPens and other tech. Pat could share his first-hand experiences, sharing his views, he has told me 'this has changed my life, because of my severe dyslexia and what my life was like before I used this sort of equipment'.

Howard has also spoken of anecdotal stories around staff he has had at Lilleshall. Some who have missed out, which is quite sad, because the study started a couple of weeks after he had several learners who would have benefited. Howard has not had as huge an uptake that he would have liked, but he is very much an advocate of the pens and hugely positive about the study.

*So, it's not just the academic side of the study, but the human element, equality and inclusion and project development which is important to you? Sharing these stories with you is important to enable you to disseminate the data. How can this be supported further?*

G: I'd like to meet with Scanning Pens in the future, we haven't gathered as much information as we wanted to and it's difficult to do a presentation without some form of evidence. We'd like to continue with the study a bit longer, if possible, once things have returned to 'normal'.

*At the beginning of the study, we had a 'block' which we worked through, how was that experience for you as a service?*

G: Yes, quickly identifying blocks was fortunate in that we had some great management to enable this research to continue, our learning centre managers have been pro-active, Sarah Wetton and Nathan De-Thabrew. Brett Stringer has pushed this from the start, supported by Howard Masters. Their involvement has helped this greatly. I feel there has been some communication difficulties, and we have re-evaluated why this occurred.

However, we have found this process has gone quite smoothly, it can take staff in HMPPS up to six months to take on new changes across the board and to start and run with it. Because of Sarah, Nathan, Howard, Brett and Christine, who have just been working on this the whole time, people have got on with it and the trainers seem to have embraced this. I know we have a great group of trainers; they have managers with different priorities ensuring that their departments are mentioned, they have to remember to do.

I think dialling in to the meetings has helped, perhaps during the next dial-in meeting Christine could share an anecdotal report, a couple of good news stories that have occurred, particularly if we can continue with this study. It is mostly managers that attend this meeting, they can talk to their staff, share back great news and push on with the research.

*What are your future plans regarding the ReaderPens?*

G: We need to look at the report Christine is producing. I'd like to read about the views of the TEAs and learners who have used the ReaderPens have to say. We then put together a cost and benefits analysis to our SMT, ask them a series of questions, such as 'can we invest in this?'. They will understandably ask if there are alternatives, what will be the benefits when having these pens available to us? How many do we need?

In this current situation financial constraints will be an obvious outcome. I would like to think we could have access to technology in the future, I think we should be offering it now.

Having ReaderPens, will enable us to extend the benefits to whom they are shared and used by, such as The National Assessment Team. We had to be careful regarding this team being involved in the research and we eventually chose not to include them. We had concerns when offering a ReaderPen for this year's assessments, and not having them next year, the number of potential complaints would create a negative aspect for the team to have to deal with. If we get the opportunity to purchase ReaderPens and supply some to the National Assessment Team, as part of the strategy of offering assistive technology to people with recognised learning difficulties, this would enable our learning development, diversity and inclusion concepts to move on.

*From a research perspective this was a missed opportunity, not having the National Assessment Team involved, ethical considerations aside it may have produced the much sought-after evidence?*

G: Yes, but we did have to think about the impact on the National Assessment Team, they receive numerous complaints or appeals per year. Their workload would have increased, putting pressure on the team and therefore I understand why the National Assessment Team were thinking how to avoid potential complaints.

*You indicated equality and inclusion are concepts which have enabled you to identify how to support your learners, has the ReaderPens been part of this process of change?*

G: We were starting to ask questions, there is quite a lot of information and change coming from the Ministry of Justice, including the use of assistive technology, so we have to make sure that everything on My Learning, which is our electronic platform, is AT compliant. It is a start, but not everyone can have access to a Quantum computer, you go onto a wing and you have 20 staff on duty and 2 computers. Due to this issue, the lack of computers, written reports will have to be made available, such as those from the parole board. However, providing written reports would create an issue for those with reading difficulties.

I think that the service may be making an assumption, that if we put reports on our computers everything is fine, but not everyone will be able to read everything on a computer, and not everyone will be able to read the handout reports.

My concluding thoughts were computers with AT provision is not the only solution to accessibility, we needed to be thinking outside the box. During the process of reviewing these issues it was completely coincidental when Brett approached me to ask if Christine could attend a meeting. The ReaderPen study concept came at a time that we were asking questions about assistive technology, it was coincidental.

*Do you think the study manifested the quicker movement of considering other assistive technology?*

G: Yes, I think it has. I think we may have still been looking around if Christine had not come along and asked if we would be part of a study, providing us with ReaderPens. I believe we would have still been doing our research, looking at what AT is available. As we have no expertise as to what is out there, we may have had to approach all AT providers to request trials or to pay for a limited number of products. We would be at a financial loss if they did not work. Such an approach would limit the ability to gather information and evidence to support what would work for us and why.

*What has been learnt during the study, to support Equality and Inclusion in the workplace? Have the concepts discussed in the meetings enabled those strategies to be transferrable into the workplace for your prison officers?*

G: Yes, if we can get this past security. That is the big block in the prison system. They rightly need to be cautious, as prisoners can be innovative.

Security departments get twitchy, we can use ReaderPens in a training setting and in the learning centres, but how will that move forward, so they can be taken into prison, to read a parole or prisoner report is the next step.

*Would specially securely identified areas, where the pens can be made accessible work?*

G: Possibly, let me give you an example, if you need to use a metal detector you go and sign one out from security, all such equipment is kept on a shadow board (Figure 4). However, placing a piece of equipment into a shadow board identifies it as having the potential to create an issue, but are ReaderPens an issue? Are ReaderPens a risk? By placing the ReaderPens onto a shadow board this indicates a concern. We may need to get around this concept of issue or risk to promote the use of the pens in becoming a common, everyday occurrence.



Figure 4: Picture of a shadow board at a prison in the North of England

*Currently the pens that are in prisons are in the education departments on shadow boards. However, one prison has agreed for a prisoner to purchase his own pen which alleviates the potential creation of the ReaderPen becoming a commodity, perhaps reducing the security issue?*

G: I do understand, if you leave something around then someone will pick it up. Therefore, for the prison service they must consider the financial loss. Whoever purchases the pen may change its status. For example, if the prison purchases the pen, then it may need to go on an asset register and the member of staff keeps hold of it for the day, handing it in on leaving.

*What do you want to achieve next?*

G: We are finding our short-term gains; we are finding out about learners being able to use ReaderPens to access the training materials. We want to now consider the long-term gains, such as asking if a Prison Officer had access to them (sic ReaderPens) would this assist with their career? We certainly wish to work with the National Research Team and operational staff to follow the careers of those prisoner officers who have used them in training and further CPD courses. We may then want to ask questions, 'would they (operational staff) have applied to go for a National Assessment before they had access to the pens, and now, if they had access to the pen, would they apply? I think about the longer-term impact with the pens not only in work but also at home, with their family.

We could therefore ask 'how has the pen enabled you to keep up to date with work?'. The quick change of information is shared on the intranet, for someone who cannot read.... How do you follow the national security framework if you have a reading difficulty? I'd like to see longer-term evidence being gathered as to the impact of ReaderPens within the service. For example, gathering data from those attending half a day training, using this data to follow that officer, and seeing what impact this has on their careers and lives.

This led me to consider how we share the information about the availability of ReaderPens we are using currently. We provide posters or share written information on the intranet. If we think about this, we may not be reaching our target audience. Making use of short videos, in a format that will enable those who struggle with reading, to have access to the information and advice we are attempting to share would be a pro-active approach, rather than providing posters and reports for people who find reading a difficulty.

This year is the National Year of Inclusion, I am currently working on providing information about diversity and inclusion to be shared across our service. I am writing a campaign and a training package, and we need information from this research to fit into our inclusion umbrella, to signpost people. If you have a learning disability or a learning style that requires assistive technology, we will ensure people know where to go to be supported.

I'd like to introduce and develop short information videos which we place onto the front page of the intranet, to inform staff who to contact if they need access to assistive technology. I believe this style of information sharing should be offered in a variety of packages, not just a written article, equipment list or report, we have to be offering different approaches to ensuring inclusion is top of our agenda.

*Would you recommend research as an approach to support inclusive practices and protocols and how would you ensure those participating are active in this process?*

G: I always want to make my decisions on evidence and research can provide that evidence

I believe we needed everyone involved from the start, the initial research team involved managers who manager the people who in turn deliver the training. I would have brought in some of the delivery team, the TEAs, the Learning Centre managers and perhaps ironed out some of the barriers, straight away, the TEAs would have told us how best to deliver this, when is the best time and how to deliver the concept to their peers.

I appreciate how the managers involved are knowledgeable but bringing in the ground floor staff would have enabled them to feel empowered, bringing their team into the process. For example, if two members of staff are at the same level and one is a positive advocate, the others will feed off this, if the other is disinterested the concepts may get lost.

We should have started this with a bigger project team, gathering different views from different grades of all the people who would be involved in this.

*The management may have assumed that providing a solution would be well received with open arms, which was not necessarily the reality?*

G: Yes, there will always be some resistance, but having a variety of staff onboard at the beginning may have enabled us to see the resistance, hurdles and barriers before the project was delivered, giving us the chance to discuss and review.

There have been ups and downs during the study, some of the processes would have been better run with different approaches, however, there have been many positives. The TEA, who is severely dyslexic who became an advocate of the pen, is one such positive. He used his teaching skills to promote the use of the ReaderPen, this has allowed students to access technology, which L&D have not previously offered. We have heard of other students and staff who have used the ReaderPens and found them extremely helpful, for their reading and understanding of course content and work materials, this is great to hear.

As we draw the study to a close, I think being part of this has allowed us to gain access to technology that we have not used before. It has allowed us to consider if we should be offering ReaderPens and other assistive technology to our learners whilst trying to remove the stigma of reading disabilities or other learning issues.

A big thank you to ReaderPens and Christine for their flexibility, professionalism and understanding whilst we go through challenging times of discovering inclusive approaches to support the delivery of courses to HMPPS staff.

#### Appendix 4: Evidence of success within a training course: TEA and Learner feedback

"I decided to introduce the learner to the reader pen after I embarked on a discussion with the learner and found out which areas, in regards to her dyslexia, she felt she would need support with during the course.

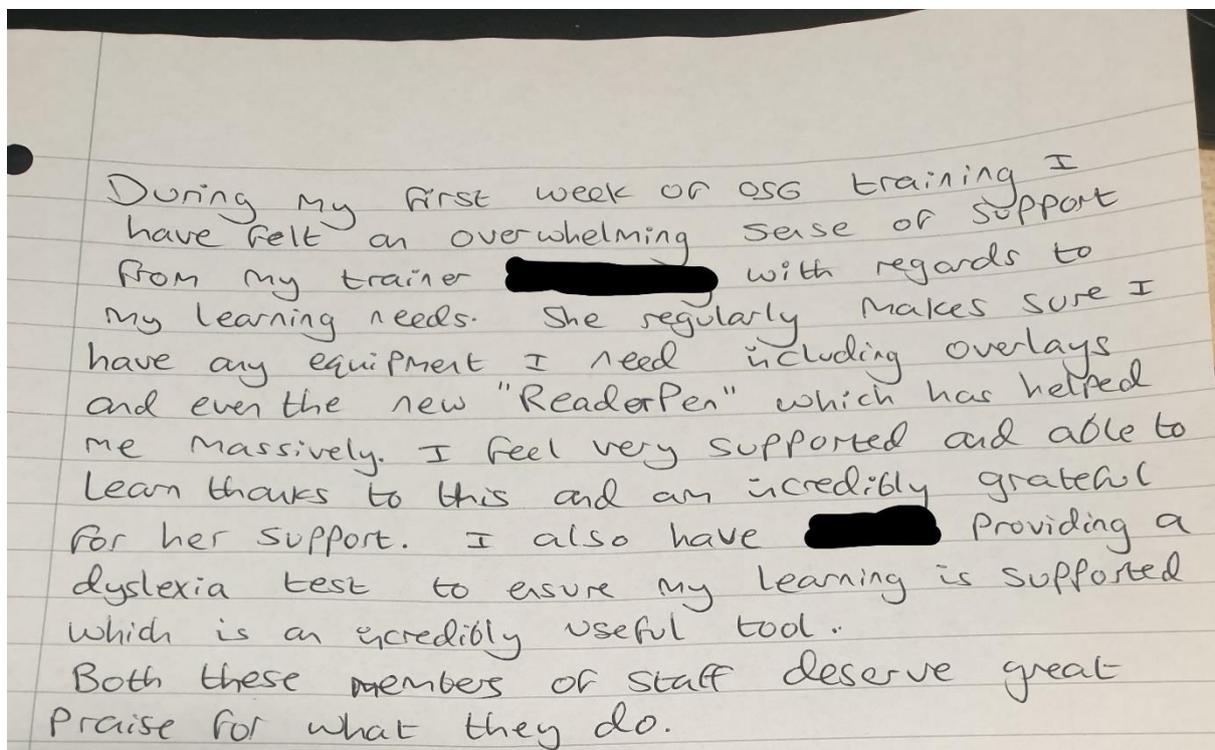
She identified that her speed of reading and being able to understand certain words that are presented to her, caused her difficulty. I had been introduced to the reader pen at Hewell Learning Centre. I received an explanation what it was for and all of its functions.

I feel the ReaderPen was an excellent tool, as not only can the learner use in class discreetly, due to the headphone function, but also during her final assessment. We offered her the option to take the pen away with her, if she wanted to, to do revision about the course on her own, away from the class setting.

This tool is definitely something I will continue to introduce to my learners as I noticed a change straight away in the learner when she began using it, her anxiety levels changed and she appeared more relaxed, and she was understanding a lot more of the content of the course subject".

Liz, Perry, Trained Expert Advisor, Hewell Learning Centre,  
Operational Support Grade Course, 2020.

Hand-written feedback from the learner, we thank her for sharing her learning experiences and alongside her praise to support this staff member, wish to share this example of good practice of the staff who recognised her neurodiversity needs.



During my first week of OSG training I have felt an overwhelming sense of support from my trainer [REDACTED] with regards to my learning needs. She regularly makes sure I have any equipment I need including overlays and even the new "ReaderPen" which has helped me massively. I feel very supported and able to learn thanks to this and am incredibly grateful for her support. I also have [REDACTED] providing a dyslexia test to ensure my learning is supported which is an incredibly useful tool. Both these members of staff deserve great praise for what they do.

## Appendix 5: Learning Centre Managers – feedback from emailed interview

Question	LCM1	LCM2	LCM3
Can you describe your role?	Provide a service for people attending the learning centre, making sure they have what they need in order for them to run a training course or hold a meeting.	Not really as no one has used the pens yet, would seem to be the role is that of an intermediary.	Venue Coordinator for the XX Learning Centre, part of Learning & Development Group, Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Services (HMPPS)
Who do you support as part of your role and why is this important to you?	We are a national training resource providing a place for national training, other prison service and government departments to run and hold courses and meetings. Making sure the classrooms are set up for their needs	Pen user when asked.	I support colleagues, trainers, delegates and visitors to the Learning Centre.
How did you become aware of the research project?	An email was received to say we would be taking part in a trial to have the scanning pens in the Centre's.	NA	My line manager advised me of the project.
What training/information was shared with you and how was this delivered?	Had an email to say someone would be attending the centre to show us how the scanning pens worked.	Someone came to the LC and talked to me.	I met with a representative from Christine Franklin Consultancy who spoke to me about the purpose of the project and demonstrated how to use the reader pens. I was given the relevant paperwork, information, guidance and a selection of ReaderPens to participate in the trial.
How did you envisage ReaderPens and/or Exam Readers would meet the needs of the learner and support them?	I think they are a very good idea; I haven't had anyone at XXX that at the moment has asked to use the pens.	Not sure	I could see the benefit of the reader pens assisting those who may find reading and subsequent interpretation of

			<p>information a challenge. Both the ReaderPens and ExamReaders have the potential to save time for the user in the classroom environment and in time limited exam conditions thus providing more capacity to engage in learning and complete exams.</p>
<p>Why is supporting learners important to the prison officer service?</p>	<p>Will make their job easier to do but in order for this to happen I believe that this should have gone into the prisons at the same time.</p>	<p>Not sure</p>	<p>To allow staff to realise their full potential in an inclusive environment, not disadvantaging staff who may have learning barriers.</p>
<p>What are your thoughts about reading pens and why do they suit the training environment? Would they be suitable for the working environment or those on apprenticeships?</p>	<p>Answered above</p>	<p>Not sure as no one has asked to use them.</p>	<p>I think that the ReaderPens are an excellent tool and do suit the training environment in certain circumstances. i.e. they are more beneficial in paper-based courses and less so for IT and scenario based courses. National training run a mixture of courses, with varied content encompassing a range of learning styles.</p>
<p>What do you hope the outcomes of the study will support in relation to your role?</p>	<p>Has no effect on my role if I'm being honest. I remind the trainers when they are doing their domestics to mention to the delegates that the scanning pens</p>	<p>Not sure</p>	<p>I would hope that there is a demand for the ReaderPens however despite the promotion and</p>

	are available for them use.		interest, the uptake on actually using the pens was minimal at the XXX Learning Centre.
How would you continue to promote and advertise the reading pens if they were to become a part of the supportive strategies and tools the learning centre offers?	To continue to do what I do as in the above,	Not sure	I would continue to advertise the availability of the reading pens within the centre and encourage trainers to offer the use of the reading pens to their delegates.
Any other comments?	Some people are embarrassed to say in front of a group of people if they have learning difficulties, so like I said on a previous question I think having these for use in a prison to use before coming to a training course will people, they don't know will take the stigma of being embarrassed away.		

Please return to the Discussion section, Learning Centre Manager Feedback, to reflect on the answers to these questions.

## Appendix 6: PEOLTs trainee (Lilleshall) – Interview – 16<sup>th</sup> January 2020

The following are extracts from an interview conducted with POELTS trainee 1 (PT1).

PT1 was asked about 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”.*

PT1 was assessed at the Learning Centre and was quickly identified with dyslexia, he was low score on every aspect of this test, his memory being the only area that he achieved well on. His memory capacity has therefore been identified as a skill he could utilise in the future. I enquired as to his earlier schooling and if they had attempted to help him with his learning needs.

*“No, cause I seen it as, I didn’t want anyone sat next to me, like a helper in class or anything, wish I did when I was younger now, but you don’t see it, you see it like a weakness....*

*I knew I couldn’t spell, when I was young, and read and stuff like that....*

*...They (school) told me I was dyslexic and that they tried to put someone next to me....*

*.... it’s a sign of weakness when your younger, ain’t it? Especially 15 years ago, no one would admit to anything like that. I’d fight people if they took the mick! (laughs)”.*

Therefore, PT1 had chosen a career in which reading and academic achievements were not required.

*“I’ve always had manual handling jobs, I never passed anything at school, apart from PE, I was good at sports....*

*...If I am shown how to build something, or how to do a certain joint, I know how to do it. It’s in (points to his head). If you showed me a diagram and stuff like that, if I had to read it, I’d be ohhhhh ohhh, cause that is where I struggle....”.*

How did PT1 manage to move from a manual learner, from being shown how to achieve success in his work, to now becoming a classroom learner, with a myriad of written materials set before him?

*“I constantly been going over these workbooks, eventually the word will stick in my head. But say a week down the line now I won’t have read the word in a while. I’ll have to get back on it and I’ll be ‘oh I don’t know what that says’, not at all. I can just go over it with that pen and it’ll tell me what it is...*

*...I can read basic words and that, you throw anything in other than say ‘you’ or that sort of thing then I can’t sound it out. I can’t spell, I am atrocious at spelling....*

*...The way I've revised. I've revised with my mum; she asks me questions. If I don't know the answer, she will keep repeating it, repeating, repeating for me and then I'll say it back to her, she'll say it, I'll say it back, that's the only way it gets in. I've had to do that, quite a lot (laughs)....*

We recognised listening and remember were important strategies for PT1, having the pen to act as a prompt and reminder of words enabled him to move forward. PT1 recognised his tutors' approach to lessons assisted his learning needs alongside the reading pen helping with his confidence

*"I think the way the classes have been run have been good as well. He's got everyone involved. It's not just off the PowerPoint, he'll start talking about it and discussing it with everyone. That sort of learning...*

*...I don't need to ask someone to read something. It gives you a bit of pride that you don't have to ask somebody. I don't mind asking, if I can't read or spell, I just ask it doesn't bother me. But just to do it on your own, like when you're at home or something its easier...*

PT1's tutor (T1) joined us at this point of the interview and he was able to reflect on PT1's praise of his teaching style. T1 added his thoughts.

*"No PT1 has put the effort in here. He's not had it his own way, all the way through. He's passed and been referred on the odd assessment. That's given him the impetus to carry on, it's all down to him. Where he's needs support, he's had minimum support from me, it's all been down to him, from my point of view...*

*... the ReaderPen has been great for PT1, it may not work for everybody but for somebody with the difficulties PT1 has, it works a treat. It needs effort from the individual, to put that effort in, credit to PT1, he got 85% on his final test"*

The identification of effort and using strategies that suit you were supported by PT1

*"I'm not saying the pens the whole thing of me passing and stuff, I've put work in. The pens have helped me with reading and stuff, it's the mindset I've tried to have with this, I need to do it..."*

*"These pens are brilliant; they have worked for PT1. If we can get them into the right people's hands, who really need them, they really are beneficial, as you can see, they worked from PT1..."*

We discussed PT1 having use of the pens in the future and other areas he may like to use them within.

*"I tended to use them in class, but the tutor's approach helped, he got us all involved, he was able to get us to listen..."*

*...I used it at home, I'm not lying. I've used it to read letters and stuff...*

*...I think it would be brilliant if I could use it in the prison, at work, but I had to give it back...*

The Learning Support Manager (LSM) joined us and I would like to conclude with some of the remarks she made in the interview.

“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 more easier and smoother journey, gaining a really good score”.

*“I am proud of myself”.*

#### Discussion:

The LCM noted that not everyone will be able to step forward and announce their learning need. PT1 stated there were others in his class who struggled and did not come forward. PT1 has given permission for his story to be shared with others, to act as an advocate to having your voice heard.

PT1 recognised the impact of having AT available to him during his training course. He was able to identify how it could be used in his personal and working life. Liaising and working with the MOJ to support the identification of ReaderPens as a workable tool, not only for prison officers but for the prisoners, is a work in progress and would benefit from the support of the Prison Officer service. A future ideal would be the allocation of reading pens to every prison officer, to create a cohesive and everyday workable and learning approach to the pens, reducing stigma and sharing transferrable skills between prison officer and prisoner.

**Appendix 7: Questionnaire survey with serving prison officers.**

	Prison Officer A	Prison Officer B
Gender	<del>Male</del> Female Prefer not to say	<del>Male</del> Female Prefer not to say
Age	<del>Under 18</del> <del>18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54</del> <del>55-64, 65+</del>	<del>Under 18</del> <del>18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54</del> <del>55-64, 65+</del>
Time in Service	12 years	17.5 years
How did you become aware of the reading pens?	My line manager asked me to attend an introduction session about the pens as a tutor.	I heard from other staff who were talking about the reading pen.
Why did you consider the reading pen would support your needs?	It would enable me to find the meaning of specific words and assisted me in reading words I was not familiar with. This was most helpful when it came to prepare myself for an upcoming interview.	I am not a good reader. I have a lot of paperwork as I am a Band 5 CM ops.
What learning need have you identified with and how does this impact on your work and attendance to courses?	Dyslexia – this can sometimes limit my ability to complete admin tasks.	I have Dyslexia. I use Dragon software for all my report writing. The pen helps me to undertake studying at home.
How and when are you using the ReaderPen?	I generally use my pen when reviewing learning materials prior to delivery of a course or when reading up on policies and operational procedures.	I use the pen when my governor asked me to perform certain tasks involving reading, so I have a clear understanding of what she is after.
Which functions of the reading pen are you using?	Scanning Text Dictionary	Scanning Text Audio Recorder
What other supportive tools have you made use of in the past?	I have been offered overlays and the option of different colour backgrounds for PowerPoint.	In the past during exams I have had a reader and scribe, as I cannot have Dragon software wherever I go. In exams I normally get 25% extra time.
How quickly did you become familiar with the functions of the ReaderPen?	<del>Extremely quickly</del> <del>Somewhat quickly</del> OK <del>Not too quickly</del> <del>Not at all</del>	<del>Extremely quickly</del> <del>Somewhat quickly</del> OK <del>Not too quickly</del> <del>Not at all</del>
Do you find your learning need holds you back from seeking promotional or operational training?	<del>Maybe</del> <del>No</del> Yes	<del>Maybe</del> <del>No</del> Yes

Comments		I still feel frustrated as I cannot complete all tasks needed in a timely fashion if I had access to a computer or software as I have at home. I feel (with the pen) better with time bound projects and I am grateful of any help that I get now and in the future.
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Discussion:

Prison Officer A (POA) initially became involved in the research project due to his day to day role as a TEA. He quickly identified concepts of supporting those on his POELT training course within the Youth Offending environment. However, POA did not have a chance to offer this support as his role changed and as a subsequence, he requested having access to the pen allocated to him for work and personal use. He struggles with dyslexia and felt the pen would have not only have helped his students but also to support his preparation and delivery of course material.

Consequently, POA has been making use of the ReaderPen, and has shared his experiences to encourage staff and young offenders who may struggle with literacy issues. He reported there was a lot of excitement around the pens and that those who were informed of the ReaderPen agreed it was a wonderful tool, that should be utilised in the youth offending environment.

He introduced the pen to another staff member, Prison Officer B (POB), who requested the use of a ReaderPen which has been purchased for this officer.

Both officers indicate the importance of having access to a tool that is successful in a variety of environments, Dragon software is required to be set up on a computer and if the system is not 'networked' can only be used on the computer it has been downloaded onto. Having access to computer software within the working prison environment is limited. The ReaderPen and ExamReader have been the variable introduced into four prison studies with great success, where access to assistive technology is limited and at times dated. Several prison educational providers have gone on to purchase ReaderPens and ExamReaders.

One of the research prisons has granted permission to a prisoner to purchase his own ExamReader for use in his cell. It may only be a matter of time before ReaderPens and ExamReaders lose their 'commodity' value and become an accepted tool throughout the prison environment.

**Appendix 8:** The following comments are extracts from an interview with Skills for Life Manager, Brett Stringer. Delivery and Development Manager for PE National Training, Howard Masters and Regional Learning Centre Manager, Nicky Volley – January 2020 – Lilleshall.

I commenced the interview by asking why the research and introduction of an unknown assistive technology tool within their specific learning environments was of interest to them.

*Brett: "From my point of view I felt it would benefit the prison service, there is still a gap of assistive technology which we provide to staff. Scanning pens were new to me, I had not seen anything like it prior to my first discussion with you. For me this was a positive step forward, but how would we put this model into fruition? I felt having everyone around the table at an initial meeting made sense, get all the right people into that room".*

*Howard: "I think there is a lot of gadgets out there, in the past we've looked at different things and felt they wouldn't really work. I looked at this (pen) and thought this has got a bit of longevity with it. I was really surprised when I picked it up (pens were taken along to the initial meeting) and looked at it, initially I thought 'oh what is this?' As soon as I started scanning and listening to it, I thought this could be a game changer for people with challenging learning needs".*

*Nicky: "Dragon software is the most common one we refer back to, that has been okay but there are so many limitations with regards to staff, particularly staff access as this is not allowed in prisons. From a staff perspective Dragon is okay as long as you don't move from your computer, the dynamics mean this system doesn't always work. There is very little support to help that member of staff to manager their learning needs, in the prison environment Dragon software is not ideal. It is very expensive; one staff member can use it and it is not transferable to others".*

We asked what the managers roles were and how this supported those with learning needs in a training environment.

*Nicky: "Part of my role is to support staff to develop themselves in their career, including dyslexia and learning difficulties. We are always trying to support staff in the best way we can, but we are slightly letting them down, limited, as we work in prisons and you can't take any technology in, and we just accept it. It is quite amazing we've got something like that (reading pens). It is early days, for people to understand and take it onboard and realise the true benefits of them. Every staff member has different needs, different ways of working and their learning needs are specific to them. This is where the pen comes into its own, it is so diverse in what it can do, you can take it from POELT all the way through your career, to governor, uber governor! It's quite an adaptable tool".*

*Howard: "I head up the team for the national PE training, so I am responsible for the processes we put in place to support those who put themselves forward for PE training. We have a system in place which tests the qualities and strengths of those who want to become a PE Officer. We assess the skills against a select criterion, they then return to their establishments, work on the areas that require improvement before returning to us. We then address their learning needs and undertake the PE course for the best part of three months".*

*Brett: "My role as 'Skills for Life Manager' is to ensure all staff within the Ministry of Justice and HMPPS have access to enable them to upskill their Functional Skills capabilities in literacy and maths. I further support learning differences within the learning and development group, ensuring all new recruits have access to support around the likes of dyslexia, dyscalculia etc. Through the Functional*

*Skills upskilling, some struggle and I often find that the individuals face barriers due to underlying learning need traits, thus my support around learning differences”.*

How do you identify learning needs for those attending their POELTS initial training and for existing staff returning to undertake courses, such as the PE Officer course or other operational and promotional courses?

Howard: “Nicky does an initial assessment for our PE learners, we try and assess their needs before the course starts during the pre-selection course, to save time for all involved. It identifies any needs and we get time to put things in place for them”.

Nicky: “...whether it is POELTS on their first day, or pre-selection we talk to them, we ask questions and I put forward ideas of what they might experience...

...we explain some of the things they may be experiencing, which may mean they maybe dyslexic.....

...it can take to week 9 in POELT for someone to say ‘I have a need’.... The biggest hurdle is getting people to accept that they have dyslexia if they are not aware, that is the first challenge...

*Brett: “We are in a new era, we are moving towards apprenticeships, a foundation course over a 12-month period. This gives a longer time for a scanning pen to be used. We have tested this concept at Lilleshall, and this will be pushed out nationwide. The equipment must work well for us and the learners. We make sure all the trainers have skills for life training around learning needs, so every trainer knows how to identify a learning need. There are trained staff to be on hand to go to. The longevity of the scanning pens is getting it across the board, so we have tried this here at Lilleshall first”.*

Why is supporting staff with learning needs important to you?

Howard: “This is something close to me, I doubted myself, I have dyslexic traits and different learning needs, I remembered at my training course how difficult I found it. I wanted to open that up and say to other people ‘it’s alright, it’s not a taboo subject, I want you to embrace this and if we can help you and say it’s okay to have this, the doors aren’t closed to you, we are just going to work a bit more closely with you’....

...it came to me on one of the first PE courses we run, two girls, one particularly was severely dyslexic, she brought it to our attention at week one and I said ‘yes we can put things in place for you’, suddenly it was week six or seven and nothing, not through people not wanting to, but things took time. I thought we were failing this person at that point. I thought we need to do better than this...

...breaking down barriers, it is okay, you can achieve as much as anyone else and you should not let your learning need be a weight around you”.

Nicky: “When I am working with staff I say ‘look if you have dyslexia you have so much to bring to your job, as so many prisoners have disabilities, so many kinds of disabilities, you are even more of an asses than a weak link in the chain, I always drive this home to them...

...and it is trying to get people to understand that it is not a limiter. That is a wonderous thing of the prison service, people think it’s (a learning need) going to be a career breaker, having dyslexia, and actually that is why a lot of people come into the service as it is quite a hands on and people orientated role, they can hide behind their dyslexia or learning difficulty and then they come to

training and think 'oh no I am rumbled, I'm done for' but we can say 'no, you have a lot to bring to the table and you can help by cascading this back to a prisoner you are working with', bingo, you unlock their potential, prevent another victim, it builds a rehabilitation culture...

...so, if I can help them be the best version of themselves, brilliant...

...I am not naturally academic, I struggle, and I find learning very hard, but when you have the right environment it's okay to learn, it's okay to make mistakes, people flourish and grow."

#### Discussion:

All three managers are passionate about their roles and how they envisage supporting others.

They clearly understood the issues of stigma and difficulties for those admitting to having a learning difficulty; a surprising number of serving prison officers assume being identified with a learning need will result in a loss of their employment. This has led to reflection on how many operational staff fail to undertake advancement or promotional training? In addition, when attending compulsory training does this create issues such as lack of engagement, not getting the most out of the day due to learning fears and preconceived concepts, therefore building a wall of disinterest or negativity to protect themselves?

Creating an environment that enables others to feel confident in sharing their learning difficulties was identified by Nicky Vollard as an important step. The concepts of 'safe space' are not new in educational frameworks and were explored by Dr Gayle et al. in their paper 'Safe Spaces, Difficult Dialogues, and Critical Thinking' (2013). Adults with learning difficulties will often continue to carry the concepts and experiences of their childhood when entering a learning environment. If they have not experienced a positive outcome it will be difficult to overcome those emotions and memories to engage in a positive and proactive manner.

Developing a framework of positivity is something these managers are actively striving towards. The offer from PT1 to share his experiences should be considered as a potential training aid.

Additionally, the tutor's approaches and understanding of 'listening and engagement' during the training course encouraged trust, open to trying and encouraging the use of ReaderPens.

**Recommendation: training such as that offered by the BDA (British Dyslexia Association) may expand tutors and TEAs knowledge to gain insight when training and teaching adults with underlining, and often none diagnosed, learning difficulties to promote confidence and understanding. In a recent survey 74% of teachers felt they were inadequately prepared to teach children with dyslexia (Dyslexia Action, 2017). 1:6 adults have a reading age below 11 years of age (Government Digital Services, 2017). In prisons this number increases to 47% of the prison population and of this 20% are completely illiterate (Moss, 2017).**

Time is required to embed the use of reading pens into prison officer and prison educational environments. Continuing to have access to ReaderPens post the research period will provide evidence and data to support and enhance what has been achieved to date.

**Appendix 9:** Emailed questions to Brett Stringer to complement and support his previous interview. April 2020.

With the advent of the new apprenticeship scheme how would you envisage the reading pens being used:

- a. In the initial classroom-based work  
**For those learners who have self-identified as being dyslexic, the offer of being able to use the pen should be made via a one to one discussion with their tutor who can explain what the pen is and how it may be of benefit. They can then use the pen either in class or in the study period.**
- b. Learning centre elements of the apprenticeship  
**As per (a). It would be very much the student's discretion as to whether they used it in the Learning Centre.**
- c. In the working environment  
**This is dependent on the establishment's security policy. It would then be up to the user as and when he/she wished to utilize the pen.**

We saw the success of a POELT finding the reading pen a positive experience, using other skills and strategies that he identified working for him. He recognised that his tutor's attitude and approaches helped during his course. Would these two men's experiences be worth following up to create a protocol of support for adults with learning difficulties?

**With their permission, I would see the benefits to their experiences being shared and used potentially as case studies to empower other staff to feel confident in trying and using the pens. A specific protocol would be required in order to ensure the tutors are up to speed with what the pens can aid along with a register of learning requirements in order to satisfy any Ofsted policies around the use of Assistive Technology.**

Are you aware of a reluctance of staff returning to training and what are your thoughts or ideas pertaining to this potential difficulty?

**In the realms of those with potential Learning Needs, they will sometimes initially raise some concerns or worries about attending the training, but once they have spoken with either their tutors or myself, they are more confident with the support measures put in place and thrive. We have had no learners fail due to learning needs issues, primarily due to the support they receive.**

When apprenticeships attend Learning Centres for continuance of classroom-based learning will they see the same tutor each time or a different? Will this impact on those with a learning need who may have to announce their learning need to a different tutor?

**It can never be guaranteed that apprentices will have the same tutor for a number of operational reasons. Where possible, we do try to keep the same one, but delivery style and consistency should be maintained across all tutors. Those with a learning need will remain supported by any tutor, this is further enforced via my input to ensure a further contact point is maintained to support the said learner. Through any change in tutors, I**

**have never been made personally aware of concerns from learners of suddenly not feeling supported by a new tutor.**

Any other thoughts or comments that you would like added to the report which will be going to Gary Reed for passing onto senior management about the study? This will include identification of the processes involved in organizing a study, the positives and difficulties that have been encountered and how these have been overcome due to the dedication from yourself, Howard and Sarah. How important you have all felt having assistive technology as part of the everyday support of staff and how you may like to see the use of reading pens in their working environment as you are aware there have been studies carried out with prisoners using reading pens in the education blocks.

**Firstly, I would like to thank you and the team from Scanning Pens for this trial, your help and guidance has been inspirational. Of those learners who have used the pens and I have had the pleasure to meet, they felt the pens offered a viable alternative to assist them through their learning journey.**

**As with all adults, there is a measure of reluctance at both accepting support and using such technology, especially if visible to their peers. Our tutors are fundamental in breaking such barriers down within the classroom and ensuring all learners are afforded support. It is critical that all Learning and Development staff are understanding of learning needs and the support that can be provided. Skills for Life has been the driving force behind this activity, and I continue to advocate a consistent message around this activity.**

**Through the upskilling of trainers in Skills for Life and being made aware of what learning needs are, what support can be available alongside such technology as Scanning Pens, we have a robust support system unrivalled by many other Civil Service departments.**

**Any device that can be deemed a supportive measure for assisting our learners with learning needs has to be acknowledged as being a useful aid, how we would incorporate that fully within the Learning and Development arena would need further consideration according to what uptake we have had and targeted to relevant learners.**

**I hope with the feedback you have gained and can share; an informed decision can be made as to the pen's viability within the Learning and Development group. With the advent of the C&D apprenticeship, considerations can be made around the use of the Learning Support Fund levy to support any such 'Assistive Technology' and whether the Scanning Pen would be deemed appropriate.**

**As for the wider service and how supportive the Scanning Pens would be, I believe interaction with the MOJ Assistive Technology team would be key for such activity. As our IT is updated, new packages will become available and may interact better with the likes of the Scanning Pen. As a central department, they may be the most informed on this type of activity. I can only reiterate that any device or Assistive Technology that can aid and support a colleague with learning needs has to be considered as a viable option to support them and make us the inclusive employer we wish to uphold, and the Scanning Pen would aid this.**

**Appendix 10:** Emailed questions to Sarah Wetton. April 2020.

Can you describe your role?

***I work in the Learning and Development Group as a Delivery and Development Coordinator within the Operational Training team. I manage a team of Trainer Expert Advisors (TEA's) whose responsibilities include the delivery of training to staff working across the HMPPS estate. I sit on the L&D Diversity and Inclusion Strategic and Governance Committee and am a member of the Innovation Group which is how I became involved in the ReaderPens pilot scheme.***

When you attended the presentation meeting about the research concept what were your initial thoughts?

***I was really excited at the prospect of the trial and could see the benefits of Assisted Technology within our service straight away. On a personal note, one of my team members showed a keen interest in using the pens to support him in his day-to-day work so I felt invested from the start.***

The initial concept had been specifically for those commencing basic training, this expanded to those undertaking PE training and onto those returning to operational courses. It was identified that there may be a number of prison officers who do not seek promotion or further enhancement training due to undisclosed learning difficulties, what are your thoughts and experiences pertaining to this assumption?

***I believe it may one of the factors associated with individual's reluctance to continue with their professional development. If that is indeed the case, then schemes such as this would allow us as a service to support staff in this area.***

Why is it important to support prison officers to seek promotion and further training?

***As an organisation we invest in people, whether it be those we work alongside or those who are in our care. It is vital that this continues to be something we do rather than something we say we do. Recognising an individual's potential is in itself rewarding and as a Manager***

***I continue to thrive when supporting staff with their CPD, be it gaining new professional (or personal) knowledge, applying for and successfully completing courses, as well as attending formal training events and seeking promotion. Staff feel valued when they are invested in and Managers should feel proud when staff achieve their best. Prison Officers can often have a wealth of knowledge and experience and this can greatly assist them as they develop their careers. Not only does this benefit the individual but as an organization it helps with our attrition rates. The old adage you get out what you put it is very true in my experience.***

How do you hope the provision of ReaderPens will encourage and support prison officers returning to educational courses?

***I hope that staff will see the benefits of assisted technology and that wider use of the pens will encourage better understanding amongst their peers as well as those around them. An individual's learning need or learning style should not be a barrier to learning or their CPD.***

Why did reading pens attract the attention of the managers at that initial presentation, what set them apart from other learning strategies and assistive technology?

***Assisted technology, such as ReaderPens, can offer an alternative strategy to those individuals who identify as having a need in a much more modern and personal way. Historically we have reached for different coloured paper and overlays and hoped that 'one size fits all'. This study has highlighted that often people have already put their own coping mechanisms in place, and this has allowed them to revisit those and try an alternative approach, maintaining, and in some circumstances, improving their situation. It has started a conversation and has given individuals, such as my member of staff, the confidence to use assisted technology to support him in writing emails as well as completing his SPDR comments.***

How do you think we could have better engaged with learning centre managers? Should they have been involved from the commencement, such as part of strategy meetings?

***Being such a geographically dispersed organisation, it did unfortunately prove difficult to monitor the use of the ReaderPens in our learning centres following the initial rollout and the sole responsibility in some did fall directly with the centre managers. In hindsight, I think they would have found it beneficial to have been involved in those first conversations, so they were invested in the scheme from the off. I believe we did keep an open dialogue with them, and the posters and leaflets helped but we were reliant on them to champion the scheme in our absence and that did not always prove possible, for a number of reasons.***

One of the tutors, Pat, has found the introduction of the reading pen into his life has expanded his concepts and thought processes of using tech to support his learning needs, can you share this with us?

***I am hoping Pat can give you more details regarding this but certainly as his Manager I have seen an improvement in his email construction and the affect that this type of technology has had in terms of his SPDR completion and his entries in his CPD Log. I believe his confidence has grown and as a result of this, he is now looking to complete his Band 5 Custodial Manager qualification which is fantastic!***

Should the use of supporting learning needs be explored further with tutors? Enhanced training? Courses to understand the variety of learning needs adults may have. CPD training to enhance and remove stigma and create a culture of openness?

***The Diversity and Inclusion Lead for L&D has recently advised us of an Assisted Technology (AT) eLearning course, available on the Learning Platform for Government which I have subsequently completed and sent to my team for them to complete. This will assist us in promoting AT and ensure it remains part of our conversation across the organisation. In terms of additional training, Skills for Life have a training package that they deliver to TEA's so it may be that the Manager, Brett, who was also involved in this pilot, has considered further inclusion of AT moving forward.***

What are your future hopes regarding reading pens and other assistive technology in the educational and enhancement of skills for prison officers?

***I have been fortunate, through Pat, to see the benefits of Assisted Technology and would like to see it progress further within L&D and HMPPS if at all possible. I am looking forward to reading the study in its entirety to see what benefits have been highlighted and celebrated in other areas of the business.***

Do you have any further comments you would like to add about this experience?

***From an Operational Training point of view, I am really pleased with what we have been able to achieve, particularly given some of the difficulties we encountered along the way. It felt challenging at times as there were so many individuals involved, such as trainers, learners and centre managers, and when those people are so geographically dispersed across the HMPPS estate, you only have certain ways to communicate to them and hope that emails, phone calls and posters/leaflets go some way to encourage everyone's involvement in the study and ensure the continuity and control of the use of the pens. I feel overall, we have contributed positively to the study and I have certainly learned a lot about the technologies that exist to support individuals and have seen first-hand, through Pat, the benefits they can offer. Thank you for letting me be part of this pilot Chrissie and for all your help and support along the way.***

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