



Disabled Prisoners' Needs - the Urgency of a Policy Response

Introduction

The first joint meeting between the HM Prison Service (Directorates of Programmes, and Health Care) and representatives of the RAD, RNIB, and RNID was held at the HM Prison Service HQs on Friday 21 April 1995. Noting the lack of a central policy, or guidance for Prison Governors, it recognised the urgency of filling this policy vacuum. The purpose of this paper is to present a draft outline of policy for addressing the needs of disabled prisoners in a systematic and coherent manner for discussion at the next meeting of this working group on 7 September 1995, and its subsequent adoption by the Government.

Aims of policy

To enable disabled prisoners to achieve full and equal participation in life within and outside the prison system, in pursuance of HM Prison Service's Mission Statement : "to keep prisoners in custody with humanity and help them lead useful and law-abiding lives after release". This aim should also be consistent with a central objective of government policy enshrined in the impending legislation, i.e. the elimination of discrimination against disabled people. This may require a widening of the Prison Service's Equal Opportunity Policy to cover disability.

Objectives of Policy

* Assessment of need

Urgent collection of comprehensive information about the nature and scale of the problems facing disabled prisoners at different stages i.e while in remand, custody and when released on probation. It will require collection of information on full range of needs arising from the objective of managing sentence planning : medical, educational, recreational and other needs.

* Identification and removal of barriers to full and equal participation

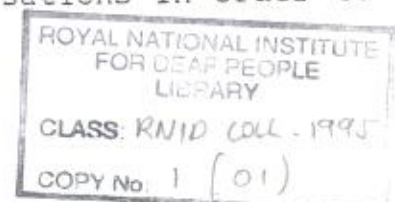
physical, social, communication, inaccessibility of information, and any others.

* Development of guidance

To develop concise and realistic but not too prescriptive guidance for use by Prison Governors so as to encourage the development of a consistent and holistic approach to addressing the needs of disabled prisoners

* Development of local links with voluntary organisations

To develop local links with organisations such as the RNID, RNIB, RADAR and other community organisations in order to



improve disabled prisoners' participation in prison life. To this end it will be useful to collect information about the availability of local community resources and facilities offered at the local level by national voluntary organizations.

Implementation of Policy

This is likely to cover the following issues:

- * Clarification of responsibility within the Prison Service between the Health Care and Programme Directorates in the implementation and monitoring of policy vis-a-vis Prison Governors.
- * Issuing of guidelines for adherence by Prison Governors in pursuit of policy objectives. A set of guidelines developed earlier by the RNID and an accompanying paper discussing the needs of deaf prisoners could be adapted for use here (see Enclosures I and II).
- * Clarification of the role of national voluntary organisations.
- * Provision of disability awareness training to selected prison staff in priority categories.
- * Provision of equipment such as text telephones, audiovisual aids, sign language interpreters, teletex TV etc., required in appropriate situations and in accordance with the minimum standards defined in the Prison Service guidance to Prison Governors.
- * If, as is likely, the number of disabled prisoners in individual prisons turns out to be relatively small, the Government may wish to give serious consideration to the adaptation of a Canadian model to UK situation whereby specialist facilities are concentrated regionally to serve the needs of several local prisons, together with the facilities offered by the community regionally and locally.
- * Introduction of an appropriate screening procedure on admission of a prisoner so that his/her needs arising from a particular disability can be assessed and catered for.
- * To be effective, the policy will need to be monitored regularly by the HM Prison Service. To facilitate this process, it is suggested that consideration be given to :
 - The appointment of a Disability Liaison Officer in each prison on the lines of a Race Relations Liaison Officer.
 - The establishment of a National Register of Disabled Prisoners.
- * Meeting disabled prisoners' needs will clearly have some

resource implications but the cost can be phased over a reasonable period while urgent attention is paid to meeting needs in agreed priority categories.

- * The Joint Committee of Disability Organizations and HM Prison Service could develop into a Standing Committee to oversee the development and implementation of policy in this area.

VINOD KUMAR
Head of Social Policy and Research
Royal National Institute for Deaf
People

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[Ref:PRISNPOL.pap]

THE ROYAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR DEAF PEOPLE

GUIDELINES ON PROVISION FOR DEAF PRISONERS

- 1 Prisons should establish priorities for providing deaf awareness training to their staff.
- 2 Deaf Awareness Training should be given to all staff in priority categories.
- 3 Appropriate communication support should be arranged for the reception procedure or medical examination if the prisoner is known to be deaf and requires it.
- 4 A simple hearing test should be given to all prisoners for screening purposes at their medical examination.
- 5 A record should be kept in the prison on the numbers of deaf prisoners and their communication needs.
- 6 All written information should be provided in plain English.
- 7 Education and recreation opportunities should be made equally accessible for deaf and hard of hearing prisoners. These include training courses, sports and television watching.
- 8 Libraries should have relevant information and subscribe to magazines of interest to the deaf community.
- 9 Materials which are accessible to deaf pregnant women should be made available.
- 10 When appearing before the Board of Visitors, the appropriate communication support should be provided.
- 11 Prison planners should be made aware of issues such as the importance of good lighting, low levels of background noise and the difficulties of communicating through plastic partitions or wire grids.
- 12 Communal areas where audible alarms/indicators are fitted, flashing or vibratory indicators should also be provided.
- 13 Teletext televisions should be made available to deaf prisoners.
- 14 Telephones should be made accessible to deaf and hard of hearing people
- 15 Visual aids would need to be fitted at the Visitors Centre.
- 16 The possibility of deaf advocates should be explored where appropriate.

(Ref:PRISGUID.GEN)

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DEAF PRISONERS AND EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY ISSUES OF CONCERN

INTRODUCTION

Deaf people tend to be disadvantaged in prison because of limited access to information and inadequate attention to their communication needs. The objective of this paper is to suggest guidelines which, when implemented, would enable the needs of deaf and hard of hearing prisoners to be addressed properly so that they can take a full part in life in prison. Ensuring equality of access for deaf prisoners would appear to be in line with the Government's equal opportunity policy for prisoners which states:

All prisoners should be treated with humanity and respect regardless of their race, religion or culture. All prisoners should have equal access to the facilities provided by the prison.

DEAF PEOPLE IN PRISON

There are nearly 7.5 million people in Great Britain with some degree of hearing loss, that is one in six of the population; 60% are elderly (see appendix 1). The number of deaf prisoners is very difficult to estimate in the absence of a central register. But it is possible to derive rough estimates from general demographic trends.

If deaf prisoners form the same proportion of the prison population as deaf people in the population generally, then according to the Institute of Hearing Research, roughly one in eight of the prison population under the age of 50 years is likely to have some type of hearing loss. In addition, in 1989 the Prison Service estimated that there were 70 sign language users in prison.

COMMUNICATION NEEDS OF DEAF PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY

Very little research has been done on the specific information requirements of deaf prisoners and their communication needs. However, enough is known about these needs in relation to deaf people in the community to enable one to apply these to the prison situation.

As hearing loss can range from total deafness to a mild hearing loss, communication needs tend to vary, *inter alia*, according to the degree of hearing loss and the age of onset (see appendix 1 for details).

Most deaf people rely on hearing aids and/or lipreading. Lipspeakers are trained to relay speech to lipreaders without using their voice, by using clear lipshapes for words and the flow of rhythm of natural speech. However, around 50,000 deaf people use British Sign Language (BSL) as their first or preferred language. BSL is a language in its own right and sign language interpreters relay it into spoken English (see appendix 2).

DEAF AWARENESS TRAINING

Deaf people use a variety of communication techniques. Communication can be adversely affected by factors such as the distortion of sound by hearing aids, background noise, poor acoustic or lighting conditions, the location of the speaker in relation to the deaf person, degree of clarity of his/her speech and level of language used. For these reasons, it is essential in our view, for hearing people coming into regular contact with deaf people to receive appropriate training in deaf awareness so as to enable both to communicate.

Deaf Awareness Training (see appendix 3 for more information) explores the variety of ways to communicate in diverse conditions and suggests simple steps to make communication more effective. Prisons should establish the priority staff to receive this training, presumably this will be those who have most contact with deaf prisoners.

Prison Officers should receive such training as a matter of priority, as they are expected to deal with the various problems which may arise on a daily basis. They are also often responsible for the allocation of a security category to a prisoner and should therefore be aware of the cultural and language differences of some deaf people (see appendix 4 for an example of good practice).

PRISON PLANNING

Some barriers to communication could be lessened if certain issues are taken into consideration at the planning stage. This has particular relevance to the government's current building programme which aims to provide 21 new prisons and 10,250 extra places by 1996 (Prison Factsheet: NACRO 1992).

Hearing aids pick up background noise and amplify it. This makes it very difficult for the hearing aid user to hear all that is being said and the noise distortion is often uncomfortable. Adequate lighting is also very important for people who are lipreading. Also communicating behind any barrier, a plastic

screen or wire mesh, is unsatisfactory for those relying on sound, lipreading and sign language.

For visiting and interviews with solicitors etc we would recommend that a room with minimum background noise and good lighting is made available. In workshops and communal areas where audible alarms/indicators are fitted, flashing or vibratory indicators should also be provided (see appendix 5 for more information on assistive devices).

ADMISSION SCREENING AND ASSESSMENT

The reception procedure during which a medical examination takes place is a very important time for the new prisoner. Appropriate communication support is essential if the prisoner is known to be deaf or hard of hearing. Requirements for appropriate communication support may include the presence of an interpreter and awareness of the best lighting and seating arrangements for communication.

A record should be kept within the prison medical centre that they have a deaf inmate. In large establishments with more than one doctor, this would lessen the chance of misunderstanding where other medical staff are not aware of the presence of a deaf prisoner.

The RNID also recommends a simple hearing test to be carried out on all prisoners during their initial medical test, and a standard procedure for referring people with hearing difficulties for further assessment and hearing aid provision and maintenance if appropriate. Otherwise deafness, especially noise induced hearing loss, may go undetected. This may result in frustration both for the prisoner and officers in contact with that person, and possibly a misunderstanding that the prisoner was in some way "difficult" if s/he did not immediately respond to instructions.

As a great deal of information in prison is given in writing using forms, the RNID suggests that these should be written in plain English, since some deaf people have a difficulty understanding written English, especially BSL users whose first language is not English.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COURSES

Educational or training courses can easily be adapted to be accessible to deaf and hard of hearing prisoners. Sometimes when a course involves visual instruction, simple deaf awareness training for the instructor may suffice. On other courses increased use of visual aids like overhead projectors or flip charts might be enough to allow deaf people to participate. A communication system (see appendix 5) in the room would benefit hearing aid users, and at times sign language interpreters would be required.

With individual or group meetings, possibly with a counsellor or

probation officer to discuss problems, access to communication support is very important and can be provided by the use of lipspeakers, sign language interpreters and communication systems. Deaf people should not be left out of these important opportunities to educate and develop themselves. It is a part of their rehabilitation and is their right to expect the same opportunities as their hearing counterparts.

RECREATION AND LEISURE

The deaf prisoner is often at a disadvantage in this situation. Television is an important part of peoples lives and for deaf people a crucial source of information as well as leisure. Provision to ensure equal access to the television is important and can be achieved in a number of ways.

Teletext subtitles can be provided and a loop system can be installed to allow hearing aid users to hear the television. When films are bought in and shown to inmates, they can be viewed with subtitles if a decoder is used. Many films now available at video shops have "hidden" subtitles known as 'closed captioning' which come up on the screen with the use of a decoder.

Also videos of programmes which are of particular interest to this audience, for example, "See Hear!" (BBC1 Sundays 10am and repeated on Tuesdays 2.30pm) and "Sign On" (Channel 4 Saturdays at 12pm) should be made available. This enables a deaf person to keep in touch with issues relating to deafness and in some cases their culture. Magazines targeted at this group should also be kept in the prison library.

In their cells hearing prisoners are given the privilege of having a radio or a record player. For many deaf or hard of hearing prisoners this may not be of any use and heighten their frustration and boredom. Experiments have been under way regarding putting televisions into cells. We understand the concerns of the Prison Service about this issue, but the RNID believes that as a question of equal access, the deaf person who cannot listen to the radio should have a teletext television in their cell. Further technological developments and awareness of this requirement in the planning stages of prisons will make this a reality.

TELEPHONES

Maintaining links with family and friends is a priority for many prisoners. Card phones are available in all prisons and the Prison Service accepts the value of allowing prisoners to use them. Lord Justice Woolf's inquiry into the prison service stated that this communication was an important way to combat isolation, giving and receiving support; and to make the inmates take greater responsibility for their own affairs.

There are two ways in which telephones can be made more

accessible to hard of hearing people. Firstly by increasing the amplification so that the telephone can be used in the speech mode, and secondly, for those who have no hearing, a text telephone can be used (see appendix 5). These modifications would make the telephone accessible to deaf and hard of hearing people. They also enable deaf people to contact hearing people with no text phone by using 'Typetalk' a national telephone relay service (see appendix 5).

ADVOCACY AND COMPLAINTS

Grievances in prison are normally dealt with by a prison officer, and internally wherever possible. The prison officers dealing with deaf people need an appropriate mechanism to communicate effectively with them so that problems can be dealt with as they arise. For prisoners undergoing adjudication, it is an opportunity for them to put their side of the case to the Board of Visitors. They may be placed at a serious disadvantage if proper communication support is not provided.

Hearing prisoners are able to gain information about procedures from each other and can therefore tap into that supportive network. This may not be possible for the deaf inmate which could increase worry and anxiety if s/he is unsure of what is happening.

The possibilities of engaging a deaf advocate may be explored by the Prison Service. This person, volunteer or employed, would need to be familiar with prison regulations and procedures and could guide a deaf person through them if necessary. This would also lessen the isolation and frustration experienced which could so easily escalate into a serious situation.

VISITORS

The previous comments about the difficulties of communicating behind barriers or in noisy badly lit rooms should be taken into consideration here (see page 2, prison planning).

The other consideration when discussing the issue of prison visiting is the fact that deaf people will come into the visitors centre to visit deaf or hearing people and the issue of communication access needs to be addressed. Either the person on the reception desk needs to be informed that the person is deaf or some visual display needs to be fitted so that the person is not left waiting because, for example, they have not heard their name called.

Any person working in the visitors centre also needs to have some deaf awareness training (see appendix 3)

WOMEN WHO ARE PREGNANT/WHO HAVE RECENTLY GIVEN BIRTH

Deaf women who are pregnant or who have a small child may be placed in one of the three mother and baby units. They need the

same help and support as hearing mothers but extra attention needs to be given to communication difficulties.

Deaf women who are pregnant often find the experience of birth, antenatal classes and gaining information and support from health workers very stressful. This is because the hearing people working in this area are often not aware of the different communication needs and consequently anxiety, confusion and worry follow as they may misunderstand information and instructions. Simple measures can be taken to ensure that this is not the case and that childbirth or bringing up young children need not be any more difficult than it is for hearing counterparts.

Again staff involved in this area of the prison service need deaf awareness, and literature with visual information needs to be made accessible to those women who are pregnant. There are also videos (one is currently being produced by the British Deaf Association) and leaflets aimed at deaf mothers.

CONCLUSION

This paper discusses the difficulties in communication which deaf prisoners may experience in a variety of situations in life in a prison. It suggests guidelines for improving communication with deaf prisoners, and their access to information. Most of these can be implemented without a great deal of extra cost. And they will go a long way to enabling deaf and hard of hearing people to take a full part in life in prison.

April 1994

(Ref:DEAFPRIS.EOP)

COMMUNICATION NEEDS OF DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING PEOPLE

Deaf and hard of hearing people are a large group, numbering 7.5 million or one in six people in the country, 60 percent of them are elderly. They are also a very diverse group with widely differing needs for communication. These can be conveniently categorised as follows:

5 million have a mild hearing loss which amounts to difficulty in following speech, particularly in noisy situations. Often people in this group do not wear a hearing aid but many lipread without realising it, or are deaf in one ear. This group benefits from clear speech, clear verbal instructions, good lighting and acoustic conditions.

2.2 million adults have a moderate hearing loss. This group finds it difficult to follow speech without a hearing aid and has a great difficulty in noisy situations. Hearing aids generally help a great deal and lipreading is useful. This group benefits from telephones fitted with an induction loop or loop systems for public announcements, interviews or meetings etc as well as clear speech, clear verbal instructions, good lighting and acoustic conditions.

240,000 adults have severe hearing loss. It is not always easy for them to follow speech even with a hearing aid. This group has no choice but to lipread what is being said and has great difficulty in using the telephone even with amplification and an induction loop. This group will not benefit from a loop system for public announcements unless they can lipread as well. This group will benefit from clear speech, clear verbal instructions only if they are good lipreaders. Otherwise in interview situations or public meetings they will need the services of a human aid to communication (HAC) e.g. lipspeaker, sign language interpreter or palantype operator with screen.

60,000 have profound hearing loss. This group cannot benefit from induction loops and cannot hear on a voice telephone. They may have difficulty in lipreading English because any hearing aid does not provide enough clues to help lipreading. Many profoundly deaf people who are deaf from birth or since early childhood use sign language so their communication needs are best met through sign language or through the written word in clear, plain English. There are others who become profoundly deaf in adult life, if they are able to lipread they can benefit from clear speech, clear verbal instructions or a HAC as well as the written word.

Further information is available in the following publications:

1. Deaf and Hard of Hearing People. RNID

2. Services and Information. RNID

(Ref:DPCOMUNC.GEN)

SIGN LANGUAGE AND SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETATION

British Sign Language (BSL) is a visual-gestural language with its own structure and grammar which is quite different from that of spoken English. BSL has been recognised as a fully developed language with its own rules comparable to that of spoken English.

BSL has a different syntax to English language, this syntax has to be learnt in order to use the language correctly and to sign correctly. As with learning other languages e.g. French or German, one has to learn the different word order within the sentences, and this is true of BSL also. Like spoken languages BSL has regional dialects.

Sign Language interpreters relay spoken English into BSL and BSL into spoken English. The work requires a great deal of skill and experience in order to be effective. The following qualifications have to be obtained:

BSL Stage I

BSL Stage II

BSL Stage III

Registered Trainee Sign Language Interpreter

Registered Qualified Sign Language Interpreter

(Ref:BSLQUAL.GEN)

DEAF AWARENESS TRAINING

Deaf Awareness Training (DAT) enables hearing people to feel more confident when communicating with a deaf person*. Various techniques are explored and history, culture and different types of deafness are discussed.

Courses vary in length depending on the customers' requirements although a days training is normally sufficient to cover the basics. Courses are also individually tailored in order to ensure that the terminology and language used is relevant to the group undertaking the training.

Without deaf awareness, some actions may be interpreted as bad behaviour, possibly leading to bad relations between prisoners and staff. For example, a person with a hearing loss may not respond to someone talking to them straight away, which may be interpreted as deliberate ignoring.

Lack of awareness of the abilities of deaf people, and how communication barriers can be overcome, can lead to unnecessary isolation. An example of this was when some prisoners were denied the opportunity of playing team games because they could not hear the whistle. In this situation simple deaf awareness training would enable people to challenge those stereotypes of what they think a deaf person can or cannot do and enables solutions to be sought, and the problems of deaf and hard of hearing people not being given access to exercise facilities would be stopped.

* The RNID uses the term deaf person to cover all ranges of deafness. The course includes training about deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people.

(Ref:DEAFWAR.GEN)

CASE STUDIES OF GOOD PRACTICE

1. There have been occasions when individual prison officers have taken the initiative and tried to learn how to communicate with deaf prisoners. An example of this happened in a Scottish prison when a deaf prisoner was classified as behaving very aggressively. The prison officer learnt that some deaf people communicate through sign language, and began to learn. The communication between the two began to improve and the man's behaviour also improved. The awareness spread among the prison officers and to other prisons. The prisoners themselves also became interested, and made soft toys in their workshops to make money for Scottish Deaf Clubs.

(Ref:PRISNCAS.GEN)

ASSISTIVE DEVICES

The technical aids to communication used by deaf people are the following:

(1) Listening Devices

- Hearing aids of different kinds
- Portable listening devices and TV listening aids

(2) Alerting devices - Visual or Vibrating

- Fire alarms/smoke detectors
- Door bells/telephone flashing signals/baby alarms
- Alarm clocks - flashing etc

(3) Telecommunication Aids

- Text telephones
- Telephone coupler/amplifier
- Computer Aided Transcription (CAT) words are relayed onto a screen verbatim via an operator

(4) Communication Systems

- Induction loops (permanent or portable)
- Infra-red systems
- Radio systems

Induction loop systems consist of a wire which encircles the room, either as a permanent fixture or temporary. The person speaking holds a microphone, connected to an amplifier which drives a current around the loop. Hearing aids can be switched to the 'T' position, which picks up the magnetic induction from the loop, and which is heard as the sound from the microphone. The sound quality can be better, as the distance from the person speaking to the microphone is much less than the distance to the hearing aid microphone. The disadvantages of loop systems are that they are not easy to set up, are not highly portable, they require a loop of wire, and the amplifier driving the loop is mains operated.

Infra-red and radio systems are available as fully portable systems. The speaker wears a pocket or neck worn transmitter,

and the listener wears a similar receiver. They are battery operated and allow complete freedom of movement, unlike loop systems, which are restricted to the area of the loop. They are very simple to set up and use.

Section II

TELEPHONES IN PRISONS

Adjusted telephones

Hearing aids do not pick up the sound well from a telephone receiver. So either the handset must have additional amplification and the handset used in the normal way (without hearing aid), or the telephone must have a telecoil which allows a hearing aid to pick up the sound (by magnetic induction) when switched to the 'T' position. All public telephones have a telecoil fitted as standard. Telephones with amplified handsets are available. An alternative is a battery powered slip-on amplifier which fits onto the receiver and boosts the sound output.

Text-telephones

Many deaf people are unable to use the telephone in speech mode but can communicate by telephone using a text-telephone. These consist of a keyboard, display and coupler in which the handset of a normal telephone sits. This enables deaf people to communicate to others who have a text telephone, and also to and from a hearing person through 'Typetalk' (a national relay service operated by the RNID with funding from BT).

Payphone text-telephones are now available through BT and can be found in some public places.

Typetalk

Remote monitoring (for security) of text telephones is possible. Unfortunately, there are many standards for data communications by telephony. The oldest, becoming obsolete, but trivial to monitor, is 'Baudot'. However, Typetalk does not support Baudot, and there may be difficulty in obtaining equipment that only operates using Baudot. (For monitoring, it would be important that the textphone be usable in only one mode.) Modern text telephones can use 'CCITT', which uses different tones for transmission and receiving states, making monitoring impossible with standard equipment. The manufacturers of textphones may be able to produce modified textphones: CCITT textphones that only operate in one mode (for use by the prisoner), and textphones modified for monitoring CCITT textphones calls. Further information can be obtained from the Science and Technology Division of the RNID.

(Ref:TECHAIDS)



SOURCES OF INFORMATION

1. Interpreting Services, Deaf Awareness Training, Information and Assistive Devices can be obtained from the RNID:

Head Office
105 Gower Street
London
WC1E 6AH
Tel: 071 387 8033 (voice)
071 383 3154 (minicom)

RNID Midlands
117 Hagley Road
Birmingham
B16 8LB
Tel: 021 455 6835 (voice/minicom)

RNID North
30 Broad Street
Salford
Manchester
M6 5BY
Tel: 061 745 7875 (voice minicom)

RNID North East
Southlands Centre
Ormesby Road
Priestfields
Middlesborough
Cleveland
TS3 0HB
Tel: 0642 327583 (voice)
0642 300630 (minicom)

RNID Northern Ireland
Wilton House
5 College Square North
Belfast
Northern Ireland
BT1 6AR
Tel: 0232 239619 (voice/minicom)

RNID Scotland
9 Clairmont Gardens
Glasgow
Scotland
G3 7LW
Tel: 041 332 0343 (voice)
041 332 5023 (text)

RNID South East
39 Store Street
London WC1E 6AH
Tel: 071 916 4144 (voice/minicom)

RNID South West
13B Church Farm Business Park
Corston
Bath
BA1 9AP
Tel: 0225 874246 (voice/minicom)

Other Sources of Information

British Deaf Association
38 Victoria Place
Carlisle
Cumbria
CA1 1HU

Hearing Concern
The British Association of the Hard of Hearing
7/11 Armstrong Road
London
W3 7JL

(Ref: INFO.GEN)