

REPORT ON TOE BY TOE: THE SHANNON TRUST READING SCHEME IN THE SECURE ESTATE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A project undertaken by CfBT on behalf of the DfES Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit



Executive summary

1.1 Facts and figures

We need to make a significant improvement in the levels of literacy in the secure estate:

Reading below L1

16% adults 16-65 are below Level 1 Literacy (Skills for Life survey, DfES, 2003)

37% prisoners below Level 1 (Prison Statistics England and Wales 2002 – Home Office, 2003, p198)

No Qualifications

15% working age population (ONS, Regional Trends, Spring 2003)

52% Prisoners (Home Office, Through the Prison Gate, Joint Thematic Review, HMI Prisons & Probation, 2001)

Unemployed

5% working age population (ONS, Labour Market Statistics, December 2004)

67% Prisoners (Home Office Resettlement Survey, 2001)

Truants

2% of pupils – The Education in Cities evaluation by NFER

[The evaluation shows that the majority of incidents of unauthorised absence were accounted for by a minority of pupils. Nearly half of the recorded sessions of unauthorised absence were attributable to 2% of the pupils - each of whom had missed 51 or more half-day sessions.]

30% prisoners (National Prison Survey 1991)

Exclusions

<1% pupils (Permanent Exclusions from Maintained Schools in England 2002/03, DfES)

49% prisoners (Singleton et al, Psychiatric Morbidity among Prisoners in England and Wales, 1998)

The Social Exclusion Unit Report 2002-3 reported that:

- the unemployment and social barriers experienced by those with basic skills deficits are one third worse for older offenders than for 18–20-year-olds;
- education attainment for female offenders is lower than that for women in the general population;
- nine out of ten young people in one Secure Training Centre were found to have missed significant periods of education.

1.2 Summary of the report's main findings

At the time of writing, the Toe by Toe Reading Scheme is being used in 128 prisons and Young Offender Institutions and in three Secure Training Centres; each establishment has its own approach to organising the day-to-day running of the scheme. The majority of establishments support the scheme and believe that it is worthwhile for the mentors and mentees involved. They believe that the scheme has a valuable part to play in developing reading skills, changing lives and hopefully breaking the offending cycle.

The success of the Toe by Toe Reading Scheme currently relies almost entirely on:

- the goodwill, enthusiasm and commitment of a few professionals working in prisons
- the fact that the offender mentors and mentees do not see the programme as a part of formal education.

These features are vital to the scheme's continuing success and should not be compromised. If the scheme were to be integrated into mainstream prison education provision it would be viewed very differently by offenders, who often have anti-teacher and anti-authority attitudes. Many non-readers accept help from peers providing they are not perceived as being part of the establishment. While supportive staff attitudes are important, the reading programme works best in adult establishments if literate *prisoners* are seen to be taking the leading role. However, support from NOMS, Governors and other staff is also vital.

1.3 Success factors: what respondents reported

Mentors and mentees reported that the Toe by Toe approach works for the following reasons:

1. The model of delivery - offender to offender - makes it a very constructive part of rehabilitation.
2. The organisation of an individual's learning activity is the responsibility of the mentor and mentee, supported by the scheme organiser in each establishment; this works particularly well with offenders who have anti-teacher and anti-authority attitudes.
3. In adult establishments literate offenders are seen to be taking the leading role (less so in juvenile establishments, where there are fewer suitable mentors and where the funding regime facilitates more use of learning support assistants as mentors.)
4. The scheme considers all learners to have educational potential. Each learner can work at his/her own pace and in privacy; there is no competition and no danger of being made to look foolish.
5. The scheme allows non-readers and reluctant readers to practise reading in a non-threatening environment, often for the first time.
6. The manual is highly structured and clearly written, with straightforward instructions for the mentor, who will usually have no teaching experience. The mentee feels supported and the mentor gets satisfaction from supporting.
7. Toe by Toe is economically viable and sustainable. Apart from the small direct financial implications of the scheme, it does not have the same space and officer time requirements as other education activities. It can take place anywhere in the prison, including residential areas, the education unit, the library or the chapel.

Benefits: personal development and attitudes to education

Reported benefits for mentees:

1. Every mentee who was interviewed felt very positively about his or her increased confidence and ability to decode words and read.
2. The relationship with the mentor is often a very positive and calming influence; for many offenders the daily session with their mentor is their first successful learning experience.
3. Mentees gain confidence from the fact that they do not have to admit in front of other people that they are unable to read.

4. Mentees benefit from Toe by Toe's small, manageable chunks of learning.
5. Mentees' progress is monitored and evidenced and, in some prisons, included in the individual learning plan (ILP).
6. Some mentees develop the confidence to progress to mainstream learning.
7. Some prisons report behaviour improvement and a reduction in self-harming among mentees.
8. Mentees assessed as having potential dyslexia indicators find the scheme helpful.
9. Foreign national mentees find the scheme helpful.

Reported benefits for mentors:

1. Offender mentors improve their self-esteem as a result of the trust and responsibility invested in them.
2. Mentors experience great satisfaction as they see the progress of mentees.
3. A number of mentors report that the experience of helping someone else enables them to benefit more from, and contribute more to, prison life.
4. Mentors, especially offender mentors, help to give the early stages of literacy real credibility and acceptance among their peers.
5. Mentors help to challenge stereotypes about the teacher role.
6. Some prisons report behaviour improvement and a reduction in self-harming among mentors.

Reading skills developed through the Toe by Toe scheme:

Mentees gain a number of significant reading skills through Toe by Toe, including:

1. Decoding skills, through using synthetic phonics and breaking words into syllables, including words of increasing complexity as they progress through the manual
2. Whole-word recognition for many of the words listed in the Dolch list
3. Understanding of upper and lower case
4. Ability to recognise and read sentences – this is very exciting for those who previously could read very few words
5. The skills needed to read letters from their families and attempt to complete forms and personal business administration for the first time.

Transfer to other prisons and release into the community:

1. Learning is controlled by the learner; the mentee has ownership of the whole manual, rather than a collection of worksheets (except in particular circumstances), and can therefore usually continue learning if he/she is moved to another prison.
2. If a mentor is changed or if a learner has more than one coach, it is easy to keep the threads of learning intact.
3. Toe by Toe can offer resettlement opportunities if the mentee continues with the scheme after release; there are progression opportunities for both mentors and mentees.
4. Better literacy skills help to improve employment prospects for released offenders: the Social Exclusion Unit report *Reducing Offending by Ex Offenders* (2002) suggests that 80% of individuals leaving custody lack the basic skills required for 96% of all jobs.

1.4 Challenges and barriers: what respondents reported

1. The prison system is identified as one of the main barriers to implementation of the Toe by Toe Reading Scheme. A minority of establishments have not been able to set up the scheme for a variety of reasons, including:
 - lack of support from officers and senior management
 - potential abuse of the scheme by offenders who could take advantage of the privileges and increased mobility that the scheme may allow.
2. During this investigation, CfBT found little evidence of 'whole prison' approaches to developing literacy skills, at least in the establishments that were part of the sample. The effective teaching of phonics and reading should ideally be underpinned by a whole-prison approach to literacy development. Whole organisational approaches are more likely to result in:
 - better ownership, consistency and take-up of reading schemes, including Toe by Toe
 - better synergy between reading schemes and a prison's other learning and skills activities
 - better learner progress and achievement
 - a deeper commitment across the prison to raising levels of literacy.
3. Whole organisational approaches require commitment at the highest level.
4. Time and funding are vital to the success of the scheme; lack of clarity around ongoing funding could mean that the scheme will not be sustained or made more widely available to offenders in custody.
5. Each prison has, understandably, adapted the Toe by Toe scheme to fit in with differing regime and learner requirements; one size does not fit all. Programme organisation, stakeholders, location and target audience are therefore unique to each prison. However, this also means that:
 - recruitment/training of mentors is not always systematic and high quality
 - each prison has its own process for enlisting mentors; criteria vary considerably
 - prisoners are not always made aware of the scheme at induction; word of mouth is the main form of recruitment
 - there are variations in approaches to coaching and the ways in which progress and achievement are recorded and celebrated
 - in some prisons, mentors receive pay and earn bonus incentives, in others they do not.
6. There are differences between the Toe by Toe approach and the Government's national Skills for Life strategy; there could be real benefits from establishing better links.
7. The Toe by Toe Reading Scheme, if followed in isolation, is a very narrow approach. Some experienced professionals believe that the scheme would be improved if it included more adult reading material, a variety of teaching/learning approaches and opportunities for wider reading.
8. Some respondents reported that learners bypass sections of Toe by Toe because they are also attending a formal class, or in some cases give up working with their mentors because they feel they have made sufficient progress. The authors of the Toe by Toe Reading Scheme stress that the scheme is designed to be used as a complete package.
9. The 'churn' of offenders between establishments can cause disruption to the programme and may end the mentee's learning. There is no formal tracking or coherent process to enable a mentee or mentor to continue with the scheme.

1.5 Summary of main recommendations

In the light of the evidence collected during the investigation and contained in this report, our main conclusion is that the Toe by Toe Reading Scheme is highly effective in a prison environment and is having a positive impact on offenders.

The report makes a number of recommendations for further development of the programme. These recommendations cover actions for:

- the Shannon Trust
- the Toe by Toe Reading Scheme
- prison managers
- prison education departments

as well as ideas for further development.

1.5.1 Recommendations: the Shannon Trust

1. *Volunteer representatives* would benefit from:
 - a job specification, including suggested competencies for the role
 - a training programme designed to:
 - clarify the aims and objectives of the Shannon Trust
 - provide background information about national changes in offender policy and the implications for learning
 - provide background information about the Government's national literacy strategy and its free materials
 - give an insight into the organisation and culture of prisons
 - support representatives to develop the skills to be a good representative
 - a manual for representatives setting out:
 - protocols for working with a prison and making positive contact with the education department
 - sample whole-prison approach to literacy development, with examples of good practice
 - an opportunity to shadow an experienced representative
 - access to a forum for representatives, including regular meetings, newsletters or an online forum to share issues and good practice.
2. *Senior managers and other staff* would benefit from a Shannon Trust manual comprised of some of the relevant materials described in 1 above. The manual would describe a whole-prison approach to literacy development, based on good practice from across the sector, and explain the vital role that managers can play in supporting literacy development across a prison.
3. *Mentors* would benefit from a Toe by Toe training programme to ensure consistency across establishments and maintain high quality standards; they should be provided with a wider range of free reading materials so that they can stimulate their mentee's interest in reading outside the Toe by Toe manual; they should be encouraged and signposted to relevant national training qualifications where relevant.
4. *Mentees* would benefit from information about the range of other learning opportunities in the prison, including programmes that offer national qualifications. They would also benefit from a short course to introduce them to the kinds of teaching and learning strategies used in mainstream education, in or outside the prison.
5. *All stakeholders and enquirers* would benefit from an updated Shannon Trust website. The site is often an

introduction to the work of the Trust; it needs to be more user-friendly and better focused on the needs of different groups of people, including:

- volunteer representatives (password protected)
- prison organiser and partners' page (password protected)
- LSC, DfES, inspectorates, other Government Departments, non-departmental public bodies and researchers who may want to find out more about the work of the Shannon Trust.

6. *General resources* should include:

- Background information on:
 - different types of prison
 - the Shannon Trust
 - the Toe by Toe Reading Scheme
 - how the programme is organised
 - relevant national developments
- lists of organisers and prison sites
- up-to-date data on the scheme
- publicity resources and flyers
- case studies and exemplars from successful schemes
- frequently asked questions and answers
- a video of the programme to show how it works in practice.

These resources could be used flexibly in the training programme, the representatives' manual, the managers' manual and the updated website described above. The resources could also be adapted to suit other specific requirements, for example to support prison organisers who are setting up the programme. Some suggestions are given on page 29 in Appendix 9.1.

7. *Shannon Trust documentation* would benefit from updating to ensure that content and wording reflects current policy and practice. For example the new National Offender Management Service will bring together learning in custody and community, so very soon the term 'offender' will be used as a generic term, and 'offender in custody', or 'offender in the community' will describe where the learning is taking place. Similarly, the terms 'mentor' and 'mentee' are confusing because they imply a role model approach rather than a learning relationship. Perhaps 'coach' and 'learner' might be more appropriate.
8. *The Shannon Trust learner certificates* would benefit from an overhaul. They currently contain prison images, which will always be associated with the criminal justice system. A more generic design for all learners to use would enable mentees to produce their certificates without being embarrassed about revealing a prison record.
9. *The whole scheme* would benefit from Shannon Trust Workshops, which could be held periodically at key events organised by prisons and by Government departments, agencies and non departmental public bodies; these would help to raise the profile of the Trust and be a good vehicle for building positive partnerships.
10. *The whole scheme* would benefit if links are strengthened with youth offending teams, Probation Services, local Learning and Skills Councils and local managers in the voluntary and community sectors to ensure that mentees and mentors can continue learning after release.

1.5.2 Recommendations: the Toe by Toe Reading Scheme

It would be helpful:

1. *To include the mapping to the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum* in each 'coaching' box on the left hand page of the manual, set alongside the exercises. The mapping can give feedback on progress in line with national standards.
2. *To add a Skills for Life section to the manual's introduction* which:
 - briefly explained the Government's Skills for Life strategy
 - set out the *Skills for Life* curriculum levels
 - described how Toe by Toe relates to these national levels

This would help to relate Toe by Toe to the national context and also help the mentor, and potentially a subsequent teacher in the education department, to describe learner progress. A companion document to the manual will provide detailed mapping of Toe by Toe to the national Adult Literacy Core Curriculum.

3. *To describe learner progress using the adult core curriculum levels* rather than children's reading ages. Giving any adult learner a chronological reading age, for example, 7.2 will reinforce a sense of inadequacy and embarrassment.
4. *To change certain images in the manual*. Some are considered inappropriate and offensive in certain cultures. The Shannon Trust has already taken up these points with the publishers of Toe by Toe, who will change the offending images in future editions. This report would go further. We suggest that all images are reviewed, updated and linked to *Skills for Life* learning programmes and materials. The inclusion of alternative images for young offenders and adults would:
 - enhance the manual
 - make it more accessible to post-16 learners
 - enable it to widen its currently child-centred reputation
 - give it a modern feel.
5. *To develop a CD-ROM version of the manual*; this would enable the mentee and mentor to develop and practise IT skills.
6. *To supply a green transparent overlay* to cover each page because the grid patterns of black squares on a white background can be a barrier to learning for people with dyslexia; the green overlay would help these learners to navigate the page and complete the exercises.
7. *To include references in the manual to motivational reading resources and strategies for practising reading skills in different contexts*. The programme is currently followed in isolation and not linked to wider reading resources. Recommended reading should be linked to the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum and Pre-entry Curriculum documents and introduced at relevant stages. Booklists could be included in the toolkit.
8. *To produce an introductory edition of the manual* as a starter pack for new mentees; it would also be suitable for local prisons and Young Offender Institutions that have a roll-on/roll-off system and lose offenders after a short time. (This assumes that the mentee would subsequently be given a full copy of the manual to continue the course on transfer).
9. *To signpost mentors and mentees to formal national qualifications*.
10. *To help teachers who are working with Toe by Toe learners in other education activities* by giving them an outline of the work that precedes and follows each element of Toe by Toe; this will enable the teacher to plan complementary work and widen the learner's reading.

1.5.3 Recommendations: prison managers

It would be helpful if:

1. *Governors and Heads of Learning and Skills include Toe by Toe data in relevant reports, including:*
 - personnel involved
 - organisation
 - age, ethnicity and numbers of offenders involved
 - offenders' lengths of sentence
 - location of scheme
 - numbers of Toe by Toe graduates who progress to learning and skills programmes in the prison.
2. *The Shannon Trust representative is kept informed about the movement of facilitators, mentors and mentees, so that they can be tracked.*
3. *The Toe by Toe Reading Scheme and other voluntary projects are included in relevant sections of the Offender's Learning Journey (adult and juvenile versions) which set out the requirements for LSC-funded providers of learning and skills.*
4. *Peer reading schemes, including the Toe by Toe Reading Scheme, are included in prison self-assessment reports, sentence plans and reports on wing governors*
5. *Prison officer training includes an outline of the Toe by Toe Reading Scheme.*
6. *Heads of Learning and Skills publicise the programme widely across all areas of the prison.*

Other ways of supporting Toe by Toe include:

- non-movement orders for mentors
- red band status for mentors (as for Listeners) and protection for mentors from losing earnings
- giving information on Toe by Toe at induction and including Toe by Toe hours in purposeful activity.

1.5.4 Recommendations: prison education departments

It would be helpful if:

1. *Education staff are kept informed about the Toe by Toe Reading Scheme*
2. *Literacy teachers and other education staff monitor mentees' progress if they are in education provision*
3. *The Head of Learning and Skills and education staff could actively support the scheme by:*
 - making informal links with mentors and including them in relevant meetings
 - including Toe by Toe in Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) for learners who are in formal education
 - encouraging Toe by Toe graduates to access mainstream educational programmes
 - encouraging Toe by Toe mentors to access higher level basic skills, key skills, wider key skills at level 3/4 and national Learner Support qualifications: this would help those who have the potential to progress to higher education and/or skilled employment
 - creating stronger links between Toe by Toe and *Skills for Life* provision in literacy classes; this would enable Toe by Toe to be part of a wider literacy skills initiative across the prison while remaining independent of mainstream education. It would also support *Skills for Life* approaches by including phonics awareness among other reading strategies and activities
 - raising awareness of Toe by Toe through newsletters, articles etc
 - supporting mentors by sharing their teaching experience when mentors ask for help.