

Report on House of Lords Dyslexia Debate

7th December 2005

Lord Addington rose to ask Her Majesty's Government:

What further proposals they have to deal with dyslexia throughout the educational and working lives of the population.

The noble Lord said: My Lords, I thank all noble Lords who have put their names down to speak in this short debate and declare a series of interest. I am dyslexic, a patron of the Adult Dyslexia Organisation and a vice-president of the British Dyslexia Association. I shall now explain why I tabled this Question at this time. The reasons are twofold. First, it is always useful to obtain guidance from the Government on how a disability is interpreted and viewed. We can do this by tabling Questions. Secondly, I believe that over the past few months and possibly for slightly longer sniping has been directed at dyslexia and the concept of dyslexia. Indeed, there has been a serious attack with regard to the validity of the condition. For example, it has been suggested that the number of prisoners with dyslexia has been greatly overestimated. That matter is probably best dealt with in the debate that will be initiated tomorrow by the noble Lord, Lord Hurd, to which I shall contribute. Therefore, I shall try not to address that issue today.

A series of articles have appeared in various papers stating that people were faking dyslexia to gain extra time in exams and other concessions. I thought about that but was not moved to address that issue because exactly how much help would extra time in an exam be if you did not know the relevant answer? Perhaps it is thought that with an extra 15 minutes per question a person might deliver himself or herself into a zen-like state and receive enlightenment with regard to the answer to question four. However, if the aim of an exam is to elicit information from the person being examined and to test his ability to answer the questions, surely extra time will not help very much if you do not have the relevant information. I hope the Minister will concur that the extra time statement is silly and counter-productive. However, if you need extra help because you have a disability or a temporary impairment, you should receive extra time. That is fair enough.

I was inspired to table this Question by a Channel 4 "Despatches" programme, "The Dyslexia Myth". The programme was shown back in September. I watched it purely to gain information as it turned out that I had not been reading the appropriate articles. I scanned through the TV listings and said to myself, "Oh, that looks interesting; I'll watch it". Within about 15 minutes I was so seething with rage that I bounced around the room. My wife sensibly turned the TV off, stuck a video in the recording machine and told me to go for a run.

The basic synopsis of the programme was that dyslexia did not exist, we had all got it wrong, someone could teach everyone with dyslexia how to read—and that if we could all read, dyslexia did not exist.

Professor Julian Elliot—or Joe Elliot as he likes to be known—had come up with this synopsis and was presenting it as fact. The programme backed him up with partial editing. My experience of dyslexia goes totally against that. I can read. I have read well enough to get through a degree course. The problem I have is predominantly with spelling. That is what I find most problematic and I have problems with short-term memory. The professor was talking about a different set of issues. He suggested a phonics-based course. Perhaps the Minister will say what the Government's intentions are in that regard. Apparently, if you teach everyone to read using a phonics system, all problems disappear. It has been estimated that 10 per cent of the population are dyslexic and that 4 per cent are severely dyslexic. Therefore, it would appear that if the phonics-based learning system were adopted, a great swathe of problems would be removed from the education system and the relevant money could be spent on something else. Will the Government confirm that they acknowledge the existence of dyslexia? Do they accept that it is a neurologically based system?

The definition I have states that dyslexia is an ectopic condition, which means that cells migrate to the wrong place in the brain. As regards both the visual and auditory systems, cells are in the wrong place and misprogramme the relevant information. I shall not go into the rest of the definition as it is very complicated. It was a mistake to try to read it out. Basically, it is a neurological condition. It is real and it is a medical condition. If the Minister will confirm that, he will deal with many of the problems I have. Will he also confirm all the safeguards contained in legislation that has been passed in the nearly 19 years I have been in this House? I made my maiden speech on dyslexia nearly 19 years ago. Ever since then I have believed that governments of whatever political colour accept that dyslexia is a real problem and will enforce laws to protect people with dyslexia. I cannot see any reason why the Minister would not agree that dyslexia is a real problem. I am not so much concerned about myself but about people who are diagnosed with dyslexia late in life. Dyslexia is a disability but dyslexics are not stupid.

In our society great weight is laid on the ability to read and write as a sign that someone is intelligent. Let us imagine a dyslexic going to a jobcentre to seek support and guidance and the person on the other side of the desk saying, "Dyslexia is not a problem. You can be taught to read. I saw how it was done on the telly the other night". Will the Minister make it absolutely crystal clear that the Government have not changed their mind about the fact that dyslexia is a disability and that the safeguards in, for example, the Disability Discrimination Act still apply? Will he confirm that any government official or person in authority would be breaking the law if he acted in the way that I have described? If the Minister can give that assurance tonight, this debate will achieve a great deal

because we can tell people that such behaviour will not be tolerated. We are not prepared to allow people to suddenly say, "I have a new theory about dyslexia. The medical evidence about it is exaggerated". Today the nature of dyslexia is being questioned, who knows what will be the next disability to be questioned? Will it be Asperger's syndrome or dyspraxia? I could go on. Because someone says, "I can deal with this problem", it does not mean that the problem does not exist. If the Minister can give the assurance that I seek, we shall take a step forward and calm certain fears and the anger that arose following the TV programme. I discovered that I was not alone in reacting to the TV programme in the way that I did. A A Gill had a lovely rant in a restaurant review. He wrote:

"This is a big red-letter day for me. Really. The big red letter might be a B or it might be a D. No matter—I'm cured. A huge weight . . . has been lifted by some very, very clever people who have decided that I'm not dyslexic any more. They didn't even have to see me. It didn't cost me a thing. They just made a documentary and decided that there's no such thing as dyslexia. Free at last, Lord—free at last".

The article goes on. Noble Lords, who have their words recorded in probably one of the most famous newspapers of the English speaking language, can have a rant about the matter. However, people outside who are applying for jobs and dealing with this problem on a day-to-day basis do not have the defence of raising the matter in Parliament. They cannot call people to help them.

I promised myself that I would speak briefly about this aspect of the matter and concentrate on the transitional period from school to the adult world and explain how difficult that transition is for many people with disabilities and ask what career guidance is available to them.

I am running out of time as I speak; indeed, I have gone over it. I ask the Minister for one final assurance: that he will ensure that his department assures all others that they must bear in mind that this problem does not disappear with the classroom or formal situation. Suggesting to somebody that they go back and have extra tuition is not always the answer, because it may be asking them to go back to their own little version of purgatory, if not to hell.

Baroness Morris of Bolton: My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Addington, on securing this short but important debate and, in doing so, declare to the House that I am mildly dyslexic. I do not have too much of a problem with reading. My problems are with writing, spelling and getting my opposites mixed up. Sometimes, when I stand up in your Lordships' House, I wonder quite what I have said.

I will concentrate my remarks on Meares-Irlen syndrome, a form of perceptual distortion caused by an overactive optic nerve that affects some children and adults with dyslexia. My son was diagnosed with dyslexia at the age of 11, just

after he had won an all-round scholarship at school. This was no special pleading by the middle-classes to get their children more time. He was lucky to be at a school which spotted that he had a problem, insisted that we do something about it and was able to offer him the support he needed.

When he was 14, in a conversation about reading, he casually asked how people stopped the print moving around on the paper. It transpired that, for the whole time he had been reading, the words and spaces had formed patterns and coursed down the page. He went to a specialist optician in York and was prescribed bright turquoise lenses. His reading improved dramatically and he is now, at the age of 22, able to read perfectly well without his coloured lenses.

On 1 November this year, I was returning to your Lordships' House from a family funeral in the north-west when I heard a fascinating interview on Radio 4's "The Learning Curve". Professor Arnold Wilkins, head of the Visual Perception Unit at the University of Essex, was talking about the very symptoms my son, Jonty, had suffered from. I discovered that Professor Wilkins and Dr Bruce Evans, of the Institute of Optometry, had referred to the symptoms of perceptual distortion and the associated benefit from colour as Meares-Irlen syndrome, in order to give credit to Olive Meares and Helen Irlen, who had made the initial discoveries. The distortion can be helped with coloured overlays, which are sheets of translucent or transparent coloured plastic that can be placed over the page of a book so as to colour the text beneath without interfering with its clarity, or with coloured lenses.

Fascinating though the Radio 4 programme was, I was deeply concerned to discover that although a number of enlightened teachers are aware of Meares-Irlen, are able to test for it and refer pupils to specialist opticians, it is not recognised by the authorities. I was so concerned that, when I returned, I immediately looked Professor Wilkins up on the "The Learning Curve" website, e-mailed him, and subsequently met him with Dr Evans.

There is no doubt that there is a high prevalence of visual stress among dyslexics. However, many suffers of visual stress are not dyslexic. I have seen with my own eyes how the use of colour can vastly improve reading and writing skills. So why, I ask, is it not recognised by the authorities? There have been some detractors in the past, but there is now a good deal of scientific evidence to support the existence of Meares-Irlen syndrome. The main stumbling block would seem to be that it does not fit neatly into the remit of one government department.

In talks with the DfES, everything is fine when the discussion is about helping with reading or speeding up reading through the use of coloured overlays. When the discussion moves to coloured lenses, however, it becomes a health issue. For those children who are helped with colour, lenses are more practical than overlays, because they can be used for work with computers, and help with

reading from blackboards and whiteboards. Incidentally, whiteboards are themselves causing visual stress, because the light shines straight back into the children's eyes.

The Department for Health, on the other hand, thinks it is a DfES problem, because it involves difficulty with reading, although coloured filters also help with eye strain and headaches. This leaves parents with no option but to buy the lenses themselves. If ever there was a case for joined-up government, this is it.

Having spoken to Arnold Wilkins and Bruce Evans, read the masses of papers, watched a video and read Arnold Wilkins' book *Reading Through Colour*, I am left in no doubt that this is an issue which has to be addressed. We are all only too familiar with the problems caused in later life by learning disabilities. It will probably not surprise anybody in this House to know that it was found that many prison inmates, when they were tested, would have benefited hugely from coloured overlays or lenses.

I am sure the Minister would find that the treatment of visual stress with special filters would be cost-effective. I wonder, therefore, whether he would consider a properly costed and evaluated regional trial of filters to assess the practical aspects of provision.

If the Minister is in any doubt, I would like to end by telling Sam's story, from *Reading Through Colour*.

"My name is Sam——. I am now 14 years and 4 months old. This is my story. 'All my life I have been unable to see clear text. 'This is normal for me. 'I thought that everybody else saw the same thing as me. 'I had to memorise everything I wrote instead of going back and re-reading it. 'This was because I couldn't read my writing either. 'Nobody asked me if I had trouble reading or writing. 'I was kept in at playtimes and told to do lines. 'The older I got the harder writing became because I had to write more and more. 'I could not cope with the amount of writing. 'I felt let down and stupid because I couldn't do all the work that everyone else was doing so easily. 'I gave up. I didn't know how to do the things that other people could do. I didn't know why. 'I was always exhausted when I came home from school. 'I often had headaches. 'This kept on happening to me until I had an eye exam that changed my life. 'I was due for an eye examination and went to see a new optician. 'My mum told him that I was dyslexic and the optician offered a coloured overlay test. 'That test changed my life. 'I would never be the same again. 'The coloured overlay test came out positive!!! 'It was the most important moment of my life. 'For the first time in my life I could see text clear as glass. 'I was astounded. 'I looked at the page stunned. 'All I could think to say was 'How did it do that?'. 'It was not easy to use the overlays because they made my headaches worse. 'Once I got my lenses the headaches disappeared. 'My life has been a lot easier

because of them. 'Now my mum cannot stop me reading. 'I have become addicted to it. 'From being a person who refused to read I now plead with mum to take me to the library every weekend. 'I now feel happier and my self-confidence has increased."

Lord Laird: My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Addington, for facilitating this debate tonight. The noble Lord has been a tireless campaigner for many disabled groups and, in particular, those who are dyslexic. I join the noble Lord in deploring the confusion caused within the educational fraternity by the recent "Dispatches" programme. The programme ventured into an area where most reputable academics believe that there is a serious issue of the collection, marshalling and reusing of information in a visual or auditory way. The reality is that many people, including myself, have suffered in a very real way from being dyslexic.

I will take one recent example of a sad but true story. The focus is on David from the Midlands, a self-made small businessman in his mid-fifties. David had specific learning difficulties but, like many other people with dyslexia, his profile showed an extreme disparity of strengths and weaknesses. David was an able craftsman. He always preferred to deal with cash because he found the complexities of modern trading extremely difficult. A short letter from the bank challenged his ability to comprehend the written word. He could read the letter, but understanding the information was the issue. For example, he was totally threatened by forms from the Inland Revenue.

David lived with his parents, who provided the secure framework which allowed him to develop his strengths. He relied on them to support him with those aspects of life he found challenging. Last year his mother died, and subsequently his father became hospitalised. Those firm rocks that provided David's security were gone.

For the first time David was managing alone. Agencies moved in to support David but withdrew because they found someone they deemed to be "normal" and whom they believed was able to cope. But David was in despair in so far as he was unable to make others understand how impossible he was finding life. He was completely threatened by society's demands and overwhelmed by his inability to cope by himself—to maintain his business and, most of all, to deal with his absolute fear of having to cope alone. But no one understood.

David's self-esteem was draining away. When he had support and understanding he was able to contribute usefully to society, but he had never had an adequate assessment of his learning difficulties and it was apparent that the agencies did not begin to understand what these were. On Saturday week past, David chose to take his own life because he had been driven to absolute despair.

Dyslexia is not just about reading difficulties; it is about processing and multitasking and managing all the complicated things the 21st century demands. Key 4 Learning has been for the past 10 years one of the leading organisations that assist people with processing differences in the work place. Jo Todd of Key 4 Learning, said that,

"more and more we are asked to intervene and help those who are going through a crisis in the work place—those just unable to cope on a day by day basis—frequently to the point where they begin to suffer from stress or depression".

The purpose of that organisation is not about helping to cure dyslexia but instead about bridging the gap between those with processing difficulties and those who function normally in the world of the majority.

We who are dyslexic just do things differently, once empowered by others' understanding of that fact. The focus has to be on our ability not our inability. People with processing difficulties do have talents, but these do not necessarily conform to the typical work-based appraisal boxes into which employees are supposed to fit. This can inhibit expectations, both at recruitment and in respect of promotion within organisations.

We have a long way to go to get society and organisations to perceive, to understand, how they can benefit from trying to accommodate the complexities of those whose thought processes are different. People with processing difficulties either drop out of society or, as did David and as I did, choose to have their own businesses. The Government are keen for people to stay in employment until they are older, and we who are dyslexic want to retain our dignity despite our difficulties and to contribute to society; but as we become older, dyslexia can make what others find natural and straightforward quite daunting.

There are many more problems for adults with dyslexia that has not been assessed during childhood than there are currently among children, but there is little research on dyslexia and ageing. I urge the Government to understand that this is not so straightforward for people with processing differences. I also urge the Government to promote better understanding of processing differences across all the supporting agencies. If that had been the case, then David may not have been afraid to live. If David had had the opportunity of a trained advocate to take him through the complexities of all the agencies, he would have been able to continue with his life and his business as he did when his parents were there to guide him.

Perhaps society's difficulties with dyslexia will be managed better if it is assessed and catered for in childhood. Recently, in her promotion of dyslexia awareness in Northern Ireland, one of our tireless workers and chairperson of an important dyslexic group, Dyslexia Awareness Raising Together, Ann Gallagher from

Derrygonnelly in Fermanagh, said that the three most important policies for society and for government bodies in coping with dyslexia were awareness, awareness, awareness.

I agree with Ann Gallagher and I hope to lead a deputation, including Ann, to meet Angela Smith MP, the Northern Ireland Minister for education, on this issue. I acknowledge that the Government are moving in the right direction, but much slower than many of us would like. While progress is being made, I look forward to the Minister telling us how the matter can be expedited.

Baroness Northover: My Lords, I am here at the express instruction of my elder son. I thank my noble friend Lord Addington for this debate and congratulate him on overcoming the difficulties of his own dyslexia.

I sometimes think that it is a historical accident that can put dyslexics at a disadvantage today. Prior to universal education, I have no doubt that my strong and determined son would have flourished. Looking to a possibly very high-tech future, will his descendants need to plough through books, fill in forms, and read instructions? Maybe not.

I remember extremely well trying to help my son Tom to read. His primary school focused on "look and say", but Tom looked not at the word but at the ceiling to figure it out. Building complex Lego machines, solving spatial problems, or whatever, was easy. Recognising a word from one page to another was something else entirely.

Tom is my eldest child. I later found how differently his younger brother and sister learnt to read, which is why I know that dyslexia exists. But I had no experience to tell me that what Tom was doing was unusual. I could not remember how I learnt to read. I thought that, like riding a bike, he must eventually get it, but that "getting it" must somehow be counterintuitive. By the time Tom was six, 10 years ago, he had drawn up detailed plans for his escape from his primary school. He was going to dig a tunnel in the playground and escape into the churchyard.

At the same time I learnt that each day his teacher was tearing up his work and throwing it at him. Now in many ways I owe that teacher quite a debt. Tom wanted me to mention her here, and I will. I will not name her, though we came to call her "the witch". I later learnt that she would hit him when he got things wrong. I knew that he was no angel, but tearing up his work did not seem quite right and I went into the school. The head heard that I had come in, pulled Tom out to assess him, and called me in. I heard the word "dyslexia" and as she said it, things began to fall into place.

The head told me that it would probably take a number of years to get Tom statemented in Haringey, where we lived, and that when she did get help for him it would probably not be from a specialist. In his interest, she said, would we

consider moving him to a private sector school with a dyslexia unit? She introduced me to the local dyslexia association, which was at that time struggling to get the child of a single mother from Tottenham into a special school, with Haringey Council tripping them up at every stage—including asking that the long-absent father fill in the forms. I saw that, chickened out, and looked at private schools. Highgate turned up its nose—it did not want to know about Tom, although later its junior school took a more enlightened view in relation to other dyslexic kids, although far less that its senior school still does.

Tom was accepted at Mill Hill. There, a guardian angel appeared, although I am not sure that Tom saw her quite that way, because she gave him and me huge amounts of homework throughout the term and even throughout the holidays. But she took him back to square one and slowly, using phonics, taught him what I thought was impossible—to read and write. When Tom was about nine he gave me a letter he had written in school. I had been given letters by the other two schools by that stage. He pointed out that this was the first letter that he had written from beginning to end. When he had tried to write one at his infants' school, he would start, but not recognise the next day what he had written, or his teacher would tear it up and he would endlessly start again.

Things have not been easy, even in a school which was supposed to be fully informed and alert to the way that dyslexics learn. Some teachers insisted on Tom laboriously copying things out of books and then had no understanding of him when he would skip or repeat chunks without realising it. Another—a science teacher—noted that he did not finish writing up his work and was therefore always behind. She took him aside at the end of lessons and got him to dictate to her what he wished to write. She wrote it down for him so that the lesson was complete—his words but her assistance, and my gratitude.

Then there was the National Listening Library—now Listening Books. At first, we received enormous tapes to go into an enormous machine, but it was a joy. Tom would lie in bed, transfixed, as someone read him a story that he might never be able to read. Over time, the tapes became ones that you could play in a normal machine or in the car. He listened to everything, and still does. I remember him, at the age of seven or so, listening to *Lorna Doone*. I switched off the tape from time to time to explain the language, but I did not need to. He was John Ridd, and the language in no way impeded his understanding. If I wanted silence amid the general commotion of home, putting on a story tape instantly immobilised all the kids.

Tom has now done his GCSEs and is in the first year of the sixth form. He seems to be on course for university, but I never count chickens. Exams are very unpredictable things. I look at one of Tom's GCSE results in history, where he got an A* in one paper and a C in the other, and I am as certain as I can be that something went very wrong. What did he misread so that probably, for a whole section of that paper, they could give him no marks at all?

Tom has become absolutely determined as he has battled through. He would like to be another Richard Branson, and that would certainly be very nice. He promises to buy me a villa in France if he becomes one. Tom has been labouring through school as though he had a great weight to pull behind him—something that his brother and sister do not have to do. But he has been helped, supported, chivvied and encouraged. What of kids who are not?

Attitudes towards dyslexia in schools, government and local authorities seem to have changed beyond all measure in the past 10 years. But I want to know the reality. I want to know what the Government are now doing to prioritise and fund specialist teacher training and, above all, specialist support in schools. That was the problem a decade ago before local education authorities had the responsibility properly to look after dyslexic kids. I hear that in some areas the situation is little better.

In what proportion of schools is there routine assessment of children before the age of five and before dyslexia starts to dent their confidence so that any problems can be picked up? And what happens when they are identified? The Dyslexia Institute reports that in a recent TES poll 90 per cent of teachers think that, where possible—and I agree—dyslexic pupils should remain in the mainstream, but only 12 per cent think that they have the resources and training to support them there.

It is not simply a matter of having a specialist teacher. There has to be a far wider understanding among all teachers of the problems that children may face in reading and writing. Catching the problem early is obviously crucial. I hate to think what would have happened had we not been able to get Tom the assistance that he needed as he planned his infant escapes.

I hope that the Government are now beginning to take in hand the needs of other kids like Tom because, in my experience, dyslexia can make a person or break him. We, as a society, have to ensure that what Tom describes as his "learning difference" can be the making and not the breaking of those whose brains may simply be wired differently.

Baroness Walmsley: My Lords, I, too, thank my noble friend Lord Addington for introducing what has so far been a very inspiring debate. Tom, David, Sam Jonty, all noble Lords who have spoken this evening and I need no convincing that dyslexia is real, and it manifests itself through a spectrum of effects varying in severity from mild to very serious. Those with the condition process information differently from the rest of us and we need to take that into account at the earliest possible stage of their education to enable them to fulfil their full potential. From a conversation with Tom, the son of my noble friend Lady Northover, I am aware that, even when dyslexia is correctly diagnosed and appropriate interventions put in place, dyslexic pupils often have to work very hard indeed to compensate for their condition in the world of school and work.

The one benefit therefore, according to him, is that you become used to hard work, and that is not a bad thing.

The sad fact, however, is that, even though it is a fairly common condition, with 10 per cent of the population showing it to some degree, often the condition goes undiagnosed for far too long. The child therefore underachieves and develops low self-esteem. That can lead to disruptive behaviour or even exclusion from school and, in the worst case scenario, to offending behaviour. We know that dyslexics are up to four times more likely to be in prison or on probation than non-dyslexics. Figures from the DfES of June this year show that 64 per cent of children permanently excluded from school have special needs and at least 80 per cent of those—that is, about 5,000 children—have dyslexia. NFER has calculated that it costs almost £50 million to support these children outside the school system each year. Would it not be better to address their needs early instead of having to spend that money on picking up the pieces?

Their low achievement in basic skills, coupled with low self-esteem, makes it hard for many children to develop their strengths and to be successful later in the workplace. However, we know that many of them are extremely creative and can be highly successful entrepreneurs.

So what can we do about it? First, we need to fund the correct and early diagnosis of dyslexia in primary and even nursery schools. Teachers should be trained to recognise the problem and teach the child in a different way. It is a learning difference. They also need to be able to recognise where more expert intervention than they are able to provide is needed, and know where to find it.

Secondly, we need to ensure that all those who struggle with literacy receive appropriate support from trained people. Synthetic phonics is not a magic bullet but it is a valuable technique among a spectrum of techniques. The key is to assess the learning style of the child and to enable him to learn in the way that is best for him. That may vary from child to child, which is why I am so wary about the imposition from on high by the Secretary of State of any single system of teaching reading. That undermines the teacher's professional judgment and understanding of the child.

Thirdly, we need to support the development of appropriate technologies, such as voice recognition, as the child's learning in other subjects should not be held up by his inability to read very well. We need to stop trapping learners at the level of their disability by insisting on them mastering the basics before they can learn anything else. If a child manages to make it to university, things improve a lot because he can fund the necessary technology through the disabled student's allowance. But why do we have to wait until a talented and persistent few get that far? We need to do it for the many, not just for the few.

Sadly, schools appear to avoid diagnosing dyslexia for fear of the financial implications of support. That indicates to me that the funding should follow the child as of right and not impose on the school's always-stretched budget. However, failing to diagnose and deal with the problem is far costlier to society as a whole in terms of failed education and the cost of managing crime. Incidentally, it has been shown that developing a dyslexia-friendly school benefits all learners and not just those with the condition.

Initial teacher training needs to be changed urgently if *Every Child Matters* is to be seen as more than just rhetoric. The absence of sufficient dyslexia and SEN tuition within ITT has been a cause for concern for many years. Often, parents will choose to send their children to independent specialist schools to get the smaller class sizes and specialist teaching that can be found there. While there are benefits in this, the child then loses out on the other benefits of inclusion in the mainstream. In a recent TES poll, 90 per cent of teachers thought that children with dyslexia should be taught in the mainstream, but only 12 per cent felt that they had the resources and training to do it properly. But it does not have to be like this, if the Government will only invest a modest amount in the short term in order to achieve long-term benefits and, indeed, savings.

The British Dyslexia Association has accredited courses for professionals working in the field of dyslexia and other specific learning difficulties. However, 65 per cent of teachers attending those courses have to fund themselves, and we do not know how many more are put off taking the courses at all because of the cost. The Dyslexia Institute estimates that with an investment of £27 million in training and teaching for primary schools, no child would be left behind and many problems would be avoided. When you consider the £50 million savings on children who are excluded, which I mentioned earlier, and the Dyslexia Institute's estimate that undiagnosed dyslexia costs the economy £1 billion every year, let alone the costs that could be avoided in the prison system, it seems amazing that the Government are not jumping at the chance of spending a tiny proportion of that—£27 million—as a good investment. Perhaps Minster would like to explain why the Government would rather spend £1.6 billion on the Skills for Life Programme of adult literacy and numeracy in the four years to 2006, rather than invest in getting it right when children are young. It strikes me as a good sound commercial investment to make, even putting aside all the frustration and heartache caused to sufferers and their families when the problem goes undiagnosed and untreated, and it would be cruel to ignore the effects of that.

Finally, I am attracted by the social model of disability that recognises that the problem is created by the expectations of the world rather than any feature of the individual. A person in a wheelchair is not trapped at the bottom of the stairs by his inability to walk up them, but by the existence of the stairs themselves. Similarly, a dyslexic person is not prevented from succeeding by his dyslexia, but by the requirement to learn to read in a particular way before he can succeed at other aspects of education for which he may have a great facility. Most people

with this condition can learn to read and function perfectly well if they are taught in the appropriate way and given appropriate technological help. We have seen many inspiring examples of that. We need to move urgently to investment in more inclusive learning and equal opportunities. That is what it is about. Equal opportunities for children with this difference will enable more people with dyslexia to succeed.

Baroness Buscombe: My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Addington for asking this Question this evening. It has been a wonderful debate, albeit short, which will focus minds on the further action needed to make equal citizenship a reality for everyone. The noble Lord, Lord Addington, was right to point out that some negative attitudes have emerged recently. I have to confess that, with regard to exams, I have heard pupils and parents snipe, in the noble Lord's word, about the so-called advantages of being dyslexic. That is a great pity, and I hope that we have helped to nip it in the bud tonight.

I have to confess that I did not know much about dyslexia until I was well briefed by the Dyslexia Institute and the Disability Rights Commission for this evening's debate. In some ways, I feel rather superfluous to this debate because I cannot speak with the depth of experience and passion of other noble Lords. I am grateful to them for educating me and making me realise how lucky I, my husband and my children are that we do not have this difficulty and lifelong challenge.

I realised that dyslexia was quite common, but I had not realised that it affects so many people: 10 per cent of the population, and some 400,000 children in primary school alone. If dyslexia is not identified and supported early, children become disaffected and frustrated, and are at risk of school and employment failure. There is evidence from Ofsted, the Audit Commission and other independent reports that the system is not identifying or supporting many children with dyslexia. Children are falling between the cracks of mainstream education and the cumbersome special needs system. Wave 3 of the National Primary Strategy has not succeeded for many children with specific learning difficulties.

Inclusion will not work if such children are not supported. As the noble Baroness, Lady Northover, said, in a recent TES poll 90 per cent of class teachers thought that children with dyslexia should be taught in the mainstream, but only 12 per cent thought that they had the resources and training to do so. Therefore, too many children arrive in the first year of secondary education without the literary skills to access the curriculum, and so they are much more likely to be excluded from school. There are too few teachers trained to identify and support dyslexic children. The Government do not prioritise or fund specialist teacher training. Indeed, 65 per cent of teachers on our post-graduate diploma course on dyslexia and literacy are self-funded. There are no standards or framework for provision,

resulting in a postcode lottery. Dyslexia is the most common issue to go before the tribunal.

To assist children who have dyslexia, schools and local authorities are expected to have regard to the special educational needs code of practice, which was published in November 2001. It gives practical advice on carrying out statutory duties to identify, assess and make suitable provision for children with SEN. However, the precise arrangements for screening and assessment are for local determination. Under the National Primary Strategy, the Department for Education and Skills produced an extensive range of specific guidance material for schools on evidence-based interventions for children with significant literacy and numeracy difficulties. A three-way model of intervention was developed that was designed to identify and support children experiencing difficulty in literacy and/or mathematics. A good many of them are likely to fall somewhere on the dyslexia spectrum.

Our now new Leader of the Conservative Party, David Cameron MP, in his former role as Shadow Secretary of State for Education recently called on the Government to deliver on their pre-election promises and launch a full review of SEN facilities and provision in England and Wales. Special educational needs can take many forms, including dyslexia, behavioural problems or a mental or physical disability. Labour's mini-manifesto promised a national audit of special school provision to give better comparative information to local authorities, head teachers and school governors as they plan future special needs provision to meet their local needs. That just has not happened.

Are there solutions? Yes, there are, including what David Cameron has called for. But early intervention also begins with a good systematic phonics programme for the teaching of reading. We very much welcome the interim report from Jim Rose. I am very proud of my colleague, Nick Gibb MP, who has been so tenacious in pushing for the profile of phonics to be raised within the school curriculum. Maybe it is not the panacea for all, but we are glad that the report contains so much positive information for synthetic phonics.

There needs to be a whole school awareness programme about dyslexia; good leadership and school management; and the training of one learning support assistant in each primary school on a level 3 course in dyslexia and literacy, so that they can support those who need extra help. One should remember that dyslexia is more than difficulties in reading. As we have heard this evening, short-term memory problems, information processing and difficulties with organisation and maths are also signs.

What about adults and that transitional phase referred to this evening by the noble Lord, Lord Addington? Adults with dyslexia are over-represented in all areas of disadvantage. The majority were not identified at school and have not received appropriate support. The Government estimate that poor skills can cost

the economy £10 billion each year. The Dyslexia Institute estimates that undiagnosed dyslexia costs the economy around £1 billion per annum. Without literacy skills and other issues related to dyslexia, there are real difficulties with employment. Dyslexics are over-represented in the offending population—something which we will be referring to in tomorrow's debate on prison education. That is not because they have a greater propensity to crime, but due to lack of early support. Recent research shows that 20 per cent of the prison population has hidden disabilities—twice as many as we would expect in the average population. It costs £186 million to keep the extra 10 per cent of dyslexic prisoners in the secure estate. With early intervention, this is preventable. Adults with dyslexia often have very low self-esteem—as we have heard this evening particularly from the noble Lord, Lord Laird—due to their life experiences. Once their dyslexia is recognised, they often need counselling as well as identification and teaching help.

There are solutions. The new tendering process for prison and probation education must ensure that enough funding is available for additional learning support for dyslexic prisoners. Staff in offender education need appropriate skills and training. Staff in further education and adult and community learning must be trained to be aware of the warning signs of a specific learning difficulty and be able to offer good resources and teaching. Government staff dealing with the long-term unemployed must ensure that they are all screened, appropriately taught and helped into suitable employment. Employers must take heed of their responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act and consultancy should be available for employers and staff. Work-based learning providers need to have staff trained to identify and support. The role of the voluntary sector should be enhanced in supporting these vulnerable learners. In conclusion, some key actions need to be taken by government to address continuing discrimination against and exclusion of people with dyslexia.

I want to touch on an issue other noble Lords have raised. I refer to the focus on "the right to read". For some 1 million people with severe dyslexia the right to read is all too often a right denied, and the time has come for action. Without equal access to the same books and published materials as everyone else, people with dyslexia will continue to experience educational, social and workplace exclusion. Solutions are at hand and action is now needed.

I hope that the Minister will have heard from all who have spoken in the debate of the urgency for more action and taken on board the issue raised by my noble friend Lady Morris of Bolton regarding the use of colour, which can vastly improve reading and writing skills—again something I had not realised until this evening's debate.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education and Skills (Lord Adonis): My Lords, the noble Lord, Lord Addington, and almost every other speaker in this debate has spoken with great personal or family

knowledge and commitment on the important issue of dyslexia. We have therefore had both a highly informed and, at times, extremely passionate discussion on the subject. In many ways, I think that the most passionate contribution came from the noble Baroness, Lady Morris, about Meares-Irlen. I listened very carefully to what she said and I think that my best response to her is to say that I will study her remarks with care; I will take them up with my colleagues in the Department of Health; I will write to her fully; and I will happily arrange a meeting either with me or with an appropriate Minister to discuss the issue more fully.

The noble Lord, Lord Addington, expressed serious concern about the controversy raised about the nature of dyslexia, including whether it exists at all, following the recent Channel 4 "Dispatches" programme. The very title of that programme, "The Dyslexia Myth", gave rise to understandable anxiety that children's needs might no longer be recognised and supported. As the noble Lord said, it is important that we reassure parents that that is not the case.

I begin by stating clearly and categorically the Government's view that dyslexia is a complex neurological condition and that people with dyslexia need proper support to develop the reading, writing and comprehension skills essential to succeeding in school, in life and in work. An authoritative report on dyslexia by the British Psychological Society in 1999 contained a helpful definition that many felt allowed professionals to move on from unproductive arguments of the kind that have surfaced again in recent months. The society defined dyslexia in the following terms:

"Dyslexia is evident when accurate fluent word reading and or spelling develops incompletely or with great difficulty. This focuses on literacy learning at the 'word level' and implies that the problem is severe and persistent despite appropriate learning opportunities. It provides the basis for a staged process of assessment through teaching".

The Government accept that definition and it is precisely such a staged process that we have introduced to our primary school national strategy. I will return to that later, as it is crucial to our policy for addressing dyslexia, but let me first address the issue of statutory support for those with serious learning difficulties, including dyslexia, throughout the age range. I will then address wider provision for adults and, finally, wider provision for children.

Statutory support for all children with special educational needs, including those with dyslexia, is provided by the special educational needs statutory framework. Any child who is not making adequate progress should have their needs identified and addressed throughout the graduated response encompassing School Action, School Action Plus and, where the child's needs are over and above what is normally available in schools, through a statement of special educational needs. The special educational needs code of practice defines

adequate progress in the number of ways. For instance, it may be progress that closes the attainment gap between the pupil and the pupil's peers; the progress necessary to prevent the attainment gap growing wider; or, in cases where pupils are, by the nature of their incapacity, on an entirely different learning trajectory from their peers, the progress that matches or betters their previous rate of progress.

Many adults with dyslexia will meet the Disability Discrimination Act definition of a disabled person and will therefore be covered by the Act. The Act aims to protect disabled people against discrimination in a wide range of areas, including employment. Last October, we removed the exemption for small employers and brought a whole range of previously excluded occupations within the scope of the Act's employment provisions. Those changes brought 1 million employers and 7 million more jobs within the scope of the DDA.

Recent research suggests that there has been a reduction in negative attitudes towards the employment of disabled people and an increase in making adjustments for disabled people, but there is still work to be done. We have just launched a further campaign to raise awareness among small businesses, in particular, of their duties under the DDA. That campaign builds on the findings of our earlier research, and will benefit many adults with dyslexia.

That takes me to the wider issue of provision for adults, so powerfully set out by the noble Lord, Lord Laird. To support older learners, the DfES Skills for Life unit last year produced a framework for understanding dyslexia as part of the Government's national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills. That framework provides general information on the nature of dyslexia; a review of theories about dyslexia; and an overview of approaches and programmes used by specialists to support dyslexic learners.

The framework gives a good deal of practical guidance on, for example, programmes used by specialists, including the Fast Forward language programme, the Arrow programme and others. It was produced by the Learning and Skills Development Agency, working with a consortium of dyslexia organisations, including the Dyslexia Institute, as part of a project to develop provision for adult teaching and learning and for English speakers of another language. Those programmes have been designed to meet needs across a range of settings in further education and adult and community settings, with additional focus on offender and workplace settings.

In this context, we recognise that a high proportion of offenders suffer from dyslexia and severe literacy difficulties, as has been mentioned by several noble Lords. We have significantly increased resources for prison and young offender institution education. The budget for that has risen from £57 million to £100 million since 1991 and that extra provision is focused especially on essential skills. I am glad that the House will have the opportunity to debate prison

education further tomorrow, when my noble friend Lady Scotland will yet again be performing in the House.

The third area is support for children. The starting point, beyond the crucial work of parents, is the school and its approach to the teaching of literacy. Our primary national strategy advocates systematic and targeted intervention for any child who experiences reading difficulties. It is based on the premise that for the majority of pupils reading difficulties are most effectively tackled by a whole school approach that emphasises a systematic and planned curriculum response to diverse needs and secures three waves of provision, as set out by the noble Baroness, Lady Buscombe: first, rigorous and systematic attention to the teaching of phonics and spelling rules; secondly, further literacy support for those falling behind; and, thirdly, differentiated curriculum provision with more personalised interventions for small groups or individuals who are still experiencing difficulties, which could include children with dyslexia.

In that third wave, independent research by Greg Brooks, entitled *What Works for Children with Literacy Difficulties?*, recommends intervention that has evidence of impact. The primary national strategy uses that research as the basis for its list of interventions. Reading intervention, such as the Cumbrian programme that featured in the Channel 4 programme, is included in the Brooks research. We therefore recommend its use. It is, however, for local authorities and schools to decide which approaches they use in their local area and other programmes have been found to have a comparable effect. We encourage parents of dyslexic children to discuss with their schools the approaches used in their area and what is best for their children.

Specifically on dyslexia, the primary national strategy has recently updated its advice to teachers in its publication *Learning and Teaching for Dyslexic Children*, which is closely linked to advice from the British Dyslexia Association and is available as a CD-ROM. It advocates an early intervention approach, using teacher assessment of the strengths and learning styles of individual children, identified in the context of the classroom and the curriculum. A learner's needs can be met through adapting learning objectives, providing better ways of reading and assessing the written work—for example, through ICT or even, as appropriate, a scribe—and adapting teaching styles to the needs of the individual pupil, including visual, oral and touch methods.

The needs of children with significant literacy difficulties are also being addressed through the Rose review. Jim Rose has looked at best practice in the early teaching of reading, which includes a focus on phonics but is not exclusively limited to phonics. As the House knows, Mr Rose's interim report was published last week and it focused particularly on teaching methods in mainstream settings. However, the range of provision that will best support children with significant literacy difficulties, including dyslexia, is a specific

element of Mr Rose's remit. As he states in his interim report, two key aspects of successful additional support are to ensure that,

"it is compatible with mainstream practice, irrespective of whether it is taught in regular class settings or elsewhere",

and that, if done separately,

"the gains made by children are sustained once they return to mainstream work".

Jim Rose will consider and report on the issue more fully in his final report, expected early next year.

One programme of additional support that we are taking forward is reading recovery. Through our "Every Child a Reader" project, the Department for Education and Skills, in partnership with the KPMG Foundation and a coalition of charitable and corporate funders, is supporting a £10 million three-year project that will bring tailored literacy support to more than 4,000 children who experience significant difficulties in literacy, through the provision of trained reading-recovery teachers. Not only is the project designed to improve the life chances of those 4,000 children but it will explore the potential for reading recovery teachers to support wider literacy teaching within a school and test out a range of different delivery models for the provision of intensive support to those children who need additional help in literacy.

Reading recovery has been found to be particularly successful with vulnerable groups, including, for example, low-attaining children, some of whom will have dyslexia. We see reading intervention programmes such as the Cumbrian approach as complementary to reading recovery and we will look at how we can take them forward further after Jim Rose has reported finally.

Vital to ensuring the best possible provision for children with dyslexia is the proper training of teachers, not only in teaching reading to those with special needs but also in effectively screening for those needs as early as possible. The Training and Development Agency for Schools is taking steps to help teachers, particularly newly qualified teachers, to be better prepared to support the full range of SEN and disabilities. In particular, it is developing specialist SEN elements in initial teacher training, which involves the development of modular pilot programmes within teacher education in respect of pupils with the full range of SEN and disabilities.

The Training and Development Agency also offers additional placements in special schools, increasing from one to four weeks the amount of time primary and secondary trainees on a three-year or four-year teacher education programme spend in special schools or settings. The TDA is also producing

guidance materials and exemplars of good practice for NQTs and is strengthening SEN expertise among existing teachers.

However, we believe that we can and should do more. In recent months, the Secretary of State, I, and our officials have met leading voluntary sector organisations, which do outstanding work with people with dyslexia—the Dyslexia Institute, the British Dyslexia Association, Xtraordinary People and the Helen Arkell Centre. We have heard from them where they think that we should best focus additional efforts. With Kate Griggs from Xtraordinary People, I recently visited Lyndhurst Primary School in Southwark and saw at first hand its magnificent work on improving outcomes for children with dyslexia and complex processing and reading difficulties. Lyndhurst School is part of a cluster of schools and houses a specially resourced unit for those with severe reading difficulties—the sort of unit mentioned by the noble Baroness, Lady Northover. As part of this, the school has expert staff who can work with children with complex reading difficulties, including those with dyslexia as well as those struggling more generally with literacy. It offers access to specialist therapies, in particular speech and language therapy and occupational therapy, and provides an outreach service for other schools in Southwark.

This model and the dyslexia-friendly schools model developed by the BDA are precisely the kind of initiatives that we would like to see extended more widely. I have been in discussions with stakeholders about how we could extend such provision. Early next year I hope to outline firm proposals. Finally, I thank all noble Lords for their contributions to this debate and for their support in the mission, which we all share, to give people with dyslexia the best possible opportunities to achieve their full potential.

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