

## Dr Martin Blake

Head of Social Responsibility,  
Royal Mail Group plc

### The importance of recruiting from socially excluded groups

Royal Mail actively recruits from socially excluded groups, including people with learning difficulties. "This not only benefits new recruits," says Blake, "but it also improves business practice."

Having conducted several successful pilot schemes, Royal Mail – the UK's largest single employer with 193,000 employees – now plans to make the recruitment scheme an integral part of the company's future.

Blake says: "For us social responsibility is not about PR or spin; it's about sustainable business. Everyone has to benefit. It has to be good for the workplace, employees, business and the brand. If you've got that in place, it's going to last."

"We are looking to challenge traditional recruitment practices. Recruiting from socially excluded groups leads to a more diverse and socially inclusive workplace, increased employee loyalty, increased customer satisfaction and lifts people with disabilities away from sole reliance on benefits system."

To ensure new recruits were able to fulfil their potential, Royal Mail increased investment in the induction process and allowed people more time to settle in their new role. The results, says Blake, were overwhelmingly positive.

"We are now looking at integrating this into business as usual. We know it works. We've seen the benefits it has for employees, customers and the business. Now it needs to be in the mainstream of our recruiting policy."

## Royal Mail Funds Leaflets for Schools

Research shows that at least six children in every class have some form of learning difficulty – and as children become adults 'learning difficulties' often become 'earning difficulties'.

However, one of the UK's largest employers is helping build bridges between the worlds of school and work. Royal Mail, which recruits from all walks of life, people with all kinds of learning and physical disability, recently asked Mindroom to help create top-quality educational literature which could be distributed to schools. It wanted to outline its wide range of job opportunities and training schemes, while helping school staff see how children with learning difficulties might best be directed.

The result is a six-leaflet pack, written by Mindroom and designed by Graphic Partners, Edinburgh. The publication will help teachers and lecturers identify and understand a range of learning difficulties. Royal Mail has sponsored the packs, printed 20,000, and will distribute them widely in schools.

Martin Blake, Head of Social Responsibility at Royal Mail Group plc, explains: "We are working hard to employ a rich and diverse mix of people

who reflect in every sense the communities where we live and work. At Royal Mail we understand that levels of learning difficulty and disability vary considerably from person to person, so we know that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach just doesn't work".

"We hope this publication will be of value to teachers when working with students, and provide them with the opportunities to discuss and evaluate future career paths," says Dr Blake. Royal Mail education service, email: info@edist.co.uk

The Royal Mail publication follows a similar project commissioned by Dumfries and Galloway Council last year.

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## Conference DVD Launched

Forty experts from around the world presented the latest research on learning difficulties at Mindroom's two-day conference in Glasgow in spring 2006. Some of the unique presentations made at **The Social Brain 2 See The Bigger Picture** are now available on DVD.



Leading specialists in neurobiology, education, genetics, child development, psychiatry and psychology debated the social brain and social developmental disorders. They revealed the science behind conditions such as autism, Asperger syndrome, ADHD, dyslexia, DAMP – and discussed how best to live with them.

With some 1,000 participants from 23 countries, the conference was a major networking and information-sharing event for professionals at all levels, as well as for parents and delegates with learning difficulties themselves.

Mindroom founder Sophie Dow, whose daughter has complex

learning difficulties, says: "Society seems to have its own form of learning difficulty: a blind spot – an unwillingness to recognise these children and meet their needs. We need to understand this complex thing called the brain so we can accommodate different needs. Only then can children with learning difficulties live their lives to the full."

Combining theory and practice, the conference ranged from talks on new dental treatments to personal presentations about living with learning difficulties. Delegate Melanie Harris says: "I found the whole event very powerful, very stimulating, very inspiring. What was amazing was that in among all the doctors, professors, academics,

parents, educators, and health professionals were sprinkled the very people about whom we were all gathered together."

The conference was widely covered in the media at the time, but many who were unable to attend have requested further details. So Mindroom has produced a double-DVD pack bringing together the best of the conference.

It can be used by teachers as an educational resource, or by parents and professionals. It provides a unique opportunity to hear Dr Lorna Wing, a world-renowned psychiatrist and co-founder of the National Autistic Society

Other speakers include Christopher Gillberg, Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and co-organiser of the conference, Bill Colley, Education Consultant, Dr Loretta Giorcelli, who encourages inclusive education in Australia, Dr Sam Goldstein, from University of Utah, Nina Black, a Swede with severe ADHD, the parents of an autistic child, as well as a voxpop from conference delegates.

The double-DVD costs just £9.99. Available direct from Mindroom, while stocks last. Tel: 0131-653 6235 or [www.mindroom.org](http://www.mindroom.org)

## Focus Moves to Diagnostic Centres

Having hosted three major conferences in three years Mindroom is poised to start the second phase of its charitable work. It will now focus on founding and funding a series of diagnostic centres in the UK.

"We have a very clear vision of what we want to achieve," says founder Sophie Dow. "The Mindroom Centres will be groundbreaking in that they will be multi-facetted. They will, first and foremost, have a clinical dimension and be staffed by a multi-professional team. This team will be able to assess and diagnose the child, or adult, within a matter of weeks, as opposed to years as is often the case now. Those years are lost years for both child and family".

"The first Mindroom Centre", she adds, "will have research facilities

as well as an educational department".

"Last but not least, we want the building to match our vision. It will be a place that lifts your spirits and make you feel great about who you are. We want people to think: 'I am here to find out what I am really good at – not what I'm not good at'."

The speed with which the Mindroom centres can be realised relies partly on funding. Several businesses and individuals have already embraced the challenge. Lifestyle Fitness, which runs some

40 fitness centres in England and Wales, adopted Mindroom as its chosen charity for 2006 and aims to raise £50,000 with fun runs, a charity ball in Durham, and collection boxes. At the other end of the spectrum, a pub quiz in London recently raised £500, supporters in Australia donated £385, and Mindroom employee Mig Coupe raised £1,200 in her 36-hour Three Peaks Challenge. If you have fundraising ideas or initiatives, Mindroom would love to hear from you! [moreinfo@mindroom.org](mailto:moreinfo@mindroom.org)



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### Sponsor Thanks

**Graphic Partners** is an award-winning graphic design agency based in Edinburgh. **Graphic Partners** continues to support our 2020 Vision by supplying their services in kind.

**Greenparka** is the cutting-edge digital division of **Graphic Partners**. They provide our website and are responsible for all our electronic communication. They, too, supply their services in kind.

Thank you also to **Standard Life** for the printing of our newsletter, yet again.

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## Imagine for a Moment

Imagine for a moment that you have been working all day on your computer. An important document has been polished to perfection and is ready to be printed out.

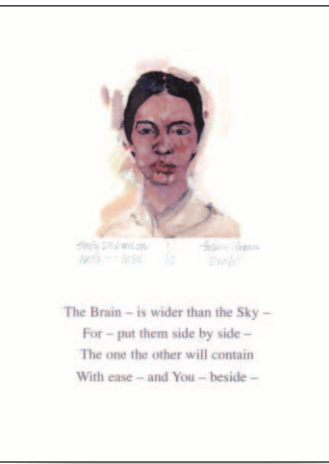
You press the print button. Nothing happens. Arrghhh!  
Frustration, anger, futility, resignation. You feel them all. Understandably.

Having learning difficulties can be just like that. You have all the tools to work with, but your 'internal' print button is out of order. You feel frustration and failure at every turn. No wonder things so often end in tears.

January/June 07

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**Conference DVD** Mindroom Centres / Post Office Leaflets / Big Picture Award / Equazen Trial / Mig Appointed / Breaking and Entering / Bateman Shoe / Beacon Award



## The Brain

The Brain – is wider than the Sky  
For – put them side by side.

The one the other will contain  
With ease – and You –  
Beside.

Emily Dickinson 1830-86

## Mindroom Presents First Award

Drs Blackman, Ostrander and Herman at the John Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore, Maryland, have been presented with the first See The Bigger Picture Award.

Established this year by Mindroom, in collaboration with prestigious American Journal of Attention Disorders, the award seeks to encourage research into ADHD and co-existing difficulties. The prize is provided to the authors of an innovative article contributing to an understanding of issues related to co-occurring psychiatric developmental and related problems in ADHD.

This year's winners, Gabrielle Blackman, Rick Ostrander and Keith Herman examined the clinical presentation of children with ADHD and Depression.

The prize is a portrait (lithograph) of American poet Emily Dickinson with an illustration of her poem The Brain.

"The portrait is by the esteemed artist, Professor of Art, and Mindroom patron Eileen Hogan," explains Sophie Dow. "We have printed a limited edition of just 15. This allows us to present one each year until 2020, by which time Mindroom should have achieved its objective."

Mindroom was established in the year 2001 with a 2020 Vision – to create such awareness and understanding that by the year 2020 all children/adults with learning difficulties are recognised and helped.

The second award will be announced in April.

The winning article, *Children with ADHD and Depression*, can be downloaded from our website: [www.mindroom.org](http://www.mindroom.org)

## Fish Oil in Exam Test



Education chiefs in County Durham, England, have launched a trial they believe could improve GCSE pass levels.

All Year 11 pupils at Durham County Council's 36 comprehensive schools are being offered omega-3 fish oil supplements to see whether they can boost exam performances. It is hoped some 5,000 Year 11 pupils will take eye q™, a supplement being offered free of charge by manufacturer Equazen.

The initiative – the largest-ever programme using fatty acids in the classroom – is the brainchild of Dave Ford, the council's Chief Schools Inspector, who has followed the progress of children involved in earlier studies in the county with the omega-3 fish oil

supplement. He is convinced that the same improvements in concentration and learning, if applied to Year 11 pupils, could have a direct impact on their GCSE results. The county-wide strategy will continue until the pupils complete GCSE examinations in June, but the first results may be seen when they sit their 'mock' exams in December.

The plan has won the backing of Councillor Claire Vasey, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services. She says: "We have been leading the way in researching the effects of omega-3 supplementation on children's

behaviour and learning. If we can improve the concentration of some of our children with this initiative, then they will benefit even more from the opportunities presented to them in our schools."



## Inverclyde Moves Forward

Professionals from several agencies in Inverclyde, Scotland, have formed a group to explore the issues raised at Mindroom's recent conference **The Social Brain 2: See the Bigger Picture**.

Organisers of a new group, who attended the conference in Glasgow, say: "Following the conference an interest group in Inverclyde was set up, to discuss matters raised at the conference and the feasibility of taking any of these forward in

terms of service delivery in our local area.

"We would be interested to hear from colleagues in any other local authority areas, who also attended this wonderful and inspiring conference, and who, like us, would like to further explore issues raised."

Please contact Inverclyde Bigger Picture Group on **01475 714713** or **01475 714726**.

## Beacon Award

Sophie Dow, founder of Mindroom, has been highly commended in the annual Beacon Prize for the third year.

Dow has been honoured in the New Initiative category of the award scheme set up to encourage individual contributions to charitable and social causes. Previous winners include Sir Bob Geldof and Jamie Oliver.

Dow says she is delighted, but laughs: "I feel a bit like Martin Scorsese – always nominated for Oscars but never actually receives one."



## Plans Afoot for New Shoe

The last few pairs of the fourth Mindroom Shoe are available at shoe designer Helen Bateman's Edinburgh store. Already there are plans afoot for another.

"We're working on a new idea based on a peacock theme. Embroidery was sampled in December and I'm keen to use the theme on a variety of things but delivery of the shoe won't be until next summer," reveals Bateman.

"The unveiling of the next Helen Bateman/Mindroom shoe is as exciting as the opening of the Olympic Games," says Sophie Dow. "Although Helen gives you the illusion that you have a say in the design process, she is utterly autocratic in her approach. And rightly so, as all previous models have been a sell-out success." [www.helenbateman.com](http://www.helenbateman.com)



Selma – the stylish way to promote a charity.

## Movie Thanks Mindroom

While Jude Law enjoys good reviews for his role in Anthony Minghella's latest film *Breaking and Entering*, Mindroom is also celebrating its role in the movie success.

Mindroom provided inspiration for one aspect of the film, and founder Sophie Dow and her colleague Dr Christopher Gillberg appear on the credits as advisers. Dow is a Swede whose teenage daughter Annie has learning difficulties – *Breaking and Entering* stars a Swedish mother and her daughter who is struggling with being somewhat different.

Dow admits that Anthony Minghella, a former London neighbour, sent her an early script for comment and that she and Gillberg, Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, helped develop the character of Bea, a child on the autistic spectrum. They also advised on the thoughts and emotions of being a mother of a child with learning difficulties.

"It's a multi-faceted film that deals with several fundamental issues such as the toll that learning difficulties take on family life and marriage, but also adultery, immigration, crime and the importance of giving people a second chance. It's an excellent and very thought-provoking film," enthuses Dow.

*Breaking and Entering* stars Jude Law, with Robin Wright Penn as his partner and Juliette Binoche as his mistress.



Martin Freeman and Jude Law in *Breaking and Entering*.

## Coupe Joins Charity

Mig Coupe has joined Mindroom as Head of the Mindroom Extension Programme.

A speech and language therapist with over 27 years' experience and a specific interest in communication problems and people with learning needs, Mig previously ran Mindroom's Extension Programme part-time. She will now work full-time to help the Board move Mindroom towards its 2020 vision. Mig's main duties will involve developing the

Mindroom Centres, co-ordinating the charity's research into learning difficulties and responding to individual and specific requests and enquiries.

Contact Mig Coupe on Tel: **0131-317 1016**. Email: [mig@mindroom.org](mailto:mig@mindroom.org)

Mig Coupe

