



# **Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Specialist Support for Students with SpLDs in Higher Education**

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## Background

These Guidelines have been produced under the auspices of the following objectives of the Association of Dyslexia Specialists in Higher Education (ADSHE):

- to share knowledge and disseminate good practice, including promoting and developing the understanding of all aspects of dyslexia
- to clarify and promote students' entitlement to dyslexia support within individual institutions and throughout the sector

A working party was set up by ADSHE to address the issue of quality in the provision of specialist 1:1 support for students with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs) and to draw up guidance for best practice.

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It is recognised that there are a number of professionals involved in the process that leads to 1:1 support for students funded through the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA). This support is based on:

- recommendations made in psychological assessment reports (see 1.1)
- recommendations agreed by the student and the needs assessor (Assessment of Needs/Access Report)
- approval of the above recommendations by Local Authorities, (Student Finance England will deal with all English students entering HE in 2009-10), NHSRC and other funding bodies.

### ADSHE

- welcomes all moves towards an open and constructive dialogue between the professionals engaged in identifying student needs and delivering 1:1 support under the remit of the DSA.
- believes that specialist knowledge (from all participants) should be respected and research should be cited where appropriate
- believes that accountability and transparency are essential to good practice.

*In clarifying and promoting students' entitlement to DSA-funded dyslexia support within individual institutions and throughout the sector (DIUS 2008) it is essential for all interested parties to consider the following:*

- Before an academic course starts, the student will only know what their needs are in very broad terms. This is especially true where a student has only recently been identified as a dyslexic learner. There is growing prevalence of students being diagnosed on entry to higher education. In a UK study of over 100 institutions, 43% of the total dyslexic population were diagnosed as dyslexic after admission to university (Reid & Kirk, 2005:19). Similarly Mortimore describes the "existence of many individuals who are not identified until, as adults, they wish to return to the education system" (2003: 51).

- The specialist tutor working with students with SpLDs will need to review the development of strategies on an ongoing basis as needs emerge. Sumner observes: “increasingly demanding requirements at each level of a course and the need for frequent review of learning means that long term goals must be flexible” (Sumner in BDA, 2009). Similarly Du Pre, Gilroy, & Miles maintain “the tutor’s approach needs to be flexible and responsive, and at times it will be necessary to review progress and negotiate with the student what type and level of support will be appropriate as her skills develop and course demands change” (2008:88).
- Specialist tutors adopt a layered approach in their response, designing support to play to student strengths, addressing difficulties in small, consolidating steps, and helping students to an understanding of how the interaction of SpLD and learning affects them “...the support tutor...provide[s] a ‘scaffold’ to help students develop strategies to deal more directly with specific weaknesses” (Mortimore, 2003:51).

## 1 Identification of SpLD

The SpLD Assessment Standards Committee (SASC) were tasked with establishing clear guidance for the identification of students with SpLDs.

**1.1** Chartered psychologists and specialist teachers who hold Practising Certificates are qualified to carry out diagnostic assessments and write reports. The SpLD Working Group 2005/DfES Guidelines for this procedure can be found on the SpLD assessment page of the SASC website:

<http://www.siteserver.co.uk/sasc/downloads/DiagnosticAssessmentReport>

ADSHE believes that, in a student-centred process, the following standards should be used as best practice guidelines at the identification stage:

### 1.2 Prior to a psychological assessment

A student should be aware of the reasons for referral, the content of the assessment itself, and the follow-up process - including the importance of consent to disclose. Cooper observes having “ a screening process for dyslexia...provides a clear message that the university expects dyslexics to be among their students” (Pollak, 2009:72). Grant comments that the screening process should be “treated as a useful first step to seeking further advice” (2002:13). Fraser & Zybutz further emphasise the student-centred approach of an initial screening which “offers the opportunity for contact to be made between the student and the support service...an essential first stage in identifying a student’s support needs” (2004:4)

### 1.3 A minimum time scale for the return of diagnostic reports to students.

A survey of the ADSHE membership found that two weeks is widely regarded as best practice (although five weeks is not uncommon). Longer than two weeks could be detrimental to the student and prolongs an already protracted procedure.

### 1.4 The original copy of the report must be given to the student

### 1.5 Post-assessment feedback to the student

This is essential to ensure that the student understands the report findings and its implications. Ideally this should be done by the author of the report; however, it is recognised that this is not always practical. Feedback should be handled sensitively by someone with a clear understanding of the issues involved.

McLoughlin, Leather, & Stringer note that “Providing feedback *is therefore* the most important part of an assessment. The goal is to enable clients to understand the difficulties in order that they can take appropriate action. It is through proper explanations that clients will be able to start developing their awareness and understanding. If, following an assessment, clients leave without a greater understanding of the nature of their difficulties and what can be done to overcome them, then it’s been a waste of their time” (2002:68).

### 1.6 An explanation of the Disabled Students’ Allowances

While responsibility for applying for the DSA lies with the student, it should be recognised that students with SpLD are those who are most likely to find the paperwork involved with the application difficult. In many institutions the disability service (or its equivalent) will offer students support with the application process.

## 2.0 Administration

ADSHE believes that, in a student-centred process, the following standards should be used as best practice guidelines:

### 2.1 Accountability and transparency are essential and should be evident throughout the provision of 1:1 support.

### 2.2 Documentation

All documentation should be stored in compliance with the Data Protection Act (1998).

### 2.3 Attendance

Attendance records must be maintained.

### 2.4 Records of Work

Teaching notes detailing support are kept for the use of specialist dyslexia tutors, their supervisors and students. Confidentiality should be assured.

### 2.5 Administration Notes

These are also known as case or office notes and are a record of support and contact, additional to records of work.

### 2.6 Learning Contract

A formal agreement (often known as a learning contract, learning agreement or something similar) should be drawn up between the dyslexia tutor (3.1) and student. This needs to cover tutor responsibilities, student responsibilities and accountability to DSA.

### 2.7 Student Feedback

- 1) Opportunities for student feedback should be provided at least once a year to cover all service provision and to inform future practice.
- 2) Feedback should be available in the public domain and utilised in service reviews and for identifying staff development needs (it is expected that this will be covered by the HEI's QAA procedures).

### 2.8 Dissemination of Information

- 1) Students are encouraged to sign a 'consent to disclose' document so that the disability service can disseminate information about anticipatory reasonable adjustments to, for example, tutors, library service, examination office, academic departments, placement contacts, etc.
- 2) With student consent, and in accordance with institutional protocols, it may be appropriate for dyslexia tutors to liaise with individual staff.
- 3) All HEI staff should have access to ongoing opportunities for SpLD awareness training. Good practice would be to include an awareness training session for all newly appointed staff as part of their induction. Dyslexia tutors and students should be encouraged to be involved in such training.

### 3 The Specialist Dyslexia Tutor in HE

Dyslexia tutors are trained to understand the issues that challenge the learning strategies of dyslexic learners in HE, the implications of psychological assessment reports and the way these affect the design and delivery of individual learning programmes. Taking account of the interplay between the elements that influence tutorials is a continuous and dynamic process in a student-centred approach.

The role of the tutor can be seen to be manifold as it “involves a mix of teaching, counselling [and] advocacy” (Hunter-Carsch & Herrington, 2001:173). Additionally Severs states: “...the main areas that are currently to be considered during the assessment of needs relating to DSA...[are] Research, Composition, Proof Reading, Note Taking and Time Management’ (2008:1). However, she goes further in referring to the student’s “Global Self Concept where non-academic factors, such as social, emotional, physical and special skills are also regarded as being essential considerations when the progress and retention of learners with dyslexia is concerned” (Severs, 2008:1).

#### 3.1 Professional standards

The academic nature of dyslexia tutorial work is increasingly recognised. This is underpinned by ensuring that tutors are:

- 1) appropriately qualified  
See <http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/spldcourses.html> for BDA Accredited and Recognised Courses for Teachers and Other Professionals
- 2) provided with supervision at regular intervals to ensure quality of provision
- 3) encouraged to be actively engaged in continuing professional development  
Postings of opportunities for professional development can be accessed from:  
ADSHE <http://www.adshe.org.uk>  
BDA <http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/>,  
PATOSS <http://www.patoss-dyslexia.org/>
- 4) able to apply their specialist practice to the context of the student’s HEI.

#### 3.2 Working 1:1

The dyslexia tutor should have the training and skills to take account of:

- 1) the well-recognised effects of SpLDs on language
- 2) the effects of short-term and working memory deficit
- 3) the influence of processing speed on learning  
Grant notes that a “weak working memory and[or] a slow speed of visual processing will impede the rate of learning (2007:94).
- 4) the possibility of a history of failure in academic learning.

Sometimes dyslexic students can feel angry about how they have been misjudged or humiliated. It is important that this is not misinterpreted, but allowed a voice (Cooper, 2009:80). Gilroy (1995, in Pollak, 2005) writes about the effect of past experiences like these on self concept “...having been branded as ‘thick’,...being ridiculed and misunderstood,...having struggled hard at school without efforts being recognised” (2005:40). The long term effects of this history should be taken into account.

### 3.3 Working with colleagues within the HEI

Tutors...can play an important role in advocating appropriate support (Cooper, 2009: 77).

The dyslexia tutor should:

1) provide advice to colleagues on inclusive learning and reasonable adjustments. A 'reasonable adjustment' may be defined as an accommodation or alteration to existing academic programmes, which is necessary for students to have the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities. The implementation of a reasonable adjustment aims to allow students to achieve their maximum potential within a framework of academic standards (ADSHE date not specified).

Good practice documents in relation to reasonable adjustments can be found on the ADSHE website:

<http://www.adshe.org.uk/WordDocs/ReasonableAdjustments.doc>

2) provide advice and guidance on appropriate formats for information and feedback.

Hunter-Carsch & Herrington note "A learning development approach which integrates support into the teaching and assessment procedures, and which is multi-tiered to provide the additional support required by particular groups or students, offers a model for maximizing support for all students (2001:236).

3) provide advice and guidance on compliance with the law.

Dyslexia tutors have a role in encouraging academic staff to understand "that inclusive learning and teaching practices, far from being an awkward imposition demanded by interfering disability legislation, in fact improves the retention and attainment of all" (Pollak, 2005:285).

4) be involved in induction training of new staff.

Increasingly, it is becoming clear that specialist dyslexia staff can be most usefully engaged in training a range of staff to recognize the implications of having dyslexic students within their 'client group' (Hunter-Carsch & Herrington, 2001:230).

5) be available for consultation and support to colleagues.

Staff can be "encouraged to think about access to the curriculum at the point of course design so that the need for reasonable adjustments would diminish" (Hurst, 2009:29).

### 3.4 Working with colleagues within the profession

ADSHE was founded with the aim of sharing best practice. In this spirit it is expected that tutors will:

- 1) share information on, for example, forms of paperwork, policies and business procedures to avoid unnecessary duplication of work
- 2) contribute to research
- 3) support professional colleagues in their reflective practice.

A variety of good practice documents can be found on the ADSHE website

<http://www.adshe.org.uk/resources/good-practice.htm> and at PATOSS

<http://www.patoss-dyslexia.org/>



## 4 Support

It is essential that everyone involved in the process has a clear understanding of both why specialist support is appropriate for students with SpLDs and of the underlying, research-based principles that underpin that support.

### 4.1 Why Specialist Support is necessary

Students with SpLDs may experience some degree of phonological difficulty, a weak short term memory, a slow speed of information processing, and diverse spatial, temporal and social perceptions, to which might be added a history of educational failure.

McGahey and Szumko observe, 'beginning to work with a specialist tutor may be the first time they have really felt understood' (2007:1).

Dyslexia is a combination of abilities and difficulties; the difficulties affect the learning process in aspects of literacy and sometimes numeracy. Coping with required reading is generally seen as the biggest challenge at Higher Education level due in part to difficulty in skimming and scanning written material. A student may also have an inability to express his/her ideas clearly in written form and in a style appropriate to the level of study. Marked and persistent weaknesses may be identified in working memory, speed of processing, sequencing skills, auditory and/or visual perception, spoken language and motor skills. Visuo-spatial skills, creative thinking and intuitive understanding are less likely to be impaired and indeed may be outstanding. Enabling or assistive technology is often found to be very beneficial (DfES 2005:5).

Researchers have identified the diversity of the dyslexic profile:

Morgan and Klein note: "...dyslexia is complex, subtle and eludes definition. It appears in varying degrees of severity and affects people in different ways'. (2000:3). Grant suggests it is useful to refer to the terms 'dyslexias' or 'dyspraxias' as this helps to break away from misleading stereotyping" (2007:2).

It is clear in general that dyslexic individuals show an imbalance of skills: they may have difficulty in taking in symbolic material when it is presented at speed, but they may be very successful at tasks that require good reasoning power (Du Pre, Gilroy, & Miles, 2008:7).

Definitions of the term should therefore "...acknowledge the individuality of dyslexic learners...people with dyslexia will not exhibit the same characteristics, nor to the same degree" (Reid & Kirk, 2005:3).

What is clear is that these students do not always learn effectively in a traditional way and alternative approaches need to be adopted.

Morgan and Klein observe the "failure of the dyslexic learner to respond to 'traditional' teaching methods may be explained on the basis of a difference in learning style" (2000:13).

Assuming that everyone can take in and remember sequences of information (particularly auditory information) is disabling (Cooper, 2009:70).

Pollak comments that the academy – the HE establishment – esteems linear thought, for example the conventional structure of an essay, above other forms, and this may disadvantage those that do not naturally think that way (Pollak, 2005:xvi).

Evidence-based practice and research underpin the development of training programmes for specialist tutors who work with adult students with SpLD. 1:1 tuition is based on individual needs and is specific to each student. Every dyslexic person is different and should be treated like an individual...dyslexia is greater than the sum of reading and spelling problems (Reid & Kirk, 2005:5).

## 4.2 Seven underlying principles facilitate learning for students with SpLDs which the students themselves need to understand (Mind Map)

- 1) **Metacognition** – Students with SpLDs need to understand how they process information to facilitate their own learning. Dyslexia tutors work closely with students to help them understand their individual learning preferences, strengths and weaknesses. Thus the “development of conscious self-knowledge about our style can enhance learning so that particular skills and approaches are used intentionally rather than automatically” (Mortimore, 2003:11).

Metacognition, or knowledge about one’s own way of thinking, plays an important role...how important it is for students to know their own style tendencies and to take personal responsibility for making use of their learning strengths. This should give students greater self-awareness and a positive academic self-concept or image of themselves as learners (Mortimore, 2003:12 ).

Often metacognition does not occur spontaneously in dyslexic learners and in those cases ‘fostering it through teaching must be considered crucial’ (Ridsdale in Turner & Rack , 2004:264).

Helping students understand the unique nature of their own specific learning difficulty and encouraging them to develop their own working methods is essential for learners in HE. Knowing they are in the “safe” environment of a support session, allows learners to experiment and to try new things; hence metacognition is encouraged (Severs, 2008:1).

- 2) **Multi-sensory** – The dyslexia tutor adopts a multi-sensory approach to learning, respecting students’ preferred learning styles. Lee observes that “most [dyslexia specialists] agree that some form of multi-sensory learning is required. Multi-sensory learning involves the integration of visual, auditory, tactile or kinaesthetic modes, as in associating letters with sounds and in writing’ (Lee in Severs, 2008:1).

There is a consensus that multi-sensory learning is particularly beneficial to dyslexic learners by arguing that multiple perceptual pathways strengthens memory.

- 3) **Relevance** – Most students with SpLDs learn best when they can see the relevance of what they are doing.

“This involves teaching strategies in the context of the work the student is doing at that time as meaning has a key role in the cognitive style of the dyslexic person” (Morgan & Klein, 2000:17).

“Most learners need to know the big picture when learning (DfES, 2004).

- 4) **Motivation** – It is recognised that motivation is an important component of SpLD students’ learning experience. Motivation can sustain students’ expectations, aspirations, self-esteem and confidence. Motivation is an essential element in keeping the student focused and able to enjoy their studies.

As a result of negative experiences within their past education, a student’s] lack of self-esteem and confidence may result in considerable anxiety linked with their learning at university” (Sumner, 2009)

- 5) **Overlearning** - Students with SpLDs often learn quickly and forget quickly. They need to recognise this and understand the efficacy of overlearning.

“It is clear that ‘the unique nature of the dyslexic difficulty’ mean that strategies often need ‘to be repeated, re-focused and re-applied, often time after time’,

until the individual again feels control over their own learning” (Severs, 2008:3). Students with SpLDs often require plenty of overlearning and reinforcement of a process before they can apply it (Hunter-Carsch & Herrington, 2001:83).

Lee notes “The dyslexic individual is in a virtually permanent state of learning, finding it very difficult to achieve the status of having learned or mastered a skill” (2002:11).

- 6) **‘Little and Often’** – Most students with SpLDs will effectively manage their own learning when it is broken into small manageable chunks and when they take short, frequent breaks.

“An important role of the dyslexia support tutor is to break workloads down into smaller more manageable ‘chunks’ with personal deadlines, working with the student to achieve these goals as part of their personal learning programme. As students begin to realise they are able to achieve their targets, their motivation, confidence and self-esteem increase, anxiety levels fall and their pathway to learning becomes clearer” (Sumner, 2009).

- 7) **Modelling** – Moving through the model-mentor-independence process is very effective for many students with SpLDs who find it difficult to appreciate what a task actually involves.

The dyslexia tutor might first model strategies and approaches that students then put into practice (Morgan & Klein 2000:172).

On a more challenging task modelling may have to be repeated several times before a student moves into a mentored role. The aim is clearly to work towards independent learning where one should be striving to achieve autonomy in learning and that responsibility should shift from the trainer to the client as soon as the support programme is established (Reid & Kirk, 2005:14).

Support should be tailored to “...the individual needs, directed towards success and some form of achievement and should eventually lead to the person taking charge of his or her own learning” (Reid & Kirk, 2005:15).

Professor Bob Burden speaking at the ADSHE Networking Day 2009 commented: “All learning includes three dimensions, namely, the cognitive dimension of knowledge and skills, the psychodynamic dimension of motivation and emotions and the social dimension of communication and co-operation” ([www.adshe.org.uk](http://www.adshe.org.uk)).

#### 4.3 Student perception of 1:1 support at university

Many students do not fully realise what specialist support at this level involves. It should be made clear to students that:

- 1) Specialist support is focussed on the student’s metacognition, alongside the skill being learned
- 2) While many students have been taught study skills in school, dyslexia tutors can help them adapt these for university and introduce new strategies
- 3) Students attending work-placements for example as trainee teachers, social workers or nurses may require focused advice on support mechanisms or reasonable adjustments to assist in their general practice.

“The dyslexia tutor can work with the student to develop strategies which can be transferred into practice requirements, according to personal and placement requirements...Where required, dyslexia tutors can provide guidance to mentors or supervisors regarding useful support and simple

adjustments that can be put in place for students on work-placements”(Sumner, 2009).

- 4) Modelling the best use of assistive software and technology reinforces IT training.  
 “The impact can be extraordinary if the assistive technology is recognized as built around our senses and capable of forming a powerful individualized learning styles environment... Technical expertise needs to service the learning priorities and be integrated with learning support” (Cooper, 2009:81).  
 “The future of study skill and IT training is dependent on their ability to merge closer together with one another as the flaw in not doing so may prevent the concept of multi-sensory training from being fully utilised” (Choudhury, 2008:9).
- 5) Tutorial support is a continual process of empowering students, helping them to become independent learners.  
 “It is clear that some students may require regular, on-going support throughout their whole programme of study, whilst others may access support at crucial stages, as and when required. A system that can therefore encompass this range of need is essential, to allow flexibility and accommodate individual differences and changes in circumstances” (Severs, 2008:2).

(Please note student feedback on Specialist 1:1 Support in HE can be found at: <http://www.adshe.org.uk>)

#### 4.4 Delivery of 1:1 tutorials

Previous guidance (paragraph 110 for DSA 2010/11) states:

*Study skills tuition to help manage difficulties within higher education, language and numeracy through the more effective use of dyslexic thinking styles. Individual study support sessions may be required because generalised advice offered by a department may not take into account different learning skills. The Department has not set a ceiling on the number of hours of study skills support that may be provided through the DSAs. However, the aim of such support should be to impart generic skills which, together with any specialist equipment that has been provided, will allow the student to become an independent learner. Therefore, any study skills support recommended should be tailored to the student’s individual needs, setting out clear goals and timescales for achieving those goals.*

New guidance (paragraph 109) for 2011/12 states:

*Dyslexia students may be eligible for the following support from the DSAs subject to the nature of their learning difficulties and their needs assessment*

- *Specialist Support (1:1 support and Group workshops)*
- *Individual 1:1 support addresses the effects of language processing (acquiring, retaining and recalling information) in written and spoken language as well as the range of memory, organizational, attention and numeracy difficulties that students with specific learning difficulties (SpLDs) often face when producing academic work in a HE context. These particular difficulties may only become evident when these students encounter the range and increasing complexity of academic tasks inherent in studying at HE level. Whilst a ceiling has not been set on the number of hours of 1:1 specialist SpLD support that may be provided through the DSAs, this support should, in conjunction with specialist equipment provided and incorporating IT strategies,*

*aim to develop the students' skills for autonomy in the learning environment. This specialist support should be tailored to the student's individual needs which will require the professionals delivering the support to set out clear goals and timescales for achieving these goals. Some students may need additional 1:1 specialist SpLD support as their course progresses and recommendations for this should be considered on a case by case basis. Whilst this guidance refers to specialist 1:1 support for students with SpLDs, similar 1:1 support may be considered for students with mental health difficulties where recommended in the needs assessment report.*

- *Group workshops should not be considered as an alternative to specialist 1:1 support, but may be effective for some students to share strategies and develop peer support or for some generic information sessions such as stress relief exercises for exam anxiety or speed reading courses. Whether additional support of this type can be funded from the student's DSAs must be considered on a case by case basis.*
- 1) Students are responsible for developing their own learning processes and dyslexia tutors are facilitators. Dyslexia sessions should be student led. Committing to support sessions can in itself assist the development of better time management and organisation.
  - 2) Learning Priorities: Any individual provision should be negotiated with the learner before support sessions begin, taking into account the demands of their degree programme, their individual experience of dyslexia and the usual considerations of any SMART targeting, so that goal setting is Specific, Manageable, Achievable, Realistic and Time constrained (Severs, 2008:2).

1:1 support focuses on the individual student and their evolving needs. Learning priorities in support sessions are developed by the student and dyslexia tutor, in partnership (3.2). In identifying priorities account should be taken of

- the student's learning profile and
- the student's current level of proficiency
- the nature of the course, how it is delivered and assessment methods
- what has worked (or not) for the student in the past
- recommendations made by diagnosticians and needs assessors.

The aim of support sessions is to

- reinforce and build on successful strategies
- support the student in critical reflection to enable independent understanding of their working preferences and of how the interaction of SpLD and learning affects them
- ensure that all sessions are student-centred with the flexibility to work with students on what is most urgent.

- 3) '*...clear goals and timescales for achieving those goals*' (DIUS, 2009).
  - It is good practice to establish short and long term goals in establishing learning priorities; however, it must be recognised that the demands of any course at this level change year by year so that inevitably each new academic year will bring new challenges. For example, the final year for many students involves an extended dissertation and the organisation and management of such a detailed assignment may mean that students who have become independent learners in many ways once again find themselves needing a high level of support. "As they progress through their courses, the quantity and volume of work increases and they can no

longer cope without additional support."  
 (dcsf.gov.uk/studentsupport/administrators/doc/DSAs.doc)

- The DIUS guidelines are clear that '*... a ceiling has not been set on the number of hours of study skill support that may be provided through the DSAs*' (DIUS, 2009). Given the research-based principles on which dyslexia support is based it is clear that effective support for students with SpLDs has to be flexible

#### 4.5 Content of Support

The enclosed Mind Map provides an overview of the breadth of learning tasks and strategies that shape learning priorities. The seven underlying principles are the first consideration whenever a new strategy is to be learned

## Abbreviations and Definitions

ADSHE	Association of Dyslexia Specialists in Higher Education
AMBDA	Associate Membership of the British Dyslexia Association
BDA	British Dyslexia Association
DIUS	Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
DSA	Disabled Students' Allowances
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
PATOSS	Professional Association of Teachers of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties
NHSBSA	National Health Service Business Services Authority
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
SFE	Student Finance England (students in Wales and Scotland will continue to be funded as before)

SLC	Student Loans Company
SpLD	Specific Learning Difficulties

## Definitions

### Dyslexia:

British Dyslexia Association (BDA, 2008) definition for Dyslexia:

Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty which mainly affects the development of literacy and language related skills. It is likely to be present at birth and to be lifelong in its effects. It is characterised by difficulties with phonological processing, rapid naming, working memory, processing speed, and the automatic development of skills that may not match up to an individual's other cognitive abilities. It tends to be resistant to conventional teaching methods, but its effects can be mitigated by appropriately specific intervention, including the application of information technology and supportive counselling.

The Rose Review (2009) defines dyslexia as a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling. Characteristic features of dyslexia are difficulties in phonological awareness, verbal memory and verbal processing speed. Dyslexia occurs across a range of intellectual abilities. It is best thought of as a continuum, not a distinct category, and there are no clear cut-off points. Co-occurring difficulties may be seen in aspects of language, motor-coordination, mental calculation, concentration and personal organisation, but these are not, by themselves, markers of dyslexia. A good indication of the severity and persistence of dyslexic difficulties can be gained by examining how the individual responds or has responded to well-founded intervention (<http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk>).

### Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD).

Specific Learning Difficulties is an umbrella term covering a range of developmental learning problems that are biological in origin, have a high heritability, are largely independent of intelligence and socio-economic factors, and show individual differences in severity (BDA 2008). Under the heading of SpLDs, the British Dyslexia Association (2007) list the following: Dyslexia; Dysphasia, speech and language delay and/or deficit; Dyspraxia, motor and co-ordination difficulties; Attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity (ADD/ADHD); Autism, Aspergers Syndrome, Tourette Syndrome.

The term Specific Learning Difficulties is often used synonymously with Dyslexia. Whilst specialist tutors support students with any SpLD, they are usually referred to as Dyslexia Support Tutors as Dyslexia is the most common form of SpLD. There is a high degree of comorbidity of the forms of SpLDs, which has to be taken into consideration in the specialism of the work of the Dyslexia Tutors.

### The Nature of Dyslexia

Dyslexia in Higher Education: policy, provision and practice Report of the National Working Party on Dyslexia in Higher Education (Singleton, 1999).

Dyslexia is a complex constitutional condition that is found in about 4% of the population, and which primarily affects acquisition and use of written language, memory and organisational skills. It is a legally recognised disability. Research into the nature and causes of dyslexia is on-going and as yet there is no one model that all professionals in this area agree upon.

Nevertheless, there is considerable evidence regarding the following:

- the neurological bases of dyslexia
- the cognitive characteristics of dyslexia
- the educational and behavioural outcomes for the person with dyslexia
- the positive aspects of dyslexia.

Each of these aspects has implications for the development of effective systems of identification and support of students with dyslexia in higher education. The lack of a uniform model of causation should not be allowed to obstruct the development of provision for students in higher education who have dyslexia and who may require support in order to learn and study effectively and take their places in the workforce.



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