



Guidance for Good Practice: Establishing Systems for Specialist Dyslexia Teaching

Introduction:

In accordance with the expectations set out in the DDA, Part IV (SENDA), most HE institutions have established some provision for supporting the learning needs of dyslexic students. However, there is often confusion about the nature of this support, including who should provide it, what should be covered, how it can be funded and where and in what form it should be delivered. The following discussion addresses these and other issues relating to the nature of specialist dyslexia teaching. All comments should be regarded as offering suggestions, rather than being part of a prescriptive document. Individual institutions will need to adapt ideas to meet the needs of their own students.

Negotiating terms of delivery for dyslexia support tutors:

Some students benefit from having individual learning contracts or individual education plan (IEPs), which should be agreed at the start of the support sessions, and regularly reviewed according to developing/changing needs. For example, students may initially be offered one hour per week of support, but as their confidence develops, the frequency of sessions may be renegotiated. Dyslexia support departments need to be flexible about the support that is on offer. Some students may need support throughout the vacations (if funding is available) or when on placements. It is important to make sure that students know when support is and is not available.

Understanding the nature of learning support:

Students need to take responsibility for their own learning – it is not a tutor's job to cosset them to prevent failure. The arrangements for learning support should be jointly negotiated between the student and the tutor. Students should not expect to have a formal 'class' with a tutor, but must take responsibility for identifying their needs and bringing in work which they want to focus on. Dyslexia tutors may refer students to other/additional support, such as counselling or careers advice, as and when appropriate. There needs to be a clear distinction between learning support and emotional / counselling support. However, it should be recognised that previous (negative) learning

experiences may affect current feelings about study, and these may need to be addressed to effect the change from an attitude of 'I can't do it' to 'I can.' In light of this, issues of self-esteem are often characteristic of dyslexic students, particularly those who have not received on-going support through school. The dyslexia support tutor must therefore be prepared to address problems such as these which clearly impact on the student's learning.

One-to-one support vs. small group work:

There might well be a mixture of 1:1 and small group work – it is often a good idea for the student to be part of a group such as a study skills workshop, to meet other students with dyslexia and to share concerns / worries, as well as useful strategies relating to studying at HE level. Small groups might also focus on general multi-sensory study strategies which can be applied by individuals once they have an understanding of their personal learning style.

Students new to the learning support model, and those who have only recently been assessed as dyslexic, should be offered an opportunity to determine their preferred learning style. This could be done electronically, using a program like StudyScan (QuickScan is the short version available for learning styles assessment). Other learning styles questionnaires, both paper versions and electronic versions are also available.

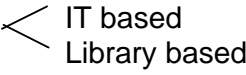
The transition from FE or sixth form to HE should be adequately supported, perhaps by providing a different level of support in Year 1, or additional sessions in study skills or IT skills. It is important to ensure that freshers' weeks and open days are used by the Dyslexia Support Team to publicise the services available.

- **Accessible curriculum:** Lecturing staff also need to be aware of the importance of teaching in a way that enables all students to access the curriculum. Regular training sessions need to be organised by the Dyslexia Support or Disability teams.
- **Extensions on coursework** for dyslexic students should *not* be automatic; in fact, unless the circumstances are exceptional, extensions do not help students to prepare for the outside world!
- Some universities are making good use of **learning management systems or virtual learning environments such as Blackboard**. (It would be useful to look into this new area in greater depth at a later date.)

Possible content for 1:1 or small group support sessions :

All dyslexia support tutors should be able to help students explore the following topics/strategies or know where to refer students for additional support if required – either within the institution, or externally. All topics can be taught using IT and traditional pen and paper methods, a mixture of both would be ideal, when possible. The approaches below are listed in alphabetical order, not in order of importance. Please note that these are *possible* areas for inclusion in Learning Support sessions. The choice of what is covered in any particular session is determined by negotiations between the student and the tutor. Learning Support is based on working with students on work emanating from their courses, *not* on establishing an independent curriculum. Moreover, Learning Support builds upon areas in which students exhibit existing strengths and helps them to identify ways of applying and developing their existing learning skills to overcome areas of weakness.

- Colour: Awareness of the usefulness of different coloured backgrounds when working on the computer (eg in WORD)
- Colour: Use of coloured paper and coloured overlays to aid reading and scanning
- Effective use of IT
 - Dyslexia programmes
 - Other programmes
- Essay/project/thesis planning - using imaginary as well as real coursework tasks
- Exam preparation and revision and ‘on the day’ skills (e.g. to avoid panic or anxiety)
- Memory techniques – using colour, rhymes, pictures, visualisation, stories etc.
- Mindmapping techniques (on paper and using software such as *Inspiration* or *MindManager*)
- Notetaking / recording strategies: paper based, using video or minidisk recorders.
- Presentation skills
 - Using IT (e.g. PowerPoint)
 - Opportunities for rehearsal if required
- Proof reading – developing students skills

- Reading / scanning strategies, including training on gadgets such as a light pen if necessary.
- Referencing/bibliographies (from books and internet sources)
- Research Strategies 
 - IT based
 - Library based
- Spelling strategies/writing skills/grammar
- Time management and self-organisation

Dyslexia support teams need to liaise with library staff and IT support staff when appropriate.

There needs to be more emphasis on encouraging students to make full use of their DSA-funded IT equipment and software – this suggests the need for training staff.

Issues relating to training dyslexia support tutors:

Since specialist dyslexia support requires a supply of tutors who are aware of the learning styles of dyslexic learners, it is often difficult to find appropriately trained staff. There are several problems inherent in ensuring both the initial and continuing professional development of specialist dyslexia tutors. Many institutions rely on existing study skills tutors to assume this role.

Some of the issues which institutions must address are:

Funding: Many support tutors work freelance and/or on part-time or fractional contracts for universities. Where resources are limited, institutions may face problems, particularly with funding training. Even in situations where the institution charges the student's DSA, this money only pays for actual contact hours with students (and increasingly, LEAs refuse to pay for sessions when the students do not attend, even though the tutor has been contracted to offer that session).

There are however, many 'pockets' of money which institutions can tap into to fund the training needs of tutors in dyslexia support services. Different institutions have used the following sources:

- Staff development budgets
- Disability premium funding
- Specific projects, such as HEFCE or ESF bids

Other possible avenues to explore as umbrellas under which training might be organised include:

- Input as part of the institutional Teaching and Learning Strategy
- Input in response to pressures for new admissions and equality and diversity policies
- Combining FE /HE support resources
- Sharing best practice of other Universities (e.g. through membership in ADSHE discussion groups)

Some institutions allocate a percentage of money based on the number of tutor hours individual support tutors are contracted to offer. Ideally, institutions should be prepared to partially fund training; a minimum of 2 days per year is considered reasonable. However, in accordance with institutional commitments to continued professional development, existing trained dyslexia support teachers should be encouraged to participate in short courses and conferences, and should be prepared to contribute to the cost of their own professional development. In the case of longer, more expensive courses or conferences, if institutions fund one member of the dyslexia service to attend, there should be a dissemination system put in place so other members can be given feedback.

On-going professional training will be needed in relation to the proposed standardisation of diagnostic assessments and needs assessments, in accordance with discussions currently taking place by a working party organised by the DfES (which includes a member of ADSHE). It is hoped that the working party will produce a range of options for accrediting assessors in both these areas (diagnosis and needs assessment), that will encourage all relevant staff to keep abreast of current developments in the field.

Professional Development available to ADSHE members:

ADSHE plans to run periodic networking days, where members can meet with other professionals in the field to address a variety of topical issues. These days will be run at cost, and will encourage attendance from people who find it difficult to attend at regular, scheduled meetings during term time.

Payment to Part-time/freelance tutors:

There are inherent differences in the situations faced by 'freelance' and 'contracted' staff. These differences pose the question as to what is a fair financial differential between the two groups.

In the private sector, current pay rates are up to £50 – £55 per hour for freelance tutors. This goes some way to compensate for the fact that freelance staff don't receive holiday/sick pay and other benefits, and whose rate has to include factors such as lesson preparation, evaluation, over-run,

and faculty and LEA liaison. The consensus of ADSHE members is that freelance tutors should earn more than contracted staff to compensate for the additional administrative tasks freelance tutors must perform, coupled with the lack of security. However, the existing figure creates a potentially over-large gap between them and contracted tutors who may earn as little as £13 - £14 an hour in certain parts of the country. However, this rate excludes all employment benefits and additional tasks as above. In addition, freelance staff have to put time and effort into unremunerated competition for contracts which they may not win, and need to charge an average cost across their spread of activities.

Some factors to consider in assessing overall total remuneration:

- Salaried staff on-costs not incurred with freelance staff:
 1. Pension - up to 16% of salary
 2. Paid holiday - up to 10% of salary
 3. Paid sick leave say 1 day per year - 4% of salary
 4. Continuing professional development/training - say 1 day - 4% of salary

- Cost of consumables for freelance tutors:
 1. Photocopying, books, IT consumables/printing resources - 4% of salary.
 2. Professional Indemnity Insurance £1 per hour if working 216 hrs per academic year.
 3. Admin overheads-processing payroll and personnel issues. LEA claim 10% of salary.

- Additional factors requiring consideration:
 1. Access centres recommend £50 per hour in 2 reports dated 2004; have they a vested interest in keeping these costs down, and should we also be looking at / comparing their rates for needs assessment (arguably higher costs for less skilled work).
 2. Access Centres currently recommend £400-£450 per 6-7 hour day for computer companies who offer technology training; Additionally, travelling time is charged for - this rate compared to specialist dyslexia support sessions appears quite a bit higher for arguably less skilled work.
 3. London weighting—different parts of the country may justifiably require differentials in salary costs when compared to cost of living
 4. Freelance tutors may be isolated and not able to contribute to policy or participate in training.

Accommodation:

Both free-lance and part-time contracted tutors share common problems in relation to accessing appropriate accommodation to conduct individual and small group sessions. The following factors must be taken into consideration, particularly in light of the learning needs of students who may find their learning affected by visual and auditory distractions:

- *Lighting* (particularly for those students with Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome)
Good natural light source – window that opens!
(not overlooked by passers by)
Ventilation / temperature control
Desk light – including natural light bulbs
- *Noise*
Confidentiality – not cubicle in the library
Free from distraction in terms of noise (deliveries, building site etc)
- *Reliability*
Adequate availability of area (high 1:1 turnover)
Specific, designated room for 1:1 support tutorials
– consistent location / time.
Use of students' rooms
- *Size*
Desk space, floor space, wall space
Trying to teach in the equivalent of a broom cupboard communicates an institution's attitude to the value of the work
Outside designated room a shared working area.
Storage of frequently used items e.g. overlays (calm, uncluttered space)
- *Accessibility*
Central location
Inclusive position – inconspicuous, sited within a building that students visit for other reasons
Signage
Mobility
- *Facilities* (furniture, phone, computer, software, printer etc)
If necessary, blinds on internal windows to maintain confidentiality.
Blinds on external windows for use in winter etc.
Desk, table top – student must be able to bring own laptop to use / connect
Comprehensively equipped with full range of assistive technology e.g. computer, printer, copier / scanner –to introduce things of potential assistance or incorporate DSA equipment into study strategies

Power sockets and Internet connection
Phone – that can be diverted or take messages silently

Waiting area (taking into account confidentiality)
Small group study area
Clock
Water fountain

Record Keeping:

Appropriate records must be kept by specialist tutors for a variety of purposes:

- For DSA purposes - LEAs increasingly require some evidence of the nature of the support a student has received; this can be a simple record sheet, signed by both the tutor and the student
- For institution - to provide evidence in the event of any possible future complaints against level of support offered to a student, e.g. a student may appeal an academic decision on the basis of lack of support
- For students and the dyslexia support service - record of progress and development.
- For tutors: good record keeping, including lesson plans, resources used and student progress could provide portfolio evidence for training courses. This would include showing personal development and progression, including new skills. Additionally, good records should include action plans for future support, which might be useful for other tutors who might take over supporting the student.

The above document was prepared from information contributed initially in two workshops at the First Annual ADSHE conference (September 2004) and subsequently agreed upon by the members of the Association.