



Guidance for Good Practice: Supporting learners on placement

Disclaimer: These are guidelines only.

1 Introduction

Throughout this document the term 'learner' has been used to cover learners studying on programmes with a placement element. The terms 'mentor/supervisor' are used for professionals supervising learners on placement. Other terms might well be used within different institutions. The term 'dyslexia' is used as dyslexic learners are by far the largest group of learners with specific learning difficulties but these suggestions would also apply to learners with other specific learning difficulties such as dyspraxia or dyscalculia.

Dyslexic learners might experience similar challenges on placement as they do in the academic setting but the strategies and skills used in university do not necessarily translate easily to the workplace. Nevertheless, dyslexic learners are entitled to 'reasonable adjustments' in the workplace under the terms of the Disability Discrimination Act Part IV (1995). Professionals working with learners in higher education institutions are often concerned that dyslexia support is not always in place on practice. Challenges might arise when mentors/supervisors are unfamiliar with dyslexia and do not know how best to support the learners in their care.

This document will consider the following issues

- Disclosure
- Suggestions for good practice

Appendices contain guidelines for particular professions and will offer more suggestions for specific strategies that would be useful within that profession. These guidelines set out good principles to use with all learners, not just those with additional learning needs.

2 Disclosure

As there are different rules and regulations about disclosure for each profession, learners should be encouraged to consider the disadvantages and advantages in order to make a personal judgement about whether or not to disclose their dyslexia. Learners will need to consider whether there are health and safety issues for themselves or others surrounding their practice if they do not disclose. However, the lack of clarity regarding disclosure can place an additional emotional burden on learners. Clear, concise, easily accessible

information about disclosure issues should be provided along with more general advice regarding the rights of the learner under the relevant legislation and the support that is available. H.E. institutions should encourage students to sign a consent form allowing the institution to disclose students' dyslexia to placement providers and to discuss relevant support.

Reasons for Disclosure

- Disclosure encourages a clearer understanding of dyslexia and the related issues for all parties
- It encourages the opening up of communication channels between the learner, mentor/supervisor and other staff
- It improves the opportunities for more effective workplace partnerships
- Disclosure enables 'reasonable adjustments' to be made and support mechanisms to be implemented at the work placement
- The development of individual dyslexia learning strategies can benefit others
- Raising awareness of dyslexia via disclosure will:
 - reduce fear of disclosing for others
 - encourage improved recruitment
 - encourage support networks of dyslexic learners
- Anxieties about 'hiding' dyslexia will be alleviated.

Reasons against Disclosure

- Learners may be of the opinion that their dyslexia does not cause them any significant difficulties or impact on their study or work
- Effective compensatory strategies may have been developed and therefore there is no need for concern
- Desire for confidentiality about personal matters and/or fear or dislike of talking to others about dyslexia might discourage some learners to disclose
- Narrow minded or old fashioned ideas about dyslexia and the associated challenges, may result in misunderstandings regarding the abilities of the learner
- Lack of understanding about dyslexia may result in discrimination or exploitation by mentors or other members of staff
- Disclosure may increase the risk of labelling, particularly where mentors and other members of staff do not have a clear understanding of dyslexia.

If learners do not wish to disclose their dyslexia and they are not obliged to disclose, they must be aware that 'reasonable adjustments' cannot be put in place.

Making Disclosure Easier

There can be limited time during placements for staff to get to know the dyslexic learner. Therefore, it is important to provide a 'dyslexia-friendly' working environment, by raising staff awareness of dyslexia and the difficulties regarding disclosure. Confidence to disclose will be increased in a 'safe' working environment. "Mentors should be understanding of the anxiety that the learner may be experiencing when disclosing their dyslexia" (RCN, 2005). Clear

procedures should be available relating to disclosure, which should include guidelines about passing on information; agreement about who needs to know about the learner's dyslexia should be discussed with the learner. The advantages of disclosure should be emphasised and appropriate adjustments and strategies should be introduced as regular practice.

It is **essential** that all mentors have disability equality training and understanding of the different reasonable adjustments that learners need to show their competence. This must also be the case for all mentors, practice facilitators and practice teachers. If effective training is not put in place, the assessment may contravene the DDA. (Skill, 2006)

Professionals should encourage the provision of a Disability/Dyslexia Support Adviser who is available to talk to the learners, in confidence, about any issues relating to their dyslexia and disclosure. Learners should be offered the opportunity to practise talking about their dyslexia, encouraging self-advocacy with regard to the strengths and abilities they can bring to their work placement.

Alternatively, the learner might practise talking about dyslexia and their learning differences with a friend, explaining their strengths as well as difficulties. It might be helpful to have a brief written resume about dyslexia, including the individual's strengths and challenges prepared and ready to give to staff.

A 'dyslexia-friendly' work placement, where learners feel at ease about disclosing their dyslexia, will enable them to achieve their full potential. It should be remembered that good practice for dyslexic learners can be very beneficial for all members of staff.

3 Suggestions for Good Practice

Responsibilities

- It is important to establish lines of responsibility and to be clear about who is responsible for arranging different aspects of learners' training and support. There should be clear institutional policies for learners with dyslexia. There should be a balance between meeting the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and maintaining patient/client safety. For example, Fitness to Practise Committees could be set up to consider ensure that any recommended 'reasonable adjustments' are fair to the learner but also to ensure that fitness to practise issues are addressed.
- Many dyslexic learners are eligible for funding from the Student Loan Company, Local Authority, NHS Student' Grants Unit in the form of Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA). This funding is sometimes available for learners to access dyslexia support whilst on placement as well as when studying at university. Funding for learners not eligible for DSA, such as international learners, should be considered by the institutions.

Communication

- It is important to establish clear lines of communication between the different professionals involved with the learners' training. Institutions might consider having a named person within each academic school who can act as a liaison between academic tutors, mentors/supervisors, the dyslexia service and the learners. Alternatively, schools might employ a Practice Learning Advisor who could act as the link. S/he would be able to offer advice to academic tutors as well as to the mentors/supervisors and to the learners themselves.

Training and awareness raising for supporters

- Individual tutorial support usually addresses academic skills only. Short informal sessions for dyslexia tutors could be provided to explain how the placement training works and what competencies and skills learners are expected to acquire.
- There can be sometimes be limited awareness in the workplace of dyslexia and how it might affect learners and this can lead either to over compensation and checking of learners or in some cases to discrimination. Dyslexia awareness sessions for mentors/supervisors could help to increase understanding of the possible effects of dyslexia, and should help to lessen any prejudice that might exist about dyslexic learner health professionals and fears about their fitness to practise.
- Mentors/supervisors should be given sufficient support to enable them to provide any reasonable adjustments for individual learners. Mentors/supervisors should have access to the dyslexia support services as well as the academic tutors if they feel they need advice or guidance or feel the support required by an individual learner is beyond what they can reasonably be expected to provide.

Support for learners

Getting prepared for practice

- An informal assessment of needs where learners are given the opportunity to discuss the most appropriate reasonable adjustments for the work place could be carried out prior to the start of the placement. It might be that a re-assessment will be needed at a later stage when the learners have experienced placements as they might not be aware at the outset of how dyslexia is likely to affect them in the work place.
- Learners should be offered the opportunity to visit the placement prior to starting in order to familiarise themselves with the setting and to meet with their mentor.
- Preparatory workshops could be provided for learners prior to starting their placements.
- Consideration should be given to addressing placement needs within the Access Centres' Assessments of Needs and/or with the institutions' assessment procedures.

Learning contracts

- Learning Contracts could set out the agreed reasonable adjustments for individual learners alongside the learning objectives and competencies. Allowance should be made for a re-assessment of any adjustments.

Support groups

- Support groups could be set up for learners to discuss issues of mutual interest. The learners should be encouraged to run these groups for themselves, perhaps inviting qualified professionals to one session to provide an insight into their own experiences.

Placement Induction Packs

- Placement Induction packs which set out specific procedures and practices together with a glossary of words and abbreviations used in the placement, as well as proformas of standard forms//telephone message sheets/ planning sheets could be given at the beginning of the placement.

Dyslexia support sessions

- Dyslexia support sessions whilst on placement could be provided if appropriate. Consideration should be given to allowing learners time out from the placement to attend, perhaps by re-arranging shift patterns.

Importance of understanding the learners' perspective

- Most dyslexic learners do not think of themselves as 'disabled'. They prefer to consider themselves as having a 'learning difference'. A greater awareness is necessary to develop an enhanced understanding of how to support the learners.
- Developing good relationships between learners and mentors/supervisors is vital to a successful placement. Most learners are well aware of their own strengths and challenges and what support they might need. Simple strategies can often be worked out by informal discussion. Refer to the appropriate appendix for more information about strategies for specific professions.
- Dyslexic learners are usually highly motivated and committed. They often have good lateral thinking and empathy but sometimes need to spend more time initially to develop strategies to allow strengths to emerge.

References

Disability Discrimination Act (2005)

www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/20050013.htm

Royal College of Nursing (2005) *Guidance for Mentors of Learner Nurses and Midwives* available from the Royal College of Nursing Website:

http://www.rcn.org.uk/publications/pdf/guidance_for_mentors.pdf (p11)

Skill (2006) *NMC Consultation on proposals arising from a review of fitness for practice at the point of registration*, available from Skill Website:

[http://www.skill.org.uk/news/policy/word/Nursing & Midwifery council 1.doc](http://www.skill.org.uk/news/policy/word/Nursing_%20Midwifery_council_1.doc)

Further information

Adult Dyslexia Association

<http://www.futurenet.co.uk/charity>

The British Dyslexia Association

<http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/>

Dyslexia Action (formerly The Dyslexia Institute)

<http://www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk>

The Disability Rights Commission

<http://www.drc-gb.org/>