



Dyslexia in HE: information for employees

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Dyslexia in HE: Guidelines for Staff

These guidelines are designed to provide information for both academic and non-academic staff within HE who are dyslexic or suspect they may be dyslexic, and are looking for guidance on what to do about this. Please note that they are guidelines only and a qualified professional, who may be found in the dyslexia service at your institution, is able to give specific advice.

Understanding your dyslexia

Once individuals have been identified as being dyslexic, it is important that they have a clear understanding of the implications of their particular pattern of abilities, and the likely impact it will have on their everyday working practices. If the information in the assessment report has not made this explicit, it may be helpful to seek clarification. If the person who carried out the assessment is no longer accessible, the Dyslexia Co-ordinator within an institution may be in a position to provide this.

Think about how dyslexia affects you and be aware of your strengths and your weaknesses. Consider how you have developed strategies to work to your strengths and deal with your difficulties. Consider whether you wish to disclose your dyslexia when applying for jobs (see below).

The law

Dyslexia is recognised as a disability under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 and the Public Service Equality Duty, which extended the 1995 Act, place a duty on employers to promote equal opportunities for disabled people.

An employer has a duty under the DDA to make 'reasonable adjustments' during the recruitment process and within the workplace. Reasonable adjustments should help you to work to your full potential

You cannot expect reasonable adjustments if you do not disclose your dyslexia. If you inform your employers, you are entitled to request that your dyslexia is treated as confidential.

Disclosure

Disclosing dyslexia is, for many, a positive step in ensuring that they acquire the necessary support in order to be effective in their work. In institutions where dyslexia is well recognised and supported, this disclosure may be relatively unproblematic in comparison to those where it is seen primarily as a disability and a problem. While the HE sector has made great advances in supporting dyslexic individuals, there are invariably people who do not understand dyslexia and consequently view it negatively. It is, however, unlawful for the institution to discriminate against anyone once the disclosure has been made.

It is important to consider the disadvantages and advantages in order to make a personal judgement on whether to disclose your dyslexia. You should feel 'safe' that your employer will be supportive and confident about talking about your dyslexia, particularly your strengths. Anecdotal evidence suggests that those who have disclosed their dyslexia and sought reasonable adjustments in their working life have benefited considerably from a reduction in stress. For more information about the pros and cons of disclosing, see www.skill.org.uk/info/infosheets/emp_disclose.doc

For Disclosure

- Enables 'reasonable adjustments' to be made and support mechanisms to be implemented
- Encourages a clearer understanding of dyslexia and the related issues
- Encourages the opening up of communication channels with employers and work colleagues
- Development of individual dyslexia learning strategies may benefit others
- Raising awareness of dyslexia via disclosure may reduce fear of disclosing for others
- Anxieties about 'hiding' dyslexia will be alleviated

Against disclosure

- Employees may be of the opinion that their dyslexia does not cause them any significant difficulties or impact on their work
- Effective compensatory strategies may have been developed and therefore there is no need for concern
- Desire for confidentiality about personal matters
- Fear or dislike of talking to others about dyslexia
- Narrow minded or old fashioned ideas about dyslexia may result in misunderstandings regarding the abilities of the employee
- Lack of understanding about dyslexia may result in discrimination or exploitation

Support

For individuals with dyslexia, a clear roadmap which outlines the support they need, produced in conjunction with their line manager is recommended; however, without adequate resourcing, the effectiveness of the support plan will invariably be compromised.

People vary considerably in terms of the support they need. For some, minor adjustments to their work methods or using specialist software (discussed below) may be sufficient to overcome any problems they experience.

A useful starting point is to identify the problems encountered in the carrying out of tasks that are an essential part of the role, as well as the person's strengths. The next step would be to explore which of these can be addressed through the adoption of new strategies. There may be instances where the best approach is for certain tasks to be allocated to other people.

It is essential that the line manager appreciates the individuals' strengths as well as their weaknesses, so that their confidence is not undermined. It may be necessary for the manager to ensure that other staff adjust their practices. For example, they may need to issue guidelines on the presentation of written information to ensure that it is accessible.

Common problematic tasks

As dyslexia typically involves problems with short-term memory and the speed at which information is processed, it is possible to identify some of the tasks that most commonly cause difficulties in the workplace. This is not an exhaustive list, and of course the extent to which these are problematic will vary from individual to individual.

- Taking phone messages
- Taking in and remembering lengthy pieces of information – both spoken and written
- Filing and other administrative tasks
- Data entry
- Project planning
- Writing and producing documents
- Using the library

- Note taking
- Providing written student feedback
- Oral presentations
- Organisation, time-keeping and time management
- Reading from texts, especially those with: a small font; a serif font; white backgrounds; justified right margins; columns
- Remembering everyday activities, procedures and instructions
- Concentration, especially in busy offices
- Number tasks

Strategies and adjustments for dealing with such situations include:

- coloured background and/or fonts on computer screens
- memory aids: wall charts, planners, notebooks of commonly used words
- images as well as words on labels
- a dictaphone or tape recorder for messages, meetings and reminders
- minor adjustments to work allocation
- computer spelling and grammar checkers
- a mentor or buddy to check written work, discuss reading matter, etc
- personal organisers, mobile phones, Outlook to-do list and calendar
- receiving individual training from a dyslexia specialist
- text to speech software / voice recognition software / spellchecker
- having some time to work free of interruptions
- being allowed to perform tasks a suitable way and at the right pace
- ensuring that verbal information is backed up by written documentation
- requesting overviews and advance notice of complex tasks
- avoiding multi-tasking
- employing relaxation strategies – for example, deep breathing
- colour coding information so that it is clearly differentiated into sub-sections

- selecting a sans serif font, such as Arial or Verdana
- creating a personal glossary of essential terms

It would be helpful to identify a qualified dyslexia support worker in the institution who could help with the development of strategies for organisation, time keeping, task management, writing skills, memory, planning skills and confidence building.

The role of IT

There are a number of IT applications that have been found to be of great use in assisting the dyslexic individual overcome the difficulties they experience. These are outlined briefly below.

▪ Concept mapping software

Among the most popular of these applications are *Inspiration* and *Mind Manager*. These programmes are useful for organising tasks, planning teaching sessions, structuring writing and oral presentations.

▪ Text-to-speech software

TextHelp Read & Write is the most frequently used application of this type. This allows the user to listen to written work, check grammar and spelling or to hear an audio version of written material.

▪ Voice recognition software:

Dragon Naturally Speaking and *Via Voice* allow users to orally input text. The software must be first trained to recognise individual speech patterns.

▪ Other useful aids:

Handheld spellcheckers

Reading pens

Personal organisers

Digital recorders

Coloured overlays

The Assessment Process

If you think you may be dyslexic, you could approach your line manager, the disability or dyslexia co-ordinator, the Human Resources department or the Occupational Health service – the appropriate contact varies between institutions. Assessments may be able to be carried out within your workplace. They can be done by qualified practitioners such as educational or occupational psychologists or specialist teachers.

An assessment is not a test, and there are no trick questions. Some of it is an extended conversation but you will also be asked to do a number of tasks. The aims of an assessment are to find out:

- if you are dyslexic or not
- your individual pattern of strengths and difficulties
- the best ways for you to manage your difficulties and make the most of your strengths.

Financing the assessment

It is worth checking with your employer to see if they will pay for an assessment, although they are not obliged to. However, a number of HE institutions have provision to pay for staff assessments.

If you want to be assessed privately, you could contact any of the following:
British Dyslexia Association www.bdadyslexia.org.uk 0118 966 8271
Adult Dyslexia Organisation helpline 0207-924-9559
Adult Dyslexia Consultancy www.adc-dyslexia.co.uk 07793 004 915

Financing support

The government's Access to Work Scheme (AtW) helps disabled people find and remain in work. They provide specialist advice and support to employees and their employers.

AtW funding (subject to assessment) may be available for IT equipment, assistive software programs and individual training from a dyslexia specialist. It pays 100% of the cost if you apply within 6 weeks of starting a job. After that, your employer pays the first £300 plus 20% of the cost of adjustments.

AtW is administered by Jobcentre Plus. Further information is available from your regional business centre – the number and details of AtW can be seen at www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/Customers/Helpfordisabledpeople/Accessstowork

Useful contacts & further information

Books

Vicki Goodwin and Bonita Thomson (2004) *Making Dyslexia Work for You: a self-help guide*, David Fulton Publishers. Includes a CD.

Sylvia Moody (2006) *How to Survive and Succeed at Work*, Vermilion Books

Ellen Morgan and Cynthia Klein (2000) *The Dyslexic Adult in a Non-dyslexic World*, Whurr (based on personal interviews)

Diana Bartlett and Sylvia Moody (2003) *Dyslexia in the Workplace*, Whurr

Brian Hagan (2004) *Dyslexia in the workplace: a guide for unions*, TUC

Websites

British Dyslexia Association – www.bdadyslexia.org.uk

Adult Dyslexia Organisation - www.adult-dyslexia.org

www.dyslexia-adults.com/a15 for useful workplace strategies

Employers' Forum on Disability - www.employers-forum.co.uk Useful briefing paper: *A practical guide to employment adjustments for dyslexic people*

Technological aids – www.dyslexic.com

www.beingdyslexic.co.uk/information/workplace.php