

Guidance

Title: Dyslexia

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This guidance has been developed to provide an overview about dyslexia and the ways in which those with this disability can be supported at work. It provides examples of how dyslexia can manifest itself, the steps the University should consider exploring in order to understand the extent of the individuals' difficulties and identify appropriate support and adjustments that may be required as a result. The guidance also includes links to external specialist organisations and sources of more detailed advice or further information.

Introduction

Dyslexia is a life-long, hereditary neurological (rather than psychological) condition that affects around 10% of the UK population, around 4% severely. It can occur in people of all ethnicities, backgrounds and abilities, and varies from person to person with no two people having exactly the same effects.

Whilst the word "dyslexia" means 'difficulty with words' in Greek, it is really related to how an individual processes, stores and receives information. People with dyslexia may have difficulty remembering, organising and processing information they see and hear. Weaknesses with literacy are often the most visible sign, but dyslexia also causes problems with memory, speed of processing, time perception, organisation and sequencing. It is best thought of as a continuum, not a distinct category, and there are no clear cut-off points.

Dyslexia can affect learning, the acquisition of literacy skills and how an individual functions at home and/or work. On the plus side, people with dyslexia often have strong visual, creative and problem solving skills and are prominent among entrepreneurs, inventors, architects, engineers and in the arts and entertainment world. Many famous and successful people are dyslexic, including Richard Branson, Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Leonardo da Vinci, Pablo Picasso, Walt Disney, Steven Spielberg, Albert Einstein, Thomas Edison, Agatha Christie, Roald Dahl, Darcy Bussell and Fred Astaire.

Dyslexia is not related to an individuals' level of intelligence, it occurs across the full range of intellectual abilities. The condition is the most common one of a family of Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs) and often co-occurring with related conditions including dyspraxia (also known as Developmental Co-ordination Disorder or DCD), dyscalculia and Attention Deficit Disorder. Further information on these conditions is available in the Glossary below.

Understanding dyslexia and recognising its symptoms

Dyslexia is a recognised disability under the Equality Act 2010, which means that employers should ensure that those with dyslexia are not treated unfavourably and are offered reasonable adjustments and/or support to assist them in employment. Dyslexia can be difficult to understand and recognise as it is 'invisible' to those around the individual with the condition.

Many people may be experiencing difficulties at work due to dyslexia but have not been formally diagnosed. They may be entirely unaware that they have dyslexic difficulties. Others may have been assessed at some point, possibly at school, but prefer not to declare this for fear of discrimination.

There is no legal duty for an individual to declare they have dyslexia (or any disability). However, once the employer has been informed that an employee has dyslexia, or is given a copy of an assessment report, they are on notice that they have a duty under the Equality Act. It should be noted however that declaring dyslexia to Occupational Health (e.g. as part of a pre-employment process) will not be reported to their line manager

unless it forms part of a referral related to the condition, and they should therefore not assume that their line manager is aware of any such declaration.

Dyslexia can manifest itself in a number of ways. The following areas of difficulty are common, but in themselves are not “markers” of dyslexia:

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| Information processing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulties with taking in information efficiently (this could be written or auditory) • Slow speed of information processing, such as a 'penny dropping' delay between hearing something and understanding and responding to it |
| Memory | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor short term memory for facts, events, times, dates • Poor working memory; i.e. difficulty holding on to several pieces of information while undertaking a task e.g. taking notes as you listen, coping with compound questions • Mistakes with routine information e.g. giving your age or the ages of your children • Inability to hold on to information without referring to notes |
| Communication skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of verbal fluency and lack of precision in speech • Word-finding problems • Inability to work out what to say quickly enough • Misunderstandings or misinterpretations during oral exchanges • Over-loud speech (which may come across as aggressive) or murmuring that cannot be clearly heard • Sometimes mispronunciations or a speech impediment may be evident |
| Literacy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty in acquiring reading and writing skills, consequently some dyslexic adults have severe literacy problems • Where literacy has been mastered, residual problems generally remain such as erratic spelling, difficulty extracting the sense from written material, difficulty with unfamiliar words, an inability to scan or skim text • Particular difficulty with unfamiliar types of language such as technical terminology, acronyms |
| Sequencing, organisation and time management | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty presenting a sequence of events in a logical, structured way • Incorrect sequencing of number and letter strings • Tendency to misplace items; chronic disorganisation • Poor time management: particular difficulties in estimating the passage of time |
| Direction and navigation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty with finding the way to places or navigating the way round an unfamiliar building |
| Concentration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak listening skills, a limited attention span, problems maintaining focus • A tendency to be easily distracted, inability to remain focused |
| Sensory sensitivity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A heightened sensitivity to noise and visual stimuli • Impaired ability to screen out background noise or movement • Sensations of mental overload / switching off |
| Lack of awareness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to realise the consequences of their speech or actions • Failure to take account of body language • Missing the implications of what they are told or interpreting it over-literally |
| Visual stress | <p><i>Example of visual stress:</i></p> <p><i>Read Regular is created without copying or mirroring shapes. Therefore the frequency of repeated shapes in a text is decreased. This results in a minimum chance of visual distortions (swirl-effect). The aim is to create interesting typography that will maintain the readers' interest and will prevent them from getting bored or frustrated. Diversity in text knows many variations. We must understand the fact that typography for a novel is different from a magazine or a publication for education. Even so a novel has the potential to be clear and interesting. This can be achieved in any level of creativity, thinking on type size, leading, the amount of words on a sentence and the character/paper combination.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some people with dyslexic difficulties may experience visual stress when reading |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text can appear distorted and words or letters appear to move or become blurred • White paper or backgrounds can appear too dazzling and make print hard to decipher |
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Individuals with dyslexia have shared how it makes them feel (British Dyslexia Association):

'I see things from a different perspective.'

'I can come up with solutions no one else has thought of and I think fast on my feet.'

'When I am reading, occasionally a passage will get all jumbled up, but when it happens I have to read and re-read the passage over again.'

'I know what I want to say, but I can never find the right words.'

'In formal situations, although I know what I want to say, I struggle, lose focus and then my mind goes blank and I panic.'

'I have the right ideas, but I can't get them down on paper.'

'It's like my computer crashing with too much information!'

'Sometimes when I am being told what to do, the words I hear get all jumbled up in my mind and I just can't take in what is being said to me.'

'In general conversation with family, friends and colleagues they usually accept that I tend to ramble, forget and repeat, because that's part of me.'

It must be emphasised that individuals vary greatly in their Specific Learning Difficulties profile. Key variables are the severity of the difficulties and the ability of the individual to identify and understand their difficulties and successfully develop and implement coping strategies.

The impact of dyslexia is extensive and can have a lasting and profound effect on an individual's opportunities and life choices. That said, by adulthood, many people with dyslexia and/or one of the other Specific Learning Difficulties are often able to compensate through technology, reliance on others and an array of self-help mechanisms - the operation of which require sustained effort and energy. As a result of their disability, many people with Specific Learning Difficulties have little confidence and low self-esteem. However, with the right help and support, strategies to overcome the difficulties associated with dyslexia can be learnt and **with appropriate changes to the environment** dyslexia need not be a barrier to education, employment and career development.

Research and self-reporting both concur that people with Specific Learning Difficulties are particularly susceptible to stress, compared with the ordinary population, with the result that their disability become even more pronounced. In a highly stressful environment, where there are multiple tasks and frequent interruptions, the coping strategies that have been developed may break down. Often people with dyslexia try to work longer hours in order to cope with the overly high demands of the work place. Working long hours accompanied with the stressful working environment have been shown to relate to a high risk of the individual developing work related stress.

Dyslexia and the University environment

The University environment is busy, dynamic and complex. It therefore inherently operates in ways that can be difficult for people with dyslexia, which can in turn become additional 'stressors' that exacerbate the condition.

The following table sets out some of the most common issues that can arise and offers some initial suggestions as to how people with dyslexia experiencing difficulties as a result can be supported and the 'stressors' reduced.

| Area | Typical activities or issues that can be 'stressors' for people with dyslexia | Examples of potential reasonable adjustments and/or other support that may be required |
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| Administration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • completion of multiple forms • processing of registers • different marking systems | For these types of tasks additional admin support may be necessary. |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> different online systems | <p>Admin teams need to be trained to support colleagues with dyslexia and be flexible with providing this support.</p> <p>Adequate time needs to be given to perform these activities, and consideration should be given as to whether it is possible to reduce or simplify the number and nature of the forms and/or admin processes that need to be undertaken.</p> |
| Managing workload demands | <p>People with dyslexia can often feel completely overwhelmed or overloaded with work, particularly if there are frequently changing or conflicting demands. They worry about saying no to additional tasks for fear of the impact that this will have on their job or career.</p> | <p>An appropriately structured workload should be agreed with the individual. It may be necessary to make adjustments to the workload, including making a temporary or permanent reduction to the total amount of tasks given without this affecting their job or career.</p> <p>In general, it is better to have fewer longer tasks than multiple short ones. Care should be taken not to give people with dyslexia last minute tasks as they need more time to prepare.</p> |
| Preparation time | <p>Poor forward planning leading to short notice notification of tasks or late notification of teaching requirements can cause severe stress</p> | <p>An overview of all teaching requirements should be given as early as possible and well in advance of the upcoming coming semester. It needs to be remembered that people with dyslexia need much longer preparation time for their modules.</p> |
| Frequent interruptions | <p>Repeated interruptions can lead to stress as it disrupts concentration and prevents individuals from being able to complete tasks</p> | <p>Working from home when concentration is required (e.g. for writing papers) should be encouraged as far as possible. The working environment and/or local working practices within the team should be arranged to reduce interruptions and keep distractions to a minimum.</p> |
| Location of teaching arrangements | <p>Multiple teaching locations around the campus and/or frequent changes to teaching locations can cause significant stress due to issues with finding different buildings and rooms</p> | <p>Teaching should be confined to a limited number of buildings and rooms, preferably not too far from their own office as this allows them to return should they forget something.</p> |
| Organisational arrangements | <p>Stress can be caused by colleagues or other University staff being unaware of the person with dyslexia's needs. This often means that the individual concerned has to repeatedly explain why they need specific changes to the environment, which is frustrating and stressful of itself</p> | <p>If people with dyslexia need support in developing and sustaining their everyday working strategies, the cooperation of their line manager, colleagues in their department and other University staff is required in order to ensure that they can be successfully implemented. It may be helpful to identify a 'co-ordinator' who can follow up on agreed actions for the individual and reduce the need for them to repeat themselves.</p> |

It should be noted that this is a non-exhaustive list, both in terms of the areas in which a person with dyslexia may experience difficulties, but also in respect of the support or reasonable adjustments that they may require within their working environment. What constitutes a 'reasonable adjustment' depends entirely on the individual circumstances of each case, however some [examples](#) of changes that may be considered are available from the British Dyslexia Association website. Further information about the [duty to make reasonable adjustments](#) is available from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) website.

Fully recognising that dyslexia is a sensitive disability, the University encourages early disclosure of the condition so that appropriate support can be put in place. Initial, informal discussions between individuals and their line manager are often the best way to raise and resolve concerns. HR Managers are available to support and provide guidance to both individuals and line managers in order to explore more formal arrangements relating to changes in the work arrangements or working environment. If specialist support is required, please contact local HR managers in the first instance so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

Supporting those working with dyslexia

If you suspect or there is evidence of a dyslexia related difficulty, you should bring it to the attention of your line manager or raise it with the individual as soon as possible. It is recommended that the first discussion takes the form of an informal face to face meeting to share concerns, consider options and explore potential solutions. If the line manager needs to initiate the discussion, it is important that it is handled sensitively and with appropriate privacy. At the end of the meeting, it is recommended that the individual is asked if they would like a summary of the points discussed to be provided in writing so that they are able to refer back and remind themselves about what was covered, if required.

If there has been no prior diagnosis of dyslexia, or previously agreed changes to the working environment are not working, the British Dyslexia Association (BDA) recommends the following approach:

- Stage 1: Organising an assessment

A full understanding of the individual's profile is necessary in order to offer the most effective support. Where an employee has not been previously assessed for dyslexic difficulties (post 16 years), the first step would be for the employer to arrange for the employee to have a full diagnostic assessment.

In the case of a job not involving significant paperwork, a [screening test](#) such as the one linked to the BDA website may be sufficient. This test is 90% accurate in predicting dyslexia.

A full diagnostic assessment should be carried out by Chartered Psychologists specialising in adult dyslexia. The test costs around £500, takes around 3 hours and is followed by a full written report. Faculties or departments would be expected to fund this as part of the steps being taken to make reasonable adjustments for the individual.

Most employers would be expected to fund a dyslexia assessment for an employee as part of their duty under the Equality Act. Unfortunately dyslexia is not funded by the NHS and does not form part of medical training.

[Click here](#) for further information about where to find BDA recommended psychologists

- Stage 2: Workplace assessment

Following the diagnostic assessment, (or where an employee is able to show an existing adult assessment report), a workplace assessment should be arranged with a dyslexia specialist. This will detail the most appropriate accommodations and support (reasonable adjustments) that would be successful in mitigating any weak areas and reduce stress. This is not something that either the individual or the employer would be able to work out for themselves.

[Click here](#) for further information and examples about the types of adjustment that could be considered in order to support those with dyslexia in the workplace.

Workplace assessments may be available through [Access to Work](#). The application should be made by the employee. There is no charge for this assessment, but the cost of implementing any recommended reasonable adjustment has to be borne by the employer up to a specific limit, depending on the size of the organisation. For costs over this limit, there may be a charge for the employer – please contact Access to Work for more details.

- Stage 3: Implementing reasonable adjustments

Reasonable adjustments should be put in place as soon as possible. Reasonable adjustments are not a quick, overnight remedy. Even if the appropriate changes are made to the work environment, it may take 2 or 3 months for measures to become embedded and for any associated training and learning to become effective depending on the individual circumstances. For optimum performance, an individual will need to have the support of colleagues and line managers to ensure the successful implementation of the changes to the environment. It is strongly recommended that dyslexia awareness training is provided for the local team as an essential part of the longer term support arrangements.

Given the nature of the disability, whilst the individuals' difficulties may lead to or be raised in connection to a referral to Occupational Health, it is unlikely that the Occupational Health team will be able to provide appropriate advice and guidance on dealing with the individuals' circumstances and they may therefore limit the scope of their report and/or recommendations to any direct medical issues arising from the disability only.

Depending on the severity of the issues needing to be addressed and the circumstances of the individual case, whilst it may be possible to explore some local approaches using the information available from the BDA and Dyslexia Action websites, where there are reasonable grounds to suspect an individual is experiencing significant difficulties that may be due to dyslexia it is recommended that a full assessment is undertaken by an appropriately trained and qualified professional in order to prevent any concerns from escalating and causing ongoing distress or concern for the individual concerned.

If, following a full assessment and an appropriate period in which reasonable adjustments are made and embedded, concerns remain about the individual's ability to undertake their current role, the University's policies on managing capability may be instigated. This may include, where appropriate, consideration of redeployment to a more suitable role.

Useful links

- BDA Adult dyslexia [checklist](#) - may be useful in promoting a better self-understanding and act as a pointer towards future assessment needs
- The B.D.A's [National Helpline](#) is open from 10:00am until 4:00pm Monday to Friday, and open late on Wednesday from 5:00pm- 7:00pm. Alternatively you can contact the Helpline via email helpline@bdadyslexia.org.uk. The Helpline is completely free and confidential.
- BDA [Frequently Asked Questions](#) on dyslexia for adults and employment
- [Dyslexia Action](#) (formerly the Dyslexia Institute)
- [BDA Guidance](#) on the legal position of dyslexia under the Equality Act 2010 and sources of further legal advice
- [BDA Guidance](#) on applying for jobs and promotions
- BDA suggestions for 'dyslexia friendly' [training tips](#)
- [BDA Guidance](#) on dealing with performance reviews and disciplinary hearings

Further information

The BDA has produced a Code of Practice for Employers, available from the [BDA online shop](#), offering detailed practical guidance for supporting dyslexic employees.

"Making Dyslexia Work for You", 2nd Edition, by Vicki Goodwin, Bonita Thomson, published by Routledge

"Dyslexia: How to Survive and Succeed at Work", by Sylvia Moody, published by Vermilion (2006)

"The Dyslexic Advantage: Unlocking the Hidden Potential of the Dyslexic Brain", by Brock Eide and Fernette Eide, published by Hay House UK Ltd. (2011)

Some BDA [Local Dyslexia Associations](#) provide support groups and meetings for adult dyslexics.

Glossary of related terms

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| <p>Dyscalculia</p> | <p>Dyscalculia is characterised by an inability to understand simple number concepts and to master basic numeracy skills. There are likely to be difficulties dealing with numbers at very elementary levels; this includes learning number facts and procedures, telling the time, time keeping, understanding quantity, prices and money. Difficulties with numeracy and maths are also common with dyslexia.</p> |
| <p>ADD/ADHD</p> | <p>Signs of Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder include inattention, restlessness, impulsivity, erratic, unpredictable and inappropriate behaviour, blurting out inappropriate comments or interrupting excessively. Some people come across unintentionally as aggressive. Most fail to make effective use of feedback.</p> <p>If no hyperactivity is present, the term Attention Deficit Disorder should be used: these individuals have particular problems remaining focused so may appear 'dreamy' and not to be paying attention. People with this condition are very easily distracted, lose track of what they are doing and have poor listening skills. By failing to pay attention to details, they may miss key points.</p> <p>Autistic characteristics can co-exist with the conditions described above. Those affected often demonstrate unusual behaviours due to inflexible thinking, over-reliance on routines, a lack of social and communication skills. People with Asperger Syndrome may have learned to largely conceal their problems but still find any social interaction very challenging and panic easily when they cannot cope.</p> |