

University of Aberdeen

## **RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING STUDENTS WITH DYSLEXIA**

### Dyslexia and the Law

The Equality Act 2010 emphasises the need for organisations to be proactive in meeting the needs of disabled students and staff. This includes students with dyslexia or other Specific Learning Difference (SpLD).

### Characteristics of Dyslexia

Dyslexia Scotland and the Cross Party Group on Dyslexia at the Scottish Parliament (2009) agreed the following definition of dyslexia:

“Dyslexia can be described as a continuum of difficulties in learning to read, write and/or spell, which persist despite the provision of appropriate learning opportunities. These difficulties often do not reflect an individual's cognitive abilities and may not be typical of performance in other areas.

The impact of dyslexia as a barrier to learning varies in degree according to the learning and teaching environment, as there are often associated difficulties such as:

- auditory and /or visual processing of language-based information
- phonological awareness
- oral language skills and reading fluency
- short-term and working memory
- sequencing and directionality
- number skills
- organisational ability"

Dyslexia exists in all cultures and across the range of abilities and socio-economic backgrounds. It is a hereditary, life-long, neurodevelopmental condition. Learners with dyslexia will benefit from early identification, appropriate intervention and targeted effective teaching, enabling them to become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.

### Assessment for Dyslexia

Any student with an SpLD, who requires adjustments to be made at University, is required to provide evidence of their difficulties as early as possible. This will usually be in the form of an Educational Psychologist's report. An assessment can be arranged through the Student Advice and Support Office.

The detailed assessment will make recommendations about any arrangements that need to be made, e.g. extra time for examinations. Subject to the student's agreement, this information will be circulated to the Schools in which they intend to study. A copy of the assessment will be held in the Student Advice and Support Office.

Account cannot be taken of a retrospective assessment, once, for example, final examination papers have been marked.

### Good Practice

- (1) An appropriate balance of continuous assessment and examination should be arrived at. Examinations can make excessive demands on the short term and working memory, but too

much continuous assessment might create a burden on time, as dyslexic students may take longer to produce their assignments.

- (2) Where possible, copies of reading lists should be given in advance of each semester in order to support planned reading and meeting assignment deadlines. Essential texts within reading lists should be highlighted, so they can be prioritised. Bibliographical references should be given as precisely as possible, so as to facilitate their being located.
- (3) Cognitive overload should be avoided. Lecture over-views and/or notes and PowerPoint presentations should be made available prior to the lecture. This will enable the student to gain an overview and create a framework to which they can attach new knowledge. It also assists with the processing of information and aids weak notetaking skills, caused by difficulties with short-term and working memory, reading and spelling.
- (4) Students should be allowed, where possible, to audio-record lectures without fuss or embarrassment. (Appendix 5.6)
- (5) Care should be taken when marking the work of a student with dyslexia to concentrate on content and not penalise for poor spelling and grammar or poor sentence construction. Any penalty applied during anonymous marking should be removed prior to the final mark being published.
- (6) Hand-outs produced in a sans serif font (e.g. Ariel, Verdana, Tahoma, Calibri) in a minimum of 12pt or 14pt with 1.5 spacing and lines left justified are recommended. Matt cream or off white paper can help to prevent glare. A comprehensive dyslexia style guide for hand-outs can be found at <http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/dyslexic/additional-resources>
- (7) The software that students use to 'read' texts will be specific to each student's individual need. Ideally, materials should be created so that there is a structure which software can make sense of and can be readily converted to an alternative. The British Dyslexia Association suggests offering both the source Word files and derived PDF files, where possible. Use of heading styles in Word, tables of contents and pictures with accompanying text are standard practice for documents designed for both Visually Impaired and Dyslexic users. Software can identify the different elements of the document and, therefore, can be used to adapt the text to formats other than straight print.
- (8) Students with extra time in examinations should be located in a separate room, if at all possible. In the main examination diets, separate examination venues for those with extra time are organised by the Registry. This does not include students who also require private circumstances. In cases of severe difficulty, an amanuensis may be provided or the student may be allowed to use a word-processor.
- (9) Students should be made aware of any sources of advice concerning note taking, essay writing, revision and examination techniques. Understanding Dyslexia – An Introduction for dyslexic Students in Higher Education, available from the Student Advice and Support Office, may be helpful. The 'Good Study Guide' published by the Open University, The Study Skills Handbook (Cottrell, 2008) and Studying with Dyslexia (Godwin, 2012) are also recommended.
- (10) Students should be encouraged to make an appointment to see an Academic Skills Advisor (Dyslexia Specialist) within the Student Learning Service, Centre for Academic Development.
- (11) Students who go on placement or apply for a job should think about disclosing their dyslexia to any future employer so that reasonable adjustments can be considered. They should also focus on the positive side of dyslexia by outlining their strengths and any compensatory and supportive strategies that they have developed.