

University of St Andrews

Student Support Services

DYSLEXIA

Guidelines for Members of Staff

The purpose of these guidelines is to help staff meet the academic needs of students with dyslexia. The terms used to refer to receptive and expressive language difficulties (and problems with information processing) vary widely but the most commonly agreed descriptor of such conditions is **dyslexia**. Whilst it is important to understand the differences between the various disabilities falling under this umbrella term, there are some general guidelines which members of staff may follow when dealing with the learning needs of students with dyslexia.

One of the most important things to many students with dyslexia is the formal acknowledgement that their slow speed or inability to perform certain cognitive and linguistic tasks result, not from a lack of intelligence, education or effort, but from measurable differences between their methods of processing information and those used by the majority of learners. It is not surprising that many dyslexics suffer from low self-esteem as a result of their learning difficulties. In the realm of higher education in particular, the characteristics of dyslexia are often seen as an indication of low academic ability. This perception is inaccurate.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 widens access to education for students with disabilities. Unfortunately, in the minds of many, dyslexia is not considered as authentic a disability as those neurological conditions having more noticeable physical symptoms - epilepsy, cerebral palsy or multiple sclerosis for instance. It is important to note that dyslexic students have to meet the same entrance requirements as all other students to obtain a place at the University of St. Andrews.

What is Dyslexia?

Characteristics

- ❖ short term memory deficit
- ❖ inaccuracy in copying text
- ❖ reversing letters/words
- ❖ transposing letters/words
- ❖ omitting letters/words

- ❖ misreading words
- ❖ slow reading speed
- ❖ poor and inconsistent spelling
- ❖ poor organisational skills (reflected in written and oral presentation of ideas as well as in organisational tasks in daily life)
- ❖ expressive language problems

Provisions

Extra time on exams: to compensate for slower processing speed and need for frequent re-reading and correcting.

Use of computer: to allow for more efficient and extensive editing; to access spellcheck functions; to allow time to follow a set writing process (expanding an outline into a formal essay) thus minimising organisational difficulties.

Tape-recorded exam questions: to prevent misinterpretation of questions

Editing assistance: to teach strategies for checking sentence structures and spelling; to help identify patterns of error in particular types of writing (essays, lab reports, presentations)

Copies of lecture notes: to prevent student from omitting or inaccurately recording important course content.

Responding to Dyslexia

Diagnosis of Language Difficulties

Students themselves may suspect that they have dyslexic-type difficulties. Teaching staff may also notice a student experiencing an unusually high level of difficulty meeting the reading and written requirements of a course. Any such student can be referred to the Disabilities Adviser at the Student Support Services (Union Building Office) to discuss and pre-screen for dyslexia. Referrals to a psychologist will be made based on the outcome of the pre-screening.

Learning Support

Some students with dyslexia may require assistance with more general aspects of study than those addressed by course tutors and lecturers. Such students may access learning skills support through the Student Support Services or SALTIRE and should be encouraged to contact the Disabilities Adviser for further information.

Provision in Lectures etc.

Students with dyslexia who wish to be considered for special arrangements for class tests, large print copies of handouts or overheads, extensions to assignments, taped lectures, or any other special facilities, should be advised to see the Disabilities Adviser to assess and formalise any such arrangements.

Provision in Examinations

Students requiring special arrangements for examinations should speak with the Disabilities Adviser to allow these arrangements to be put in place.

Equipment and IT Support

Dictaphones, desktop and laptop computers are available for use by students with disabilities. Students wishing access to this equipment, or to be given an orientation session on software specifically designed for dyslexics, should The Disability Team in Student Support Services.

Guidelines

The following procedures should be taken as standard practice:-

- Any prospective student, intending to seek special provision on the basis of diagnosed dyslexia, should have indicated the severity of the condition, and the level of support required on the UCAS Application Form. A letter outlining the current provisions offered to students with dyslexia would then have been sent to the applicant by the Admissions Office before any offer was made or accepted.
- Any member of staff approached by a student claiming a need for assistance due to dyslexia should ensure that the student has identified this need to the Disabilities Adviser.
- Before any formal arrangements are made for a student with dyslexia, a current assessment must be provided. The report should be no more than two years old and consist of a neuropsychological or psychoeducational evaluation, and should explicitly state the existence of mild to severe dyslexia. The diagnostic tests used should assess three areas: aptitude, academic achievement and information processing. The test results provided in the report will be kept confidential, with only the name of the condition (e.g. dyslexia) and general descriptors (e.g. lack of fine motor control) being communicated to teaching staff. The report should also provide specific recommendations of appropriate assistance to be provided by the Higher Education Institution.
- Formal requests and documentation must be received by 30th November for first semester examinations and by 31st March for second semester examinations, in order for special arrangements to be made by the Disabilities Adviser and the Academic Support Office.

References

Poustie, Jan et al: *Solutions for Specific Learning Difficulties: Identification Guide.*

Somerset: Next Generation, 21997

Singleton, Chris: *Dyslexia in Higher Education: Policy, Provision and Practice*
University of Hull 1998

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