

Dyslexia - A guide for lecturing staff

The National Working Party on Dyslexia in Higher Education (1999) concluded that in universities where there was an established system of support for dyslexic students, degree classifications achieved by dyslexic students were not significantly different from those of other students. It is important that students with dyslexia are given the support they need – with this, the vast majority of dyslexic students pass their degree courses and go on to find graduate employment.

Definitions of dyslexia

There are many definitions and hypotheses about the exact nature of dyslexia. Although researchers haven't agreed on a definitive answer, most would accept that dyslexia is physiological in nature, is indicated by a problem with phonological processing and results in difficulties in the acquisition of literacy skills. Bournemouth University (1998) suggests the following definition as relevant to students with dyslexia in higher education:

'Dyslexia manifests itself as an imbalance of skills whereby the dyslexic is unable to commit to paper ideas and information which are commensurate with their intellectual ability as evidenced by spoken understanding or demonstration.'

This definition highlights that dyslexia is constitutional in origin and affects areas other than literacy ability such as short-term memory and organisational skills.

In 2009, Dyslexia Scotland and the Cross Party Group on Dyslexia agreed on a working definition of dyslexia which you can read on our website.

Dyslexia is now legally recognised as a disability and is estimated to exist in approximately 10% of the population.

Points to consider

Each department should have a dyslexia reference package which should include:

- Leaflets giving information about how to recognise dyslexia
- Hints about how to help students
- Information about the College/University policies for Reasonable Adjustments and Additional Arrangements for assessments and examinations.

Some students may already know that they have dyslexia, but many others will only have been aware that they have to work much harder than others and that their written work does not show their ability. If you are puzzled by a student's work, please chat with them and ask them to arrange for further screening with the disability support team at your institution.

Reasonable Adjustments

According to the Equalities Act 2010, students are legally eligible for 'Reasonable Adjustments'. These are changes which will allow them to fulfil their potential without extra stress and may include arrangements for:

Exams/Assessments: Your institution should have a firm policy about extra time and all tutors should be aware of this. Additional Assessment Arrangements might include:

- Extra time to complete exams
- The use of a scribe and/or a reader
- The use of a computer instead of handwritten exam scripts.

You should have received information about this from the Disability Advisor at your institution. Please check with your student and the advisory service.

Lecture notes: Students with dyslexia might experience difficulties taking notes in class because of their short-term memory and slower processing difficulties. Please allow requests to record your lecture. Alternatively, you could provide backup notes which are in dyslexia friendly format. See 'Dyslexia-Friendly Formats' by Dyslexia Scotland.

Library: Dyslexic students may need to borrow books for longer periods. A shortage of books may also add to difficulties – ordering extra copies would help.

Photocopying: Some students might require extra photocopies so that they can cut and paste them into their own notes, or they might prefer to photocopy someone else's notes in order to augment their own.

Reading List: Distribute early. Indicate essential reading with chapter outlines and key points.

Placements and Field Trips: Provide opportunities for students to discuss with the project supervisor any difficulties and strategies that would help.

Transition to Employment: EmployAbility can work with dyslexic university students and graduates to ease the transition from education into employment.
www.employ-ability.org.uk/universities/services

More information

- 'Dyslexia: A Guide for Students', and 'Dyslexia Friendly Formats' by Dyslexia Scotland
- 'Understanding Dyslexia' a Glasgow School of Art publication, useful for any course:
www.gsa.ac.uk/media/782517/understanding-dyslexia-for-print-and-web.pdf
- Supporting Dyslexic Adults in Higher Education and the Workplace, Nicola Brunswick (2003)
- Key Points for Busy Lecturers
www.brainhe.com/staff/types/dyslexiatextstaff.html
- Dyslexia Scotland Helpline 0344 800 8484
or helpline@dyslexiascotland.org.uk



Dyslexia Scotland

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