

Briefing

Employment adjustments for people who have Specific Learning Difficulties such as Dyslexia

Abridged content for sample purposes

This briefing is not an authoritative statement of the law. While we have made every effort to ensure that the information we have provided is correct, Business Disability Forum cannot accept any responsibility or liability.

Contents

Introduction	4
Employment and people with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs)	9
Reasonable adjustments and best practice	11
Working arrangements to retain employees	24
Assistive Technology	25
Induction and training	27
Communication	28
Teamwork	29
Harassment	30
Further sources of reference	31
Contact us	34

Introduction

What are Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs)

Dyslexia

Dyslexia is the most common Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD)[1] and research suggests that around 10% of the population (6.6 million people) may be affected by dyslexia.[2] It is not related to intelligence and having dyslexia does not mean a person's intellectual and creative abilities are impaired.

The noun dyslexia comes from the Greek "dys-" which means "difficult" and "lexis" which means "words", "language" or "speech".

Dyslexia is a difficulty of neurological origin that affects a person's ability to process and memorise information. The areas primarily affected are reading, writing, spelling, numeracy, time-management and personal organisation.

Dyscalculia

The noun dyscalculia comes from the Greek "dys-" which means "difficult" and "calculare" which means "to count"; it is often called "Maths dyslexia". People with dyscalculia find it difficult to interact with numbers, particularly in arithmetic. They may also have difficulties understanding the relationship between numbers.

[1] Other Specific Learning Difficulties include Dyscalculia, Dyspraxia, Dysgraphia, Dyspraxia (or Development Co-ordination Disorder) and Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD).

[2] Source: British Dyslexia Association.

Dyspraxia or Developmental Co-ordination Disorder

The noun dyspraxia comes from the Greek “dys-” which means “difficult” and “praxis” which means “an action”. People with dyspraxia have difficulties with coordination; this does not only include writing, but also walking and balance; movements may not always seem steady. People with dyspraxia also have difficulties with planning, organisation and time management.

Dysgraphia

The noun dysgraphia comes from the Greek “dys-” which means difficult and “graphia” which means “to write” or “writing”. Writing is a fine and complex motor skill. People with dysgraphia have difficulties with the automated action of handwriting, which impacts on the legibility of their handwriting, particularly at speed.

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

ADD and ADHD affect people’s concentration and ability to focus, particularly for long periods of time. People with ADD/ADHD may have difficulties with organisation, concentration, behaviour and difficulties with social interactions such as interrupting people at the right time or the appropriateness of comments made.

Visual stress

Some people with dyslexia may experience 'visual stress', also called Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome or Irlen Syndrome; this is not an optical problem. When a person who has visual stress reads a document, the text appears blurry and the letters seem to 'move around'. This is accentuated when reading black on white documents.

Co-occurrence and secondary effects

Frequently people experience more than one SpLD at a time and they may overlap in how they affect individuals. Strategies to support people with more than one SpLDs will remain similar. Also, SpLDs can have secondary effects on self-confidence leading to anxiety, frustration and low self-esteem.

About Neurodiversity and SpLD

Some Educational Psychologists (in charge of diagnostic assessments) now prefer to include individual specific learning difficulty under a diagnosis of "specific learning disorder" rather than as separate diagnoses.

Neurodiversity is a "new" term originally used by communities of people with Autism in an attempt to move away from the medical model of disability. Now embraced by other communities, it is often used to refer to a wide variety of conditions such as Autism, SpLDs and Specific Language Impairments. Autism is not discussed in this Briefing and is the topic of a separate Briefing on employment adjustments for people who have a diagnosis of autism, including Asperger Syndrome.

Assessments

An individual may not realise they have SpLDs. Job or organisational changes could bring this to light, for example when someone who had secretarial support has it withdrawn.

Screenings

One way of establishing whether a formal diagnostic assessment is required would be to suggest an individual completes one of the many checklists that are available on the internet. These can confirm that many of the characteristics associated with a particular SpLD exist.

Diagnostic assessment

To get a diagnosis of dyslexia or other SpLDs, a person needs to go through a diagnostic assessment conducted by either a chartered Educational Psychologist, a registered educational or occupational psychologist or a Specialist Teacher. The assessment report provides analysed test results, information on the person's weaknesses and strengths and often contains recommended methods of support. When the assessment was made prior to employment (for school or University for example), it may not contain information on reasonable adjustments that could be implemented in the workplace.

Workplace assessment

A professional workplace assessment may be required to plan and offer support in the workplace beyond the acceptance that a person will need to approach tasks differently. This also applies when a member of staff has a diagnostic report confirming that they have SpLDs but that does not outline the support they require in the workplace. Recommendations made in a report will be job specific and apply to the individual only.

Employment adjustments for people who have SpLDs such as Dyslexia

If a workplace assessment is required, it is important to raise the following points with any prospective Educational Psychologist before they undertake the assessment:

- Ask for a report sample. This will provide you with an example of the assessment you receive for an individual.
- Ask for testimonials. What work have they carried out for other employers? Who have they worked with?
- In the case of a diagnostic assessment, ask if the report will include adjustments for the individual in the workplace. Explain why this is essential as it enables you to support the individual moving forward, and to meet your legal duty to provide reasonable adjustments.
- Provide the psychologist with a full and current job description for the individual who needs the assessment.
- Following the assessment, if the individual is advised to obtain some coaching or training, shop around. Speak to other educational psychologists or training consultants who provide this service.

Employment and people with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs)

Many people who have SpLDs will be protected under the Equality Act 2010 but will not consider themselves to be disabled.

Nevertheless employers have a legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments and not to discriminate against employees who might be facing barriers at work because of a disability or long-term condition – even if it has not been diagnosed as a disability or accepted as such by the individual.

Employers should be aware that non-visible disabilities, such as SpLDs, mean that barriers can be less obvious. This means reasonable adjustments may be harder for employers to determine and put in place. Employers can seek advice from Work Coaches and Disability Employment Advisers at Jobcentre Plus who refer people with SpLDs for positions. There are also organisations which offer specialist advice and disability awareness training to help employers ensure that their recruitment processes are barrier-free for those with SpLDs – **see page 31** for further details.

It is important that employers have an open and honest conversation with new employees and their support staff about the barriers that may be present in the workplace and what simple measures might help remove the barriers. The best practice approach is to make adjustments for anyone who needs them in order to work effectively and contribute fully to your organisation.

Employment adjustments for people who have SpLDs such as Dyslexia

Most employers will want to know what is 'reasonable'. Doing what seems fair for the individual and others who work for you given the size and resources of your organisation is a good place to start.

This guidance will help you deliver best practice.

- You might need to treat people differently in order to treat them fairly.
- Don't make assumptions about what people can and can't do.
- Ensure that everyone knows who is responsible for doing what and when it must be done.
- Involve the individual in generating solutions and respect their right to confidentiality.

For more detail on the law and making reasonable adjustments contact **Business Disability Forum's Advice Service** on telephone number **+44-(0)20-7403-3020** or by email **advice@businessdisabilityforum.org.uk** or see the Briefing on The Equality Act 2010.

Content has been removed for sample purposes. Pages 11 to 33 are available in the full booklet.

© 2018 This publication and the information contained therein are subject to copyright and remain the property of Business Disability Forum. They are for reference only and must not be reproduced, copied or distributed without prior permission.

Business Disability Forum is committed to ensuring that all its products and services are as accessible as possible to everyone. If you wish to discuss anything with regard to accessibility, please contact us.

**Company limited by guarantee with charitable objects.
Registered Charity No: 1018463.
Registered in England No: 2603700.**



Contact us

Business Disability Forum
Nutmeg House
60 Gainsford Street
London
SE1 2NY

Tel: +44-(0)20-7403-3020

Fax: +44-(0)20-7403-0404

Email: enquiries@businessdisabilityforum.org.uk

Web: businessdisabilityforum.org.uk