

STRANMILLIS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

DYSLEXIA POLICY

1. Introduction

Dyslexia is a registered disability under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and is defined as a Specific Learning Difficulty in Great Britain. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Order (SENDO) was made law in September 2006. Under this legislation it is illegal for universities to discriminate against students with disabilities and special needs. Such discrimination is defined as:

- Failing to make a reasonable adjustment where any arrangement or physical feature places a disabled person at a substantial disadvantage; and
- Unjustifiably treating someone less favourably for a reason relating to his or her disability.

In its Disability Policy Stranmillis University College makes explicit its wish to be inclusive and supportive of all students with disabilities. This Dyslexia Policy focuses on issues relating only to this category of student.

2. Definition of Dyslexia

Dyslexia is defined as a congenital disorder which creates problems in processing language and symbols, particularly in reading and writing. Dyslexia can be intensified by sight and/or hearing problems at key stages of development. Neurological studies have shown differences in the brains of people who are dyslexic and those who are not, in particular the left side of the brain. There is evidence of deficits in short term memory and the transference of short-term to long-term memory and it is estimated that 4% of the population are dyslexic learners. Dyslexia is recognised as a disability under the 1970 Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

Dyslexia is generally defined as a specific difficulty in the acquisition of reading and spelling which is not predicted by age or intelligence. It is a specific learning difficulty, probably of genetic origin. Dyslexia affects the individual throughout their life-span, but its manifestations change with age.

Dyslexia is a form of specific learning difficulty – that is, a problem with particular aspects of learning despite adequate intelligence and general learning skills. The syndrome of dyslexia is now widely recognised as being a specific learning disability of neurological origin that does not imply low intelligence or poor educational potential, and which is independent of race and social background. (The report of the National Working Party on Dyslexia in HE, 1999:25)

Dyslexia is more usefully described as a difference in learning styles and cognition than as a deficit in intellectual ability. People with dyslexia demonstrate specific strengths in their approaches to learning.

Dyslexia is not a curable condition, however, its effects on study can be alleviated by specialist support together with awareness across the University College community.

3. Admissions

The Teacher Development Agency (TDA) in England and Wales does not specifically preclude students with dyslexia from entering the profession. In Northern Ireland this issue is currently under discussion with UCET (NI) and the University College will give these recommendations full consideration. Many ITT dyslexic students experience difficulties with attitudes of teachers, tutors and parents on school placements and in obtaining a post in the profession. Some may have difficulty in meeting the standards on literacy and numeracy set by Government policy.

However, once a student has been admitted to any of the UG programmes he/she will receive support and guidance from the University College Disability Officer and course tutors as outlined in the Disability Policy.

4. Declaration of Disability

Some students choose to declare their disability on their UCAS form and are invited for an interview with the University College Disability Officer who conducts an assessment and assists with the DSA application for which UC support is essential. Applications are forwarded by the University College. At this stage dyslexic students usually have a recent Chartered Psychologist's report which must accompany the application. With the student's permission, tutors are informed of the student's disability so that appropriate support may be provided. The student is entered on the shared Disability Database to which Student Support staff and Examinations only have access. This enables special examination requirements to be provided.

Often students or tutors may suspect that the student has dyslexia which has not been recognised previously. Dyslexia has many common features and is usually characterised by a *pattern of difficulties* rather than isolated characteristics. The combination and level of these difficulties vary from person to person. Tutors noting *several of the following* might reasonably raise the issue with a student and suggest a referral to the Disability Officer for assessment.

The following list is an indicator of possible ways of recognising dyslexia in students:

- Discrepancy between verbal and written performance
- Severe problems with spelling
- Letters or syllables missed out or transposed
- Use of immature language or simplified vocabulary, particularly in written work
- Excessive or misplaced punctuation
- Word omissions
- Poor handwriting
- Poor sentence and essay structure, content which appears to 'meander'
- Repeated information or phrases
- Difficulty in seeing errors and proof reading
- Poor reading skills, for example mispronunciation of small words and poor phonic attack on unfamiliar words
- Forgetfulness or poor time management skills – missing deadlines, repeatedly forgetting appointments and dates
- Poor organisational skills, particularly with written work
- A lack of 'note-taking' in lectures or slow at taking down information from boards and OHPs
- Co-ordination or spatial problems

- Difficulty with sequencing e.g. numerical tables
- Difficulty in concentrating, especially with background noise
- Problems may not be immediately apparent. Many dyslexic students will rewrite an assignment several times before presenting it, often having had a friend or member of the family proof read the work first; typewritten or word-processed essays will also disguise features of SpLD. Problems may become more apparent when the student is placed under pressure, for example giving a presentation, reading aloud in a seminar, or in examinations and time constrained assignments.
- A stilted style of writing which may not match oral performance (University of Sunderland website)

Many of these characteristics are similar to those displayed by inexperienced students, although dyslexia may be a cause when the problems are persistent and intractable.

Evidence of several of the above need to be provided to the Disability Officer who can then arrange for a Psychological Assessment to be carried out. Only then can special support and examination arrangements be provided through the psychologist's recommendations. Examples of current recommendations include:

- Seating near the front of the lecture theatre
- Tape recording (on own equipment) of lecture/seminar/tutorial
- Photocopies/handouts/lecture notes/diagrams/OHPs
- Advice on background reading/shortened reading lists/essential texts
- Alternative formats of course materials eg. Tapes, video, electronic format
- Enlarged or specific style text
- Handouts on specified colour paper
- Students not being asked to read aloud
- Students not being asked to write on whiteboard/flipcharts in class
- Arranging extended library loans
- Additional photocopy credits and printing credits

5. Recommendations for Support

In addition, the DSA may provide specialist trained tutors who will engage in one-to-one support, the nature of which will depend on the Educational Psychologist's report.

Recommendations, based on the psychologist's report may include support for:

- Reading skills and strategies
- Spelling skills
- Note-taking from both texts and lectures
- Revision techniques
- Examination techniques
- Time management and organisational skill
- Listening skills
- Essay planning
- Essay writing; structure and organisation
- Proof-reading skills
- Oral presentations: individual and/or group
- Dictation skills: making use of oral ability to support written work
- Making the most of computer word processing
- Information retrieval skills and using reference

6. Assessment

Coursework and examinations

The University College aims to ensure that a consistent, objective and fair approach is taken so that dyslexic students are neither disadvantaged nor unfairly advantaged.

(i) Examinations

All students who have been assessed by the Disability Officer, and whose case is supported by medical/psychological reports and recommendations are entered on the Disability Database. Students are expected to confirm their arrangements prior to their examination period with the Examinations Office.

Alternative arrangements may include:

- Time extensions
- Provision of rest periods with extra time
- Separate room
- A reader for exam questions and/answers
- An amanuensis
- Use of laptop/computer
- Alternative forms of assessment e.g. open book, taped answers etc.

Stickers placed on the front of an examination paper may be used to indicate a SpLD – at the discretion of the student. Tutors conducting class tests should liaise with the Examinations Office to ensure that any dyslexic student receives parity of treatment to that in a formal examination.

(ii) Coursework

Although assessed work, other than unseen examination scripts, is likely to be word-processed and spell-checked, assessors should be aware of the limitations of an examinees spellchecker. Some of the problems likely to remain in dyslexic students' work after spell-checking include:

- Homophone substitutions e.g. there/their, effect/affect, course/coarse
- Phonetic equivalents e.g. frenetic or phonetic, homerfone for homophone
- Incorrect word substitutions (distance for disturbance)
- American spelling (e.g. colourful, fueling)
- Difficulties with sequencing or word-finding may produce a stilted style of writing which may not match the student's oral performance in seminars etc.

When marking dyslexic candidates' scripts, examiners are asked to focus on the clarity of the argument, rather than on details of expression. Examiners should try to separate marking of transcription errors and marking of content. However, while sympathetic treatment of assessed work submitted by dyslexic students implies the disregarding of errors of spelling and grammar, the communication itself must be effective. If academic standards are to be safeguarded sympathetic treatment cannot extend to written expression so poor that coherence and intelligibility are at issue.

7. Staff Development

The University College provides guidance and advice to staff to enable them to support and manage the learning of dyslexic students. All new tutors receive a briefing during induction to raise awareness and workshops are arranged for tutors.

8. Enhancing Facilities for Students

The University College will seek to develop and enhance facilities for all disabled students, including those with dyslexia, by making the best use of human and technological resources and by keeping abreast of best practice.