

Dyslexia and the workplace

A guide for students



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This booklet aims to give useful information to dyslexic students about the workplace. It outlines aspects of work which might be challenging and looks at some solutions. It aims to be impartial to allow students to make an informed choice on disclosure. This is a personal choice, but one which needs to be considered. It points students in the direction of further support and information.

The workplace today

The workplace is becoming more aware of and sensitive to the needs of dyslexic people¹. This has been partly fuelled by changes in the law. Most employers now have policies on equal opportunities which cover staff with disabilities including some dyslexic people. Employers often recognise that dyslexic people have qualities and compensatory strategies that add value to organisations.

The extent to which employers are dyslexia-sensitive varies. Although dyslexia is increasingly talked about and recognised, not everyone in the workplace will have a clear understanding of what dyslexia means. Also, the level of support is likely to be less than at university.

If you have been assessed as dyslexic you will need to consider how this might impact on your work and what steps you can take to avoid running into problems.

You should also think about disclosing to any future employer and what adjustments you can reasonably ask to be made. You are not bound to disclose by law, but it is probably wise to consider the possible consequences of not disclosing. (See section on disclosure page 11).

¹ The term dyslexia is used to incorporate other specific learning difficulties such as dyspraxia.

Dyslexia and the law

The law recognises severe dyslexia as a disability under the Equality Act (2010); this consolidated previous anti-discrimination laws. A person is considered to have a disability if the “impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”²

Dyslexia is a wide term. If you have been assessed as having ‘mild’ dyslexia you may consider that this will not impact upon you at work. How much it does will depend on your chosen career path and the expectations placed upon you. These may change as your career progresses.

Many employers are willing to take steps to help even if the impact of dyslexia is not severe.

Where an employer is aware of such a condition, they are obliged to make **reasonable adjustments** to help you manage your difficulties.

As part of the Public Sector Equality Duty, public authorities such as local authorities, hospitals, universities and schools are required to publish an action plan to show how they will proactively address disability, including dyslexia, to create equal opportunities among staff.

² <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

How dyslexia can affect you at work

The extent to which dyslexia will affect you at work will depend on the demands made upon you as well as your ability to set up effective support systems. At times of stress and urgent deadlines, you may feel less able to cope.

Aspects of dyslexia and dyspraxia such as poor working memory, weak organisational skills, slow speed of processing and difficulty with multi-tasking, alongside weaknesses in literacy, could impact on the following:

- writing accurate and clear reports
- prioritising work
- reading information quickly
- taking minutes or phone calls
- remembering procedures and instructions
- copying numbers
- time management/working to deadlines
- presenting your thoughts clearly
- working in an open plan office

A new job will place demands on you. Graduate engineers, who may have limited experience of extended writing, may find their line manager expecting very clear language for their client reports, while trainee doctors could struggle with prioritising workload in a busy acute ward.

Finding solutions



During your time at university you have probably developed your approach to academic study skills to suit your learning style and compensate for any weaknesses. In the same way, developing effective strategies and using appropriate assistive technology at work can go a long way towards overcoming problems.

Area of difficulty

Taking minutes

Possible solutions

Use a recording device; ask a colleague to act as a back-up.

Writing
reports/letters/
memos

Collect examples of good reports to use as templates. A colleague may be willing to proof read. Consider using text-to-speech software or speech recognition software. There are a number of free or Open Source programs available.(add this to resources?)

Forgetting
information

Note everything then you don't need to remember! You can use assistive technology or a simple notebook. It's ok to ask for instructions to be repeated.

Organisation/
prioritising

Devise workable 'to do' lists; prepare a daily work schedule to cover routine daily tasks. Make it clear to work colleagues when you don't wish to be interrupted.

Focus and
concentration

Be aware of your most productive times; use headphones to reduce noise. Phrases like "can I get back to you?" can be useful.

Reading

Change the background colour on computer to avoid visual stress; change the font; use text to speech facilities widely available; apply scanning techniques to get the gist and identify the bits you need to read.

Dealing with
emails

Limit the times you check your emails; deal with each item once; auto preview saves opening; apply spellchecker before sending.

Compensated dyslexics – people who have put energy into developing strategies to overcome weaknesses – can be a valued asset in any organisation.

Asking a supportive colleague to demonstrate a task or share aspects about their method of working can be a good way to cope in a new job.

Ask for training in time management; you could find out about courses and present them to your line manager.



Reasonable adjustments

Reasonable adjustments is a term to describe the steps an employer can take to make sure that, as far as is reasonable, a person with a disability is on an even footing job-wise with a non-disabled person.

Reasonable adjustments should enable people to work more effectively. Everyone is different and any adjustment will need to focus on their particular needs. Often small, low-cost modifications will do the trick. If more expensive adjustments are necessary, employers may be able to apply for part-funding from the Government's Access to Work scheme (see appendix).

Examples of adjustments could be:

- allowing a recording device in meetings
- providing a quiet work space
- providing specialised software packages
- establishing the use of accessible fonts

The duty to make adjustments also **covers job applicants**. Companies will consider making changes to aspects such as psychometric tests, which can be difficult for dyslexic people, or extending the length of the interview.

Disclosure

You are not obliged to volunteer information about your dyslexia. It is now unlawful to ask applicants questions about their health, which includes disability/dyslexia, before offering them work. But an employer can ask questions about an ability to carry out a function intrinsic to the job and could set tests to assess this e.g. literacy competence for teachers.

The University Career Destinations team suggests that it is beneficial to make an early disclosure. It shows a more open approach, enables your future employer to offer adjustments and could prevent you running into difficulties later.

Reasons not to disclose:

- *Competition for jobs is fierce; disclosure may put me at a disadvantage.*
- *I want to be considered on merit and don't want to be interviewed because I have ticked the disability box.*
- *I feel my dyslexia will not impact on my ability to do the job.*

Reasons to disclose:

- *Dyslexia does not carry the stigma it did in the past.*

- *I chose to be upfront about dyslexia as employers need to know what they are getting.*
- *I would disclose before going to an interview so allowances such as extra time for written tests can be made.*

Generally, disclosure provides opportunities for more effective partnerships.

Remember employers only have a duty to accommodate your dyslexia if they know about it. But be aware that disclosing to human resources does not necessarily mean that your line manager will know.

Marketing dyslexia positively

When disclosing dyslexia, aim to be honest but also focus on the positives and what steps you have developed to support yourself. You might also consider how a future employer could support you.

Career Destinations has produced a useful briefing sheet on disclosure and marketing dyslexia positively. To obtain a copy view at <http://www.southampton.ac.uk/careers/employability/myneeds/disclose.html> , visit the Career Destinations Centre in Building 37 (the Student Services building) or email careers@soton.ac.uk You can also make an appointment to see a careers practitioner to discuss disclosure or other aspects of career planning.

Work based assessments

The dyslexic candidate may be asked to provide the employer with evidence of a diagnostic assessment. If you have an assessment, for example from an educational psychologist or a specialist tutor, you can show this to your line manager or the HR department.

In some cases, the employer might wish to arrange an assessment of the support you need in your workplace through the Government's Access to Work scheme or through an independent dyslexia consultant. This is similar to the DSA needs assessment where potential adjustments are explored and proposed.



Further information and resources

Job applications/interviews/opportunities

University of Southampton **Career Destinations** runs events to help you prepare for CV writing, interviews and assessment centres. You can meet prospective employers at a series of career fairs and workshops. Opportunities for dyslexic/disabled students are also posted on the events calendar and newsfeed.

www.southampton.ac.uk/careers

Quick guides to current equality legislation

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/equalities/equality-act-publications/equality-act-guidance/>

Organisations

AbilityNet

www.abilitynet.org.uk IT advice and training for people with disabilities

Access to Work

www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/Employmentsupport/WorkSchemesAndProgrammes/DG_4000347

This scheme gives advice, information and funding for people with a recognised disability, including dyslexia, which hinders them in their work. It is run by the Employment Service. Contact is made through three regional centres.

Association of Dyslexic Specialists in Higher Education (ADSHE)

http://adshe.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/staff_guidelines1.pdf

Website provides information for employees including strategies to use in the workplace.

British Dyslexia Association

www.bdadyslexia.org.uk The BDA has produced a document on good practice guidelines: the Code of Practice for Employers.

EmployAbility

www.employ-ability.org.uk

EmployAbility is an organisation dedicated to assisting people with all disabilities into employment.

Hampshire Dyslexia Association

www.hantsda.org.uk Locally-based support group; provide contacts of dyslexia assessors and trainers.

Books

Bartlett, Diana et al **Dyslexia in the Workplace: An Introductory Guide** (2010) Wiley-Blackwell

Colley, M. **Living with Dyspraxia** (2006) JKP

Moody, Dr Sylvia,
Dyslexia: How to survive and succeed at work
(2004) Vermillion

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