



Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD)

Key Support Actions

- Permit recording of lectures
- Provide handouts in advance of lectures
- Provide directed reading lists
- Extend loan periods for books
- Facilitate examination access arrangements (such as extra time, and/or use of a word processor, and/or rest breaks and marking advice to examiners)

What are Specific Learning Difficulties?

Although the term 'Specific Learning Difficulty' (SpLD) can be used as a diagnosis in its own right, it is commonly used as an umbrella term to refer to one of the following diagnoses:

Dyslexia

Dyslexia is an underlying language processing difficulty. 'It mainly affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling. It is characterised by difficulties with phonological processing, rapid naming, working memory, processing speed, and the automatic development of skills that may not match up to an individual's other cognitive abilities'

(<http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk>)

Developmental co-ordination disorder (DCD), also known as dyspraxia

DCD is a difficulty with motor co-ordination and visual perception and can hinder the efficiency with which the individual can plan and carry out motor tasks. As a result, people with DCD may have difficulty with physical organisation and orientation as well as with fine motor control, visual perception, and spatial awareness. Dyspraxia can be defined as 'an impairment of the organisation of movement and is also associated with problems of perception, language and thought'

(<http://www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk>)

Dyscalculia

Dyscalculia primarily affects the ability to acquire arithmetical skills. 'Students with dyscalculia may have difficulty understanding simple number concepts, lack an intuitive grasp of numbers, and have problems learning number facts and procedures. Even if they produce a correct answer or use a correct method, they may do so mechanically and without confidence' (<http://bdadyslexia.org.uk>)

Dysgraphia

Dysgraphia primarily affects handwriting. It is the result of difficulties in the processes that are required to assemble the motor codes for writing and is characterised by difficulties with the organisation of fine motor control and/or processing difficulties.

There are common aspects and characteristics that are shared between each of these diagnoses (i.e. it is common for there to be overlaps between the various Specific Learning Difficulties). It is also quite common for an individual to have co-occurring SpLDs or to have an SpLD that co-occurs with other impairments such as Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder (AD(H)D) and/or Autism.

How do Specific Learning Difficulties impact on study?

The impact of a Specific Learning Difficulty will vary from individual to individual and will depend upon a range of factors including the time since diagnosis, the range of strategies that have already been developed, and the support that is available. In general, it may take students with a Specific Learning Difficulty significantly longer to read material than their peers due to slow speed of processing. It may similarly take them substantially longer to write essays. This is because students with a Specific Learning Difficulty may experience difficulties in the following areas, particularly under time pressure:

- Absorbing information quickly from reading material
- Writing concisely
- Fluency of written composition
- Speed and legibility of handwriting
- Planning, organising, ordering, and structuring writing and ideas
- Retaining and manipulating long lists of orally given instructions
- Formulating and retaining ideas (both for speech and in writing)
- Proofreading (ability to recognise own errors)
- Sentence structure / grammar / punctuation
- Listening and taking notes simultaneously and selecting essential information
- Summarising from source material / paraphrasing
- Scanning and skimming information rapidly
- Maintaining focus & focusing accurately on the text for a sustained period

Task and time management - including planning and structuring time. In addition, students with dyspraxia may also experience difficulties with physical co-ordination and spatial awareness, which can make some practical tasks difficult. It is important to note, however, that not all students will experience all the difficulties listed and the range of areas of difficulty experienced will vary from individual to individual. Students with an SpLD will have developed a range of compensatory strategies. However, these strategies may come under pressure in different environments and also during times of increased stress. Therefore, the difficulties may become more noticeable when under time pressure (such as in examinations), where there is an increased burden on memory and the rapid retrieval and organisation of information.

Inclusive Teaching

These are strategies of benefit to all students but will also help to remove barriers for students with SpLD:

- Provide guidance with reading lists and/or directed reading tasks
- Give adequate time to assimilate information and prepare answers to verbal questions
- Provide group discussion materials in advance
- Use concise, clear, and explicit language
- Break information down if task details are long
- Provide instructions in written form if required
- Provide assignment deadlines well in advance
- Provide constructive written and verbal feedback
- Provide detailed, legible feedback on strong points of the essay or assignment as well as areas for improvement

Lectures:

- Give permission to record lectures, supervisions, dissertation tutorials, and guest speakers
- Give permission to take notes using a laptop computer
- Leave information on the board to allow adequate copying time
- Provide copies of PowerPoint presentations, OHTs, handouts, lecture notes, and discussion documents, where available, preferably in advance in electronic format
- Provide handouts on yellow or off-white paper to enable the student to access the reading material
- Provide PowerPoint presentations on a pastel-coloured background where possible
- Number PowerPoint slides to assist with referencing during notetaking
- Identify essential information
- A synopsis at the start of the lectures and effective signposting throughout. At the conclusion of each lecture, review major points

Reasonable adjustments

These are adjustments which should be available if required to students with Specific Learning Difficulties:

- Allow extra time and flexibility over deadlines, where necessary
- Avoid asking the student to read aloud from unseen texts without prior agreement
- Offer additional supervisions to discuss subject-specific areas and identify knowledge gaps due to speed of processing difficulties
- Extend library loans
- Introduce new vocabulary in context with concepts explained
- Label diagrams in handouts. If this is not possible, make labelled diagrams available afterwards.

The Equality Act (2010)

The Equality Act protects people with a diagnosed Specific Learning Difficulty. There will be a legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments and not to treat these individuals less favourably.

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