Dyslexia in the Workplace Guidance

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Hampshire County Council
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1. Introduction

Dyslexia is defined by the British Dyslexia Association as "a combination of abilities and difficulties that affect the learning process in one or more of reading, spelling and writing. It is a persistent condition. Accompanying weaknesses may be identified in areas of speed of processing, short term memory, organisation, sequencing, spoken language and motor skills. There may be difficulties with auditory and/ or visual perception. It is particularly related to mastering and using written language, which may include alphabetic, numeric and musical notation".

Estimates of the prevalence of dyslexia vary, but it is thought to affect between 10% and 20% of the population. Dyslexia affects different people in different ways. It is important to find out what the specific issues are for an employee with dyslexia and to clarify what support they may need within the workplace.

Under the Equality Act, a person has a disability where there is a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. Dyslexia is a recognised disability under the Act. An individual with dyslexia will need to show that their difficulties relate to all aspects of their life, not just to the particular situation in question.

This guidance aims to provide line managers and individuals with an understanding of the issues faced by a person with dyslexia and to standardise the County Council's approach to supporting staff with dyslexia.

It is recognised that Hampshire County Council is increasingly moving towards styles of flexible working and that some suggestions within this guidance lean towards set practices and work spaces. Whilst local management assessment is required in each case, it may be appropriate that a 'reasonable adjustment' is to allocate a permanent work station, for example.

2. Dyslexia in the workplace

Dyslexia affects different people in different ways. It is important to find out what the specific issues are for an employee with dyslexia and what support they may need in the workplace.

People who are dyslexic are considered to have a different way of thinking and learning. They can often see the 'big picture' and have other key positive attributes such as;

- innovative thinking skills;
- excellent trouble shooting skills;
- intuitive problem solving skills;
- lateral thinking skills;
- creativity in many different ways.

Although it is extremely unlikely that an individual with dyslexia will have difficulty with all of the symptoms listed below, some individuals may face challenges within the workplace such as;

- reading hesitantly
- misreading, making understanding difficult
- difficulty with sequences, e.g. getting dates in order
- poor organisation or time management
- difficulty organising thoughts clearly
- erratic spelling

Many individuals with dyslexia learn a number of different coping mechanisms to alleviate their symptoms and can overcome difficulties with different tasks either on their own or with support from their line manager.

Dyslexia can have a negative impact on individuals during the recruitment process and during their employment with the County Council if they are managed inappropriately. For this reason it is vital that line managers are supportive and helpful to team members who may have dyslexia to ensure that they are not disadvantaged. Problems can be effectively resolved within the workplace through a combination of strategies including;

- recognising that the individual has dyslexia and appreciating the full range of potential difficulties that this can bring;
- ensuring that their needs are accommodated during the recruitment and selection process;
- making reasonable and appropriate workplace adjustments;
- researching and implementing specialist information, technology and training.

When might adjustments be made?

Because staff who have been diagnosed with dyslexia are considered to have a disability under the Equality Act, they are entitled to 'reasonable workplace adjustments' to enable them to carry out their duties so as not to put them at a disadvantage when compared to a non-disabled person. The requirement to consider making adjustments to the workplace exists in the following situations:

- when a person with dyslexia applies for a post
- when a person with dyslexia is appointed
- when an existing employee is diagnosed with dyslexia
- when an existing employee with dyslexia transfers to a different role within the County Council

What are 'reasonable adjustments' for staff with dyslexia

Individuals have different needs and it is therefore essential to discuss requirements with the member of staff before any changes are made to ensure that any equipment or other intervention is suitable.

Line managers and budget holders should also be consulted at the earliest opportunity to ensure that financial support is available and appropriate.

If equipment and/or IT software are considered appropriate, depending on the user's needs, liaison with IT services is crucial to ensure compatibility of systems and packages.

It is important to note that individuals with dyslexia will not require all of the following adjustments to the workplace and it is important to discuss with the individual what their specific needs are. Possible adjustments that should be considered can include;

Written communication
For general difficulty with reading:

- give verbal and written instructions;
- use bullet points and numbering;
- avoid long paragraphs containing lots of information – make sentences short and simple;
- use voicemail and written memos;
- provide information on coloured paper (find out which colour helps the person to read best);
- set up a computer screen with a coloured background to documents;
- use suitable font sizes and styles;
- consider mind mapping as a way of keeping records;
- consider other ways of giving the same information to avoid reading.

For difficulty with reading and writing:

- allow plenty of time to read and complete the tasks;
- discuss the material with the employee, giving summaries and/or key points;
- utilise information prepared in other formats; for example, audio or videotape, drawings, diagrams and flowcharts;
- arrange for someone else to take the minutes of meetings.

For spelling and grammar errors:

- provide a 'work buddy' to proof read work;
- set up instant spell checker on a computer;

Working at a computer

- change background colour of screen and font size/style to suit individual preference;
- supply anti-glare screen filter;
- allow frequent breaks away from the screen, at least every hour;
- alternate computer work with other tasks where possible;
- avoid continuous all-day computer work;
- make use of the accessibility options on Hantsnet http://learnit.hants.gov.uk/learnit/accessibility-home.htm

Verbal communication

For difficulty remembering and following verbal instructions:

- give instructions one at a time;
- communicate instructions slowly and clearly in a quiet location;
- write down important information;
- demonstrate and supervise tasks and projects;
- encourage the person to take notes and then check them;
- ask instructions to be repeated back, to confirm that the instruction has been understood correctly;
- write a memo outlining a plan of action;
- back up multiple instructions in writing or with diagrams.

For difficulty with hidden meanings in conversation:

- give clear, concise and direct instructions; do not hint or make assumptions that you have been understood.

Time and Work Planning

For staff who find it difficult to concentrate or are easily distracted:

- make sure the workplace is quiet and away from distractions, for example, away from doors, busy phones, loud machinery;
- allocate a private workspace if possible;
- where feasible, allow the employee to work from home occasionally;
- provide a quiet working environment by allocating libraries, file rooms, private offices and other enclosed areas when others are not using them.

Coping with interruptions

- use a 'do not disturb' sign when specific tasks require intense concentration;
- encourage co-workers not to disturb the individual unless absolutely necessary;
- when interrupting, allow the individual to pause and write down what they are doing to refer to when resuming work;
- encourage the individual to complete one task before starting another;
- offer training in how to use the telephone effectively, for example, jotting down key points before making the call.

Remembering appointments and deadlines

- remind the individual of important deadlines and review priorities regularly;
- encourage use of a wall planner that visually highlights daily/monthly appointments, deadlines, tasks and projects;
- promote the use of the daily calendar and alarm features on the computer.

Organisation of property

- ensure that the individual keeps his/her work areas organised, neat and tidy;
- keep items where they can be clearly seen; for example, on shelves and bulletin boards;

- ensure the team returns important items to the same place each time;
- colour code items;
- ensure work areas are well lit.

Organising workflow:

- supply and ensure that the individual uses a wall planner;
- encourage the individual to prioritise important tasks, create a daily, dated 'to do' list and use diaries;
- help the individual to write a layout for regular tasks with appropriate prompts; for example, for meetings or taking notes;
- allow extra time for unforeseen occurrences;
- build planning time into each day.

General difficulties

Reversing numbers:

- encourage the individual to say the numbers out loud, write them down or press the calculator keys and check the figures have been understood.

Directional difficulties

Encourage the individual to;

- always try to use the same route;
- show the route and visible landmarks;
- take time to practice going from one place to another;
- use detailed maps.

Short-term memory problems (especially names, numbers and lists)

Encourage the individual to;

- use mnemonic devices and acronyms;
- organise details on paper so that they can be referred to easily using diagrams and flowcharts, then check understanding;
- use multi-sensory learning techniques such as reading material onto a tape machine and then play it back whilst re-reading;
- use computer software; sometimes well-developed programme menus and help features are useful.

3.   What to do when an individual declares/ suspects they may have dyslexia

A member of staff who has or suspects that they may have dyslexia should discuss this with their line manager as soon as possible. The line manager should allow the employee to explain the issues they are facing within the workplace and to discuss what assistance they may require to resolve these issues.

If necessary, the recommended dyslexia checklist and online dyslexia assessment should be discussed and completed with the individual to gain a clearer view of the possible support that may be required in the workplace. The suggested reasonable

adjustments within this guidance should also be explored and implemented where appropriate, avoiding lengthy delay where possible.

The checklist can be found at http://www.key4learning.com/checkdyslexia.htm. If the individual's requirements for adjustments are unclear, the checklist may be able to help identify appropriate interventions. The checklist asks the employee a set of questions, provides an overview of the results and gives some suggestions for further support that may be required.

Changes to equipment or IT which incur a cost should be discussed with the budget-holder and IT services before adjustments are put in place. Managers will need to decide whether the cost of adjustments is 'reasonable' and therefore should refer to the HR guidance http://intranet.hants.gov.uk/hr/subjectguide/reasonable-adj-home.htm to help them make a decision. Adjustments should be reviewed periodically to ensure they remain effective.

In some cases a more detailed dyslexia assessment may be required and the British Dyslexia Association provide a dyslexia testing facility. There is a charge for this service (£29 per test as at April 2009) which should be accommodated within departmental budgets in line with the guidance on reasonable adjustments http://intranet.hants.gov.uk/hr/subjectguide/reasonable-adj-home.htm.
The following link can be followed to access the test -
http://www.spot-your-potential.com/buy-spot.htm?aff=bda
Consideration should be given to supporting individuals to complete the online assessment if required.

If aids and adaptations are recommended the individual will need to inform their line manager and HR so that financial provision can be considered by the appropriate manager in line with the guidance on reasonable adjustments.
http://intranet.hants.gov.uk/hr/subjectguide/reasonable-adj-home.htm

IT services should also be involved at an early stage if the individual requires changes to IT equipment. In some circumstances it may be beneficial to involve Access to Work, who provide support with funding for certain equipment providing eligibility criteria are met. More information on Access to Work can be found here.

In some cases it may also be relevant to refer the individual to Occupational Health who can provide recommendations for pre-employment fitness decisions and general information for managers about support for existing employees.

4.   What to do if you suspect that an employee may have undiagnosed dyslexia

It may arise during the course of an individual's employment with Hampshire County Council that they are having difficulties in the workplace and as a line manager you suspect that they may have undiagnosed dyslexia. Although the symptoms will differ from person to person the following list provides some guidance in relation to recognising the symptoms of dyslexia in adults;

- hiding reading problems;
- poor spelling or relying on others to correct spelling;

- avoiding writing;
- often very competent in oral language;
- relies on memory; may have an excellent memory;
- often has good "people" skills;
- often is spatially talented; professions include, but are not limited, to engineers, architects, designers, artists and craftspeople, mathematicians, physicists, physicians (esp. surgeons and orthopaedists), social workers and dentists
- may be very good at "reading" people (intuitive);
- may be working well below their intellectual capacity;
- may have difficulty with planning, organisation and management of time, materials and tasks;
- often entrepreneurs.

As a line manager, if you consider that an individual within your team may have undiagnosed dyslexia, you should arrange to meet with the employee in a confidential environment to discuss your concerns and the reasons for them. The meeting should be conducted sensitively; be aware that this information may come as unexpected and unwelcome news to the individual, though for some it may be a welcome explanation for a problem they have been experiencing for some time. It may take the individual some time to absorb the information and accept the help available. At this meeting it may also be appropriate to discuss the online checklist and dyslexia online test facilities and support that is available to the individual. Further advice and support in how to conduct such meetings can be obtained from the Employment Practice Centre.

If an employee refuses to complete the dyslexia checklist or online dyslexia test advice should be sought from the Employment Practice Centre.

5.   Dyslexia linked to the managing unacceptable performance policy

It is important for managers to take into account that an individual may have undiagnosed dyslexia if they are considering action under the managing unacceptable performance policy. The policy can be found here: Managing unacceptable performance policy

Further support and advice in relation to the managing unacceptable performance policy can be obtained from the Employment Practice Centre.

6.   Flowchart for supporting dyslexia in the workplace
Flowchart for supporting dyslexia in the workplace

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┌─────────────────────────┐
│ Employee declares or    │
│ employee/ line manager  │
│ suspects the employee   │
│ may have dyslexia       │
└───────────┬─────────────┘
            │
            ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐
│ Employee & line         │
│ manager meet to         │
│ discuss workplace issues│
│ and requirements.       │
└───────────┬─────────────┘
            │
            ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐
│ Reasonable adjustments  │
│ are identified (utilise │
│ guidance) and           │
│ implemented. (involve   │
│ budget holder and IT    │
│ where appropriate).     │
└───────────┬─────────────┘
            │
            ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐
│ Are adjustments         │
│ effective?              │
└───────────┬─────────────┘
            │
            ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐
│ Yes – review            │
│ adjustments regularly to│
│ ensure ongoing          │
│ effectiveness.          │
└─────────────────────────┘
```

No - employee to complete online dyslexia **checklist.** http://www.key4learning.com/checkdyslexia.htm Recommendations are reviewed and implemented where possible. (involve budget holder and IT where appropriate).

Are adjustments effective?

Yes – review adjustments regularly to ensure ongoing effectiveness.

Employee is unwilling to complete the dyslexia checklist or online dyslexia test – **Contact the Employment Practice Centre**.

No - employee to complete online dyslexia **test** via the British Dyslexia Association. http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/Dyslexia%20Screener.html Recommendations are reviewed and implemented where possible. (Cost for the test to be absorbed within department. Some employees may need support with completion of the online test. Involve budget holder and IT where appropriate).

Are adjustments effective?

Yes – review adjustments regularly to ensure ongoing effectiveness.

No - contact the Employment Practice Centre for further information.

7.   Access to Work

Access to Work may provide assistance, including funding, for adjustments in the workplace to support individuals, **but only if the individual has been formally diagnosed as suffering from dyslexia.** The British Dyslexia Association online test facility is recognised by Access to Work.

To find out whether Access to Work can assist with equipment or funding please contact the local operational support unit for the south east on 020 8426 3110.

Whilst Access to Work may provide some financial support in relation to equipment (decided on an individual basis), the primary responsibility for this lies with the employer.

Not all adjustments will require IT equipment; for example some needs may be met by offering admin support or proof readers. It is important to ensure that the flowchart and consideration/decision sheet for making reasonable adjustments are followed when considering adjustments to be made. They can be found at
http://intranet.hants.gov.uk/hr/subjectguide/reasonable-adj-home.htm

The following link provides further information about the Access to Work programme:
http://www3.hants.gov.uk/logos/cx-logos-corporatestandards/cx-logos-accessforall/cx-logos-accesstowork.htm

8.   Support

Line managers supporting an employee with dyslexia or an individual who has recently been diagnosed with dyslexia should ensure they inform the individual about the employee support line (*esl*). This is a free, confidential counselling service provided by trained, experienced counsellors where face-to-face counselling is available.

Further information about the employee support line can be found here:
http://www3.hants.gov.uk/employeesupport.htm

9.   Useful links

Guidance on reasonable adjustments:
http://intranet.hants.gov.uk/hr/subjectguide/reasonable-adj-home.htm

Guidance on IT accessibility: http://learnit.hants.gov.uk/learnit/accessibility-home.htm

British Dyslexia Association http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/

Guidance on Job Centre Plus – (for Access to Work programme information)
http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/Employmentsupport/WorkSchemesAndProgrammes/DG_4000347