Dyslexia and employment

Some students are diagnosed with ‘specific learning difficulties’ (SpLD) such as dyslexia or dyspraxia whilst at school or college, but for others this may not have been identified until they reach university. Once assessed and provided with the appropriate support and/or specialist software, having dyslexia does not necessarily have a profound impact on academic achievement. Extra time to sit exams and study skills support can mean that for many dyslexic students, the educational experience is a positive one.

The transition from university into the graduate employment market can be daunting for any student, but if you are dyslexic there are a number of issues which may be of concern to you. Within this leaflet we will address those concerns and explain the support systems available to you.

Dyslexia and career planning

So what impact, if any, is dyslexia likely to have on your future career plans? Depending on the severity of your dyslexia and what form it takes, it is likely that you will have already developed a variety of coping strategies. Research shows that dyslexic people process information differently and often more slowly than people who are non-dyslexic. The severity of dyslexia can vary from mild to severe and there is often a discrepancy between an individual’s intellectual ability and their written work.

It’s important to be aware that an employer must not refuse to employ someone simply because they have a disability. They also have a duty to think about different ways of working. Employers must not discriminate against a disabled person in:

- the recruitment and retention of employees
- promotion and transfers
- training and development
- the dismissal process

In the recruitment market it’s essential to always ‘play to your strengths’. Focus upon the skills and abilities you developed through your academic study and any work experience you may have undertaken rather than on any areas of weakness. However you should also be realistic about the kind of activities you find frustrating and time consuming, or which put you under increased stress. When making career choices, reflect upon what you know about yourself – your preferences and interests. If you haven’t already spoken to a careers adviser, we recommend that you book an appointment to discuss how you can assess your skills in relation to graduate career options.

Additional support at the application and selection stage

The recruitment and selection process will vary greatly between organisations, but the majority of graduate recruiters now use on-line application forms and, in some instances, on-line psychometric tests as a first filter. If psychometric tests are used, these will be timed and it may not be possible to proceed to the next stage unless a minimum score is achieved.

It is important to ensure that you are not disadvantaged in psychometric tests, so seek advice as to whether alternative arrangements are possible. Some employers may be willing to allow you to make a full application without sitting such tests, if you declare that you have a disability. Alternatively they may be able to make adjustments to the way in which your test results are interpreted, or allow extra time to complete the tests.

For many graduate training schemes, the selection process involves an assessment centre, where individual and group exercises are undertaken such as panel interviews, simulated business scenarios, case studies and other activities. If you are open about being dyslexic, it may be possible to receive instructions for such tasks in both written and verbal form, or to be allowed extra time, especially on tasks which involve processing a great deal of written or numerical data.
**Positive self-marketing**

Consider which stage of the application process you feel is the right time to disclose dyslexia. You may be able to include it in the equal opportunities section of an online application form. Alternatively, if the employer requests a CV and covering letter and you decide to disclose dyslexia in these documents, don’t just state it – expand on it and sell your experience in a positive way.

You may prefer to wait until you’re invited to interview, when you can bring it up on the day or make a quick phone call beforehand. This way you’ll be able to explain face to face how your dyslexia affects you and how the employer could offer extra support in the workplace. If you were invited to interview, you may also be required to do written tests or other assessment exercises. You may feel that disclosure would be appropriate at this point in order to request accommodations, such as extra time and other arrangements, depending on the nature and severity of your particular dyslexic difficulties.

If you have decided to mention the fact that you are dyslexic, either at the application stage or at interview, there are a number of points to consider. How will you explain about the impact dyslexia has on the way in which you do things? How will you outline the coping strategies which you have developed over the years?

It is also important to highlight the positive aspects of dyslexia. Many highly successful people are also dyslexic – Richard Branson, Alan Sugar, Agatha Christie, Beethoven and Leonardo da Vinci to name but a few!

So what are the positive aspects of dyslexia?

- Creative ability – many dyslexic people are drawn to study subjects like art and design, engineering and information technology
- Strong reasoning and lateral thinking skills
- Able to maintain an overall strategic view
- Familiarity with the use of a range of IT packages
- Well-developed problem solving and coping strategies
- Highly motivated and determined to succeed
- Insightful, able to ‘read’ people and make good character judgements
- Able to work effectively in team situations
- People who are determined to learn and succeed

**Reasonable adjustments at work**

Current legislation requires employers to make changes to help disabled people work. These are known as ‘reasonable adjustments’ and can include:

- Making changes to the building or premises where the person works
- Changing the way in which work is done
- Providing equipment that will help the person to do their job

Most adjustments don’t cost anything – just a change in attitude. For others that do involve a cost, the Government ‘Access to Work’ scheme can help you. The website Access to Work includes information on the support available to disabled jobseekers. The type of adjustments which are appropriate to somebody who is dyslexic will vary from individual to individual, but these could include:

- Ensuring that all documents are made available to you in a plain font, size 13 (at least) and on cream paper
- Many people with dyslexia have difficulty with taking notes in meetings while at the same time listening and participating in the meeting. The use of a digital recorder should be regarded as a disability aid and a reasonable adjustment
- Circulating notes, hand-outs, reports etc. electronically 2-3 days prior to a meeting
- Providing both verbal and written instructions for work to be undertaken
- Access to specialist IT software
- Provision of a quiet workspace, avoiding unnecessary distractions

People with dyslexia may also be eligible for help from the government Work Choice scheme [www.gov.uk/work-choice/overview](http://www.gov.uk/work-choice/overview) via the Disability Employment Adviser. Work Choice helps people with disabilities whose needs cannot be met through other work programmes such as Access to Work or workplace adjustments. This might be because you need more specialised support to find employment or keep a job once you have started work. If Work Choice is for you it will be tailored to meet your individual needs. It will focus on helping you achieve your full potential and moving towards being more independent.

### Enforcement of the Equality Act

If a person with a disability feels they have been discriminated against they may want to take their case to an Employment Tribunal. If they win the case, they may be able to claim for financial loss and damages for injuries to feelings. The Tribunal may instruct the employer to make a reasonable adjustment to enable the dyslexic person to work.

We would strongly recommend that dyslexic employees wishing to take legal action should seek legal representation. Employment Tribunals are not favourable environments for the litigant in person and can be particularly challenging for claimants with dyslexic difficulties.

Form I.T1 is available from Employment Service offices (Benefit Offices and Job Centres) and the Citizens Advice Bureau. The form includes space to describe the complaint. The form must be sent to the appropriate Tribunal office. They will register the case and send a copy of the form to the employer and ACAS. The employer should reply within 21 days. Then the Tribunal office will arrange a hearing.

Proceedings under the Equality Act must be started within three months of the alleged act of discrimination. However in some circumstances the Tribunal may offer some flexibility in the case of a disability where there is no distinct time period for the commencement of discrimination or long delay in implementing reasonable adjustments.

### Careers & Employability Service support for dyslexic students & graduates

There are a variety of ways in which the Careers & Employability Service can provide assistance to dyslexic students:

- Individual careers guidance
- Help in constructing and updating your CV
- Advice on how to answer difficult questions on applications forms and at interview
- Assistance with interview technique
- Impartial advice on how to disclose dyslexia to an employer
- Information on ‘reasonable adjustments’ in the workplace

### Further help

If you feel you may have dyslexia but have not been properly assessed, the Disability Support Team can put you in contact with local assessors who can provide a number of different screening tests.

- Adult Dyslexia Association
- Beating Dyslexia
- British Dyslexia Association
- Disability Rights UK
- Dyslexia Action
- HM Government
- Lexxic