

# Dyslexia and employment

## Introduction

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 their university education. 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 possibly study skills support can mean that for many dyslexic students, the educational experience is a positive one. However, dyslexia takes many different forms and the challenges it presents will vary for individual students.

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. This publication addresses some of these and explains the support available to you.

## Dyslexia and career planning

So what impact, if any, is dyslexia likely to have on your future career plans? Depending upon 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.

The advice given to any student or graduate in relation to career choice is often to 'play to your strengths'. Focus upon the skills and abilities developed through your academic study and any work experience which you possess, 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 choices about your future career reflect upon what you know about yourself – your preferences and interests. If you haven't already spoken to a Careers Adviser about your future plans and aspirations, now might be a good time.

Some of the issues which might concern you as a dyslexic student could include:

- How realistic are your future career plans?
- Are you underestimating / overestimating your potential?
- How and when should you explain to an employer or admissions tutor that you are dyslexic?
- What possible solutions are there to any of the concerns you have about looking for a job?
- What additional technology and 'reasonable adjustments' might assist you in the workplace?
- What is the attitude towards dyslexia held by people working in your chosen occupation?

For help with career planning, read the Careers Service publication '**Getting Started**'.

## Gaining work experience and developing your skills

Undertaking work experience whilst at university, whether paid or unpaid, can be invaluable. Not only does it provide you with the opportunity to check out the ideas you already have, it also gives you the chance to make some useful contacts and provides you with information to build into your CV and future applications. However, many dyslexic students find that simply

keeping on top of their coursework and the necessary background reading can be much more time consuming than it is for other students. There just may not be enough time during the week to fit in part-time or voluntary work and the competition for formal summer internship programmes can be off putting.

There are a number of specialist work experience schemes which are available to students with dyslexia and disabilities. The Careers Service has a list of such schemes, while our **'Finding Work Experience'** guide provides additional help with finding work experience. Please ask us for a copy, our download **'Finding Work Experience'** from [www.sheffield.ac.uk/careers/students/jobs/jobshop](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/careers/students/jobs/jobshop). We also run **Taste of Work** which offers a chance to undertake a short (3-4 hour) placement in a real live work place. It is aimed at students who have no existing work experience. You will undertake relevant training and have a chance to observe how staff carry out their duties. For more information, see [www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/tasteofwork](http://www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/tasteofwork).

If you'd like to develop your personal skills or study skills, visit '301: the Student Skills and Development Centre' at 301 Glossop Road [www.shef.ac.uk/studentsskills](http://www.shef.ac.uk/studentsskills). To find out more about extra-curricular activities at Sheffield, which can help you develop personal skills, see the 'Experience Sheffield' webpages [www.shef.ac.uk/experience](http://www.shef.ac.uk/experience). Meanwhile, The *Sheffield Graduate Award* webpages explain how you can gain a University award for taking part in different activities [www.sheffield.ac.uk/thesheffieldgraduateaward](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/thesheffieldgraduateaward).

### **Should you mention that you are dyslexic?**

When making an application, whether for employment or further study, one of the issues which concerns some students, is whether or not they should mention the fact that they are dyslexic.

Many people feel that competition for jobs and postgraduate courses is already strong and are unwilling to highlight anything in their application which could disadvantage them further. However, it is also important to consider how your application will be viewed in comparison to others, if it is **not** obvious that you are dyslexic. Minor spelling / grammatical errors might be wrongly interpreted as evidence of a 'last minute' application. The results you have achieved at university and school may not give a totally accurate picture of your potential. If you have limited work experience, this may be because you have needed to devote extra hours to your study, but an employer would not realise this unless told.

For general advice on how to write applications, see the Careers Service's guide to **'Applications'**; [www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/gettingajob](http://www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/gettingajob)

### **Job Hunting**

When looking at job adverts you may have noticed the two ticks symbol (√√) on some job adverts. This indicates that the employer operates a policy of positive discrimination in favour of candidates who declare a disability or specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia. As long as a candidate who has declared a disability meets the basic selection criteria, they will automatically be offered an interview.

The Careers Service webpages on disability provide useful resources including 'Get that Job', a DVD with advice to disabled jobseekers from graduates, Careers Advisers and recruiters [www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/equalops/opstone](http://www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/equalops/opstone).

Our guide to **'Job Hunting Strategies'** provides general information about job hunting, [www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/jobs](http://www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/jobs).

### **Careers Service support to dyslexic students and graduates**

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

- Individual careers guidance

- Help in constructing and updating your CV
- Discussion about how to answer difficult questions on application forms and drafting personal statements
- Advice on the interview and selection process and extra support which might be available
- Impartial advice about if and when to disclose that you are dyslexic to a potential employer or admissions tutor
- Advice on how to respond to questions about being dyslexic
- Access to on-line psychometric practice tests
- Information about 'reasonable adjustments' in the workplace

To book an appointment with a Careers Adviser, contact the Careers Service reception tel: 0114 222 0910. Support is also available via the email enquiry service [www.sheffield.ac.uk/careers/students/emailenquiry](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/careers/students/emailenquiry).

### **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 of the selection process unless a minimum score is achieved on these tests.

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 more advice, read our guide to **'Psychometric Tests Used in Selection'**: [www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/gettingajob](http://www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/gettingajob).

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. The guide to **'Interviews and Assessment Centres'** can be found at [www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/gettingajob](http://www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/gettingajob).

### **Positive self-marketing**

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 some of 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
- Able to lighten situations with wit and a natural sense of humour
- People who are determined to learn and succeed despite their difficulties

### **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 do their job

Most adjustments don't cost anything at all - just a change in attitude. For others that do involve a cost, the Government 'Access to Work' scheme might be able to help. The type of adjustments which are appropriate to somebody who is dyslexic will obviously vary from individual to individual, but these could include:

- Ensuring that all documents are made available to you in a plain font, in point size 13 (at least) and on cream paper
- Circulating notes, handouts, 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

### **What next?**

The Careers Service provides comprehensive careers information and support. You can contact us in person or use our Email Enquiry Service via our website.

### **Further help**

Adult Dyslexia Association [www.adult-dyslexia.org](http://www.adult-dyslexia.org)

Beating Dyslexia [www.beatingdyslexia.com](http://www.beatingdyslexia.com)

British Dyslexia Association [www.bdadyslexia.org.uk](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk)

Disability Rights UK [www.disabilityrightsuk.org](http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org)

Dyslexia Action [www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk/](http://www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk/)

HM Government [www.gov.uk/browse/disabilities/work](http://www.gov.uk/browse/disabilities/work)

Lexxic – Services for adults affected by dyslexia and other neurological differences  
[www.lexxic.com](http://www.lexxic.com)