

THE UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

Policy and Procedures for assessing students diagnosed as dyslexic

1. CONTEXT

- 1.1 The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act, (the Disability Discrimination Act Part IV) was made law in September 2002. Under this legislation it is illegal for universities to discriminate against students with disabilities and special needs. Such discrimination is defined as:
 - Failing to make a reasonable adjustment where any arrangement or physical feature places a disabled person at a substantial disadvantage;
 - Unjustifiably treating someone less favourably for a reason relating to his or her disability.
- 1.2 Dyslexia is a registered disability under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and is defined as a Specific Learning Difficulty. Dyslexic students typically have certain difficulties with reading, spelling and writing and many definitions focus on discrepancy – on the difference between the person's potential (as measured by psychometric – IQ tests) and their performance in reading, writing and spelling.
- 1.3 Curriculum Sub-Committee, at its meeting on 14 June 2002, agreed that there should be a consistent University-wide policy on the treatment of all assessed work submitted by students identified as dyslexic.

2. POLICY

The following applies only to students who are diagnosed by the Student Support Unit as dyslexic:

- 2.1 All written work submitted for assessment is eligible for sympathetic marking.
- 2.2 Students are entitled to place a sticker or cover sheet on their examination scripts and all written assessed work which will flag to the examiners that the script should be marked sympathetically; students are entitled to additional time in unseen examinations.
- 2.3 Examiners should mark in accordance with the following notes of guidance:
 - 2.3.1 When marking dyslexic candidates' scripts, examiners are asked to focus on the clarity of the argument, rather than on details of expression. Try to separate marking of transcription errors and marking of content. However, while sympathetic treatment of assessed work submitted by dyslexic students implies the disregarding of errors of spelling and grammar, the communication itself must be effective. If academic standards are to be safeguarded, sympathetic treatment cannot extend to written expression so poor that coherence and intelligibility are at issue. Do not penalise errors that a good copy editor could put right.

2.3.2 The written work of candidates with dyslexia may be characterised by one, or in some cases, several, of the following:

- omitted words or punctuation;
- excessive or misplaced punctuation;
- repeated information or phrases – this would not be detected by a spellchecker or by a dyslexic student proofreading their own draft.
- unsophisticated language structures – in order to avoid grammatical errors, many dyslexics adopt simplified language structures, which do not necessarily denote unsophisticated thinking;
- simplified vocabulary – in order to avoid spelling errors, many dyslexic students adopt a simplified vocabulary when writing;
- difficulties with sequencing or word-finding may produce a stilted style of writing which may not match the student's oral performance in seminars etc.

2.3.3 Although assessed work, other than unseen examination scripts, is likely to be word-processed and spell-checked, you should be aware of the limitations of a spellchecker. Some of the problems likely to remain in dyslexic students' work after spell-checking include:

- homophone substitutions (e.g. there/their, effect/affect, course/coarse)
- phonetic equivalents (e.g. fernetic for phonetic, homerfone for homophone)
- incorrect word substitutions, (distance for disturbance)
- American spelling (e.g. colorful, fueling).

3. PROCEDURES

3.1 The Student Support Unit will undertake the diagnosis of a student who considers himself or herself to be dyslexic.

3.2 For students who are diagnosed as dyslexic, the Student Support Unit will inform the relevant School.

3.3 The School will arrange with the Print Unit for a number of stickers as required to be printed with the candidate number and with the following statement:

“This candidate is dyslexic. Please refer to the guidelines on marking which can be found in the Handbook for Examiners” (see Appendix for the common wording of Handbooks).

3.4 The School will advise the student when the stickers are printed and the student shall sign for their collection.

3.5 It is the student's responsibility to attach a sticker to written assessed work.

- 3.6 The Student Support Unit will inform relevant offices on whether the student requires extra time in an examination.

Academic Office
February 2003

Appendix

Common text for Handbooks

Candidates assessed by the Student Support Unit as dyslexic will be supplied with stickers indicating that the work submitted is that of a dyslexic candidate and consequently spelling and grammar errors are to be disregarded. It is the candidate's responsibility to attach these stickers to their submitted work – where stickers are left off a submission, for whatever reason, it cannot be guaranteed that the examiner will give particular consideration to errors symptomatic of dyslexia. The following advice on the marking of work submitted by dyslexic students is offered to examiners:

When marking dyslexic candidates' scripts, examiners are asked to focus on the clarity of the argument, rather than on details of expression. Try to separate marking of transcription errors and marking of content. However, while sympathetic treatment of assessed work submitted by dyslexic students implies the disregarding of errors of spelling and grammar, the communication itself must be effective. If academic standards are to be safeguarded, sympathetic treatment cannot extend to written expression so poor that coherence and intelligibility are at issue. **In effect, examiners ought not to penalize errors that a good copy editor could put right.**

The written work of candidates with dyslexia may be characterised by one, or in some cases, several, of the following:

- omitted words or punctuation
- excessive or misplaced punctuation
- repeated information or phrases – this would not be detected by a spellchecker or by a dyslexic student proofreading their own draft
- unsophisticated language structures – in order to avoid grammatical errors, many dyslexics adopt simplified language structures, which do not necessarily denote
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- difficulties with sequencing or word-finding may produce a stilted style of writing which may not match the student's oral performance in seminars etc.

Although assessed work, other than examination scripts, is likely to be word-processed and spell-checked, examiners should be aware of the limitations of a spellchecker. Some of the problems likely to remain in dyslexic students' work after spell-checking include:

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- phonetic equivalents (e.g. frenetic for phonetic, homerfone for homophone)
- incorrect word substitution (distance for disturbance)
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