

Student Disability Service Guidance on Marking Coursework of Dyslexic Students



Introduction

From academic year 2013-14, the Student Disability Service (SDS) no longer issues course work stickers to dyslexic (and other) students.

This policy change has been discussed and agreed with dyslexic students, the University's Learning and Teaching Committee and the three Colleges.

The following highlights some key issues for markers to be aware of:

1. Signs of Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) - dyslexia

- Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty which mainly affects reading and spelling
- General issues may include poor organisational skills, difficulty sequencing information in a linear format and the inability to make effective notes
- Markers should be aware that work from students with SpLD may include errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation.
- Students with specific learning difficulties sometimes spell words phonetically and have difficulty with the correct use of vowels, e.g. 'peice' and use of double consonants e.g. 'writting'.
- Some students have difficulty with homophones e.g. there/their or have a tendency to omit or repeat words.
- Generally, such students have difficulty organising and expressing their ideas in writing, so their ideas may appear to lack clarity or structure.
- There may be an apparent lack of proofreading as dyslexic students often have difficulty recognising their own errors.

Please note that the standard spellchecker in Microsoft Word does not identify many "dyslexic" errors, such as those mentioned above.

2. Feedback

- It is particularly important that markers are sensitive and constructive in their comments when providing feedback on work.
- Students with specific learning difficulties can be particularly adversely affected by insensitive or unduly negative feedback.
- Students with SpLDs generally spend far longer producing work than their non-disabled peers and may have made considerable efforts to produce work to the best of their abilities.
- If the marker suspects SpLDs it is recommended that an appropriate person in the School sensitively discusses this with the student and suggests that the student contacts the Student Disability Service.

3. Support for Students with Specific Learning Difficulties

- Some students are aware of their specific learning difficulties and will be receiving support from the Student Disability Service. The SDS aims to equip students with the appropriate tools to enable them to submit work that both reflects their knowledge of the subject and is free from errors.

- Support may include the use of assistive software such as specialist spell-checkers and text-to-speech software. It may include access to a proofreader or a specialist 1-1 tutor to help students develop their writing skills.
- Markers should be aware that students who have contacted the SDS may be in the process of obtaining appropriate support through the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA), and this process can take several months.

4. Useful guidance

- The Equality Act 2010 states it is a legal requirement for Higher Education Institutions to anticipate and provide for the needs of disabled students:
<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/equality-act-2010-technical-guidance-further-and-higher-education>
- The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Quality Assurance Agency, 2010), section 3 Disabled Students:
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Code-of-practice-Section-3.aspx>

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www.ed.ac.uk/student-disability-service

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the Student Disability Service on 0131 650 6828 or email:
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