

Educating, employing and training people with Dyslexia-SpLD for 2020

The Dyslexia-SpLD Trust, the combined voice representing organisations that work to improve outcomes for individuals with dyslexia and other specific learning difficulties, has produced this manifesto to outline the policies it believes the next Government should implement during the next Parliament.

Taking steps to ensure the accessibility of education, employment and training for people with dyslexia is both a challenge and opportunity for any future Government. Evidenceⁱ shows that individuals with dyslexia and literacy difficulties are currently over represented in all areas of poverty and disadvantage. Poor literacy levels can exacerbate child povertyⁱⁱ across generations. Resultant costs for society, not to mention the emotional costs incurred, are significantly higher than the vital preventative support, outlined in this paper.

We therefore call on all parties in England to make a positive commitment to value the outcomes for all our children and young people equally by implementing the nine points for improvement highlighted in this manifesto.

An accessible education

Children and young people with dyslexia often struggle to access a curriculum and an examination process that is almost entirely text-based. Schools and further education institutions need to embrace modern technologies to help empower and assist students who may otherwise be left behind.

Many people with dyslexia who are excluded from the curriculum rely instead on gaining vocational qualifications before they enter the workforce. Some rely on further education to gain basic and vocational skills, yet funding for further education colleges has been drastically cut resulting in the decimation of specialist support provision.

Currently thousandsⁱⁱⁱ of students with dyslexia use the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) to access a variety of support mechanisms in higher education (HE). However, proposed changes to the rules threaten the availability and quality of this support. By handing responsibility to universities we need to ensure that decisions necessary to support students with dyslexia, whether from internal or external assessors, remain consistent across the sector.

It is therefore vital that the future Government:

- Ensures that all professionals involved in the support of individuals follow a minimum standard framework of 'good practice'^{iv} and are provided with the appropriate CPD to develop skills and knowledge to guide people with dyslexia.
- Commits to equal access to education and assessment by ensuring that all curriculum and assessment resources are available in accessible formats^v and the use of assistive technologies is encouraged and actively promoted at all levels of education.
- Maintains all parts of the DSA that covers the additional costs necessary to ensure higher education students with dyslexia complete their course.
- Supports universities by promoting the innovative use of assistive technology, such as text-to-speech, to improve the learning environment for dyslexic students and ensures that staff are aware of its importance.

A skilled and knowledgeable educational workforce

Too many children and young people with dyslexia do not have their needs identified or are inadequately supported. Special Educational Needs (SEN) training is not compulsory in initial teacher training or the continual professional development of others. Three children^{vi} in the average class are likely to have dyslexia, so teachers must be trained to recognise a specific learning difficulty, support and swiftly signpost to more specialist services.

It is therefore vital that the future Government:

- Commits to introducing compulsory SEN modules that include dyslexia awareness in all Initial Teacher Training courses, regardless of setting, including dyslexia awareness^{vii}.
- Commits to ensuring that dyslexia awareness is a mandatory part of a teacher's continuing professional development

An equal playing field for workers, trainees and job seekers

Once people with dyslexia leave further education and/or training many still need support – either to find employment or through reasonable adjustments whilst at work (a duty under the Equality Act 2010). Experts^{viii} often relate high NEET rates (currently still over 1 million) to difficulties in the transition from school to work. Being disengaged from the labour market can have negative long-term social consequences - the cost of Britain's NEET problem will be around £22 billion in additional public spending.

It is therefore vital that a future Government:

- Maintains the Access to Work grant to help pay for the practical support needed and resists any temptation in the face of further public spending cuts to reduce this funding.
- Ensures that all Job Centre staff and those assisting job-seekers in finding work placements, have the training, skills and knowledge to guide people with dyslexia into work – or empower them with the formal qualifications to do so; as well as providing access to essential assistive technology for job-seekers who struggle with literacy.

By following the advice in Dyslexia SpLD Trust's manifesto - to **ensure dyslexia is fully understood and recognised by all the teachers and trained support workers in the education and employment system** – is likely to result in a substantial decrease in the future NEET and unemployed population - a significant percentage of whom will be dyslexic.

Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty that affects auditory memory and processing speed which impacts on literacy development, mathematics, memory, organisation and sequencing skills to varying degrees. Dyslexia can occur at any level of intellectual development. It is neurological in origin and is seen to run in families. It affects up to 10% of the UK population at some level and can affect anyone of any age and background.

References:

- ⁱ Dyslexia Still Matters (2012); See: http://www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk/files/dyslexiaaction/dyslexia_still_matters.pdf
- ⁱⁱ Child Poverty Strategy Consultation (2014-2017)
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/285265/Child_Poverty_Strategy_2014-2017_Consultation_Document_Final_.pdf
- ⁱⁱⁱ Dept. for BSI; HIGHER EDUCATION, Disabled Students' Allowances: Equality Analysis, December (2014);
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/392610/bis-14-1108-higher-education-disabled-students-allowances-equality-analysis-revised-16-12-2014.pdf
- ^{iv} As a starting point, the BDA Dyslexia Friendly criteria for Higher Education provides useful benchmarking and guidance for a whole organisation approach see: www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/services/quality-mark
- ^v For example: Load2Learn provides free UK curriculum resources in downloadable, accessible formats for people who have difficulty reading standard print books. Schools/colleges may add parents and learners to their Load2Learn membership group, enabling free support at home and independent study. www.load2learn.org.uk
- ^{vi} Pennington, B.F. (1990) shows dyslexia prevalence from 15% to 3% whilst Lerner (1989) rates prevalence at 5-10%; Educational Interventions in Learning Disabilities; therefore approx.10% with 5% having more severe difficulties.
- ^{vii} The SEND Reform Guidance, produced by the Dyslexia-SpLD Trust and supported by government, signposts to existing evidence, research and good practice. <http://www.thedyslexia-spldtrust.org.uk/4/resources/2/for-schools-and-local-authorities/279/online-guidance-on-the-sen-reforms/>. This is freely available to all.
- ^{viii} The Literacy and Dyslexia-SpLD Professional Development Framework, produced by the Dyslexia-SpLD Trust, is a self-assessment on-line tool for practitioners working with learners with literacy difficulties. It recommends professional development and signposts to research and materials. <http://framework.thedyslexia-spldtrust.org.uk/> This is freely available to all.
- ^{viii} Impetus – PEF Report Demands Action to Make Neets history in 2014: http://impetus-pef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/2014-01-02_Make-NEETs-History-report-launch-press-release.pdf