

# Disability Resource Centre

## Assessment of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties

The University of Cambridge and the Disability Resource Centre believe that the primary purpose of any assessment for a specific learning difficulty carried out with a student is to provide that student with a greater understanding of his / her profile of strengths and weaknesses and consider how this profile pattern might impact upon academic study.

The assessment report may be used not only to develop greater self-awareness and inform strategy development in managing key academic tasks whilst studying in a demanding, challenging and intensive academic environment, but also as evidence for an application for a Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) and / or an application to the University of Cambridge's Board of Examinations for examination access arrangements. Whilst it is likely that you have been asked to supply assessment evidence for examination arrangements, we would also like you to consider our position on the primary purpose of the assessment and the possibility of an application being made for a Disabled Students' Allowance when carrying out the assessment and producing the report.

The University's Board of Examinations requires **full\*** diagnostic assessment reports from:

Practitioner Psychologists registered with the HCPC (Health and Care Professions Council)

Or

Specialist Teachers holding an approved qualification (as noted in the SpLD Working Group 2005/DfES Guidelines) to include a Current Practising Certificate in SpLD Assessment giving the certificate number and issuing body

In addition, you should be aware that the University's Board of Examinations is following the timetable set out in the DfES Guidelines regarding assessment report format and use of recommended tests, which are as follows:

- Diagnostic reports use **report format** recommended in the SpLD Working Group 2005/DfES Guidelines and subsequent updates
- Diagnostic reports use **tests** recommended in the SpLD Working Group 2005/DfES Guidelines and subsequent updates

\* Please note that "top up" assessments are not acceptable nor are copies of the JCQ Form 8. However, the University accepts Evaluation of Need assessments that have been carried out in accordance with SASC guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic



With reference to the recommended assessments we have found that the following assessments in particular provide us with significant information in understanding and supporting students and, therefore, would ask that you administer these assessments, or equivalents in line with the DfES Guidelines 2005 and subsequent updates. International reports must include the same range of assessment areas, use internationally recognised materials with similarly robust standardisation, and be translated where necessary into English:

- Underlying cognitive ability
- Working memory
- Single word reading and spelling
- Single word and text-level reading speeds
- Reading comprehension of extended text
- An assessment of free writing composition skill and speed (over a time frame of at least 10 minutes by hand, supplemented with a further assessment of free writing skill using a word processor over 10 minutes if necessary).
- Qualitative analysis of the approach to each assessment task and the anticipated impact of any observations on academic study activities such as reading, research, note taking, planning, writing, proofreading and editing etc.

**In addition to these core tests**, to inform the University about the nature of the SpLD, we recommend further specific information to underpin particular diagnostic conclusions.

In cases of **dyslexia** suitable tests of phonological awareness, single word reading and single word spelling alongside evidence of a history of difficulty in literacy skill acquisition.

In cases of **dyspraxia or dysgraphia** tests of graphic speed alongside evidence and extensive history of gross and fine motor co-ordination difficulties. Please note that illegible handwriting is not considered sufficient evidence to substantiate a diagnosis of dysgraphia. Underlying difficulties in cognitive processing and written composition are expected.

In cases of **ADHD**, evidence which applies the guidance for assessment by educational professionals provided by the SpLD Assessment Standards Committee. Please note that medical evidence of ADHD is also acceptable when it sets out both the diagnosis and reports on the impact on study; a comprehensive letter from a GP, an adult psychiatrist or a consultant at a specialist ADHD clinic are likely to be acceptable.

Recommendations for examination arrangements should be clearly and explicitly stated, e.g. **25 %** extra time, use of word processor, rest breaks (please specify the recommended number of minutes rest break in each hour).

Information on courses at the University of Cambridge can be found at

<http://www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/courses/subjects.html>

If you are not already aware, you may find it helpful to know that the University of Cambridge has 8-week terms and some students, especially those reading Natural Sciences and related subjects, would be expected to attend lectures on Saturdays.

Thank you very much for following our guidelines and thereby enabling the Disability Resource Centre, University academic and non-academic staff to provide the most appropriate support, advice and guidance to students with specific learning difficulties at the University of Cambridge.

