

The Recommended Format for a Diagnostic Assessment Report for Specific Learning Difficulties

The specific learning difficulties (SpLDs) under consideration are dyslexia, dyspraxia/developmental coordination disorder (DCD), attention deficit hyperactivity-disorder (ADHD) and dyscalculia. Diagnostic assessment reports should present evidence for SpLD(s) in such a way as to facilitate their perusal by the Student Loan Company. The format and the information contained should therefore be consistent. While acknowledging that individual assessors must be able to exercise their professional judgement in selecting appropriate tests, assessment reports should conform to certain basic standards.

Wherever possible, tests should be properly standardised on the adult population, with clear evidence of validity and reliability. Tests not suitable for use with adults should be avoided. It is recognised that there are limited tests available for use with adults. Where adults are over 25, and no appropriate adult-normed test is available, tests can be used diagnostically, without quoting standard scores (SpLD Test Evaluation Committee, *Suitable Tests for the Assessment of Specific Learning Difficulties in Higher Education*, Revised December 2014, p. 1).

Certain information needs to be given in a report so that a diagnosis can be seen to be based on evidence. The evidence required will relate to a recognised definition of the relevant SpLD(s) and to the relevant diagnostic criteria. The Student Loans Company can then determine whether Disabled Student Allowances are appropriate.

The recipient of the report will be the student who has been assessed and not third parties, unless the student has requested that a copy be sent to a tutor or to the Disability Coordinator of the institution.

The core components of an assessment report in which SpLD(s) are identified are listed and a report proforma is provided below. Assessors might also need to investigate problems related to numeracy, attentional function and motor control. Assessors should take care to act within the limits of their knowledge, skills and experience and if necessary refer the matter to another practitioner (Health and Care Professions Council, *Standards of competence performance and ethics*, 2012, p. 3).

Details of content

Structure of Report and Core Elements (see proforma for detail) (Guidance notes are given below for each of the core elements. These notes should not feature in the actual report.)

Cover sheet

Summary

Background Information

Test Conditions

Attainments in Literacy

- *Reading*
- *Spelling*
- *Writing*

Underlying Ability

Cognitive Processing

Other Relevant Information

Conclusion

Recommended Support

Statement of assessor (signed)

Appendix – List of tests used and summary of scores

Cover sheet

Complete details as outlined on proforma

Diagnostic Assessment Report Proforma

Candidate's name:

Date of assessment:

Date of birth:

Age at assessment:

Correspondence address:

College/University attended:

Course of study (subject and degree):

Year and length of course:

Name of the author of this report & contact details

The author of this report

- holds a current Practising Certificate/is HCPC registered (delete one which doesn't apply)
- certifies that this assessment has been conducted and the report written in accordance with the SpLD Working Group 2005/DfES Guidelines for Assessment of SpLDs in Higher Education and subsequent updates.

Name: (printed)

Signature:

Date:

The author is (delete the profession that does not apply)

A qualified psychologist /specialist teacher holding an approved qualification (as noted in the SpLD Working Group 2005/DfES Guidelines and subsequent updates)

Qualification held and awarding institution

Current Practising Certificate number and issuing body.

Summary

Guidance notes: The main assessment findings should be summarised and placed immediately after the cover sheet for ease of reference. This section should include an outline of strengths and weaknesses and key recommendations. There should also be a clear statement based on performance at assessment and taking account of any background information as to whether the student has one or more than one SpLD. If so, the nature of these should be clearly stated. A diagnosis will have been based on converging evidence from all parts of the assessment and this evidence should be summarised in support of the diagnosis. Relevant weaknesses in cognitive processing within the profile in relation to ability tests should be highlighted where identified. The effects of the SpLD(s) on the student's literacy and study skills should be outlined, taking account of compensatory strengths. Other relevant conclusions should be drawn; for example, if previous experience or affective factors appear to have had a significant effect on the student's development of literacy skills, this should be noted.

Background information

Guidance Notes: The diagnostic assessment report should start with referral information (e.g. assessment suggested by tutor or teacher). The main part of this section will cover the student's developmental, educational and family history, relevant medical information, with specific reference to vision and hearing, any previous examination access arrangements, statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN)/Educational Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and learning support. . A note of any previous assessments should be made and can be summarised if helpful. Where English is spoken as a second or additional language, details of the student's language history should be included. In all cases, the student's own perceptions of his/her difficulties and motivation for assessment should also be stated.

Test conditions

Guidance Notes: Conditions in a test setting may influence the student's performance. These can include environment, comfort, interruptions, as well as health of student, and signs of attention, motivation, anxiety and fatigue. A student's behaviour during the assessment session may influence his or her performance. It is therefore recommended that reports include a brief statement about the test conditions and the student's response to them so that results can be interpreted accordingly. It is usual to state the duration of the assessment and whether it was a continuous session or not. If a second session was necessary both assessment dates need to be reported.

Assessment

Guidance Notes: Reports of performance in individual tests should be prefaced by a brief statement about the attainment or cognitive function which the test is designed to examine, and a brief description of the requirements of the task for the student.

Attainments in Literacy

Reading

Guidance Notes: Assessment of reading should include untimed single words (a graded, single word reading test), non-word reading, and one standardised test of reading comprehension (either oral or silent) using continuous prose. Performance in each test should be reported separately and should cover qualitative analysis of errors (without reference to specific test items), evidence of strategies being used (for example: whole word recognition, decoding), fluency, reading speed (oral and silent) and ability to extract information from text. There should follow a summary of the student's reading profile, relating this to expected performance the student is likely to meet in their studies.

Spelling

Guidance Notes: Information about spelling should come from a standardised spelling test (single words), and a piece of free writing. The report should give a qualitative analysis of errors and should take account of the student's level of knowledge (without reference to specific test items). Where there are non-phonetic errors these should be reported using equivalent examples.

Writing

Guidance Notes: The student's free writing should be analysed to provide information about ability to write grammatically, the complexity of sentence structure, the coherence of writing, use of vocabulary, writing speed and legibility of handwriting. It is also important to report handwriting speed in a copying task so that difficulties relating to motor skills and the process of composition can be teased apart. The free writing may reveal lack of consistency in spelling or a tendency to make omissions; a student may also limit vocabulary to simple words so that spelling is not a problem. All these aspects of performance should be reported and should be related to expected attainment levels in relevant educational environment and to the SpLD(s).

Underlying Ability

Guidance Notes: Gathering information about underlying ability is a vital component of assessment. The assessment of verbal and non-verbal ability throws light on the extent to which students are likely to be able to develop compensatory strategies, and can inform specialist teaching intervention. The effect of the SpLD(s) on a student's learning can be evaluated more effectively when underlying ability is taken into account.

The student's performance in other areas of testing can then be considered within the context of his/her underlying ability, including verbal and non-verbal ability. Qualitative observations should be made about the student's test performance. The profile of scores

should be discussed, with particular reference to any significant discrepancies between verbal and non-verbal ability. Reference should also be made about discrepancy within and across domains. If these exist, consideration should be given to whether composite scores should be calculated.

Cognitive Processing

Guidance Notes: As it is widely accepted that the underlying causes of SpLDs are weaknesses in particular cognitive processes, a section of the report should be dedicated to reporting the student's performance in tasks designed to tap these skills. For the identification of dyslexia, phonological processing performance should be reported and this will need to include phonological awareness and phonological processing speed. In some cases a full ability test will include measures of working memory and visual processing speed but, if not, tests of these skills, in addition to phonological short-term memory and phonological processing speed should be administered and reported here.

Other relevant information

Guidance Notes: At the assessor's discretion, performance in a range of other tests may be reported here, but only testing relevant to the diagnosis of the SpLD(s) should be considered and included. Other tests might include tests of competence in certain aspects of numeracy or tests of motor control. Assessors may additionally consider it appropriate to screen for disorders such as visual stress, or to use recognised checklists to identify whether a student shows signs of dyspraxia/DCD or ADHD. The results of any such screening procedures should be reported in this section.

Conclusion

Guidance Notes: In this section, it can be helpful to refer to an up-to-date and accepted definition of the SpLD(s) in order to provide context to the diagnosis. Ideally the conclusion should follow a structure where the different assessment areas are drawn together and their impact is explained. This section should be used to support the diagnosis and show the overall pattern of strengths and weaknesses using level descriptors. Scores are not necessary in the conclusion. It is important to emphasise the impact of the SpLD(s) on the individual's study.

Recommended Support

Guidance Notes: A brief statement about the type of support which might help the student should be made here, particularly in relation to study skills tuition. Diagnosticians should also bear in mind that students will have a full assessment of their needs for the purposes of DSA, and the final recommendations for support will be made through that assessment. We would expect recommendations from the diagnostician to be used to inform the academic staff and those who undertake a later assessment of the student's course related needs which will identify the appropriate support for the Higher Education course. If recommendations are made about examination arrangements it should be borne in mind that universities may have their own systems for supporting students with SpLD(s). Information about the procedure for applying for the DSA can also be given here. For reports not intended for DSA, recommendations should relate specifically to that individual with reference to the purpose of the report.

The author of this report:

- **holds a current Practising Certificate (see cover sheet), is HCPC registered (delete as appropriate)**
- **certifies that this assessment has been conducted and the report written in accordance with the SpLD Working Group 2005/DfES Guidelines for Assessment of SpLDs in Higher Education and subsequent updates.**

Name (please print):

Signature:

Date:

Appendix

Guidance Notes: This section should contain the following:

- Clear guidance to aid interpretation of scores and technical terms
- A summary table of scores (including confidence intervals) achieved in the tests implemented
- A formal bibliography including:
 - a fully referenced list of tests used in the assessment
 - all formal sources referenced, including documents and guidance.