



# Advice for Employers of Dyslexic Workers



Helpline

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[www.dyslexiasw.com](http://www.dyslexiasw.com)

## **Introduction**

About 10% of the UK population has dyslexia. In all likelihood then, most employers will employ dyslexic staff at some stage. The vast majority of dyslexics have well developed coping strategies which enable them to cope easily with difficulties caused by dyslexia. However, at times dyslexia can cause some employees problems. This pamphlet is designed to give employers some ideas what they can do to help dyslexic employees achieve their potential, what their legal obligations are and what they can do to get the best out of their dyslexic workers.

## **Dyslexia at Work**

Dyslexia is a fairly wide ranging syndrome and can have numerous different effects. Thus, each dyslexic will have different difficulties as a result of their dyslexia. Generally however, dyslexia may cause problems for people in some of the following areas:

- Literacy - leading to problems with reading and writing
- Numeracy - leading to problems with numbers

- Short term memory - leading to problems following instructions, or carrying out tasks
- Sequencing - leading to problems with organisation and time management

These problems can lead employers to think their staff are incompetent or worse, when in reality, a few simple changes can help these employees to blossom.

### **Employer Obligations**

Dyslexia is considered a disability under the Disability Discrimination Act and thus, employers cannot discriminate against current or prospective employees because of their dyslexia (for more information see the Dyslexia Scotwest pamphlet "Dyslexia and the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and Regulations (2003)).

This also means that employers are expected to make reasonable changes to their workplace and work practices to assist dyslexic workers to do their job without difficulty. This is not as onerous as it sounds and there is government assistance available to pay for it. In most cases a few simple

changes will enable a dyslexic worker to reach their full potential, will bypass many of the problems they may be facing, and make them a much more valuable employee.

### **When is dyslexia likely to be a problem?**

Dyslexic employees usually manage their dyslexia through the use of well developed coping strategies. This means that they probably already have processes in place that enable them to do their job effectively. However, dyslexia can become a problem in certain circumstances. These may include:

- **Changes in work duties:** Major changes which require dyslexics to undertake new and unusual duties can lead to difficulties.
- **New technology:** The adoption of new technology can cause problems for dyslexics, as they have to learn new ways of working. Equally, new technology can be extremely liberating for dyslexics and lead to major work improvements.

- Promotions: These can mean that a person has to learn a completely new job, which can be overwhelming for a dyslexic in the short term.

## **What to do about it**

So what changes can employers make to assist dyslexic employees to work to their full potential? Often you will need to experiment to see what works best. However, we would recommend making changes in four broad categories; training; technology; organisation; and management.

## **Training**

Any new employee taking on new duties or using new equipment should expect to receive some form of training. This is equally true for dyslexics but it must be remembered that many traditional teaching techniques may not work for dyslexics. Dyslexics may need more training, or to have it backed up by written procedures they can refer back to. Likewise, many training courses are not designed for dyslexic learners and this may need to be taken into account.

For small changes a dyslexic employee may need to be shown a number of times before it 'sticks'. For more intensive training it is important that the trainer is aware of the trainee's dyslexia and that they may need to alter their procedures to accommodate this.

### **Technology Changes**

There is a vast array of technology available, much of it specifically designed to compensate for some of the problems caused by dyslexia. These include software and hardware options and can make a huge difference for dyslexic workers, particularly with literacy and numeracy issues. For example, one dyslexic described using voice recognition software as "life changing" and he credited it with enabling him to reach his full potential in the workplace. For more information on technology available see the Dyslexia Scotwest pamphlet "Technology Assistance for Dyslexics".

### **Organisational Changes**

By this we mean helping dyslexics to stay organised. Simple changes can make a huge difference in dealing with memory, time

management and organisational issues. Simply instituting a better diary or communication system can be extremely beneficial. Likewise, PDAs, Palm Pilots or Blackberrys can be useful as well.

Dyslexics often also benefit from mind mapping which is a great way to help them organise their thoughts.

### **Management Changes**

You can make a difference simply by changing the way you manage your dyslexic staff. Short term memory and sequencing problems can be alleviated by changing the way you give instructions to dyslexic staff. For example, giving individual instructions one at a time, rather than lots of instructions together, or providing them in writing (via email) so the dyslexic worker can refer back to them.

Some dyslexics can get very distracted by excessive noise or clutter, so it is worth considering ways to reduce distractions of this nature. Likewise some dyslexics can have trouble staying on track, particularly if they have a number of things to worry about at once. This can be

alleviated by changing the way their work is organised, so that they can concentrate on one thing at a time.

Management is the one area where you can really experiment to see what works best with your dyslexic staff.

### **Understanding**

The most important thing an employer can do for a dyslexic employee is to understand. Dyslexia is not a choice made by an employee; it is a reality they have to deal with. Many dyslexics have faced significant negativity throughout their life and thus a bit of positivity can cause dyslexics to thrive.

Additionally it is important to understand that every dyslexic is different and suffers different problems as a result of their dyslexia. What might work for one may not work for another, and vice-versa. One dyslexic may have terrible problems with something such as numeracy, while another may be fantastic in this area and have problems somewhere else. There are no hard and fast rules

about dyslexia, except that every dyslexic can thrive with the right type of assistance.

The most crucial thing to remember as an employer is to have an open mind about dyslexia and treat each dyslexic employee individually. Experiment and try different things to see what works.

### **Access to Work**

Access to Work is a government programme designed to assist business to make changes to accommodate disabled staff. Administered through Job Centre Plus, this programme provides a number of services.

Firstly, the programme provides a grant to cover costs. This grant covers 100% of costs for new staff, and 80% of costs for existing staff. The grant is designed to assist business to make capital changes, purchase new equipment, organise training etc.

Secondly the program is designed to provide advice to businesses about the types of change they can make. The Disability Employment Advisor can give

very good advice about appropriate changes, levels required etc.

Finally, one-off specific assistance can be provided in a number of areas, dependent upon the needs of the workplace. An example of this is communicator support at interview.

You can contact the Glasgow Office of Access to Work on 0141 950 5327. The Job Centre Plus website ([www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk)) contains more information on the Access to Work programme.

### **Advantages of Dyslexia**

Contrary to popular belief, dyslexia is not just negative, but has positive aspects as well. There are numerous extremely successful dyslexics, including for example Winston Churchill, Richard Branson, and Albert Einstein. The same brain functions that cause dyslexic problems can also result in the following:

- High creativity
- Excellent lateral thinking and problem solving capability

- Excellent visual and spatial awareness
- Good communication skills
- Good dexterity and manual skills

Obviously, these are traits that when properly harnessed can be extremely beneficial to any business or workplace.

There are a disproportionately high number of dyslexics in professions that require good communications skills, such as in sales, marketing, or politics. Likewise there are a very high number of dyslexics in professions that require good spatial awareness and innovation, such as architecture, engineering and the visual arts.

Following consultation with our Service users our leaflets are prepared in Comic Sans font, size 14 on coloured paper as this is considered to be the most dyslexic friendly format.

**Open daily**

Monday to Friday

9.30 am till 4.30 pm

Please phone before visiting our office to ensure that someone is available to see you

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