Guidance for Staff Working with Students with Dyslexia and Dyspraxia

Classification and Characteristics

**Students with specific learning difficulties, e.g. dyslexia and dyspraxia,** are one of the largest student groups eligible for support in higher education. Each new academic year, approximately 500 students register with UCL Student Disability Services as dyslexic and between 50 and 100 students register as dyspraxic. Students can present with co-occurring specific learning difficulties and/or with other disabilities or medical or sensory conditions such as ADHD or an autism spectrum condition. Students with specific learning difficulties occur across all subjects and courses at UCL. However, there are relatively high proportions of students with specific learning difficulties taking courses in the sciences, in psychological and language sciences, in architecture, in fine art, in construction and in education.

There is no universal agreement on the definition and classification of dyslexia or dyspraxia but these developmental and probably heritable conditions are underpinned by distinct, measurable and observable areas of cognitive difficulty and behavioural effects.

In dyslexia, there will be significant underlying difficulties in one or more of the following areas:

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<th><strong>Phonological and /or Visual Processing Speed</strong> - the speed at which sound or text sequences (such as a sequence of letters, digits or words) are processed in the brain.</th>
<th><strong>Phonological Awareness</strong> - the ability to quickly and accurately to identify, discriminate between and manipulate the separate units of sound in words, known as phonemes.</th>
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<td>For example, phonological awareness would be demonstrated by understanding that if the ‘r’ in <em>strain</em> is removed, the word becomes <em>stain</em>.</td>
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<td><strong>Rapid Automatic Naming</strong> - the ability to quickly and efficiently retrieve and produce from memory the sounds for objects, letters, numbers and words.</td>
<td><strong>Working Memory</strong> - the ability to retain and manipulate sequences of information for short periods.</td>
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In dyspraxia, there will be significant underlying difficulties in one or more of the following areas:

<table>
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<th>Fine and/or gross motor coordination skills.</th>
<th>Visual-spatial awareness and visual processing speed.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>![Handwriting]</td>
<td>![Visual-spatial awareness]</td>
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<th>Temporal awareness, time-management and forward planning.</th>
<th>Organisational skills</th>
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<td>![Clock]</td>
<td>![Organisational skills]</td>
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**Impact on Study**

**The effects of dyslexia**

The most common *persisting effects of dyslexia* that students at UCL report are difficulties in:

- Spelling accuracy
- Reading and/or writing speed
- Reading accuracy and/or reading aloud
- Processing auditory information e.g. note-taking in lectures
- Organisation, expression and accuracy of written work
- Spelling and pronouncing new vocabulary
- Word-finding, especially when making presentations or contributing to discussion
- Managing and balancing the demands of their course
- Remembering sequences of instructions and times tables facts
- Mental arithmetic
Dyslexia nearly always affects both speed and accuracy in reading and writing. It does not generally affect higher level language skills such as oral comprehension, and reading comprehension is only affected if the ability to decode text is seriously impaired. Most dyslexic students are slow readers, and as accuracy is also affected they generally need to re-read texts more often than students who are not dyslexic. Dyslexic students generally dislike or dread reading aloud, as this exposes the errors they make.

Most students with dyslexia cannot produce written work as quickly as other students; they are likely to make more spelling errors even in word-processed work; their punctuation and grammar may be weak and they often omit, repeat or insert small function words or word endings in both reading and writing.

Dyslexic students typically find it very difficult to proof read and edit their work, as they lack awareness of detail in texts. They may submit assignments which look as if they have not been checked for inaccuracies. If they experience significant weaknesses in working memory, they may have difficulty transcribing or copying, resulting in inaccuracy. When numbers and statistics are involved, this may have serious implications. Students with dyslexia who are also dyspraxic (see below) may have handwriting difficulties.

**The effects of dyspraxia**

The most common persisting difficulties which students with dyspraxia at UCL report are difficulties with:

- Handwriting speed.
- Handwriting legibility.
- Note-taking in lectures.
- Organisation, expression and accuracy of written work.
- Problems with spatial awareness, orientation and following directions.
- Clumsiness.
- Telling the time / time management / planning and personal organisation.

Many dyslexic students are also affected by dyspraxia, but both can occur independently. Dyspraxia affects motor coordination and fine and/ or gross motor skills. Students with dyspraxia typically have difficulty with speed and legibility of handwriting. They may also have difficulty with some aspects of spatial awareness, such as following directions, and organisational skills. Some individuals with dyspraxia experience difficulties in working memory, with consequences for their ability to create structure in writing, to extract key points or to co-ordinate and synchronise information from a variety of sources. When attending lectures or completing coursework, students may experience difficulties in taking notes, in planning and constructing longer pieces of written work and in organising their time and studies.
Supporting and Teaching Students

Student Disability Services has produced guidelines for staff marking and assessing the work of students with dyslexia and dyspraxia. These guidelines are referenced on the electronic coursework ‘sticker’ students are given to attach to coursework submissions, if they choose to do so. See: http://www.ucl.ac.uk/disability/info-for-staff/dyslexia-marking-guidelines

Other good practice can include the following:

- Establish clear roles within the department so students know who to go to for particular issues.
- Give clear and unambiguous instructions and feedback, preferably in word-processed form.
- In seminars and lectures give key information such as references and authors’ names in written form.
- Do not ask students to read aloud unless time has been given for prior preparation of what is to be read.
- As a personal tutor or supervisor consider scheduling regular meetings - a supportive relationship with a member of staff who knows the student well can be a great help.
- Encourage students who suspect they may be dyslexic or dyspraxic but who have never been previously assessed to contact Student Disability Services to access our screening and assessment process.

Reasonable Adjustments

- Provide reading lists and lecture notes in advance.
- Allow student to record teaching sessions.
- Provide printed materials in an accessible format with font size of at least 12.
- Explore alternative assessment options/adjustments for students who find extended written assessments particularly challenging.
- Permit some flexibility with deadlines e.g. consider requests for coursework extensions of up to one week.

Further Information

For further information and guidance on dyslexia or dyspraxia in a wider context please see:

http://www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk/
http://www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk