



All-Party Parliamentary Group on Dyslexia and Other Specific Learning Difficulties

Wednesday 29th November, 1:15-2:30pm, Committee Room 15

Present:

Members

Sharon Hodgson MP, Chair
Lord Addington, Vice-Chair
Ian Liddel-Grainger MP, Vice-Chair

Presenters

Dan Baynes, Driver Youth Trust
Sue Flohr, British Dyslexia Association
Dr Abi James, University of Southampton

Observers

Liz Loly, BDA secretariat; Margaret Malpas, Joint Chair of BDA; Jim Malpas, Joint Chair of BDA; Robert McLaren, Manager of APPG for Assistive Technology; Inspector Peter Phillips, Hampshire Police; Angela Fawcett, Emeritus Professor, University of Swansea; David Fawcett; Gillian Audley, BDA trustee; Bernadette John, SEN Director, The Good Schools Guide; David Williams, Joint Chair of BDA & Assistant Principal, The Park Academies Trust; Enrico Riva, BDA NTC; Nikki Baines, IDL Solutions Group; Jill Hudson, Ascentis; Jo Crawford, BDA ambassador; Alison Crawford; Lynn Greenwold, Patoss; Bernadette McClean, DAN Committee; Christopher Rossiter, DYT; Richard Todd, Dyspraxia Foundation; Andy Cook, Helen Arkell; Mike Johnson, Executive Vice Chair of the BDA Accreditation Board; Jim Rose, DST; Mark Ashmore, Future Artists; Kathryn Benzine, Dyslexia Action; Linda Austin, BDA Trustee; Frankie Salisbury, Student volunteer Alison Owens, BDA; Kate Saunders, BDA CEO; Mel Byrne, Made by Dyslexia; Kate Griggs, Made by Dyslexia; Belinda Seeff-Gabriel, Speech and language therapist; Tania Sentobe Bruun, BDA; Kim Brown, Adults with Dyslexia Helen Boden, BDA; Katherine Hewlett, Achievability; Jessica Faulkner, Sharon Hodgson staff; Juliet Campbell, Olivespring Consultancy; Marta Bartoli, Sharon Hodgson staff; Ben Drinkwater, Driver Youth Trust; Jules Daulby, Driver Youth Trust; Margaret Heath, Waltham Forest Dyslexia Association.

Apologies:

Lord Boswell; Pauline Latham MP; Lord Storey; Carol Monaghan MP; David Linden MP; Dr Daniel Poulter MP; Dr Alan Whitehead MP; Angela Rayner MP; Victoria Pentris MP; Matthew Hickey, The Children's Literacy Charity; Chris Williamson MP; Clive Lewis MP; Rushanara Ali MP; Eddie Hughes MP; Dr Rosena Allin-Khan MP; Dr Philippa Whitford MP; Ronnie Cowan MP; Emily Thornberry MP; Derek Twigg MP; Richard Benyon MP; Guto Bebb MP; Eleanor Laing MP; Vince Cable MP; Frank Field MP; Debbie Abrahams MP; Alex Burghart MP; Kirsty Blackman MP; Alan Mak MP; Jeremy Corbyn MP; Nick Thomas-Symonds MP; Alex Cunningham MP; Mark Menzies MP; Helen Grant MP; Stephen Kerr MP; Scott Mann MP; Steve Brine MP; Victoria Prentis MP; Kemi Badenoch MP; Emma Lewell-Buck MP; David Drew MP; Baroness Hamwee; Bim Afolami MP.

Welcome

The meeting was opened at 1.20pm by Lord Addington.

1. Animation from the British Dyslexia Association

The brief animation pointed out the individuality of our brains, personalities, strengths. It showed that dyslexics face difficulties, but they often do a lot of things differently which can be a really good thing. It is why dyslexics have so many famous people among their number.

2. Primary Assessment and specialist support concerns – Dan Baynes, Driver Youth Trust

The Driver Youth Trust is a charity with a focus on Special Education Needs in mainstream schools. They liaise with the government on issues. The school environment should fully support dyslexics' needs. Currently provision is patchy.

One of the main issues is primary assessment. Intense reforms over the past 5 years have had a profound effect, particularly on dyslexic learners. National Curriculum levels have been scrapped for age-related 'expected standards'. Teachers are doing their best but were not given enough time. Children have struggled to adjust. Only 14% of SEND pupils reached the KS2 'expected standard'. Testing of primary school pupils does not allow dyslexics to achieve: it undermines them and puts them at a disadvantage. The British Dyslexia Association have received a record number of calls. The tests have been set at too high a level for dyslexics, and the danger is that they cannot show what they know so are branded as failing. The current focus on spelling and handwriting disproportionately affects them. A more flexible approach is needed. The DfE has reviewed its position, recognising the current approach to assessing writing can disproportionately affect pupils with dyslexia or dyspraxia. An equality impact assessment is needed. The APPG could support this review and engage with policymakers, reminding them of the disproportionate impact the reforms have had on dyslexics. There should be a review of assessment measures and of SATs testing for accessibility.

The second issue is that there must be high quality specialist provision for dyslexics. Professional support is needed, like Educational Psychologists. The Rose Report (2009) says that we should find 4,000 specialist teachers. 3,200 have been specially trained, but a DYT freedom of information request shows that £6m has been spent but there is no record of where they went. A DYT report, 'Joining the Dots' analysed what provision is available for dyslexia. It is patchy, so who oversees their work? The APPG could consider in future meetings what provision exists. There should be an audit of specialist provision, how much of it is focussed on assessment, and any issues. Our mission is to have dyslexia expertise in every school or cluster. We want an understanding of the importance of specialist teachers. Students who struggle should get the right support at the right time.

In conclusion, a number of measures are needed to create an environment that better suits our learners.

3. The need for a coherent system for assessment and access arrangements - Sue Flohr, British Dyslexia Association.

The British Dyslexia Association helpline receives hundreds of calls each month, and are currently getting an unprecedented number about assessment and access arrangements. There are concerns about SATs, GCSEs, right through all qualifications to professional examinations. Why are readers allowed in one but not the other? Why is there more support for degree students than apprenticeship students? Sometimes dyslexics are penalised by institutions who use their own criteria.

It raises many concerns. There is a lack of consistency for required pre-requisite levels and access arrangements. Is an assessment fit for purpose, or is it merely testing language? We need to look at the appropriateness and/or the lack of contextualisation, for instance there has been an influx of calls since January from private car hire drivers who need to re-licence via a letter. Many dyslexics turn to trades that don't require literacy skills, and then things, like this letter, are introduced. Out of 467 drivers we approached, 82 had significant dyslexic features, and a further 71 had some.

A lot of things are currently being reviewed. The APPG should raise awareness of discrimination amongst assessment for dyslexics. It should get departments to work together to have joined up thinking for, and mapping of, qualifications and access arrangements. It should promote the need for qualification assessments to be contextualised. With qualifications under review and being newly introduced, it would seem like an ideal opportunity to get it right.

4. The research on higher education institutions' inconsistent support for students – Dr Abi James, Chair of the British Dyslexia Association New Technologies Committee and Researcher at the University of Southampton.

We are looking at whether support in Higher Education is effective. In April 2014 modernisation was announced through the Equality Act, and from Sept 2015 students could get assistive technology but had to contribute £200. Guidance was issued on inclusive practices but it was aimed at senior management and had flaws.

There has been a 2.8% decrease in students applying for the Disabled Students' Allowance in England, as against Wales and Northern Ireland where reforms were not introduced. There is a 17.8% drop in disabled students receiving equipment. A BATA survey of students in receipt of the DSA showed that many had difficulty paying the contribution, and 42% said it had a negative impact on their studies. It is important that students receive timely support. Assistive technology often makes them independent.

There is high variability in the implementation of inclusive teaching and learning approaches among Higher Education Providers. For instance, 88% recommend providing notes, but only 35% provide notes, reading lists and presentations online. Often the responsibility for supporting students is left up to departments or individual academics.

Daffran, James and Martin looked at what makes provision successful in 'Inclusive Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: What's Next?' (2017). Successful inclusive teaching and learning practices involve planning, design, delivery, and evaluation of curricula; sector wide agreement about expectations; strategic leadership linked to collaboration with students; training and support to embed inclusive practices; and analysis of outcomes.

Students are often the ones who feel left out, so we must enable them to access support. They need an SpLD assessment report after the age of 16 to apply for the DSA. The costs to obtain assistive technology are often prohibitive. We need published information for them. A Welsh Government survey on the DSA in Nov 2017 showed that 60% of disabled students felt that they would not have completed their studies without DSA support.

The recommendations to stakeholders and the APPG are:

- o Make access to support easier
- o Reduce the paperwork and financial burden

- o Higher education providers must make information accessible about the support on offer at academic department level, both for the benefit of students, and to enable governance and monitoring
- o This should be available at all stages of education

5. Questions.

Sharon Hodgson MP, Chair, thanked the 3 speakers for their presentations and asked for questions.

Robert McLaren, Manager of APPG for Assistive Technology, suggested that when there is change (e.g. with Higher Education Funding Council for England currently) it may provide an opportunity for impact. Dr Abi James agreed that there could be a positive impact. Things are in a period of transition, so we must ensure a voice with that Department.

Richard Todd, Dyspraxia Foundation, asked if there was any past information on the achievement of SpLD students which could be compared to present? Dr Abi James responded that data from prior to DSAs indicates that generally the differential has decreased, but was still there for SpLD students. The DfE has commissioned further research.

Margaret Malpas OBE, Joint Chair of the BDA, pointed out that students with a history of need going into Higher Education, particularly girls, were not always assessed. Awareness of Dyslexia is absolutely crucial, and urged MPs to join the Cappuccino Challenge on 20th February 2018.

Lord Addington said there was confusion on exams, and asked whether any steps have been taken to guide people through? Has any work been done on ensuring that teachers are aware of paths through? Sue Flohr OBE responded that every context was different. She cited the General Medical Council, who wondered why so many doctors taking professional examinations were found to be dyslexic after they failed, and how the BDA is now working with the GMC to create guidelines. Guidelines need to be done for lots of contexts. Dan Baynes suggested that the APPG could be the pressure group to ensure this. Dr Abi James agreed that diagnosis was crucial. Schools at all levels must assess and document any history of need, particularly for dyslexia.

David Williams, The Park Academies Trust and joint Chair of the BDA, in regards to primary assessment and specialist teaching, said that 75% of Local Authorities were moving funding from the school block to the Higher Needs block. To support dyslexic students we need money in schools. Is there any pressure for this? Dan Baynes agreed we should try to influence the agenda and get specific funding for dyslexic pupils.

Professor Angela Fawcett, University of Swansea and Vice President of the BDA, said that when she was in charge of assessing students, 50% had never been diagnosed by the time they came to University. Dr Abi James agreed that there has been long term recognition of the lack of diagnosis of dyslexics. They have coped in school, where access arrangements were often aimed at lower achievers, not the higher achievers who were struggling. It is often assessment situations in a different environment that show these up. Sue Flohr OBE agreed and said this was a real issue when it came to professional examinations, like pilots, accountants etc.

Juliet Hamble, Olivespring in Lewisham, referred to the Rose review, and asked how can we make sure that we have information about specialist teachers in our locality, and whether they exist. Are Local Authorities taking up the opportunities available? Dan Baynes agreed an audit needs to be done. One way may be through freedom of information requests to local authorities.

Belinda Seeff-Gabriel, Speech & Language Therapist and Specialist Teacher, suggested that we must put pressure on policy makers to recognise the disproportionate effect that assessment has on dyslexics. Dr Abi

James replied that Special Needs' registers list all students, but there is no real data on who is receiving access funding and arrangements.

Richard Todd, Dyspraxia Foundation, said that up to 16, a dyspraxic diagnosis is medical. In Higher Education there comes a need for another form of academic diagnosis. Dr Abi James replied that there was no consistent framework in the school system, and no monitoring or evidence, so there was a need for formal guidance. Dan Baynes observed that it was often a long hard slog, on Primary Assessment/GCSE reforms etc, with the Department for Education and exam boards.

Kim Brown, Adults with Dyslexia and work with Transport for London, who does assessments for Higher Education, said that dyslexic inclusion was important. With the DSA, when assessment was in place, funding for new assessments seemed unreasonable.

Sharon Hodgson MP, Chair, stated that in her previous role as Shadow Children's and Families Minister she had seen this coming. We have no idea of the number of children with needs, or receiving support. She had personal experience of how, for her son, there was better support at university than at school, but it took many months to get everything in place.

Lord Addington agreed it was disappointing. Even though they have been working on these access arrangements, he had been told to let the courts sort it out so that there could be case law, and that 'almost half of universities have a disability officer in place'. The issue is hot now, but on-going. It is important to compile the hot issues so that the BDA can use the APPG to get more Parliamentarians involved. We need specific problems which we can raise and get colleagues on board with.

Sharon Hodgson MP referred back to Dr Abi James' presentation, saying that we must revisit post-16 assessments. If students have been identified previously, they must be assessed. We should lobby to ensure that post-16 providers (Higher Education and 6th Forms) automatically give kids with known needs an assessment by rights. It is a funding issue. Schools need to know that HE, and apprenticeships etc, need a post-16 assessment.

David Fawcett said that the funding to do it is needed, as it is £500 a time. Once assessed as dyslexic they should not need another assessment post-16.

6. AOB: Sharon Hodgson MP, Chair

- o Cappuccino Challenge in Parliament! Please lobby your MPs and encourage them to attend the drop-in event on 20th February 2018, 2.00 - 3.30pm in Room M, Portcullis House.
- o Dr Kate Saunders retires as CEO of the BDA after 8 years. Introduced Helen Boden, who will take over as CEO in March 2018.

7. Date of next meeting

To be agreed by BDA/APPG later (in December).

8. Meeting closed at 2.35pm.