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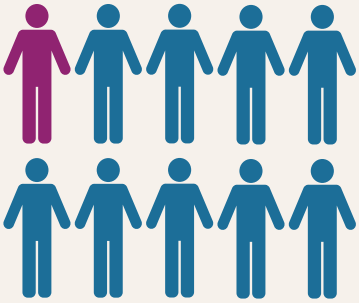


Dyslexia Commission:

2022 Report

Dyslexia Commission

British Dyslexia Association



1 in 10
people have
dyslexia



At the British Dyslexia Association we believe that everyone with dyslexia should be able to reach their full potential in life.

For information and advice call our **free Helpline**

Our Helpline is a national service for people with dyslexia and dyscalculia and those who support them. We support parents, students, adults with dyslexia, teachers, employers and professionals, with free, confidential, impartial information and signposting.

0333 405 4567

helpline@bdadyslexia.org.uk

Facebook messaging

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Foreword

This report is based on inquiries held over four days during 2022, in the year the British Dyslexia Association reached its 50th anniversary. Over those five decades individuals from our organisation fronted the campaign for advancing the understanding of dyslexia and other specific learning difficulties and there has been significant progress in that time. Today, more is known about how to identify and support those with dyslexia than ever before.

Although the experience for many individuals with dyslexia in school, at college or in work is better than fifty years ago, that is not the case for everyone. Our national helpline still routinely hears of children whose learning difficulties have not been picked up early enough. We have calls every week from families who cannot access specialist teaching for their children. We receive about half of our enquiries from adults with dyslexia who are not getting the support they need at work and in life. Despite the uplifting narrative about how dyslexia is a 'superpower', we still hear daily about experiences of individuals facing stigma, disadvantage and social exclusion. There are clearly huge costs associated with our collective failure to get this right: for individuals and for society.

That is why we welcome the evidence brought to this Commission from such a broad range of stakeholders. It is vital that the lived-experience and voices of individuals and experts from the community are heard.

Our view is that you should be able to access the support you need throughout your life regardless of your socio-economic background. Our concern is that it continues to be the most vulnerable in society who struggle to get the support they need.

We believe that funding needs to be made available to train and support teachers and practitioners throughout the education system so that early identification and intervention in schools can be provided. Investment also needs to be made to promote reasonable adjustments so that adults with dyslexia can access employment, social services and continuing adult education.

The testimony from contributors to these sessions is invaluable in shining a light on the issues that continue to arise. We expect policy makers to take responsibility for addressing these issues and to ensure that clear lines of accountability are in place. We look forward to a future where individuals with dyslexia can flourish in an inclusive society that celebrates difference.

Chivonne Preston
Chief Executive (Interim)
British Dyslexia Association





Foreword

Thousands of people who are diagnosed with dyslexia late in life, like myself, wonder if it would have been any different if we had been identified earlier.

Whilst my own dyslexia is not debilitating, it does present challenges. It takes me just a little longer than everyone else to read aloud. It takes me a little longer than average people to process words on a page. Since I was diagnosed, I have spoken to hundreds of dyslexic people about their own experiences and there are many consistent themes that caused delay in the diagnosis.

I count myself lucky that at university, my lecturer saw a jumble of words on a page of my coursework, that did not necessarily make sense and referred me for a test. There is no way that I could have been elected an MP, own a business, or achieve many things over the years without the skills I learnt from expert learning and development professionals.

However, many millions of people over the years have not been as fortunate.

That is why Curia formed the *Dyslexia Commission*. Its objective is to consider the application of pre-existing policies that impact the lives of dyslexic people, drive down inequalities and improve outcomes. Each inquiry session was expertly chaired by leaders in government, the NHS, education and criminal justice sectors. It was refreshing to hear ideas for ways in which pre-existing policies impacting everyday lives of dyslexic people can be reformed to improve outcomes.

The recommendations from this report highlight tangible actions that policy makers at all levels of government can deliver to improve the lives of dyslexic people. From the consideration of dyslexic people during the development of new care pathways as part of the formation of Integrated Care Systems to improved access pathways for new supportive technologies.

Commitments including the use of animation as part of assistive technology (AT) to diversify teaching styles, proactively identifying mental health needs as part of education, and co-production of care systems with families, community groups and reading groups to encourage holistic support for dyslexia beyond classrooms will make a significant difference to dyslexic people in this country.

As the Secretary of State for Education considers her plans to implement reforms to assist all people with learning disabilities and additional needs, it is important that dyslexic people benefit from some of the reforms considered by this Commission. Cross-governmental co-ordination is crucial, as all too often dyslexic people fall between the cracks of public policy. Often it sounds like a cliché, but you cannot improve a child's health and wellbeing outcomes without involving their school. Joined up services are critical for people living with dyslexia and this report calls for dyslexic people not to be left behind.

In some countries across Europe, dyslexia is not even considered a condition that requires specific policies. As pressures on the public finances grow, many dyslexic people feel as though we are merely treading water when it comes to policy progress. More concerning are calls from some in the education sector to dismiss dyslexia altogether. This report highlights what a retrograde step this would be.

On behalf of Curia, we would like to thank all the contributors and in particular, our sponsors, the British Dyslexia Association, Scanning Pens and Sir Linkalot which have given much of their time to formulate the recommendations in this report. Their personal testimonies and examples give life to policy formulation. Without their example, it would have been impossible to produce a set of comprehensive recommendations.

Over the coming year, Curia will take these recommendations into consideration as part of our *Levelling Up Commission*, where tackling inequalities within education and skills are a core part of the agenda. Rest assured, Curia will assess the recommendations published in this report to see how policy makers have reflected the ideas within their local, regional and national strategies.

Ben Howlett
Chief Executive Office
Curia



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Executive Summary

Introduction

Political turmoil in Westminster during 2022 put education policy - and dyslexia policy in particular - into limbo. First, the Government's Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) delivery plan - following the consultation on their Green Paper SEND review: right support, right place, right time - was delayed and then, the Schools Bill was dropped in December.

Meanwhile, the *Dyslexia Commission* was created to find implementable solutions that could be applied within the current policy framework. To this end, Curia held ten inquiry sessions over four days, which brought together experts from all levels of government, school administrators, civil servants, activists, charities, former prisoners and academics to discuss the issues facing people with dyslexia. These inquiry sessions were held virtually, recorded and posted to The Chamber UK YouTube channel for review.

Below, the recommendations and thinking that went into the sessions are summarised.

Inquiry sessions and recommendations

Each inquiry session brought together thinkers from many different perspectives. Examples included headteachers and SEND tutors, volunteers that teach prisoners to read and former prisoners. Chairs and panellists helped to shape a lively discussion in these sessions, in the hope that practitioners would mix and exchange ideas that they would not otherwise express to each other.

During this process, the panellists and attendees also discussed their suggestions for how systems, processes and culture can be improved, the below recommendations are the result of these sessions.

Disparity in service provision

Teach students about different learning styles - by acknowledging and raising awareness of the different ways in which pupils can learn in classrooms, and by having a coherent infrastructure in place that assists students with multiple needs, education institutions can better practice inclusivity in teaching. A practical way that this can be done at the individual, school and government level, is to address structural problems of finance, resources and statutory guidelines by better enforcing existing SEND statutory guidelines that are in place to support children with SEND across the UK.

Increase screening to increase early intervention - a lack of medicalisation of the SEND support model has led to costs of screening being placed on parents and schools, as opposed to being shared across healthcare. Thus, when schools are unable to pay for screening, this burden falls on parents, some of whom cannot afford to pay, heightening inequalities in accessing screening. Improving legislation to share the cost of screening across different budgets, including health budgets, is a possible avenue forward for a less unequal system.

Spread education technology and teacher training to use it - training that incorporates existing technological tools that are at the disposal of teachers, make learning easier and more accessible to students, helping improve learning outcomes. This is especially true among children with SEND. Given the increased use of technology in education during and after the Covid-19 pandemic, governments should continue to reduce technological disparities and poverty among students.

Teacher training and culture

Ensure SEND support throughout education - engaging in reform and intervention, solely during the early years of education, may not provide adequate and holistic support to dyslexic children. While early screening as a preamble to intervention can be useful, there is no reason why teachers cannot and should not adjust their teaching techniques to the needs of children before any diagnosis

is made, and at every point of their education. Prioritising practices that make schools dyslexia-friendly by following the British Dyslexia Association (BDA) quality mark accreditation scheme, empowers students to better understand their learning needs, engages parents in the dialogue of assistance and care, and increases the understanding of dyslexia among teachers.

Use a 'toolbox approach' to deliver an inclusive learning environment - to incorporate diversity in learning needs among all students, classrooms should be equipped with learning 'toolboxes' that are available to teachers and students to use during the teaching and learning process. Allowing students to self-select resources from these 'toolboxes' will help to empower them in meeting their own needs in the learning process and will prevent feelings of isolation and exclusion that arise when neurodivergent pupils are side-lined in classrooms that employ rigid teaching methods designed to work best for the neurotypical.

Empower teachers by training them on tools SEND students will need - empowering teachers by training them in the use of school 'toolboxes', as well as assistive technology (AT), creates environments where teaching can be provided more efficiently and through more inclusive practices. Further, this has a trickle-down effect, where teachers pass on this information to students who can then learn to use each tool to their advantage and become self-equipped inside and outside the classroom, aiding their learning process. It is important to reduce pressures on schools to provide teacher training and deliver on performance expectations based on the national curriculum. This can be done by equipping them with tools that help the teachers understand the strengths and interests of their pupils. Coupled with this, making the curriculum more approachable and understandable to neurodivergent students and conducting assessments based on criteria other than age-related expectations can prove to be beneficial.

Ensure that teachers are consistently assisted through training in understanding the appropriate use of Assistive Technology at the primary literacy level - supporting teachers to better understand AT at earlier stages of literacy helps to explicitly target learning difficulties at a primary stage. By equipping students and teachers with assistive measures from an early development stage, this would be a helpful measure in ensuring that learning difficulties do not remain undiagnosed untill later stages.

Schools White Paper and SEND Review

Proactively identify mental health needs as part of education - emphasising a holistic approach towards a student's learning process is imperative in an educational landscape where neurodivergent students are ill-equipped with suitable learning structures. The urgency to outline NHS plans that cover mental health support for children and adolescents across the country is paramount.

Strict enforcement of SEND Code of Practice legislation guidelines - stronger enforcement of the SEND Code of Practice will minimise unlawful variations in training and provisions among local authorities (LAs) and ensure that the 'postcode lottery' is replaced by a more universal approach to SEND provision. This will also help reduce the instances where parents feel required to go to tribunals to get the support they need.

Implement in-depth dyslexia and SEND syllabus during Initial Teacher Training (ITT) - universal teaching of how to identify and adapt to students with SEND or neurodiversity gives a chance of helping all children, not just those with SEND. Ensuring that teachers are adequately equipped with the knowledge of the needs of the children, and the teaching methods they may respond best to, can better prepare teachers for early identification and assistance during the entire education process.

Replace some exams with an individual assessment for neurodivergent students - to increase equal opportunity in assessment and inclusivity, grade requirements for students with special needs should be re-evaluated against markers other than age-based performance indicators, as well as the shifting emphasis placed on grammar, punctuation and spelling abilities.

Co-ordination of Care

Better targeting Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) for neurodivergent children - a reconfiguration of the CAMHS delivery system among mental health counsellors is imperative so that incorporation of a wider variety of mental health support is undertaken to reach all students who currently cannot benefit from cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) due to its reliance on language abilities. Improving the familiarity of counsellors with wide-ranging neurodiverse issues will help them produce and target therapies instead of, or in addition to, CBT. Looking into alternatives to speech therapy, such as art therapy, as taken up at The Levels School, has proven to be beneficial.

Improve and properly resource the diagnostic services of educational psychologists - owing to a lack of funding, underperformance of education psychologists, as part of local authority standardised Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) assessments, has reduced the number of standardised tests taking place, thereby significantly reducing dyslexia diagnosis and giving rise to a 'postcode lottery', of diagnosis and intervention accessibility. Enforcing stricter and targeted government protocols that increase funding to local authorities can help provide education psychologists, who are better equipped with the tools and methods of standardised testing. This can help address the concerns of a large majority of dyslexic students who remain undiagnosed.

Give GPs a greater say in early diagnosis - increasing the role that GPs play in providing diagnosis and prescription for early intervention, as well as putting co-ordination of care on their agenda, is key to bringing together social systems, be it in education, health or community support, to help dyslexic children. Within Integrated Care systems (ICSs), the co-ordination of service delivery, not just with care but with education, is integral. Allocating GPs with clearly defined roles and action plans for targeted diagnosis is important.

Integration of care systems

Increase co-production of education between schools and parents - co-production, partnering with parents and students to deliver their own education, is an essential step in developing successful strategies that help dyslexic children and SEND. Reading together with families, community groups and other groups significantly boosts confidence in children, increases interest and engagement in the content being studied, and also helps them better explore their feelings and abilities around their needs and develop a social community. Reading lists that are informed by professionals and frontline users are also fundamental to empowering dyslexic people.

Target funds and services to children with multiple risk factors for low educational attainment - adapting services in education and care should target aid to those individuals experiencing multiple issues, such as poverty, SEND, neurodiversity and mental health issues. ICSs should set up systems that take into account socioeconomic deprivation, and its negative impacts on mental health for neurodiverse people, to prevent the marginalisation of these vulnerable populations that are lesser able to access medical and social care.

Ensure better partnerships among service providers to support dyslexic people - increasing local authority partnerships and encouraging them to work on complex needs that address the intersection of health needs, special education needs (SEN) and structural disadvantage, is essential. For children experiencing mental health difficulties in conjunction with dyslexia, such as adverse childhood experiences (ACE), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), etc. these approaches can be beneficial in achieving overall health and educational equality.

Improving access and uptake of the latest technologies

Incorporate and target Assistive Technology in the prison system - within the criminal justice system, understanding what adults with dyslexia want to gain from the use of AT helps to better target interventions that will prove to be uplifting and empowering. Instead of a top-down approach, where officials assume that those with learning disabilities will seek help, engaging in conversations with dyslexic people will help the system better gauge targeted help for dyslexia that manifests in many different ways. As a result of the aforementioned measures, tangible improvements in the form of increased self-confidence, increased emotional wellbeing and improved concentration among persons in the criminal justice have been demonstrated.

Introduce Assistive Technology to every child in every school - introducing AT to every child in school will not only help establish a common ground and equal footing among students in schools but will also help raise awareness of the benefits of incorporating technology within mainstream teaching and learning. The benefits of this early years intervention carry into adulthood, where a collective understanding of the benefits of AT in education translates into greater availability of AT across workplaces. This would create a more equitable environment throughout an individual's life, from early years to employment, and reduce inequalities in social and public spaces.

Use animation as part of the 'teaching toolbox' - apps such as Sir Linkalot are using animation in AT for learning. Capitalising on the ability of dyslexic individuals to form mental links between images and words is a helpful method of helping students benefit from their own strengths and learn in ways that may be different from the mainstream rote learning method. This will allow children to capitalise on creativity and will help level the playing field between all students in a classroom.

Funding disparities and diagnosis

Standardise local authority SEND funding and policies - Ensuring that local authorities do not have discrepancies in the ability of students with SEND to procure funding is essential. A robust framework will need to be in place that allows for standardised access to monetary resources by families seeking help for SEND and, over time, consistent funding will need to be made available to all local authorities for this to be possible. Adequate funding will also ensure that schools do not have to apply for EHCPs to receive funding for dyslexia and will reduce the huge costs currently incurred by parents.

Broaden, rather than deepen, SEND training for teachers - the current system involves significant investment to deliver special education needs co-ordinator (SENCo) qualifications and training to teachers. An efficient way to provide staff support to students would be to upskill all teachers so that they are equipped with all the tools and qualifications necessary to identify a broad spectrum of learning difficulties, instead of having to rely on SENCo expertise. This will also help reduce the amount of resources spent on diagnosis at later stages as upskilled teachers will be able to identify children with SEN and provide support from earlier stages.

Close funding gaps so that all children have access to dyslexia screening - a lack of diagnostic assessments for children who lie at the middle of the socioeconomic spectrum significantly increases inequalities among student outcomes. These students may include those who do not have the financial resources to go to tribunal while at the same time, may not have access to resources reserved for the severely economically deprived. Increasing funding to make diagnosis universally available and easily accessible for all students is imperative in reducing inequalities among students with SEND.

Accountability and transparency

Improve local SEND partnerships to increase support provision - increasing accountability for the provision of support within the system will only increase when local partnerships are strengthened so that the system provides consistent and uniform help. One of the methods to achieve this is to make performance reports uniform, easily transferrable and accessible in schools and local authorities across the national landscape. The standardisation and digitisation of EHCP formats to seamlessly transfer across authorities is a tangible way that this can be done to ensure equal standards for all students.

Improve parent-teacher communication - a crucial step in providing support to children is allowing the voices of their parents to be heard. To achieve this, investments can be made in training teachers to better engage and discuss goals and outcomes with parents. This will make the mediation process much easier and help parents and teachers work as a cohesive unit. Making such mediation compulsory for parents is not seen as ideal policy, since this can lead to parents feeling pressure to engage in multiple processes to receive the desired support for their child while also sidelining many whose socioeconomic conditions do not allow them to engage in such conversations.

Dyslexia in the workplace

Normalise neurodiversity conversations in the workplace - having conversations around dyslexia and neurodiverse conditions among individuals in the workplace will give people confidence in asking for the support that they require. This will also help remove the communication barrier around voicing disability needs while simultaneously empowering employees to feel more equal in social settings. This will also have a beneficial impact on performance indicators.

Fund assistance for workers with dyslexia - increasing funding for individuals with dyslexia in employment will ensure inclusivity and help tap into the many avenues of creative expression that neurodiverse adults possess. These people may currently be sidelined due to a lack of resources being invested in helping them work at their full potential. Employers must remember that dyslexics represent 10 per cent of the workforce.

Take steps to encourage company dyslexia policies - while most organisations have improved in addressing disability, the focus has often remained on physical disabilities. Requiring organisations to be transparent about their disability policy, including neurodiverse conditions, will help in including individuals whose disabilities might not be as overtly visible. This will assist in creating inclusive and better practices in employment structures.

The criminal justice system

Raise awareness of dyslexia in the criminal justice system - training prison staff to understand how dyslexia and other neurodiverse conditions manifest, and teaching about the consequent needs of such individuals, will help the criminal justice system become increasingly sensitive to dyslexic individuals. This will also help raise awareness about mental health conditions that arise from disability and its needs.

Provide more resources for prison staff to support dyslexic people - investment in increasing the tools, sessions and training available to prison staff in identifying and helping persons with dyslexia is important. This can be done by conducting programs that train staff in the necessary methods. Such training will be beneficial in raising awareness about the tailored and individualised support needed for dyslexic people.

Incentivise prisoners to take part in education - providing infrastructure and technology in the prison system that encourages prisoners to engage in education will empower those with dyslexia to be able to join and gain employment once they leave prison. This not only has short-term benefits of reform within the prison system but a long-term positive impact on the inclusion of dyslexic persons within the workforce. One of the methods in which this can be done by is providing one-to-one 30-minute learning sessions to prisoners, allowing them to learn at their own pace.

Gain more accurate dyslexia diagnosis with long-term assessments - instead of conducting assessments for dyslexia among prisoners during early days in prison, these should be conducted over a period of time. This will prove to be more beneficial in gaining accurate results as precise estimates of dyslexia indicators will manifest better over comprehensive long-term assessments. This will also help to prioritise the emotional and mental wellbeing of prisoners by taking away assessment pressures and helping them cope better with prison life.

Conclusion and next steps

In addition to these recommendations, one theme that arose during the Commission was normalisation. In many areas of society, not just schools and prisons as explored, it is important that neurodiversity and differences in learning styles are destigmatised, normalised and then broadly understood. This process will underpin the changes that most people want to see, including adaptions for the neurodiverse, flexibility when taking into account how people learn and work, and therefore, the flourishing of dyslexic people and the neurodiverse.

One of the main ways this can be achieved is for teachers to be trained in the tools that different people use to learn most effectively. A broader knowledge of neurodiversity and teaching methods, coupled with the ability to use them, was favoured rather than a model where 'best practice' for the majority is enforced from the centre.

Further research could dive into what methods should be included in broader teacher training, how technology and the changes seen during Covid-19 can be incorporated, and how teachers will be assessed if their methods are less standardised. It should also encompass issues such as social deprivation and mental health issues, in addition to dyslexia and neurodiversity.

Curia will incorporate these findings into the work of the *Levelling Up Commission* ensuring these recommendations are considered as part of a programme reduce inequalities in education and skills.

Methodology

The approach taken in producing this report has largely been based on qualitative information retrieved from inquiry sessions conducted by Curia, supported by the BDA, and attended by leading experts in education, psychology, the co-ordination of care, NHS, criminal justice and beyond. Certain sections of the session have been assisted with quantitative data brought to the table by the panellists.

The reports in this publication are based on ten inquiry sessions conducted over four days during 2022, connecting ideas among thought leaders and experts on four diverse areas that need addressing within the discourse on dyslexia. The themes explored on each day were

1. Reducing inequalities
2. Co-ordination of care
3. The SEND Review and Schools Bill
4. Dyslexia and working-age adults

The discussions by the panellists have been summarised in this report, along with the recommendations that were discussed during each session.

While the introduction of new legislation for dyslexia is often hotly debated, there currently exist various policies in place - ranging from the national level to the local level - that if implemented completely, provide significant assistance to dyslexic persons.

The underlying objective for all sessions has been to devise recommendations that concisely explain how the current legislative framework can be used effectively, as opposed to proposing recommendations for new legislation.

The inquiry sessions have, therefore, been led by the inquiry session chairs to encourage panellists to analyse how the existing policies in place can be implemented to empower dyslexic people in different settings in society. Panellists have brought to the discussion evidence and experience from their own fields of work in this area. This evidence and research has formed the basis on which the recommendations have been proposed.

The third inquiry session, focusing on the SEND Review and Schools Bill, was conducted prior to the scrapping of the Schools Bill. The session remains relevant in discussing the problem areas for dyslexic people that are not addressed by the Government's current policies.

Please note that this report on the inquiry sessions is not intended to be a verbatim, nor an exhaustive account of all areas covered in the meetings. Rather, this paper seeks to highlight the core areas of consensus discussed by our panel, along with a discussion of the steps ahead for policymakers, the Government, school boards, schoolteachers and parents.

To view the full inquiry sessions this report is based on please subscribe to YouTube.com/@chamberuk or scan this QR Code.

HEADLINE RECOMMENDATIONS

Disparity in Service Provision

- Teach students about different learning styles
- Use a 'toolbox approach' to deliver an inclusive learning environment
- Introduce Assistive Technology to every child in every school
- Use animation as part of the 'teaching toolbox'
- Replace some exams with an individual assessment for neurodivergent students

Teacher Training and Culture

- Empower teachers by training them on tools SEND students will need
- Broaden, rather than deepen, SEND training for teachers
- Ensure that teachers are consistently assisted through training in understanding the appropriate use of Assistive Technology at the primary literacy level

Schools White Paper and SEND Review

- Increase screening to increase early intervention
- Ensure SEND support throughout education
- Improve local SEND partnerships to increase support provision
- Strict enforcement of SEND Code of Practice legislation guidelines
- Proactively identify mental health needs as part of education
- Better targeting CAMHS for neurodivergent children
- Implement in-depth dyslexia and SEND syllabus during Initial Teacher Training (ITT)

Funding Disparities and Diagnosis

- Improve and properly resource the diagnostic services of educational psychologists
- Target funds and services to children with multiple risk factors for low educational attainment
- Spread education technology and teacher training to use it
- Close funding gaps so that all children have access to dyslexia screening
- Standardise local authority SEND funding and policies

Co-ordination of Care

- Give GPs a greater say in early diagnosis
- Ensure better partnerships among service providers to support dyslexic people

Integration of Care Systems

- Improve parent-teacher communication
- Increase co-production of education between schools and parents

Dyslexia in the Workplace

- Normalise neurodiversity conversations in the workplace
- Fund assistance for workers with dyslexia
- Take steps to encourage company dyslexia policies

The Criminal Justice System

- Incorporate and target Assistive Technology in the prison system
- Raise awareness of dyslexia in the criminal justice system
- Provide more resources for prison staff to support dyslexic people
- Incentivise prisoners to take part in education
- Gain more accurate dyslexia diagnosis with long-term assessments

Introduction

Defining dyslexia

Dyslexia is a life-long neurological difference that affects around one in ten people in the UK to some degree. It is often associated with difficulty in learning to read, write and spell but it is not a learning disability and, by teaching differently, dyslexics can and do attain literary achievement at, or surpassing, their neurotypical peers' levels.

Dyslexics may struggle with planning, organisation or sequences of tasks but they often excel in creative thinking and problem-solving. They make up a disproportionate number of both successful entrepreneurs[1] and the prison population[2].

To successfully equip dyslexics with the tools that they need to navigate a world of work, educators need to be able to tailor their teaching styles to the needs of their pupils. This flexibility, and the resources it requires, can often be framed as 'extra help' but in fact, it is simply levelling the playing field. Together with other neurodiverse children and those with SEND, dyslexics represent a significant minority of the population. By designing an education system to most efficiently educate the neurotypical, we are not merely failing to help dyslexics, we are setting them up to fail.

Dyslexics and neurodiverse people have the right to the same opportunities as the neurotypical. In contemplating the practicalities of delivering these opportunities, we must not lose sight of the fact that we are fixing an injustice.

Dyslexia screening

Thanks in large part to the efforts of former Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP, and his Private Members Bill (PMB) - Dyslexia Screening and Teacher Training Bill, the issue of screening was raised multiple times over the course of this Commission.

While there was no overall consensus, the assembled experts at the inquiry sessions were agreed that while screening can be helpful for children and parents who are unsure or unable to ask for the help that they need, the danger of universal screening is that it consumes resources and results in a diagnosis that will not necessarily lead to an education system that will respond to that diagnosis. A screening for dyslexia also flattens a student's neurodiversity to a diagnosis, which can stand in the way of significant variations in educational needs.

The counterpoint to these concerns was ably put by Matt Hancock during an inquiry session, "What gets measured gets managed."

Stigma

Expressed again and again during the inquiry sessions was the problem of stigma. For many with dyslexia in the UK, their journey through the education system, and beyond, in Britain exposed them to shame, which has undermined their endeavours through life. The associations between literacy and ability mean that students with dyslexia, which has no correlation with decreased ability, can be subject to unsuitable learning practices that diminish their faith in the education system and undermine their thirst for learning in the first place.

This feeling of being held back, even when not accompanied by societal stigma, can be internalised, leading to a lowering of expectations. Raw accounts from dyslexic people are reflected in a still-evolving language around dyslexia and neurodiversity.

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1 Logan, J. (2009) Dyslexic Entrepreneurs: The Incidence; Their Coping Strategies and Their Business Skills. Cass Business School, Bunhill Row, London, UK.

2 Taylor, C., Russell, J. and Winsor, S.T. (n.d.). NEURODIVERSITY IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM A review of evidence. [online] Criminal Justice Joint Inspection. Available at: https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/cjji/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/07/Neurodiversity-evidence-review-web-2021.pdf.

While older language treats dyslexia as a 'disability' and later a 'learning difficulty', newer language stresses the relative normality of such common conditions and their associations with positive, as well as negative traits. 'Neurodiversity' is a good example of this phenomenon.

There are also ideological changes to language that lead to further change. Some will baulk at the use of the term 'disability' as it implies that someone is somehow less than the norm and will require help. Rather, they might choose to emphasise 'neurodiversity' and so, this changes the framing to less as help and more as an accommodation to people who deserve it as much as anyone else.

In such a fast-changing environment, and with an ideologically diverse group of contributors, readers will note that the language in this report is not entirely consistent. Perhaps soon, a consensus will be reached on how these meanings are communicated, but for now, Curia has respected the phrasing used by our contributors.

Working age adults

While the main effort of this Commission has been on education as the frontline in decreasing inequality for people with dyslexia, it is also necessary for other elements of the Government and the rest of society to recognise and adjust to the needs of the more than 10 per cent of the population with neurodiversity.

Foremost among these areas is the prison system, where the issues of dyslexia, stigma and low literacy levels can interact to limit people from flourishing. Another area where dyslexics can fall behind due to a lack of accommodation is the workplace, where many employers lack the understanding to make the proper adjustments to get the most from their staff.

Resources

The Commission has in general tried, wherever possible, to avoid adding to calls for increased government spending, which is not always possible or politically expedient. We have often, however, set out recommendations that will require at least the reallocation of resources.

The Commission is independent and not party political and, by and large, our recommendations are in line with stated government aims.

One area where significant progress has, and can be made without significant investment is in the increased role of technology in enabling people with dyslexia. Spell checkers, task managers and text-to-speech software are all invaluable to levelling the playing field.

This year, the Commission this year was fortunate to be sponsored by two companies producing excellent AT. Sir Linkalot uses online videos to make spelling fun using "links", small narratives that enable people to remember non-standard spelling and visualise letter order. Scanning Pens produce handheld readers that can convert text to an audio playback for those who are struggling to read text, even during exams!

Policy landscape

Throughout 2022, dyslexia and SEND policy was largely left 'in limbo' awaiting the final form of the Schools Bill and the publication of the Government's SEND delivery plan. The SEND delivery plan would mark out how the Government would proceed following the 13-week consultation on their Green Paper *SEND review: right support, right place, right time*. This was eventually published on March 2nd 2023.[3]

3 SEND Review - right support, right place, right time (publishing.service.gov.uk)
SEND and alternative provision improvement plan (publishing.service.gov.uk)

Aims of the Commission

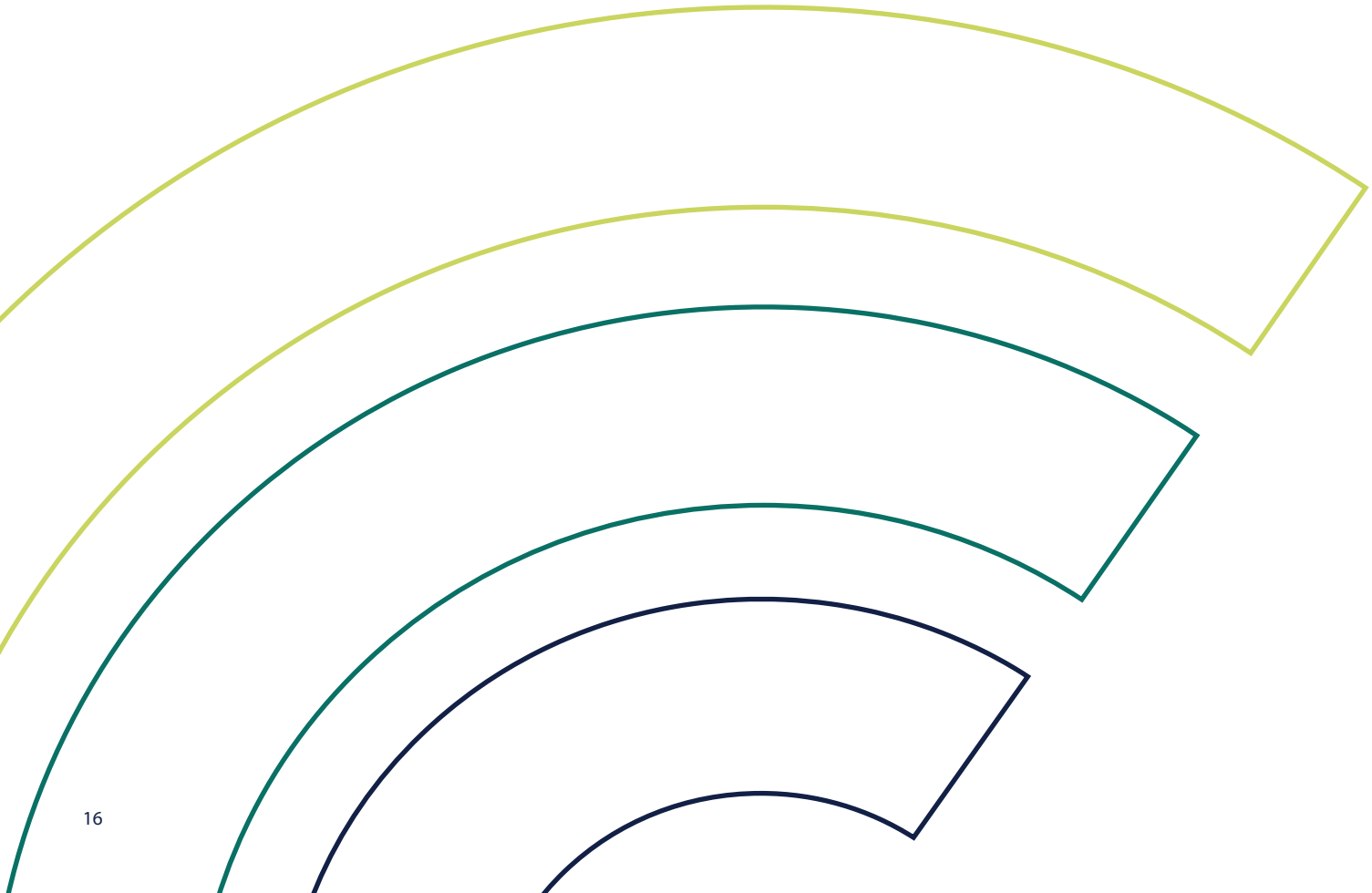
This Commission formed up by Curia to bring together a spectrum of experts - with varying perspectives on the education, political and criminal justice systems - to discuss and recommend the implementable steps towards reducing barriers to the success of dyslexic people in the UK.

In conjunction with the BDA and Hancock, Curia chose to interrogate four areas of policy and put together a host of informed contributors to attend our inquiry sessions.

The areas covered were

- Reducing inequalities
- SEND review and Schools White Paper
- Co-ordination of care
- Working age adults

At each of these inquiry sessions, expert panellists and attendees discussed solutions to the problems faced within the current systems or institutions and how those problems could be remedied for the good of people with dyslexia. These solutions were then distilled into the recommendations found in this report.





REDUCING INEQUALITIES



Chaired by former Health and Social Care Secretary, Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP, and then CEO of the BDA, Gillian Ashley, the first inquiry session of the *Dyslexia Commission* took place on 10th May 2022. This session focused on the necessary reform to teacher training and the disparity in service provision for students with dyslexia in the UK, as well as bringing together the recommendations of leaders in SEND, local/regional authorities and civil society on these issues.

Session One: Disparity in Service Provision

The first part of this inquiry session of the *Dyslexia Commission* focused on service provision. The panel for this session included

- Lord Dominic Addington, Vice Chair, Dyslexia and Other Specific Learning Difficulties All Party Parliamentary Group and President of the BDA
- Gillian Ashley, then CEO, BDA
- Dr Helen Ross, Trustee, BDA and Chair, Wiltshire Dyslexia Association

Infrastructural requirements

The first session of the inquiry session focused on existing infrastructural disparities in education and training for children with SEND within the education system in England. What has been gaining recognition at a policy level is that not all children learn in the same way. This was highlighted through Lord Dominic Addington's example of systematic synthetic phonetics that help children learn by forming links between the sounds of spoken language and letters of written language. These phonetics are reputed to be one of the best ways to learn. However, in the discussion, this method was seen as not entirely sufficient when used as the only way to deliver teaching to children, due to its inability to address varied manifestations of learning abilities among students. The panel unanimously agreed that an increase in infrastructural investment that supports early identification and robust training to tackle these unaddressed diversities in learning difficulties was a necessary and crucial step.

Progressing the discussion, Lord Addington mentioned a poignant theme around carrying forward experiences of persons with dyslexia, not in isolation with an attitude of suffering and victimisation but as a part of a larger movement of individuals with disabilities. This was seen to empower persons with disability as a coherent group and make their demands more pressing and stronger at all levels of action.

Accounting for people with dyspraxia, ADHD and other forms of neurodiversity, in addition to dyslexia, was discussed by the panel to increase policy interventions and allow for doors to open for solutions like coaching, AT, alternative ways of teaching in classrooms, etc. These were agreed to be more cost-effective and abundantly available tools in schools and universities.

Having conducted a systematic review in 2020, Dr Helen Ross highlighted several interrelated, yet independently important, structural concerns that need addressing. These include the inadequate funding and lack of teacher training in SEND that seems to be the norm, as well as legislation and statutory guidelines, which she argued were not fit for purpose and poorly enforced. She said that the current statutory guidelines (for the SEND code of practice) do not stipulate the detail as to what is required in SEND teacher training, which is a clear indication of where the disparities in service provision begin. She urgently called for an enforcement plan that coaxes legislation to deliver on its provisions and adequately supports children with SEND needs across the UK.

> **"Policy practice guidelines that are coherent and supported by fit-for-purpose, robust content in teacher training is essential."**
>
> **– Dr Helen Ross**

As chair, Hancock supported this sentiment by voicing the need for statutory guidelines for all teachers of neurodiverse students and the importance of universal screening of all students. He further necessitated focusing on lived experiences of students, especially as the pandemic heightened educational inequalities and exacerbated them for individuals with special educational needs. Another important step highlighted by the chair was a commitment to improve data to evaluate progress, highlight areas of concern and showcase tangible development in the school system.

> **"What gets measured gets managed."**
>
> **– Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP**

Importance of early intervention and assessment needs

A key theme that emerged from the session was that accessing assessments was a crucial barrier to improving the experiences and development of dyslexic children.

> **"Accessing assessments is the biggest issue." [4]**
>
> **– Gillian Ashley**

With the undeniable importance of assessment, Ashley pointed out how the cost-of-living crisis has taken a toll on schools that initially bore the burden of providing assessment to students. With inflation, trade-off decisions - such as buying exercise books versus investing resources in a small number of students with learning disabilities - becomes difficult for schools, who then transfer the burden to parents. Parents, often unable to carry the weight of this burden, find it difficult to pay for assessment for their children. This consequently results in an outcome where large numbers of students remain undiagnosed within the education system, resulting in poor prospects for future employment.

> **"Largely because it is not a medicalised model, the emphasis is on education having to provide assessments in schools. It is not a shared cost across health."**
>
> **– Gillian Ashley**

Dr Ross notably pointed out that 80 per cent of dyslexic students were undiagnosed according to a 2018 study.[5] This reiterated the focus on early intervention as a crucial policy area and the subject was highlighted by both panellists and attendees.[6]

The panel progressed its discussion on improving access to intervention for early identification and screening, as well as creating a robust framework for the same. This discussion sprouted an important question of how dyslexia interventions can be better targeted and focused on those who need them, as opposed to being accessed only by those who can afford them.

A comprehensive response from Dr Ross and Lord Addington focused on the structural issues that lie behind the debate on screening. The first element of the response focused on a lack of resources - whether manual, physical or technological - that are still lacking in schools. The second element emphasised the need for educating teachers on alternate practices of schooling and moving away from "the right way" of teaching - be it through the use of AT, diverse ways of allotting and assessing the work of students, and varied ways of assessing needs.

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4 The BDA has since changed their stance and believe that lack of awareness and understanding in how to identify support is the most pressing issue facing individuals, schools, families and organisations dealing with dyslexia.

5 This figure comes from calculating the number of children listed as having special learning disabilities (SpLD) as their 'main' need in the population of England schools that are identified as having SEND but are not provided with support. The baseline figures for the calculation draw on NHS data that estimates 10 per cent of the population having dyslexia. Dyslexia - NHS (www.nhs.uk)

6 On this topic, one of the audience members, Angela Fawcett, Emeritus Professor, Swansea University strongly emphasised the importance of early screening. This puts structures in place that can support children by identifying risk factors early on in the education process as opposed to later stages where intervention may hold relatively lesser influential power.

> **Unless you invest in at least some awareness about a child and knowing what you don't do-don't give them extra work and tests and you work a little smarter and you tell a teacher it's okay to do that-that is the approach you need to be taking on board. The idea that there is a "right form" of teaching is the battle."**
>
> **– Lord Addington**

Following this, a question directed to the role of AT was posed by the executive director of children's services at Dorset Council, Theresa Leavy. Importantly, Ms Ashley highlighted how technology poverty for students and parents was made obvious during Covid-19 and proposed that the Government continue with the support it provided during the pandemic, into the long term. Dr Ross reiterated this view and argued that many schools had the existing AT in their devices but lacked the knowledge to utilise it in the SEND context.

Discussion on how we define dyslexia

Lastly, a discussion began around the importance of defining dyslexia. The panellists generally agreed on the need to have a consensus in definition to allow for actionable plans at the legislative level. A working definition was appropriate in that it sets out generally accepted parameters and allows for policies to be formulated in a targeted and scalable fashion.

An important point was raised by Dr Craig Collinson, on the norms and social attitudes towards literacy being problematic. This was due to their streamlined rigid definitions, which often engage in the process of 'othering' those with dyslexia due to normative education practices that do not tend to dyslexic individuals as a minority group. These streamlined definitions are further enforced by policies that do not cater to neurodivergent students. Dr Collinson added that this creates a vicious cycle, where neurodiversity and SEND are not addressed adequately since they are not grasped in their entirety in a socio-political atmosphere that defines and designs education for largely the mainstream brain and doesn't focus on the diversity of experiences among those with dyslexia. This is seen to be a problem in a system where no two individuals with dyslexia may have the same experiences but are grouped together under definitions that do not attend to their individual lived experiences.

Key recommendations from the panel

- **Teach students about different learning styles -** by acknowledging and raising awareness of the different ways in which pupils learn in classrooms, and having in place a coherent infrastructure that assists students with multiple needs, education institutions can better practice inclusivity in teaching practices. A practical way that this can be done at the individual, school and Government level is by addressing structural problems of finance, resources,and statutory guidelines by better enforcing existing SEND statutory guidelines that are in place to support children with SEND across the UK.
- **Increase screening to increase early intervention -** a lack of medicalisation of the SEND support model has led to costs of screening being placed on parents and schools, as opposed to being shared across healthcare. Thus, when schools are hard hit by costs, this burden falls on parents, heightening inequalities in accessing screening. Improving legislation that helps the costs of screening to be shared across different stakeholders can be seen as a possible avenue forward.
- **Spread education technology and teacher training to use it -** training that incorporates the understanding of existing technological tools that are at the disposal of teachers and make learning easier and more accessible to students, can help improve learning outcomes among children with SEND. Additionally, in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, governments should continue to aid in reducing technological disparities and poverty among students.



Session Two: Teacher Training and Culture

The second part of this *Dyslexia Commission* inquiry session focused on teacher training and reforms to culture. The panel for this session included

- Julia Clouter, Head of Education Scanning Pens, Succeed with Dyslexia Ambassador
- Kelly Parkin, Specialist Teacher, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
- Tricia Sterling, Executive Dean, Faculty of Education, Newman University
- Alison Szalay, Specialist Advisory Teacher, Wiltshire County Council

Holistic response

A key theme that was made apparent during the second section of the inquiry session was the need for reform at every stage of the support process for children with dyslexia. Julia Clouter highlighted these issues were present within teacher awareness of SEND, early intervention provisions, support available once children had been identified and a continual review of the development of these children.

> **"I absolutely agree with everybody that it has to be a mandatory thing that everybody, before they set foot in a classroom, has training on all of the neurodiversity areas."**
>
> **– Kelly Parkin**

Alison Szalay mentioned steps that can be taken in addition to assessment and screening that help make schools dyslexia friendly. While an effective aspect of dyslexia-friendly schools is identifying children with additional needs, she highlighted that assessment does not serve "as an end in itself" for supporting children. A key recommendation outlined by Szalay was for schools to move towards dyslexia-friendly status, either through formal BDA quality mark accreditation or in a general principal commitment to high-quality inclusive practice across the range of ability and need. This recommendation was discussed to help improve access to learning by focusing on effective intervention and involved working with parents and carers. These strategies in schools were seen to make the biggest difference in terms of helping students have a better understanding of their own learning process, being able to help themselves and being able to view themselves more positively.

Citing a project across eighteen primary and secondary Wiltshire schools to become more inclusive and achieve the BDA quality mark, Szalay highlighted strategies beyond screening that were important to improve schools' understanding of dyslexia and positively impact the achievement and engagement of dyslexic learners in schools. These included a strong commitment from schools and a review of approaches in monitoring and the assessment of performances of children with SEND, in tandem with allowing students to access all aspects of the curriculum and monitoring the ongoing progress of these students.

> **"It is taking those underlying principles that underpin dyslexia friendly schools, essentially effective, good practice that I do believe needs to be the way forward."**
>
> **– Alison Szalay**

Stigma

Embedding additional learning support into mainstream forms of teaching was advocated by Clouter, who emphasised the importance of a 'toolbox approach' to change the landscape for learners with literacy difficulties. She said that this is proven to help students with SEN at earlier stages of education. This approach could enable diagnosed and undiagnosed children to self-select resources within a classroom to aid their learning style through tools that support them most effectively. On the topic of stigma, Kelly Parkin raised an important point from her own work with students facing exclusions, that supporting children before their self-esteem dropped was crucial to their development. It was noted that these 'toolbox approaches' should be embedded in the earliest phase of schooling to tackle the stigma faced by dyslexic children. Furthermore, by encouraging all students to access these resources, dyslexic children are less likely to be ostracised by their differences.

Empowering teachers

Considering the issue of funding and connectivity, Clouter highlighted that these resources did not necessarily need to be high-tech, or rely on connectivity, but it was crucial that teachers were aware of the resources available to them and how to implement them. This would allow tools to be used more universally across the country and for children who do not have access to the Internet at home.

Clouter explained that when providing teacher training to develop the toolbox approach, the use of this strategy is particularly effective when the toolbox contains a range of AT, such as MP3 devices to support reading and comprehension of the class reading books and ReaderPens to support decoding of words and providing immediate text to speech support for reading materials. Also, programable buttons that support the development of speech sounds and build confident responses by allowing opportunities to practice speaking and listening. When teachers adopt the approach of modelling the use of these helpful tools as part of their normal way of teaching, learners adapt their learning approaches to accommodate the strategies that are being modelled.

It was further discussed that ensuring mandatory training of all teachers in the understanding of neurodiverse conditions in a classroom was imperative. In addition to this, improving their understanding of the use of such assistive tools is essential in the short term to improve and positively impact long-term education outcomes in school. Parkin echoed this point, stating that training for teachers should empower them with the knowledge of each tool and how it can be used to best support different needs.

There is a gap that exists between the resources available to teachers and the ability and knowledge to access them. On this point, Clouter highlighted that teachers could develop skills that bridge these gaps through the extensive and high-quality continued professional development (CPD) resources available - with examples of reputable AT companies, such as Scanning Pens, MatchWare, and CricketSoft, and organisations like the BDA and others also included. Encouraging more teachers to access the available resources and connect them with teacher training providers can connect high-quality resources and teachers who are eager to develop their understanding.

Tensions in training

There were clear tensions between the hopes of what teacher training could achieve and the feasibility. This was outlined by Tricia Sterling, who offered insight from a university perspective. She highlighted that whilst there was a possibility to include this in-depth learning opportunity within the full training course, this did not seem possible within a nine-month post-graduate course. Unfortunately, within the ITT criteria, two-thirds of the training took place within schools, which is a theme that is being urged by the Government. This leaves an immense amount of pressure on schools to provide the training that teachers desperately need to understand children and the needs for their development. Working within the limited time restraints in university, Stirling mentioned an example of best practice within Newman University, where they have established pre-course modules on child development and SEND needs to ensure their students are trained on more than how to manage a classroom.

As the panel turned to ways of improving the tensions within teacher training, an important question that arose from a class teacher at Church Preen Primary School, Kate Ross, was how teachers can be better prepared to deliver the national curriculum in a meaningful way that ensures that dyslexic children can reach the same age-related expectations as their peers. Szalay offered five key areas to consider improving this:

1. For pupils to excel, teachers need to have a higher level of awareness of pupils, including their strengths, interests and what they want to improve.
2. In differentiated learning for students who have varied requirements, teaching needs to be relevant and at an appropriate level for that pupil, whilst also challenging the individual.
3. Minimising barriers to accessing the curriculum, with an increased focus on independence.
4. Additional targeted intervention to help pupils accelerate their learning, as evidenced by the Greg Brooks documents[7] and Education Endowment Foundation[8].
5. Assessment and measuring students against age-related expectations or other assessments are not the only indication of progress.

7 Brooks's What Works for Literacy Difficulties? (theschoolpsychologyservice.com)

8 Education Endowment Foundation | EEF

> **"We need to be really careful that we try to help people's access to assessments, but also that we don't disadvantage them by the type of assessments that we use."**
>
> **– Alison Szalay**

Szalay strongly emphasised supporting the pupil in the direction of their learning and encouraged teachers to consider the hopes and aims of dyslexic children to provide personalised support to assist these children in achieving their goals.

Key recommendations from the panel

- **Ensure SEND support throughout education -** Merely screening in early years and relying on the output data to provide support to dyslexic children can be seen as a limiting measure. Instead, aiding screening with other measures further on during the timeline of the child's education can prove to be beneficial for students. As such, focusing on practices that make schools dyslexia-friendly by following the BDA quality mark accreditation scheme, empowers students to better understand their disability and needs, engages parents in the dialogue of assistance and care, and increases the understanding of dyslexia among teachers.
- **Use a 'toolbox approach' to deliver an inclusive learning environment -** to incorporate diversity in learning needs among all students, classrooms should be equipped with learning 'toolboxes' made available to teachers and students to use during the teaching and learning process. Allowing students to self-select resources from these 'toolboxes' will help to empower them in meeting their own needs in the learning process and prevent feelings of isolation and exclusion that arise when neurodivergent pupils are side-lined in classrooms that employ rigid teaching tools according to the mainstream norms.
- **Empower teachers by training them on tools SEND students will need -** empowering teachers by training them in the use of school 'toolboxes', as well as AT, creates environments where teaching can employ more efficient and inclusive practices. This has a trickle-down effect, where teachers pass on this information to students who can then learn to use each tool to their advantage and become self-equipped both inside and outside the classroom in their learning process. Teachers should also be upskilled to understand in-depth strengths and interests of their pupils. Coupled with this, making the curriculum more approachable and understandable to neurodivergent students, and conducting assessments based on criteria other than age-related expectations, can prove to be equally beneficial.



Session Three: Schools White Paper and SEND Review[9]

The final part of the inquiry session focused on the main points and areas of concern within the Schools White Paper and the SEND Review Green Paper. The presenter for this section was

- Jo Hutchinson, Director for Social Mobility and Vulnerable Learners, Education Policy Institute

The White Paper and its provisions

On the topic of the White Paper plans, one of the key ideas highlighted as challenging was a proposal for 90 per cent of children to reach literacy and numeracy standards. These unrealistic targets are an area of concern, as they are either ignored or tend to further exclude dyslexic children from mainstream schools and into specialist schools - which are heavily oversubscribed. The Government proposed that interventions would be made available for children who fall short of this trajectory. A promising aspect of this intervention was that it would be made available to students regardless of their diagnosis, which would be beneficial in reducing the stigma faced by students with SEND needs. Hutchinson highlighted a financial concern echoed earlier in the session regarding the requirement in these interventions for additional staff, training and resources, as well as the current absence of detail around funding these interventions by the Government.

9 This write up and the corresponding sessions were held prior to the Government scrapping the Schools Bill 2022. The views presented in this section are thus aligned with earlier legislative decisions that have since changed.

> **“If you set unrealistic targets, one of two things happens to them. Either everyone soon forgets about them, and we all move on, or they tend sometimes to drive the exclusion of children or the pushing of children into more specialist placements because mainstream schools know they cannot meet those targets.”**
>
> **– Jo Hutchinson**

A focus on the personal, social and emotional development of these students was highlighted by the panel as an important step to drive down inequalities between the progress of children, irrespective of whether they are dyslexic or not. This was outlined by Hutchinson as imperative, considering that the difficulties faced by SEND students are often exacerbated by a system that is ill-equipped to support them.

The Green Paper and its provisions

Within the SEND Green Paper, Hutchinson's view reflected initial optimism regarding the Government's proposed national framework of standards as a step towards ensuring that all students with SEND are provided equal treatment and opportunity. However, according to Hutchinson, the current system of 152 varied local authority provisions requires stricter protocols in terms of monitoring and assessing local special needs provision. This move could certainly narrow the postcode lottery gap and ensure that all students have the same opportunity to access assessments and support for their needs. To generate the framework, Hutchinson mentioned that the Government is aiming to codify what parents can expect from schools and local authorities. This proposal empowers parents of children with SEND needs to articulate what they require for their child so that they can be supported in the school system. However, Hutchinson highlighted that this would be a challenging task to fulfil, considering that the Government aims to outline the assessment and support for each specific need and disability.

To deliver these national standards, the panel further moved on to discuss the Department for Education's (DfE's) proposal to bring all planning and accountability centrally within a new group called the Department for Education Regions Group, which would regulate schools through new statutory academy trust standards.

A significant portion of the Bill is a push for all remaining schools to join a multi-academy trust (MAT), which will be regulated by the DfE's new statutory academy trust standards, which will have a portion dedicated to the inclusion of children with special educational needs. With this, the Government aims to merge the split between schools currently under two different forms of governance, which could make government regulation more universally effective. However, Hutchinson's own research highlighted that primary schools within MATs are, on average, less likely to identify children as having SEND. Her research, therefore, highlighted that in setting the new standards, it is critical that the Government commits to the crucial stand of increasing provisions highlighted in the SEND Green Paper. This would increase the level of complex needs that could be tackled by mainstream school provision, without pushing children into specialist institutions or alternative provisions.

Hutchinson also discussed a significant lack of focus on personal, social and emotional development in the Green Paper. The paper primarily focuses on learning difficulties, literacy and numeracy. The paper does not recognise the extent to which children may have social and emotional difficulties separate from such learning difficulties and that they may be struggling in a system that does not focus on these issues. What is to be monitored, according to Hutchinson, is whether schools would implement reasonable adjustments as a response to those that may clash with their behavioural policies or standard curriculum offers.



> **“Struggling within a system that’s not recognising and supporting them (children with SEND) may, in many cases, cause those difficulties and exacerbate those difficulties.”**
>
> **– Jo Hutchinson**

Hutchinson also threw light on another challenge in the Green Paper around cost neutrality. To elaborate, within the current system, early intervention for children with dyslexia is seen when they begin reception classes. Given England’s metrics, these classes are seen as an international outlier. Since formal education is started earlier than in other countries, a larger number of children are bunched together in reception classes. This increases the burden on teachers, where such overpopulated classes that are inadequately matched with understaffed and poorly trained teachers, further increasing the overhead costs in the system. Hutchinson also highlighted the present neglect around mental health in the Green Paper.

Teacher training

On the topic of teacher training, Hutchinson highlighted that there is a proposal to boost SEND and early years practitioner training, which was a recommendation strongly suggested during the teacher training section of this inquiry session. However, the skills challenge for the teaching workforce is significant and ensuring that teachers have a rich knowledge of child development will not be an easy feat. The UK teaching workforce is relatively inexperienced due to a high turnover and fewer qualified teachers with master’s degrees. To tackle this, core requirements for the ITT must include dyslexia and SEND inclusion more frequently and with more depth.

In analysing the interrelated impact of different legislations, an important question linking provisions of higher education with the requirements for dyslexia arose from Emeritus Professor at Swansea University and Research Consultant for Dyslexia Association of Singapore, Angela Fawcett, about how the changes in rules on minimum English and mathematics entry requirements to university were going to discriminate against potential dyslexic university students. Hutchinson recommended two ways in which this policy could be more inclusive:

1. Those designated as requiring special access arrangements for exams could have a lower grade requirement, or an exception from the requirement altogether.

2. Taking this a step further, consideration should be given to the amount of emphasis placed on marks awarded for punctuation and grammar, considering the AT available in work environments.

These solutions would not only benefit dyslexic and SEND children but also students from low socio-economic backgrounds or those who do not have the vocabulary to express themselves. The discussion ended on a note that delved into the need for contextually assessing guidelines on entry requirements, i.e. understanding when they are required and other times when they become regressive for SEND children, as a step forward towards the inclusion of diverse educational needs and assessment standards.

Key recommendations from the Panel

- **Proactively identify mental health needs as part of education -** emphasising a holistic approach towards a student's learning process is imperative in an educational landscape where neurodivergent students are ill-equipped with adequate learning structures. The urgency to outline NHS plans that cover mental health support for children and adolescents across the country is paramount.

- **Strict enforcement of SEND Code of Practice legislation guidelines -** stronger enforcement of the SEND Code of Practice will minimise unlawful variations in training and provisions among local authorities and ensure that the 'postcode lottery' system is replaced by a more universal approach to SEND provision. This will also help reduce the instances where parents feel required to go to tribunals to get the support they need.

- **Implement in-depth dyslexia and SEND syllabus during Initial Teacher Training (ITT) -** with the essential role played by ITT in assisting children with SEND, ensuring that teachers are adequately equipped with the knowledge of the needs of the children is imperative. As such, engaging in understanding dyslexia and SEND at the training level can better prepare teachers for early identification and assistance during the entire education process.

- **Replace some exams with an individual assessment for neurodivergent students -** to increase equal opportunity in assessment and inclusivity, grade requirements for students with special needs should be re-evaluated against markers other than age-based performance indicators, as well as shifting the emphasis placed on grammar, punctuation and spelling abilities.



Debbie Hicks MBE

Creative Director, The Reading Agency

The Value of Inclusive Reading Communities

There can be no doubt about the proven power of reading. It is more important for a child's cognitive development than a parent's education, and a more powerful factor in life achievement than socio-economic background.[10] It is also a fundamental building block of health and happiness and really can connect children socially and emotionally with their peers, families and communities.[11]

However, reading is not easy for everyone and often, those children who need its benefits the most, find it the most difficult to access and enjoy. The Reading Agency is a national charity committed to using the proven power of reading to tackle life's big challenges: helping to build skills and learning, supporting health and wellbeing, and connecting individuals and communities. We are also committed to ensuring the benefits of reading are for everyone through our work to build inclusive reading communities accessible to all, including those who find reading difficult or who need targeted support.

Around one in five children will struggle to read and write by the age of 11 - while estimates indicate that up to 80 per cent of these children are likely to be dyslexic, not all will be diagnosed, particularly if they are from lower-income backgrounds.[12] Studies have shown that as many as 20 per cent of children with dyslexia also experience anxiety or depression.[13]

Our evidence shows that community-based, family-focused reading interventions, delivered through public libraries, can complement work in educational settings and make a significant contribution to improving a broad range of outcomes for children with dyslexia.

This is why we work hard with public libraries to deliver engaging reading that builds understanding and awareness, encourages reading confidence and language development and, most importantly of all, is a source of fun and enjoyment.

Our reading well for children and teens booklists, put together by children with lived experience and health professionals, are designed to build understanding of neurodiversity, promote mental health and combat stigma through accessible health information, personal stories and fiction. They include brilliant books by brilliant authors and are available for free in public libraries in a range of formats and genres to support access for all. Some books are specifically written with dyslexic readers in mind and the collections as a whole are endorsed by the BDA.

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10 Sullivan and Brown (2013) Social inequalities in cognitive scores at age 16: The role of reading

11 Hilhorst, et al. (2018) A Society of Readers, Demos

12 DfE (2015) Reading: the next steps; British Dyslexia Association (2019) Educational cost of dyslexia, Report from the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Dyslexia and other SpLDs

13 UCL and the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families (2020) Dyslexia and allied reading difficulties and their relationship with mental health problems: A rapid review of evidence, Children and Families Policy Research Unit; British Dyslexia Association (2019) The human cost of dyslexia: The emotional and psychological impact of poorly supported dyslexia, Report from the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Dyslexia and other SpLDs

The summer reading challenge is the biggest out-of-school reading for pleasure programme in the UK, providing free and fun summer reading activity in public libraries. Materials are accessible and inclusive, and the supporting book collection always aims to include dyslexia-friendly titles and books accessible to children with specific learning differences. And kids love it - all 700,000 of them! As one mother of a daughter with dyslexia shared last year, "The Reading Challenge has been so amazing and helped so much to push her reading. […] She is more confident in class […] It shows reading really does help."[14] This year's challenge will be coming to libraries again this summer - look out for the character with dyslexia providing a positive role model to engage children with reading.

So, what do we feel are the secrets of success in building inclusive reading communities that empower and engage all children? Firstly, understanding needs, through targeted co-production work with children and families, is fundamental to the delivery of interventions that are both authentic and effective. Book selection that provides range and choice in content and format is also key.[15] Interest pathways are an important way into reading - just because a child has dyslexia, it doesn't mean that they only want to read one type of book in one type of format. Reading apps and e-readers help make content accessible; picture and graphic content can also be helpful and audiobooks are a gateway into stories, helping children to actively listen and learn new words, escape into new worlds, and try out new ideas and perspectives.[16]

Absolutely nothing beats being read to or sharing reading with others in families, with friends or in reading groups. All the evidence shows that books are made for sharing, whatever our age. Reading together in families, libraries and classrooms builds confidence and engagement, builds empathy and understanding, develops vocabulary and language, and fosters social connectivity. It is also great fun![17]

We want everyone to enjoy the benefits of reading. Get in touch to find out more about our work at info@readingagency.org.uk

14 The Reading Agency (2022) Summer Reading Challenge Annual Report: Gadgeteers

15 Cremin and Moss (2018) 'Reading for Pleasure: Supporting reader engagement', Literacy 52(2); Education Standards Research Team (2012) Research evidence on reading for pleasure, Department for Education

16 Schneps, et al. (2013) 'E-Readers Are More Effective than Paper for Some with Dyslexia', PLoS ONE 8(9); Best (2020) Audiobooks and literacy, National Literacy Trust

17 Hilhorst, et al. (2018) A Society of Readers, Demos; Q-W Xie, et al. (2018) 'Psychosocial Effects of Parent-Child Book Reading Interventions: A Meta-Analysis', Pediatrics, 141(4); Marmot, et al. (2011) Fair society, healthy lives, Strategic review of health inequalities in England post-2010; Egmont (2019), Children's Reading for Pleasure: trends and challenges



CO-ORDINATION OF CARE



British Dyslexia Association's 50th Anniversary Celebration in the House of Lords, November 2022

Chaired by Matt Hancock and the former Deputy National Medical Director of NHS England, Professor Mike Bewick, the second inquiry session of the *Dyslexia Commission* took place on July 12th, 2022. This session focused on the correlation and experiences of people diagnosed with dyslexia whilst simultaneously having complex care needs.

The first part of this session focused on how the co-ordination of care for multiple needs can ultimately be better integrated within the existing system that provides support to dyslexic persons. The second session furthered this discussion, exploring the ways in which the representation of dyslexic persons can be increased within the new ICSs. In the Health and Care Act 2022, ICSs were granted statutory status, making them formal bodies with power over NHS commissioning and spending at the local level. The panellists drew on their discussion from this relatively newly granted status to the ICSs and discussed how they could beneficially transform the assistance available to dyslexic persons. Having existed in shadow form for a number of years before receiving statutory status, ICSs have helped people with learning disabilities and autism by tackling unequal outcomes and resource access.

The last section of the session developed the conversation to explore what pioneering technologies are available for dyslexic people. This section focused on ways that can help increase how the accessibility and uptake of such AT by dyslexic persons.

The discussion in this session was pursued with the aim of increasing conversation and awareness around problems pursuant to the co-ordination of care for dyslexic people, with a key focus on attaining recommendations for the problems discussed.

Session One: Co-Ordination of Care

The first half of this inquiry session of the *Dyslexia Commission* focused on the co-ordination of care. The panellist for this session was

- Claire Thomas, Head of Therapy, The Levels School

Neurodivergence, mental health services and counsellor training

The session began with a discussion by Claire Thomas around mental health. One of the key themes that emerged from this section of this session pertained to the issues around neurodivergent children receiving suitable mental health plans for their individual needs. A vital concern that arose from this discussion was the inefficiency of CAMHS appointments for children who are dyslexic with co-occurring needs.

Thomas discussed the prevalence of language difficulties among dyslexic people, stating that 50 per cent of dyslexic individuals have an additional language disorder that remains undiagnosed due to a lack of speech therapists. She said that this makes dyslexic students with co-occurring needs harder to identify. In linking mental health to dyslexia, she noted that when therapy is, in fact, provided for dyslexia and co-occurring needs, it is delivered in the form of CBT, which relies heavily on language skills and abilities. As such, therapy based on language becomes difficult to access for people who have language-based difficulties to begin with.

> **"The provision our children were being given when they got their CAMHS appointments relied on CBT, which relies on language abilities...we are lucky we have an art therapy teacher starting in September so that we can do the mental health work without focusing on language."**
>
> **– Claire Thomas**

In addition to issues concerning mental health plans for neurodivergent children, it was highlighted by Thomas that mental health counsellors across the board fail to deliver "adequate plans for people living with neurodiversity" due to their lack of familiarity with the wide-ranging needs of neurodiverse persons.

Thus, to make mental health plans suitable, the discussion concluded with the view that schemes adopted by mental health facilities not only need to be modified for neurodivergent people but that counsellors should be required to undergo in-depth training to identify neurodiverse conditions among students.

> **"Counsellors across the board need to have extensive training in neurodiversity, not only so that they can refer on in case they notice a neurodiverse condition that has not been diagnosed, but also so they can modify their counselling, if they need to, to make it accessible for children with neurodiversity."**
>
> **– Claire Thomas**

The importance of this was not to establish counsellors as a secondary port of referral but to also create internal, distinct and long-term change to how intensively mental health counsellors deliver their services. This was done with the view of delivering greater forms of accessible mental health provision for neurodivergent children.[18]

Thomas provided the session with an example of a project running at her own school, called 'owning your neurodiversity', which provides neurodiverse students with the tools to understand their neurodiversity better, reach out for help to their peers, understand the laws in place that provide support and understand workplace requirements for future employment.

Accessibility and usefulness of Education Health and Care Plans

Within the present SEND support system provided by local authorities, to receive an EHCP, a child is required to have a co-occurring need in addition to dyslexia, since dyslexia is generally well catered for through SEND support in schools. On this topic of accessibility of EHCP for dyslexic children with co-occurring needs, Thomas highlighted two simultaneous issues at play.

The first was that despite the development of social awareness and progressive views of dyslexia in schools, the accessibility of diagnosis is remarkedly harder for young people navigating the educational system. With educational psychologists playing a critical role in performing dyslexia diagnosis, Thomas stated that since the pandemic, standardised testing by educational psychologists as a part of the local authority EHCP assessments has significantly diminished.

It was emphasised further that among educational psychologists, the current practices involved phone calls to parents to gather a general understanding of what is happening to their children, as opposed to a face-to-face diagnosis. This has resulted in children with dyslexia not being diagnosed anymore, further leading to significantly weaker EHCPs being provided, due to performing inadequate and improper diagnoses.

> **"The parents who can fund extensive assessments and their case in tribunals win the specialist provision. There is a huge postcode lottery for the children who do get the right care and plans and the ones who don't."**
>
> **– Claire Thomas**

Such practices provoke a fundamental question. If educational psychologists are merely speaking to the parents of the child, how can they attain an adequate picture of the child's needs?

The second issue surrounding EHCPs delved into the length of time it takes for children to be given any form of planning provisions for their education. The routine maximum length of time for EHCPs should involve a 20-week turnaround, however, Thomas remarked that at The Levels School, this process has been extended to more than "a year and a half".

A key contribution by an attendee in the audience discussed the ramifications of such weak EHCPs. The attendee explained that due to the reduced resources available at their son's primary school, teachers were regularly taking her son out of the classroom. This resulted in increased labelling and bullying of her son by peers, which led to her son being "unable to take SATs exams" as he was too far behind his peers.

Notably, teachers believed that there was a key risk of the attendee's son's mental health being significantly negatively impacted if he had taken the exams. It is apparent that the consequences of not having the early intervention of suitable educational plans, systematically, is one of the chief contributors to increasing mental health difficulties for neurodivergent children.

18 In addition, addressing the service delivery of counsellors, the BDA also proposes that a lack of funding and of specialist practitioners are issues that simultaneously need to be addressed and improved.

Teacher training and GPs in early dyslexia diagnosis

The discussion progressed on the impact of a lack of teacher training and awareness on children with co-occurring needs. The discussion expressed wider concerns, not only around the small number of specialist teachers for diagnosis but the sizeable number of children with co-occurring needs. With Thomas having mentioned that 50 per cent of dyslexic children in her school live with additional language difficulties, the limited knowledge, skills and training acquired by teaching staff in neurodivergence presents a key issue in the classroom. This is because teachers fail to deliver a curated and tailored curriculum and lesson plan that will be inclusive of the learning needs of dyslexic children.

With dyslexia having been largely outside the domain of GPs, Chair Professor Bewick highlighted a lack of a role for GPs in the domain of early dyslexia diagnosis, while asserting the need for GPs to have clear and defined roles within the new ICS for individuals with dyslexia and co-occurring needs.

This observation and recommendation is important since the focus of this session is not only on dyslexia but also on co-occurring needs that occur in tandem with dyslexia. Incorporating ICS support for these difficulties can significantly benefit neurodivergent persons. This isn't to imply that early diagnosis for dyslexia cannot take place without GPs but rather that GPs should be included in the early diagnosis process for better diagnostic and medical assistance.

During the panel discussion, it was apparent that in the conversation of co-ordination of care, specifically for people with dyslexia and cooccurring needs, GPs who do not have a specialised background in the field of neurodivergence do not have co-ordination of care on their agenda. Expanding on the point raised by Thomas, Professor Bewick stated that postcode lotteries also influence the amount to which GPs can offer early diagnosis and medical assistance for neurodivergent children. It was emphasised that due to there being no existing national educational curriculum for GPs, assistance given by GPs for people with dyslexia has been "non-collaboratory and heavily inconsistent".

For this to be achieved, it was emphasised that GPs should have a clear and defined role to better assist in early intervention, screening and prescribing treatment for people accessing the health sector who are neurodivergent and have other complex care needs that can receive assistance via the medical system. According to Professor Bewick, this would go a long way in increasing societal advantages and bringing neurodiverse individuals, who have largely been excluded, within the system. The role of GPs has been further discussed in the second section.

Key recommendations from the panel

- **Better targeting Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) for neurodivergent children -** a reconfiguration of the service delivery system among mental health counsellors is imperative so that incorporation of a wider variety of mental health support is undertaken to reach all students who currently cannot benefit from CBT due to its reliance on language abilities. Improving the familiarity of counsellors with wide-ranging neurodiverse issues will help them produce and target therapies alternate/in addition to CBT. Looking into alternatives to speech therapy, such as art therapy, as taken up at The Levels School, has proven to be beneficial.
- **Improve and properly resource the diagnostic services of educational psychologists -** underperformance of education psychologists as a part of local authority standardised EHCP assessments has reduced the number of standardised tests taking place, thereby significantly reducing dyslexia diagnosis and giving rise to postcode lottery systems of diagnosis and intervention accessibility. Enforcing stricter and targeted government protocols that increase funding to local authorities can help provide education psychologists, who are better equipped with tools and methods of standardised testing. This can help address the concerns of a large majority of dyslexic students who remain undiagnosed.
- **Give GPs a greater say in early diagnosis -** increasing the role that GPs play in providing diagnosis and prescription for early intervention, as well as putting co-ordination of care on their agenda, is key in bringing together social systems, be it in education, health or community support, to help children with dyslexia. Within ICSs, the co-ordination of delivery of services, not just with care but with education, is integral. Allocating GPs with clearly defined roles and action plans for targeted diagnosis is important.



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Session Two: Integration of Care Systems

The second half of the session focused on the strategies for the integration of care systems that can accommodate dyslexic people. This was comprised of three fundamental concerns: reading inequality, the role of GPs specifically in addressing health inequalities, and the impacts of poverty and trauma on neurodiverse people. The panel for this session included

- Debbie Hicks MBE, Creative Director and Founder, The Reading Agency
- Dr Ruth Bromley, Former Chair, Manchester Health & Care Commissioning

Tackling reading inequality

One of the central themes discussed in the second half of the inquiry session concerned ways in which reading inequalities can be addressed and overcome for people, namely for neurodivergent young people and adults. In this section, the points put forward by both panellists touched on current central practices being adopted and the way these could be used to foster an ICS that coordinates care pathways, with organisations doing the work to assist neurodivergent people.

Debbie Hicks discussed the seminal practices undertaken at her organisation, The Reading Agency, to tackle general reading inequalities. This included a national 'reading for pleasure' programme delivered at scale through public libraries, in partnership with schools, colleges and prisons. Hicks stated that the central way in which reading inequality may be tackled is via such evidenced based strategies for dyslexic students, which are needs - focused and quality assured. Specific to people living with dyslexia, she highlighted the success of the creation of reading lists developed specifically for young people living with dyslexia.

> **"Co-production is key to ensure that we are meeting real need and real change."**
>
> **– Debbie Hicks MBE**

Targeting support where it is needed most, Hicks emphasises the importance of such programmes in building understanding of mental health and neurodiversity among dyslexic young adults and combatting stigma through people's discussion of their shared experiences. In this aspect, the development of a robust curated reading list, co-produced with health professionals and people with experience of dyslexia, was highlighted to be important. The importance of co-production was seen in its ability to bridge the nuances and variations between professional perspectives on appropriate dyslexia support and the experiences of frontline users.

Hicks noted that despite accessible books and resources, it was of central importance for dyslexic children to have spaces available in which they can have access to such resources and materials that seek to overcome illiteracy and poor attainment.

> **"Evidence shows that targeted community and family focused - reading activity can complement work in educational settings and can make a real contribution to improving outcomes for children with dyslexia and SEND needs."** [19]
>
> **– Debbie Hicks MBE**

Hicks went on to give a practical example of how reading organisations may increase inclusivity and uptake of their work by dyslexic people. Hicks referenced a time in which a young dyslexic person raised concern about the colour background and the font of a book that the Reading Agency was utilising, stating that it was not equally accessible to her. As a result of this, The Reading Agency acted:

> **"We chose another title and fed back to the publishers, who immediately agreed to make changes."**
>
> **– Debbie Hicks MBE**

In doing this, Hicks emphasised a need for literacy organisations to readily develop and mould the output of materials for people with additional reading needs. In referencing the work by The Reading Agency, she went on to call for a wider message of co-production between organisations that tackle educational inequality for neurodivergent people and clinical providers for ICSs to design and produce a coherent care plan.

GPs and health inequality

As discussed in the first section of the session, where Professor Bewick called for more support of GPs for neurodivergent children, in the second session, Dr Ruth Bromley reflected on the ways in which she, as a GP, has attempted to mould an optimal service for her neurodivergent patients with co-occurring needs. In her former role as Head of Manchester Health Care & Care Commissioning, she led on health resource allocation.

19 It is important to note that the responsibility of providing such support lies on educational institutions. Relying on parents to provide support to dyslexic children may exacerbate socioeconomic inequalities as parents from low-income households may not have the means or skills to support dyslexic children who are suffering.

> **"One in ten children have dyslexia and 30 per cent of those children will have another co-occurring condition. As a GP, that resonates into my population. Poverty in particular impacts people's ability to access support."**
>
> **– Dr Ruth Bromley**

In adopting this position on the role played by poverty, Dr Bromley emphasised that the access to care pathways for dyslexic people and other neurodivergences relies heavily on their upbringing and socio-economic status. She raised that it was particularly difficult to deliver solutions for patients when other issues were at play; these issues being grounded in socio-economic deprivation. Dr Bromley elaborated that when such socioeconomic issues were "an overwhelming factor", they often made the understanding of the condition worse for two reasons.

First, patients experiencing socioeconomic deprivation typically have a limited understanding of their condition due to the minimal resources available for them to gain a diagnosis. Secondly, Dr Bromley stated that young patients who come from households that have difficult relationships with local authorities may not see GPs and other local authorities as a port of trust to begin the steps of accessing support for their condition.

Dr Bromley gave the example that patients who present with ADHD and other SEND needs who come from poorer economic deciles, typically present with worse and often additional difficulties, which heightens learning difficulties. She called for the new ICS to reflect the weight of negative socioeconomic backgrounds for patients with neurodivergences and to address socioeconomic deprivation within their plan of action to better serve the needs of patients.

Poverty, trauma and neurodiversity

Head of Education at Microlink,[20] Marius Frank, a panellist for AT in Session Three, expanded on the points raised by Dr Bromley by stating that better partnership work must be the focus of local authorities. He argued that this will help local authorities begin to appreciate complex needs. Frank summarised this as "a collision between health needs, special educational needs but also, structural disadvantage."

The cornerstone point put forward by the panel here tied in with the theme of social deprivation mentioned by Dr Bromley. For ICS to truly be optimally rolled out by local authorities and the NHS, a clear chronological picture of the child's journey must be mapped out - this being the health concerns and a review of interactions with GP services, the level of educational support a child has received, and finally, the socio-economic background of a child. These would all create a coherent triangularization of health inequality, structural inequality and educational attainment.

All the panellists agreed that the need for a coherent strategy of care, an optimal system for the GPs, and educational providers, centrally relies on funding and the Government's willingness to tailor service provision for neurodivergent people.

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20 Microlink is a leading organization working towards an inclusive society by providing disability management and assistive technology to workplace and educational facilities. https://www.microlinkpc.com

“We piloted an approach with ten library agencies, where libraries work with children’s services and public health to come together to reach out to children. We have seen 100,000 additional children take part in the reading challenge. I think it’s the cross partnerships, bringing agencies together to integrate support and target interventions.”

– Debbie Hicks MBE

Key Recommendations From the panel

- **Increase co-production of education between schools and parents -** co-production is an essential step in developing successful strategies to help children with dyslexia and SEND. Reading together with families, community groups and other reading groups significantly boosts confidence in children, increases interest and engagement in the content being studied, and also helps children better explore their feelings and abilities around their needs and develop a social community. Reading lists that are informed by professionals and frontline users are also fundamental to empowering dyslexic people.
- **Target funds and services to children with multiple risk factors for low educational attainment-** adapting services in educational institutions, as well as sectors working in care, is important for greater access to mental and educational support to reduce social inequalities, especially for individuals experiencing multiple difficulties. Moving forward, ICSs should set up systems that take into account socioeconomic deprivation and its negative impacts on mental health for neurodiverse persons - preventing the marginalisation of these vulnerable populations that are lesser able to access medical and social care.
- **Ensure better partnerships among service providers to support dyslexic people -** increasing local authority partnerships and encouraging them to work on complex needs that address the intersection of health needs, SEN and structural disadvantage is essential. For children experiencing mental health difficulties in tandem with dyslexia - such as ACE, ADHD, etc. these approaches can be beneficial in achieving overall health and educational equality.



Andy Salmon, Founder and CEO, Sir Linkalot, Tom Hunt, MP for Ipswich and Susie Dent, presenter on Countdown at the BDA's 50th Anniversary Celebration

Session Three: Improving Access and Uptake of the Latest Technologies

The third part of the session focused on the exploration of innovative technologies and how to increase the uptake of this technology by dyslexic people. The panel for this session included

- Christine Franklin, Independent Researcher
- Ruth-Ellen Danquah, Chief Innovation Officer, Neurodivergent
- Marius Frank, Head of Education, Microlink
- Andy Salmon, Founder and CEO, Sir Linkalot

Overcoming resistance to assistive technology in prisons and schools

Christine Franklin opened the discussion with an overview of her research conducted on behalf of Scanning Pens[21] on the impacts of AT in the prison and educational sectors. Christine discussed the pervasive nature of assumptions in literacy, namely in the prison sector. She mentioned that organisations and facility providers in prisons assume that adults facing reading, writing and spelling difficulties will voluntarily ask for help. However, her research strongly refuted this claim, wherein an element of social embarrassment or insecurity sets in that makes it difficult for adults to reach out for help.

21 Scanning Pens is an award winning portable AT company based in the UK helping people with neurodiversity learn and work in the workplace, education, and public sector. https://scanningpens.co.uk

> **“There is still stigmatising, and issues around adults admitting that they have a learning difficulty.”**
>
> **– Christine Franklin**

Franklin noted that individuals' self-confidence, concept of self, independent achievement, etc. was seen to increase significantly after introducing AT within the prison systems. A marked positive change that was brought about was in the mentality of adults and practitioners within the system. In addition to this, the underlying assumption of redundancy of personnel and human assistance after the incorporation of AT was also debunked, as Franklin found the importance of the role that teachers and assistants play in the delivery of technology to individuals within the prison system.

She reiterated that the best way to overcome reading difficulties is by readily accessible and well-funded AT provision, thereby making technology an equaliser in the prison system. Franklin explained that AT notably increases the ability for prisoners to re-join their communities, with lower reoffending rates.

Franklin further mentioned that within her research collation was the experience of a dyslexic prisoner who had never written a letter and did not enjoy reading. Once she introduced the use of Scanning Pens technology, the prisoner completed reading a book and ultimately was able to read through his prison documents and flag three irregularities, which were resolved once he advocated for himself. In summary, Franklin highlighted the life-changing role that AT proves to be for people in prisons - helping in rehabilitation and lowering rates of reoffending.

Ruth-Ellen Danquah expanded the theme raised by Franklin by discussing the issues of organisational resistance to AT in the workplace, mentioning the imperative point that organisations need to adapt and adopt the latest technologies. In her capacity to evaluate workplace assessments, she observed that workplace ATs were typically outdated.

> **“Now technology is always evolving, people are often old school, they don’t look at the new tech coming in. So, during the process of reviewing their needs, some assessors treat it as a tick box, the employee goes away and they don’t feel seen, heard or valued.”**
>
> **– Ruth-Ellen Danquah**

Eradication of stigma - technology the silent equaliser

Technology not only proves vital in providing immediate access to people with learning difficulties, an additional advantage of such technology is also its way of providing silent assistance without creating obvious identifications of need for those who rely on it. Franklin explored this additional advantage of AT by reflecting on how she introduced Scanning Pens in a classroom setting.

Whilst conducting research on the impacts of AT, Franklin tailored her methodology and introduced a mixed sample size. In doing this, she provided all children in the classroom with Scanning Pens in order to establish a common ground.

> **“I wanted the children to appreciate what technology can do and what technology can do for others.”**
>
> **– Christine Franklin**

Christine explained that in doing this, she believed that AT would become normalised uniformly for generations who have seen and interacted with said technology from an early age. In this manner, she argued, the next generation of policymakers will have a first-hand understanding of the needs and the importance of resource allocation for AT in all sectors.

CEO of Sir Linkalot[22], Andy Salmon, furthered the conversation by highlighting the significant impact of animation via AT in the classroom.

> **"By bringing things into animation, it works for children with dyslexia. It doesn't matter how they process things; it works for them. That walk of shame, having to walk out of class for that special lesson, it's all gone."**
>
> **– Andy Salmon**

Salmon went on to explore the benefits of the Sir Linkalot app. He demonstrated the direct comparability between continued traditional learning vs AT that focuses on animation and linking words to common and humorous meanings to improve literacy and the memory of word retention. He also highlighted the innovative power of forming mental links among dyslexic people. Salmon affirmed that the mechanism of utilising animation for reading and numeracy in the classroom created a levelling of the educational playing field.

He said that he has received testimonials from schools that have used Sir Linkalot, they explained that children with dyslexia were using their imaginative skills to help improve their literacy and numeracy aptitude. In a similar notion to points raised by other panellists, Salmon emphasised the need for such technology to be rolled out at the earliest opportunity for children.

> **"The earlier you can help children of all ages, using the same resource, the less chance they will derail later on."**
>
> **– Andy Salmon**

Marius Frank added to the points already raised on the use of AT by explaining the impact of AT funded by the Department of Education. Frank stated that one of the biggest changes he saw was the reception of AT by teachers. He mentioned the initial reluctance of teachers to adopt the technology in class, which was soon replaced by a sense of familiarity with the technology. This helped teachers appreciate all that they could do with this resource and how it could be applied to their classroom as an additional beneficial strategy to improve education outcomes.

The methodology adopted behind these strategies to deliver AT, and the encouragement to adopt novel practices in schools, primarily consisted of three parts. These were training instilled insights; which then went on to motivate purposeful behaviour; which helped teachers develop their techniques and embed them within their practice.

Frank raised a key testimony he received from a teacher who adopted AT in her classroom. Frank explained that a dyslexic child could not initially keep up with the normative way of reading and discussing books on the curriculum with his peers. As a result of this, he was disengaged and unconfident. However, once the teacher provided the book in an app form, the child's aptitude dramatically changed in the classroom:

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22 Sir Linkalot is an award-winning spelling app that is making way in transforming how spelling is taught, especially for relatively tricky words. Its focus ranges beyond just spelling, with animations for homophones, spelling rules, punctuation, grammar, prefixes and the origins of words. https://www.sirlinkalot.org

> **"At the age of eight, he was excited at the possibility of not having an adult read it to him but he was empowered to read and access the curriculum himself. If we open up the possibilities in the classroom, the child will make the journey to independence at the age of seven, eight and nine."**
>
> **– Marius Frank**

The panel concluded its discussion on AT by reiterating its abundant and often zero-cost availability across several platforms. They urged schools, parents, students and dyslexic people to reach out to learn, adopt and efficiently use AT to overcome reading difficulties and the social stigma associated with dyslexia.

Key Recommendations From the panel

- **Incorporate and target assistive technology in the prison system**
  - Within the prison system, understanding what adults with dyslexia want to gain from the use of AT helps to better target interventions that will prove to be uplifting and empowering.
  - Instead of a top-down approach, where officials assume that those with learning disabilities will seek help, engaging in conversations with dyslexic persons will help the system better gauge targeted help for dyslexia that manifests in many different ways.
  - As a result of the aforementioned measures, tangible improvements in the form of increased self-confidence, increased emotional wellbeing and improved concentration among persons in the prison system have been demonstrated.
- **Introduce Assistive Technology to every child in every school -** introducing AT to every child in schools will not only help establish a common ground and equal footing among students in schools but will also help raise awareness of the benefits of incorporating technology within mainstream teaching and learning. The benefits of this intervention at early years carry into adulthood, where a collective understanding of the benefits of AT in education translates into greater availability of AT across workplaces. This would create a more equitable environment throughout an individual's life - from early years to later in working life..
- **Use animation as part of the teaching toolbox -** with apps such as Sir Linkalot making headway within the spaces of AT for learning disabilities, capitalising on the ability of dyslexic individuals to form mental links between images and words is a helpful method of encouraging students to benefit from their own strengths and learn in ways that may be different from, yet subjectively better than, the mainstream rote learning method[23]. This will allow children to capitalise on creativity and help level the playing field between all students in a classroom.
- **Ensure that teachers are consistently assisted through training in understanding the appropriate use of Assistive Technology at the primary literacy level -** supporting teachers to better understand AT at earlier stages of literacy helps to explicitly target learning difficulties at a primary stage. By equipping students and teachers with assistive measures from an early development stage, this would be a helpful measure in ensuring that learning difficulties do not remain undiagnosed till later stages.

23 The mainstream rote learning method is popularly understood as the simple storage of data in the brain, often without any learning or understanding. Repeating information helps in more easy and automatic recall, without any need for thought. This method may not only lead to poor learning but may be difficult to grasp by neurodivergent persons who may understand and process information differently.



Andy Salmon

Founder and CEO of Sir Linkalot

Dyslexia: gift or hindrance?

I've heard this one so many times, but children are not going to buy it while they are getting zero out of ten on their spelling tests - the dreaded weekly humiliation. The definition of dyslexia is a developmental disorder that can cause learning difficulty in one or more of the areas of reading, writing and numeracy. The one subject that brings this to the fore is spelling, as the letters are in a strict, non-negotiable order. It is often said that spelling is a very dry subject, which I don't agree with. The way it is learnt is the issue, i.e. rote learning, which people try to jazz up by dubbing it "Look, say, cover, write, check". Rote learning is boring, time-consuming and simply does not work for students with dyslexia. There has to be another way to commit something to memory and, luckily, there is! A mnemonic or, as I like to call it, a link, because mnemonic is hard to pronounce and spell.

Children never forget "Naughty Elephants Spray Water" (or variations of) for the order of the compass points. You would have thought that having to remember the order of four words would be a lot more difficult than N E S W. But, with the latter, you have got nothing to work with, nothing to hang the fact on. A hook (link) has been created. And the beauty of this method is that you can think of your own link. All you need in order to play is an imagination. No rules. No system. Nothing. The aforementioned technique is called an acrostic but there are many others, e.g. words inside words (parent), things that look like letters (the u of buy is the bag you put your shopping in when you buy), the CIA have special agents. The list goes on.

With the Sir Linkalot app, the public can submit their spelling and maths links (more subjects to follow), hoping they will end up on the app alongside their name. Check out this really fascinating statistic: 15 adults and children have achieved this, with 11 of them having dyslexia. 11! This is no coincidence as they have been forced to explore their imagination to learn a spelling due to rote learning not cutting the mustard. So, even though they aren't aware of it, they are seasoned linkers. The upshot is that a child with dyslexia says to their classmate "I can help YOU with YOUR spelling." How cool is that.

If children are introduced to linking when they are four or five years old, then dyslexia will not be a hindrance. It's like being left-footed. In fact, as they naturally look at things differently, this 'gift' will shine brightly from an early age, inspiring other children to use their imagination, not just in the playground but in the classroom too. It can be no coincidence that there is a direct correlation between entrepreneurs and the number of people in prisons with dyslexia (reports vary from 35 per cent to 45 per cent). Most movers and shakers look at life through a different lens and many of them have dyslexia - Albert Einstein, Muhammad Ali, Sir Richard Branson, Steven Spielberg and Robin Williams.

It is, most certainly, a gift.

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Sir Paul McCartney

"Sir Linkalot complements phonics programmes perfectly"
Ruth Miskin CBE

"Groundbreaking for dyslexia"
Matt Hancock MP (Diagnosed with dyslexia at 18)

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SEND REVIEW AND SCHOOLS BILL 2022



Chaired by Matt Hancock and Dr Ross, the third inquiry session of the *Dyslexia Commission* was held on September 20th, 2022. The session discussed the SEND Review and the Schools Bill[24], bringing together recommendations from school teachers, SENCo practitioners, policymakers, charity organisations and wider civil society.

The first part of the session focused on issues surrounding the lack of funding available for schools among local authorities and the impact of existing postcode lottery systems on the accessibility of resources for dyslexic pupils. It also explored the importance of upskilling staff and the need for diagnosis and screening for children.

The second part of the session focused on accountability and transparency measures that can be taken by systems to promote the seamless transfer of information across authorities. It also focused on the importance of encouraging parents to enter mediation processes and provide their views on the support needed by their children.

24 This inquiry session was conducted prior to the scrapping of the Schools Bill 2022. All views in this paper pertain to the analysis of the Bill at a time when it was still in reading in the House of Lords. As legislative decisions have since changed, this section of the session remains informative in expressing the demands and needs of those at the ground level and provides information that can be taken forward in government decisions in the future.

Session One: Funding Disparities and Diagnosis

The first session of the inquiry discussed the need for, and issues surrounding, funding. The panellists for the first session included

- David Williams, Executive Director of Inclusions, The Park Academies Trust
- Pamela Hanigan, Co-founder of LDIGS and Teacher, Cawthorne's Endowed Primary School, Abbeystead
- André Imich, SEN and Disability Professional Adviser, Department for Education (observer)
- Angela Fawcett, Research Consultant, Dyslexia Association of Singapore
- Georgina Durrant, Author, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, Ltd

Funding disparities

The first part of the third inquiry session opened with Matt Hancock providing an overview on the present scenario, where frustrations regarding funding for SEND support have been commonplace, as existing "low outcome and high-cost systems" across schools do not adequately provide the required support to students with SEND[25].

Leading the discussion into how spending can be better enforced and allocated, David Williams expressed his views on the present context. Talking about the existing system of postcode lottery in England, he highlighted the case of Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, and Swindon councils. While all neighbour each other, they provide very different support and service provision, often with a difference as high as £10,000 between students, based on the local authority of their home address. Williams expressed his optimism around the Green Paper's ability to address this issue, as well as addressing the complexities around tedious paperwork and applications that hinder schools from securing funding. The current process for applying for high needs funding is found to be tricky and lengthy by many SENCos, where in many local authorities receiving the funding is contingent on the parents' abilities to argue through the mediation process and go to tribunal. This significantly shifts the focus away from helping and addressing the needs of children with disabilities by increasing costs in terms of money, resources and time. With improved provisions in the Green Paper, the panel discussed the potential for changing these burdensome processes with swift, efficient and quicker ways of providing SEND support.

Williams also emphasised his optimism regarding the focus on alternative provision (AP) alongside SEN mentioned in the Green Paper. AP refers to education arranged for pupils who are unable to attend mainstream or special schools and who are not educated at home, whether for behaviour, health or other reasons[26].

> **"With around 80 per cent of children in alternate provision having special educational needs, I think it is about time. We have been asking for it for a long time and it is finally there."**
>
> **– David Williams**

25 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/

26 Alternative provision - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Discussing the funding for AP, Williams outlined how the shift in status of most schools to MATs can be a beneficial opportunity in securing funding by utilising the so-called 'academy structure', which is better and more coherently developed to procure funding for SEND children and young people. This statement was supported by providing an example of early intervention AP launched within his own trust, The Park Academies Trust, where Williams explained how a structured approach helped increase funding for five to six students to over fifty, supported by moving funding away from private enterprises. This highlighted the benefits that can be achieved when schools come together for a common goal.

Discussing the importance of easily accessible high needs funding, irrespective of local authority, Williams pointed towards the discrepancy in local authorities towards accessing high needs funding through EHCPs. Presently, certain schools can secure high needs funding for intervention projects outside of an EHCP, while other local authorities do not provide the same provision. The problem arises where schools housing children experiencing high levels of poverty can easily access funding, as opposed to those schools where students sit at the threshold of poverty but not below it. These students often get left behind in the struggle to procure funding because of the fact that they are just on the margin but do not make the cut. In these situations, schools unable to make the cut are required to apply for external funding, which is only made possible by local authorities once schools have EHCPs. In this manner, the efforts to procure funding are often forcefully moulded into struggles to secure EHCPs. This significantly delays the process of securing funding and diverts attention away from the targeted goal of increasing monetary resources in schools.

> **"If you don't have the funding, your only option is to go to a high-needs funding party. If local authorities don't allow you to access this without EHCPs, then schools that need around £200 - 300 might have to spend around £800 to get an EHCP. So, it is a very inefficient way to access the funding. If they are in MATs, to a degree that might solve the problem, although it is much more complex than that."**
>
> **– David Williams**

On this point, a noteworthy comment by Pamela Hanigan was around the inability of schools to secure EHCPs through dyslexia diagnosis unless they are accompanied by other neurodiversities. This makes the process of securing funding even tougher, reinforcing the argument of having structures such as extra time and AT in place to support students.

Upskilling all staff

Moving onto teacher training, the panel highlighted the need for upskilling the teaching staff. Hanigan stressed the point that all teachers need to be given training on how they can identify a student facing difficulties in their class. Instead of spending time and resources on lengthy SENCo accreditations, which are not affordable for the majority, it was proposed that vital money can be saved by upskilling the teaching staff.

> **"I'm not coming at this from a policy - making angle, I'm coming at it as a worker and how I see it working on the ground. I think we need to think outside the box when it comes to funding. I think we need to not worry about all teachers doing the SENCo qualification because that is going to be incredibly expensive and incredibly time-consuming.**

> **"What I think we need to do instead, is upskill teaching staff and everybody who works with a child. They need to be upskilled in terms of what they are looking out for and how they can heighten their spider senses to find out if a child may be having problems specifically due to dyslexia."**
>
> **– Pamela Hanigan**

By doing so, Hanigan mentioned that such upskilling should be able to equip teaching staff with tools to diagnose a spectrum of difficulties, which include reading difficulties, spelling difficulties, challenges with memory, chronological awareness and processing difficulties, among others.

Bringing in the idea of universal screening, which was mentioned in the SEND Review and Schools Bill, Hanigan outlined that screening all children can help establish uniformity in a system that is currently "detrimentally varied". Putting in funding for early identification can become the diagnosis through adequate support, instead of putting in funding for diagnosis.

Giving an example of Cambridge County Council's universal support through dyslexia-friendly classrooms, Hanigan expressed her approval of such measures that do not attribute labels to learning difficulties but address all difficulties through inclusive and supportive classrooms[27].

The panel expressed their stance on the need to change the current national requirement of SENCo qualifications from master level with 60 credits to MPQ level. In this, bringing in courses with more hands-on knowledge with assessments and screening was seen as the best way to make sure that students do not slip through the assessment net. Dr Ross expressed her support for the stance by stating the necessity of a universally consistent framework, which is currently lacking in the system where schools are left to craft their own policies, resulting in neglect of dyslexic students and, consequently, poor education outcomes.

> **"While it is clear that there is no framework, people are going to make it up as they go along. We need a solid consistent framework that targets all teachers and is very robust."**
>
> **– Dr Helen Ross**

Panellist Angela Fawcett carried the discussion forward with her analysis of the significant role played by early screening in conserving the self-confidence and sense of accomplishment felt by students. This was essential in ensuring that they are not "destroyed by the failure". Dyslexic students not only experience difficulties in keeping up with learning standards but also experience the added impact of failure when unable to do so. On this she said:

> **"Early screening is key...If we can prevent the impact of failure, then it might mean that we don't actually need to diagnose everybody, and people will get the support they need from very constructive and supportive teachers. As they go forward, it is recognised that they are struggling and provided support so that it may not be that every child needs to end up with an expensive diagnosis."**
>
> **– Angela Fawcett**

27 SEND Strategy - Final Nov 19 (cambridgeshire.gov.uk)

The requirement to not neglect diagnosis in the screening discussion

In conjunction with universal screening, the discussion and debate on the importance of diagnosis continued as the panel discussed the benefits diagnosis may provide. Georgina Hunt, author at Jessica Kingsley Publishers and a panellist in the second half of the inquiry session, pointed out that while upskilling of teachers may be important, diagnosis is often essential for the child's mental health and wellbeing and their ability to understand themselves. She mentioned that a child's mental health may be particularly impacted when transitioning from primary school to secondary school, due to several simultaneously experienced changes.

> **"I heard a story from a parent the other day whose child has recently started secondary school, and because this child hasn't received a full dyslexia diagnosis, they have been asked to read in front of their new class, which sent the child into an emotional crisis."**
>
> **– Georgina Durant**

Hancock echoed this sentiment, stating that understanding oneself, and the availability of diagnosis for a child, is essential. In this, he refutes the stance that screening should replace a diagnosis and, instead, proposed that it should be added as a beneficial additional step in helping students understand dyslexia.

> **"I think it is really important that we don't say that the screening step is an alternative to diagnosis but that it can actually lead to more high-quality targeting of resources for diagnostic assessments."**
>
> **– Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP**

The discussion then turned to the correlation between socioeconomic outcomes and diagnostic assessments. Hancock highlighted that the relationship between such outcomes and assessments manifests as a U-shaped curve. He emphasised the abundant presence of diagnostic assessment at the bottom and top of the socioeconomic spectrum, without its equal distribution across the spectrum, leading to unequal opportunities and outcomes experienced by dyslexic students.

> **"This is a social injustice that comes from the current system, as well as the economic and educational failure from the lack of diagnosis. For me, the universal and fair access to diagnosis to those who genuinely need them, as identified through universal screening, has a really important social fairness aspect to it as well."**
>
> **– Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP**

Such inequalities are, however, not just present in diagnosis accessibility but also in the ability of schools and parents to acquire high-needs funding through EHCPs. Validating this point, Williams stated that children at the extreme ends of the socioeconomic spectrum find it easier to access funding. These are those who are socioeconomically advantaged, where parents with financial resources are able to fight a mediation and go to tribunal, and those who are severely socioeconomically disadvantaged, with mental and emotional health issues. Students who do not lie at either end are often neglected by the system and forced to rely on external support that is often extremely hard to access.

Adré Imich concluded the first session by explaining the lack of exploration of existing systems available in schools regarding diagnosing literacy difficulties, giving the examples of the early years foundation stage assessment, the phonics screening check and the key stage one and two assessments that schools could explore further. Imich also expressed his optimism on the Green Paper's efforts to address the transition and information exchange from primary to secondary schools.

Key recommendations from the panel

- **Standardise local authority SEND funding and policies -** ensuring that local authorities do not have discrepancies in the ability of students with SEND to procure funding is essential. This will require having a robust framework in place that allows for standardised access to monetary resources by families seeking help for SEND, and consistent funding made available, over time, to all local authorities for this to be possible. Adequate funding will also ensure that schools do not have to apply for EHCPs to receive funding for dyslexia and it will reduce huge costs currently incurred by parents.
- **Broaden, rather than deepen, SEND training for teachers -** the current system involves significant investment to deliver SENCo qualifications and training to teachers. An efficient way to provide staff support to students would be to upskill all teachers, so that they are equipped with all the tools and qualifications necessary to identify a broad spectrum of learning difficulties, instead of having to rely on only SENCo expertise. This will also help reduce the amount of resource spent on diagnosis at later stages, as upskilled teachers will be able to identify children with SEN and provide support from earlier stages.
- **Close funding gaps so that all children have access to dyslexia screening -** a lack of diagnostic assessments for children who lie at the middle of the socio-economic spectrum significantly increases inequalities among student outcomes. These students may be those who do not have the financial resources to go to tribunal while at the same time are not severely economically deprived. Increasing funding to make diagnosis universally available and easily accessible for all students is imperative in reducing inequalities among students with SEND.



Session Two: Accountability and Transparency

The second part of the inquiry session focused on accountability and transparency, discussing various roles and responsibilities and what can be expected from different stakeholders in the process of providing adequate assistance and support to dyslexic students. The panellists included

- Jane Bradley, Lecturer, Chester University
- Brian Lamb, Policy, Public Affairs, Research and Strategy Consultant
- Rachel Gelder, SENCO Specialist and Co-founder, LDIGS

Accountability

Jane Bradley opened the discussion on accountability in the SEND Review and Green Paper, outlining the importance of 'consistency of offer'. This is where all schools should ideally offer a uniform provision of service and information reports that are made accessible to everyone across schools, authorities and the national landscape. In ensuring school funding, it was also noted that the decisions and national formula behind allocating funding should be made fair and equitable, with independent schools included in the formula.

> **"We need to include independent schools in the formula. Otherwise, we have a competitive market with high-cost placements and, from the work I am doing across local authorities and multi-academy trusts, that certainly is the case."**
>
> **– Jane Bradley**

Bradley also encouraged the panel to conceptualise local SEND partnerships to understand how they can intensively help support teacher training and upskilling to ensure that the needs of dyslexic learners are met.

Furthering the discussion by assessing EHCPs, Bradley highlighted how the present EHCPs exist in non-uniform and varied formats. In the case of students shifting postcodes, and consequently local authorities, a transfer of information among authorities does not always take place in a seamless manner. Bradley proposed the digitisation and standardisation of EHCP reports as a means of helping professionals develop consistent standards for all students.

Supporting this framework with a balanced approach to placements was also discussed by the panel. Allocating a large number of students with additional needs to a limited number of inclusive spaces/ institutions overloads the spaces with a high number of enrolments. This may not only deter their efficient functioning due to a high student - to-staff ratio but may also focus funding in selected areas while side-lining others. Evenly balancing the distribution of children with learning needs to inclusive spaces was seen as a way of establishing a more uniform and efficient approach to providing support.

An important theoretical point outlined by Bradley was the distinction between the medical and social models in the provision of disability support. While the medical model has focused on putting in systems for support and enforcing them in settings with dyslexic pupils, an emphasis on the social model helps us understand the reasons behind the existing inequalities of opportunities. This would help address certain underlying, lesser understood, causal factors that impact disability, as opposed to focusing a narrow vision solely on the consequences of learning difficulties and other disabilities.

> **"There needs to be a much bigger focus on the upskilling of knowledge of professionals around attachment and trauma that can potentially be linked to diagnosis. I have worked with many children where their difficulties in themselves become traumatic."**
>
> **– Jane Bradley**

Emphasising the need for the national funding formula to be equitable across schools, Rachel Gelder outlined the inadequacy of resources in the system. Much like the other panellists, Gelder touched upon the difference in funding opportunities across authorities and the impact it makes in improving or worsening education outcomes for students. Calling for a normalisation of funding across schools, Gelder highlighted how limited funding required teachers to juggle to provide between EHCPs and children with SpLD.

As mainstream settings are generally beneficial for students, the panel agreed that efforts need to be made for dyslexic students to be incorporated. However, the resources available in mainstream schools often make students feel frustrated, stagnating their growth. Investing highlighted in early identification through screening and teacher training, thus, becomes important. More importantly, it is necessary that schools should screen in a similar way, where all teachers should be made aware of the qualitative data to look for in the field when screening and the qualitative data to look for in terms of understanding SEND reports produced.

> **“Upskilling teaching staff to recognise their vital role and their knowledge of SEND is huge. It underpins everything.”**
>
> **– Rachel Gelder**

Gelder also touched upon measures that are necessary to provide SEND support, apart from those that require large amounts of resources in terms of time and funding. In the current scenario, there exists a £6,000 per pupil notional budget for SEN support in schools. However, such funding doesn't make its way to student support as schools often have to fund this, it is often not adequately allocated. These measures included the accurate knowledge of teachers and teaching assistants about the things they can do on an everyday basis to make a real difference to the lives of dyslexic students. Though put in place to offer support to dyslexic students, these measures were thought to benefit all children.

Moving forward, Dr Ross posed a question to Imich regarding the role of the DfE in validating and sanctioning the screening process used by schools, which may be varied.

Imich emphasised the degree of freedom held by schools, laying out the framework currently followed. In the current framework, schools are responsible for outcomes that are achieved through tools used-which may be methods of screening, early identification, etc. In utilising and choosing these tools, schools possess a certain degree of freedom in adapting their teaching and learning processes to meet the national curriculum and examination requirements, which helps them achieve their targeted outcomes.

In relating accountability to this framework, Imich highlighted that student outcomes are the measures of accountability that accurately reflect whether the correct tools have been chosen by the schools in helping their students make the necessary progress. Thus, a national focus on outcomes and the degrees of freedom at the local level is seen to be largely favoured by schools across the country, although they can produce inconsistencies at certain times. Expressing his optimism on the proposals in the Green Paper, Imich highlighted that measures in the paper to develop local partnerships and inclusion plans are intended to drive consistency practices.

In response to Imich's answer, Dr Ross raised an important point, questioning how a 'good screener' may be defined in academic practice. Imich responded by highlighting the challenges faced by the system due to the lack of national consensus on the definition of dyslexia and the consequent lack of screening tools for the same.

> **“I do think the focus on teaching, learning and assessment of outcomes is the right one. Schools will make their own judgement, guided by the information on the BDA website, for example.”**
>
> **– Andre Imich**

To this, Williams contributed by stating that the screening tool used by the screener was not as important as the outcomes and measurable indicators that show that students are progressing. He gave the example of his Trust, which uses different screeners. However, what was stated to be of importance was checking whether students are making progress and, if they are not, inquiring into the reasons for the same in order to put interventions in place to improve the situation.

> **“I am indifferent to what screener they use, as long as they are getting good outcomes from that screening.”**
>
> **– David Williams**

Highlighting the gender divide in SEND diagnosis, Williams emphasised that girls tend to be diagnosed at later stages compared to boys, due to their ability to develop coping strategies far more easily than boys. As a result, the argument shouldn't be about the screening tool used but rather, about regular screening that should be made a priority to get an accurate and timely diagnosis.

Fawcett added to the discussion, mentioning the importance of inclusive practices and increasing teacher awareness and knowledge about the screening tools used, their purposes and reason for use, and what they showed. Bringing along the teachers in their understanding of screening was seen to be important as it would then feed into their intervention and support.

> **"The key point in the screener is not just that you look at one definition of dyslexia, it is that you are inclusive. If you are inclusive, you bring everyone along with you. But also, you need something that is quick, interesting and fun for the child and you need to empower the teachers."**
>
> **– Angel Fawcett**

Concluding the discussion on accountability with thoughts on the role of Ofsted, the panel unanimously agreed on the importance of Ofsted inspectors having the qualifications and understanding to recognise good practice and the ability to share this knowledge across systems. The creation of SEND specialist Ofsted inspectors was seen to be essential.

Transparency between teachers, parents and carers

Brian Lamb opened with a discussion on the importance of strong communication between all stakeholders-schools, local authorities and parents-on delivering better results for children.

Lamb led the discussion into exploring the perspective of parents of dyslexic children. He highlighted how parents within the system may often struggle in the process of having the existence of dyslexia validated, due to many individuals challenging the very notion of SEND. It was worth noting that despite advancements in dyslexia diagnosis and SEN recognition, such narratives are still persistent in the everyday lives of people living with SEN.

In terms of transparency, Lamb expressed his optimism around the Green Paper. This was seen as essential for parents to understand how the system works and what they are entitled to.

> **"I think the new proposals in the Green Paper around parental engagement are very much welcome, especially around strategic proposals around there being partnership boards where parents have a very clear view, where there is a local inclusion framework that they inform and feedback on and, of course, the monitoring of the plan."**
>
> **– Brian Lamb**

However, Lamb expressed concern around getting parents involved in the planning beyond what was necessary. He noted that getting parents engaged may often lead to them policing the system. Making mediation compulsory, he stated, would undermine why mediation works in the first place.

> **"The danger around having parents increasingly engaged in partnership boards, local authority planning and monitoring whether inclusion is going to work, is how much it starts to drag them into processes that are more about how you monitor whether the system is working as opposed to how you ensure it is meeting their needs in the first place."**
>
> **– Brian Lamb**

Lamb expressed support for the Green Paper's provisions to look at what is ordinarily available in schools and what should be provided to meet their SEND needs. Going forward, he highlighted that some important questions needed to be asked, including whether the right information and data around dyslexia are held locally, whether there is a vision of what children need, and what transparency should look like. He also emphasised the importance of the value system that ensures that teachers want their children to succeed and share the same motivation for outcomes as parents.

Bringing in the importance of trust in the system, Durrant highlighted how the current system in schools, local authorities and legislation harbours fractured trust among parents and teachers. For example, instances of EHCPs becoming lost between schools and having a severe impact on children's mental health due to the lack of SEND support were also mentioned.

> **"I had an instance about a parent who had reached out for support for dyslexia for their children and they were told to Google it... How can we expect teachers to make parents trust in a system when they know it is not working the best that it can."**
>
> **– Georgina Durrant**

Durrant emphasised that the means to mending the fracture would be to get the system to "do it right" by training all staff to understand SEND, upskilling teachers, improving ITT, identifying SEND earlier and most importantly, paying close attention to the self-esteem, confidence, mental health and familial relationships of children waiting to receive that support.

Dr Ross introduced a question from the inquiry audience that inquired into the structure and stages of the mediation and asked what the setting-up provision for children should look like.

In response, Lamb expressed that the Government got it right in earlier policy by making clear that mediation was there and that it is important to consider, but not making it compulsory. He noted that since the introduction of the aforementioned policy, mediation has been increasingly used and has successfully reduced the number of cases going to tribunals.

Lamb expressed that by making mediation compulsory, parents would have to be supported to understand the process thoroughly and this might often make parents feel like "there is another hoop to jump through". Lamb also highlighted that getting the basics right, in terms of parental confidence and trust, would significantly reduce the need to make mediation compulsory and increase tribunal cases - which would only take place in cases where trust had completely broken down.

> **"The better you get at parental engagement and the better the provision made available in the first place is, the less tribunals you will get... I think it shows a lack of confidence on the Government's part that the proposal is going to work if they then also have to have compulsory mediation. If the proposals work, it should be that you get less tribunal cases."**
>
> **– Brian Lamb**

Williams delivered his views on the topic by critically highlighting that it was, in fact, only literate parents who could go to mediation and, consequently, to a tribunal. Those who are illiterate, have substance abuse struggles or have a chaotic family life, do not make it to these discussions.

The panel jointly agreed on the need for standardised guidelines on funding in terms of its availability and the conditions under which it could be accessed moving forward. This would significantly reduce back-and-forth conversations between local authorities, schools and parents and reduce the number of unsuccessful discussions, making the system more efficient.

Moving the discussion further, the panellists took a step back from the legislative processes and teacher training for students by focusing on the topic of training teachers to interact with parents. Lamb highlighted the current absence of a structured approach that would train teachers in engaging with parents, sharing their values on improving student outcomes and learning processes, and improving the process of mediation.

> **"If we are saying that working with parents is fundamental for getting the system right and that we don't need certain professionals, we just assume that they will do it. There are models of what good looks like in this area, but we don't develop them."**
>
> **– Brian Lamb**

Concluding the session, Dr Ross expressed her appreciation for the focus of such discussions on the actual values and needs of children and parents who often get caught between delayed logistical and practical processes of accessibility of funding, paperwork, tribunals and mediation.

Key recommendations from the panel

- **Improve local SEND partnerships to increase support provision -** increasing accountability for the provision of support within the system will only happen when local partnerships are strengthened so that the system provides consistent and uniform help. One of the methods to achieve this can be to make information reports uniform, easily transferrable and accessible in schools and local authorities across the national landscape. The standardisation and digitisation of EHCP formats to seamlessly transfer across authorities is a tangible way that this can be done to ensure equal standards for all students.
- **Improve parent-teacher communication -** a crucial step in providing support to children is allowing the voices of their parents to be heard. To achieve this, investments can be made in training teachers to better engage and discuss goals and outcomes with parents. This would make the parent-teacher engagement process much easier and allow all stakeholders to work as a cohesive unit. This would also help prevent making mediation compulsory for parents, with which parents may feel pressure to engage in multiple processes to receive the desired support for their child while many whose socio-economic conditions will not allow them to engage in such conversations may be wrongfully excluded from the process.



David Williams

Director of Inclusion of The Park Academies Trust

My belief is that the best measure of a civilised society is how inclusive it is. As such, the most inclusive trusts and schools are also the trusts and schools that are driving socio-economic progress in the communities they serve.

So, what does the shelving of the Schools Bill mean for the SEND Green Paper, "The right support at the right time", and, more importantly, for children with SEND across the country? At this point, it is not completely clear; however, there are many aspects of the Green Paper that would have a positive and lasting impact on SEND provision for young people. It is encouraging that ahead of the improvement plan, the Department for Education have committed to training 400 more educational psychologists and that a "children not in schools register" is still on the table, as this will combat off-rolling and give a much needed (albeit limited) oversight of home education. For me, the key element of the Green Paper is the focus on bringing AP and SEND together. This is a long overdue development, given that the vast majority of students accessing AP stay, for the rest of their time in education, in that phase.

AP should be operating as a short-term intervention, ultimately aiming to return pupils to mainstream education, but at the moment, it is being used, at best, as an overflow for special schools and, often, as a long-term alternative to a more suitable school placement. As the majority of students in AP have SEND, such as dyslexia, ADHD, and ASC, among a wide range of others, AP is, in essence, being used to bolster the special school system across the country. Most students who attend AP full time never return to their mainstream schools and their outcomes are, in turn, consistently worse than their peers' across every measure. The academy system could, should and, in some cases, does help to combat this issue and the changes identified in the Green Paper would help to emphasise the need for new types of provisions alongside the correct designation and support in the existing AP structure.

Within our Trust (The Park Academies Trust), we have invested substantial resources into an early intervention AP, which operates on a two day per week, 12-week therapeutic placement for students who have just started struggling to either attend or manage school. Providing a significant level of intervention at this early point, alongside the continuation of the student's main school placement three days per week, ensures that students feel that they belong to their mainstream school and, as such, do not become isolated from that pathway.

The proposal for standardised EHCP documentation with a central high needs funding model would reduce the discrepancies in decision making at local authority level largely arising as a result of resource - led planning. This would also reduce the confusion and complexities with children moving between local authorities and thus, needing their EHCPs to be transferred onto local paperwork, a process which is both costly and timely. When high needs finance is viewed in the round alongside the proposal to include AP and children who are electively home educated in the wider SEND and inclusion conversation, there is the opportunity for a great many vulnerable young people to be better monitored and supported. Schools are currently applying for statutory assessment as it is, in most cases, the main, and in some circumstances (as a result of local policy), only access to additional funds to support a child. This goes some way to explaining the exponential growth in both school and parental request, which has in turn, broken the high needs and tribunal system. For children who are sitting below this high level of support, there is still a need for schools to be able to easily access short term high needs funds outside of statutory assessment to support intervention. This access would reduce the number of EHCP requests, thereby reducing the bill of between £5,000 and £8,000 per assessment and enabling those thousands of pounds to be spent on support mechanisms, rather than measurement - surely a more effective and worthwhile approach.

Moving forward, there is an opportunity to make positive changes that benefit the current generation of students in school, and this should be grasped rather than postponed.



Pamela Hanigan

Co-founder of Lancashire Dyslexia Information Guidance and Support (LDIGS)

The third panel for the *Dyslexia Commission*, held in September 2022, looked at the SEND Review and the Schools Bill. This panel focussed on matters pertaining to the most effective use of funding in ensuring the best possible outcomes for all children. As co-founder of LDIGS and a teacher, dyslexia and reading difficulties are close to my heart. The 'gold standard' for dyslexia diagnosis is undoubtedly the full diagnostic assessment, involving looking at the whole individual, completing a comprehensive battery of assessments, deciding upon the strengths and needs of that individual, and providing guidance for future support. This is both time-consuming and costly and, due to the number of qualified assessors available, inevitably means that only a relatively small number of individuals - disproportionately those from more affluent and educated backgrounds - receive the support they require in a timely manner.

A more egalitarian and cost-effective approach would be dyslexia screening across the board (using a validated, robust tool), together with training students and teachers on what to look out for and a dyslexia-friendly teaching approach, utilising the wealth of AT available. Children and young people need to be at the heart of all that is done and there must be a approach. Those who work with children should look at what the greatest barrier to learning is and support that need, as part of an assess, plan, do, review cycle.

Cambridgeshire County Council has taken an interesting approach, where they highlighted that every child should have the, "opportunity to read, to read widely and to read well", highlighting that this was "a simple matter of social justice". The 'label' of dyslexia was not seen as a necessity there, where the approach focussed on high-quality first wave teaching, with universal support through dyslexia-friendly classrooms. A way of assessing reading across schools is offered by Lexplore Analytics. This utilises AI technology, with a validated reading assessment tool that provides a benchmark for readers across the board, identifying those who may need further investigation.

ITT support and upskilling of all those who work with children is a great starting point to achieving these aims. This could be done comprehensively and relatively cheaply, by rolling out training as continuing professional development (CPD) for all teachers and teaching assistants. This could enable a simple uniform model, with early identification and intervention with a national set of expected standards, where professionals know what they are looking for and trust their 'spider senses'. This would be as part of wider assessments and a holistic approach where teachers ask 'why' with anomalies, as well as knowing whom to refer to and the appropriate signposting. This upskilling must be for children too - developing metacognition, multisensory learning, built-in-overlearning and memory support, and ensuring that wellbeing is nurtured.

National banding could increase efficiency without compromising outcomes, with the child, schools and families at the centre of funding decisions. Parity of support has been achieved in some MATs (as highlighted by David Williams on the panel), which could be replicated across the country, where school clusters could pool funding and organise support across settings. This holistic approach, based predominantly on needs, would better reflect the desire in the SEND Review of the, "right support, right place, right time". Consideration must also apply to all aspects of transition, within and across schools.

Dyslexia is largely a positive diagnosis, often described as 'empowering'. Currently, only one in five receive a diagnosis at school, this undoubtedly has implications for the next panel, where there is a focus on those who are not identified, many of whom then go on to be disengaged, disenfranchised and effectively 'drop out' of the education system and, all too frequently, 'fall into' the criminal justice system. Identifying needs, supporting early and across the country, together with upskilling a willing workforce, could go a long way to preventing some of these outcomes.

Rachel Gelder

Co-founder of Lancashire Dyslexia Information Guidance and Support (LDIGS)



The child must be placed at the centre of any discussion and planning for the future. The SEND Review concluded that there is a real disparity in how children's needs are identified and supported and that crucially, this should not be dependent on where they live or which setting they attend. The national funding formula proposed by the Schools Bill will go some way to addressing this disparity, however, funding aside, it is the widely differing experiences of children at the school/ classroom level that really have an impact.

Early identification of needs is key to the success of children who need to learn differently, such as those with dyslexia, not only in terms of academic achievement but also in terms of self-esteem. All too often, children fall under the radar, only to come to the attention of staff later in their schooling, when they are then struggling with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) issues on top of their difficulties with learning.

As discussed during the panel session, early screening of all children for dyslexia would ensure that those with dyslexic-type difficulties are identified and supported appropriately. However, this is with the caveat that there is a consistency of method, and that staff are trained appropriately to interpret the results. A formal diagnosis is not always necessary, particularly at the primary school level, however, screening of all children would help to identify those who would benefit the most from having their difficulties investigated further, ensuring that their needs are highlighted in the critical transition information passed on to their next school.

The upskilling of all those involved throughout a child's education is imperative. I delivered training alongside a SENCo to a group of recently qualified teachers, entitled 'SEND in the classroom'. Much of the day was around highlighting what neurodiversity looks like in the mainstream classroom and how children with dyslexia and other co-occurring difficulties might present. It soon became clear that all of those present had very little prior knowledge (for example, just one session linked to SEND throughout their training), apart from an attendee who was the parent of a child with SEND. One even commented that she was "almost scared of SEND" as she felt that she was unprepared. The day was also about equipping these teachers with the tools for how to make theirs an inclusive classroom. Again, this highlighted a lack of knowledge, such as around the variety of AT available to support children.

This upskilling of staff needs to go beyond those working directly with children in the classroom. All staff, from the senior leadership team down, need to feel that they have an informed grasp of SEND issues, as do those supporting schools in their decision - making and inspection. The old adage 'walk a mile in someone else's shoes' applies here. To really understand that child and support them, you must understand their experiences, challenges, thought processes and, therefore, way of learning.



WORKING AGE ADULTS



Chaired by Michelle Catterson, Chair of BDA Board of Trustees and Dr Georgia Niolaki, Senior Lecturer in SpLD/Dyslexia and Inclusion at Bath Spa University, the fourth inquiry session of the *Dyslexia Commission* was held on 1st November 2022. The session discussed the need for dyslexia adjustments for individuals in the workplace and brought together recommendations from schoolteachers, SENCo practitioners, policymakers, charity organisations and civil society at large.

Dyslexic people have the potential, especially if supported in the right way, to learn and achieve results just like those without it. Supporting working-age adults in the right manner can go a long way in helping them become assets to workplace productivity and knowledge. When it comes to the criminal justice system, no studies have been conducted on how dyslexics are treated and whether they have any special needs; as per the 2021 review of neurodiversity in the criminal justice system, the prevalence of dyslexia is almost five times greater amongst the adult prison population in the UK.[28]

Session One: Dyslexia in the Workplace

The first part of the inquiry session focused on dyslexia in the workplace. The panellists for the first session included

- David Williams, Director of Inclusion, The Park Academies Trust
- Dr Deborah Leveroy, Neurodiversity and Inclusion Lead, Dyslexia Box
- Nasser Siabi, CEO, Microlink PC
- Steve O'Brien, Founder and CEO, Dyslexia Foundation

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Career impact and profession decisions

Dyslexia among individuals affects not only their education at a younger age but also their career and professional decisions throughout their life. Catterson opened the discussion by talking about the increased work pressure and stigma faced by people in education and workplace institutions that has often resulted in dyslexic persons dropping out of these spaces due to underperformance fears. Though such patterns of behaviour are often seen as stemming from a lack of understanding and support on the part of workplace organisations and employers, the issue at hand is rather deep-seated. Neglect experienced during childhood and early years carries forward into schooling and young adulthood, ultimately translating into difficulties in the workplace. This lack of support and understanding not only impacts one emotionally but can adversely affect almost all aspects of life. Catterson also noted that people who don't get enough support may experience isolation, mental health issues and a lack of career progression.

Williams opened the first half of the session on behalf of the panellists by giving his personal account and experience with dyslexia. He emphasised the sense of empowerment he felt on expressing himself as dyslexic. One of the most inspiring phrases that he came across during his career was, "people should be reading for content, not for spelling". Williams stated that this phrase fundamentally shifted his understanding of dyslexia by realising that the content was more important than the manner of expression. Williams also noticed that opening up about being dyslexic helped members of his staff gain the confidence to share their experiences with dyslexia as well.

> **"What I have found in my position is that the higher that I get, and I am very open about being dyslexic, the more other staff in the trust talk about their dyslexia."**
>
> **– David Williams**

Moving on, Dr Deborah Leveroy shifted the panel's focus to workplace adjustment processes and the ways that organisations can help dyslexics utilise their full potential. She stated that despite workplace adjustments being offered - whether individualised or rolled out for all employees - through coaching and AT, they do not require the employer or team members of dyslexic persons to adapt. The onus remains on dyslexic individuals to access these adjustments and work at the same level as their colleagues.

Dr Leveroy proposed that 'reasonable adjustments' should be turned into 'anticipatory adjustments', wherein adjustments follow the principle of universal design. This can look like having AT already installed and used unanimously across the organisation so that irrespective of one's neurodiversity status, people work in an equitable environment. She stated that this would additionally prevent dyslexic individuals from having to apply for funding and installing personalised special software.

Another example of a proposed recommendation given by Leveroy was anonymous workplace questionnaires. Such questionnaires would be made available to employees, irrespective of their disability status, asking them how they prefer to work and communicate and their workplace environment preferences. With such questionnaires, the benefit was discussed to be that once employers find out the number of dyslexic persons in the organisation, they can become more inclusive by talking about disability in everyday language and make employees feel comfortable and confident about voicing their needs. This would replace the fear that dyslexic employees feel in stating their disability status due to anticipated threats, a lack of promotion or dismissal. However, such solutions pose significant barriers due to them being in written form, as dyslexic persons would struggle to access them. This may lead the intervention to produce understated responses.

As a concluding point, Dr Leveroy mentioned that disability adjustments are often seen as a part of performance management. As such, they are often weighted with emotional sentiments, since individuals going through the disciplinary procedure quite frequently experience stress from such processes. She noted that such processes are also inconsistent within and between organisations, which further leads to a discrepancy in the opportunities provided to dyslexic persons.

In addition to this, a lot of disability support provided in organisations, while helpful towards those facing physical disability and requiring accessibility provisions, is frequently disappointing for dyslexics. This is caused by a lack of awareness of the needs of dyslexic people. The panel agreed that such inconsistencies give rise to significantly untapped talent that dyslexia individuals possess.

Benefits of technology in workplace environments

Nasser Siabi led the discussion forward, mentioning how his company has successfully completed 30 years of helping almost half a million disabled people and working across the largest multinational companies. Siabi's main point of emphasis remained the importance of removing barriers faced by dyslexic persons, as opposed to providing individualised and tailored adjustments.

> **"We are not there to cure dyslexic people; we are there to remove barriers. So, our job is very much to become experts in identifying what barriers people face, whether they go to a school or university or workplace, and offer very simple solutions."**
>
> **– Nasser Siabi**

Siabi mentioned the importance of global recognition of workplace adjustments, as opposed to reasonable adjustments, echoing Dr Leveroy's point on universal design. Within reasonable adjustments, employers almost invariably require dyslexic employees to 'prove' their disability to be able to receive adequate recognition and disability provision. This method of proving not only prevents dyslexic employees from seeking help but rather, medicalises the entire model of disability assistance provision. According to Siabi, what was essential was removing barriers faced by dyslexic persons so that voicing their needs and accessing provisions is an uplifting process.

Siabi mentioned his work in the field, stating that significant advances can be made in workplaces through the provision of AT and/or coaching. Such adjustments have been paramount in bringing about inclusivity. According to his work at Microlink, Siabi stated that such interventions have cost a rough estimate of "£500 - 600 per individual while the productivity saw an improvement of more than 50 per cent."

The discussion noted a poignant point on the economic costs of underproductivity, which were seen to be a significant threat to the economy. The panel noted that underproductivity is not only seen in employment but early on in schools as well. In this scenario, according to Siabi, the right education and workplace design solutions go a long way in reducing underproductivity and bringing out the productive potential in students and employees. Such designs would vary contextually, depending on individualised models of needs assessed by education and workplace organisations. The designs discussed by Siabi were not only restricted to dyslexia but were seen to assist other associated difficulties, such as anxiety and poor mental health.

> **"Our goal is to enable every individual, regardless of disability and condition, to be able to do their job, achieve success and reach their full potential. That really has to go back to education, where there's a big impact on children with learning disabilities. We need to look at the core reason they are failing and address this so that it doesn't land up in employment."**
>
> **– Nasser Siabi**

Low number of organisations helping adults with dyslexia

Steve O'Brien carried ahead the discussion, mentioning how, in his work over the past 25 years, his biggest concern has been the significantly low number of organisations working for dyslexia adults. When it comes to dyslexia, the focus of organisations has mainly been on children within the education system. Not many have come forward to focus on dyslexia in adulthood. He mentioned how there are several funding streams available for persons with SEN, such as Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA[29]), and funding streams, such as Access to Work[30], but there is nothing for unemployed people. O'Brien considered this one of the biggest social costs, a massive area where people are left to fail.

O'Brien noted that more than 3000 people per month come to Dyslexia Foundation for information, where there are several resources available - including podcasts and free online dyslexia assessment tools to support adults. The association provides a quality assurance framework, where people gain support. Discussing workplace settings, he explained that despite an increase in the number of employers taking steps to help employees through assessments, there is still an absence of accountability on the part of employers due to a lack of adequate awareness or information on what the intervention process for dyslexia entails.

> **"It is very alarming that luck is the biggest factor in someone progressing and reaching their potential. That, for me, is essential."**
>
> **– Steve O'Brien**

One of the questions posed by the audience was centred around whether employees in recent years have started to feel differently about expressing their needs for dyslexia adjustment. Siabi agreed with this point. He continued to state that some organisations have improved enormously - carefully looking at inclusion and neurodiversity and considering it essential to talk about. He mentioned that well-informed and progressive employers are not looking at dyslexia like a label. Instead, they are trying to figure out what they can do for employees to make them more productive and efficient by working on identifying the barriers and issues in the workplace environment and providing solutions. Siabi mentioned that even within his organisation, the approach is to focus on the solutions rather than considering dyslexia as a problem. Among the multinationals that Siabi worked for, within some organisations, up to 20 per cent of the workforce received adjustment over a five-year period, making 4 per cent adjustment received, each year, a significant number.

> **"Once you provide easy solutions, people will happily disclose their needs."**
>
> **– Nassir Siabi**

O'Brien agreed with this point, mentioning that employers are more willing to assess staff. With the biggest client for the Dyslexia Foundation in 2020 being the NHS, they have worked more with doctors than any other profession, while simultaneously supporting 30 police officers and 25 nurses.

Looking at some of the challenges within the system of support provision, Siabi noted that a common error seen across workplaces has been oversubscription to solutions. Organisations may often believe that giving a range of options may be helpful but it may frequently overwhelm many individuals who already feel overly burdened by the poorly tailored system. Instead, the panel argued that targeted solutions that might not require the full spectrum of assistive resources, but a limited solution in a particular timeframe, could prove to be more helpful.

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Screening and identification measures in the workplace

Catterson posed a question from the audience to Dr Leveroy on the need for individual employees in the workplace to have dyslexia screening or a dyslexia diagnosis. Dr Leveroy expressed her opinion on this by saying that screening may often be a red herring, which may take the responsibility of providing intervention away from the employer and place it back on the individual. It is important that employers realise their critical role in providing support to their employees and taking on responsibility for intervention. Williams added that people who know that they are dyslexic need to be empowered enough so that they can come forward and say that they are dyslexic without any shame. Siabi agreed with Williams, stating that:

> **"In companies where they really get it, people can say "Hey I'm dyslexic. That's a great thing!" and not have to say, "I'm dyslexic, please feel sorry for me or help me.""**
>
> **– Nasser Siabi**

Catterson directed the final question to O'Brien, inquiring about the steps that the organisations could be taking to make the workplace more inclusive for dyslexics.

O'Brien suggested that people should be more open and straightforward in inquiring with organisations regarding their dyslexia policy and whether it is a part of their disability policy. In cases where there is an absence of such policies, the threat of litigation was discussed to have previously nudged organisations to provide help to dyslexic persons. O'Brien also mentioned that while large scale enterprises are usually better at offering such support, small and medium sized enterprises are still catching up. Such questions that inquire into a company's disability policy become important not only when there is threat of litigation, but also when forming the basis of making employers more accountable.

> **"Enterprises don't usually understand that they need to use employees for their strengths instead of beating them on their heads for their weaknesses. If employees have talent in a particular area, they should be supported, and the communication barrier should be removed. That's what it is to me, dyslexia in the workplace; it is lack of being able to communicate effectively in the form that people expect you to."**
>
> **– Nasser Siabi**

Moving ahead to further questions, as a member of the audience, Lord Addington targeted a specific question to Williams, asking the following:

"What is the initial phase you think people must go through to realise that it (workplace interventions) is important? What is that trigger point when people suddenly go, oh this is valuable. Is it caused by the threat of litigation, or is it caused by something else? Is there a pattern to it, or is it very random?"

Williams responded by saying that he believed it was the latter. He commented that people are less worried about litigation. Instead, it is when employers realise that incorporating the different thought processes and capabilities of dyslexic persons is valuable, that is when organisations make efforts to help them. From an employee's point of view, they get the confidence to talk about their own struggles and worries, and things that they find easy and difficult. O'Brien also added to his comment on the threat of litigation, stating that firms frequently find it difficult to train and recruit staff due to the amount of time and resources expended in the process. As such, employers recognise the importance of retaining the staff that they have invested in over time, thereby avoiding laying them off.

Moving forward, a member of the audience, Dr Melanie Thorley, added to the discussion by mentioning the importance of language used in the process of addressing dyslexic persons. In her dialogue with the panel, she highlighted that dyslexic persons often have to "declare" that they are dyslexic. She proposed that small changes, such as changing the word from "declare" to "share", helps people feel more accepted and at ease in expressing their needs while increasing their sense of autonomy. She noted that words such as "declare" can often be trigger points for people who were stigmatised and made to feel ashamed as early as starting school. Before ending the first session, the panel unanimously noted the need for organisations to be inclusive of all disabilities. This would not only help neurodiverse employees feel included but would generate more socioeconomic return from the workforce in the long term.

Key recommendations from the panel

- **Normalise neurodiversity conversations in the workplace -** having normal conversations around dyslexia and neurodiverse conditions among individuals in the workplace will give people confidence in asking for the support that they require. This will also help remove the communication barrier around voicing disability needs while simultaneously empowering employees to feel more equal in social settings. Additionally, this will have a beneficial impact on performance indicators.
- **Fund assistance for workers with dyslexia -** increasing funding for individuals with dyslexia in employment will ensure inclusivity and help tap into the many avenues of creative expression that neurodiverse adults possess. These might currently be side-lined due to a lack of resources being invested in helping them work at their full potential.
- **Take steps to encourage company dyslexia policies -** while organisations in recent years have largely improved in addressing disability, the focus has often remained on physical disabilities. By requiring organisations to be transparent about their disability policy or other disabilities, including neurodiverse conditions, this will help in including individuals whose disabilities might not be as overtly visible. This will assist in creating inclusive and better practices in employment structures.



Session Two: The Criminal Justice System

The second session was chaired by Dr Georgia Niolaki and focused on dyslexia in the criminal justice system. The panellists included

- David Breakspear, Criminal Justice Champion and Former Prisoner
- Karen Ryan, Director of Prison Delivery, The Shannon Trust
- Melanie Jameson, Founder, Dyslexia Consultancy Malvern

Dr Niolaki started the session by highlighting the importance of personal networks. She stated that in addition to assessments and intervention, developing and providing personal networks and relationships to dyslexic persons can prove to be very helpful. She shared her personal background - being bilingual and struggling with dyslexia - highlighting the difficulties that dyslexic persons who speak many languages may face as dyslexia may show up differently in speech and learning abilities across languages. With this, she emphasised that while discussions on the theory and ideology behind dyslexia and intervention are necessary, implementable interventions should take precedence across academia, legislation, the justice system and industry.

Awareness and training of prison staff

The first panellist, who is a criminal justice champion and a former prisoner, David Breakspear, opened the discussion by briefly talking about his personal experience as a neurodiverse person and as a teaching mentor helping in prisons. He mentioned that a lack of awareness and understanding by prison staff has been the most pressing issue in prisons. Neurodivergent persons are more likely to face difficulties coping in prisons compared to those without neurodiverse conditions. This stems from the difficulty in reading paperwork, confidence issues, mental health struggles, etc. In such a scenario,

he emphasised that understanding and awareness regarding neurodiversity among staff members can make a huge difference in easing difficult experiences for prisoners and creating an inclusive environment.

He reiterated that prison staff should be well versed with tools and methods to employ when working with people with neurodiversity. This should be done not only for those who have been diagnosed but also for those who may have been missed by assessments but display signs of learning difficulties. He gave the example of prisoners experiencing anxiety. It is a frequent observation that prison staff attribute expressions of anxiety to attitude and behavioural issues. However, such surface observations may often have their root in deeper difficulties faced by prisoners with neurodiversity. These should not be side-lined.

The second panellist, Karen Ryan, spoke about the need to provide mentors to individuals struggling with reading difficulties. Speaking about the work of The Shannon Trust, Ryan mentioned short, one-to-one thirty-minute sessions provided to individuals with dyslexia. She noted that such short and personal sessions were important in giving agency and autonomy to individual learners, instead of forcing them to be a part of a system of mainstream learning that is not well-equipped to meet their needs. In such learning structures, diversifying the learning process was discussed as integral. Matching books to the right levels for the learners and individualising the process to the best of the staff's ability was noted by Ryan to go a long way in making sure that prisoners read for pleasure and not for the need to study.

Ensuring that neurodiverse prisoners feel supported

Ryan turned the panel's attention to ensuring support for neurodiverse persons in prisons. A disproportionately high number of people in prisons struggle with reading and learning difficulties[31]. In these scenarios, a peer-mentor system taught and practised at The Shannon Trust was reported as a crucial way to bridge the support gap. According to Ryan, in such personal settings, prisoners are more likely to ask for support and confide in mentors whom they have come to know and develop familiarity with. Often when dyslexic children and adults do not receive such personalised support, it leads them to drop out of the education system entirely, as they see education as "not for them". When taking place in the prison system, these experiences can be very distressing as prisoners with learning difficulties are often handed out paperwork that they cannot read and understand.

Notably, it was also mentioned by Ryan that bringing formal and informal ways of learning together could prove to be beneficial for dyslexic persons. While formal education classes and teaching lessons are necessary, supporting them through informal mentor support and dedicated one-to-one sessions is integral in building confidence and making people proactive in their own learning. The biggest improvement noted by Ryan is the way people view themselves and their ability to cope better in prison life. In this process, Ryan also mentioned some of the tools used by The Shannon Trust, which can be taken on by institutions and prison systems to help dyslexic persons.

> **"We use tools like coloured overlays to minimise visual stress and we match reading books to the right level of learners."**
>
> **– Karen Ryan**

The discussion moved towards testing for dyslexia and looked at the need to broaden attention from focusing too narrowly on measurements and learning disability indicators. Ryan highlighted that while measuring is important, it can often be off - putting for some individuals. Rather, a focus on demonstrating progression for learners and progress in improvement was discussed to be important. Ryan briefly mentioned the use of technology - in the form of applications and assistive devices - decided by neurodiversity specialists for prison systems could be a helpful tool to increase autonomy among prisoners and help them feel empowered.

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Measures to be introduced for addressing dyslexia in prisons

The third panellist, Melanie Jameson, shifted the panel's focus to the usage of terminology in the discussion around dyslexia. She highlighted how, in recent times, several authorities associated with the prison system have started utilising the words learning disabilities data (LDD) as an umbrella term to group all neurodiverse conditions. This has proven to be unhelpful for people who have specific learning disabilities and often get overlooked and side-lined. Within this, the identity of dyslexia has, regrettably, become further diluted.

According to Jameson, any worthwhile solution for a dyslexic person within the prison system must consider four areas

- Screening and follow-ups
- Training of staff to better identify dyslexia
- Awareness training and support training funded by the Ministry of Justice
- A 'through the gates' arrangement that provides continued help to ex-offenders

However, such measures have been unable to take place, caused in large part by the Covid-19 pandemic. Jameson noted recent records of cancellations of education classes and workshops due to a shortage of staff, in addition to a fall in the number of senior prison officers. Neither service has recovered, significantly reducing the support that dyslexic prisoners can access.

The panel was posed a question by a member of the audience on how existing programmes in prisons can be scaled to improve literacy in the criminal justice system. Jameson responded to the question, saying that the police, courts, prisons and probation services had to work together to improve the context of literacy. She highlighted the example of His Majesty's Prison and Probation (HMPP) rapid screening service that should be followed by a further detailed assessment of those who were identified in the initial screening. As such, improving screening standards was seen as a favourable place to improve literacy outcomes. Ensuring that assessments take place more strictly within institutions was thought to be an important first step as well.

A critical point noted here by Ryan was on the reports published by Ofsted and HMPP on the inability of screening tests to identify signs of dyslexia within prison systems. This was due to inaccurate timings of assessments conducted relatively early on for prisoners.

> **"We know that assessments are often conducted with people when they arrive, within the first two days. You can imagine, if you have just arrived in prison, you will not be in the right frame of mind. Thus, you cannot expect to get accurate results from such a resource."**
>
> **– Karen Ryan**

Ryan offered her recommendation, proposing that such assessments should be conducted at a later time, when prisoners are settled and helped, while also emphasising, once again, the need to complement informal structures with formal procedures to test for dyslexia. This was because many individuals in the prison might find ways to get around the formal system of assessment as a way of dodging education provisions. Keeping this in mind, making sure that assessments are more inclusive and non-threatening for dyslexic persons can be a good starting place to ensure wider response rates. One of the ways Ryan said this can be tackled is through incentives for taking part in education programmes. As such, improving pay in the education sector was seen as a tangible way forward for this.

On the topic of assessment response rates, Breakspear mentioned the inaccuracy prevalent in the universal assessment within prisons. This was often due to tutors in prisons offering help to prisoners in attempts to ensure that they are not left behind. Thus, while assessments are integral, the panel noted that they needed to be conducted in a more robust fashion. The second point highlighted by Breakspear was that of inductions within prisons. He highlighted that people entering prison systems are often expected to understand the system and the need for assessments early on. This understanding, in reality, is often not achieved. He recommended that assessments should be

conducted over time. What should, instead, be at the top of the priority list within prison systems is the mental, emotional and physical wellbeing of prisoners, allowing assessments to be conducted at an individual's pace.

One of the final questions posed to the panel was on how risk factors could be identified early, allowing for signposting people who might need interventions and thereby preventing their clash with the criminal justice system.

Jameson responded to this question, stating that the certain targeted populations are more vulnerable to entering the prison system. One of the groups mentioned was 'excluded people' who may have faced humiliation in class, thought to be different and as a result, side-lined in schools. The other category mentioned by Jameson was 'looked after children'. In this cohort, certain behaviour displayed by children that would be accepted under normal circumstances is met with police attention. Jameson added that once such attention has been received, a significant proportion of children enter prison.

As a recommendation, Jameson highlighted the Justice Reinvestment report in 2010[32], which encouraged the £18 billion spent each year on reoffending to be redirected to vulnerable individuals. Jameson estimated the number to be £43,000 per person per year, which was seen to be feasible by her. Highlighting that such measures would significantly reduce of the number of dyslexic people entering the criminal justice system.

In conclusion, the panel unanimously agreed that it is the strength of the education system that will prevent individuals from entering the criminal justice system. The panel acknowledged that the education system is currently failing many students, excluding them from receiving the appropriate intervention and side-lining them from educational spaces, increasing inequalities. A comprehensive and cohesive approach to support provision is needed to ensure that all systems work together to support dyslexic persons, across all sectors and stages in society.

Key recommendations from the panel

- **Raise awareness of dyslexia in the criminal justice system -** training prison staff in understanding how dyslexia and other neurodiverse conditions manifest and teaching about consequent needs of such individuals will help the criminal justice system become increasingly sensitive to dyslexic individuals. This will also help raise awareness about mental health conditions that arise from disability and its needs.
- **Provide more resources for prison staff to support dyslexic people -** investment in increasing the tools, sessions and training available to prison staff in identifying and helping persons with dyslexia is important. This can be done by conducting programs that train staff in the necessary methods. Such training will be beneficial in raising awareness about tailored and individualised support needed for dyslexic individuals.
- **Incentivise prisoners to take part in education -** providing infrastructure and technology in prison systems that encourages prisoners to engage in education will empower those with dyslexia to be able to gain employment once they leave the prison. This not only has short-term benefits of reform within the prison system but a long-term positive impact on the inclusion of dyslexic persons within the workforce. One of the methods that can be used is providing one-to-one 30-minute learning sessions to prisoners, allowing them to learn at their own pace.
- **Gain more accurate dyslexia diagnosis with long-term assessments -** instead of conducting assessments for dyslexia among prisoners during their early days in prison, they should be conducted over a period of time that will prove to be more beneficial in gaining accurate results, precise estimates of dyslexia indicators will manifest better over comprehensive long-term assessments. This will also help to prioritise the emotional and mental wellbeing of prisoners by taking away assessment pressures and helping them cope better with prison life.

32 Criminal Justice System statistics quarterly: June 2021 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)



Claire Thomas

Head of Therapy at The Levels School

The *Dyslexia Commission* report identified multiple research outcomes.

An immediate priority is the need to train all health professionals working across the ICSs to ensure that they understand neurodiversity and how they can modify their practice to support their service users.

CAMHS staff and counsellors need training to spot dyslexia and other neurodiverse conditions in their service users so that they can recommend them for referral if the service user has not already had a previous diagnosis, this is an important part of the jigsaw. A diagnosis of any neurodiversity is a life-changing event, which can be positive as it often helps the service user understand themselves. If a diagnosis is not made, then it can impact the effectiveness of any mental health support they receive.

Given the link between Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) and Social Emotional Mental Health Needs (SEMH), it is vital that speech and language therapists are part of the CAMHs teams to assess if a need is identified and ensure that the language need is also being worked on in conjunction with the SEMH need.

Across the healthcare system, there needs to be more funding for speech and language therapy and occupational therapy as this has been drastically reduced over the past ten years. These therapeutic interventions significantly support children with neurodiverse conditions.

Investment should be made into increasing the numbers of speech and language therapists (SALTs) and occupational therapists (OTs) as there are severe shortages nationally in both professions. This is having an impact on the number of children who can be assessed and supported.

Therapeutic provision needs to be accessible to all. This provision should include a wider variety of SEMH creative arts therapies, including art therapy, play therapy and drama therapy, as all of these can play a valuable role in supporting children who cannot access traditional talking therapies due to their neurodiversity. These therapies need to be funded through EHCPs.

Within education settings, there needs to be better training for teachers about the co-morbidity of neurodiverse conditions e.g. developmental language disorder (DLD) and dyslexia. This needs to be in place during teacher training but also available as regular 'top up' courses for staff during inset training days.

SENDCo networks should be created across the local authorities for sharing best practices with opportunities to feed into ICSs about what is happening at a school-based level.

These are several preventative measures that can be taken. These also include a project being run at The Levels School in Somerset, where students are encouraged to "own your neurodiversity". Students are empowered to talk about the positives of their specific neurodiversity, how this can be of benefit to future employers and how they identify role models to aspire to.

Whilst some of these ideas require significant investment, others require little funding to implement, but they would make tangible differences to the outcomes for the service users.

Dr Nasser Siabe

CEO of Microlink PC



ATs and effective interventions have a proven record of improving employment outcomes for dyslexic and neurodivergent individuals.

Effective interventions are all about affording disabled people the same freedom to let their brilliant talents shine that non-disabled people often take for granted. By adjusting, often simple, environmental factors and providing them with the powerful tools available to us, we can loosen the restrictions that prevent dyslexic and neurodiverse people from unleashing their potential.

For businesses, case studies show that the right intervention can reduce staff absenteeism, employee churn and legal costs and significantly improve employee engagement. These benefits not only improve outcomes for disabled and neurodiverse cohorts but they also bring with them a valuable return on investment (ROI) for businesses.

In times of great economic uncertainty, and in the midst of a productivity crisis in the United Kingdom, AT and tailored interventions offer an avenue to help millions of economically inactive individuals find their way back to employment and independence as consumers. By recognising both the talent of dyslexic, neurodiverse and other disabled people, and by ensuring that we support them effectively, we can help give a huge boost to the economy and save millions on social care.

Used correctly, AT and tailored interventions can have a major positive impact on employment and on the social and political landscapes we inhabit. It is imperative that the *Dyslexia Commission* report makes note of the significant benefits of effective interventions if it is to be successful in helping millions of disabled individuals currently struggling to return to the workforce or remain in employment.



Conclusion and Next Steps

This *Dyslexia Commission* has heard contributions from a diverse range of perspectives. Peers, teachers, former prison inmates, academics, a former Secretary of State, business leaders in the field of AT and many experts in the study of dyslexia..

The varied perspectives published in this report have allowed the Commission to approach the problem of creating a more equal society for dyslexics from various perspectives. In particular, Curia has focussed on implementation of existing policy aims, whether that be within schools, prisons or Parliament.

Key findings

The recommendations listed in the headlines section, and expanded on in the executive summary and throughout the report, are the primary output of this *Dyslexia Commission*. They are by no means the consensus recommendations of the Commissioners or contributors, but they do represent the viewpoints of the experts present at our inquiry sessions.

Normalisation

A key theme of this Commission was the need to normalise neurodiversity. This needs to happen throughout society but, particularly in schools and prisons. A basic understanding of different types of neurodiversity and an end to any stigma for those who are not neurotypical will be a necessary prerequisite to reducing the barriers to success for dyslexic people in our society.

There is no reason why a basic understanding of dyslexia cannot be relayed at school. One of our recommendations is for children to be made aware of different learning styles and methods, this would perhaps be a good way to normalise those who learn differently and universally improve educational attainment.

Teaching

Teaching children with different needs may require a range of teaching and learning techniques to be utilised. Several of the recommendations emphasise the need for a broadening of teachers' knowledge of learning styles and their training in different 'tools' to unlock success in a diverse range of children.

In general, contributors to the inquiry sessions would rather that teachers learn many ways to teach rather than learning a set 'best pratice' way which will only work for the majority of students; those with SEND or the neurodiverse learning entirely separately. Of course, giving teachers a range of tools to use at their own discretion will also require that the judgement of teachers will be respected as they apply these tools to the best of their ability. Future investigation into the maintenance and measurement of teaching standards should look into how best to monitor the quality of teaching while teachers are using such diverse methods. This is especially true if individualised examinations were introduced for the neurodiverse.

Next steps

Policymakers are welcome to use the conclusions of this *Dyslexia Commission* and use them as a useful resource for understanding multiple perspectives on the complex issue of dyslexia.

As education has changed in response to evolving technology, the lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the greater understanding of both neurodiversity and mental health issues, a more general inquiry would seem to be the next logical step.

Any future research should focus on teaching, teaching assessment, the use of AT by the education system, the impact of technology on the education system and how flexibility can accommodate those with mental health issues, social deprivation and neurodiversity.

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To hear more about our work please get in contact at: shivani.sen@chamberuk.com

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