

# Human Resources

## DYSLEXIA/DYSPRAXIA

Author	██████████
Date Written	April 2008
Date Reviewed	September 2008
Date for Review	September 2009
Version	1



South Yorkshire  
Fire & Rescue  
WORKING FOR A SAFER  
SOUTH YORKSHIRE

# Dyslexia/Dyspraxia

## INTRODUCTION

1. South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service (SYFR) is committed to employing a workforce that reflects the diverse community that it serves and recognises that this will be accompanied by a wide variety of different abilities and disabilities. Therefore to ensure that discrimination in the workplace on the grounds of disability does not occur we have introduced the following policy guidance for dealing with employees and potential employees with dyslexia and/or dyspraxia.
2. Around 4% of the population have severe dyslexia, with a further 6% having mild to moderate dyslexia. Dyspraxia is thought to affect up to 10% of the population and up to 2% severely. The Disability legislation covers severe Dyslexia and Dyspraxia.
3. As a member of the Dignity at Work Partnership<sup>1</sup>, SYFR is committed to promoting a positive working environment where the dignity and respect, to which all employees are entitled, is not undermined. No employee should be treated less favourably on the grounds of race, gender or gender reassignment, disability, sexual orientation, religion or spiritual belief, colour, nationality, national or ethnic origin, marital/parental status, family ties, trade union or political belief, hours worked, or any other reason, either directly or indirectly.

## LEGISLATION

4. The Disability Discrimination Act prohibits discrimination against disabled people in employment. Employers must make reasonable adjustments to premises and employment arrangements, if these substantially disadvantage a disabled employee, or prospective employee, compared to a non-disabled person.

## WHAT IS DYSLEXIA?

5. Dyslexia is a combination of abilities and difficulties that affects the processing of information. A dyslexic individual may have experienced difficulties in acquiring skills in reading, writing, spelling and numeracy.

## WHAT IS DYSPRAXIA?

6. Dyspraxia is generally recognised to be an impairment or immaturity of the organisation of movement. It is an immaturity in the way that the brain processes information, which results in messages not being properly fully transmitted. Associated with this may be problems of language, perception and thought. The term dyspraxia comes from the word praxis, which means 'doing, acting'. Dyspraxia affects the planning of what to do and how to do it. Males are four times more likely to be affected than females.

<sup>1</sup> The Dignity at Work Partnership is a partnership between the Government, Unite (the UK's largest union) and major public and private sector organisations. For further information on the Partnership, see [www.dignityatwork.org](http://www.dignityatwork.org)

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### EXISTING EMPLOYEES

7. For any adjustments to be made employees need to disclose details of their disabilities. This can be via the Line manager and/or the HR Manager – Equality & Diversity. It is recognised that Dyslexic/Dyspraxic people will want SYFR to understand their disability and feel confident about discussing any difficulties that arise so that reasonable adjustments can be made.
8. In order for adjustments to be made employees are asked to undergo a dyslexia or dyspraxia assessment to determine the level of disability prior to receiving any reasonable adjustments.
9. Employees who require an assessment should contact the Occupational Health Unit for an appointment to be made.
10. SYFR will pay for the initial first assessment only.
11. On receipt of the dyslexia or dyspraxia assessment report, the employees should speak to their Line Manager about any adjustments recommended.
12. On-line tests are available at [www.beingdyslexic.co.uk](http://www.beingdyslexic.co.uk) and Educational/Occupational Psychologist tests can be organised through the Department of Works and Pensions, Access to Work Section by contacting the Human Resources Department. This will provide an overview of the assessment and the results, plus a list of recommendations, which may be helpful in progressing areas for improvement.

### ASSESSMENT DEVELOPMENT CENTRES

13. Employees undertaking an Assessment Development Centre Process who have been identified of having dyslexia or dyspraxia should contact the Station Manager – Workforce Development prior to any selection process taking place in order that a meeting can take place and a Reasonable Adjustments Form be completed ( See Appendix A).

### PROMOTION INTERVIEWS

14. Employees undertaking a promotion interview who have been identified of having dyslexia or dyspraxia should contact the Recruitment Manager prior to their interview taking place in order that a meeting can take place. Employees selected for an interview must ensure that they have a completed a Reasonable Adjustments Form (See Appendix A).
15. After a meeting has taken place the Recruitment Manager will inform the recruitment panel of any adjustments identified that will be needed to assist the employee within the interview process.

### POTENTIAL EMPLOYEES

14. For any adjustments to be made throughout the recruitment process, potential employees must disclose details of their disabilities on the application form. If

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appointed, details of any difficulties/assessments must be disclosed to the manager responsible for the employee by the Recruitment Manager e.g. Station Manager, Training Instructors.

15. The Manager responsible for the employee will then make contact with the individual before their employment commences to ensure all the information is available to make provisions for any reasonable adjustments. Where the manager is unable to make contact prior to the employee's commencement, the manager must ensure that they speak with the employee on their first day of employment with SYFR.

***If you require any further guidance on this document please contact the Human Resources Function.***

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PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

APPENDIX A

## ASSESSMENT DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

### REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS FOR DYSLEXIA AND DYSPRAXIA FORM

Candidates undertaking the Assessment Development Centre Process who have declared that they have either dyslexia or dyspraxia should be asked to attend a meeting with the Station Manager – Workforce Development prior to any selection process taking place. This form is to be completed at that meeting.

South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue has a legal duty to consider making reasonable adjustments for all applicants who declare any disability.

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) defines disability as “a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”

Both Dyslexia and Dyspraxia fall within the DDA, therefore reasonable adjustments need to be made where appropriate and this includes the National Firefighter Selection Process.

For further guidance please refer to the organisations Equality and Diversity Policy.

#### Dyslexia

Dyslexia causes difficulties in learning to read, write and spell and can occur at any level of intellectual ability.

#### Dyspraxia

Developmental Dyspraxia is an immaturity in the way that the brain processes information, which results in messages not being properly or fully transmitted.

#### Reasonable adjustments:

**Individuals will have had to have undergone a dyslexia or dyspraxia assessment to determine the level of disability prior to receiving any reasonable adjustments. Individuals who require an assessment should contact the Occupational Health Unit on 0114 2532273.**

On receipt of the assessment form, the Station Manager – Workforce Development should ask the candidate which of the following aspects are affected by their condition (please tick the following that apply):

- Difficulty with reading
- Difficulty with writing
- Spelling and grammar errors
- Difficulty remembering and following verbal instructions

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- Difficulty with hidden meanings in conversation
- Concentration difficulties/distractions
- Directional difficulties
- Short term memory problems especially names, numbers and lists

What extra equipment or assistance would the candidate benefit from bringing with them or benefit from us providing? (Continue on separate sheet if necessary)

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Please see Appendix B– ‘Range of Reasonable Adjustments to be Considered in the Joint Assessment Between Training/Assessment Provider and Candidate’ and use the space provided below to list the adjustments provided for the candidate. (Continue on separate sheet if necessary).

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For Candidate:

Name ..... No .....

Signature ..... Date .....

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For SM Workforce Development:

Name ..... No .....

Signature ..... Date .....

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## Appendix B - Range of Reasonable Adjustments to be Considered in the Joint Assessment Between Training/Assessment Provider and Candidate.

### National Firefighter Selection Process

#### Reasonable Adjustments

##### Introduction

- 4.1 An employer must not refuse to employ someone simply because they have a disability. Employers must make reasonable adjustment to their premises or employment arrangements, if these substantially disadvantage a disabled employee, or prospective employee, compared to a non-disabled person.
- 4.2 It is for the employer to consider whether the adjustments are reasonable or not - and to defend that decision to a Tribunal if necessary. The onus lies with the employer rather than the employee to disprove discrimination. Failure to make reasonable adjustments cannot be justified except where the employer can demonstrate that they were not informed by an individual that reasonable adjustments were required, or could not reasonably be expected to know.
- 4.3 Decisions on whether reasonable adjustments would be appropriate are dependent on Fire and Rescue Service managers being satisfied that the individual could safely carry out the requirements of the role i.e. they must consider whether the severity of the person's condition would pose any risk to themselves, colleagues or members of the public.
- 4.4 The advice and guidance contained within this chapter is provided specifically with regard to the NFS process.
- 4.5 You must contact a candidate with a potential disability to find out what level of disability the person has, the impact it might have and what reasonable adjustments they would like to be taken, or are normally taken in similar situations (e.g. for exams). The candidate's perspective must be taken into account when considering what reasonable adjustments could/should be made.
- 4.6 The main call for reasonable adjustments will be, as now, from candidates with dyslexia and dyspraxia, hence the reason that this chapter provides specific guidance on making reasonable adjustments for candidates with these two conditions when taking the psychometric tests. This guidance was formulated after reference to existing material published by organisations and experts e.g. The British Dyslexia Association.

#### ***Disability Discrimination (Amendment) Act (2003)***

- 4.7 On the 1 October 2004 the employment provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) (DDA) were extended to include firefighting. The employment provisions of the DDA protect people with existing disabilities, and those who develop disabilities in the course of their working lives, from unfair discrimination. The DDA defines disability as "a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities". The Act also applies to people who no longer have a disability but have had one in the past.

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- 4.8 Fire and rescue services have a legal duty to consider making reasonable adjustments for **all** applicants who declare **any** disability.
- 4.9 The legislation is intended to ensure that disability should not debar an individual from a job unless it would genuinely and significantly impede that person from doing the work and there is nothing the employer could reasonably be expected to do to overcome this.

### Psychological tests

#### *Candidates with dyslexia*

##### *What is dyslexia?*

- 4.10 Dyslexia causes difficulties in learning to read, write and spell. Short-term memory, mathematics, concentration, personal organisation may also be affected. Dyslexia usually arises from a weakness in the processing of language-based information. Biological origin, it tends to run in families, but environmental factors also contribute.
- 4.11 Dyslexia can occur at any level of intellectual ability. It is not the result of poor motivation, emotional disturbance, sensory impairment or lack of opportunities, but it may occur alongside any of these. Dyslexia is a puzzling mix of both difficulties and strengths. It varies in degree and from person to person. Dyslexic people often have distinctive talents as well as typical clusters of difficulties.
- 4.12 Approximately 10% of the workforce may be dyslexic. Severe dyslexia is covered under the DDA.

#### *Reasonable adjustments during the NFS process*

- 4.13 Adjustments for candidates with dyslexia can be simple and inexpensive. For adjustments to be made, the candidate needs to disclose details of their difficulties since, as the strategies that help candidates overcome obstacles vary in line with the severity of dyslexia.
- 4.14 Once you are informed by a candidate that he/she has dyslexia (e.g. he/she declares it on his/her application form), you should contact them to understand the extent of their dyslexia and what type of allowance or assistance you should offer as part of the NFS. Asking candidates the following questions may be useful:
- What aspects are affected by your dyslexia? E.g.:
  - Difficulty with reading;
  - Difficulty with writing;
  - Spelling and grammar errors;
  - Difficulty remembering and following verbal instructions;
  - Difficulty with hidden meanings in conversation;
  - Concentration difficulties/distractions;
  - Directional difficulties; or

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- Short term memory problems especially names, numbers and lists.
- What extra allowance were you offered at school/college/university when taking examinations?
- What extra equipment or assistance would you benefit from bringing with you to the selection assessments?
- What extra equipment or assistance would you benefit from us providing for you at the selection assessments?

4.15 The following have proved successful for many people with dyslexia, although the person's pattern of dyslexia may make some of these inappropriate. An individual may require none, one or several of the strategies. The information elicited in discussions with the candidate will help determine which strategies are most appropriate for his/her circumstances. When providing instructions:

- Offer verbal directions to the testing venue as well as written instructions. Supply detailed maps and show the route and visible landmarks.
- On leaflets or posters about selection events, keep essential information about time and place grouped together.
- On boards and posters, print lowercase rather than using joined writing.
- Allow extra time for candidates with dyslexia to read instructions.
- Read out instructions to candidates in addition to providing written instructions.
- Give instructions one at a time.
- Communicate instructions slowly and clearly in a quiet location.
- Allow candidates to take notes whilst instructions are given.
- Give clear concise and direct instructions; do not make assumptions that you have been understood.
- During completion of questionnaires/tests.
- Allow extra time for candidates with dyslexia to complete the assessment (an additional 25% of the standard time is good practice).
- Make sure the testing venue is quiet and away from distractions for example away from doors, busy phones, loud machinery. Use a "do not disturb" sign.
- Ensure that work areas are organised, neat and tidy.
- Allow candidates to use a reading pen (candidates can use a pen-like device to scan a word on paper, listen to it spoken by the machine, and listen to, or read, the dictionary definition).
- Allow candidates to bring an assistant to help with reading, or inputting responses.
- Provide information on coloured paper (find out which colour helps the person to read best).

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- Supply different coloured acetates for candidates to place over written material to change the background colour of the page.
- When assessing any written work, do not over-emphasise the need for accurate spelling.

### **General written style guide**

- 4.16 These are some suggestions on how to make simple changes to the way information is presented to candidates with dyslexia that can make all the difference.

### **Font style**

- 4.17 Fonts should be rounded, allow for space between letters, reflect ordinary cursive writing and be 'easy on the eye'. Look for a font that spaces letters rather than running them closely together. Bear in mind that fonts that have unusual shaped letters can create difficulties.
- 4.18 Select sans serif fonts such as Arial or Comic Sans. Other suggestions include Verdana, Helvetica, Tahoma, Trebuchet and Sassoon.
- 4.19 Use a minimum of size 12pt or 14pt.
- 4.20 Where possible use lower case letters rather than capitals. Using capital letters for emphasis can make text harder to read.

### **Paper**

- 4.21 Avoid light text on a dark background.
- 4.22 Use coloured paper instead of white. Cream or off-white provides a good alternative.
- 4.23 Matt paper is preferable to glossy paper, as this reduces glare.
- 4.24 Ensure the paper is heavy enough to prevent text glaring through from the back. Good quality 80 or 90 gms is effective.

### **Presentation style**

- 4.25 Presentation can make a big difference, both to readability and initial visual impact.
- 4.26 Limit lines to 60 to 70 characters. Lines that are too long or short can put strain on eyes.
- 4.27 Use line spacing between paragraphs to break up text.
- 4.28 Use wide margins and headings.
- 4.29 Use of boxes for emphasis or to highlight important text can be effective.
- 4.30 Avoid dense blocks of text by using short paragraphs.
- 4.31 Use bold to highlight. Italics or underlining can make the words run together.
- 4.32 Keep lines left justified with a ragged right edge.

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- 4.33 Use bullets or numbers rather than continuous prose.
- 4.34 Don't hyphenate words that are not usually split in order to fill up line ends, e.g. "operation".
- 4.35 The space between lines is important. Recommendations suggest a space of 1.5 to 2 times the space.

**Online design** - must consider all the above factors together with the following points.

- Research shows that readers access text at a 25% slower rate on a computer. This should be taken into account when putting information on the web. When a website is completed, check the site and information for accessibility by carrying out these simple checks.
- Navigation should be easy. A site map is essential.
- Use graphics, images, and pictures to break up text, while bearing in mind that graphics and tables may take a long time to download.
- Large graphics make pages harder to read.
- Offer alternate download pages in a text reader friendly style.
- Where possible design web pages which can be downloaded and read off-line.
- Moving text creates problems for people with visual difficulties. It also creates a difficulty for text-reading software.
- Contents links should show which pages have been accessed.
- Most users prefer dark print on a pale background. Colour preferences vary.
- Some websites offer a choice of background colours.
- Encourage the use of hyperlinks at the end of sentences.
- Make sure that it is possible for users to set their own choice of font style and size, and background and print colours.

### **Candidates with dyspraxia**

#### **What is dyspraxia?**

- 4.36 Developmental dyspraxia is an immaturity in the way that the brain processes information, which results in messages not being properly or fully transmitted. Dyspraxia affects the planning of what to do and how to do it. It is associated with problems of perception, language and thought.
- 4.37 Between 5 per cent and 10 per cent of the population have some symptoms of dyspraxia. In many ways, people who have dyspraxia are similar to those who have dyslexia: they are often creative and original thinkers as well as strategic problem solvers.
- 4.38 Mild dyspraxia may affect a candidate's speech and language, for example he/she may talk continuously and repeat themselves. Some people with dyspraxia have difficulty with organising the content and sequence of their language. He/she may

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have unclear speech and be unable to pronounce some words. Speech may have uncontrolled pitch, volume and rate.

- 4.39 Dyspraxia may affect a candidate's learning, thought and memory. He/she may have difficulty in following instructions, especially more than one at a time.
- 4.40 Severe dyspraxia may affect an individual's perception and motor-coordination skills. However, since the NFS pre-application checklist is likely to screen out candidates who have such a disability, adjustments during further selection processes are unlikely to be required.

### ***Reasonable adjustments during the NFS process***

- 4.41 Many of the options for reasonable adjustments made for candidates for dyspraxia are similar to those made for candidates with dyslexia.
- 4.42 In particular, make sure instructions are clear and concise. Candidates should be encouraged to write instructions down clearly and to keep them for easy reference. When assessing any written work, do not over-emphasise the need for neat handwriting.

### **Physical tests**

- 4.43 The role relevant physical tests and the timings or pass requirements applicable to each have been designed and developed taking into account the context of a safety critical environment.
- 4.44 The pass levels are, therefore, absolute requirements and cannot be adjusted to accommodate candidates with particular physical disabilities.
- 4.45 However, some aspects of the physical selection process can be subject to reasonable adjustment e.g. allow candidates with missing digits on their right hand to complete the manual dexterity test from right to left.
- 4.46 Adjustments to equipment are important to consider, such as adjustments to clothing, harnesses or personal protective equipment to allow for individual musculoskeletal or skin conditions.