THREE TYPES OF ASSESSMENT
for
Dyslexia   Dyspraxia   ADHD
Maths difficulties   Visual stress

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Please note:
In this guidance article the term specific performance difficulties is used to cover all the difficulties listed in above title.

Three types of assessment are described:

A. Diagnostic assessment.
B. Study needs assessment.
C. Workplace needs assessment.

Introduction
In recent years information on specific performance (or 'learning') difficulties in adulthood has become more widely available and, as a result, adults of all ages – from twenty-something to eighty-something – are now coming forward in ever greater numbers to request assessments. Some people need an assessment because of difficulties with their work or studies; others simply want a better understanding of themselves. It can take some courage to decide to have an assessment, but it is very rare to hear of anyone who has regretted their decision to do so.

It may be that the reader of this article is at this moment wondering if he/she would benefit from an assessment. A full diagnostic assessment is expensive and so, before investing in this, you are advised to inform yourself further about specific performance difficulties and also to do a screening test.

To learn more about these specific difficulties:
(i) read What is your problem?
(ii) visit the websites of the relevant advice organisations (see end of article for details);
(iii) complete Checklists

Completing checklists is the usual form of a screening assessment. However, you need to be aware that screening tests have limitations: they do not always pick up the more subtle types of difficulty. So if you come out as, for example, 'not dyslexic' on a dyslexia screening test, this does not necessarily mean that you are not dyslexic; it may simply be that you have compensated so well for your difficulties that they are not picked up on a relatively simple test.

In order to find out precisely what your difficulties are, you need to have a comprehensive diagnostic assessment; to find out how best to get help for your difficulties you should follow this up with a needs assessment. Below details are given of what diagnostic and needs assessments cover and how these assessments can be arranged.

A. DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT

How can you find a qualified diagnostic assessor?

An assessor of specific performance difficulties will belong to one of the following groups:

- clinical psychologist
- educational psychologist
- occupational psychologist
- specialist teacher assessor

However, it is by no means the case that every member of these groups specialises in assessing adults. Begin your search for a suitable assessor by contacting the relevant advice organisations and requesting a recommendation. Then, when you contact the recommended assessor, double check that:

(i) he/she specialises in assessing adults who are in education or employment;
(ii) he/she can cover the full range of specific difficulties shown in the title of this article – some assessors only cover dyslexia.
A diagnostic assessment usually has to be arranged privately, but it is possible that your employer will be willing to fund it. If you are in Further or Higher Education your college may do so – and colleges usually have a list of recommended assessors.

Please note:
It is not useful to seek an assessor though the NHS as hospital psychologists do not usually specialise in adult developmental dyslexia. As regards dyspraxia, occupational therapists may be able to help with physical problems but they are not able to offer help with general study or workplace difficulties.

What should you expect in a diagnostic assessment?

You may be feeling a little nervous about having an assessment, perhaps worrying that it will reveal something dreadful about you. But, as far as you can, contain your nervousness: the most likely outcome of an assessment is that difficulties you have been struggling with for a long time will be recognised, categorised and explained, and that you will be given advice on how to manage them.

The assessor will begin by discussing your difficulties with you. He/she may also administer checklists. As regards the assessment tests, these are not the sort of tests that have a pass or fail mark; they simply measure your ability on different scales, just as a tape measure measures your height.

The tests fall into two groups: cognitive (e.g., verbal ability, memory) and literacy/numeracy. The profile of results on these tests, along with the history-taking, will indicate (a) whether you have specific performance difficulties, and (b) point up your strengths.

Some of the assessment tests will be timed, but this does not mean that you have to race through them. The assessor will want to get an idea of your normal rate of reading and writing. So, unless otherwise instructed, work at your usual pace. If you feel you are becoming fatigued during the session, request a few minutes' break.

Ideally your assessor should also screen you for visual stress and binocular problems. See Visual stress - binocular problems.

At the end of the assessment, the assessor will explain the assessment results and their implications, and give general advice about the sort of help and support that would be of benefit to you. You will also receive a detailed written report of the assessment results.

If a definite diagnosis of one or more specific performance difficulties comes as something of a shock to you, then you may expect to feel some 'emotional turbulence'
during the days following the assessment. See: Assessment – the morning after.

If you feel you have **difficulties with numbers or maths**, see Maths and number difficulties to establish what type of assessment would be suitable for you. Such difficulties are often due to dyslexia or dyspraxia rather than to dyscalculia.

**If you have ADHD**, you may well find that a standard needs assessment (see below) will provide you with all the help that you need in order to manage your difficulties. However, if:

(i) your ADHD is severe and continues to interfere seriously with your daily life and your study/work activities, and/or:

(ii) it is accompanied by mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, obsessional-compulsive disorder:

then you would be advised to also ask your GP to refer you to an ADHD specialist for a medical diagnosis and possible treatment. In this case you could complete the ADHD section in !! Checklists and take this to your GP so that he/she can see your difficulties at a glance. It is also helpful if your diagnostic assessor can give you a letter for the GP summarising his/her findings.

**B. STUDY NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

If you are in higher education, or if you are in further education but planning to go on to an HE college, you will need to follow up your diagnostic assessment with a needs assessment. This assessment, which is free of charge, does not involve further tests; rather, you will discuss with the needs assessor the general recommendations made in your diagnostic report and determine exactly what your needs will be in terms of tuition and equipment.

You will receive a copy of the needs assessment report, and it is important that you take this back to your college and discuss it with your disability advisor. If you and the advisor feel that the needs report is deficient in any way, you can request that the report be revised accordingly – for example, the needs assessor may not have made a referral to an optometrist.

See the article Visual stress and binocular problems on this website.
If you are planning to go up to university, it is preferable to go through this process of having a diagnostic and needs assessment before you begin your university course; otherwise it could be well into your second term before funding for support is available to you. For this to happen, one of the following three things needs to be the case:

1. You are willing to fund the initial diagnostic assessment yourself. (In this case, check with your future university that they are willing to accept the credentials of the assessor you have chosen.)
2. Your future university is willing to fund the diagnostic assessment once they have given you a definite place.
3. You already have a previous diagnostic assessment report that is deemed by the university to be acceptable.

C. WORKPLACE NEEDS ASSESSMENT (WNA)

If you are in the workplace and have had a diagnostic assessment, then you need to follow this up with a workplace needs assessment (WNA) in order to receive appropriate help and support. The WNA looks in greater detail at the support you need in the form of training and equipment, and also makes recommendations for reasonable adjustments that your employer can provide. It does not involve any tests.

Arranging a workplace needs assessment

There are two ways of arranging a workplace needs assessment, each of which has advantages and disadvantages.

The first way is to arrange the assessment through the government’s Access to Work (A2W) scheme. The advantage of this route is that A2W will pay for the assessment. Disadvantages are that the assessment may be carried out by an assessor who is not an expert in specific performance difficulties and who may not visit your workplace. Further, such assessors may recommend only a limited programme of help, and they are not usually able to offer long-term liaison with the employer to monitor the results of training or to give on-going advice on reasonable adjustments and pertinent legal issues.

The second route is to contact a private practitioner or organisation that specialises in:
• carrying out workplace needs assessments for people with specific performance difficulties;
• advising on reasonable adjustments and legal issues;
• writing comprehensive reports in a form acceptable to Access to Work;
• offering long-term liaison with employers to monitor the training.

The disadvantage of the private route is that you, or your employer, will have to fund the assessment. Advantages are that the assessment will be carried out by an expert in specific performance difficulties who will be able to:

• visit your workplace (if desired) for discussions with you and your manager;
• specify and monitor a detailed training programme;
• recommend a specific skills trainer and IT adviser;
• advise on reasonable adjustments;
• maintain on-going liaison with the employer;
• advise on relevant legal issues.

If you do approach a private organisation or practitioner to get a needs assessment, it is essential to check that they are qualified to offer this service (see below).

Please note:
Even if you arrange the workplace needs assessment privately, you can still apply to Access to Work for the funding for the training or equipment that is recommended.

How can I check the credentials of the workplace needs assessor?

When arranging a workplace needs assessment you (or your employer) need to establish that the assessor is experienced in workplace consultancy and will be able to recommend a workplace skills training programme and reasonable adjustments as well as IT support.

Contact the advice organisations at the end of this article for a recommendation and also pursue your own enquiries. Below are some suggested specific questions that you could email to the assessor:

• Do you have expertise and experience in assessing adults who are in employment?
• Can you produce a detailed workplace needs report acceptable to Access to Work?
• Will your report contain recommendations for workplace skills training as well as IT
recommendations?

- Can you advise my employer on reasonable adjustments in the workplace and related legal issues?
- Can you offer on-going consultancy to the employer to monitor the training programme?

**Workplace needs assessment report**

A comprehensive workplace needs assessment report should cover all of the following:

- *A detailed workplace skills training programme* which covers all aspects of literacy which are directly related to your work, e.g., writing emails and reports, reading quickly with good comprehension. General work skills should also be covered, e.g., dealing with job interviews or work reviews, contributing to meetings, understanding instructions, time management, organisational skills. A specific skills trainer should be recommended. An initial training programme should ideally be around 30 hours spread over a period of at least three months.

- *IT recommendations.* A specific trainer should be recommended who is knowledgeable about specific performance difficulties and who can (a) deliver the training in a *suitable manner,* and at a *suitable pace,* for a person with such difficulties; (b) identify and demonstrate the *specific elements* in an IT program that are relevant to a person’s particular job.

- *Detailed recommendations to the employer* about reasonable adjustments, i.e. what actions they can take to support the programme, for example, giving time off for training, providing a quiet workspace, allowing extra time for tasks to be completed. Legal advice should also be given, if required.

If the report you receive does not include all of the above sections, you should take up the matter with the assessor, or with the organisation that has provided the assessor, and request relevant additions to the recommendations, or, if necessary, a second assessment.

It is important to stress this point, because it frequently happens that employees with specific performance difficulties, after going through the long process of diagnostic and needs assessments, do not get recommendations for a *comprehensive* training programme.
that takes account of their actual workplace situation; nor do they get the training delivered in a manner which enables them to make efficient use of the help they are given. Adequate training can make all the difference between keeping and losing a job!

D. RESOURCES

a) Advice organizations

Dyslexia
British Dyslexia Association 0845 251 9002 www.bdadyslexia.org.uk
PATOSS 01386 712 650 www.patoss-dyslexia.org

Dyspraxia
Dyspraxia Foundation 01462 459 986 www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk
Dyspraxia UK 01795 531 998 www.dyspraxiauk.com

ADHD
Simply Wellbeing 020 8099 7671 simplywellbeing.com
AADD-UK aadduk.org
ADDISS 020 8952 2800 addiss.co.uk
ADDERS adders.org

b) Books and guides

(i) Self-help for employees / students with specific performance difficulties

(ii) General introductions


c) Optometrists

*In the London area:*
Barnard Levit Associates, 58 Clifton Gardens, London NW11 7EL, 020 8458 0599
reception@eye-spy.co.uk
DF Optometrists, 148 Chanctonbury Way N12 7AD, 020 7754 0372
david@dfoptometrists.com
Institute of Optometry, 56-62 Newington Causeway, London SE1 6DS, 020 7407 4183
admin@ioo.org.uk

*UK-wide*
Society for Coloured Lens Practitioners s4clp.org

When making an appointment with a practitioner, you need to ensure that a full eye test will be done, to investigate binocular problems as well as visual stress.

d) Counsellors and therapists
Cognitive behavioural therapists, psychotherapists and counsellors all work on changing unhelpful attitudes and habits.

Cognitive behavioural therapists: www.babcp.com
Psychotherapists: www.bacp.co.uk
Counsellors: www.counselling-directory.org.uk

All types of therapists and counsellors who are knowledgeable about specific learning/performance difficulties can be found through groOops.com

e) Legal advice

www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/docs/justice/Coping With Courts & Tribunals.pdf

This is a guide for people with Specific Performance Difficulties who face a court, tribunal or parole hearing. It will also be helpful to those who offer support and advocacy to such people. Sections include police custody, legal aid and alternative approaches to resolving disputes.

Resources

www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/docs/justice/Accommodating SpLDs in hearings.doc
This 4-page document lists the features of Specific Learning Difficulties which can disadvantage and disable people in court, tribunal and parole hearings; appropriate accommodations are proposed. It can be used as a template for the consideration of an individual’s difficulties when drawing up a document proposing Reasonable Adjustments in hearings.

It should be noted, however, that the Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) have recommended a simpler approach, i.e. Court / tribunal users with disabilities should in good time inform the court where the hearing is to be held of the nature of their disability and its effects. Nonetheless it may still be useful to submit the 4-page template as well.
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