

**Q&A dyslexia study day – 12 July 2016**

On July 12 2016, the CSP Disabled Member’s Network held a study day on reasonable adjustments for dyslexia. Below are some of the key points from the questions to the speakers following their presentations and from the panel Q&A session.

Please note that this document contains the views of the speakers and delegates that attended the study day, and are not necessarily the views of the CSP.

**Speaker One**

**Theresa Awolesi –** recent graduate from the University of Nottingham

**How did you manage on outpatient placements?**

I found that it depended very much on the clinical educator. With one educator I sat down with her to develop a template that I could use to assess patients and write notes, that was very helpful.

On a second year placement my clinical educator made lot of negative comments about my handwriting and said things that put me down. By this point I was more confident and was able to say: ‘This is a problem (impairment) that I have and I don’t think it’s fair for you to make these negative comments. I’m going to do the best I can, these are the strategies I have in place and we need to work together to make this placement successful’.

**How did you manage the transition to university?**

My university were really good. They made a point of understanding different learning styles, and we were encouraged to do a test to find out how we learned best, for example kinetic, visual and so on. There was a lot of diversity within our lectures to cover the different learning styles.

I also had an academic support tutor who I could talk to. The only time I felt at all unsupported was on placement outside of the university.

**Speaker Two**

**Karen Atkinson –** principal lecturer at University of Hertfordshire

**What is the support available for dyslexic students who want to do postgraduate study within physiotherapy?**

Disability services are available for all students including postgraduates. The issue with students doing a masters is that they are doing a lot more independent work and a lot of self-directed study. However, there will be academic support available and adjustments such as additional time in assessment and support with writing.

There is some financial support available to postgraduate students in the form of Disabled Student Allowance, but it is not as much as undergraduates. Students with dyslexia have studied to PhD level and beyond in physiotherapy.

You need to look at the course, how it is structured, what the assessment process is to see if it will suit your learning style. Some courses offer an alternative assessment process and if they don’t then why not suggest that they think about it?

**Is there a difference in the support offered in the NHS compared with outside the NHS?**

It depends very much on the individual organisation, private practice may have a higher throughput of cases and be focussed on profit but, on the other hand, it may be a smaller team and easier to manage your own work area than a big NHS department.

An effective assessment of your needs and a proactive approach is a must wherever you work, implementing changes and then reviewing them on an ongoing basis are essential.

**Speaker Three**

**Hilary Thompson –** previous MSK service manager

**Why do I need to apply for Access to Work (AtW) within the first six weeks of employment?**

In the first six weeks of employment Access to Work will pay for the bulk of the recommended adjustments. After you have been employed for more than six weeks you can still apply for an assessment but your employer will need to meet a proportion of the costs of any recommendations (depending on the size of the employer).

Once you have your employers name and a start date you can register with AtW. The process can take up to three months so it is helpful to register early.

More information can be on the Gov UK’s Access to Work page <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work/overview>

**Speaker Four**

**Michael Michaeloudis –** employment rights solicitor at Thompsons

**What can I write on a reference about the support that a staff member needs with regard to their disability?**

There is no legal obligation on an employer to provide a written reference but if they do then it must be fair, accurate and not misleading.

If the prospective employer acts upon information regarding a disability in a negative way. For example, not employing the disabled person then they could bring a claim of disability discrimination.

**Is there a set time frame which reasonable adjustments must be implemented?**

No, but there must not be unreasonable delay. A claim of disability discrimination can only be bought to the employment tribunal within three months less one day from the date of the recommendation.

Members can “retrigger” the time limits by asking again for the reasonable adjustments.

Employers can “drag their heels” at times. An example may be that they may provide Dragon software but not provide the earpiece or access to training. Reasonable adjustment doesn’t only refer to the software; it is a package to enable the employee to use the adjustment effectively.

**What are reasonable costs to the employer?**

A case called Cordell v. Foreign Office is a useful case when considering whether the cost of an adjustment is reasonable.

The case laid out some considerations that the tribunal can consider:

* Does it remove the substantial disadvantage?
* The size of the employer
* Does the employer have a budget for adjustments?
* Have they made adjustments before?
* Is the required support practical / available?

An NHS trust will have a higher burden to provide adjustments than a smaller organisation as it has a bigger budget.

Reasonable adjustments go wider than equipment or software, it can include changes to substantive duties, amending trigger points on sickness policies and agency staff to do aspects of the disabled person’s role.

**General Q&A panel session**

**Can assistive technology cause problems with confidentiality (such as dictating in an open plan office)?**

Members who had used Dragon said the mic is very sensitive so you can speak more quietly than you would expect.  It was felt to be no different to issues arising when staff treat patients behind a curtain and forget that they can still be overheard. A good headset helps.

It is essential to have a good IT coach to help you identify which software (and which version of that software) will best meet your needs.  Although it can appear time consuming, member who used speech software found it was much quicker than their attempts to type up notes.

Delegates recommended Dragon and ClaroRead for dictation and proof reading.

It was recognised that employer IT departments won’t have the specialist knowledge to help you work out what is the best technology for you.  It is best to go to others who have used it or to specialists in this area first (for example, Access to Work) and then approach your IT department with clear information on what you want and an idea of where you can get it from.

**Problems with getting a dyslexia diagnosis**

One delegate reported he couldn’t get Access to Work assessment without a diagnosis and ended up having to pay himself.  It was noted that universities can get funding for diagnosis for students but it appears to be more difficult for those in employment.

It was suggested members could go to their GP to ask for a referral for assessment but delegates reported different experiences - some GPs were helpful but others saying it was not their role.  Another approach could be through your manager if employed – if it’s causing work related stress it may be possible to get referral via Occupational Health (OH) department.

Thompsons agreed that they would see funding for an assessment as a reasonable adjustment. It was noted that it is possible to re-apply to Access to Work for support.

More information can be found on the British Dyslexia Association website: [www.bdadyslexia.org.uk](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk)

**Should students with dyslexia be sent on different or “protected” clinical placements?**

There was a discussion about whether university staff should take more care in selecting placements for students with dyslexia – usually placements just get allocated.  One possible option is to amend the learning contract to take account of special needs.

It was felt that it was important that students with dyslexia are able to start work in an environment where their needs are understood – at least for the first placement to help them build confidence and develop coping strategies.  Being thrown in at deep end on first placement, for example in an intensive care unit (ICU) can be overwhelming and knock confidence.

Karen Atkinson noted that universities have a duty to ensure practice educators are catering for needs of students. This can have implications for future career opportunities if students are seen as not having wide enough experience.

**How much extra time is reasonable for note writing?**

It was not possible to put a figure on this, it will depend on the workload, the team and the capacity within the department. It is important to work closely with your educator or manager in setting goals for improving time taken.

Thompsons (solicitors) advised that members could seek OH referral to help agree how much extra time was reasonable.