**Dyslexia Friendly Education – An Overview**

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**Abstract**

The Dyslexia Friendly Quality Mark for Higher Education organisations is a whole organisation approach. The British Dyslexia Association (BDA) has set criteria covering policies, teaching and learning, and partnerships with students as part of the BDA Dyslexia Friendly Quality Mark. It also involves effective identification, intervention and support, including reasonable adjustments, access arrangements for examinations and effective use of assistive technology. Around 10 per cent of the population as some degree of dyslexia difficulty so all educational establishments must be able to differentiate for their needs. This is to the benefit of students, the success rates of the colleges and society in general. The British Dyslexia Association aims to create a dyslexia friendly society and works across all age ranges and sectors ([www.bdadyslexia.org.uk](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk)).

The British Dyslexia Association (BDA) is a charity which is now 40 years old. It arose originally mainly from parents trying to get recognition and provision for their dyslexic children, and teachers who were pioneers in trying to understand how to help these children. The BDA has 58 affiliated local associations across the UK.

The BDA aims to bring about a Dyslexia Friendly Society. The following main goals have been identified:

1. Early identification of dyslexic difficulties for all in society.
2. Availability of effective and appropriate teaching provision for all dyslexic children and adults.
3. Availability of appropriate assessments for all dyslexic children and adults.
4. Reasonable adjustments for dyslexic individuals within all sectors of society (including education, employment, training and the criminal justice services).
5. Information should be available for dyslexic individuals across the age ranges and sectors, and for those who support them, about effective strategies to help overcome dyslexia related difficulties, and how to maximise the strengths of those with dyslexia.

The activities of the BDA contribute to the achievement of these key goals.

The BDA sets the course criteria for the training of Dyslexia/Specific Learning Difficulties specialist trained teachers. These courses are run by 32 universities across the UK and increasingly, thorough the work of the BDA International Accreditation Board, also across the world. They are for teachers with at least 2 years teaching experience and are at 2 levels. The first level (ATS - Approved Teacher Status) enables teachers to be able to set, deliver and monitor progress on dyslexia specialist teaching intervention programmes and work with class teachers on dyslexia friendly class room practice. Teaching Assistants (who are not usually qualified as teachers) can also do the ATS courses and they can then be awarded APS – Approved Practitioner Status. In some Initial Teacher Training Universities, a version of the ATS course, known as ATS ITT (Approved Teacher Status - Initial Teacher Training), is offered as an integral part of the general teacher training courses.

The further level (AMBDA - Associate Member of the British Dyslexia Association) covers the same area as ATS but also trains teachers to be able to carry out diagnostic assessments for Dyslexia/Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD). Educational Psychologists also carry out diagnostic assessments in the UK. In England the government recently carried out a large research study, a review of international literature and government expert committee, culminating in the Rose Review report (2009). As a result of the recommendations for this report, which recognised the positive impact of specialist trained dyslexia teachers on the progress made by pupils, the English government funded the training of 3,200 more dyslexia specialist teachers on BDA accredited courses. These teachers often work in schools as Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCos). Every school is required to have a SENCo (but they do not have to be dyslexia qualified and there are not enough trained currently to resource this). AMBDA qualified teachers also often work within a Local Education Authority across a region, advising schools, assessing, setting programmes and monitoring progress. Specialist teachers also work in the Learning Support departments for Further and Higher Education organisations. For both ATS and AMBDA specialist teacher qualifications, there are particular courses geared to working in the Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) sectors (ATS FE/HE and AMBDA FE/HE).

For many years, the BDA has also run a Dyslexia Friendly Schools Quality Mark scheme. The BDA sets the criteria for those things that a school should be doing, if it is to be considered Dyslexia Friendly. If the school demonstrates that it is fulfilling these criteria, it can be awarded the BDA Dyslexia Friendly Quality Mark. One of the key concepts behind this, which is shown to be the case in practice, is that changing policy to accommodate individuals with dyslexia will result in good practice for everyone. Many Local Education Authorities run Dyslexia Friendly Schools schemes across their regions. The BDA scheme provides a template of good practice and helps organisations to meet the legislative requirements of the Equality Act 2010 in England.

BDA Dyslexia Friendly Quality Mark Initiative has developed sets of standards for each of the following sectors: Individual Schools, Post 16 Educational and Training Providers, Further Education, Commercial Organisations, Children’s and Young Peoples Local Authority Services, and Universities and Institutes of Higher Education (Departments and Schools of Learning).

The BDA criteria for Dyslexia Friendly Universities/Higher Education (HE) Institutes (Departments and Schools of Learning) cover the following key areas:

* Effectiveness of Management Structure.
* Identification of Dyslexia/SpLD.
* Effectiveness of Resources (Physical Environment, Teaching and Learning).
* Continuing Professional Development.
* Partnership with Students, Parents/Carers and External Agencies.

The process is that the University/HE organisation registers with the BDA to undertake the Dyslexia Friendly Quality Mark. They identify a lead member of staff, but also the senior management team must be on board with the scheme. They conduct a self-audit against the listed BDA criteria. They make an Action Plan to put in place any criteria that they are not currently satisfying. It can take around 18 months to work through this action plan. They note what evidence they then have that they are then satisfying all of the criteria. The British Dyslexia Association then carries out a Verification Visit, conduction interviews (with senior managers, learning support staff, lecturers and students) and lesson observations. They also ask to see a random sample of the evidence against the BDA set criteria.

If the organisation has been able to demonstrate that they meet the criteria, they are awarded the BDA Dyslexia Friendly Quality Mark. They are presented with a certificate and allowed to use the copyrighted BDA Dyslexia Friendly Quality Mark logo on their website and headed paper. The award lasts for 3 years, during which time they are expected to embed good practice. There will then be a further Verification Visit. The British Dyslexia Association offers consultancy support, including a mock verification, for participants going through the Dyslexia Friendly Quality Mark process, as an additional service.

The Standards for the BDA Dyslexia Friendly Quality Mark for Universities/Higher Education can be found here:

[www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/files/qm universities.pdf](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/files/qm%20universities.pdf)

The Dyslexia Friendly Quality Mark criteria include a number of key points, including that the organisation should have effective identification systems, effective intervention programmes, allow appropriate access arrangements for examinations, all lecturers should be aware of key dyslexic difficulties and potential strengths and of how to teach in a dyslexia friendly way, there should be regard to dyslexia friendly learning environment factors, support services, positive role models and ways to enhance the self-esteem of dyslexic students, particularly with regard to their learning skills.

The BDA recently completed an EU funded project working with partners in Italy, Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary, adapting the Dyslexia Friendly Quality Mark to the education system in those countries, for use with Vocational, Education and Training organisations (see http://www.dyslexia-veto.eu). Appropriate changes to both the criteria and the assessment protocol were made, in line with the needs and situations in those countries. The Dyslexia Friendly Quality Mark scheme has, therefore, been shown to be highly adaptable and to bring benefits across nations.

In the Higher Education system in England there is also a government funded scheme called ‘Disabled Students' Allowance’ (DSA). This arises from the Equalities Act 2010. It is available to dyslexic students in Higher Education (full-time, part-time and post-graduate). The application from the student has to be supported by post 16 years of age diagnostic assessment (from a suitably qualified dyslexia specialist teacher or psychologist). Provision can include assistive software, study skills training, proof reading and allowances for books and photocopying. These are paid for by the government.

Typical reasonable adjustments include: an appropriate computer, headset etc., assistive Technology software (eg. text read back, dictation software), training in the use of the software, 1:1 coaching in personal organisation, managing their learning, getting assignments in on time, approaching revision and exams. Maximum DSA allowances are £5610 for equipment and ‘non-medical support worker’ costs of £20,520. The majority of dyslexic students would typically get most of the equipment allowance and a proportion of the non-medical support worker allowances.

Within the Dyslexia Friendly Quality Mark criteria there is a requirement to make access arrangements for dyslexic individuals undertaking examinations. The access arrangements given in any one case depends on the precise learning difficulties of the individual concerned. Access arrangements can include: a reader, a scribe, extra time, rest breaks, marking for content and not being marked down for errors of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Other criteria relate to appropriate use of computer technology and assistive technology, including the use of hard ware and software to allow assist with recording for note-taking, text to speech, speech to text, concept mapping, spell checking, organisational skills, time management, reminder, reading and handwriting recording pens, cameras for photographing text to use with text to speech software, e-learning platforms and web-based assistance including early posting of lecture notes, coursework requirements and submission dates, alternative learning and recording/presentation/assessment modes (eg. using video material, iphone recordings, role play, demonstrations, etc.). The British Dyslexia Association New Technologies Committee webpages have a good deal of helpful information about technology that is useful for dyslexic students (see <http://www.bdatech.org> and [www.bdastore.org.uk](http://www.bdastore.org.uk)).

For those students going on to employment, there is also a government funded scheme, called ‘Access to Work’. Under the Equalities Act 20120, when a new employee discloses dyslexic difficulties (or other disability) reasonable adjustments should be implemented. Access to Work provides access to work assessments and funding for necessary ‘reasonable adjustments’. Adjustments can include assistive technology, coping strategy training and support workers to help with proof reading, organisational skills, etc.

The BDA has a number of helpful publications covering many aspects relating to Dyslexia, including co-occurring difficulties, dyscalculia and learning difficulties, languages and multilingualism, tips for teachers and dyslexic adults, parents, music and performing arts, early identification, code of practice for the criminal justice system and code of practice for employers, as well as an annual Dyslexia Handbook covering an update on a range of topics and Wiley’s ‘Dyslexia’ academic journal (see [www.bdastore.org.uk](http://www.bdastore.org.uk)).

The BDA has been working in recent years with other organisations as part of the Dyslexia-SpLD Trust in England, with government funding. The Dyslexia-SpLD Trust has developed a web based Professional Development Framework for dyslexia/Specific Learning Difficulties/Literacy Difficulty professionals. This has 6 strands:

* + - Language and literacy
    - Theories of dyslexia
    - Identifying and assessing
    - Supporting and teaching
    - Communication and working with others
    - Professional development

The framework defines additional knowledge skills and understanding required to support SpLD learners. It also allows professionals to think strategically on Continuing Professional Development ([www.thedyslexia-spldtrust.org.uk/4/resources/](http://www.thedyslexia-spldtrust.org.uk/4/resources/)).

Summary

The Dyslexia Friendly Education approach provides a road map to creating an environment where dyslexic individuals are enabled to fulfil their potential, with positive benefits for the individual, the educational organisation and society. This approach helps to develop a dyslexia friendly society.

For further details about the BDA Dyslexia Friendly Quality Mark: [www.bdadyslexia.org.uk](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk), Quality Mark tab.

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11. ‘Good Practice guide for Employers’ BDA England.

For further information on these publications see: www.bdastore.org.uk

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